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**THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE DECLINE OF CHILDREN'S OUTDOOR PLAY AS A SOCIAL  
PROBLEM IN THE UK**

**By**

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## **Abstract**

*The past three decades have seen a substantial growth of interest in children's play in scholarly and popular writing, the mass media and government policymaking. Implicit and explicit in this growing interest is the idea that children's play, or more specifically, a decline or lack of children's outdoor play, represents a serious problem in the UK and other western societies and that it therefore requires the intervention of a range of professional and political powers. The rapid and widespread affirmation that claims about children's play have received deserves critical examination.*

*This study examines the construction of children's play as a social problem in four major UK newspapers. Focusing on the period from 1985 to 2016, it draws on theoretical and conceptual tools from the constructionist study of social problems and methodological tools from Qualitative Media Analysis to examine the roles played by various claimsmakers in the construction of the problem and the rhetoric used in support of their cause. It hence offers important insights into the prominent position children's play holds on the public agenda and identifies some of the underlying cultural currents from which claims about children's play draw.*

## **Acknowledgments**

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## 1 Introduction

Recent decades since the early 1990s have witnessed a growing interest in children's play across a range of academic disciplines as well as in popular writing and the mass media. Textbooks such as *Playing Outdoors: Spaces and Places, Risk and Challenges* (Tovey, 2007) and popular publications commonly found in bookshops like *The Power of Play: Learning What Comes Naturally* (Elkind, 2007a) and *Free to Learn: Why Unleashing the Instinct to Play Will Make our Children Happier, More Self-reliant, and Better Students of Life* (Gray, 2013a), suggest outdoor play is limited for today's children due to different causes which have a variety of negative consequences. Articles with a similar focus can be found in academic journals from divergent fields, such as the *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, *Children's Geographies*, *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, and *Archives of Paediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*. Newspaper headlines in the United Kingdom (UK) similarly identify that children's outdoor play is in decline: 'Why boys and girls stay in to play' (Wheway, *The Guardian*: 12<sup>th</sup> August 1992), 'Why can't boys and girls go out to play?' (Sieghart, *The Times*: 5<sup>th</sup> August 1995), 'Only 1 in 10 kids allowed out to play' (Solomons, *The Daily Mirror*: 19<sup>th</sup> July 2001), 'Children losing the right to play in fresh air' (Hinsliff, *The Observer*: 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2003), 'Boys and girls don't go out to play' (Coyle, *The Sunday Times*: 18<sup>th</sup> February 2007), 'Kids spend half as long playing outside as their parents did' (Keogh, *The Daily Mail*: 27<sup>th</sup> July, 2016).

Since the early 2000s, children's play has also become an important subject for policymaking and policy debate. Most significantly, in 2008 the Labour government launched the first ever national government Play Strategy (DCSF/DCMS, 2008a), an unprecedentedly ambitious, wide-ranging 10-year national government plan for children's play. Ed Balls, Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families (2007-2010) in the foreword to the strategy consultation document said, 'We want local authorities to give high priority to supporting and promoting outdoor play - with play and public spaces being seen as an essential characteristic of a healthy community' (DCSF/DCMS, 2008b). On a visit to Slade Gardens Adventure Playground in the same year, Balls told a reporter that 'it seems children spend less time playing outside than they would like and less than their parents did as children' and 'as many as one in four children, aged eight to 10,

have never played outside without an adult' (BBC News, 2008). This 10-year strategy was, however, cut short as part of the new coalition government policy cull in response to the financial crash of 2007-2008, which began soon after they took office in the summer of 2010 (HM Treasury, 2010a, 2010b). The coalition government, notably, still went on to claim that children's play was in decline and in need of intervention. This is evident in a speech on supporting families and children in June 2010 by Nick Clegg, who stated that:

If you ask adults if they used to play near their homes as children, 71% will tell you they did. Every single day. That compares to just 21% of children now. It's not right, and it has to change. But, despite how obvious that is, I do appreciate that there's no easy answer [...]. So we have to be innovative, we have to find new solutions [...] developed in the context of the upcoming spending review. (Clegg, 2010)

Despite such claims, play policy has been removed from ministerial responsibilities (Voce, 2016). Indeed, this has recently been criticised by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, who in their fifth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on children's rights, write that the committee is 'concerned about the withdrawal of a play policy in England, and the under-funding of play' (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2016).

Both implicit and explicit in the growth of interest in children's play over recent decades is the contention that children's play, or more specifically a decline or lack of children's outdoor play, represents a serious problem in the UK and other western societies, which therefore requires the intervention of a range of professional and political powers. Understanding how and why children's play has emerged as a social problem requires a critical examination of *how* and *why* it has come to be seen as a social problem, rather than a straight-forward acceptance of it as a natural or empirical phenomenon. Consequently, this study draws on a subjectivist approach (also called a constructionist or interpretivist approach) known as "contextual constructionism" (Best, 2003).

To establish the premise of this study, this introductory chapter is structured as follows. First, it explores the concept of children's play. Next, it presents a discussion of how to approach a social problem like children's play, which includes the contextual constructionist approach adopted for the study. Then, a brief description of the structure of the thesis is given. Finally, on a more personal note, the chapter concludes with an acknowledgement of what the children play problem

means to me. The structure of the introductory chapter is in keeping with the logical coherence of the study as a whole.

## 1.1 What is children's play?

Play – at its most basic level – is often defined by what it is not. For example, play is not work. However, such binary definitions are often considered insufficient because the borderlines between activities are not always clear (Hughes, 2010). Indeed, when scholars make theoretical statements that define children's play, there is little agreement and much ambiguity (Burghardt, 2005, Sutton-Smith, 2001).<sup>1</sup> The idea that children's play is difficult to define is echoed in a much-quoted literature review of contemporary perspectives on children's play, policy and practice by Stuart Lester and Wendy Russell (2008). The authors argue that definitions of children's play are complex and contested. Others, such as Griffiths and Goodall (2007), have even gone as far as to suggest that, due to its complexity, children's play may even defy definition. Therefore, no clear or unequivocal definition is available (Frost, 2010).

In this sense, defining children's play has long been the subject of social and academic debate (Lester and Russel, 2008). However, over the centuries there have been different definitions and perspectives concerning children's play, which have viewed children's play quite differently depending on the prevailing view of children and childhood at the time (Griffiths and Goodall, 2007; Hughes, 2010). For example, children in ancient Greece were viewed as naturally playful: play was allowed and even encouraged. Children in ancient Greece were viewed as naturally more uninformed, unruly, helpless, cheerful and affectionate compared to adults, while the idea that children were in need of gentle guidance from adults in order to become useful and responsible citizens was generally accepted (French, 1977). This view of childhood and children's play is illustrated in the writings of Plato. In his late dialogue, *Laws*, Plato emphasises the positive significance of children's play. In *The Republic*, he discusses an appropriate approach to children's learning: 'enforced learning will not stay in the mind. So avoid compulsion and let your children's lessons take the form of play' (cited in Griffiths and Goodall,

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<sup>1</sup> For further information, see Sutton-Smith (2001) who identifies that some of the most outstanding scholars of children's play have been concerned by this ambiguity.

2007, p. 1). By contrast, French historian Philippe Ariès argues in *Centuries of Childhood* (1973), one of the seminal and most widely debated studies in this area, that in medieval times the idea of childhood did not exist, since ‘as soon as the child could live without the constant solicitude of his mother, his nanny or his cradle-rocker, he belonged to adult society’ (Ariès, 1973, p125). Consequently, there was a notable absence of comment on children’s play in the literature of this period (Griffiths and Goodall, 2007). Indeed, a distinct world of children with its own play would have seemed alien to the people of the middle ages (Guldberg, 2009).

Other examples can illustrate that the definitions of and perspectives on children’s play have depended on the prevailing view of children and childhood at the time. For instance, in the seventeenth century children were seen as worthy of attention and with developmental needs different from those of adults. The English philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) is representative of this thinking. For Locke, children arrive in the world as a *tabula rasa*, or blank slate, which must be "filled up" with knowledge through education and the child gently civilized by the adult world. Locke is no advocate of play, although he does not actually condemn it. Instead, he makes it clear that work, rationality and discipline are the main ingredients for a child’s optimal development. Additionally, during this period diarists record that children should have their minds raised above what is perceived as the "sillier" and "trivial" diversions of childhood (Cohen, 1993). By contrast, during the Romantic era in the eighteenth century, a more romantic vision of childhood was adopted, highlighting children’s charm, purity and need for protection, as explored by the prominent French philosopher of the time Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s (1712-1778) in his seminal text *Emile* (2007 [1762]). For Rousseau, in contrast to Locke, children come into the world not as empty minds waiting for experience to shape them but as original human beings equipped by nature with an innate plan for their development. Consequently, Rousseau argues for the importance of children’s play (Cohen, 1987). He traces a connection between the development and efficient use of the senses and the child’s playful activities (such as running, jumping and games). For Rousseau, play and work are as one to the child.

It should be emphasised that the examples presented here take a European perspective, since the study’s focus is the UK. It is not an assumption that other cultures over the course of history or those of all contemporary cultures operate in the same way. For a contemporary cross-cultural view of children’s play, see Lindon (2001) and more recently Roopnarine et al. (2015).

It is evident from the above historical examples, as well as in the discussion in the remainder of this section, that definitions of and perspectives on children's play both reflect and are shaped by the prevailing views of children and childhood. Children's play, then, has always been as much about the imagination and actions of adults as the activities of children. Adults bring their attitudes and beliefs to bear on how they see and respond to children's play. For these reasons, children's play, and indeed childhood itself, should be understood as socially constructed phenomena.<sup>2</sup>

Social construction can be defined as 'the process by which people continually create – or construct – meaning' (Best, 2008, p. 342). Claiming that children's play is a social construction means that the experiences and dominant image of children's play in any society, at any given time, is neither universal nor fixed. However, this does not entail discrediting children's play: all human knowledge is ultimately socially constructed (Berger and Luckman, [1966] 1991; Best, 2009).<sup>3</sup>

This study is interested in how and why children's play has emerged as a social problem over the past three decades. Given that the construction of children's play is both reflected and shaped by the prevailing construction of children and childhood, it is vital to explore the contemporary construction of children and childhood and examine how this is related to the construction of children's play as a social problem.

The basic definitional features of "childhood" as we might think of it today did not emerge until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Central to the construction of childhood in its modern senses, which has been termed the 'sentimentalised vision of childhood' (Best, 1994, p. 6), is the gradual removal of children from "labour" and the introduction of schooling as a socially recognised and legitimate occupation. This, more than anything else, acts as a distinction between childhood and adulthood. In England, an important moment in this development was when concerns about the experience of children working long hours in often poor conditions resulted in

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<sup>2</sup> Since the 1990s, a number of sociologists, such as Barry Mayell, became interested in the sociology of childhood and they developed ideas of the social construction of childhood (Linden, 2001). Childhood is often understood in contemporary literature as a social construction and has been identified as the "consummate" social construction (Shanhan, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Social constructionism as a perspective and its development are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

the government introducing the Factory Act (1833), which prevented children under nine years of age from working, with limits on the hours for children under 18. The Act also provided for two hours of schooling per day for children under the age of 13. In addition, towards the end of the century, the state took on responsibility for the education of all children between the ages of five and 12 years of age through the Education Act (1870). Notably, the dramatic growth in compulsory schooling meant that children's days became divided into a period of school work and a period in which they could play.

Another factor critical to understanding childhood in its modern sense, observed by social historian Hugh Cunningham (2006), is not directly linked to work or education but rather concerns the experience of childhood as an end in itself. American sociologist Viviana Zelizer, in an important study *Pricing the Priceless Child* ([1985] 1994), argues that as children ceased to be economically valuable, they become "emotionally priceless", or "sacralised". Zelizer explores the changes that took place in the economic and sentimental value of children in the United States during the period between the 1870s and the 1930s. At the beginning of the period, children were mainly valued for their economic contributions to the family. However, changes in economic and social life meant that child labour diminished in significance; over time, children were less likely to be valued for their productive role and became more objects of sentiment. As Zelizer puts it, 'the twentieth century economically useless but emotionally priceless child displaced the nineteenth century useful child' (Zelizer, [1985] 1994, p. 209). The emergence of the economically 'worthless' but emotionally 'priceless' child Zelizer emphasises 'has created an essential condition for contemporary childhood' (Zelizer, [1985] 1994, p. 3).

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also saw a variety of other developments that shaped attitudes towards children. One, according to Best (1994), regarding the modern sentimentalisation of childhood, is that of the emergence and popularisation of psychoanalytic and cognitive child development theorists, which most notably include Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), Erik Erikson (1902-1994), Jean Piaget (1896-1980) and Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934). These theorists published studies of childhood which associated childhood experience with adult personalities, an insight that became commonplace during the twentieth century. Although relatively few people understood the perspectives well, many realised the new science held

parents responsible for the development of their children – and, in particular, their problems and failings (Best, 1994).

It is important to emphasise that children's play often features in psychoanalytic and cognitive child development theories. For example, according to psychoanalytic theorists, most notably Sigmund Freud, play's value is primarily emotional: it allows children to reduce anxiety by giving them a sense of control over the world and an acceptable way to express forbidden impulses. The psychoanalytic perspective on play is reflected on in the writings of Erik Erikson. Erikson rejected as unduly narrow Freud's view that the main function of play is anxiety reduction. He proposes that play can also have an ego-building function, since it brings about the development of physical and social skills that enhance a child's self-esteem (Hughes, 2010). Cognitive theorists, the most prominent of whom is Jean Piaget (1896-1980), typically regard play as a tool for facilitating intellectual growth. Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934), like Piaget, also recognises the role of play for facilitating intellectual growth, although he criticises Piaget (and others including Freud) for paying too little attention to the social-cultural and historical setting in which it occurs (Hughes, 2010).

Significantly, in the late nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century, scholars unsuccessfully tried to formulate a clear definition of children's play. Proposed definitions over this period reflect the academic roles of their developers, primarily behavioural scientists (such as the psychoanalytic and cognitive child development theorists identified above), which results in a "crazy quilt" of theories about play's meaning and purpose (Frost, 2010). This ambiguous field of play theories has led play theorist Brian (2001) to suggest that some of the chaos is due to a lack of clarity about the popular cultural rhetorics that underline the various play theories.<sup>4</sup> He suggests seven rhetorics, the most dominant of which applied to children's play is *the rhetoric of play as progress*, the notion that children adapt and develop through their play (Sutton-Smith, 2001). According to Sutton-Smith, this belief in play as progress is something that 'most

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<sup>4</sup> Sutton-Smith (2001) notes that they use the word *rhetoric* in 'its modern sense, as being a persuasive discourse, or an implicit narrative, wittingly or unwittingly adopted by members of a particular affiliation to persuade others of the veracity and worthwhileness of their beliefs' (Sutton-Smith, 2001, p. 8). He goes on to stress that what is talked about as rhetoric 'is not so much about the substance of play or of its science or of its theories, but rather the way in which the underlying ideological values attributed to these matters are both subsumed by theorists and presented persuasively to the rest of us' (Sutton-Smith, 2001, p. 8).



westerners cherish' (Sutton-Smith, 2001, p. 9). Indeed, the notion that children adapt and develop through their play, according to Lester and Russel (2008), is particularly important in relation to government policy and evident throughout the ensuing chapters of this study, discussed in detail in Chapter 7. It is important to note that Sutton-Smith (2001) make the point that although the idea although that children develop by their participation in play may make good intuitive sense it has more often been assumed than demonstrated. Sutton-Smith's point is supported by the findings of a number of studies. For example, after reviewing the literature on play's functions, Martin and Caro (1985) conclude that 'there is no direct evidence that play has any important benefits, with the possible exception of some immediate effects on children's behaviour' (p. 97). A more recent example is found in Scarlett et al. (2005), who in relation to children's development through play identify that there is insufficient data and evidence concerning the long-term effects of play.

Since the late twentieth century, the modern construction of childhood of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has increasingly become seen as under threat or in crisis. American author, educator, media theorist and cultural critic Neil Postman, whose book *The Disappearance of Childhood* was published more than 30 years ago in 1982, is one of a number of critics who express concern that childhood is no longer distinguishable from adulthood (See Buckingham, 2000; Olfrnan, 2005; Polakow, 1992; Sommerville, 1982; Suransky, 1982). Postman's thesis is that, in the present day, childhood is disappearing because literacy, which used to mean that adulthood could be achieved by "children", is being replaced by television which (he argues) requires no skills to master.

Sociology professor Frank Furedi in the introduction to the 2008 version of *Paranoid Parenting* observes that, certainly since the turn of the twenty-first century, it has become routinely claimed that childhood is toxic and dangerous, what he refers to as the as 'the diseasing of childhood' (Furedi, 2008, p. 12). The diseasing of childhood, according to Furedi, is frequently represented through the metaphor of toxic childhood. This metaphor, Furedi suggests, 'conveys the idea of moral pollution of childhood' (Furedi, 2008, p. 12-13). For the proponents of this idea, things are getting worse for children from too much consumerism to the pressure of school exams. Sociologist Jennie Bristow (2014) observers that in Britain this view has been clearly articulated by Sue Palmer's (2007a) book *Toxic Childhood: How Modern Life is Damaging our Children*

and *What We Can Do About It* and its sequel *Detoxing Childhood* (2007b). Palmer summarises the extent of "toxicity" surrounding the modern child:

- 'Physical toxicity'- unhealthy food;
- 'Emotional toxicity'- parents too busy with work and domestic responsibilities for 'family time' and setting and maintaining behavioural boundaries, family breakdown, and 'screen-based violence';
- 'Social toxicity'- the lack of outdoor play, leading to an 'inability to make friends naturally and learn to take turns' and an unprecedented openness to 'marketers, unsuitable role models, and celebrity culture';
- 'Cognitive toxicity'- too much time watching television leading to poor language development, while education in schools suffers from a preoccupation with targets and the threat of litigation. (Palmer, 2007b, p. 5)

The positioning, here, of myriad features of everyday modern life as "toxic" influences upon the child according to Bristow 'speaks to a highly idealized (and inaccurate) notion of childhood as a period untainted by adulthood' (Bristow, 2014, p. 211). Indeed, central to the toxic childhood thesis and the diseasing of childhood in general appears to be a desire to free children from what is perceived to be a dangerous, "toxic" adult culture (Bristow, 2014).

There is, however, no matter what assessment is made of the demands today's culture places on children, no simple process of the "disappearance" of childhood, through which children simply become treated just like adults and become again like their medieval predecessors. For instance, Helene Guldberg in *Reclaiming Childhood: Freedom and Play in an Age of Fear* (2009) writes that although there is a tendency for society to treat children as adults, children are also seen as excessively fragile and in constant need of care and protection. Sociologist of childhood, Alan Prout, also identifies this paradox or contradiction in how childhood at the beginning of the twenty-first century is socially constructed:

On the one hand, there is an increasing tendency to see children as individuals with a capacity for self-realisation and, within the limits of social interdependency, autonomous action; on the other, there are practices

directed at a greater surveillance, control and regulation of children. (Prout, 2000, p. 304)

Prout's sentiments are echoed by Cunningham (2006), who observes that adults are now more concerned about children and their safety than at any other time in history. He notes that children are monitored more today than ever before because they are seen as endangered by their engagement with the adult world. Cunningham (2006) suggests four overriding characteristics of childhood in contemporary western societies. Firstly, that a child is set apart as different from adults; secondly, that the child is said to have a special nature and be associated with that nature; thirdly, the child is innocent but corruptible; fourthly, the child is vulnerable and "at risk". Regarding the fourth point, Peter Stearns (2009), writing about American childhood over the course of the twentieth century, suggests that our current ideas about children as "at risk" and emotionally fragile are prefigured by cultural representations from the 1920s. During this time, he writes, using example from the of child-rearing literature, there was a growing emphasis on children's vulnerability. For Stearns, the basic cultural logic that emerged in the 1920s has largely persisted as 'dominant cultural symbols still emphasize the preciousness and of children but also their vulnerability and lack of capacity' (Stearns, 2009, p. 45). As already discussed, it was during this period that psychoanalyst and cognitive child development theorists began emphasising the psychological vulnerability of children regarding their development.

Perhaps nowhere are ideas of children being vulnerable and "at risk" more evident than in the concern about child abuse in western countries since the early 1960s (Cooper and Ball 1987; Corby 2000; Parton et al. 1997). The upsurge in concern about the problem of child abuse is usually traced to the publication of C. Henry Kempe and his colleagues' 1962 article 'The Battered Child Syndrome' in the prestigious *Journal of the American Medical Association*. The publication of the Kempe et al. article is often used to date the modern discovery of child abuse. Although first "discovered" and publicised by medical experts, its meaning has expanded to other areas since the 1960s (to include for example: child neglect, emotional abuse, and eventually, incest and the sexual abuse of children) in response to the campaigning by a widespread child-protection movement (Best, 1990; Johnson, 1985; Nelson, 1984).

The way childhood at the beginning of the twenty-first century is socially constructed, with children and childhood being seen as vulnerable and "at risk", needing protection from what is

perceived to be a harmful adult world, means that "what children do" in their everyday lives (such as the food they eat, traveling to and from school, socialising with other children, and watching television) has become framed as a social problem/cultural or political debate. One such area of children's everyday lives, as identified at the very beginning of this chapter, is their play.

Postman claims that 'There is no more obvious symptom of the merging of children's and adults' values and styles than what is happening with children's games, which is to say, they are disappearing' (Postman, [1982] 1994, p. 129). He continues that while he found no studies that document the decline of unsupervised street games, 'their absence is noticeable enough and, in any case, can be inferred from the astonishing rise of such institutions as Little League baseball and Pee Wee football' (Postman, [1982] 1994, p. 129). For Postman, the games of American youths have become 'increasingly official, mock-professional, and extremely serious'. The same can be argued for many other western societies, including the UK.<sup>5</sup> In a similar vein, Palmer (as identified above) claims that a lack of outdoor play is one of the many features of everyday modern life that has a toxic influence upon the child. Palmer (2007a) argues that changes in children's play habits have been helped along by two side effects of contemporary adult culture. The first is that the development of technological (and entirely indoor) options have provided a seductive alternative to outdoor play. The second is parental anxiety, most notably parents' anxious concerns about their children's safety around traffic and strangers. The notion of childhood as a period untainted by adults (as this study will show) is a powerful strand of the arguments put forward by advocates for children's outdoor play, which often leads to arguments that more should be done to free children from over-interfering adults.

It is evident in both Postman's and Palmer's claims about children's play that the immediate context in which play takes place (i.e. adults' involvement/intervention in play and/or the location in which play takes place) has become particularly important when discussing children's play. This is reflected in attempts since the late twentieth to the early twenty-first century to define children's play. Many of these, as described below, come in relation to the immediate context in which play takes place.

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<sup>5</sup> For more discussion on Neil Postman and *The Disappearance of Childhood* see Chapters 7.

Some scholars define children's play using a set of criteria. These often include that children's play is freely chosen, a personally-directed and intrinsically-motivated behaviour and undertaken for its own sake (e.g. Else, 2009; Garvey, 1991; Hughes 1982). Adults' involvement or intervention is central to such criteria. However, it has also been argued that many of these factors are inaccurate, for example that children's play is not *intrinsically motivated behaviour* (Smith and Vollstedt, 1985) and neither is it *freely chosen* (Lester and Russel, 2008).

Other recent attempts to define children's play distinguish different types of play according to its immediate context. A prominent example of defining play according to its immediate context, particularly relevant to the current study, is *outdoor play*. Significantly, as Bates and Stone find in their 2013 methodological review of measures of outdoor play and independent mobility, there are multiple terms other than *outdoor play* used to describe outdoor play. These include *playing outdoors*, *play outside*, *outdoor active playing*, *unstructured outdoor play*.<sup>6</sup> Differing terminology makes it difficult to conduct comparative research (Bates and Stone, 2013). The various terms are also often presented as self-explanatory or else it is assumed that their meanings could be inferred by others from the context in which they are used. On the rare occasions when outdoor play is defined or described more explicitly, it is often regarding its importance to child development and/or health with no attempt to identify its characteristics and features. Definitions of outdoor play are discussed in Chapter 7. A typical example is Clements (2004), who in her investigation into the status of outdoor play (discussed in the following chapter) states that through outdoor play, 'children learn some of the skills necessary for adult life, including social competence, problem solving, creative thinking, and safety skills' (Clements, 2004, p. 68). Clements (2004) significantly dedicates six of the seven paragraphs of her introduction to the study defining and describing outdoor play regarding its importance to child development. Since numerous terms describe outdoor play, for the sake of simplicity *outdoor play* is the prominent term used throughout this thesis.

The ages of the children referred to by definitions of children's play are often vague. For example, Clements' (2004) investigation into the status of outdoor play, as is evident from the above definition, makes no reference to the ages of children, although the study analyses the

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<sup>6</sup> For a complete list of the terms found see Bates and Stone (2013, p. 8).

outdoor play of children aged between three and 12. Other studies similarly make no reference to the ages of children in such definitions of outdoor play, however, they study significantly different age ranges. For example, a study by Children's Society (2003) on adults' intolerance to children playing outdoors focuses on children aged from seven to 18. Therefore, it can be inferred that when reference to outdoor play is made, young children aged from three-years-old through to teenagers aged 18-years-old are being discussed together. The benefits of such vague and self-explanatory definitions in relation to outdoor play are discussed in Chapter 7.

When defining children's play, it is important to consider that at the end of twentieth century, play became defined as a human right specific to children in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 31 of the Convention establishes that 'States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts' (The United Nations, 1989). Related to this right are children's rights to freedom of expression and association, as established by Articles 12, 13, 14 and 15 (Lindon, 2001). More recently in 2013, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, following evidence provided from The International Play Association (IPA), adopted a General Comment that clarifies for governments worldwide the meaning and importance of Article 31 of the Convention on the Right of the Child.<sup>7</sup>

Understanding children's play as a socially constructed phenomenon, the meaning of which differs depending on the cultural context and specifically the prevailing view of childhood of the time, has implications for studying children's play as a social problem. Approaches to studying children's play as a social problem are discussed next.

## **1.2 Approaching the problem of children's play**

The wealth of literature on children's play, particularly since the opening of the twentieth century, suggests there are many ways to approach the study of children's play. However, the

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<sup>7</sup> A General Comment is an official statement that elaborates on the meaning of an aspect of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child that seems to require further interpretation or emphasis. The aim of the General Comment is to raise the importance of an Article and increase accountability among countries that have signed up to the Convention.

interest here is not the physical activity of children's play, nor its importance for child development, nor the amount or type of children's play. Rather, the focus is the problematisation of children's play – that is, the rise and subsequent success of claims asserting that children's play, and more specifically that a decline or lack of outdoor play, constitutes a serious problem for society. The study examines how and why children's play, and specifically a decline in children's play, has emerged as a social problem.

The following discussion considers the theoretical approaches to the study of social problems and the rationale for adopting the contextual constructionist approach. The research questions that guide this study are presented, followed by a brief exploration of the preferred information-gathering strategy used in a contextual constructionist approach.

### ***1.2.1 Approaches to studying social problems***

Although there are many and diverse sociological approaches to the study of social problems, most can be understood as falling into two broad philosophical perspectives: realist or "objectivist" approaches and their "subjectivist" counterparts (also called constructionist or interpretivist approaches). The former starts from the existence of a social problem and attempts to explain how and why it occurs, while the latter begins by asking how some conditions come to be defined or constructed as a social problem (Best, 2008; Clarke, 2001). These approaches are not monolithic and may vary in their levels of analysis and sociological outlook. Objectivist perspectives range in focus from the individual biological, or even genetic, level, to the micro, meso, and macro social levels (Hacking, 1999; Clarke, 2001), while subjectivist perspectives can differ significantly in terms of their underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions. Each approach is considered in turn below.

#### ***1.2.1.1 Objectivist approaches***

On the surface, the meaning of the term *social problem* seems self-evident: social problems are simply harmful conditions that affect society (Best, 2008; Loseke, 2003). Such an understanding of social problems reflects an objectivist orientation, where 'social problems are objective conditions, elements in our social environment that should be examined to determine their magnitude, causes, consequences, and resolution' (Loseke and Best, 2003, p. 3). The objectivist

orientation has historically been the dominant approach in the study of social problems and remains among the most popular means of organising the teaching of social problems in introductory courses and textbooks on the subject (Best, 2008, p. 4). Objectivist approaches are also the dominant method used to present information to the mass media.

Professor of Sociology Donileen Loseke in *Thinking About Social Problems* (2003) importantly suggests that although there are many different objectivist approaches to social problems (such as conflict theory and functionalism) with different frameworks, all objectivist approaches share a number of commonalities. Loseke (2003) agrees that in addition to taking the examination of objectively harmful conditions as their starting point, objectivist approaches to social problems also tend to hold particular ideas about what sorts of conditions are intolerable and what causes social problems. For example, conflict perspectives hold ‘the beliefs that the social order is held together by power and coercion and that the primary cause of social problems is the oppression of groups of people such as radical and minorities, poor people, and women’ (Loseke, 2003, p164). Conflict perspectives, Loseke (2003) continues, ‘emphasize the importance of the cultural theme of equality so intolerable conditions are those violating this theme’ (p164). Another commonality of objectivist approaches, according to Loseke (2003), is that people approaching social problems as objective conditions present themselves as "experts" who can and ought to tell people how the world *should* work. For example, functionalist approaches that hold the conviction that social order is held together by widely shared beliefs in cultural themes and by social institutions (such as family the economy, and religion), ‘lead to prognostic frames centred on how to make families, the economy, education and so on better’ (Loseke, 2003, p165).

### ***1.2.1.2 Subjectivist approaches***

While objectivist approaches designate particular conditions as social problems, subjectivist approaches examine the process by which people come to define certain conditions as social problems. As Best (2008) contends, ‘from the subjective outlook, it is not an objective quality of a social condition, but rather the subjective reactions to the condition, that make something a social problem’ (p. 9).

At first glance, this approach may seem wrongheaded. If you are interested in children’s play, shouldn’t you study children’s play as a social condition? Well, you can study children’s play or



any other social conditions, and there is nothing wrong in doing so. Indeed, it is apparent in Chapter 2 that such approaches are dominant in studies of children's play regarding a decline or lack of play outdoors. But such objectivist studies, from a subjectivist outlook, have nothing to do with studying children's play *as a social problem*. This is because conditions that seem accepted or that go unnoticed in different times and places could become serious social issues in others (Best, 1995; 2008). For example, a lack of outdoor, or indeed any type of children's play, wouldn't have been considered an issue in the medieval and Victorian eras when children's play was seen as waste of time (see Ariès, 1973; Griffith and Goodall, 2007).

Significantly, subjectivist or alternatively constructionist or interpretivist approaches to social problems initially arose out of a dissatisfaction with some of the shortcomings of earlier objectivist accounts. Best (2004) identifies that the objectivist approach to social problems faces at least three serious challenges. Firstly, as alluded to above in reference to Best (2008), over the course of history, the ideas of society change and few attempts are made to account for the fact that conditions that seemed acceptable or went unnoticed in different times and places could become serious social issues in others. Secondly, diverse phenomena, such as suicide and global warming, are grouped together as "social problems" with little uniting of them at the level of theoretical abstraction. Thirdly, in terms of practicality, the concept of "social problems" was not particularly useful for social analysis: 'the concept of social problems was too broad and too vague to be useful' (Best, 2004, p. 16). Many of these arguments are encapsulated in Becker's objections to sociological explanations that define 'deviance as the infraction of some agreed-upon rule' and which proceed to 'ask who breaks the rules, and to search for the factors in their personalities, and life situations that might account for the infractions' (Becker, 1963, p. 8). As he famously asserted, deviance is not universal but subjective: 'The deviant is one to whom that label has successfully been applied; deviant behaviour is behaviour that people so label' (Becker, 1963, p. 9).

The subjectivist approach takes many different forms, for example critical realism or poststructuralism, and claims many different intellectual lineages. Since the purpose of this study is to understand how and why children's play has emerged as a social problem, the specific approach adopted throughout the thesis is an approach known as "contextual constructionism"

(Best, 1993). The contextual constructionist approach and why it is adopted for this study is briefly discussed below.<sup>8</sup>

### ***1.2.1.3 Contextual constructionism***

Contextual constructionism (Best, 1993) is a later development of the social constructionist approach to social problems formulated in Spector and Kitsuse's ([1977] 2009) book *Constructing Social Problems* and a series of articles published in *Social Problems* (Kitsuse and Spector 1973 1975; Spector and Kitsuse, 1974). Spector and Kitsuse ([1977] 2009) offer the guiding statement of the approach to the study of social problems and a systematic articulation of a sociology of social problems. In forming their approach, Spector and Kitsuse ([1977] 2009) entertain a certain ambiguity, or at least allow for contrasting readings, around which facts about the objective world should be taken into account (Holstein and Miller, 2003). It is a question raised by Woolger and Pawluch (1985) on the place of objective conditions in constructionist examinations that first led to a distinction of between *strict* and *contextual* constructionism. Consequently, when discussing contextual constructionism, it is often useful to also discuss strict constructionism.

Strict constructionism focuses exclusively on language in claimsmaking (the process of making claims, of bringing a troubling condition to the attention of others) to 'avoid making assumptions about objective reality' (Best, 1989, p. 245-6), 'This requires not allowing any explicit *or* implicit references about a world outside human understanding to enter into the analysis' (Loseke, 2003, p. 198). Therefore, in strict constructionism, analysts cannot point to historical records or public records to argue about the constancy or presence of a condition in the social world. As such, records are only other constructions and cannot be judged as better (or worse) than other constructions because evaluations of their "truth" would require objective indicators and these are not allowed (Loseke, 2003).

By contrast, contextual constructionism requires the analyst remain focused on claimsmaking, yet they might acknowledge making some assumptions about objective conditions (Best, 1989). So,

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<sup>8</sup> The contextual constructionist approach and the reasons why it is adopted for this study is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3

the contextual constructionist analyses claimsmaking within its context of culture and social structure (Best, 1993). Therefore, analysts within contextual constructionism can examine some claims, such as historical records or public records, and use these claims to comment of the truth of other claims, allowing analysts to ask questions, such as what was going on in the social environment that led to claimsmaking about this particular problem at this particular point in history (Loseke, 2003).

The contextual constructionist approach allows for the analysis of claimsmaking within its cultural and social context. Best (1993) argues, in his forceful articulation of the contextual constructionist perspective, that such contextualisation is important because in order for analysts to properly describe social problem claimsmaking, reference must be made to social conditions. Strict constructionism pushes analysts into a contextless region where claimsmaking can only be explained in the abstract. More specifically, central to the constructionist perspective is that the claimsmaking is both implicitly and explicitly rhetorical, and ‘rhetorical strategies undoubtedly reflect particular cultures, social structure, and historical strategies. The language of claims does not exist independently of the social world; it is a product of - and influence on- that world’ (Best, 1993, p. 141). A strict, analysis ‘that "never leaves language" is an illusion because language never leaves society’ (Best 1993, p. 141). As such, the contextual constructionist approach is adopted throughout this thesis since it is clearly more fruitful (Best, 1993, 1995). The theoretical and conceptual tools used by the perspective as developed by Best are more fully articulated in Chapter 3. So too are the main controversies within the constructionist approach regarding its direction and application, which resulted in strict and contextual constructionism.

### ***1.2.2 Research questions***

To better understand how and why children’s play has emerged as a social problem over recent decades, attention must be paid to claimsmaking within its context of culture and social structure. Consequently, this study aims to describe the construction of the problem (what the problem is as a series of claims) and the people from whom claims about its existence have originated. In accordance with these aims, the research questions, which are central to the contextual constructionist endeavour, are as follows;

1. Who says that children's play is a problem? That is, who are the 'claimsmakers'?
2. What sort of problem do they say it is?
3. How did these constructs evolve?
4. How did they come to prevail?
5. What are their consequences?

Specifically, these five research questions are adapted from Ashley Frawley's (2012) study on the construction of happiness as a social problem, due to the parallels between the aims of the two studies. In seeking to answer these questions, this study offers an alternative and unique understanding of children's play as a social problem.

### ***1.2.3 Analysis of newspaper articles***

Although not explicitly recommended by Best (1993), the preferred information-gathering strategies used by contextual constructionists involve examining publicly available materials about conditions claimed to be social problems (Holstein and Miller, 2003). Holstein and Miller (2003) identify that the materials include such written texts as newspaper accounts, government reports and statistics, transcripts of hearings and public meetings, and professional publications. They find that contextual constructionists also examine television and related mass media presentations about claimed social problem conditions.

To address the research questions outlined above, the study analyses articles published in four major national UK newspapers: *The Daily Mail*, *The Daily Mirror*, *The Guardian*, *The Times* and their Sunday editions from 1985 to 2016 that mention the words 'children' and 'play' within five words of each other.<sup>9</sup> It is worth noting here that references for newspapers throughout the thesis are not in line with Harvard referencing guidelines for in-text references and include the name of the newspaper, alongside the author's surname and date. This is because the study tracks claims made over a particular period and through particular newspapers.

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<sup>9</sup> The rationale for using the key terms "children" and "play" within five words of each other as opposed to simply "children's play" is discussed in Chapter 4.

The specific methodology used to gather and analyse the data on which this study is based is David Altheide's (1996) Qualitative Media Analysis (QMA). It is important to note that this method is utilised by a number of recent studies that adopt a contextual constructions approach in seeking to understand the emergences of a social problem. Prominent examples include Jennie Bristow (2015) and Alexander Hochuli (2014) regarding the construction of baby boomers and fair trade as social problems respectively, along with the aforementioned Ashley Frawley (2012) study.

QMA blends 'the traditional notion of *objective content analysis* with *participant observation* to form *ethnographic content analysis*, or how a researcher interacts with documentary materials so that specific statements can be placed in the proper context for analysis' (Altheide and Schneider, 2013, p. 5). For Altheide, an appreciation of the context in which a document is produced is important for understanding its 'meaning and message'. These meanings and patterns rarely appear at the same time, rather they '*emerge* or become clear through constant comparison and investigation of documents over a period of time'. The concept of *emergence* refers to 'the gradual shaping of meaning through understanding and interpretation. It is because documents can allow us to focus on emergence that 'they are helpful in understanding the process of social life' (Altheide and Schneider, 2013, p. 16). Chapter 4 discusses Altheide's QMA methodology in more detail and its theoretical rationale and describes the sampling procedures and approach to data analysis used.

### **1.3 Structure of thesis**

The thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on a concern about a decline or lack of play outdoors, one of the most significant themes emerging from the growing interest in children's play over the past few decades. It identifies the main topics and issues within the literature, which centre around concerns linked or attached to a decline or lack of outdoor play, its suggested causes, proposed consequences and recommended solutions. The chapter concludes with a discussion of some the more important features uncovered from reviewing this literature regarding examining how and why children's play emerged as a social problem and the significance of the social constructionist approach adopted for this study. Chapter 3 explains the development of social construction as a perspective and how and why this perspective became

applied to the study of social problems. It explores the controversies within the constructionist camp, resulting in strict and contextual constructionism, and debates the limitations of the former and the advantages of latter and potentially less epistemologically "pure" version. Drawing extensively on the work of Best (2008), who strongly advocates a contextual constructionist approach, the chapter goes on to lay out the theoretical and conceptual tools necessary to understand how and why children's play has emerged as a social problem. Chapter 4 describes David Altheide's QMA, which is used through the study, and its theoretical rationale and describes the sampling procedures and approach to data analysis used. Chapter 5 tracks the discourse of children's play since the mid-1980s in major national UK newspapers, revealing a distinct trend towards the problematisation of children's play. The chapter provides a periodisation of the development and direction of claimsmaking activities from before the emergence of a problem to 2016 and describes the emergence of some of the central themes explored in more detail in later chapters. Chapter 6 addresses research question 1, 'who says that children's play is a problem? that is, who are the claimsmakers?', by identifying and analysing the role of claimsmakers who have led the problematisation of children's play, illustrating the role of prominent 'owners' of the problem. The penultimate chapter, Chapter 7, addresses research question 2, 'what sort of problem do they 'claimsmakers' say that children's play is?'; research question 3, 'how did these constructs evolve?'; research question 4, 'how did they come to prevail?' and 5 'what are the constructs' consequences?'. The chapter answers these questions by identifying and analysing the relative popularity of claims and the rhetoric used to promote them. Finally, Chapter 8 draws together the findings of the thesis and identifies areas for further research.

### **1.4 What the children's play problem means to me**

In recognition of the role played by the subjectivity of the researcher in conducting qualitative research, it is necessary to identify what the children's play problem means to me. I have always had an interest in sport and leisure, my undergraduate degree from 2005 to 2008 was in this subject. Towards the end of my degree during my individual study on child protection measures in sport, a subject I continued during my postgraduate master's degree from 2008 to 2010, I became more interested in the topic of children in sport and leisure. While conducting research for these studies, my attention was first drawn to the problematisation of children's play, and

more specifically to a decline or lack of outdoor play, not only in academic literature but also the attention this was receiving at the time in both the mass media and in policymaking. In addition to my interest in children's sport and leisure, what made the problematisation of children's play of particular interest to me is that I was born in 1984, meaning that I was a child growing up during the period when claims first started to appear problematising children play (see Chapter 5).

My own experience of outdoor play in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s would indicate a decline in outdoor play when compared to the experience of my parents. Both my parents, who were born in the 1950s, recall playing on the streets for hours. My mother in particular recalls playing outdoors from as young as the age three with a dummy pinned to her dress and has often told me that when she was a child, she was a "street urchin" (i.e. a child who spends most of their time in the streets). Moreover, from my own observations it appears that children are playing less outdoors since the late 1980s and 1990s when I was growing up. However, these personal experience and observations do not equate to evidence – and, more crucially, as argued above, just because a condition exists does not make it a social problem.

When my attention was first drawn to the problematisation of children play, it became clear to me that there was a distinction to be made about why those problematising children's play view a decline in outdoor play as a problem. For some, such as Elkind (2007a), Gray (2011), and Palmer (2007a), a decline or lack of outdoor play is a problem because they view outdoor play as an instrumental activity important for children's development and learning and health, which they see as impeded by what they perceive as a dangerous adult world from which children need protecting. Whereas for others, such as Helene Guldberg (2009) and Lenore Skenazy in *Free-Range Kids, How to Raise Safe, Self-Reliant Children (Without Going Nuts with Worry)* (2009), a decline or lack of outdoor play is a problem because they view outdoor play, specifically unsupervised outdoor play, as crucial for children's personal development in terms of enabling them to develop an understanding of the adult world, learning to navigate risks and relationships. In other words, Elkind, Gray, and Palmer views the problem as one where a harmful adult world prevents an activity instrumental for children's development, while Guldberg and Skenazy perspective views the problem in terms of the extent to which it prevents children from growing into the adult world.

For me personally, the idea that children are missing out on an opportunity to go outside and play spontaneously with their friends, whether it be on a local street, park or play area is a troubling one, since I deem such play as important for two reasons. Firstly, in similar vein to Guldberg (2009) and Skenazy (2009), outdoor play gives children the ability to interact with and learn about the adult world away the confines of school and home. Secondly, it is something that children do for its own sake because it is interesting and enjoyable to them and not because they have or need to do it.

It is because of my interests, experiences, observations and views that I chose to embark on this study of the children's play problem and it is partly why I chose media analysis as the most appropriate research method for my study of the children's play problem. By examining the published documents external to my own lived experiences to examine how and why children's play has been constructed as a social problem, I avoid many of the ethical issues that arise from interview-based qualitative research. Additionally, I was careful to use both quantitative and qualitative data to illustrate the development of the problem and situate my findings within a wider body of historical and sociological literature, to guard against drawing impressionistic conclusions.



## 2 The Decline or Lack of Outdoor Play: Review of the Literature

As discussed in the preceding chapter, interest in children's play has risen substantially over recent decades across academic disciplines and in popular writing. One of the most significant themes emerging from this burgeoning literature is a concern about a decline or lack of outdoor play. The literature on a decline or lack of outdoor play, the focus of this current chapter, can be understood as one part of a wider context in which "what children do" in their everyday lives has become framed as social problem/cultural or political debate. Debates about "what children do", as argued in the previous chapter, stem from the way childhood in the twenty-first century is socially constructed. Childhood today is socially constructed in such a way that children and childhood are seen as vulnerable and at risk, needing protection from what is perceived to be a dangerous adult world. Significantly, the basic definitional features of childhood as we might think of it today emerges in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It was during this period that the sentimental perspective of childhood emerged, children increasingly became viewed in 'romanticized, sentimental terms as priceless innocents who need protection from a harsh world' (Best, 1998, p. 199). Key to this sentimental vision of childhood according to Best (1994) is the emergence and popularisation of the psychoanalytic and cognitive child development theories that associate childhood experience with adults' personalities, emphasising the psychological vulnerability of children regarding their development.

The debates about "what children do", of which the literature on the decline or lack of outdoor play is argued here to be part, are extensive and include bodies of literature on related topics. A prominent example of a literature on a related topic within the debate about "what children do" is the literature on the rise of "bedroom culture". *Bedroom culture* is a term often used to refer to concerns about children spending longer amounts of time in their technology-rich bedrooms to the exclusion of other activities, such as playing outdoors or spending time with their family, and the affect this has on their development. Concerns about bedroom culture first appeared in the 1970s in a few sociological accounts that drew attention to a culture of the bedroom, pointing to its connections with teenage consumer culture, particularly that of girls (McRobbie and Garber, 1976; Frith, 1978), emphasizing how teenage girls' search for personal identity through self-

presentation and the development of "taste" has been led, exploited even, by powerful commercial interest in the fashion and music industries. Moira Bovill and Sonia Livingstone in *Children and their Changing Media Environment: A European Comparative Study* (2001) observe that more recent research on bedroom culture has placed increasing emphasis on the media (see Silverstone and Hirsh, 1992; Bachmair, 1991; Steele and Brown, 1994). Bovill and Livingstone (2001) go on to observe that although the academic literature remains sketchy, it suggests that 'the teenager's bedrooms is where media and identity intersect: in this space media technology and content are appropriated by young people to express their sense of who they are' (Bovill and Livingstone, 2001, p. 180). This new leisure site according to Bovill and Livingstone (2001) raises a variety of questions both for family life and children's use of the media, as "bedroom culture" implies that children:

[...] spend significant proportions of their leisure time at home with the mass media, increasingly screen media, in their own private space rather than communal or family space. This provokes concerns about children leading increasingly isolated lives, and about parents' ability to regulate and monitor media use. (Bovill and Sonia Livingstone, 2001, p. 180-181)

Sonia Livingstone, Professor of Social Psychology at the London School of Economics (LSE), in addition to the study above is the author or editor of over a dozen books and many academic articles and chapters on children, media and the internet. She has thus becoming an authority on the subject to the extent that she was awarded the title of Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 2014 'for services to children and child internet safety'. One of Livingstone's many contributions is an LSE project summarised in the report *UK Children Go Online* (2005). The report finds that young people's main motivation for going online is to look for a way to hang out with their friends. The report states that most online communication is with people they have face-to-face communication with on a regular basis: 'being in contact with friends is highly valued, and there is little interest contacting strangers' (Livingstone and Bober, 2005, p. 4). Both the risk and opportunities of children's internet use are emphasised in the report, including how they go hand in hand: 'There is a strong, positive association between opportunities and risks - the more children and young people experience the one, the more they also experience the other, and vice versa' (Livingstone and Bober, 2005, p. 3).

The literature on a decline or lack of outdoor play often refers to and draws upon many of these bodies of literature on related topics in the debates about "what children do", such as, for example: independence/freedom, mental health problems, obesity, overscheduling and bedroom culture. As the brief discussion of the literature on bedroom culture illustrates, these bodies of literatures on related topics are extensive and therefore it is not possible to provide a comprehensive review of all the bodies of literature on related topics referred to or drawn on in the literature on a decline or lack of outdoor play. Instead, each of the main topics referred to or drawn upon within the literature is reviewed by exploring a smaller number of key ideas and authors to provide an overall picture of this vital literature.

The literature review presented below is divided thematically to enable comparisons to be drawn between the main themes and those identified in the analysis chapters. The chapter begins by reviewing concerns linked to a decline or lack of outdoor play, followed by a review of an explanation of the causes. Next, the suggested negative consequences are reviewed, followed by proposed solutions. Finally, the chapter discusses some of the most important features uncovered by the literature review and the significance of adopting a social constructionist approach and more specifically a contextual constructionist approach which seeks to locate claimsmaking within its cultural context.

## **2.1 Linked or attached concerns**

A central theme within the literature is that a variety of concerns are linked or attached to the decline of children's play. Four such concerns are frequently identified in the literature: a lack of independence/freedom, a lack of being outdoors, bedroom culture and overscheduling. Each concern is presented individually below, though it is worth noting these concerns are often interrelated and overlap.

### ***2.1.1 Lack of independence/freedom***

A longstanding concern linked or attached to a decline or lack of outdoor play is that children have been given increasingly less independence to roam outdoors freely since the 1970s. A particularly prominent example is the much-quoted *One False Move* (1990) study by Mayer Hillman and colleagues. Through surveys of children and parents in five areas of the UK, the

Hillman et al. (1990) study investigates the independent mobility of junior school children aged seven to 11 years and senior school children aged 11 to 15 years in 1990 compared with 1971.<sup>1</sup> The study shows a dramatic decrease in the children's independent mobility over this two-decade period. In 1971, 80 per cent of seven- and eight-year-old children were allowed to go to school on their own, by 1990 this figure was only nine per cent. Personal freedom for children a little older at nine-years-old was also shown to have declined with only half being allowed to cross the roads on their own, only about one third being allowed to go to school without an adult, and less than one in ten being allowed to use buses. By contrast, in 1971 most nine-year-olds were found to be free to do all these things. Hillman et al. go on to note that the increasing restrictions on children's independent mobility indicate that the geographical scope of children's 'play territory' has been much reduced (p. 79).

Hillman's (1990) findings that children are given less independence to roam outdoors freely over the past several decades are echoed by Pooley and colleagues' (2006) research for *A Mobile Century*, which includes oral testimonies from some 250 respondents from four urban areas in Britain. They find, like Hillman et al. (1990), a decline in the amount children went alone to school. However, Pooley et al. find that only 40 per cent of 10- to 11-year-olds went alone to school in the 1940s, as opposed to 80 per cent of younger children aged seven- and eight in 1971 in the Hillman et al. study. By the early 2000s, this figure of 40 per cent had shrunk to only nine per cent, the same figure as the Hillman et al. study, even though these are a decade apart. The researchers also find a decline in the proportion of 10- to 11-year-olds allowed to travel around local areas freely and that children are more tightly regulated in where they can go unaccompanied compared to the 1940s. Pooley et al. (2006), similar to Hillman et al. (1990), also suggest that the size of the area in which children are allowed to play in has shrunk dramatically.

Consistent with both of these studies, former director of the Children's Play Council (CPC), Tim Gill (2011), finds that 66 per cent of parents report that children lack the freedom they themselves had as children in a paper that examines how childhood has changed over the generations, based on 1000 children aged five to 11 and their parents across the UK. Gill also shows, consistent with

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<sup>1</sup> Children's independent mobility typically refers to children having the freedom to explore and move about within their neighbourhood or community without adult supervision (Tranter and Whitelegg, 1994; Romero, 2010; Zubrick et al. 2010).

the suggestions of Hillman et al. (1990) and Pooley et al. (2006), that the size of the area in which children are allowed to play has shrunk dramatically, with more than half (57 per cent) of nine-year-olds being restricted to within sight of their home. In addition, 29 per cent of children are found to be unable to venture out of the grounds of their home. Jago and colleagues (2009) also find that children are being restricted from being able to venture out of the grounds of their homes. In a study of 24 parents of 10- to 11-year-old children from six primary schools in South West England on their attitudes towards their child's physical activity independent of adult supervision, which includes playing outdoors, and the factors that limit "parental licence" (a term used in their study which refers to parental approval for children to engage in independent forms of physical activity including playing outdoors), Jago et al. (2009) find that a quarter of parents indicate their child's physical activity is restricted to within the home or its immediate proximity.

Another study that identifies a lack of independence in children's play is Prezza and colleagues' (2001) study of 251 mothers living in Rome, Italy, with children seven- to 12-years-old. The authors discover that children have limited possibilities to autonomously discover the world outside their home with only a few of the children in the study having the possibility of reaching open spaces, going to and from school, going on small errands and playing outside without constant adult supervision. Additionally, the study discovers that age is the most important factor in relation to independence and that male children acquire freedom before their female counterparts. Veitch and colleagues (2006) also identify a lack of independence from interviews with parents. The authors investigate where children play and why by exploring the perceptions of 78 parents of children from five primary schools representing a range of Social Economic Status (SES) areas in Melbourne, Australia. Seventy per cent of parents report that children aged six to eight years have limited independent mobility. Veitch et al. (2007) again find a lack of independence in their study that this time explores the perceptions of 132 children (71 girls, 61 boys) from a variety of primary schools representing a range of SES in Victoria, Australia. The study examines the role and use of public open spaces, which are defined as parks, playgrounds, ovals, public outdoor netball/basketball courts, or other freely accessible recreational open spaces. Consistent with the 2006 study, children aged six to eight years comment most often on their restricted independent mobility.

### **2.1.2 A lack of outdoors**

Concern that children in recent decades spend less time and have far fewer experiences outdoors than the previous generation are also linked to a decline or lack of outdoor play. Perhaps the most prominent example is provided by American journalist Richard Louv's book, *Last Child in the Woods*, first published in 2005 and updated in 2010. The book identifies a growing divide between children and the outdoors. Louv (2010) suggests that within the space of a few decades, the way that children understand and experience nature has changed radically, with their physical contact and intimacy with nature in decline. Consequently, he argues that children are suffering from what he calls "nature-deficit disorder". According to Louv, 'Nature-deficit disorder is the human costs of alienation from nature, among them: diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties, and higher rates of physical and emotional illness' (2010, p. 36).

Louv (2010) highlights how, not so long ago, children went camping in the garden, riding bikes through the woods, climbing trees, collecting bugs, picking wildflowers and running through piles of autumn leaves. However, 'children today play outside less often' (2010, p. 34). Echoing Louv, Tim Gill in *The Ecologist* (2005) also identifies an increasing divide between children and the outdoors. Gill (2005) suggests that children are disappearing from the outside at such a rate that would put them at the top of any conservationist's list of endangered species if they were a member of the animal kingdom.

Qualitative studies find that children in recent decades experience a lack of the outdoors compared to previous generations. For example, Professor of Geography Lia Karsten in her 2005 study compares children's use of space during the 1950s and early 1960s with that of 2003 from three streets in the city of Amsterdam. Findings from the past are gathered by oral histories from adults who were brought up on one of the streets in the study or neighbours who have a long history of living on one of the streets in the study and thus know about different periods in the past and in 2003. Findings for 2003 are obtained by carrying out interviews with children and parents living in one of the three streets in the study, as well as observations. Karsten discovers that the amount of time children spend outdoors has declined considerably. She also finds that the public space of the street, which used to belong to children (child space), has been transformed into one meant for adults and accompanied children. Conversely, private home space, traditionally the domain of adults, has become a child space. It is worth pointing out that Karsten

(2005) distinguishes two new types of children's geography in addition to the traditional "outdoors child", both of which are characterised by a decrease in time spent outdoors and an increase in adult supervision. The first type she distinguishes is the "indoor child", who rarely spends time outdoors playing and spends most of their time indoors. The second type is the "backseat generation", those escorted children whose time is occupied primarily by adult-organised children's activities.

Another example is provided by Skår and Krogh's (2009) study from Scandinavia. It is important to note that there is a wealth of research on children's experiences of the outdoors from Scandinavian countries, in particular Norway, which all place a strong cultural emphasis on nature and outdoor life (Gullestad, 1990). Despite this strong cultural emphasis on nature and outdoor life, a number of the studies show children experiencing a lack of outdoors (see; Krange and Strandbu, 2004; Lidén, 1999; Midjo and Wigen, 1997). Skår and Krogh's (2009) research suggests changes in children's outdoor and nature-based experiences near their homes. They conduct interviews with 20 residents between 18 and 72 years of age (six parents of the 20 informants had children aged between five and 11 years) from a small town in Norway; participants are asked to describe memories of their own childhood and give their observations of contemporary children's practices. Informants provide a number of examples that highlight a decrease in the use of outdoor areas, especially regarding play that is spontaneous (i.e. play that is initiated and decided on by the children), such as descriptions of small local playing fields that have overgrown and the abandonment of a local ski track. Several parents also note that they no longer see children building tree-houses. One limitation of both the Skår and Krogh (2009) and Karsten (2005) studies is that they are based on a relatively small and localised sample.

A study without the limitation of a small and localised sample, which also found children in recent decades experience a lack of outdoors compared to previous generations, is Clements' (2004) study, which has a nationally representative sample of 830 mothers with children aged between three- and 12-years-old throughout the US. Significantly, the main focus of this study is children's outdoor play. For the study, mothers are asked to compare their children's outdoor play with their own. Eighty-five per cent of mothers say that their child or children play outdoors less than they themselves had when they were their children's age. Seventy per cent of mothers report playing outdoors every day when they were young, compared with 31 per cent of their

children. Fifty-six per cent of mothers say that when they played outdoors, they generally played for periods of three hours or more at a time, compared with only 22 per cent of their children. The mothers are also asked to give information regarding their children's indoor play activities. Overall, Clements (2004) finds that number of regular play activities was higher for indoor activities (the vast majority of which were technology-based) compared to outdoor activities. She suggests that the findings further support the notion that today's children lead a more indoors life than previous generations. It is important to emphasise here in relation to these studies that they are constrained by potential generational recall bias and nostalgia associated with adult's reflection on their past.

Another representative study that finds children in recent decades experience a lack of the outdoors compared to previous generations is an online survey using a panel of respondents representative of the population of the UK by England Marketing (2009), on behalf of Natural England (who are the government's adviser for the natural environment in England). The study aims to explore the difference in contact with nature between today's generation of children compared with the contact children from their parents' generation. The main explanation for this difference in contact with nature is that children in the twenty-first century spend less time playing in natural places such as woodlands, countryside and heaths, than they did in previous generations. The study of 1,150 and 502 children found that fewer than 10% play in such places, compared to 40% of adults when they were young. The most popular place for children to play in 2009 is in their home, while for adults a generation ago it was outdoors in local streets. Sixty-two per cent of children say they play at home indoors more than any other place; forty-two percent of adults say they played outdoors in local streets more than in any other place.

### ***2.1.3 Bedroom culture***

The rise of bedroom culture is a further concern linked or attached to a decline or lack of outdoor play. For instance, child psychologist David Elkind identifies how children 'spend an increasing number of hours each day in front of TV, computer, movie, BlackBerry, and cell phone screens' (2007a, p. 37). He suggests that screens have contributed dramatically to the changing world of children's play with 'much of the time children once spent playing outdoors is now occupied by sedentary screen play' (ibid, p. 37). Echoing Elkind, Frost, in his 2010 book on the history of children's play, identifies how children's lives are being overrun by electronic media, he calls



this 'out of control cyber play' (p. 214). Frost (2010) contends that outdoor play is being traded for an increasing diversity of technology available to many children in their homes, where they spend long solitary and sedentary hours dominated by virtual socialisation with unseen faces, video games, WIFI, text messaging and chat rooms. There are a number of similar examples to those studies referred to above (see for instance: Mercogliano, 2007; Palmer, 2007a; Tovey, 2007).

Researchers also attempt to quantify the extent of the rise of the digital technology in children's lives by researching the number of hours children spend using digital technology. For instance, Juster and colleagues (2004) utilise time diary data from the University of Michigan Child Development Supplement to examine how American children aged six to 17 spent their time between 1981 and 2003. The authors find that American children of six- to 17-years-old in 2003 spend 2.45 hours per week on computer activities, 14.36 hours per week watching television and 8.5 hours per week playing games, most notably video games. This accumulates to around 25 hours per week of what Juster et al. (2004) refer to as media and game time. In 1982, this figure was 15.44 per week and consisted of only watching television. Research from the Kaiser Family Foundation, which has been tracking children's use of electronic and media since 1999, further attempts to identify the extent of the rise. The research includes a large national sample of more than 2,000 children from ages eight to 18 across America. Results indicate that in 2009, children engaged in 7.38 hours of media time (e.g. watching TV, listening to music, using the internet/computers, playing video games) each day, a substantial increase on the previous two waves of the research in 1999 and 2005, which were 6.19 and 6.21 hours per day respectively (Rideout, Foehr, and Roberts, 2010). The researchers also find that for about a quarter of their time, children are using more than one medium simultaneously, leading researchers to dub today's children as 'Generation M' for multitasking. As a result of multitasking, children in 2009 managed to fit in a total of 10 hours and 45 minutes' worth of media content into those daily 7.38 hours of media time (Rideout, Foehr, and Roberts, 2010).

It is worth briefly expressing here how, within the literature, indoor and outdoor play are presented as binary constructs. However, indoor and outdoor play are not always necessarily distinct. Both types of play can be argued to offer opportunities for playing and socialising with friends. Indeed, the possibilities afforded by social media play can be argued to offer even more

opportunities for children to play with their friends than outdoor play. For instance, social media play means that children can play and socialise with friends from school or clubs they attend who don't live in their local area, as well as play and socialise with their friends during the winter months in the UK when it is dark by four o'clock in the afternoon. Moreover, the fact that children may be using their relative freedom of the internet to counteract the isolation of not being able to engage in outdoor play tends to be presented in the literature less as a solution to a problem than yet another worrisome risk.

Given that indoor and outdoor play are not always necessarily distinct, this begs the question: why are indoor and outdoor play presented as such in the literature with the rise of indoor play/bedroom culture tending not to be presented as a solution to children not being able to engage in outdoor play? One chief reason, as the study will show, is that distinguishing outdoor play from indoor play makes it possible to problematise a decline or absence in outdoor play. Moreover, arguing that the indoors play that replaces the outdoor play is harmful to children is more likely to resonate in a cultural context where children are as seen as vulnerable and at risk – and thus receive more attention.

#### ***2.1.4 Overscheduling***

Another concern linked or attached to a decline in outdoor play, as well as play in general, is being overscheduled by participation in too many activities that are adult-directed and goal-orientated, in addition to basic schooling. Children being overscheduled is the focus of the much-quoted research by child psychiatrist Alvin Rosenfeld and journalist Nicole Wise (2000; 2001). This research explores the impact of *hyper-parenting*, a term used to describe a phenomenon whereby middle-class parents become overly involved in their children's lives and, with the aim of perfection for their children, overschedule them with activities that are goal-orientated. The authors explain how many children 'participate on one or more teams, have lessons in music, art, foreign languages, and are tutored in school subjects' (2001, p. 1). Rosenfeld and Wise (2000; 2001) argue that, although not perfect, in the past everyday life was a lot less complicated. They are concerned that children are being denied the time to play without structure or being supervised by adults.

Similarly to Rosenfeld and Wise, Canadian journalist and English teacher Carl Honoré (2009) also explores the impact of hyper-parenting on children's lives and identifies how many middle-class parents are scheduling their children in ceaseless goal-orientated activities in their attempt to enable their children to excel in every way. In addition, he suggests that opportunities for unscheduled time to play are being denied to children by overscheduling. Honoré (2009) suggests that although hyper-parenting hails from the middle classes, this does not mean that hyper-parenting only effects the well-to-do. He points out that 'when it comes to social change, the middle classes often set the tone, and over time their hang-ups and foibles trickle up and down the social ladder - or at the very least they make everyone else feel guilt for failing to keep pace' (ibid, p. 5).

Sociologist Annette Lareau in her 2003 book *Unequal Childhoods*, based on observing twelve families representing a range of social economic status (SES) with children aged nine- and ten-years-old in their natural environment, finds that when children come from middle-class families, their lives outside of school are dominated by adult-organised activities. These activities are established and controlled by parents in order to ensure their children achieve their potential. Lareau (2003) terms this constant work by parents on their children's development as *concerted cultivation*. Lareau also finds that these children's lives are, as she puts it 'chock full', with so many activities run by adults that it is only on very rare occasion that they had 'free time' in which to 'play outside' or 'hang out with friends' (p. 163).<sup>2</sup>

Some research attempts to quantify the scale of overscheduling. One example is provided by a cross-cultural study of parental values and attitudes towards children's time for play conducted by the LEGO Learning Institute in 2002. The report consists of a telephone survey of approximately 3000 parents of children between the ages of zero to 12 years from five countries: the US, the UK, France, Germany and Japan. The report also utilises data from another survey conducted by LEGO Brand Tracking. Almost two thirds of parents in the USA (58 per cent) and Germany (60 per cent), and almost half of parents in the UK (48 per cent), report that they think that their child is overscheduled now and then, often or very often. The report concludes by

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<sup>2</sup> Lareau does not define what she means by free time, although it would be safe to assert that she means time away from adult supervision and control.

suggesting that many parents seem to prefer scheduled and goal-oriented activities as opposed to play because they are convinced that children need to participate in scheduled activities and lessons after school in order to be properly prepared for adult life. Another study which attempts to quantify the scale of overscheduling comes from Melman and others (2007) and involves 90 (49 female and 41 male) children, in a health class in a suburban New York high school, with the average age of 15. The students completed an activity questionnaire to measure the number of regularly scheduled activities in which children were involved and the amount of time children spent participating in these activities. Melman et al. find that students reported spending an average of 30.54 hours per week engaged in regularly scheduled activities. School-related activities made up the greatest portion of their time with an average of 17.42 hours (11.30 of which was spent doing homework). This is followed by non-school activities, household tasks and paid employment.

It is important to point out that Elkind's classic book *The Hurried Child*, first published in 1981, is something of a forerunner of the concern about overscheduling. Elkind called attention to the negative effects of parental pressure on their children's lives. He argued that by expecting too much too soon from their children, parents are forcing them to grow up too fast. According to Elkind (1981), so much emphasis is placed on children's achievement by their parents, particularly in middle-class families, that their children's schedules are overloaded with organised activities and school homework, with many children so tightly scheduled that they have to keep date books. Elkind identifies that it is not just older children who as being heavily scheduled in this way, he points out that it is not unusual for some children at elementary level to go to 'hockey practice, or swimming, or gymnastics training before school' and 'after school these same students may take music lesson or participate in a church or civic social organization activity, such as putting on a play' (2007b, p. 43). Elkind also identifies how even preschool children are being heavily scheduled in this way as well. Elsewhere, Elkind (2007a) in *The Power of Play: Learning What Comes Naturally* uses the term *overprogramming* to refer to children whose lives outside of school are overloaded with activities aimed at child development by their parents

## 2.2 Explanation of causes

Since children are cast as particularly vulnerable to a harmful adult world, parents become seen as risk-mangers tasked with optimising their children's outcomes (Lee et al., 2010). A corollary of this, observes sociologist Ellie Lee et al. (2010), is that parents who engage in "risky" or "toxic" behaviour can be framed as a danger to their children:

Attention has been drawn to the distinctiveness of a culture that now routinely represents 'parenting' as the single most important cause of impaired life chances, outstripping any other factor...the idea that *parents themselves* constitute an important, and according to some perhaps the most significant, risk factor in children's lives. (Lee et al., 2010, p. 295)

According to Charlotte Faircloth (2014) in one of her chapters in *Parenting Culture Studies* (2014), the development paradigm that is so firmly established as fact in many western societies following the popularisation of psychoanalytic and cognitive child development theories in the twentieth century is one of the key reasons 'parents are now understood - by policymakers, parenting experts and parents themselves - as 'God-like', and wholly deterministic in an individual child's development and future' (Faircloth, 2014, p. 26). Furedi (2002; 2008) terms this *parental determinism*, a form of deterministic thinking that construes the everyday, most routine actions and activities of parents as directly and causally associated with "failing" or harming them and, as a result, the wider society. To illustrate the extent to which the routine actions and activities of parents are directly and causally associated with "failing" or harming children, Furedi (2008, p. 55-56) provides a list of ten child pathologies attributed to parental behaviour, a list that he suggests represents a very small proportion of the conditions for which mothers and fathers are blamed. One example, he contends, is: 'A report published by Parentline in April 2000 stated that thousands of parents are psychologically damaging their teenage children because of the way they speak to them' (Furedi, 2008, p. 56). Another of these ten child pathologies attributed to parental behaviour listed by Furedi is failure in school:

Numerous newspaper reports and two widely publicized television programs have claimed that children's academic achievement is compromised if their mother is employed full-time. One such report stated that such children are twice as likely to fail exams than if she stays at home. Mothers who work outside the home are also indicted for risking their child's psychological development. (Furedi, 2008, p. 55)

This notion of parental determinism Faircloth (2014) argues ‘has inflated the social importance of the parent role, precipitating a range of ‘intensive’ styles of parenting (readily understood through such tags as ‘Gina Ford’, Tiger Mothers’, ‘Attachment’, or ‘Helicopter parenting)’ (Faircloth, 2014, p. 26). Another intensive style of parenting worth noting here is the hyper-parenting discussed above. Faircloth (2014, p. 26) suggests that in turn, these parenting styles have themselves become the lens which many adults (mothers in particular) derive their sense of identity, in a form of ‘identity work’ akin to a vocation.

It is worth briefly mentioning here that the emergence of a culture of ‘intensive parenting’ is notably a central focus of *Parenting Culture Studies*. Faircloth (2014) in one of her chapters in the book discusses two of the earliest and most influential observers of parenting becoming increasingly “intensive” - Hays (1996) and Furedi (2002). Both of whom draw attention to the way that what parents do and are expected to do, has become both demanding of time but also of emotion. Significantly, regarding the book’s descriptions and discussions of emergence of intensive parenting culture, central tenets of this culture can be gleaned. These central tenets are that it is presumed that what parents do (or don’t do) is central and determining importance, and that any problems with what parents do or do not do should be measured by their presumed impact upon the child.

As parents are seen in such deterministic terms, it is parents and more specifically their "risky" or "toxic" anxieties about their children’s safety that are identified as the main causes of a decline of lack of outdoor play in the literature. This section of the literature review identifies and explores the most prominent causes identified in the literature individually. These include parental anxiety, stranger danger, traffic, other children, lack of places, adults’ growing intolerance and reduced sense of community. Although factors are identified individually, as with the concerns linked or attached to a decline in outdoor play, they are often interrelated and overlap.

### **2.2.1 Parental anxiety**

A major cause identified within the literature is parental anxiety. *Parental anxiety* is a term used to refer to parents’ worries about different areas of their children’s lives, such as their safety, development and so on. The term also includes parents’ concerns about how their parenting is perceived by others. A practically prominent example of this is provided by Elkind, who in his

book *The Power of Play* (2007a) dedicates a whole chapter to parental anxiety – or as he refers to it, *parental angst*. Elkind (2007a) argues that one negative consequence of parental angst is that parents increasingly fear dangers to their children’s physical safety and wellbeing – and as a result, overprotect them by restricting or eliminating their outdoor play. He also argues that as a result of parental angst, parents are increasingly concerned about their child’s development and how their parenting looks to others: parents overschedule and overprogramme their children and do not let them out to play. Similarly, Palmer (2007a) argues that the causes of a decline or lack of outdoor play derives from a significant increase in parental anxiety. She contends that anxiety is insidious: it stimulates irrational fears, such as stranger danger, and amplifies rational ones, such as the danger of traffic. Interestingly, *The Good Childhood Inquiry* commissioned by The Children's Society and launched in September 2006 as the UK's first independent national inquiry into childhood, goes so far as to assert that children are "hostage" to parental anxiety by being denied the freedom to play outside.

There are numerous other examples in the literature of parental anxiety being identified as a cause for a lack of or decline of outdoor play, see for instance: McNeish and Roberts (1995); Valentine and McKendrick (1997); Cole-Hamilton, Harrop and Street (2002) Tovey (2007); Jago et al. (2009), Frost (2010). Before moving on, it is important to note that the next four causes identified below – namely: stranger danger, traffic, other children, lack of places – are parents’ fears or concerns about safety said to be fuelled by this anxiety and which are argued in the literature to have had the most pervasive effect on children’s outdoor play.

### **2.2.2 *Stranger danger***

One suggested cause of a decline or lack of outdoor play is parents’ fears about their children’s safety from the potential danger of "other adults", often referred to as *stranger danger*. According to sociologist Mary Anne Stokes in *Stranger Danger: Child Protection and Parental Fears in the Risk Society* (2009), although the exact origins of the term stranger danger are unknown, it is best described as ‘a buzzword developed over the past decade in education and the media’ that ‘refers to the possible threat of strangers to children’ (Stokes, 2009, p. 7).

An example of parents’ fears about stranger danger as a suggested cause of a decline or lack of outdoor play is provided by Palmer (2007a), who states that one of the main reasons why

children's play seldom takes place outdoors, as well as for the retreat inside, is parents' fear of stranger danger. Louv (2010) similarly suggests that parents' fear of strangers is the most prominent cause of not allowing their children the freedom to play outdoors or to explore nature. There are other similar examples in the literature, for example, Tovey (2007) suggests that parental fear of stranger danger appears to be the major cause of children no longer playing outdoors to the extent they once did a generation ago; Layard and Dunn (2009) suggest that one reason for the decline in children's outdoor play is that 'parents fear the abduction and murder of their child' (2009, p. 38).

Qualitative studies of parents provide evidence that parents' fear about stranger danger is a major cause of the decline or lack of outdoor play. An example is the 1995 study by McNeish and Roberts for the children's charity Barnardo's. The research investigates parents' concerns about their children's safety and how this impacts outdoor play. The study includes a survey of 94 parents and 62 children and is supplemented by information gathered from other studies, including Barrett et al. (1995) and a survey from the polling organisation MORI. The study finds that danger from strangers is the biggest worry for parents regarding letting their children out to play. Sixty-six per cent say it is a major worry. A much-quoted example is provided by Valentine and McKendrick (1997), who explore parental concerns about children's independent play outdoors, which they refer to as simply *outdoor play*. The authors use data from a two-year study involving 400 households with children aged between eight- and 11-years-old in North-West England. They find that one of the main causes of restrictions on children's play opportunities is parental fears about stranger danger. Similarly, Veitch and colleagues (2006) investigate where children play and why by exploring the perceptions of 78 parents in a city in Australia. They find that active free play, which they describe as 'unstructured physical activity that is conducted outdoors during free time' (p. 3), is impeded by parental fears regarding strangers, with a high proportion (58%) of parents reporting that safety concerns regarding strangers influence where their children play.

Other prominent examples of qualitative studies include O'Brien and Smith's (2002) study of six mothers with children aged eight-years-old in the United Kingdom. The study finds that parents' fear of strangers prevents them from allowing their children to play freely outdoors away from adult intervention and supervision. Another qualitative study is Allin and colleagues' (2014)



research into 12 mothers with children aged between nine-years-old and 11-years-old from a primary school in the North-East of England, which finds that the most frequently raised concern in semi-structured interviews in relation to parents restricting their children's outdoor play is the risk of stranger danger. These findings have also been repeated in a large-scale multinational study on children's play by Family, Kids and Youth (2010). The report, which includes 7933 internet-based interviews with parents from 25 countries, finds that the most often cited fear which leads parents to restrict their children's outdoor play is that "they may be in danger of child predators" (cited by 49 per cent of parents).

It is important to point out that identifying parental fears about stranger danger as a major cause of a decline or lack of outdoor play is often presented alongside suggestions that such fear is out of proportion with the likelihood of children being harmed by a stranger. Tovey (2007), for example, after suggesting that parental fear of stranger danger appears to be the major cause of children no longer playing outdoors to the extent they once did a generation ago, points out that 'children have never been safer, and incidents of child abduction and murder although tragic, are extremely rare and have remained unchanged in the last fifty years' (p. 3). Echoing Tovey, Layard and Dunn (2009), after stating that one of the reasons for the decline in children's outdoor play is parents' fear of abduction, highlight how incidents of child abduction and murder are incredibly rare and the number of child murders by strangers has remained around the current level for decades. Although, it could be argued that levels have remained the same because children are kept inside, meaning there is limited opportunity for strangers to abduct or murder them. Similarly, the Family, Kids and Youth (2010) report, before identifying that 49 per cent of parents cited worry about child predators, leading them to restrict their children's outdoor play, states that 'children are no more likely to be harmed by strangers now than they were 20 or 30 years ago' (p. 8). For further almost identical examples see: McNeish and Roberts (1995); Gill (2005); Palmer (2007a); Frost (2010); James and Gregory (2011), Little (2013).

### **2.2.3 Traffic**

Parents' fears about traffic, fuelled by parental anxiety, are also identified in the literature as a cause of a decline or lack of outdoor play. For example, Palmer (2007a) states a main reason that parents restrict their children's outdoor play is because of their fear about the danger of traffic on the roads. In a similar vein, Louv (2010) suggests that parents' fear of traffic is one of the major

causes which separates children from the freedom to play outdoors and explore nature. Repeating Louv, Moss's (2012) report for the National Trust suggests that parents fear the risk posed by traffic and that this is one of the main causes of children's reduced freedom to roam and play in nature.

Qualitative studies involving parents provide evidence that concern about traffic is a major cause of the decline in children's play. For instance, the Valentine and McKendrick (1997) study finds that parental concerns about traffic, along with stranger danger, is the other main cause of restrictions of children's play opportunities. Echoing Valentine and McKendrick, Jago et al. (2009) find that parents' concern about traffic is a major factor that adversely affects their child's engagement in forms of physical activity independent of adults, which as noted above includes playing outdoors, with over half of the parents (n=13) reporting that the volume of local traffic adversely affects their child's physical activity opportunities. Further examples include McNeish and Roberts (1995); O'Brien and Smith (2002); Veitch et al. (2006); Weir et al. (2006); James and Gregory (2011) Little (2013); Witten (2013). Additionally, the Family, Kids and Youth (2010) largescale multinational study on children's play finds that the second most often cited fear which leads them to restrict their children's outdoor play is "that they may be in danger from road traffic" (cited by 43 per cent of parents).

Interestingly, whereas parental concerns about stranger danger as a major cause of the decline of children's play is often presented alongside suggestions that such fear or concern is out of proportion to the likelihood of their child being harmed by a stranger, parental concerns about traffic as a major cause of the decline of play is often presented alongside suggestions that the fear or concern is rational. Palmer (2007a), for example, alongside stating that a main reason parents restrict children's outdoor play is because of their fear about the danger of traffic on the roads, suggests that the fear is rational since a significant increase in traffic on the roads means that every year the outdoor environment becomes less safe. In another example, Moss (2012), before suggesting that parents fear the risk posed by traffic and that this is one of the main causes of children's reduced freedom to roam and play in nature, suggests that parents concern about traffic is entirely rational.

### **2.2.4 Other children**

Parents' fears about other children, fuelled by parental anxiety, is another cause of a reduction in outdoor play identified in the literature. Qualitative studies of parents provide evidence that concerns about other children are a cause of a decline in children's play. An early example comes from the McNeish and Roberts' (1995) Barnardo's study, in which bullying by other children is found to be a major worry for 35% of parents. More recent studies tend to identify a relationship between parents' concerns about other children and the Social Economic Status (SES) of the areas in which they live. For example, Veitch et al. (2006) find that parents report the presence of teenagers at parks as a deterrent to allowing their child to use parks and playgrounds. Interestingly, they find these concerns particularly evident among parents from low and mid-SES areas. For example, more than one third of parents from low and mid-SES areas express safety concerns about teenagers loitering in parks, compared to just 10% of parents from high SES areas. The parents from low and mid-SES areas explain that teenagers often use parks as places to congregate in groups and be involved in undesirable behaviours such as bullying, swearing, drinking alcohol – and, in some parks, taking drugs.

Similar findings are obtained by Weir and colleagues' (2006) New York study of 204 parents with children aged between five-years-old and 10-years-old residing in either a low SES inner city area (101) or a medium SES suburb (103), in which parents completed a questionnaire on concerns about neighbourhood safety and reported how physically active their children were in various settings. Parents are found to limit their children's outdoor activity because of their concerns about neighbourhood safety, one reason being worry that other children might hurt their child. This worry, similar to the findings of Veitch et al. (2006), is higher among parents from the poor inner city (62%) compared to the middle-class suburban community (14%).

Another study that finds other children, particularly older children, present a factor explaining why parents restrict their children's play is Jago et al. (2009). From their interviews with 24 parents of 10- to 11-year-old children, the researchers find that some parents (n=3) indicate they would not allow their child to go to the park or other outdoor areas due to the presence of older children there. Notably, the few parents who do indicate they would not allow their child to go to the park or other outdoor areas due to the presence of older children have a middle or low SES, which is consistent with the findings of Veitch et al. (2006) and Weir et al. (2006).

Allin et al.'s (2014) study of 12 mothers with children aged between nine- and 11-years-old from the North-East of England also finds that concerns about other children, specifically teenagers and teenage gangs, is one of the reasons why parents restrict their children's outdoor play. Similar to the Veitch et al. (2006) study, they find that mothers perceive their local adventure park as a "risky" place since it had become increasingly used by older children above the intended age range for the park, who were attracted to it being new and exciting as well as being somewhere to go. This meant 'crowds' of people waiting to use equipment and potentially children 'not being nice to each other' (Allin et al.'s, 2014, p. 650). However, it is particularly the presence of teenagers which is perceived as intimidating for younger children, leading parents to avoid parks in this instance. Contrary to many of the recent studies above, Veitch et al. (2006) do not identify a relationship between SES and concerns about other children, despite the primary school from which the sample is selected from having a mix from both the relatively affluent and more deprived population.

Interestingly, some studies somewhat contradictorily suggest that a lack of other – or more specifically, the right kind of – children (i.e. children from the same school, the same age, friends or siblings) is a cause of a decline or lack of outdoor play. For example, Veitch et al. (2006), who as identified above find the presence of other children is a cause in the decline of outdoor play, also find that 40% of the 78 participants in their study perceive that absence of neighbours or nearby friends to play with seems to be a very important influence on children's outdoor play. Parents comment that their child is more likely to play in their street or go to parks or other public open spaces (such as playgrounds, ovals, public outdoor netball/basketball courts) if they have siblings or friends with whom to play. A similar finding identifying a lack of other children as a cause are found in Jago et al. (2009) and Karsten (2005). A study by Holt et al. (2013), discussed in more detail below regarding a reduced sense of community as a cause, interestingly found that a lack of other children playing outdoors means there is no longer a feeling of safety in numbers and this contributes to a decline or lack of outdoor play. It is worth noting how identifying a lack of other children to play with as a cause for a lack of or decline in outdoor play, arguably due to other suggested causes discussed in this review, suggests a self-perpetuating spiral of decline.

### **2.2.5 Lack of places**

The literature also identifies a lack of places for outdoor play as a cause for its decline. Gill (2005) suggests there are fewer outdoor places for children to go to play, which is a cause of the decline in outdoor play and experiences. Echoing Gill (2005), Tovey (2007) suggests that the amount of public space for children's play has declined and this is one cause of children no longer playing outdoors to the extent they once did a generation ago. An earlier example is found in the work of Mary Rivkin, a professor of education at the University of Maryland, who in *The Great Outdoors: Restoring Children's Right to Play Outside* (1995) suggests that one of the reasons outdoors play has declined is that outdoor play habitats are vanishing.

Parents have also identified a concern about a lack of places for outdoor play. For example, research by Cole-Hamilton, Harrop and Street, (2002), which is discussed in more detail later in the chapter, finds that nearly one in three said that a lack of playgrounds in local parks stopped their children playing outside, while one in four said playgrounds were too dirty and equipment was unsafe. Jago et al. (2009) identify that the environment around the parents' home reduces their child's physical activity independent of adult supervision opportunities, including playing outdoors. In addition, some parents remark that the lack of an appropriate space in which to be active is a consequence of urban living. This concern is also found to be fuelled by parental anxiety. For example, Valentine and McKendrick's (1997) study finds that parents identify a lack of local play provision (i.e. parks and playgrounds). This is evident in working-class areas (91 per cent of parents) compared to middle-class areas (75 per cent parents). Interestingly however, the researchers find on closer analysis that there is no relationship between play patterns and play provision, with middle-class parents restricting their children's outdoor play to a greater extent than working-class parents. Consequently, they suggest that children are no more likely to play outdoors, or play further away from home, if adequate opportunities are provided within their neighbourhoods. Valentine and McKendrick (1997) also suggest that the rationale behind many campaigns for better facilities for children's play is therefore at odds with actual experience.

### **2.2.6 Reduced sense of community**

One further cause identified in the literature is a reduced sense of community and the loss of the perception of safety that derives from the surveillance of people in the community, whether

directly or indirectly, as they watch out for children playing in the neighbourhood. An early example is found in the 1995 Barnardo's study by McNeish and Roberts, which finds a lack of a sense of community compared to a generation ago has negativity impacted on children's ability to play outdoors. A more recent example is provided by a study from New Zealand by Witten and colleagues (2013), who investigate parents' understandings of a decline in outdoor play as well as children's independent mobility. The study consists of focus groups involving 68 parents of nine- to 11-year-old primary school children in the city of Auckland; parents are asked about their play while they themselves were children and why their children's play differs from their own at the same age. The researchers find that parents discuss a range of factors that, in their estimation, have contributed to a decline in outdoor play. One factor is a decline in neighbourhood-based relationships and a general loss of what is described in the study as 'eyes on the street' (p. 220), in other words people in the community watching out for children playing in the neighbourhood. Witten et al. (2010) identify how parents are now reluctant to let their children out to play in streets not peopled with familiar faces.

Another example, which echoes the findings of both the Barnardo's (1995) study and Witten et al. (2010), is provided by Holt and colleagues (2015), who examine factors that influence children's active free play. Active free play is defined as 'a specific type of physical activity play that refers to child-initiated spontaneous and voluntary activities that include bursts of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) such that metabolic activity is well above resting rate' (Holt et al. 2015, p. 73). The study consists of semi-structured interviews with 13 young adults, who reside in one western Canadian city; participants are asked about their memories and experiences of play. Interestingly, it is found that despite the safety concerns of participants' parents about, for example, stranger danger, the young adults in question were able to engage in active free play. Holt et al. (2015, p. 81) suggest this is because there were many 'eyes on where the children play' that fostered a sense of safety. In other words, there was a perception of supervision, whether direct or indirect, that facilitated involvement in active free play. Holt et al. (2015) suggest some factors that contribute to "eyes on where children play", the most significant being a sense of community within the local neighbourhood. However, participants generally shared the view that any sense of community had since eroded. It is of interest to note that Holt et al. (2015) also suggest another factor that contributes to "eyes on where children play" is children playing together providing a sense of safety in numbers. Again however, the participants

generally share the view that such a sense of safety had since eroded. A further example is provided by lecturer in childhood development Little in her 2013 study of 26 mothers of children aged four-years-old to five-years-old attending one of six early childhood centres in Sydney, Australia. Little (2013) finds that a factor influencing children's opportunities for outdoor play is a general lack of connectedness within the community.

### ***2.2.7 Adults' growing intolerance***

The growing intolerance of adults to children playing outdoors in public areas is another cause identified in the literature for a lack or decline in outdoor play. Perhaps the most prominent example, which received particular attention in the UK media when it was first published, is a study by the Children's Society in 2003 called *Grumpy Adults*.<sup>3</sup> The study consists of a survey of 2,600 children aged seven to 18-years-old. Researchers find that 90% of seven- to 11-year-olds and 70% of 11- to 18-year-olds have been told off for playing on the streets, on estates and even in parks. Additionally, half of the respondents say they have been yelled at by adults who objected to their noise and sometimes merely to their presence. As a result, the Children's Society argues that children's outdoor play is being threatened by "grumpy adults". Others have made similar arguments about the intolerance of adults. For instance, Tovey (2007) refers to evidence of adults' growing intolerance to outdoor play including the Children's Society study discussed directly above. She notably goes on to state that maybe this intolerance is nothing new and refers to research by Opie and Opie (1969) that provides various examples throughout history of intolerance towards children's playing on the street. However, the difference today is that play in contemporary urban areas has largely disappeared from residential streets.

## **2.3 Negative consequences**

The negative consequences of a decline or lack of play outdoors provide another central theme within the literature. With children cast as vulnerable and the development paradigm so firmly established as fact, these negative consequences often focus on a state sometimes referred to as *play deprivation*. Play deprivation can be defined as a spectrum from extreme to moderate reductions in play opportunities, which negatively affect children's development and learning and

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<sup>3</sup> For more a more detailed discussion on the attention this study received in the UK media see Chapter 5.

health (Brown and Vaughan, 2009; Frost, 2010). In addition, since children's play holds an important place in the sentimental vision of childhood (Best, 1998), it is also argued that a lack of outdoor play contributes to childhood being in crisis. The main negative consequences in the literature are identified and explored individually below. They include impeded child development, obesity, mental health problems and childhood in crisis. Again, although presented individually, as with both linked or attached concerns and explanation of causes, they are often interrelated and overlap.

### ***2.3.1 Impeded child development***

As discussed in the previous chapter, the belief that children adapt and develop through their play is something that 'most westerners cherish' (Sutton-Smith, 2001, p. 9), particularly since the psychoanalytic and cognitive child development theories of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries in which children's play often featured.<sup>4</sup> Such a belief is evident in the literature when various aspects of child development are argued to be a negative consequence of a lack of outdoor play. A prominent and recent example is a 2018 study by paediatrician Dr Michael Yogman and colleagues, titled *The Power of Play: A Pediatric Role in Enhancing Development in Young Children*. Yogman et al. (2018) observe that 'Play has been categorized in a variety of ways, each with its own developmental sequence' (Yogman et al. 2018, p. 3). The authors argue that a lack of one such category of play – outdoors play – is a particular cause for concern since 'Outdoor play provides the opportunity to improve sensory integration skills. These activities involve the child as an active participant and address motor, cognitive, social, and linguistic domains' (Yogman et al. 2018, p. 3).<sup>5</sup>

One aspect of child development that has received particular attention in the literature over the past decade is social development. A prominent example is provided by a study by Jarvis and colleagues (2014). The study finds decreasing opportunities for children to play outdoors (referred to in the study as *collaborative peer free play*) in contemporary Anglo-American

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<sup>4</sup> The belief that children adapt and develop through their play, or as Sutton-Smith terms it 'play as progress' (Sutton-Smith, 2001, p. 9), is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

<sup>5</sup> Sensory integration is a term associated with developmental psychologist Anna Jean Ayres (1920 – 1988). Sensory integration is the process by which people receive information through their senses, organise this information, and use it to participate in everyday activities.



societies. Drawing on a wide range of research in the arenas of psychology, anthropology, education, sociology, marketing and philosophy, Jarvis et al. (2014) argue that outdoor play is important in relation to children's social development since it is through such play that most children under the age of eight naturally learn to:

[...] independently interact with others on a moment-to-moment basis, not only learning how to compete for resources and/or individual recognition for appropriate understanding/behaviour, but also how to share, collaborate and 'be social' in order to sustain shared narratives. (Jarvis et al. 2014, p. 63)

By the same token, Richard Layard and Judy Dunn in *A Good Childhood: Searching for Values in a Competitive Age* (2009), which builds on evidence and discussions for The Good Childhood Inquiry Panel over eighteen months during 2007 and 2008, report that fewer children today play out with their friends. Layard and Dunn (2009) indicate that a lack of play with friends may reduce children's ability to flourish socially and make deep and lasting friendships.

A number of other studies have identified that a lack of outdoor play is associated with developmental problems. For example, Palmer (2007a), who suggests that the loss of opportunities for outdoor play is likely to have long-term effects on children's social development, contends that learning how to make friends, play as part of a group and resolve minor conflicts used to take place independently out of any adult's view. Palmer (2007a) suggests that nowadays socialising happens under the eagle eye of adults, who swiftly intervene if things look dire, or it can also take place via the internet with screen-based virtual friends, from whom children don't learn social skills. Another example is Elkind (2007a), who suggests that limited outdoor play may have a harmful impact on children's social development since it helps them to learn the interpersonal skills needed to become effective social beings. Elkind goes on to contend that while some social skills can be gained through activities other than play, such as organised and individual sports, a lot cannot be learned in this way. Significantly, before these studies, a mid-1990s study from Switzerland by Huttenmoser and Degen-Zimmerman (1995) finds that children who are deprived of outdoor play are socially repressed and find it difficult to mix.

Another aspect of child development that is argued to be negatively affected by a lack of outdoor play and has received attention in the literature is creativity. A noteworthy example comes from

psychologist Peter Gray (2012: 2013b), who suggests that a decline of children's play, especially outdoor play, is linked to a decline in creativity as found in research by educationalist Kyung Hee Kim (2011). Kim (2011) analyses scores on a battery of measures of creativity, called the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT), collected from normative samples of American schoolchildren in kindergarten through to twelfth grade over several decades. According to Kim's (2011) analyses, the scores on these tests at all grade levels begin to decline somewhere between 1984 and 1990 and have continued to decline ever since. Gray (2012) contends that this decline in creativity is not surprising because for several decades, freedom in relation to how and where children play has declined. He identifies how creativity blossoms when children are given the freedom to play and is stifled by continuous monitoring, evaluation, adult direction and pressure to conform. Other examples in the literature that suggest child development is impeded by a lack of outdoor play include Frost (2010) and Russ and Dillon (2011).

### **2.3.2 Obesity**

Another negative consequence of a lack of outdoor play suggested in the literature is that it is a contributory factor to what many medical professionals have described as *an obesity epidemic* – which, it is argued, is threatening to become a pandemic. A prominent example is provided by Joe Frost (2010), who contends that a lack of outdoor play has significantly contributed to the obesity epidemic: he refers to research that shows rising levels of overweightness and obesity in industrialised countries (which he indicates appears to mirror the reported declines in outdoor play) and research that reports the value of outdoor play in the prevention of obesity. Other similar examples which suggest that a lack of play has contributed to the obesity epidemic include Tovey (2007) and Harten, et al. (2008).

A number of studies over the past decade associate a lack of outdoor play with being overweight and with obesity. For instance, Stone and Faulkner's (2014) study of 856 Canadian children aged 11-years-old assesses the amount of time children play outside and examines the associations with physical activity and weight status. The amount of time children play outdoors is assessed by the parent's report of their children's time spent playing outdoors on a typical weekday. Physical activity is assessed by the children wearing an accelerometer, an instrument for measuring acceleration, for seven days. It is classified by variables of physical activity that include time spent in sedentary behaviour, minutes in light physical activity and Moderate to

Vigorous Physical Activity (MVPA). Weight status is assessed by the children's Body Mass Index (BMI)<sup>6</sup> and categorised using age and sex specific cut off points in relation to their BMI as either normal weight or overweight/obese. Stone and Faulkner (2014) find that time spent playing outdoors is associated with sedentary behaviour, light physical activity and MVPA. Children who spend one hour per day playing outdoors tend to accumulate less light physical activity and MVPA, and spend more time sedentary, than children spending at least one hour each day playing outdoors. The researchers also find an inverse relationship between playing outdoors and weight status, yet only in boys' play. Boys who spend less than one hour outdoors playing (low outdoor play) are more likely to be overweight/obese than boys spending two hours or more playing outdoors (high outdoor play).

In a similar vein, Cleland and colleagues' (2008) study of 548 children (188 five-year-old and six-year-old children and 360 10-year-old and 11-year-old children) explores, among other things, the associations between times spent outdoors playing, physical activity and being overweight. Time spent outdoors playing is assessed by parents' report, during a typical weekday after school and a typical weekend; physical activity is assessed by the children wearing accelerometers for an eight-day period; being overweight is assessed by obtaining children's BMI and if their BMI was greater than the internationally accepted age and sex cut off points, children were classified as overweight. Cleland et al. (2008) find that older elementary school-aged children who spend less time playing outdoors tend to be less active and have a higher prevalence of being overweight than children spending more time outdoors playing. However, few associations are noted among younger children.

Kimbrow and colleagues (2011) explore whether outdoor play and watching television are associated with children's BMI at age five. The data utilised is from a sub-sample of the United States Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study at wave IV in which children were weighed and measured to obtain their BMI, mothers reported their child's average number of hours per weekday of outdoors play and mothers reported their child's average number of hours per weekday of television viewing. Kimbrow et al. (2011) find that hours of outdoor play are

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<sup>6</sup> BMI is the calculation of a person's weight in kilograms, divided by their height in meters squared.

negatively associated with BMI. This contrasts with Cleland et al. (2008), who could only find association between time spent playing outdoors and BMI in older children, they were unable to find such associations in younger children aged five to six. Additionally, Kimbro et al. (2011) find that hours spent watching television is positively associated with BMI, and that a ratio of outdoor play to television time is a significant predictor of BMI.

However, not all studies find associations with amounts of outdoor play and children's weight. For instance, Burdette and Whitaker's (2005) cross-sectional survey in 20 large US cities of 3141 children aged three, whose BMI was measured, and their mothers asked to report on their children's average daily time of outdoor play, finds that outdoor play minutes are not significantly correlated to BMI. In addition, the study does not find a link between television watching and BMI. A further example of research that doesn't find lower levels of outdoor play among children with higher BMIs is provided by Marino et al. (2012).

### ***2.3.3 Mental health problems***

A growing body of research within the literature suggests that increased mental health problems in children is a negative consequence of a lack of play. A prominent and also early example can be found in a three-year inquiry by the Mental Health Foundation (1999) that examines factors affecting the mental health and emotional development of children in the UK, stating that a lack of opportunities for outdoor play contributes to mental health problems in children. The report emphasises the importance of outdoor play for children's mental health and as an effective way of giving children opportunities to practise making and consolidating friendships and dealing with conflict. These skills are suggested to be the basic skills needed in order to become "emotionally literate", and to increase children's resilience to mental health problems.

Another prominent example is provided by psychologist Peter Gray (2011; 2013). Gray (2011) contends that a decline in play, especially outdoor play, has contributed to a decline in the mental health of children and the rise of psychopathology (the scientific study of mental disorders) in children. He refers to several studies that identify an increase in anxiety, depression, feelings of hopelessness and narcissism in an apparently linear manner which he suggests seems to mirror a decline of children's play. Gray (2011, p. 458) rightly points out that correlation does not prove causation; however, he suggest that on the grounds of logic, a strong case can be made for

causation since play serves a variety of 'developmental functions' (e.g. developing intrinsic interests and competencies; learning how to make decisions, solving problems, exerting self-control, and following rules; learning to regulate emotions; making friends and learning to get along with others as equals; and experiencing joy), all of which promote children's mental health. Repeating Gray (2011), Belke and Hazler (2014) discuss the detrimental effects of play deprivation, arguing that children are experiencing an unprecedented decline in opportunities for play – outdoor free play in particular – and that this correlates with researchers' findings of high levels of anxiety and depression in children.

Rosenfeld and Wise (2000) and Elkind (2007b) contend that a lack of outdoor play, and indeed play in general, coupled with overscheduling, are together a source of stress and anxiety and may even contribute to depression. Elkind (2007a) explains that when young children are overprogrammed and have limited opportunity to play, they manifest their stress in physical ways, including stomach-aches, headaches and hair pulling. He provides the example of an overprogrammed six-year-old child he saw who had scratched himself till he bled, the symptoms disappeared when his parents cut back on activities and allowed him more time for play. School-age children, he explains, manifest their stress in behavioural ways, with some children beginning to perform poorly at school while others becoming depressed and apathetic. Melman et al. (2007) as well as measuring the number of regularly scheduled activities in which children were involved and the amount of time they spent participating in these activities, also study whether there is a relationship between levels of participation in regularly scheduled activities and anxiety, as well as the relationship between levels of participation in regularly scheduled activities and depression. A self-reporting behavioural and personality test is used to quantify levels of anxiety and depression. According to the findings, the greater amount of time children report participating in scheduled activities, the higher their levels of self-reported anxiety tend to be. However, similar findings are not found for depression. Melman et al. (2007) conclude by asking whether this higher level of self-reported anxiety is just the tip of the iceberg, and whether there may possible long-term negative effects that can't be measured in a one-time study such as theirs.

Before moving on to the final main negative consequence identified in the literature, it is vital to highlight an observation regarding *why* those authors identified so far view a decline or lack of

outdoor play as problematic and what appears to be their motivation. The authors view a decline or lack of outdoor play as a problem because they view outdoor play as (merely) an instrumental activity important for children's development and learning and health. They tend to see this as impeded by what they perceive as a harmful adult world, in which: parental anxieties about their children's safety and development mean that they keep their children indoors and/or overschedule them with adult-organised and goal-orientated activities; traffic volumes are ever increasing; seductive and addictive digital technologies "lure" and keep children indoors and "corrupt" them with their violence and sexual content; adults are intolerant of children playing in public spaces (such as on the street or village greens). As such, these authors appear to be motivated by a desire to insulate or "free" children from this harmful adult culture. Significantly however, a small number of other authors view outdoor play, specifically unsupervised outdoor play, as crucial for children's personal development in terms of enabling them to develop an understanding of the adult world and learning to navigate its risks (e.g. traffic) and relationships (e.g. accounting and dealing with other adults such as neighbours as opposed to just their parents, school teachers and organised activity leaders). Therefore, rather than being motivated by "freeing" children from a "harmful" adult culture, the main motivation of these authors is instead a concern about the extent to which a decline or lack of outdoor play actually *prevents* children from directly engaging with and growing into the adult world. So to clarify, where the former want to insulate or "free" children from growing traffic and "grumpy adults" - i.e. the dangerous and "toxic" adult world – so that that can play outdoors, the latter smaller number of authors want children to play outdoors because they believe that it is through such play the children learn, for example, how to navigate traffic and how to deal with/form relationships with other adults in their community and thus grow more fully into the adult world.

A notable example of an author who explores the negative consequences of a decline or lack of outdoor play on children's personal development is Helene Guldberg (2009), who challenges what she calls the 'dangerous myths about modern childhood and children' in which children are seen as vulnerable to a dangerous adult culture which has low expectations of their capabilities (Guldberg, 2009, p. 3). Guldberg states that 'watching the speed at which free space is becoming eroded by a culture that prizes 'safety' above all has weighed upon me as a grave concern' (Guldberg, 2009, p. 2). She explains that the combination of research as a doctor in developmental psychology and experience as a primary school teacher has led her to be

convinced that ‘children need to be given space away from adults’ watchful eyes in order to play, experiment, take risks (within a sensible framework provided by adults), test boundaries, fight and learn to resolve conflict’ (Guldberg, 2009, p. 1). Significantly Guldberg argues against the desire to protect children from what is presumed to be a dangerous and "toxic" adult world and suggests instead that:

Adults should behave like adults and build children’s confidence to get by in the wider world. That means leading children down the road to adulthood, giving them the chance to engage with people they don’t know, and giving them something to aspire to, not teaching them to fear and deride the adult world. (Guldberg, 2009, p. 178)

Echoing Guldberg (2009) is American writer Lenore Skenazy. Skenazy was famously labelled "America’s worst mom" for allowing her nine-year old son to ride the New York City subway alone and then writing about it in a newspaper column (see Gibbs, *The Times*: 30<sup>th</sup> November 2009). Skenazy states that outdoor play which is something that is ‘fun and formative and *free* is disappearing faster than polar bears in an Al Gore Power Point’ (Skenazy, 2009, p. 126).<sup>7</sup> She goes on to state:

Go back a few generations and this would have been ridiculous. Play was the default setting of most kids. You didn’t have to encourage them to do it, or convince their parents, "please let your children cavort; it is oh-so developmentally worthwhile!" it was just a given: kids played. (Skenazy, 2009, p. 126)

Skenazy (2009) argues that instead of viewing the adult world as harmful and attempting to insulate children from it, that the best way of keeping children safe is to "worldproof" growing children by gently introducing them into the adult world. For Skenazy (2009), children (or *kids* as she refers to them) are not vulnerable and incompetent, in need of protection from a perceived harmful adult world. Instead, ‘Kids are competent. Kids are capable. Kids deserve freedom, responsibility, and the chance to be part of this world, not cooped up like, well chickens’ (Skenazy, 2009, p. 194). Another example is provided by Psychologist Jennie Lindon in her book *Too Safe for Their Own Good: Helping Children Learn about Risk and Life Skills* (1999).

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<sup>7</sup> Al Gore is American politician known for his environmental campaigning.

Interestingly, someone who can be observed to straddle both sides of this debate is Tim Gill. For instance, Gill in a CPC report co-authored with Issy Cole-Hamilton argues that outdoor play is an instrumental activity, important for children's development but lacking in their lives because of their vulnerability to the harmful adult world – which among other things includes parents' fears about traffic and stranger danger (also see Gill, 2005) – and therefore that children need freeing up or protecting from it. On the other hand, Gill in his 2007 book *No Fear: Growing up in a risk averse society* argues that 'The retreat from the outdoors denies children the chance to build their confidence and competences through everyday interactions with the wider world' (Gill, 2007, p. 53). In this work, Gill's (2007) main thesis is the need for a more balanced approach to children and childhood, which takes account of children's resilience rather than only viewing them as vulnerable and in need of protection from the world.<sup>8</sup>

### **2.3.4 *Childhood in crises***

A final major negative consequence of a lack of outdoor play is that it is damaging our modern, sentimentalised understanding of childhood itself. As discussed in the previous chapter, Neil Postman argued in the *The Disappearance of Childhood* ([1982] 1994, p. 129) that the disappearing of outdoor play is an obvious symptom of the merging of children's and adult's values and styles. In other words, the disappearing of outdoor play is an obvious symptom of childhood no longer being distinguishable from adulthood.

Since *The Disappearance of Childhood* was first published 1982, a number of studies and more specifically since the turn of the twenty-first century, instead of suggesting that a lack or decline of play is a symptom of the disappearance of childhood have argued that a lack or decline has contributed to damaging childhood. Significantly, since these studies were produced from the turn of the twenty-first century, there would have been significant documented evidence of a lack of outdoor play which was not available in 1982 when *The Disappearance of Childhood* was first published. A prominent example of one these studies is found in educationalist Chris Mercogliano's book *In Defence of Childhood: Protecting Kids' Inner Wildness* (2007, p. 57). Mercogliano contends that the fading away of what he defines as 'real play', the essence of which

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<sup>8</sup> Tim Gill is discussed at greater length in Chapter 6.



is its flexibility, spontaneity, and open-endedness, combined with among other things, electronic media, has resulted in childhood being in ‘trouble’ or even ‘lost’. He further contends that what he calls children’s ‘inner wildness’, which he defines as ‘the luminescent spark that animates the young, serves as a source of their uniqueness and creativity, and supplies the energy and the impetus for them to become who they are intending to become’ (Mercogliano, 2007, p. ix), cannot survive without real play.

Additionally, others in a similar pessimistic vein propose that a lack of outdoor play is part of childhood today becoming "toxic". This is clearly articulated by Sue Palmer (2007a,b), who as discussed in the previous chapter identifies a lack of outdoor play as one of a myriad of features of a child’s everyday life that has been contaminated by adult culture, making childhood itself "toxic".

## **2.4 Solutions**

A final central theme within the literature is solutions proposed to reverse the decline and encourage children to play outdoors. These solutions unsurprisingly reflect the many different causes of a decline or lack of outdoor play identified in the literature, the most prominent of which are discussed above. This section of the review, following the preceding sections, identifies and explores the most prominent solutions proposed within the literature individually. These include: more provision, parental education campaigns and strategies, and gaining community support.

### ***2.4.1 More provision***

The solutions that appear most frequently within the literature are for more provision for outdoor play. Such solutions typically aim to address the fears and concerns that parents have about letting their children outside to play. Such solutions therefore attempt to tackle parental anxieties ‘indirectly’ through reducing risk, as opposed to ‘directly’ through education schemes and

campaigns. The distinction between indirect and direct strategies for managing parental anxiety is made by Jago et al. (2009).<sup>9</sup>

As stated, parents have several prominent fears about letting their children outside to play, identified within the literature as fears and concerns about: stranger danger, traffic, other children, and a lack of places to play (see the explanation of causes above). Consequently, various forms of provision are proposed within the literature to address these concerns. These include: traffic calming measures (Hillman, 1990; Gill, 2006); more outdoor spaces for children to play in (Skår and Krogh, 2009; James and Gregory, 2011; Little, 2013); and supervised play provision at parks and other public spaces (Follett, M, 2007; Gleave and Cole-Hamilton, 2012).

Within the literature, the most comprehensive solutions regarding more provision are found in a CPC report, *Making the Case for Play: Building Policies and Strategies for School Aged Children* (Cole-Hamilton and Gill, 2002). This is based on a research document *Making the Case for Play: Gathering Evidence* (Cole-Hamilton, Harrop and Street, 2002), which finds there are many restrictions on children's play opportunities (including parental anxiety, poor maintenance and often an inadequate number of play spaces) and proposes an extensive list of solutions. The document suggests the need for good local play opportunities for all, which include:

- Creating and improving parks and open spaces so that they are well lit, overlooked and feel safe;
- Providing playgrounds and facilities which are age appropriate, offer challenging play opportunities, in easy-to-get-to, overlooked locations, accessible to disabled children and well maintained;
- Providing supervised open access play provision, staffed by skilled playworkers, which offer a range of both indoors and outside play opportunity activities;

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<sup>9</sup> Jago et al. state that there are two types of strategies for managing parental anxiety 'either indirectly through reducing risk in the local environment or directly through enhanced parental licence' (2009, p. 476-477). As noted early in the chapter, Jago et al. use the term *parental licence* to refer to parental approval for children to engage in independent forms of physical activity, including playing outdoors. They suggest that enhanced parental licence can be achieved through progressively building parents' confidence to allow independent activities. Jago et al.'s proposed solutions are discussed later in the Chapter.

- Improving children’s mobility by reducing traffic speed and flow in residential streets and other roads used regularly by children and considering the introduction of home zones. (Cole-Hamilton and Gill, 2002, p. 53)<sup>10</sup>

It should be emphasised that in this report, which together with the research document was funded by a government department called the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the key proposal is for a national strategy for play. This report and its key recommendation for a national strategy for play is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

#### ***2.4.2 Parental education campaigns and strategies***

Another solution appearing in the literature, albeit far less frequently than calls for more provision, is parental education campaigns and strategies that attempt to tackle parental anxiety ‘directly’ to inform parents about the importance of outdoor play. Valentine and McKendrick (1997), for example, who as identified above question the rationale behind many campaigns for more provision as they found no link between play patterns and play provision, propose that:

The primary political objective should be to tackle parents' fears about their children’s safety in public spaces by adopting an historical approach to explore how and why parental anxieties have increased over recent generations. Perhaps then the knowledge will help to challenge and relax the shackles of parental regulation so that the opportunities embodied in every local environment will be realized by children themselves through independent exploration. (Valentine and McKendrick, 1997, p. 232)

In addition to calling for more provision, Cole-Hamilton and Gill (2002) also argue somewhat similarly to Valentine and McKendrick (1997) that no matter what the range of play provision available to children, they will only be able to make full use of it if their parents allow them to. The authors emphasise the importance of gaining parents’ support and suggest that parenting programmes should include information about the nature and importance of play for children of all ages as they grow and develop. Cole-Hamilton and Gill (2002) also suggest that parents should be encouraged to be involved with in-community initiatives to develop and improve play

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<sup>10</sup> Home zones can be defined as ‘a residential street where people and vehicles share the whole of the street space safely, and on equal terms, where quality of life takes precedence over the ease of traffic movement’ (The Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation, 2012, p. 4).

provision. It should be stressed however that despite making these suggestions, the main focus of Cole-Hamilton and Gill's solutions is more provision.

Other examples are found from James and Gregory (2011) and Jago et al. (2009). James and Gregory (2001), in their small-scale research conducted in Cardiff through questionnaires and focus groups into how the views of parents restrict children's play, find that the children of the parents represented in the research have extremely limited opportunities to play outside unsupervised because of parental anxiety about safety. As well as recommending the need for 'safe' open spaces for children to play in unsupervised, the authors also recommend the need to promote play provision to parents to encourage them to give their children better play opportunities, since many were unaware of what was available in their area. In relation to teaching parents about the value of their children's play, Jago et al. (2009) suggest the need to progressively build parents' confidence by changing their perceptions and behaviour to allow independent physical activities. This, the authors suggest, can be achieved through campaigns that for instance promote health and social benefits, independent physical activities or address the negative perception that parents who allow independent physical activity are neglectful. The researchers suggest that such campaigns could be combined with strategies to build children's self-efficacy by steadily increasing children's licence and extending space and time boundaries. Jago et al. (2009), it is important to point out, also emphasise the importance of 'indirect' strategies for managing parental anxiety, such as traffic calming measures.

### ***2.4.3 Community schemes and campaigns***

Community schemes and campaigns are a further solution that appears in the literature, although far less commonly than the other solutions identified so far. For instance, the Barnardo's study by McNeish and Roberts (1995), which as identified above finds that a reduced sense of community has contributed to children playing less outdoors, suggests developing community initiatives that engender and nurture a sense of community (which many feel is disappearing) as one of a number of recommendations. The authors identify that Barnardo's is involved in a number of such initiatives and that local authorities and voluntary organisations should bear in mind that small-scale initiatives of this kind are likely to be cost effective, particularly in terms of the quality of life of people living in poverty.

Cole-Hamilton and Gill (2002), along with their other solutions, suggest the importance of 'winning over the community' if children's play opportunities are not to be limited by some hostile adults (p. 45). They suggest that building community support and acceptance of outdoor play may include:

- Education programmes aimed at adults in local communities about the value and importance of providing children with places where they can play freely without interference from adults.
- Community planning and consultation groups which bring children, young people, and different groups of adults together to discuss and learn about each other's needs, wishes and fears.
- Local programmes which help mediate between different groups and interests within the community. (Cole-Hamilton and Gill, 2002, p. 45)

Cole-Hamilton and Gill (2002) state that 'They [local residents] need to understand that children have the same right to public spaces as they do.' The authors continue by adding that 'children need to play and benefit from play and that providing good, attractive play opportunities is good for the whole community' (p. 45).

A slightly different approach to community schemes and campaigns as a solution comes from Holt and colleagues (2013). As discussed above, the study of 13 young adults finds that a sense of community that used to contribute to "eyes on where children play" and thus facilitated active free play during their childhood has since been eroded. Participants were asked for their suggestions on how to improve this situation, they suggested that parents should get to know their neighbours and that community events could play an important role. The researchers, however, suggested other ways they thought might help promote a sense of community and "eyes on where children play". They suggest that parents' supervision programmes could be introduced, whereby different parents take turns to be at play areas at designated times to help create a sense of supervision and facilitate community among parents. Holt et al. (2013) suggest that children's play communities could be created with mass play dates at play areas where 'children could take back play areas for their own purpose' and this would 'capitalise on the idea of safety in numbers' (p. 85).

## 2.5 Discussion

As identified in the previous chapter, the main intention of this study is to examine how and why children's play has emerged as a social problem over recent decades. The review of relevant literature, which itself has been central to the growth of interest in children's play, reveals four important features regarding how and why children's play has emerged as a social problem and the significance of the social constructionist approach adopted for this study. These four features form the basis of the following discussion.

First, the literature is dominated by objectivist approaches which begin from accepting the existence of a decline or lack of outdoor play as a problem – conceived as an objective condition – and seek to determine its magnitude, suggest its causes, propose consequences and recommend solutions. The dominance of this approach within this prominent literature highlights the need for a social constructionist approach to the study of children's play as a social problem that provides further insight into how and why it has emerged as a social problem.

Second, it is clearly observable that the literature comprises a wide variety of different contributors, including several academic disciplines (e.g. child development, childhood studies, children's geographies, physical activity, psychology, and sociology education); children's charities, play charities; and journalists. This feature is perhaps made more significant given that only the main ideas and authors are drawn on in order to review the major topics within this extensive literature. The diversity of those advancing children's play as a problem and those who are the driving force of such claims is the focus Chapter 6.

Third, there are several contradictions within the literature. One significant contradiction is that most argue, such as Elkind (2007a), Gray (2011), and Palmer (2007a), that a decline or lack of outdoor play is a problem because outdoor play is an instrumental activity important for children's development and learning and health on which they are missing out because of a harmful adult world, a view motivated by a desire to "free" children from this dangerous adult world. At the same time, others such as Guldberg (2009) and Skenazy (2009) argue that outdoor play is crucial for children's personal development in terms of enabling them to develop an understanding of the adult world and navigate risks and relationships. This view is motivated by a concern about the extent to which a decline or lack of outdoor play prevents children from

growing into the adult world. So, while most argue the problem in terms of a harmful adult world that prevents an instrumental activity for children's development, a small number of others argue the problem in terms of the extent to which it prevents children from growing into the adult world. Another significant contradiction is that parental anxiety, which is argued to fuel fears (whether rational or not), is most commonly suggested as the cause of a decline or lack outdoor play. However, instead of the focus of solutions being to tackle parental anxiety "directly" through education schemes and campaigns, the focus lies with tackling anxiety "indirectly" through more provision for outdoor play to reduce risk. Given that parental anxiety is argued to fuel fears and, furthermore, concerns about whether such fears themselves are rational or not, the rationale for more provision for outdoor play is unlikely to have any bearing on parents' anxiety. Such a contradiction raises questions about how such claims have led to the successful construction of children's play as a social problem. These questions are addressed in Chapter 7.

Finally, the review shows the critical importance of the specific social constructionist approach adopted for this study, which seeks to locate claimsmaking within its cultural context. It is clear from this review how the claims within the literature draw on cultural resources, the 'cultural knowledge that can be incorporated in claims' (Best 2008, p. 338), in their attempts to convince others of the issue's importance and severity. For instance, the contemporary construction of children and childhood as vulnerable and "at risk" from a dangerous and "toxic" adult world and the development paradigm so firmly established as fact is drawn upon in claims about the negative consequences of a lack of outdoor play, where a lack of outdoor play is argued to impact negatively on children's development, children's health and contributes to childhood disappearing or becoming toxic. The contemporary construction of children and childhood as vulnerable and "at risk" from a harmful adult world is also drawn upon regarding the causes of a lack or decline of outdoor play, such as parents fears about stranger danger, traffic and so on. The significance of claims that problematise children's play achieving a sufficient "fit" with their cultural context in order to be successful is examined in more detail in Chapter 7.

The next chapter explores the social constructionist approach to social problems in detail. It also more fully articulates the theoretical and conceptual tools developed by Best for the specific contextual constructionist variation of the social constructionist approach adopted for this study.

### 3 Constructing Social Problems

This chapter sets out the philosophy behind the method the thesis applies to the study of how and why children's play has emerged as a social problem. First, the chapter explains the development of social construction as a perspective and, drawing specifically on the work of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, reveals its epistemological and ontological features. The chapter then describes the application of the constructionist approach by Spector and Kitsuse ([1977] 2009) to formulate a social constructionist approach to the study of social problems. Next, the chapter sets out two very different versions of the approach: strict constructionism and contextual constructionism, going onto explore debates on the limitations of the former and the advantages of the latter and potentially less epistemologically "pure" version adopted for the current study. The chapter then draws on the work of Joel Best, a strong advocate of the contextual constructionist perspective, and details a complete set of tools for analysing any social problem. Finally, continuing to draw on the work of Best, the chapter discusses the crucial role of the media in constructing social problems and discusses how the mass media, particularly the news media, provides the ideal locale for studying the problematisation of children's play over recent decades. This sets the scene for the ensuing chapter that details the specific methodology – Qualitative Media Analysis (QMA) – used to gather and analysis the data on which this study is based.

#### 3.1 The development of social construction

Social construction as a perspective claims many different intellectual lineages. Indeed, Lock and Strong's book *Social Constructionism* (2010) shows that ideas of social constructionism have deep historical roots that predate the modern era, identifying different theorists and schools of thought that have contributed to the development of social constructionism. Consequently, there is not space here to explore them all. The term *social construction*, according to research carried out by Best (2003), may have first appeared in the sociological literature in 1905, in an article in the *American Journal of Sociology* by Lester Ward. However, the term was not widely used until after 1966 when Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann published their book, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. This was one of the first works to introduce the concept of social construction published in English and the very first book



to have "social construction" in the title (Hacking, 1999). Furthermore, Berger and Luckmann are often identified as providing the essential groundwork for the application of the social constructionist perspective to the study of social problems by Spector and Kitsuse ([1977] 2009) (see for example: Loseke, 2003). It is important to note that Spector and Kitsuse (discussed in detail the following section) do not cite Berger and Luckmann. However, there are clear parallels in that both perspectives emphasise the defining practices of individuals, the acceptance of which forms the basis of our taken-for-granted notions of reality. Therefore, in order to develop a richer understanding of the contextual constructionist approach to social problems adopted by the present study, which as discussed in Chapter 1 and later in this current chapter is a development of the social constructionist approach to social problems formulated in Spector and Kitsuse (1977), it is important to briefly explore the formulation outlined by Berger and Luckmann.

Berger and Luckmann's ([1966] 1991) philosophical roots are grounded in phenomenology, the philosophical study of the structures of experience and consciousness. As a philosophical movement, phenomenology emerged around the turn of twentieth century and is associated with its founder Edmund Husserl. Later, Alfred Schutz (1899-1959) in his book *Phenomenology of the Social World* ([1932] 1962), 'helped translate Husserlian assumptions about the relationship among subjectivity, intersubjective and society into a workable research agenda for empirical sociology...' (Agger, 1993, p. 283). The significances of phenomenology, and especially the work of the social theorist Alfred Schutz's impact on Berger and Luckmann, is emphasised by philosophy professor Ian Hacking (1999). Hacking explains that Schutz's philosophical heritage was from Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and Max Weber (1864-1920). Hacking states that:

Where Husserl had asked us, in his middle years, to reflect on the quality of immediate experience, and Weber had directed us to the fabric of society as a way to understand ourselves and others, Schutz brought the two together. His project was to understand the taken for granted and experienced world that each person in a society shares with others. That is the topic for Berger and Luckmann. (Hacking, 1999, p. 25)

Significantly, Berger and Luckmann's ([1966] 1991, p27-29) themselves identify several influences which include: Alfred Schutz 1899-1959 (in relation to their focus on the common-sense world of everyday life); Karl Marx 1818-1883, Alfred Gehlen 1904-1976, and Helmuth Plessner 1892-1985 (in relation to their anthropological presuppositions); Émile Durkheim 1858-

1917 (in relation to their view of the nature of social reality); Max Weber 1864-1920 (in relation to their emphasis on the constitution of reality through subjective meanings); and George Herbert Mead 1863-1931 (in relation to their social-psychological presuppositions).

Berger and Luckmann were interested in developing a ‘sociology of knowledge as part of the empirical discipline of sociology’ ([1966] 1991 p. 26), concerned with the concrete problem of how one goes about studying social knowledge. The sociology of knowledge the two authors propose, in line with their philosophical roots, notably differs from earlier theories (e.g. Max Scheler 1877-1928, Karl Marx 1818-1883, Karl Mannheim 1893-1947, etc.), which they argue were often overly focused on scientific and theoretical knowledge. Berger and Luckmann contend that the practical task of social knowledge is to ask how notions have come to be taken for granted in one time or place, and not in another, and how this "reality" is maintained or not maintained. The 'knowledge' in question, then, is not scientific and theoretical but ‘what people "know" as "reality" in their everyday non- or pre-theoretical lives’ (Berger and Luckmann [1966] 1991, p. 27). The sociology of knowledge Berger and Luckmann propose urges researches to focus on common-sense 'knowledge', rather than 'ideas' (p. 27).

In order to study *the reality of everyday life*, the analytical spotlight is focused on social interaction – and more specifically, on language. For Berger and Luckmann ([1966] 1991), language is one of the ‘essential constituents of the reality of everyday life and of the common-sense apprehension this of reality’ (p. 55). Language is defined by the authors as a ‘system of vocal signs and is said to be the most important sign system of human society’ (p. 53). The two authors note that language builds up semantic fields or zones of meaning. By virtue of this accumulation, a *stock of knowledge* is constituted, which is transmitted from generation to generation and is available for individuals in their everyday lives.

The construction of the reality of everyday life, however, concerns more than the play of signs and language. Berger and Luckmann emphasise the importance of *institutionalisation*, which ‘occurs whenever there is a reciprocal typification of habitualised actions by types of actors. Put differently, any such typification is an institution’ (p. 72). Even though social actors can be involved in creating institutions, they are seen as "there" external to the individual. This is called

*externalisation*. Externalised products of human activity attain a character of objectivity through a process known as *objectivation*.

It is argued that institutions, at some point, require legitimation. The authors suggest legitimation is best described as a *second-order* objectivation of meaning. It is identified that the function of legitimation is to make *first-order* objectivation 'objectively available and subjectively plausible' (p. 110).

The need for legitimisation suggests that not all social constructions are automatically accepted. There is contestation over meaning and definition. Berger and Luckman importantly contend that 'Reality is socially defined. But definitions are always *embodied*, that is, concrete individuals and groups of individuals serve as definers of reality' (p. 134). Therefore, to understand the maintenance of certain definitions at the expense of others, one must understand the social organisation that permits the definer to do their defining. In other words, it is vital 'to keep pushing questions about historically available conceptualisation of reality from the abstract "what?" to the socially concrete "says who?"' (p. 134).

Competition over different definitions of reality can sometimes be settled fairly amicably at a theoretical level between rival coteries of experts when they have pragmatic applications. Ultimately though, definitions of reality 'are validated by social rather than empirical support' (p. 137). Therefore, in order to be validated by social support, the definitions of reality must have some popular resonance. A social construction is not the result of an arbitrary process of meaning-creation, as if a simple act of labelling and categorising by various individuals or groups accidentally results in a specific reality. On the contrary, a social construction is the product of individuals and groups achieving legitimacy for their particular conception of reality. It is important to understand that while construction can be contingent, the process is not random.

Significantly for Berger and Luckmann, the social contraction of reality is a two-way-process. Human beings are not passive recipients of constructions by individuals and groups, they interpret them and find personal meaning, a process called *internalization*. The two authors importantly state that:

Since society exists as both objective and subjective reality, any adequate theoretical understanding of it must comprehend both aspects. [...] these aspects receive their proper recognition if society is understood in terms of an ongoing dialectical process composed of the three moments of externalization, objectivation and internalization. (Berger and Luckmann, [1966] 1991, p. 149)

Before moving on to discuss the constructionist perspective's application to the study of social problems, it is necessary to make one final important point. By grounding the media analysis in the contextual constructionist orientation to social problems, this thesis contributes to the sociology of knowledge developed by Berger and Luckmann by showing how a powerful idea within UK culture and policy today – that children's play constitutes a social problem – has been developed, framed and articulated according to the wider political and cultural dynamics of its time.

### **3.2 The social constructionist approach to social problems**

The social constructionist approach to the study of social problems originates in Spector and Kitsuse's book *Constructing Social Problems* ([1977] 2009) and a series of articles published in *Social Problems* (Kitsuse and Spector 1973 1975; Spector and Kitsuse, 1974). Spector and Kitsuse ([1977] 2009) offer the guiding statement of the approach and a systematic articulation of a sociology of social problems. In doing this, 'They sought to turn social problems – a concept that rarely figured in sociological analysis, other than the topic for the beginning undergraduate course and textbooks – into a subject for serious study' (Best, 1993 p. 132).

In their guiding statement, the researchers define social problems as 'the activities of individuals or groups making assertions of grievances and claims with respect to some putative conditions' (Spector and Kitsuse, [1977] 2009, p. 75). Construed in this way, 'social problems are not objective conditions to be studied and corrected; rather, they are the interpretive processes that constitute what come to be seen as oppressive, intolerable, or unjust conditions' (Holstein and Miller, 2003, p. 2). In this view, then, social problems are not distinctive and inherently immoral conditions; rather, they are definitions of, and orientations towards, putative conditions that are argued to be inherently immoral or unjust (Spector and Kitsuse, [1977] 2009). Accordingly, the authors urge sociologists to study social problems by examining how 'individuals and groups become engaged in collective activities that recognise putative conditions as problems, and

attempt to establish institutional arrangements' ([1977] 2009, p. 72). They propose that the main interest of sociologists of social problems should be the *interaction* between these individuals and groups – claimsmakers – and others regarding the definition of social conditions and what should be done about them. The approach attempts to 'account for the emergence, nature, and maintenance of claimsmaking and responding activities' (Spector and Kitsuse, 1973, p. 415). Therefore, central to this position is that claimsmaking is both implicitly and explicitly rhetorical (Holstein and Miller, 2003). Thus, when analysing children's play as a social problem, it is not children's play as a (putative) condition that is of concern. Rather, the aim is to examine children's play as an interactive process of claimsmaking and its reception.

This approach emerged from some sociologists' dissatisfaction with the dominant objectivist approach to social problems (Best, 1995).<sup>1</sup> Such dissatisfaction was not new. Spector and Kitsuse ([1977] 2009) review some of the earlier efforts that criticise the dominant objective approach for its failure to deal systematically with the definitional process of social problems. They identify that by reviewing this "critical literature" – some of which dates back to the 1920s – that writers interested in the process of definition rejected the dominant objectivist approach to social problems. However, despite the rejection of the dominant objectivist approach to social problems, the critical literature has largely failed to initiate an alternative line of investigation (Spector and Kitsuse ([1977] 2009). This point is reiterated in Joseph Schneider's article, *Social Problems Theory: The Constructionist View* (1985a). Schneider (1985a) contends that although the possibility of a research-based sociology of social problems integrated around a distinct theoretical perspective is not new, most sociological writing and research on social problems before Spector and Kitsuse (whether guided by functionalist, Marxist, conflict theory or other perspectives) does not forward a distinct theory of social problems and how they might work.

Spector and Kitsuse do credit some of these efforts as important sources in developing their social constructionist approach to social problems. One important source is Herbert Blumer (1971), who calls for a fundamental change in conceptualisation to reflect a definition of social problems as 'products of a process of collective definition' rather than 'objective conditions and social arrangements' (p. 289). Blumer (1971) also identifies the need for a sociological approach

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<sup>1</sup> The objectivist approach to social problems and the serious challenges it faces is discussed in Chapter 1.

to social problems that does not simply search for causes and solutions in the objective but can alternatively ‘study the process by which a society comes to recognize its social problems’ (p. 300). Other important sources in developing their approach credited by Spector and Kitsuse include Fuller and Myers (1941), Becker (1963) and Mauss (1975).

It is worth noting that because Spector and Kitsuse’s focus in *Constructing Social Problems* was to promote the constructionist approach to social problems as a corrective approach to the objective approach, little attention was paid to developing a *theoretical* mandate (Loseke, 2003). However, as Loseke (and indeed others) have pointed out, ‘there is an *implicit* theoretical framework in *Constructing Social Problem*’ (2003, p. 188). While many scholars have tried to fill in the implicit theory, Loseke (2003), drawing on the work of Gale Miller and James Holsten (1989: 1993) proposes that the social constructive approach to social problems can be placed within the larger phenomenological, ethnomethodological (a more empirical variant of phenomenology associated with Harrold Garfinkel (1917-2011) and Durkheimian frameworks. She argues that when the social construction approach to social problems is placed within these larger frameworks, it provides a justification of why this approach is important *regardless* of what might (or might not) be perceived as problems from an objectivist approach. She clarifies, ‘I am arguing that it is logical to believe social problems *can* be examined as objective conditions yet also believe that constructionist perspectives are important and valuable; they are theoretically grounded’ (2003, p. 192-193).

Since the constructionist approach to social problems breaks with the conventional and common sensical conception of social problems, it has always been controversial. Critics have attacked the approach from seemingly several sides. The most influential critique concerns which facts about the objective world should be taken into account. This critique has led to debate within the constructionist camp about the relative merits of strict and contextual versions of constructionism (Holstein and Miller, 2003).

### **3.3 Strict versus contextual versions of constructionism**

In forming their approach, Spector and Kitsuse ([1977] 2009) entertain a certain ambiguity, or at least allow for contrasting readings, around which facts about the objective world should be taken into account (Holstein and Miller, 2003). This has provoked criticism that accuses social

constructionists of tending to invoke a selective "objectivism" to conduct their analyses. The most influential criticism is made by two supporters of the constructionist perspective, Steve Woolger and Dorothy Pawluch (1985).

Woolger and Pawluch (1985) note that while constructionists identify their focus as a subjective judgment of claims, their analysis typically assumes some knowledge of objective conditions. Consequently, they argue that constructionism is theoretically inconsistent. They contend there are three key moves in most constructionist arguments: 'First, authors identify conditions or behaviours. Second, they identify various definitions (or claims) made about the conditions (or behaviours). Third, the authors stress the variability of the definitions vis-à-vis the constancy of the conditions to which they relate' (1985, p. 215). Woolger and Pawluch (1985) point out that this sort of analysis thus depends upon some "objective" statement about the condition in order to justify the "fact" that the definitions and claims associated with these conditions (or behaviours) have changed. Therefore, although constructionists identify claims about *putative* conditions as the proper subject of social problem analysis, indicating that the nature of the social condition is irrelevant (and maybe even unknowable), they tend to assume that they do know the actual status of the social problem (as an unchanging condition). For Woolgar and Pawluch (1985, p. 216), this theoretical inconsistency lies at the heart of constructionism: 'The successful [constructionist] social problem explanation depends on making problematic the truth status of certain states of affairs selected for analysis and explanation, while backgrounding or minimizing the possibility that the same problems apply to assumptions upon which the analysis depends'. They refer to this selective attention to objective conditions as 'ontological gerrymandering' (Woolgar and Pawluch, 1985, p. 216).

Woolgar and Pawluch (1985) draw two different implications from their analysis. First, they suggest that ontological gerrymandering may be an unavoidable necessity of the social constructionist project. In this response, they justify 'the theoretical status quo, even taken an appreciative stance towards social constructionists' writing practices' (Holstein and Miller, 2003, p. 5). A second implication, they suggest, completely different from the first, is that constructionists should 'search for forms of argument which go beyond the current impasse between proponents of objectivism and of relativism' (Woolgar and Pawluch (1985, p. 224). This

suggestion thus ‘assumes that it is possible to write about social life and experience in ways that do not objectify the phenomena under discussion’ (Holstein and Miller, 2003, p. 5).

This critique prompted a lively debate between those who saw themselves as constructionists (Gusfield, 1985; Hazelrigg 1985; Pfohl 1985; Schneider, 1985b). Best (1995) recognises that the debate focused on the analytic assumptions at the perspective’s foundations. These include: ‘What assumptions about the social world are appropriate? Should all such assumptions be avoided, or are some acceptable? What are the consequences of making different assumptions?’ (p. 341). Constructionists give varied responses to these questions, which demonstrates ‘the extent to which constructionism is a complex intellectual movement that includes diverse – and occasionally contradictory – orientations to social problem theory’ (Holstein and Miller, 2003, p. 5).

Favouring a strong reading of *Constructing Social Problems* (1977) that is radically phenomenological, John Kisuse and Peter Ibarra in 1993 directly respond to Woolgar and Pawluch’s (1985) criticisms by hardening the constructionist position and ironing out any theoretical inconsistencies. Recognising the problem that reference to objective conditions was creeping into constructionist examinations, the authors propose substituting something else for the term *putative conditions* in Spector and Kitsuse’s original guiding statement, since the term *putative condition* might have subtly allowed people doing constructionist analysis to attend to conditions. They recommended substituting the term with "condition-categories", defined as:

[...] typifications of socially circumscribed activities and processes - a "society's" ongoing classification of its own contents - used in practical contexts to generate meaningful descriptions and evaluations of social reality. They vary in their level of abstraction and specificity (e.g., "antismoking" in contrast "smoke-free public spaces", but they are the terms used to propose what the social problem is "about". (1993, p. 30)

By replacing *putative conditions* with *condition-categories*, the authors propose a constructionism that ‘never leaves language’ (Best 1993, p. 141).

This "strict" constructionism, as it has come to be known, that focuses exclusively on language, was to turn the empirical gaze to the *vernacular resources* drawn upon in claimsmaking activities. *Vernacular resources* are defined as ‘the conventional means by which members



realise claims' (p. 33). These include: rhetorical idioms, i.e. forms of talk; interpretive practices, i.e. frames of interpretation; and features of settings that distinguish claimsmaking activities as a class of phenomena while also differentiating among claimsmaking instances, i.e. context for articulation in as much as these effectively organise and circumscribe members' social problems. Ibarra and Kitsuse's (1993) strict constructionism therefore stakes out *rhetoric* as the topic matter. By replacing *putative conditions* with *condition-categories* and locating the topic of constructionism in rhetoric rather than the previous broader category of claimsmaking activities, 'they advance a method allowing constructionists to return to the original intent of Spector and Kitsuse: constructionism completely ignores objective reality' (Loseke, 2003, p. 197). However, while strict constructionism 'carefully hones Spector's and Kitsuse's original programme, it retains traces of objectivism in that it makes members' reality-constructing practices - assumptions, discourses, acts of interpretation and representation-objects for analysis' (Holstein and Miller, 2003, p. 6).

Other constructionists raise the question of whether strict constructionist analysis that completely ignores objective reality is possible, or even desirable. For example, in *But Seriously Folks: The Limitations of the Strict Constructionist Interpretations of Social Problems* (1993), Joel Best (1993), who favours a weaker reading of *Constructing Social Problems* (Spector and Kitsuse, [1977] 2009), argues that strict constructionism places unreasonable constraints on sociologists hoping to understand social problems.

Best (1993) illustrates the possibility and price of the approach by offering contrasting examples of the satanic ritual abuse scandals and the panic over AIDS. He argues that the strict approach allows analysts to note claims and contradictory claims, but asks analysts not to assess their relative merit because, irrespective of what they already know about a context, they must (pretend to) start from ignorance. Analysts must flatten each claim to the same level. This suggests that strict constructionists will recognise no difference between claims about a secret conspiratorial satanic blood cult, which are untestable since a successful conspiracy is one that cannot be proved to exist, and – say – claims about AIDS. Both emerged as a subject of claimsmaking in the 1980s and both are said to have killed thousands of people each year. In both cases, claimsmakers have attracted contradictory claims, and the strict constructionist will find no difference between the FBI saying that claims are implausible given that there have been no

bodies found and there has been no physical evidence, and someone claiming that the purported AIDS crisis is a hoax.

Continuing to argue the shortcomings of a strict approach, Best (1993) explains how constructionist analysts rarely declare that they know the truth about objective conditions. However, they are likely to make assumptions about objective conditions, assumptions that frame the research agenda. So, a sociologist who doubts the reality of the satanic menace is more likely to ask "who believes this stuff, and why?" than "why haven't the authorities done more about this?". He argues that 'it may be possible to avoid overt "lapses" – outright declarations about objective reality – but implicit assumptions about objective conditions will almost inevitably guide researchers' (Best, 1993, p. 137). Best then contrasts the sort of questions analysts are likely to ask about satanism with the sort of questions analysts are likely to ask about AIDS. He identifies that by strict constructionist standards, sociologists who have written about the construction of AIDS have addressed a series of "inappropriate" topics (e.g., "why the federal government was slow to react to the epidemic" or "why the press began focusing on the risk of transmission via heterosexual intercourse") as there is an implicit forbidden assumption that frames their research: people are sick with AIDS. However, 'A strict constructionist can no more assume that AIDS exists than presume that there is probably no large, satanic blood cult at work' (p. 137). This means that a strict constructionist researcher is constrained to asking the same questions about each claimsmaking campaign, rather than focusing on the interesting aspect of a particular case. How can an analyst who doesn't presume anything about a case possibly identify its interesting features?

These limitations of strict constructionism resulted in Best rhetorically asking, 'Is there anything an analyst might say about the construction of a particular social problem, such as satanism or AIDS, that does not require the analyst to make assumptions about objective reality?' (Best, 1993, p. 138). These theorists, as Best puts it, have 'painted themselves into an armchair' (p. 138). Even if it is not impossible to do empirical research within the constraints of strict constructionism, analytic purity comes at a terrible cost since it pushes the analyst 'into a contextless region where claimsmaking can only be examined in the abstract' (p. 143).

In addition to arguing the weaknesses of the strict constructionist approach, Best (1993) advocates a "contextual" approach (see also: Best 1995). Contextual constructionism;

[...] seeks to locate claimsmaking within its context. Claims emerge at particular historical moments in particular societies; they are made by particular claimsmakers, who address particular audiences. Claimsmakers have particular reasons for choosing particular rhetoric to address particular problems. Such specific elements form claimsmaking's context, and contextual constructionists argue that understanding social problems claims often depends upon understanding their context. (Best, 1995, p. 345)

To illustrate what this means in practice, Best (1993) returns to the contrasting examples of the satanic abuse scandals and the panic over AIDS. He argues that analysts may doubt claims that satanists sacrifice 60,000 victims per year on the grounds that the anti-satanism claimsmakers are unable to provide much evidence to support their charge. While generally accepting the Centers for Disease Control's figures for the numbers of AIDS victims on the ground, there is some limit to the degree that organisational practices are likely to distort the collection of these official statistics. Since the analyst's focus is on the construction of the social problem, they are unlikely to be interested in the exact number of satanists or AIDS victims. Rather, the analyst is more likely to be interested in how the statistics are collected, the role they play in claimsmaking rhetoric, the responses they elicit from the media, officials and the public and so on. Additionally, since contextual constructionism assumes that claimsmaking happens within some context, an analyst studying satanism might 'marvel that estimates of human sacrifice victims are supported by so little evidence, and ask why these claims are successful', while an analyst studying AIDS might 'wonder why, in the face of accumulating evidence of a serious problem, it took officials and the press so long to attend to AIDS' (p. 139).

Therefore, contextual constructionists acknowledge the usefulness of careful and delimited assumptions about the social context of claimsmaking – ontological gerrymandering – to explain how social problems claims emerge within sociohistorical contexts. Best (1995) offers two justifications for this practice. First, he contends it is impossible for social constructionists, no matter how hard they try, to avoid ontological gerrymandering since it is a necessary aspect of writing about the social world and the definitional process. Second, efforts to avoid ontological gerrymandering undermine the empirical application of the constructionist perspective on social

problems since they divert analysts from the study of the social worlds within which, and social processes through which, social problems are constructed.

Best (1995) importantly argues that although assumptions are made by contextual constructionists about social conditions to better understand how social problems claims emerge and develop, this does not mean the advocates of the strict approach are right when they equate contextual constructionism with objective sociology. He emphasises that contextual constructionist analysts remain focused on the claimmaking process and thus ask questions that are very different from those asked by traditional objectivist researchers.

Evidently, there are distinct differences between strict and contextual constructionism. Strict constructionists try to completely avoid ontological gerrymandering by refusing to evaluate the accuracy of claimmakers' claims. They argue that one set of claims (e.g. statistics about rising crime) cannot be used to assess other claims (e.g. claimmaking about "crime in the street"). Contextual constructionists regard the evaluation of social problems claims as a vital part of their analysis. They argue that any claim can be evaluated with reasonable confidence by carefully using available statistical and other information about the condition the claim describes. That the information used to make the evaluation is itself a social construction and rhetorical claim is irrelevant (Holstein and Miller, 2003). As Best states, 'calling a statement a claim does not discredit it' (1995, p. 347).

Developing theoretical justifications for strict constructionism is easier than developing such justifications for contextual constructionism. As Loseke notes, 'strict constructionism makes good theoretical sense', whereas theoretically, 'contextual contortionism is incoherent and confused' (2003, p. 199). The contextual approach, however, is evidently easier to defend in relation to practical relevance than the abstract and academic understanding of the strict approach (Loseke, 2003).

Given that strict constructionism's goal of assumption-free analysis can never be achieved, and moreover, even if the approach were possible it would come at the terrible cost constraining the analyst and limiting what can be learnt about the process of constructing social problems, a contextual constructionist approach will be adopted to better understand how and why children's play has emerged as a social problem over recent decades. Furthermore, as argued in the previous

chapters, locating claimsmaking within its context is important when examining the problem at hand. For example, over the course of history, children's play has been understood and defined in many ways and consequently a lack of outdoor, or indeed any type of children's play, would not have been considered an issue in the medieval and Victorian eras when children's play was viewed as waste of time (see Ariès, 1973; Griffith and Goodall, 2007). Another example is how the claims within the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 draw on cultural knowledge as a resource, most notably the contemporary construction children as vulnerable and "at risk" from a harmful adult culture and development paradigm that is so firmly established as fact in many western societies, in their attempts to convince others of the issue's importance and severity. So to clarify, a contextual constructionist approach is clearly the more fruitful than a strict constructionist approach for the studying how and why children's play has emerged as a social problem. Moreover, as Best notes, 'Analysts who hope to understand how and why social problems emerge and evolve must locate claimsmaking within its context. By default, all constructionist analysis becomes a form of contextual constructionism' (1995, p. 348).

It is clear from the discussion above that strict constructionism is ruled out as an approach for this current study as it fails to locate claims within their context. Context is also the reason why another subjectivist approach – poststructuralism – was dismissed for this current study. However, poststructuralist analysis, such as Foucauldian analysis, was conversely ruled out because it centres on the context which made claimsmakers' claims possible. More specifically, a Foucauldian analysis centres on historically and culturally located systems of power/knowledge (or discourses) that shape the "conditions of possibility" for social action (see Foucault, 1972; Holstein and Gubrium, 2003). This is problematic since the main research question concerns how and why children's play came to be seen as a social problem and a Foucauldian analysis would only go some way to answering the "why?" part of the question. Interestingly, despite not adopting a Foucauldian approach, Foucault's work is argued to have impacted on social constructionism. For instance, Lock and Strong (2010) and Clarke (2001) in their explorations of the social constructionist approaches emphasize how the work of Foucault has been a major line of development of social constructionism in its concern with discourse. Indeed, Holstein and Gubrium (2003) have gone so far as to suggest a Foucauldian approach – together with ethnomethodology (a sociological analysis that examines how individuals use everyday

conversation to construct a common-sense view of the world) – to analyse context in a social constructionist analysis of social problems.

In adopting a contextual constructionist approach to better understand how and why children's play has emerged as a social problem over recent decades, the study must not only reconstruct the discourse in order to describe its "natural history", but also scrutinise it in its specific historical context. This requires not only linguistic or rhetorical features but also making judgements about these claims.

### 3.4 Joel Best on social problems

From the contextual constructionist perspective which he so strongly advocates, Joel Best has produced a textbook entitled *Social Problems* (2008) to help analysts understand how and why social problems emerge and develop. The book is structured around the overarching social problem process. The process is identified as having six stages, with one flowing into the next. The six stages are: claimsmaking (i.e. the claims and those who make the claims claimsmakers), media coverage, public reaction, policymaking, social problems work that implements the policy, and policy outcome. Best (2008) proposes that this sequence of stages should be seen as a natural history that a typical social problem might follow. Importantly, not every social problem will fit the pattern exactly. In fact, other sociologists have offered different natural histories of the social problems process (see Blumer, 1971; Spector and Kitsuse, [1977] 2009). Others have even argued that it is wrong to present social problems as passing through pre-defined stages (see Hilgartner and Bosk, 1988). Certainly, the social problem process is far more complicated than the six stages, which only flow in one direction. The process involves a great deal of *feedback*. This 'can occur at every stage of the social problem process because actors at the various stages [...] don't just act, but also pay attention to how others react to what they have done, and then respond to those reactions by adjusting what they're doing' (Best, 2008, p. 27). So for example, 'claimsmaking does affect media coverage, but claimsmakers are also affected by that media coverage' (Best, 2008, p. 26). However, as Best explains, the six stages are used to provide a framework for understanding the course taken by those claims that are successful and have the greatest impact. Since the study focuses on claimsmaking (i.e. the claims and those who forward

them, the claimsmakers), the latter stages of the social problems process are not of principal concern. Nevertheless, the latter stages will be mentioned where relevant.

One of the most significant contributions of *Social Problems* is that it provides a complete set of tools for analysing any social problem. Drawing on Best (2008), as well as his work in general and the occasional reference to Loseke (2003), who co-edited *Social Problems: Constructionists Reading* (2003) with Best, the remainder of this chapter will now turn to a delineation of the earlier stages of the social problems process and some of the analytical devices that will aid the ensuing analysis, namely, claims and those claimsmakers who forward them.

Before proceeding, however, it is important to briefly discuss how Best (2001; 2008) emphasizes the importance of incorporating the study of diffusion into the analysis of social problems. Diffusion, according to Best, is the term used by social scientists to describe the spread of innovation. The process of diffusion involves sources, or *transmitters*, that pass the innovation along to adaptors. Best suggests that all claimmaking is a form of diffusion in which claimsmakers (transmitters) try to persuade audiences (adopters) about social problems (the object of diffusion). Diffusion occurs through channels – that is, there needs to be links or connections between potential transmitters and perspective adaptors. Best identifies how theorists of diffusion, such as McAdam and Rucht (1993), make an analytic distinction between relational channels and nonrelation channels. Relational channels involve interpersonal contact between transmitters and adaptors, while nonrelation channels such as the media do not have personal ties. In practice, according to Best, diffusion combines both nonrelational and relational channels: ‘Through informal ties (such as acquaintanceship) and more formal ties (such as membership of organisations)’ and ‘At the same time information about social problems flows through nonrelational channels – through the press and entertainment media, through books and news broadcasts and internet’ (Best 2008, 302). As such, Best states that ‘relational and nonrelational channel[s] are mutually reinforcing’ (2001, p. 11). Diffusion, Best emphasizes, in reference to Strange and Meyer (1993), can be made easier and indeed more rapid when claims are phrased in relatively abstract or theoretical language, which is called *theorization*. It is important to note that analysts according to Best (2011) tend to take the process of diffusion for granted when examine the spread of claims in a particular society. Following Best’s recommendation, the study of

diffusion is incorporated in the in this analysis of children's play as a social problem (see Chapter 6).

### 3.4.1 *Claims*

Constructing a new social problem involves making claims. Every social problem claim is a persuasive argument: it is an effort to convince others that  $x$  is a problem, that  $y$  offers a solution to the problem and that  $z$  should be adopted to address the problem in a specific way (Best, 1987). A claim, then, is an argument, an effort to persuade others that something is wrong, that there is a problem that needs to be solved.<sup>2</sup> When analysing claims as arguments, Best (2008) argues that it is less a matter of whether the claims are true or not than whether the people who make the claims and the audiences for those claims find the reasoning convincing. Since people who share the same culture are likely to find the same sorts of arguments persuasive, claims tend to take a standard form. This section on claims starts by examining the standard structure of claims, before considering how audiences respond to them, how claims evolve, and where they fit in the larger culture.

#### 3.4.1.1 *The structure of claims*

Since claimsmaking is rhetorical, rhetoric – the study of persuasion – can be used to analyse claims (Best 1987). Building on Stephen Toulmin's (1958) scheme on the basic structure of arguments, which asserts that persuasive arguments have a basic structure of three fundamental components: data (later termed grounds), warrants, and conclusions, Best (1987) develops a technique for analysing claims. Notably, while there have been rhetorical analyses of claims previously, there were comparatively few attempts to develop an analytically coherent approach to their sociological study. In Best's conceptualisation, *grounds* are statements about the nature of the problem (including facts and data), *warrants* justify taking action and *conclusions* explain what that action should be (2008, p. 33). Each of the three components that form the structure of claims will now be considered in turn.

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<sup>2</sup> Importantly it was Spector and Kitsuse's guiding statement (discussed in this chapter) that introduced the vocabulary of claims into the constructionist lexicon (Best, 2002).



In any claim, statements about grounds typically provide the basic facts. Although facts are themselves socially constructed, they serve as the foundation upon which the claim is based and can be appealed to whenever the claim's conclusions are called into question. Best (1987) importantly explains that claimsmakers and their audiences may agree to accept grounds statements without question, or one or both may have reservations about the statements' truth, their relevance, the methods used to establish them, and so on. Best (1987) explains that although the specific facts at issue depend upon the particular claims being made, some types of grounds statements recur in many claimsmaking campaigns, Best (2008) refers to this recurrence of grounds statements as the *basic rhetorical recipe* for establishing grounds. The recipe consists of three types of ground statement, or, sticking with the recipe analogy, ingredients, which include a typifying example, name, and statistic. Each of these ingredients will now be briefly discussed. Claims normally begin with a typifying example. A typifying example is a description of a particular instance of the condition that is usually chosen to illustrate the seriousness of the problem, so they tend to be dramatic. As such, they are usually anything but typical. Next, the claim names the problem, giving it a distinct moniker. Importantly, naming a problem is not the same as a defining it. Claimsmakers tend to avoid defining a problem, which has a limiting potential, by focusing instead on typifying examples which offer an implicit definition. As Best argues, 'the people who make up the audience for claims probably assume they understand the nature of these problems because they are familiar with one or more typifying examples' (2008, p. 32). For many claims, the final ingredient is some sort of statistic, a number that indicates the scale of the problem, so the numbers tend to be big to imply that the problem is big. These three ingredients in this recipe combine to create a troubling impression.

Beyond this basic recipe, claims may also feature what Best (2008) refers to *additional grounds*. These may include but are not limited to: the prognosis of a worsening situation, categorising the problem as a familiar type (e.g. crime or disease), stating the kind of people involved in the troubling condition (e.g. victims and villains), suggesting the range of people affected (e.g. rich and poor, white and black, etc.), or challenging older interpretations of the social problem. Effective grounds create a sense of the problem and convince listeners that the condition is real. This sets the stage for a claim's warrants.

Warrants are statements that bridge the gap between grounds and conclusions by explaining why something ought to be done. To achieve this, warrants invoke values. As Best explains, ‘warrants argue that the condition identified in the grounds is inconsistent with what we value, and therefore we need to do something about it’ (2008, p. 36). Values are usually expressed as vague principles that the majority – if not all – people can endorse (e.g. freedom, health, justice, equality and protecting the vulnerable are considered cherished values). However, although most people in western countries can be expected to affirm their belief in the cherished values identified above, they may disagree over how such abstract values should be translated in practice. Best (2008) highlights how new warrants may emerge that change how the social problem is characterised: that is, warrants can rise and fall in popularity. Since claims can invoke a multitude of values, and since those values are abstract and open to conflicting interpretations, claims generally feature a variety of warrants. This is because even if different people don’t agree on the reason for taking action, they may agree that something needs to be done about the troubling condition.

All claims lead to conclusions, which are statements that specify the action that should be taken to alleviate or eradicate the relevant social problem. The nature of the conclusions is shaped by the grounds and warrants that proceed them. So, for example, ‘if a claim’s grounds have depicted a condition that causes terrible suffering, and the warrants speak to humanitarian concerns about the need to alleviate suffering, then the conclusions are likely to focus on ways to help the afflicted (Best, 2008, p. 39). According to Best (2008), conclusions often include both short-range and long-range goals. Short-term goals try to arouse concern in order to make others aware of the problem, to get people to join the campaign or encourage the media to cover the issue. Longer-term goals typically seek policy change by arguing that people need to pass a new law, fund a programme, or otherwise deal with the problem in a new, more effective way. Best (2008) notes that usually the short-range goals are seen as steps toward making these long-range changes possible.

In sum, grounds, warrants and conclusions, then, are the standard elements of most claims. The rhetorical structure explains what is wrong, why it is wrong and what should be done about it. Now it is important to address who these claims are for – the audiences for social problem claims

– since it is persuading these audiences and competing for their attention that plays a critical role in shaping claims.

#### ***3.4.1.2 Claims and their audiences***

A claim involves communication between those who make the claim – claimsmakers – and the audience the claim is meant to persuade (Best, 2008). The audience are the people who evaluate the believability and importance of claims, they are ‘the judge and jury of social problem claims’ (Loseke and Best, 2003, p. 40). The audience of claims are therefore not passive recipients of claims. Successful claimsmakers must be sensitive to their reactions and revise the parts of their claims that are not persuasive and need revising (Best, 2008). In this way, according to Best (2008) referring to the Nichols (2003), claimsmakers and audiences engage in a *dialogue* in which audiences respond positively or negatively and claims are revised accordingly. Thus, claimsmaking is not a one-shot effort and typically involves claimsmakers trying out claims, assessing the audience response, modifying the claims, and so on, until they develop a persuasive argument.

Who are the audience of claims? Best (2008) argues the audience for claims includes all the other participants in the social problem process, for example: people who might be enlisted in the cause, other claimsmakers, members of the media who might publicise the claims, the general public, policymakers, etc. In our daily lives, we each are members of audiences for social problem claims. The persuasion of audiences, however, can be difficult (Loseke and Best, 2003). Loseke and Best (2003) identify two reasons for this difficulty which will now be explored.

One reason identified is that audiences differ in what they find persuasive. That is, claims that might persuade some people that a social problem is happening (or is about to happen) and that action needs to be taken might not persuade others. Since audiences differ in what they find persuasive, effective claims need to be made to fit their audiences’ concerns. How claimsmakers understand those concerns should affect their rhetorical choices, since it would be of very little value to present claims that an audience would not find convincing. In order to fit claims to their audiences’ concerns, audiences can be subdivided or segmented by race, age, gender, social class and so on, groups which tend to have different interests and ideologies. To clarify, ‘Different segments of society, then, view the world differently, and persuasive claims need to match the

various worldviews of the segments of the audience toward which they are directed' (Best, 2008, p. 42).

Best (2008) identifies that claimsmakers devise various strategies to deal with audience segmentation to get their claims across and drawing on the work of Barbara Nelson (1984) refers to two such strategies. One strategy is to avoid resistance, crafting claims to maximise their appeal to the broadest possible audience and creating alliances among people who usually don't agree. Claims that inspire general agreement, to which it is difficult to imagine any reasonable opposition, are sometimes referred to as *valence* issues (Nelson, 1984). Put another way, a valence issue elicits 'a single, strong, fairly uniform emotional response and does not have an adverbial quality' (Nelson, 1984, p. 27). A prominent example of a valence issue, which is the focus of Nelson's 1984 study, is child abuse. In western countries, children are viewed as vulnerable innocents who deserves social protection (see Chapter 1). Thus, claims that children are being abused by adults seem so compelling that it would be difficult to imagine anyone opposing such claims without appearing to "blame the victim" or defend the child abuser. Alternatively, at the other extreme, a second strategy is to direct claims toward those segments most likely to respond favourably. This is a particularly useful tactic when addressing contested issues, or *position issues* that 'do not elicit a single response but instead engender alternative and sometimes highly conflictual responses' (Nelson 1984, p. 27), that will probably never lead to a consensus, such as abortion. This second strategy is also useful at the beginning of the social problem process when claims are first being made since it can, for example, rally supporters and give claimsmakers a chance to hone their claims to make them as persuasive as possible.

The second reason identified by Loseke and Best (2003) for this difficulty in persuading audiences is that claims compete for audience members' attention in what Best (1990) refers to as a *social problems marketplace*. As Best (2008) argues, 'At any given moment, countless claimsmakers are struggling to get their particular claims heard – far more than can hope to capture the audience's limited attention' (p. 46). He highlights that the competition to capture audience attention helps to explain some of the features of social problem rhetoric noted above. Rhetorical devices (such as disturbing typifying examples, names – often catchy ones, statistics with large numbers) are 'arresting, eye-catching; each can draw attention people's attention to this claim (and away from those other claims competing for the audience's attention)' (Best,

2008, p. 46). Best states that ‘this competition in the social problem marketplace means that claimsmakers are encouraged to devise dramatic, disturbing, easily grasped claims that will command attention over competing claims’ (p. 46).

In sum, claimsmakers make claims they hope will be persuasive; however, since audiences are not passive, they must attend to the audience’s feedback and revise their rhetoric accordingly. In addition, since audiences are not an undifferentiated mass and given the competition for audience attention, claimsmakers must utilise various strategies and rhetorical devices to persuade their intended audiences.

### ***3.4.1.3 Evolution of and opposition to claims***

Best (2008) argues that claims keep evolving even after audiences become concerned about the problem. Even once a claim has attracted recognition and gained acceptance and can be considered *well established* (there is widespread agreement this is a troubling condition that ought to be considered a social problem) or indeed has become *institutionalised* (there is official recognition and endorsement of a claim in various realms of public life, and the programmatic and legal changes that occur accordingly, see Best, 1999), claims still need to change because of *audience saturation*, which happens when audience members become bored with repeatedly hearing the same claims. In order to combat the problem, claimsmakers often revise and repackage claims to make them seem fresh and interesting.<sup>3</sup> Claimsmakers often do this by adding additional grounds, more warrants or new conclusions.

Once a claim has become well established or institutionalised, it is often possible for claimsmakers to build additional claims on the same foundation. One such strategy is termed *domain expansion*, where the contents of the accepted social problem category are expanded (Best, 1990). For example, once the physical abuse of children gained acceptance as a social problem, claimsmakers expanded the domain to include neglect, sexual abuse and emotional abuse (see Best 1990). Another example is slavery, which has expanded to include immigrant labour, prostitution and low wage jobs (see: Loseke, 2003).

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<sup>3</sup> In relation to the use of the term *repackage*, Best (2008) uses the term *package* to refer to ‘A familiar construction of a particular troubling condition, including specifications of its causes and solutions’ (p. 340).

A related strategy for linking social problems is *piggybacking*, when a new troubling condition is constructed as a different instance of an already well established problem claim (Loseke, 2003). The civil rights movement, according to Loseke, is the most obvious example: it promoted equal rights so successfully that it inspired different claimsmakers to promote the rights of other groups such as the rights of children, gay people and animals. Notably, claims do not have to use the same terms, such as "rights", to piggyback on successful constructions (Best, 2008). Loseke (2003) notes that although domain expansion and piggybacking can be effective as claimsmaking strategies, their use has limits since things must *make sense* to audience members. She warns claimsmakers to be careful, since 'expanding categories too far can backfire because audience members stop listening to all claims about the category' (2003, p. 62).

Claims encounter opposition from *counterclaims*, arguments that directly oppose the original claim (Best, 2008). Counterclaims may challenge the original claims' evidence – the grounds – as presented in the original claim, charging that claimsmakers have misunderstood or misrepresented the nature of the troubling condition. Similarly, counterclaims may challenge the original claims' warrants, arguing they should be considered less compelling than others. In some cases, claimsmakers with opposing views develop fully-fledged arguments – each with its own set of grounds, warrants and conclusions – to make a persuasive case.

Counterclaims often lead to claims being modified. Best (2008) argues that modification occurs for two reasons. First, easily-challenged elements may need to be changed or reinforced. Second, the opposition can be incorporated into the claims: it may be possible to characterise the opposition as part of the problem, thus turning the opposition into a new ground for the claim. Claims, then, are continuously in play: they evolve, they inspire other claims and they encounter opposition.

#### ***3.4.1.4 Cultural resources***

Although theoretically claimsmakers can formulate claims in any manner they choose, every culture and time period presents a large repository of ideas and images about how the world works – and should work – that a claimsmaker must respect if their claims are to be widely recognised and accepted. Consequently, for claims to be successful, they must make sense by being consistent with people's understanding of how the world works and should work. These

*cultural resources*, as Best (1991) terms them, from which claims must draw, are available whenever claims are created.

Best (2008) points out that the fund of cultural resources is large and diverse, yet not necessarily logically consistent. Any culture offers various ideas and images that might be incorporated into successful claims. Due to this cultural diversity, most social problems tend to be constructed in very different ways. Best (2008) illustrates the point with the example of debates over poverty, which often feature profoundly different interpretations: some commentators argue the poor are individually and personally responsible for their situation, while other critics insist poverty is largely the product of a flawed social structure.

Furthermore, the cultural context for claims is continually shifting, something reflected in social problem claims (Best, 2008). Best (2008) describes how many social problems, for instance gangs, cults, racism, and poverty, have been the subject of claims for tens or even hundreds of years, but the particular constructions of these social problems in different periods reflect cultural developments during those periods. Therefore, cultural conditions within particular historical periods affect how social problems are constructed at the time. Best (2008) illustrates this point by identifying how the theme of expanding individual rights during the 1960s, as reflected in the civil rights movement and the sexual revolution, or the shift towards the conservative values of the 1970s, as reflected in growing concerns about sex and drugs, can be seen as having influenced claims about many different social problems.

Since claimsmakers draw on existing cultural understanding – cultural resources – to formulate successful claims, it follows that successful claims provide a window into the culture that produced them. Consequently, this study not only concerns the problematisation of children's play, but also the culture in which claims about children's play as a problem could take root.

#### ***3.4.1.5 Summary***

There are various aspects of social problem claims. It is the competitive nature of claimsmaking, combined with its culture-bound character, that makes Best's (1987, 2008) structure of claims – the three component parts of grounds, warrants, and conclusions – particularly useful for analysing social problem claims. These tools will be adopted to answer three important questions

guiding this research: what is the problem of children's play? How has it evolved? How has it come to prevail? The results are detailed in Chapter 7.

Claims, however, as Best (2008) notes, do not exist independently of claimsmakers. People formulate them in the hope of persuading others. The people who make claims are discussed next.

### **3.4.2 *Claimsmakers***

'Claims cannot exist without claimsmakers' (Best, 1995, p. 103). In other words, claims do not exist in the abstract: people must make them and therefore individuals and groups always pre-exist claims.<sup>4</sup> The reason claims have been defined and described in this chapter before claimsmakers is that it was deemed necessary to first understand *what it is* that claimsmakers construct. This is an approach that Best frequently adopts when explaining claimsmaking (see for example, Best, 1995, 2008, 2013). Claimsmakers are 'people who seek to convince others that there is a troubling condition about which something should be done' (Best, 2008, p. 338). They both create and promote claims, which can be difficult and frustrating work that not everyone is willing to do (Best 1995). This section on claimsmakers starts by examining how Best distinguishes claimsmakers into insider and outsider claimsmakers and then turns to explore the broadly recognised social roles of claimsmakers. The section ends by investigating what it means for a claimsmaker to achieve 'ownership' of a social problem.

#### **3.4.2.1 *Insider and outsider claimsmakers***

Best (1990) separates out claimsmakers into "insider" and "outsider" claimsmakers. Insider claimsmakers are those who easily access people in powerful positions, most notably policymakers.<sup>5</sup> Those who have easy access form what is sometimes called the *polity* (Useem and Zald, 1982, cited in Best, 2008, p. 65), consisting of groups that are regularly consulted and able to influence policymakers' decisions. Examples of insider claimsmakers include pressure groups, lobbyists, politicians and think tanks. In contrast, outsider claimsmakers are those who have

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<sup>4</sup> This understanding is reflected in the ordering of forthcoming chapters, with the examination of claimsmakers (Chapter 6) preceding the discussion of the claims they construct (Chapter 7).

<sup>5</sup> Best defines policymakers as 'People who are able to establish a social policy of some kind' (2008, p. 341).

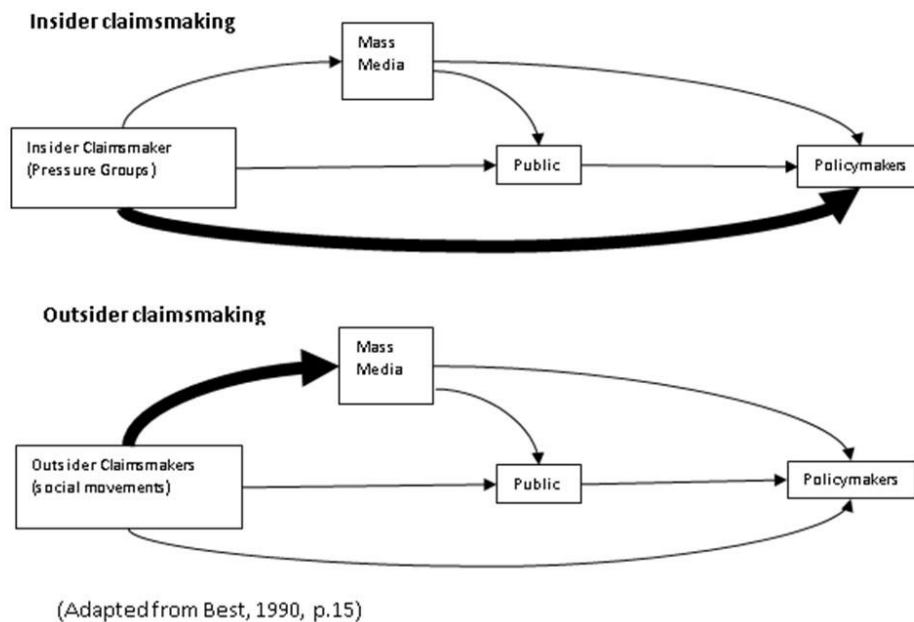


limited access to policymakers and lack ready access to the media. They often come from outside of the polity and thus have little influence over policymakers. Examples of outsider claimsmakers include activists, social movement organisations (SMOs)<sup>6</sup> and individual members of the public. Best (1990) argues that since it is fairly difficult for outsider claimsmakers to directly reach policymakers and the media to gain recognition for their social problem claims, outsiders often try to take their message to the general public in the hope they will gain widespread recognition and acceptance for their claims. This means outsider claimsmakers try to attract the attention of the news media to generate either hard news (e.g. by conducting demonstrations or holding press conferences) or soft news (e.g. by appearing on talk shows or giving interviews for feature stories). Both forms of coverage can aid claimsmaking, since media coverage attracts public attention to the cause and also pressures policymakers into taking the claims into consideration. Consequently, 'the mass media are especially important to claimsmaking by outsiders' (Best, 1990, p. 14).

Best (1990) provides a diagram to compare the claimsmaking process for insiders and outsiders, see Figure 3.1 below.

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<sup>6</sup> SMOs are defined by Best (2008, p. 342) as, 'A particular organisation that belongs to as social movement', with a social movement being defined as, 'A general cause that motivates activists and social movement organizations to address particular troubling conditions'.

**Figure 3.1** Claimsmaking by insiders and outsiders

For insiders, the principal channel of influence flows directly from claimsmakers to policymakers, depicted in the figure above with the thicker arrow running directly from claimsmakers to policymakers. This process can be quite discreet, with claimants utilising their access to policymakers to lobby change outside the glare of the media spotlight and without arousing much public attention. On the other hand, insider claimsmakers may choose to conduct public campaigns for tactical reasons. Thus, they have a choice, 'they can decide to use a discreet approach for one campaign while seeking maxim publicity for the next' (Best, 1990, p. 15). Alternatively, outsider claimsmakers typically depend upon reaching the media, as shown above with the thicker arrow running between the claimsmakers and the media. This is because media coverage seems the best route to public sympathy and access to policymakers.

#### 3.4.2.2 Social roles of claimsmakers

Best (2008) also distinguishes claimsmakers in terms of their broadly recognised social roles. He suggests that two of the most obvious examples are *activists* and *experts* (Best 2008). The former refers to people who organise into social movements for the specific purpose of persuading audience members that one condition or another is a social problem. Activists are 'Members of a social movement organisation who make claims about social problems' (Best, 2008, p. 337). The

latter refers to 'People-such as physicians, scientists, lawyers, and officials - who have special knowledge [e.g. training, equipment, vocabulary, etc.] and claim to speak with special authority' (Best, 2008, p. 338).<sup>7</sup> Numerous other types of claimsmaker can be identified in terms of their broadly recognised social role, such as members of the general public, journalists, celebrities and public figures and so on. Best (1995) notes that social problem construction often features alliances among different types of claimsmaker. He illustrates the point with the example of Philip Jenkins's (1995) analysis of the construction of clergy sexual abuse as a social problem, which suggests the campaign involved several sorts of claimsmaker, including 'victims of abuse, lawyers and therapeutic professionals, and activists seeking to change the Church' (p. 104). The importance of these alliances among different types of claimsmaker is emphasised by Nichols (1997), who states 'narration of new problems [...] is more likely to be effective when there is a symbiotic relationship between different types of claimsmakers' (p. 325).

Claimsmakers, no matter what their broadly recognised social roles, have *interests* in promoting the social problem (i.e. they tend to gain something if their claims are successful) but not all claimsmakers' interests are the same (Best, 1995). Interests can help to explain why people engage in claimsmaking, which, as already noted, can be difficult and frustrating work. Claimsmakers often stand to gain if their claims are successful, for example, experts may acquire influence, control, or prestige, while activists may gain clout and even official' standing. Best (1990) notes that even when successful claims do not lead directly to such benefits, "there may be indirect, symbolic benefits; successful claims can reaffirm the correctness of the claimsmakers' values, ideology, or life-style" (p. 11).

As well as having different interests, different social roles often mean that claimsmakers often have different *resources* (Best, 1990), such as money, members, skills and so on readily available to them. For example, the resources that activists need to forward their claims, such as money, are almost always scarce. Best (1990) argues that claimants must collect and assemble the resources needed to make their claims successful: they may need to recruit members to the cause, raise funds and so on. This is sometimes referred to as *resource mobilization* (Best, 2008).

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<sup>7</sup> Best (2008) importantly argues that at different times and places, ideas about which people and with what kind of knowledge ought to be considered *experts* varies. For example, in some cultures and in our culture in the not too distant past, religious people (such as priests or ministers) would have been considered experts.

It is important to emphasise that the distinction between insider and outsider claimsmakers on the one hand, and that which separates out claimsmakers according to their social roles on the other, are by no means mutually exclusive. Instead, the categories of insider and outsider claimsmaker, which might be understood as "processual" roles, should be seen as overarching functions that various claimsmakers (e.g. activists, experts etc.) may perform in the process of making claims. These processual roles highlight the connections and relationships between individuals and groups and the available opportunities for bridging gaps between disparate factions through which access can sometimes be granted to new public arenas and policy domains.

### **3.4.2.3 Ownership**

Drawing on the work of Gusfield (1981), Best (1990) suggests that perhaps the ultimate success for claimsmakers is to achieve *ownership* of a social problem. Ownership involves 'the ability to create and influence the public definition of a social problem' (Gusfield, 1981, p. 10). It 'occurs when your construction of a problem gains acceptance, when you become the authority to whom people turn, when you assume effective control over social policy'" (Best, 1990, p. 12). Ownership, as Best (2008) points out, is a critical element in the construction of a social problem. If ownership is not assumed, 'it is hard for the social problem process to be proceed; it is too easy for public attention to shift away as soon as the next issue arrives. Owners are needed to tend to the topic, to revise their claims so that the topic remains fresh and interesting' (p. 89). Best also states that owners constantly strive to keep their ownership visible to the press, the public and policymakers to preserve their status as owners. Significantly, a social problem can have multiple owners: for instance, in position issues marked by intractable disagreement, often claimsmakers own opposing sides of the debate.

Ownership is advantageous for all the different types of claimsmaker. Ownership, according to Best (2008), benefits activists (or indeed any outsider claimsmaker) because as owners:

[...] their claims seem better established; their authority seems more legitimate; and as they become familiar figures with a large network of social contacts [most notably with people in powerful positions such as policymakers], they can begin to transform themselves from outsiders to insider claimsmakers. (2008, p. 89-90)

Best (2008) also argues that experts who assume ownership also stand to gain a great deal. Their social visibility and prestige rises, they become more powerful and typically stand to benefit financially.

Lastly, in relation to ownership, it should be noted that not all claimsmakers are in a position to take ownership of a potential new social problem. Individual members of the general public may find it difficult to successfully take ownership of a social problem. They may lack the skills, resources, authority and power to make pronouncements on social conditions and how and why they should be altered.

#### **3.4.2.4 Summary**

Best (2008) distinguishes different types of claimsmaker according to social position. He also distinguishes claimsmakers according to whether they are either insiders or outsiders in the claimsmaking process. These distinctions allow for a discussion of claimsmakers in terms of social position, along with its accompanying interests, resources and alliances, as well as whether the claimsmakers are either insiders or outsiders in the claimsmaking process and the paths their claimsmaking activities follow. These distinctions provide the tools adopted in this study to answer one question guiding this research, namely, who the claimsmakers who say that children's play is a problem are (the results of which are detailed in Chapter 6).

Ultimately, whether claims made by claimsmakers are widely understood or not depends on the treatment they receive in the mass media (Best, 2008). Continuing to draw on the work of Best, the role of the mass media in the social problem process will now be discussed.

#### **3.4.3 The Mass Media**

The mass media, according to Best (1990), plays a crucial role in constructing most social problems. Best (1990) argues that claimsmakers who hope to attract wide attention – and this is especially important for outsider claimsmakers – usually turn to the mass media, who they hope will serve as a channel to transmit their message to a larger audience. In efforts to draw coverage, claimsmakers use various deliberate tactics, including demonstrations, press releases and press conferences. Here, media workers can be seen as a kind of *gatekeeper* for claims. The term *gatekeeper* is frequently used in constructions literature, including Best (1987). Although the

term is not developed extensively, it is commonly used to describe those who straddle different means of communication, especially those in the mass media who make decisions on which message to disseminate to their audience.

Media workers have constraints and conventions. For example, they work under deadlines, meaning they rarely have time to become familiar with the claims they cover; they have presentation constrictions (such as that newspapers can only print so many inches of news per day); they need to make their coverage interesting enough for the audience to not stop reading or watching. Best (2008) refers to the job of locating and presenting news to the larger public as *news work*. The media, therefore, do not only transmit claimsmakers' messages, they typically translate and transform them into what Best (1990) calls *secondary claims*, which are shorter and more dramatic than the initial *primary claims*. The mass media, it should be noted, can make both primary and secondary claims. Journalists make original primary claims when searching out information and writing a story but more commonly they make secondary claims translating claims by others (e.g. activists, politicians, experts). Best importantly points out that 'the public sense of social problems is more likely to come from secondary, rather than primary, claims' (1990, p. 19). The public sense of social problems through the mass media is discussed in more detail later in this section.

It is important to define the terms *mass media* or *media* in any study. Loseke (2003) argues that while widely used, the term 'mass media' is unfortunate since it disguises incredible diversity. The mass media is composed of multiple sites or arenas, including magazines, newspapers, television, and the internet. While fragmentation and proliferation in the mass media has led to more competition than in the past and therefore audiences tend to be smaller, the "mass" in "mass media", according to Loseke, 'continues to signify that many people potentially can see or hear claims made in these sites. [...] these sites offer the largest possible audiences' (2003, p. 41). Mass media coverage, according to Best (1990), gives claims a certain degree of credibility (as noted above) in relation to outsider claimers but is also relevant to insider claimsmakers, since media coverage attracts public attention to the cause and also pressures policymakers into taking the claims into consideration. Given this appeal and potential effectiveness, many claimsmakers

compete within the aforementioned social problems marketplace for media coverage in these sites (each typically having limited *carrying capacity*)<sup>8</sup> which offer the "largest possible audiences". Therefore, the mass media and particularly the news media is the most obvious site for secondary claims (Best, 1990) and provides an ideal locale for studying the interaction between various claimsmakers as the issue evolves over time, as well as the accompanying consensuses and controversies that develop with them.

The mass media are crucial for another reason pertinent to the study of social problems construction. Loseke argues that:

As our world gets larger (because of the mass media) we must rely on these media to tell us about it. [...] So, while it is important to remember that audience members do not necessarily believe what we see or hear, it remains that an increasingly important source of information is the mass media. Indeed, peoples' ratings of specific conditions as a "problem important to society" depend more on the coverage they have seen on television than on their personal experience. What is presented through the mass media, in other words, is what people *can* think about. (2003, p. 41)

The choices that media workers make regarding which claims they cover, then, are consequential. Best (2008), drawing on the work of McCombs (2004), describes the central role of the media in the process of *agenda setting*, which can be defined as the course by which issues are adopted for public consideration and, perhaps, remedied. He argues that 'just as meetings are guided by an agenda – a list of topics to be addressed, usually in order of importance – we can envision society's members as needing to prioritize their concerns' (p. 154). The media's, particularly the news media's, coverage 'make[s] people aware of a social problem – get it on the society's agenda' (p. 154). This means the news media are also an important locale in the study of social problem claims since it is not only awareness claimsmakers want, but also that their issue be understood as important and placed high on society's agenda.

The mass media evidently perform an essential role in the construction of social problems since much of our reality is mediated by our interaction with the mass media, which affects our perceptions of what issues deserve our attention. Studying the successful problematisation of

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<sup>8</sup> Carrying capacity is 'The number of issues that can receive attention in an arena' (Best, 2008, p. 337).

children's play in the mass media thus provides an understanding of the evolution of the issue over time, the use of effective rhetoric and how it has shaped the problem, and the cultural moment in which it has happened since claims must resonate with the audience. Since the news media is the most obvious site for secondary claims and making people aware of an issue, it is therefore an ideal site of study. Interested parties come together in the social problems marketplace for news media coverage who might not otherwise have come together, and through which can be identified the various characterisations of the issue as it develops an array of domains. Claimsmakers who become the 'go to authority' on the issue can also be identified.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the insights and conceptual tools used in the ensuing analysis. In terms of methodology, these insights guide the research in a number of ways. The general development of news media discussions of children's play is considered (Chapter 5), before turning to a detailed analysis of the claimsmakers who have been instrumental in the construction of the problem and the corresponding roles they have played at various stages in the claimsmaking process (Chapter 6). Research is also carried out to analyse the rhetoric of claims (Chapter 7). This latter phase considers in more detail some of the themes discussed in the context of their historical development in Chapter 5, attempting to account for their success as elements of rhetorical arguments intended to persuade audiences. The specific methodology used to gather and analyse the data on which this study is based is detailed in the following chapter.



## 4 Methodology

In order to analyse the emergence of children's play as a social problem, alongside approaching the research questions detailed at the outset of this thesis, a qualitative media analysis is performed on major UK newspapers. This chapter details the methodology and its theoretical rationale, alongside describing the sampling procedures and approach to data analysis used.

### 4.1 Qualitative Media Analysis (QMA)

Qualitative Media Analysis (QMA) is described and developed by Altheide (1987, 1996, 2000), Altheide et al. (2008) and more recently Altheide and Schneider (2013). It should be noted that QMA is referred to by its originator and later adopters by a variety of terms, including *ethnographic content analysis*, *qualitative document analysis* or *qualitative content analysis*. However, QMA was chosen over other titles because it maintains an emphasis on the fundamental role of documents, the subject of research, as "mediators" of meanings in social life. QMA blends more traditional objective content analysis with the cultural immersion characteristic of participant observation. The result is an approach dedicated to the study of the interaction of a text with its context and the process of making by which meaning is constructed.

QMA has theoretical and methodological roots in the work of George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer, Alfred Schutz, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (Altheide, 1996). As Altheide describes, QMA is a method that emphasises, 'the meaning of an activity, the situation in which it emerges, and the importance of interaction for the communication process' (1996, p. 8). Accordingly, it is guided by three core apprehensions. Firstly, that 'social life consists of a process of communication and interpretation regarding the definition of the situation' and that the 'symbolic order we join as infants infuses our own view of our self, others, and our future' (Altheide, 1996, p. 8). Secondly, 'this communicative process that breaks the distinction between subject and object, between internal and external, and joins them in the situation that we experience and take for granted' (Altheide, 1996, p. 8). Thirdly, the process is central since everything is 'under construction', even our most firmly held beliefs, values and personal commitments' and, as such, 'what we consciously believe and do is tied to many aspects of

“reality maintenance”, of which we are less aware, that we have made part of our routine “stock of knowledge” (Altheide, 1996, p. 8).

The philosophical lineage shared by the constructionist approach detailed in the preceding chapter and QMA is clearly evident. Both are concerned with unpicking and reconstructing the sense of "givenness" about that world and understanding the process by which it has come about. However, what QMA provides is the specific tools to achieve this aim, taking into consideration new technological innovations and the methods appropriate to the study of artefacts of culture (Hochuli, 2014).

The focus of QMA is analysing documents as artefacts of culture ‘to understand culture – or the process and the array of objects, symbols, and meanings that make up social reality shared by members of a society’ (Altheide, 1996, p. 2). Altheide defines documents as ‘any symbolic representation that can be recorded or retrieved for analysis’ (1996, p. 2). He also identifies three classes of document: *primary* (e.g. newspapers, magazines, TV newscasts), *secondary* (e.g. field notes, published reports about primary documents) and lastly a catch-all term *auxiliary documents*, materials discovered by the researcher as relevant to the investigation of the particular aspect of study. Altheide and Schneider (2013) highlight how ‘the possibilities of document analysis have expanded geometrically during the past 40 years’ (p. 10). Innovations in the audio-visual realm or concerning the internet have opened up new communitive realms for qualitative document analysis. Most important for researchers, documents become more easily accessible, retrievable and affordable as a result of the digitalisation of archives. LexisNexis online archive, which among other things includes newspaper articles, is given by Altheide and Schneider (2013) as a prominent example.

QMA as a methodological approach to document analysis is underscored by three important concepts: context, process and emergence. *Context*, ‘or the social situation surrounding the document in question’, must be understood to grasp its significance. Understanding context is also part of understanding *process*, ‘or how something is actually created and put together’ in order to understand its context (Altheide, 1996, p. 9). For example, newspapers are organisational products that are put together according to routine and a complex division of labour and deadlines. As noted in Chapter 3, the job of locating and presenting news to the larger public is

called *news work* by Best (2008). Without knowledge of context and process, one may place too much emphasis upon assumptions of journalistic bias. Context and process are also important for the ‘meaning and message’ of a document; these meanings and patterns, however, seldom appear all at once, rather, ‘they *emerge* or become clearer through constant comparison and investigation over time’ (Altheide, 1996, p. 10). *Emergence*, Altheide thus goes on to state, refers to ‘the gradual shaping of meaning through understanding and interpretation’ (1996, p. 10).

While some elements of quantification do have a place in QMA (such as tracking the frequencies of phenomena over time and noting changes and variations in particular categories), the primary emphasis in QMA is placed on ‘discovery and description, including [the] search for underlying meanings, patterns, and processes, rather than mere quantity of numerical relationships between two or more variables’ (Altheide, 2000, p. 290). For this reason, the method is alternatively termed ‘ethnographic content analysis’ (Altheide, 1996, p. 2). As a variant of quantitative content analysis, QMA, is ‘orientated to documenting and understating communication and of meaning as well as verifying theoretical relationships’ (Altheide, 1996, p. 16). However, a major difference is the reflective and highly interactive nature of the investigator, concepts, data collection and analysis. As Altheide (1996) states:

Unlike in [quantitative content analysis], in which the protocol is the instrument, the investigator is continually central in [QMA], although protocols may be used in the later phases of the research. As with all ethnographic research, the meaning of a message is assumed to be reflected in various modes of information exchange, format, rhythm, and style – for example, the aural and visual as well as the contextual nuances of the report itself (p. 16).

This *inductive* approach, which makes the investigator central to the research process, includes as many as 12 steps. These are listed by Altheide as: ‘topic, ethnographic study/lit, a few documents, draft practical, examine documents, revise protocol, theoretical sampling, collect data, code data, compare items, case studies, report’ (1996, p. 13). The steps typically involve five stages: finding and gaining access to documents; protocol development and collecting data; data coding and organisation; and reporting results. This study utilises many of these steps to examine the development of children’s play as a social problem, drawing on the study of rhetoric as an analytic device in later stages.

It is important to emphasize that although reference to "steps" and "stages" implies a linear approach, the intended practical approach to conducting QMA is fluid. There is always a recursive and reflexive movement between "steps" and "stages": the process is meant to be 'systematic and analytic, not rigid' (Altheide, 1996, p. 16). Categories and variables initially guide the study but others are allowed and expected to emerge, allowing for 'constant discovery' and 'constant comparison' (Altheide, 1996, p. 16). This has led Altheide et al. (2008) to call QMA an 'emergent methodology' (p. 127). A 'dynamic' use of QMA, which is made more easily accessible, retrievable and affordable by online archives of news media such as LexisNexis, is 'tracking discourse' or 'following certain, issues, words, themes, and frames over a period of time, across different, issues, and across different news media' (2008, p. 130). Tracking discourse, discussed in more detail later in the chapter regarding tracking the discourse of children's play, requires that 'initial manifest coding incorporates emergent coding and theoretical sampling in order to monitor changes in coverage and emphasis over time and across topics' (Altheide, 2008, p. 130).

One further point regarding QMA should be examined. It has been asserted that concepts are allowed and expected to emerge from the data and that the researcher is central in QMA. Altheide (2000) crucially states that QMA 'like all research, it is interpretive, but remains empirical, meaning that instance of certain meanings and emphases can be identified and held up for demonstration' (p. 290). However, the emphasis in QMA is on *validity*; that is, on the meanings behind the numbers discovered in the analysis, as opposed to the *reliability* of the empirical method. Nonetheless, all efforts have been made to clearly delineate the research process so that any other researcher may seek to replicate the study. The resultant data and interpretations are presented in detail throughout this thesis so that they may be replicated, questioned, or enhanced in future research.

Before moving onto detailing the steps taken to conduct this research, it is important to briefly discuss methods other than QMA that were considered and ruled out. It has already been asserted that QMA is a variant of quantitative content analysis with the major difference that the investigator is continually central. The centrality of the investigator in QMA is the key reason why quantitative content analysis was not adopted for the current study. The centrality of the investigator in QMA allows for categories and variables to emerge, enabling "constant discovery"

and "constant comparison" rather than being restricted to predetermined protocol. This is essential to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex social phenomena that is the construction of children's play as a social problem. Another method ruled out for the current study is grounded theory, since this study aims to understand how and why children's play came to be seen as a social problem rather than investigating the development of a theory. As Altheide (1996) points out, despite there being clear similarities between QMA and grounded theory, QMA differs in emphasis and approach. The major difference, however, is that the focus of both are different. Specifically, 'grounded theory is trying to generate clear testable hypotheses as a foundation for "theory," and this may require excluding certain materials', whereas QMA 'is not orientated to theory development but is more comfortable with clear descriptions and definitions compatible with material' (Altheide, 1996, p17).

## **4.2 Researching the problematisation of children's play**

The following sections detail the steps taken to conduct this research; results are described in the remaining chapters of the thesis. Since emphasis is placed on context, process and emergence, there is a constant comparison and refinement of protocols and sampling strategies, meaning new avenues open up throughout the research process. Purposive and theoretical sampling methods are used on the primary documents (newspapers), with auxiliary documents gathered and analysed, opening up new insights, themes and connections. The study is conducted in three phases: immersion and tracking discourse; claimsmakers; and rhetorical analysis of claims, as adapted from Frawley's (2012) study. There are two reasons for adapting Frawley's three phases. Firstly, the three phases are guided by her research questions, which as noted in Chapter 1 are adapted for this study due to similarities between the aims of the two studies. Secondly, the three phases follow the core tenets of QMA. Importantly, insights emerging in the process of data gathering and analysis informed the progression toward the next phase of data gathering and analysis. For instance, only after "tracking discourse" could it have been discovered that a period beginning after 2003 was the most important to analyse in depth.

The first steps in the process of QMA involve identifying and pursuing a specific problem to be investigated (Altheide, 1996). Initial explorations of the topic did not immediately take the news media as the main focus of study. Rather, the impetus for the study was a realisation that

children's play seemed to be an important subject, appearing with greater frequency in academic writing, the speeches of politicians and the pages of newspapers. To know that children's play has become an important subject is not, however, enough. As argued in previous chapters, it is important to develop a broader understanding of the nature of these discussions, not by joining ongoing constructions of its importance to children's development, or childhood, or of the causes and solutions to a decline or lack of outdoor play, but rather through a study of these discussions themselves. Thus, the rise of interest in children's play was identified as the problem to be investigated.

### **4.3 Phase 1: Immersion and 'tracking discourse'**

Having identified the specific problem to be pursued, Altheide recommends the researcher become 'familiar with the process and context of the information source' and 'explore possible sources (perhaps documents) of information' (Altheide, 1996, p. 24). Since the study of children's play covers a range of academic disciplines and has become the subject of debate across a variety of media, it was initially necessary to become familiar with a number of contexts before selecting a particular area on which to focus the data gathering. An expansive exploratory review was carried out that examined studies of children's play in child development, childhood studies education, children's geographies, physical activity, psychology and sociology. Historical and recent literature was reviewed. Mass media discussions of children's play were viewed, read and recorded. From these preliminary investigations, two important insights were gleaned. The first was that children's play appeared to have acquired a substantial focus over the past three decades, specifically since the early 1990s. A steady increase in discussions using the term *children's play* in major newspapers was discerned and seemed to warrant further investigation. These increasing studies and news media stories appeared to focus increasingly on the nature of children's play, specifically, a decline or lack of outdoors play, as a problem. The more these studies and stories increased, the more urgent claims seemed to be. The second insight was that the types of idea about children's play currently gaining currency had appeared at various points in history but had not been successful in passing into the public agenda until more recent decades, for example, ideas that the play in which children used to participate is in decline due to modern day living. A prominent illustration is provided in Steve Roud's (2010) book *The Lore of the Playground*, which opens with a quotation from a magazine article lamenting that children are

forgetting how to play. The book argues that the pastimes which children once enjoyed have become obsolete as an inevitable consequence of modern developments. The lament, as it turns out, is a 1903 article in *Leisure Hour*.<sup>1</sup>

Bearing in mind the importance of the news media in agenda-setting and capturing the attention of policymakers (see Chapter 3), newspapers were selected as the starting point for this research and as a grounding for data-gathering and sampling. The justification for selecting newspapers as the primary source of data over other forms of news document are as follows: newspapers are produced on a daily basis and have larger circulation numbers; there are numerous newspapers, providing the ability for comparison between them; stories are divided into individual articles, which can be analysed in their entirety; and comprehensive online archive databases (such as LexisNexis) provide access to newspaper articles in their entirety. Although news media were taken as the primary source of data, constant exploration of other data and of other media was also conducted in order to ascertain their interconnections.

Given the selection of the primary information source, the context of the news creation process – or as Best (2008) terms it, *news work* – specifically regarding the news print media was also investigated through studies of the news media (in particular Altheide 2002: 2006: 2009) and the role of the news in constructing social problems (in particular Best 1990: 2008). From this emerged an awareness of the critical importance of rhetoric, which guided the analysis of claims in the third and final phase of this research.

A key questions informing this research stated at the outset of the thesis is research question 3: ‘How did these constructs [children’s play as a problem] evolve?’. The preliminary investigations revealed a discernible shift, identifiable through changes in the conceptualisation of children’s play. As briefly mentioned above, tracking discourse involves following certain issues, words, themes and frames over a period of time. Altheide (1996) contends that this is important because ‘what we call things, the themes and discourse we employ, and how we frame and allude to experience is crucial for what we take for granted and assume to be true’ (p. 69). Shifts in meanings and emphases are consequently of vital importance: ‘When language changes and new

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<sup>1</sup> *Leisure Hour* was a British general-interest periodical of the Victorian era which ran weekly from 1852 to 1905.

or revised frameworks of meaning become part of the public domain and are routinely used, then social life has been changed, even in a small way' (p. 69).

Therefore, the first phase of this research involves an exploration and subsequent narrative description of the use of the term *children's play* in news media discourses over the past three decades (namely 1985-2016).<sup>2</sup> Tracking the discourse over the past three decades is guided by the preliminary investigation of children's play (discussed above), in which it was observed that the general use of the term *children's play* over the past three decades had increased with a trend toward problematisation. The results are detailed in Chapter 5.

Tracking the discourse of children's play is accomplished by searching the keywords "children" and "play" within five words of each other in the news portion of LexisLibrary online archives to explore the general use of the term *children's play* over the past three decades (1985-2016), to explore the uses of the term and then to elucidate connections between emergent themes.<sup>3</sup> The keywords "children" and "play" within five words of each other are used to search the LexisLibrary as opposed to simply "children's play" because it finds reference to children's play in which the two words are not presented together, for example, "children don't play outdoors anymore", or "children used to play in the streets all day". Although the keywords search "children" and "play" within five words of each other, for simplicity this is referred to as *children's play* unless the exact search term is particularly relevant.

Given the nature of the search term, searches produced a large volume of results. It was subsequently decided to focus the analysis on four major UK newspapers: *The Daily Mail*, *The Daily Mirror*, *The Guardian*, *The Times* and their Sunday editions. These newspapers were chosen for a number of reasons. Firstly, they embody different political perspectives and cover a range of formats (broadsheet and tabloid) designed to target different audience segments with differing interests and ideologies.<sup>4</sup> Secondly, they are amongst the most highly circulated

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<sup>2</sup> The reason 2016 is selected as the cut-off point for analysis is that at the time of data collection, it was the most recently completed year from which to analyse.

<sup>3</sup> LexisLibrary provides access to LexisNexis comprehensive full-text database of newspapers in the UK. It permits searching for key words, delimiting in numerous ways, such as by segment (sections of the newspaper) and date.

<sup>4</sup> Best (2008) importantly identifies how the audience for claims is not an undifferentiated mass. Rather, it can be subdivided or *segmented* by race, age, social class, gender, religion and so on. Different segments of the audience



newspapers in the UK with more than 100,000 copies per day (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 2015). It should be noted that different newspapers have joined the archive at different times, with older publications constantly being indexed. At the time of data gathering, all of the above had been included in full since 1995. The table below shows LexisLibrary coverage of each of the selected newspapers.

**Table 4.1 LexisLibrary Coverage of each of the newspapers in the sample**

<i>Newspaper</i>	<i>Coverage in LexisLibrary database</i>
<i>The Guardian and The Observer</i>	From 1984 through to 2016 From 1990 through to 2016
<i>The Times and Sunday Times</i>	From 1985 through to 2016
<i>The Daily Mail and Mail on Sunday</i>	From 1992 through to 2016
<i>The Daily Mirror and Sunday Mirror</i>	From 1995 through to 2016

From examining these several thousand articles (for exact numbers of articles see Figure 5.1), important changes and trends over the past three decades can be observed in the uses of *children's play* and recorded in field notes to be explored using further searches. The important changes and trends discovered in these newspapers are also investigated in a range of other auxiliary documents. These findings provide important insights into how the construct has evolved and are utilised in order to construct a narrative of the development of public discourses using the word using the words *children's play* over the past three decades (Chapter 5). Broad shifts are discernible and these are described, resulting in a periodisation of children's play discourses into three periods (including "pre-emergence of a problem"). Critically, however, this only constitutes a partial answer regarding the construction of the problem in that the underlying mechanisms and claimsmakers involved in changing these constructs and subtly rearticulating their meanings, as well as the rhetoric that they employed in claims to persuade others to accept these meanings, are only hinted at, and as a result are further explored in the later phases of this research.

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may have different interests and ideologies. A newspaper, as with other forms of the media, target different audience segments because they are more likely to read a newspaper aimed directly at their interests.

It is worth mentioning that these later phases of the research utilise the qualitative data analysis programme NVivo. The goal of the first phase of research is exploration and gaining familiarity with the data and subject matter, so it is therefore kept as broad as possible, while later phases more fully explore emergent discoveries. Having gained a good level of familiarity with children's play discourses, it was decided that a computer programme would be used to organise and analyse newspaper data. NVivo was chosen because it helps to situate the researcher centrally with regards to the analysis. It allows the researcher to easily maintain relationships between extracts of text and their context, as well as making connections and drawing out relationships between cases and codes and with field notes. Altheide importantly cautions researchers who elect to use such data analysis programmes as NVivo that although they can be helpful, they 'cannot think and they cannot decide the best way to conceptually integrate your materials' and can potentially encourage 'researchers to make premature decisions' (1996, p. 43).

#### **4.4 Data gathering and sampling**

So far, the problem to be investigated has been identified, an understanding of the role of the media and the claimmaking process implicated has been developed, and discourse over the past three decades (1985-2016) has been tracked. Although tracking changes in discourse is the ongoing aim of the investigation, acquiring knowledge of the general trends serves as a starting point from which to develop categories and derive a focus for the more detailed analyses to follow. As Altheide describes:

Prior research and awareness of an activity involved in the production of documents can theoretically inform sampling procedures, whereas constant comparison and discovery may be used to further delineate specific categories, as well as narrative description. In general, this means that the situation, settings, styles, images, meanings, and nuances are key topics of attention. (1996, p. 14)

Once the exploration of concepts over the past three decades was completed and field notes and resulting data transformed into narrative form, particular changes became evident. Recurring claimmakers and recurring rhetorical strategies are used in claims. Both are examined in phases 2 and 3 respectively. Altheide (1996) suggests successive levels of focus and emergent theoretical sampling. Insights from analysing the past three decades therefore inform the

development of criteria for relevance that constitute the basis for the creation of a research database, from which samples are derived for further analysis.

#### ***4.4.1 Creating a research database***

To draw out a sample from the several thousand potential articles from the LexisLibrary database containing the key terms "children" and "play" within five words of each other from 1985 until the end of 2016 from the four newspapers and their sister editions, each of the years articles were screened for their applicability to this analysis (applicability is defined below). Having ascertained general trends in discourses and identified the growth in problematising claims about children's play, the research database intended to draw out these relevant articles from the broader LexisLibrary database as the subject of further research.

Applicability was decided if an article met any one of the following criteria;

1. A discussion about children's play outside of school as the subject of the article.
2. Claims about the nature of children's play outside of school.
3. Claims about the nature of children's play outside of school as a problem.
4. The use of claims about children's play outside of school in support of another problem claim.

These criteria effectively exclude all articles that mention "children" and "play" within five words of each other in passing, for example: in a phrase (for example, children who play truant from school or children play active role); irrelevant book, film or television programme reviews; theatrical productions often referred to as a children's play; children playing or being taught to play musical instruments; garden design; playgrounds and play areas as a location or point of reference; advertisements for property; advertisements or competitions for holidays or restaurants which have facilities for children to play; and other similar coincidental or incidental mentions. Also excluded were mention of the key words to add context to different incidents or stories (for example: the children play as I work upstairs); discussions about particular sports (for example: the head of a sports organisations governing body suggesting that they want more children joining local clubs to play their sport in order to aid the UK's future prospects of wining trophies

and medals, or the way that sport is coached or organised for children compared with other sports and countries); and finally discussions about children's play inside school (for example, in school break and lunch times).

It is important to note here that repetition of similar articles across different newspapers was included to create the research database. A crucial reason for including repeated articles is that leaving them out of the research database would mean that a piece of research, government policy, incident or event that received a lot of attention across the newspaper media, and potentially played a significant role in the problematisation of children's play, would be underrepresented. In a similar vein, another rationale for including repeated articles in the research database is that the claimsmakers whose claims appear in these articles would be underrepresented. A further reason for including these repeated articles is that different newspapers may report on the same story in different ways.

The resultant sample of 622 articles drawn from the years 1985 to 2016 was imported into NVivo to create a research database of relevant articles.<sup>5</sup> Although articles from previous years (1985-2003) remained in the database for comparison and analysis, it was decided that the final two phases of the research would focus upon the most recent period during which discussions of children's play were observed to have reached significant heights. Articles in the NVivo database corresponding to the period 2003-2016 were indexed as "cases". Four hundred and twenty cases were initially indexed for the years 2003-2016. The following "attributes" were recorded for each case:

**Table 4.2 NVivo case attributes**

<i>Attribute</i>	<i>Value</i>
Title	<Insert>
Year	<Insert>
Author	<Insert Name>

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<sup>5</sup> This time period reflects the earliest year at which two major sources used in this study - *The Times* and *The Guardian* – were first included in the LexisLibrary database to the most recently completed year.

Publication	<i>The Daily Mail</i> <i>The Mail on Sunday</i> <i>The Daily Mirror</i> <i>The Mirror on Sunday</i> <i>The Guardian</i> <i>The Observer</i> <i>The Times</i> <i>The Sunday Times</i>
Word Count	0-200 201-300 301-400 401-500 501-600 601-700 701-800 801-900 901-1000 1001-1500 1500+
More than half the article about <i>children's play</i>	Yes No
Claim about <i>children's play</i> /social problem within opening (headline, lead, first paragraph)	Both <i>children's play</i> and problem claim <i>Children's play</i> claim in opening Problem claim in opening None

The information was recorded in Microsoft Excel. The purpose of recording this information is that it allows for searches to be carried out in NVivo using any of the above attributes. For example, the prevalence of a particular code across years confines searches to a particular source, author, year and so on. It was also utilised for drawing out a sample of relevant material for analysis in phase 3, which necessitated a focus on articles with more substantial attention attributed to children's play and the attributes above were used to select such articles (detailed below).

#### 4.5 Phase 2: Claimsmakers

Since the emphasis in QMA is placed on the types of content presented and the process of generating meanings, a form of theoretical sampling, which Altheide (1996 p, 33) refers to as *progressive theoretical sampling*, is usually required which attempts to focus the analysis on emergent themes. Progressive theoretical sampling 'refers to the selection of materials based on emerging understanding of the topic under investigation' (Altheide 1996 p, 33), this may later expand to include additional sources in various media as the primary sample leads the researcher

to investigate new areas. While a combination of broad keyword searches are used in phase 1 of the research, following the identification of an emergent trend toward the problematisations of children's play, later phases aim to focus on these discussions and the claimsmakers implicated in the problematisation of children's play.

Consequently, the second phase of the research is designed to answer research question 1 - 'Who says that children's play is a problem? That is, who are the claimsmakers?'. The intention is to identify which claimsmakers have emerged as leading authorities and to investigate the fields and backgrounds from which claims about children's play have tended to emerge. As detailed above, it was decided that the focus should be on the most recent period, 2003-2016, identified in phase one as the main time period from which to generate data on claimsmakers. However, recognising that numerous claimsmakers and connections between them may have been active prior to this phase, a comparison is made with the first claims problematising children's play in the UK news media identified in early 1990s. The results are detailed in Chapter 6.

#### ***4.5.1 Data gathering and sampling***

In order to gain a sufficient degree of familiarity with the sources, the sample had to be small enough to be manageable by a single researcher, while keeping in mind that for the present purposes, the level of detail required is moderate. The aim is to identify claimsmakers and track the discourses, activities, and connections between major advocates, rather than an in-depth analysis of their rhetoric (the subject of the final phase).

**Table 4.3 Number of articles per year 2003-2016**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of articles</i>
2003	37
2004	35
2005	30
2006	22
2007	48
2008	49
2009	38
2010	16
2011	18
2012	24
2013	19
2014	20
2015	38

2016	27
<b>Total:</b>	<b>420</b>

**Table 4.4 Applicable articles source breakdown**

<i>Source</i>	<i>Number of articles</i>
<i>The Daily Mail</i>	108
<i>The Mail on Sunday</i>	12
<i>The Daily Mirror</i>	41
<i>The Mirror on Sunday</i>	3
<i>The Guardian</i>	100
<i>The Observer</i>	26
<i>The Times</i>	94
<i>The Sunday Times</i>	36
<b>Total:</b>	<b>420</b>

The 420 articles were deemed small enough to be manageable by a single researcher. Consequently, no further sampling was required and all 420 articles made up the sample. The sample of 420 articles was analysed in a separate NVivo file, although the full NVivo database remained important for comparisons with the first claims problematising children's play in the UK news media identified in the early 1990s.

#### ***4.5.2 Analysing the sample***

The precoding of protocols and categories before data is collected in QMA is limited. As touched on above, in comparison to quantitative content analysis, protocols and categories are informed by a continuous relationship with the data rather than by attempting to fit data to preconceived categories. Consequently, a protocol is developed to address one of the key research questions that inform this thesis (discussed below), and categories are subsequently applied depending on the capacity in which a claimmaker primarily acted in the sample. It should be emphasised that the purpose of this categorisation is only to gain insight into the general sectors of society from which claimmakers have tended to come and to develop a list from which further progressive theoretical sampling and interpretation of sources could proceed (the categorisation of claimmakers is discussed in the following section). As already noted in the introduction to this second phase of the research, this phase endeavours to elucidate from whom claims about children's play emerge. Correspondingly, the following protocol was developed:

Does the person/organisation make a claim about children's play in terms of its:

- Constitution/definition
- Importance (or lack thereof)
- Need for intervention (and such interventions)
- Problematic nature (or lack thereof)
- Present state

These five criteria importantly allow for inclusion of those who dispute aspects of children's play discourse, such as its importance and whether or not its nature is problematic. An individual or organisation is recorded if they met any one or more of the above criteria. An answer of "yes" to the above protocol warranted the inclusion of the individual or organisations as what NVivo calls "nodes", along with information relating to how they are described or cited in the articles (the unit of analysis was each article in its entirety). Journalists and the content of their claims are only recorded if they pass judgment on the issue, explicitly give support, make recommendations or raise concerns. This is because many journalists simply report claims passively.

From testing this protocol on several articles, as recommended by Altheide (1996), it became clear that a strategy of counting claims meeting these criteria under "nodes" created for individuals and organisation was sufficient not only to identify who is making claims about children's play along with their field and background but also, by their frequency of appearances in the sample, it was possible to evaluate which claimsmakers have emerged as leading authorities. Thus, there was no further need to revise protocol and select several additional articles to test it.

To clarify, this means that the numerical totals listed in Appendices A, B, and D reflect the number of articles in which an individual or organisation made a claim about children's play. This allows us to ascertain which claimsmakers have emerged as leading authorities.

Additionally, information is subsequently gathered on the identified individuals and organisations from auxiliary materials, including their own official websites and publications, relevant books and scholarly articles written by, citing or otherwise referencing the claimsmakers, and archival information gathered from the LexisLibrary database.



### **4.5.3 Categories**

The way in which the individual or organisation primarily acts in the sample is the category in which the claimmaker is placed. For example, a patron of a charitable organisation who is referenced because of their status as a celebrity or public figure would be classified as a "celebrity or public figure". A policy adviser who is frequently referenced because of the authority the individual holds by virtue of their expertise in psychology would be classified as an "expert: psychologist". It is important to emphasise that "pigeonholing" claimmakers in this way is of limited utility and meaningfulness. However, the object of the categorisation is to gain some grasp of the sources of children's play discourses and the range of commentary that has emerged. The most common categories reveal a reliance on a particular type of commentary. Yet, as insightfully observed by Frawley (2012) and as becomes clear in Chapter 6, it is in the interpretation of the contents of these categories, of the activities and histories of particular individuals and organisations and their relationships with one another, that the most fruitful analysis is to be found.

## **4.6 Phase 3: Rhetorical analysis of claims**

The previous chapter describes how the intense competition to capture and sustain audience attention about social problems makes rhetoric central to the study of social problems. As Best (1987) argues, 'Rhetoric is central, not peripheral, to claimmaking. Claimmakers intend to persuade, and they try to make their claims as persuasive as possible' (p. 115). The previous chapter also stresses how claimmakers pre-exist claims. Therefore, it is necessary to identify the claimmakers before embarking on a detailed analysis of the claims. As well as pre-existing claims, claimmakers also draw on the wider culture's large repository of existing claims. That is, new social problems draw on the rhetoric and themes of those that have come before as cultural resources to formulate successful claims. Building on Stephen Toulmin's (1958) scheme on the basic structure of arguments (grounds, warrants, and conclusion), Best (1987) develops a technique for analysing claims which is ideally suited to investigating claims since it reflects 'both the nature of interaction between claims-makers and their audience, and the larger cultural context within which claimmaking occurs' (Best, 1987, p. 117-118).

This phase of the research, therefore, endeavours to elucidate what the problem is as a series of claims. It adds further insight into the examination begun in phase 1 towards answering research question 3, ‘How did these constructs [children’s play as a problem] evolve?’ but more importantly, it answers research question 2, ‘What sort of problem do claimsmakers say that children’s play is?’ and research question 4, ‘How did these claims come to prevail?’. The results are detailed in Chapter 7.

#### ***4.6.1 Sampling***

To answer these research questions, the focus is placed on the most recent period of children’s play discourses, when discussions about children’s play are observed to have reached significant heights. This final phase of the research requires a greater detail of analysis compared to previous phases, with all articles sampled needing to be read before coding and the coding process itself involving a close analysis of every sentence in each article. Progressive theoretical sampling is therefore applied with a number of needs in mind. First, a relatively small sample of articles was required. A test was carried out seeking to identify claims corresponding to grounds, warrants and conclusions in a sample of half a dozen articles. It was found that a single article could take anywhere from one to several hours to complete. Consequently, a sample of around 80 articles was deemed viable given the timeline for coding and analysing the results. Second, whereas the analysis of claimsmakers was intended to gain insight into the broad range of claimsmakers utilising children’s play claims, the focus of the analysis here was more acutely on the claims themselves, therefore articles with a more substantial focus on children’s play were sought. Therefore, articles were selected: if children’s play was located in the headline, lead or first paragraph, since, ‘Journalistic tradition holds that the headline and lead should be written to inform the reader as to what is most important about the story’ (Trumbo, 1996, cited in Frawley, p. 91); if more than half was about children’s play; and if it was greater than 300 words as more developed commentary was preferred. As a result, a search of the NVivo database was conducted for all cases with the following attributes:

1. Claim about children’s play /social problem within opening (headline, lead, first paragraph) = children’s play claim in opening
2. More than half of article about children’s play = Yes
3. Word Count = >301 words

Cases with these corresponding attributes totalled 151. However, as a small sample was needed, it was judged that 50% of these results would be examined in detail. Since each of the articles was equally amenable to study, the 151 articles were stratified by year and 50% were randomly selected per year for inclusion in the sample. The random selection was achieved by creating a list of all article titles in each year in Microsoft Excel, assigning a number to each article utilising the programmes random number generator, sorting the articles according to their randomly assigned number smallest to largest, and selecting the first 50%. This strategy resulted in a sample of 79 articles.<sup>6</sup>

**Table 4.5 Rhetorical analysis of claims sample**

<b>Year</b>	<b>NVivo Database Population</b>	<b>Relevant Cases</b>	<b>Rhetorical analysis of claims sample (50% of Relevant Cases)</b>
2003	37	11	6
2004	35	14	7
2005	30	13	7
2006	22	7	4
2007	48	21	11
2008	49	13	7
2009	38	10	5
2010	16	8	4
2011	18	8	4
2012	24	7	4
2013	19	5	3
2014	20	6	3
2015	38	20	10
2016	27	8	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>79</b>

#### **4.6.2 Analysing the sample**

Frawley (2012) finds in her study on the construction of happiness as a social problem that when it came to analysing the rhetoric of claims, that ‘since the study of rhetoric in terms of grounds, warrants and conclusions is an analytical device and not a conscious approach taken by claimsmakers, it was often difficult to ascertain precisely when a claim might be considered to

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<sup>6</sup> When selecting 50% of articles per year, it was necessary to round up the results ending in .5, thus producing a total selection of 79 articles.

belong to any one of these categories' (p. 93). Consequently, she decided, in line with Altheide (1996, p. 27) who states that most often data in QMA is 'coded and given "refined meaning" after the data has been collected', that rather than imposing codes on the data, codes would be generated from the data with analytic categories emerging from the data. She decided that a catalogue of claims would be created, and the results subsequently grouped into grounds, warrants and conclusions according to the role each claim played in the general construction of the problem that emerged.

Before coding was initiated, from reading the resultant sample and field notes taken regarding recurrent grounds, warrants, and conclusions, possible problems were anticipated regarding ascertaining precisely when a claim might be considered as a ground, warrant, or conclusion. Therefore, like Frawley (2012), it was decided that a catalogue of claims would be created, and the results subsequently grouped into grounds, warrants and conclusions according to the role each claim played in the general construction of the problem that emerged. So, for example, claims about the nature of children's play were grouped under "grounds", while claims evoking values were grouped under "warrants", and proposals for change were grouped under "conclusions".

To create a catalogue of available claims about children's play, each article was read sentence by sentence. Claims about children's play were coded in NVivo as "Nodes" in the form of phrases that encapsulated the claim along with a short description. These phrases, it should be emphasised, were not word for word repetitions of phrases in the articles, but instead intended to distil the core of the claim being made about children's play. If claims were observed to relate to each other, but demonstrated variations deemed significant, a "Child Node" was created with the letter V for "variation" followed by an encapsulating phrase. Criticisms or counterclaims launched against particular claims or made in general were similarly coded as "C" followed by a phrase encapsulating the criticism or counterclaim. The resultant catalogue of claims summarises many of the most common themes in major UK news media discussions of children's play and confirm observations in previous phases of the study, as well as the literature review. The results of this analysis are detailed in Chapter 7.

## 4.7 Summary

This chapter outlines the general QMA method as well as the specific phases adapted from Frawley's (2012) study of the constitution of happiness as a social problem taken to conduct the research. This methodology is designed to ascertain who says that children's play is a problem, what sort of problem they say it is, how the problem of children's play as a social construct evolved, and how it came to prevail. The final research question, referring to the consequences of these constructions, can only be addressed through an investigation of the underlying messages of children's play claims which emerge in the analysis.

## 5 Tracking the Discourse of Children's Play

There was noticeable growth in public discussions about children's play towards 2016; however, it is less clear what it is about these contemporary discussions that led to such development.

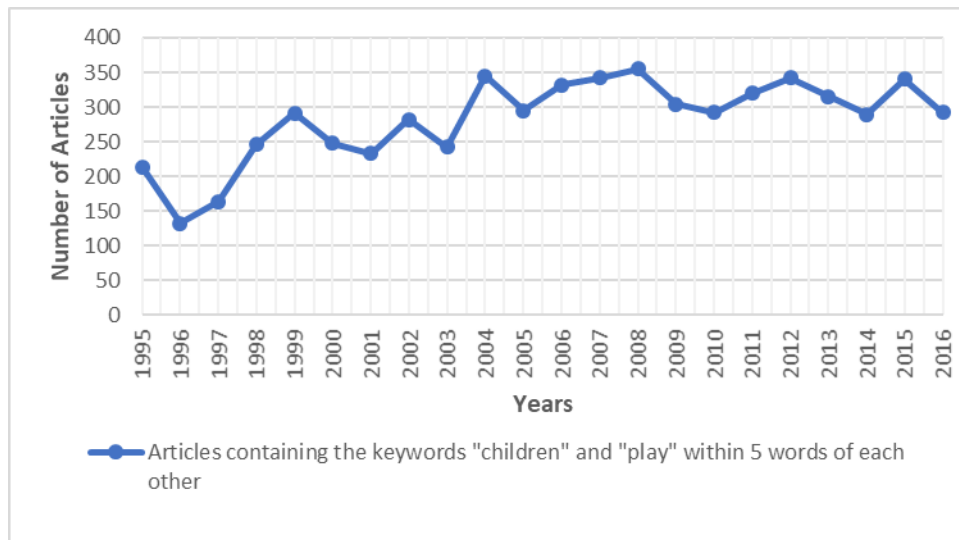
This chapter begins to shed some light on the matter by tracking the discourse of children's play as a social construct in major UK newspaper discussion. It attempts to describe and locate the essential characteristics of trends in the usage of *children's play* over recent decades from the mid-1980s to 2016. As detailed in the previous chapter, tracking the discourse of children's play is performed by searching the keywords "children" and "play" within five words of one another in four major UK newspapers (*The Daily Mail*, *The Daily Mirror*, *The Guardian*, *The Times* and their Sunday editions) in the news portion of the LexisLibrary online archives.<sup>1</sup> The resulting articles (see Figure 5.1 for numbers of resulting articles) are then examined and important changes and trends observed in the use of *children's play* are recorded in field notes and explored using further searches. The important changes and trends discovered in these newspapers are also investigated in a range of other auxiliary documents. Auxiliary documents is a catch-all term used by Altheide (1996) to refer to materials discovered by the researcher that can supplement a research project.

The increased prevalence and centrality of *children's play* in public discussion is a trend which can be observed by a marked increase in the number of articles in UK newspapers mentioning the term. The figure below show the results of a keyword search of the LexisLibrary covering four major UK newspapers, revealing the steady increase of articles containing the words "children" and "play" within five words of each other.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The rationale for searching "children" and "play" within five words of each other as opposed to simply "children's play" is also discussed in Chapter 4 in detail.

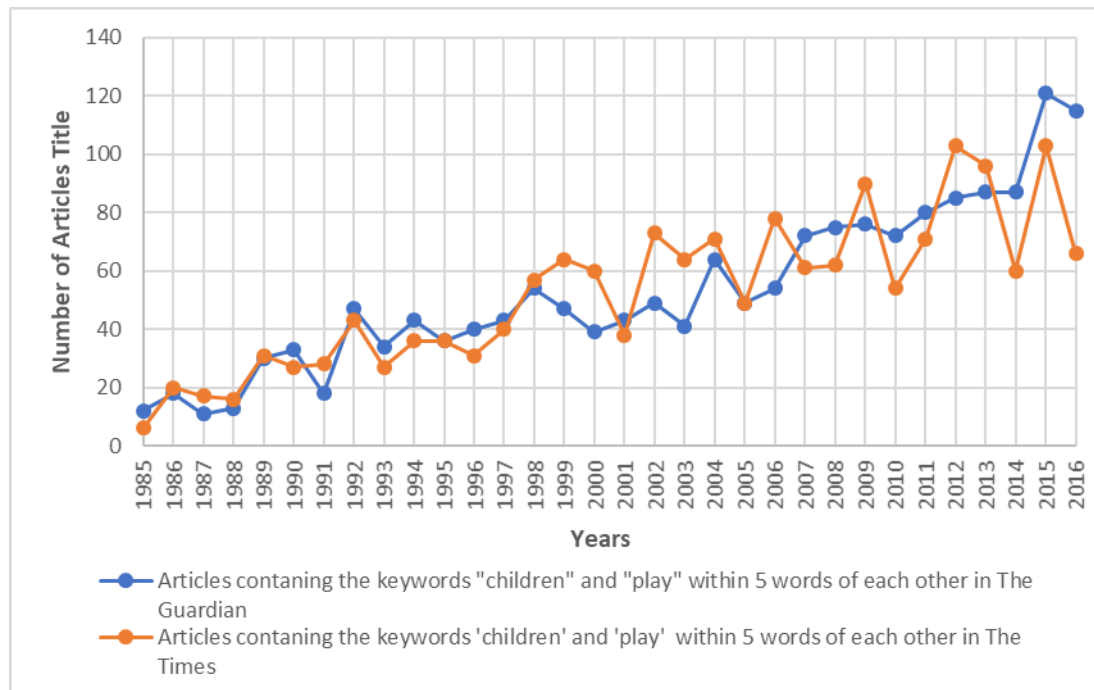
<sup>2</sup> This search and other searches described from this point on (unless otherwise specified) include *The Daily Mail*, *The Daily Mirror*, *The Guardian*, *The Times* and their Sunday editions. All of the publications used in this study at the time of data gathering were included in full on LexisLibrary from 1995 onwards.

**Figure 5.1 Newspaper articles containing "children" and "play"**

The LexisLibrary database is limited in its historical holdings. Consequently, in order to observe trends over a longer period of time, the search is confined to the LexisLibrary holdings of *The Guardian* and *The Times* (without their Sunday editions) as these are two of the most inclusive archives available.<sup>3</sup> Here, the trend is even more striking. Whereas in 1985 only 12 articles in *The Guardian* and six in *The Times* used the keywords, these numbers reached 115 and 66 respectively in 2016.

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<sup>3</sup> See Table 4.1 for a full listing LexisLibrary holdings of the newspapers in the sample.

**Figure 5.2** Articles containing "children" and "play" in *The Guardian* and *The Times*

Evidently, public discussion about children's play has grown in prominence. However, increased usage of *children's* and *play* within five words of each other does not necessarily imply increased importance. When the contents of these articles are considered, it is evident that the meaning, usage and importance of children's play have not remained the same over time, as the following sections demonstrate.

## 5.1 Periodisation

The remainder of the chapter is divided into three time periods, deduced from shifts observed in usage of *children's play* from the mid-1980s up to 2016. It is important to note before going any further that these time periods are to some extent ambiguous and the years given are not meant to imply any kind of abrupt discontinuity. Rather, they correspond to two important developments discernible within the time periods: a shift towards problematised discourse and a shift to where the problematisation of children's play gains recognition and acceptance as well as being implicated in a growing number of other social issues and policies.



Below is a brief summary of each of the three time periods in order to clearly and concisely illustrate the changes in usage of *children's play* and a distinct trend towards the problematisation of children's play.

### **5.1.1 1985-1991: Pre-emergence of a problem**

During this period, little significance is afforded to the nature of children's play itself, nor its nature as a problem. Instead, the term *children's play* is used as secondary, contributing to the things being described, or used merely coincidentally. Claims that children's play is important in relation to children's development appear in this period in rare incidents (i) when children's play is the subject of an article in reports on the activity of the government in relation to children's play; (ii) in calls for improved provision for children's play.

### **5.1.2 1992-2002: Emergence of a problem**

In 1992, claims begin to focus on the nature of children's play, specifically the immediate context in which it takes place. These claims distinguish outdoor play from other types of play and forward a decline or lack in such play as a problem requiring change. It is this problematisation that marks these years following 1992 as noticeably different from the proceeding time period. These new claims tend to come from children's play charities and children's charities who initially use expert research that does not focus on children's play to validate their claims. However, with the addition of new advocates, the most significant being the Children's Play Council (CPC) which goes on to take ownership of the problem, later claims began to use the CPC's own research that focuses specifically on outdoor play. This period sees the beginning of a trend in which increasing numbers of advocates add their claims to a growing discourse which, among other things, distinguishes outdoor play, explains why it is in decline or lacking, mentions the negative consequence of the decline or lack, and prescribes solutions for how the situation can or must be ameliorated.

### **5.1.3 2003-2016: Children's play as a social problem**

Although the discourse progresses in much the same way, with new advocates adding their voices and forwarding new claims, there are two significant developments during this period that separate it from the periods above. Firstly, the problem receives a significant boost from the CPC

taking ownership of it and playing a key role in directing and increasing media attention. It is worth briefly noting here the CPC during this period evolved into Play England in 2006, for this reason the current study from this point forward refers to the organisation as the CPC/Play England.<sup>4</sup> Secondly, as argued on several occasions already in this thesis, since the turn of twenty-first century children and childhood have come to be seen as vulnerable and "at risk" needing protection from what is perceived to be a harmful adult world. This means that "what children do" in their everyday lives has become framed as social problem/cultural or political debate. The discourse of children's play since 2003 has adapted to fit this wider context and becomes associated with a growing number of existing and new social problem claims related to children's everyday lives. After 2003, the idea of children's play as a social problem becomes more prevalent. Furthermore, although policy for children's play is made to varying extents in the past, seeing the reduction of a decline or lack of outdoor play as a goal for policy begins to gather in both importance and urgency after 2003. Consequently, it is during this period that claims problematising children's play can be considered as what Best refers to as *well established* and *institutionalised*.<sup>5</sup> Very few counterclaims question the importance of such play or its decline, although criticisms of the solutions proposed or employed to meet the decline or lack of outdoors play do appear slightly more.

## 5.2 1985-1991: Pre-emergence of a problem

Between the late 1980s and the very early 1990s, the appearance of *children's play* reveals that the term is often used in passing with little significance placed on the nature of children's play itself. The term also rarely appears as the main subject of an article. The main uses of the term are identified below.

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<sup>4</sup> For a detailed discussion on the evolution of the CPC to Play England in 2006 see Chapter 6.

<sup>5</sup> As discussed in Chapter 3, Best proposes that a claim becomes *well established* when there is widespread agreement that this is a troubling condition that ought to be considered a social problem. Problems become *institutionalised* when there is official recognition and endorsement of a claim in various realms of public life, and the programmatic and legal changes that occur accordingly.

*Children's play* is most commonly found in 138 (42%) of articles in various incidental or coincidental mentions.<sup>6</sup> Incidental mentions appear in 77 of these articles, for example, in irrelevant book, film or television programme reviews, garden designs, reference to individual job titles, discussions about particular sports and other similar incidental mentions. Coincidental mentions appear in 59 of these articles. Such coincidental uses can often be found in reference to theatrical productions for children, which are commonly referred to as a "children's play", as recommendations for a production to go and see. Examples are as follows: 'Those looking for a children's play can find Glyn Robbins's version of C.S. Lewis's story, *The Horse and His Boy*, at the Lyric Hammersmith' (Billington, *The Guardian*: 13<sup>th</sup> December 1990), or, more general discussions about the theatre, for example 'At Christmas-time there were as many pantomimes and children's plays as ever, and as many people to see them' (*The Times*: 5<sup>th</sup> February 1991). Another coincidental use is in a phrase, for example, 'Many children play truant because they are afraid to go to school' (Maclaren, *The Sunday Times*: 5<sup>th</sup> May 1991), or, 'Children play a crucial role in social malaise' (Grove, *The Sunday Times*: 15<sup>th</sup> November 1987).

The term *children's play* is also found in 80 (25%) of the articles in reference to places for children to play, such as children's play areas and children's playgrounds. Such mentions often appear as parts of recommendations or suggestions and sometimes advertisements for places to go on holiday or visit for a day out. For example, an article in *The Times* lists and describes hotels that cater for children as well as adult guests, describing one hotel as having as 'delightful grounds with a small lake, a flower-bordered stream with bridges, tennis, a heated swimming pool, a six-hole golf course, croquet and children's play area' (Rubinstein, *The Times*: 14<sup>th</sup> December 1991). Another similar example is an article on self-catering holidays. The article lists a number of different places for self-catering holidays in the UK and describes one as having a 'well-furnished and comfortable cottages, two acres of paddock, children's play area and barbecue space' (Byrne, *The Sunday Times*: 18<sup>th</sup> June 1989). An article on places parents can take their children to visit during the school holidays provides yet another example. The article lists a

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<sup>6</sup> It is important to reiterate here that the percentages identified in this section were obtained from the LexisLibrary search of "children" and "play" within five words of each other, which between the years 1985 and 1991 found 322 results/articles. It is also important to point out that the percentages in this chapter are rounded up or down to the nearest whole number, therefore when added together may not total 100.

variety of places and describes one has having ‘a museum, country park, picnic and children’s play areas’ (Hartley, *The Sunday Times*: 28th July 1991). Similarly, such mentions also appear in reports on various business or attractions which have, or are going to have, facilities for children’s play. For example, an article on the refurbishment of a department store in London reports on how the store plans to ‘add more modern features like a crèche and children’s play area’ (Brasier, *The Guardian*: 31<sup>st</sup> May 1986), or an article in *The Times* on a large high street bank reports ‘Children’s play areas have been set up in all the 168 branches’ (Cook, *The Times*: 14<sup>th</sup> April 1990). In addition, such mentions also appear as a location or point of reference, for example, one article about a police hunt for man seen near the site of a schoolboy murder and explains that ‘Police were last night hunting a man seen loitering at a children’s play area near which a schoolboy was murdered’ (*The Times*: 5<sup>th</sup> May 1987). Another example is an article giving directions to a ‘tranquil’ rural area in the West Midlands ‘at a lane, turn left to Holy Cross, turn right to take the No Through Road past a children’s play area, and follow this bridleway for about a mile, but about 200 yards before the road, cross a stile on the left’ (Castle, *The Times*: 10<sup>th</sup> February 1990).

Additionally, the term *children’s play* is found in 79 (25%) of the articles to add context to a variety of different reports or stories. In around half of these articles (37), it adds context to dire situations and conditions in which children live in different countries around the world. A 1989 article, for example, reporting on the civil war in Afghanistan following the withdrawal of the Soviet Union, describes the scene in the area surrounding Jalalabad, Afghanistan’s second largest city: ‘Children play, apparently undisturbed by the gunfire and bombing less than two miles away. One child was playing with the skull of what was said to have been a Russian soldier’ (Krushelnycky, *The Sunday Times*: 5<sup>th</sup> February 1989). Another example is an article from 1985 which reports on farming families who settled in neighbouring Paraguay since the late 1960s and early 1970s being forced to abandon their homes, land and crops by the Paraguayan police and returning to their own countries as refugees to live in a camp of several thousand in which ‘Hundreds of thin, dirty children play among the tents’ (Rocha, *The Guardian*: 24<sup>th</sup> August 1985). A further example is an article on San Salvador following an earthquake the previous year that describes how ‘children play alongside open sewers that reek in the heat’ (Thomas, *The Times*: 16<sup>th</sup> May 1987). It is worth briefly emphasising how the modern sentimental perspective of childhood where children are seen in sentimental terms as priceless innocents who need

protection from a harsh world, and where children's play holds an important place (Best, 1998), is implicit in such reports.<sup>7</sup> Other examples in which the term is used is to add context: 'A man tried to molest a woman who was watching her children play in Kensington Gardens, London' (Keatley, *The Guardian*: 27<sup>th</sup> April, 1985), 'afternoons are whiled away at each other's houses, drinking coffee while the children play' (*The Sunday Times*: 10<sup>th</sup> February, 1991), and 'Time and again they record the fathers huddling together talking about football, while the children play among themselves' (Toynbee, *The Guardian*: 6<sup>th</sup> April, 1987).

What is perhaps most notable about these discussion during this period is that the terms rarely appear as the subject of an article, they are instead used in passing with little significance placed on the nature of children's play itself. Children's play, more often than not, is secondary, contributing to other things described, or, in the case of theatrical productions for children referred to as a "children's play" and in a phrase, merely coincidentally.

In those rare incidents when children's play does appear as the subject of an article, 21 (7%), it is often either to report on the activity of government in relation to children's play or in terms of calls for improved provision for children's play.<sup>8</sup> Each instance is discussed below individually, starting with reports on the activity of government in relation to children's play before moving onto calls for improved provision for children's play.

Firstly, regarding reports on the activity of government in relation to children's play, one early article in this period with the title 'Plea form more space/Call from the Association for Children's Play and Recreation' (*The Guardian*: 19<sup>th</sup> November 1985) reports on the activity of a government-funded national body for children's play, which notably involves their call for improved provision for children's play. Specifically, the article reports on the publication of the Play Board's (a government funded body for children's play which was previously known as the Association for Children's Play and Recreation) discussion document on play policy for the future, titled *Make Way for Children's Play*. The document, according to the article. advocates more space for children's play for "healthy child development" as well as "safety". An article a

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<sup>7</sup> The sentimentalised view of childhood is discussed in more detail Chapter 1 as well as Chapters 2 and 7.

<sup>8</sup> The remaining 6 (2%) of articles included dissuasions on children's play, however, they were not the focus of the article.

few years later in *The Times* with the headline 'MPs want minister to play' (Goodbody, *The Times*: 6<sup>th</sup> April 1987) reports on the call from a group of MPs to the Government to appoint a minister responsible for the promotion of children's play following the voluntary liquidation of the aforementioned Playboard after its refusal to merge with the Sports Council because it believed it was not in the best interests of children's play. The following year, an article in *The Guardian* reports on the appointment of Mike Nussbaum as the first head of the new government-funded Children's Play and Recreation Unit (CPRU) following the demise of the unit's predecessor, the Association for Children's Play and Recreation, the previous year. Nussbaum states in the article that children's play in other countries, such as Scandinavian countries, is taken more seriously and that the top of his list of priorities is 'to create a climate of consciousness in which the importance of children's play is publicly recognised' (Boseley, *The Guardian*: 15<sup>th</sup> June 1988). For a fuller and more detailed discussion on the activities of government in relation to children's play in relation to claimsmakers, see Chapter 6.

Secondly, regarding calls for improved provision for children's play, a prominent example is an article by playground consultant and playground industry author Peter Heseltine, who criticises the current state of children's play provision in Britain. He argues that, 'we have to follow continental and Scandinavian practice in according the child a higher position in our social priorities. The mere provision of a swing and a roundabout is only a token response to the developmental needs of children', a token response that he argues has failed with Britain being 'littered with badly sited, incompetently designed and inadequately maintained and managed playgrounds (Heseltine, *The Guardian*: 17<sup>th</sup> September 1986). In the later years of the period, calls for improved provision for children's play tend to focus on the safety of playgrounds. For example, an article from 1990 reports on calls for improved provision for children's play from various children's play provision campaigners, following the publication of a Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) report which included statistics on playground injuries, who argue that children's play provisions in the UK falls short of the standard taken for granted in other European countries. One of the campaigners featured is the aforementioned Peter Heseltine, then of the National Playing Fields Association (NPFA), who states that 'the pressure on play space is increasing all the time, because of the sale of land for development. At the NPFA, we reckon 800 sites are currently at risk. It's a major problem' and that 'Too many playgrounds ignore the behavioural, social and educational aspects of play' (Welford, *The Guardian*: 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1990).

Additionally, although receiving little attention in the sample during this period, and indeed from all newspapers in the LexusLibrary archives, it was during this period in 1989 that children's play becomes defined as a human right specific to children in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. Children's play defined as a human right is discussed in more detail in the opening chapter of this thesis.

These rare articles that focus more closely on children's play, report on the activity of government in relation to children's play or on calls for improved provision for children's play, all to some degree include claims on the importance of children's play in relation to child development. This idea has been subscribed to at various time across history and has been advocated in scientific research since the late nineteenth century (see Chapter 1). Such claims during this period, however, remain isolated to these rare articles and more significantly don't include claims that forward children's play as a problem.

### **5.3 1992-2002: Emergence of a problem**

Although most uses of the keywords "children" and "play" within five words of each other in 2241 (92%) of the articles are, as in the past, used in passing and secondary to other concerns or else are used coincidentally, it is at this point that growing attention is given to the nature of children's play, specifically the immediate context in which it takes place. However, on the rare occasions when children's play is discussed in the news media, and indeed in scientific research the late nineteenth and most of the twentieth century, it tends to only be regarding children's play in a very general sense and its importance for child development with little reference to the immediate context in which it takes place. Beginning in 1992, a growing number of claims begin to appear that distinguish outdoor play and where play is understood as a fundamental part of childhood and child development (see Chapter 1), forwarding a decline or lack in such play as a problem to which change should be directed.

### 5.3.1 *Decline in outdoor play*

Table 5.1 contains the results of a keyword search for children’s play in the Lexis Library archive. It illustrates the growth in articles featuring claims asserting a decline or lack in outdoor play in the sample.<sup>9</sup>

**Table 5.1 Growth in articles featuring claims asserting a decline or lack of outdoor play**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of articles featuring claims asserting a decline or lack of outdoor play</i>
1991	0
1992	4
1993	3
1994	2
1995	4
1996	4
1997	2
1998	4
1999	8
2000	10
2001	7
2002	3

The earliest appearances of articles that forward the claim that a decline or lack of outdoor play is a problem in UK print news media discussions in the sample occur in 1992. A few of these initial claims between 1992 and 1994 refer to research findings; however, the research referred to often concerned subjects other than children’s play. An example, and also one of the first articles forwarding a decline or lack of outdoor play as a problem in the sample, is an article with the headline ‘Why boys and girl stay in to play’ (Wheway, *The Guardian*: 12<sup>th</sup> August 1992), which refers to the ground-breaking Hillman et al. (1990) study on children’s independent mobility.<sup>10</sup> In the article, Rob Wheway, a consultant for the Child Accident Prevention Trust who is involved in

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<sup>9</sup> The search for this table was performed across *The Daily Mail*, *The Guardian*, *The Times* and their Sunday editions. LexisLibrary does not have holdings for *The Daily Mirror* and *Sunday Mirror* until after 1995. In order to maintain comparable numbers after 1995, *The Daily Mirror* and *Sunday Mirror* was excluded.

<sup>10</sup> See Chapter 1 for a more detailed discussion on the Hillman et al. study.



the Fair Play for Children charity, commenting on Hillman et al.'s findings about children's decreased independent mobility since the 1970s due to increased traffic levels, states that:

So in the last 20 years, children have been punished by a 2 1/2 -year loss of liberty. For the period of that sentence (which at 10 is a quarter of your life) they have been restricted in their ability to visit grandparents, meet friends, fish for tiddlers in the stream, make houses in the bushes and play games on the field. (Wheway, *The Guardian*: 12<sup>th</sup> August 1992)

Not all these early claims, however, refer to research as Wheway does, although they do typically blame a decline or lack of outdoors play on an increase in traffic. For instance, joint director of the Children's Play and Recreation Unit (CPRU) Hilary Weedon is quoted as saying, 'Children don't remember how to play anymore. Parents don't feel happy letting them out because of increasing traffic and other safety problems, so the only real provision for children playing together is in schools and other supervised schemes. (Beaumont, *The Observer*: 7<sup>th</sup> March 1993). For more examples of these early claims between 1992 and 1994 see Table 6.1 in the following chapter.

From the mid-1990s, similar claims appear with increasing frequency. However, unlike the claims of the early-1990s, the claims from the mid-1990s include the results of various studies that focus on children's play, specifically outdoor play. These later claims assert that a decline or lack of outdoor play is being caused by an increase in parental anxiety.<sup>11</sup> Notably, parental anxiety as the cause of a decline or lack of children's play that is outdoors and unsupervised is ubiquitous in claimsmaking towards 2016 (see Chapter 7). An example of these later claims is a 1995 article which reports on the findings of a report titled *Playing it Safe* by children's charity Barnardo's, which found from a survey of 94 parents that the fear of strangers, traffic, drugs, bullying and dangerous dogs were keeping children prisoners in their own home with '44 per cent saying their children hardly ever play outside unsupervised' (Wright, *The Guardian*: 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1995). Another example is an article with the headline 'Only 1 in 10 Kids Let Out to Play' (Solomons, *The Mirror*: 19<sup>th</sup> July 2001). The article reports on the results of a study by the Safe Kids Campaign, run by the Child Accident Prevention Trust, and describes that:

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<sup>11</sup> Parental anxiety as discussed in Chapter 2 is a term used to refer to parent's anxieties about everything to do with children in relation to their safety, development and so on. As well as how they are perceived by others as a parent.

Its survey of 2,000 parents found them so worried many hardly ever let their children play out alone. Three in four were afraid strangers would approach their children while four in ten worried about kids crossing the road. Almost six in ten feared children could be injured in rough games and one in four did not let kids play out unsupervised while eight in ten said there were not enough safe play areas near home. (Solomons, *The Mirror*: 19<sup>th</sup> July 2001)

The article continues with a quote from Katie Ghose of Safe Kids, who states that ‘Accidental injury is the single biggest cause of death for UK children so it's understandable parents are worried. But its important kids don't miss out on the social and physical benefits of outdoor activity’ (Solomons, *The Mirror*: 19<sup>th</sup> July 2001).

Examples of these later claims also come from the CPC/Play England, as Chapter 6 will detail, which greatly facilitates the problematisation of children’s play by taking the issue on and making it their own. For instance, one article reports on a joint poll by the CPC/Play England and the Children’s Society in which 80% of parents questioned said ‘they regretted the fact that their children spent far less time playing outside than they did as children. Of these, 78 per cent said that it was their own fear of the dangers posed by strangers and traffic that kept their children indoors’ (*The Times*: 4<sup>th</sup> August 1999). Another instance is an article that quotes Tim Gill (the then director of the CPC/Play England), who claims that ‘children today had fewer chances to play outside than any previous generation because their parents were too afraid to let them out alone. As a result, many were missing out on a vital part of growing up and on the chance to develop independence and self-confidence’ (Freen, *The Times*: 2 August 2000). It is worth emphasising that regarding that this is a typical quote revealing that play, specifically outdoors play, is an important part of childhood and child development and that a decline or lack of outdoor play is detrimental to both.

Typically, the claims during this period, 1992-2002, call for more provision for children’s outdoor play as a solution to the problem. For example, in an article by Tim Gill and Sandra Melville, the director of PlayLink, a charity for play research and policy advocacy, the authors argue in relation to children being prevented from playing freely outdoors that ‘There is [...] a form of play provision specifically designed to allow children to play as nearly as possible in the way they would if left to their own devices.’ However, they continue ‘Sadly these [adventure] playgrounds, which have operated safely and successfully for 40 years, are now being closed or

regulated out of existence. There are fewer than 200 left and the skills to design and run them are being lost' (Gill and Melville, *The Guardian*, 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1998).

In addition to provision for outdoor play facilities, even more popular during this period are calls for more provision for traffic calming measures, particularly *home zones*, as a solution to the decline or lack of outdoor play. Home zones are developed from a Dutch model and can be defined as 'a residential street where people and vehicles share the whole of the street space safely, and on equal terms, where quality of life takes precedence over the ease of traffic movement' (The Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation, 2012). Such calls are perhaps unsurprising in light of many of the earliest claims problematising children's play and suggesting that a decline in outdoors play is the result of increased traffic on the roads. A leading home zones supporter who has either written or is quoted in many of these articles calling for home zones is the aforementioned Tim Gill, this is illustrated in Table 5.2 below.

**Table 5.2 Articles featuring calls for home zones compared to those which that were written by or quoted Tim Gill<sup>12</sup>**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of articles featuring campaigns for home zones as a possible solution to a decline in children's play that is outdoors and unsupervised</i>	<i>The number of these articles that were written by or quoted Tim Gill</i>
1996	0	0
1997	1	1
1998	4	3
1999	3	1
2000	1	0
2001	1	1
2002	2	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>7</b>

A typical example is a 1997 article by Tim Gill with the headline 'Home zones: Calm solutions' (Gill, *The Guardian*: 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1997) in which Gill calls for a change in the law, he argues that Britain lags far behind the rest of Europe on measures to make residential streets safe from traffic. He reports that 'the Children's Play Council and Transport 2000 launched a campaign to

<sup>12</sup> This table contains the results of a keyword search for "children" and "play" within five words of each other in the LexisLibrary archive.

raise public support for changes which would enable Britain to create home zones' and states that 'we believe that the home zone is a creative and practical response to the dominance of the car in residential streets' (Gill, *The Guardian*: 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1997). Another example article from 1999 reports on the government's plans to test the home zone system in nine pilot areas. Gill is quoted saying he hoped that the Government would act quickly to allow other communities to establish home zones and that 'The home zone is not simply a measure to improve road safety. It is about creating a valued public space in the street, where even young children can play safely and where neighbours can meet and chat' (Woodman, *The Times*: 5<sup>th</sup> August 1999).

### 5.3.2 *Rise of bedroom culture*

Claims problematising children's play also appear in this period that identify that instead of playing outdoors, children are staying indoors playing computer games as well as using various other forms of digital technology. For example, one article warns that:

As the territory for children's play has shrunk over the past 20 years, parks and streets and open fields have been replaced by computers, televisions and bedrooms. Adventures have to be experienced vicariously, whether through Just William or, more likely, Nintendo. Virtual freedom is the best that our children can hope for. (Sieghart, *The Times*: 5<sup>th</sup> August 1995)

A similar example comes from a 2001 article that reports on a study by psychologist Aric Sigman, commissioned by The Unity Company Powergen, who found that a quarter of the 1000 children aged seven to twelve who completed the questionnaires listed 'playing computer games alone' as their principal summer activity. Sigman comments that, 'I believe that children play with other children only half as much as their parents' generation did during the long holidays'. He goes on to state that 'This is a very recent but real problem' (Freen, *The Times*: 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2001).

Moreover, claims that the computer games children play are addictive began to appear in newspaper articles during this period. Research findings and comments made at various conferences by Dr Mark Griffiths of the psychology department at the University of Plymouth, warning that computer games are addictive, feature in a number of these articles. For example, in one article Dr Griffiths claims that 'computer games can be as addictive as hard drugs for the most besotted children' (Boseley, *The Guardian*: 13<sup>th</sup> March 1995).

As well as claims that computer games are addictive, claims that they often involve violence also began to appear in a number of articles. A prominent example is an article in *The Times* which quotes Elizabeth Stutz and refers to her research findings that violent computer games are children's preferred choice:

Elizabeth Stutz [...], said that children took violent electronic games intensely seriously. There was "total involvement with the killer. They appeared to lose all sense of reality." Traditional children's games were being abandoned. In a survey of 500 children, she found that computer games involving fighting were the unanimous favourites. (Hawkes, *The Times*: 14<sup>th</sup> March 1995)

A similar example comes from an article by the aforementioned Dr Mark Griffiths, who claims that 'it does appear that some children only play video games because of their violent content. My own research has shown that one in seven children play their favourite video game specifically because of the violent content' (Griffiths, *The Sunday Times*: 5<sup>th</sup> December 1999).

In relation to computer games, it is worth noting a study from this period on toys as social problems in America by Joel Best (1998), whose contextual constructionist approach as discussed in Chapter 3 is adopted for this current study. Best suggests that toys, in which he includes computer games, have increasingly become viewed as a problem. He states that 'claimsmakers argue that toys impart undesirable values, in turn lead[ing] to undesirable behaviour' (p. 202). He notes that critics of computer games 'worry that the stories they depict celebrate violence (e.g. kung fu fighting), sexism (e.g., rescuing the princess), and so on' (p. 206). Best (1998) importantly emphasises that historical records reveal many campaigns denouncing leisure's threat to the young. Reformers, he suggests, worry about youths' deviant recreations, but they have focused their attacks on commercial popular culture aimed at young consumers, including: nickelodeons, dime novels, jazz, movies, comic books, pinball, television, video games, music videos, various forms of rock music up to and including rap and heavy metal, and the internet.

### **5.3.3 Expanding domains**

It is evident from the above discussions that in formulating claims about the new problem of children's play, advocates draw on existing concerns about other social problems, expanding their domains to include the damage caused to children because of a decline or lack of outdoor

play. Advocates often do this in the period by suggesting various causes of the decline in outdoor play. In this way, the ability of the problem to be attached to a to a variety of causes is revealed. For instance, most of the earliest claims forwarding a decline during this period suggest increased traffic and reduced road safety as a cause, while later claims suggest parental anxiety.

As discussed in the following sections on the period 2003-2016, advocates expand the domains of other social problems by suggesting that a decline or lack of outdoor play contributes to them. For example, a decline or lack of outdoor play is suggested as a contributing factor in increasing levels of obesity. However, advocates expand the domains of other social problems by linking or attaching a decline or lack of outdoor play in more complex ways than simply suggesting that it is a cause or a contributory factor. This can be observed from the above discussion in which advocates argue that outdoor play is being "replaced" with digital technology. In such claims, digital technology is posed as a cause of a decline or lack of outdoor play (e.g. because of the attraction of digital technology, children prefer to stay in) and a contributory factor to children staying indoors using digital technology (e.g. because children aren't allowed out to play, they spend more time using digital technology) of a decline or lack of outdoors play. Children's lack of independence/freedom is another social problem advocates expand the domains of by linking or attaching a decline or lack of outdoor play in similarly complex ways (e.g. because of a lack of independence or freedom, children don't play outdoors and because children don't play outdoors, they lack independence or freedom).

Advocates continue to draw on concerns about other social problems in the following section on the period 2003-2016. It is worth noting how drawing upon concerns, including many of the ones already discussed and the ones discussed below regarding the next period, is evident throughout the literature on decline or lack of outdoor play (see Chapter 2).

#### **5.4 2003-2016: Children's play as a social problem**

Most of the claims described so far, while gaining influence, are relatively marginal. Figure 5.1 and Figure 5.2 at the beginning of this chapter show a marked increase in the mid-2000s, and by 2008, the interest in children's play is particularly noticeable. In this period since the early 2000s, increasing numbers of claimsmakers became involved in turning children's play into an issue of public concern and the CPC/Play England took ownership of the problem. Also, the discourse of

children's play since the beginning of this period has adapted to fit the wider context in which adult culture is seen as being harmful children and childhood and becomes associated with a growing number of existing and new social problem claims related to children's everyday lives. It is from 2003 that the idea of children's play as a social problem becomes not only increasingly more prevalent but the idea it should be a focus of public policy becomes increasingly accepted. It is important to note that the use of the keywords "children" and "play" within five words of each other are, as one would expect given the keywords, still used in passing and secondary to other concerns in 3645 (89.5%) of articles.

#### ***5.4.1 Expanding domains continues and intensifies***

In this period, the trend towards expanding the domain of other social problems continues and intensifies. It is interesting to see that there were attempts to expand the domains of some of these existing social problems in the previous period; however, they failed to gain interest and remained isolated to a handful of rare articles over the previous period. For example, advocates in the previous period expand the demands of traffic and parental anxiety to include the damage caused to children because of a decline or lack of outdoor play by suggesting they are causes of a decline or lack of outdoor play. During this period, although parental anxiety continues to be suggested in claims as a main cause of the problem (see Chapter 7), advocates draw on an even greater variety of other social problems, especially social problems related to children's everyday lives, by suggesting they are other causes. These additional causes include bullying, cotton wool culture, increasing health and safety regulations and a reduced sense of community. One other such additional cause appearing in a number of articles in this period is adults' growing intolerance of children in public spaces. For example, one article reports on the survey findings from the Children's Society which suggest that adults' intolerance of children in public spaces is stopping children from playing outdoors:

Children are being banished from playing outdoors by adults who regard them as a nuisance, and by a plethora of bylaws against bicycles, ball games and skateboards. A survey for the Children's Society has found that 80 per cent of children aged from 7 to 16 have been told off for playing on the streets, on estates and even in parks. Half said they had been yelled at by adults who objected to their noise and sometimes merely just to their presence. (Frean, *The Times*: 6<sup>th</sup> August 2003)

Another explains in detail the extent of adult intolerance of children in public spaces and identifies that this intolerance does stop children playing outdoors:

The UK seems to be leading the way in how not to treat children. A plan to erect a netball hoop on a village green in Oxfordshire was blocked "because residents didn't want to attract children". In west Somerset, an eight-year-old girl was stopped from cycling down her street because a neighbour complained that the wheels squeaked. In one survey, two-thirds of children said they liked playing outside every day, mainly to be with friends, but 80% of them have been told off for playing outdoors, 50% have been shouted at for playing outside and 25% of 11- to 16-year-olds have been threatened with violence by adults for. . . for what? For playing outdoors, making a noise, being a nuisance Saddest of all, it works. One in three of the children said that being told off for playing outside does stop them doing it. (Griffiths, *The Guardian*: 4<sup>th</sup> May 2013)

It is significant that many of the causes are often interrelated and overlap, as argued in Chapter 2. For example, parental anxiety is often argued by advocates to fuel parents' concerns about children's safety in relation to traffic or bullying.

Advocates, as mentioned above, also expand the domain of other social problems by suggesting that a decline or lack of outdoor play contributes to them. One such social problem suggested to be contributed to by a decline or lack of outdoor that appeared in a number of articles during this period is obesity (see: Table 5.3 Number of articles featuring claims that link a decline or lack of outdoor play to obesity and mental health problems below). The example below demonstrates the shift from the results of a study which finds a lack of outdoor play to rising obesity levels:

A survey of seven to 14-year-olds revealed that one in five plays outside for less than an hour a week. [...] The poll of 670 youngsters, released ahead of National Playday today, was carried out last month by the Children's Society and the Children's Play Council. It follows the publication of Government figures showing one in four under 11s is overweight while one in seven is so obese their health is at risk. (Clark, *The Daily Mail*: 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2005)

Another example can be seen in an article by Adrian Voce (the then director of the CPC/Play England), who directly links declining levels of outdoor play to increasing levels of obesity: 'research has shown that children's freedom to play out has been in steep decline for many years



and that the resulting sedentary lifestyles of many children is a significant factor in increasing levels of childhood obesity' (Voce, *The Guardian*: 6<sup>th</sup> January, 2010).

A number of articles during this period suggest that a decline or lack of outdoor play also contributes to mental health problems, albeit less than it is claimed such a decline or lack of play contributes to obesity (see: Table 5.3 Number of articles featuring claims that link a decline or lack of outdoor play to obesity and mental health problems below). An example is provided in an article reporting on an open letter, signed by a group of almost 300 teachers, psychologists, authors and childcare experts, on the loss of children's outdoor play, which connects a rise of mental health and behavioural problems to a decline of children's play, in which they claim that:

Research has deepened concern that youngsters are facing a mental health crisis. They point to the finding by UNICEF that Britain's children are among the unhappiest in the developed world, adding: 'We believe that a key factor in this disturbing trend is the marked decline over the last 15 years in children's play.' The letter goes on to insist that play, particularly outdoors, is vital to children's all-round health and well-being. (Clark, *The Daily Mail*: 10<sup>th</sup> September 2007)

Another example is provided in an article in *The Guardian* by Adrian Voce, who links declining opportunities for children's play to depression:

The Good Childhood inquiry has confirmed what the wider play movement has been saying for years: that diminished opportunities for outdoor play are damaging children's quality of life and social development [...] Friendships, children say, are among the most important things in their lives. But restrictions on their freedom to play are leaving many children isolated and depressed. (Voce, *The Guardian*: 7<sup>th</sup> June 2007)

Table 5.3 below contains the results of a keyword search of “children” and “play” within five words of each other in the LexisLibrary archive to illustrate the number of articles featuring claims that link a decline or lack of outdoor play to obesity and mental health problems

**Table 5.3 Number of articles featuring claims that link a decline or lack of outdoor play to obesity and mental health problems**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of articles featuring claims that link children's play to obesity</i>	<i>Number of articles featuring claims that link children's play to mental health problems</i>
2003	9	6
2004	8	4
2005	8	2
2006	5	4
2007	10	5
2008	9	4
2009	2	4
2010	3	2
2011	3	0
2012	7	2
2013	0	2
2014	2	4
2015	5	2
2016	4	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>49</b>

Additionally, advocates also expand the demands of other social problems by linking or attaching them to a decline or lack of outdoor play in more complex ways than simply suggesting a lack of outdoor play is a cause or contributory factor. This is similar to children staying indoors using digital technology and a lack of independence in the emergence of a problem period between 1992 and 2002. One such social problem that features prominently in these newspaper articles is "overscheduling", where children's time is dominated by adult-organized, goal-orientated activities. For example, an article in *The Times* suggests that overscheduling is a cause of a decline or lack of outdoor play: 'Working parents who feel guilty about being out of the home are organising and structuring their children's free time, leaving them few opportunities just to lark about' (Frean, *The Times*, 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2003). A different article suggests that a decline or lack of outdoor play because of parental anxiety about their children's safety contributes to overscheduling: 'Safety fears are a common reason parents cite for filling up children's time with appointments. Many are afraid to let their children play outside, due to "stranger danger" and heavy traffic. There is a sense that the world is a lot less safe than it was in the past' (O'Sullivan, *The Sunday Times*, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2008). Another example worth mentioning of a social problem linked or attached to a decline or lack of outdoor play in a similarly complex way, albeit which is

seen less frequently than overscheduling, is children's lack of outdoors and a disconnection from nature.

#### ***5.4.2 Continued focus on provision***

During this period, calls for proposed solutions to a decline or lack of outdoor play remain focused on provision, although provision for traffic calming measures is no longer the most popular proposed solution, as in the previous period. Given that since the mid-1990s parental anxiety is often asserted in UK newspapers as the main cause of the problem, as opposed to increased traffic as in the earliest claims at the beginning of the 1990s, that traffic calming measures are no longer the most popular proposed solution is arguably unsurprising.

With parental anxiety often being claimed to be main cause of the problem in UK print news media, solutions typically aim to address the fears and concerns that parents have about letting their children outside to play during this period. By far the most popular solution is more provision for facilities for outdoor play. This includes calls for more play areas with fixed play equipment (e.g. slides and swings) and also the idea of "reclaiming" other public spaces. It is worth mentioning that such solutions, as discussed in the literature review, are referred to by Jago et al. (2009) as an attempt to tackle parental anxieties about outdoor play "indirectly" through reducing risk, as opposed "directly" through education schemes and campaigns.

What is perhaps most significant about these proposed calls for solutions to a decline or lack of outdoor play during this period is that they are adopted and implemented by the government. A government strategy which receives significant attention in UK print news media at this time is a 10-year national play strategy. For example, one article on the strategy in *The Guardian* claims that if the strategy is executed correctly, it will encourage parents to let their children play outdoors by relieving their anxieties about their children's safety:

The government is clearly trying to respond to what parents and children have been telling them through the consultation on the 10-year children's plan. The truth is that many parents are simply too frightened to let their children out of their sight. A 10-year strategy must mean 10 years if we are to see children's trusts and local authorities redirect their resources towards reclaiming public space for the whole community. (O'Hara, *The Guardian*: 9<sup>th</sup> April 2008)

It is important to highlight here, although it is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, that a national strategy for play is a key recommendation of the CPC/Play England (2003) report *Making the Case for Play: Building Policies and Strategies for School Aged Children*, funded by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) as part of the government contract for play they were awarded in 2000. The CPC/Play England takes ownership of the problem at around this time and successfully focuses claimsmaking for a national strategy for play.

Another government scheme that receives attention in UK newspapers is play ranger schemes. Many such schemes are created following recommendations from the government's Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) report *Getting Serious about Play* (2003), co-authored by Tim Gill. A typical example is found in an article in *The Guardian* which explains what it is that play rangers do and states how effective they are, given parental anxiety about their children's safety as well as children's fears about bullying:

Play rangers are trained in "supporting children's outdoor play in public parks, housing estates, village greens and other open spaces". It's an unlikely sounding job description: do children really need to be shown how to play? But visiting a couple of play ranger schemes shows how effective they can be. Children want to play outside, and research from the Playday campaign group has shown that 72% would like to do so more often, but parents are often dubious about safety issues, from traffic to "stranger danger". And parks and open spaces can be daunting to children if they are colonised by older teenagers and adults. A benign adult presence removes fears of bullying or intimidation. (Lacey, *The Guardian*: 6<sup>th</sup> November 2007)

Although proposed solutions focus on provision as a way of tackling parental anxieties about outdoor play "indirectly" through reducing risk, there are occasions when education schemes and campaigns for parents as a way of tackling their anxieties about outdoor play "directly" are proposed as solutions. One such campaign, which appears in most of the national UK newspapers when it is launched in 2007, is led by Ed Balls (the then newly appointed Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families) and follows the publication of the 2007 consultation document *Staying Safe*, which calls for more children to play outdoors. One article, for example, explaining what the campaign will do, refers to the *Staying Safe* consultation document and quotes Ed Balls:

The government campaign will encourage parents to let children play outside "in safe environments" and take part in other "positive activities". According to statistics quoted in the paper, *Staying Safe*, more

than one third of children never play outside and nearly two thirds of parents are worried about letting their children do so. Parents should be able to "strike the right balance between protecting their children and at the same time allowing them to learn and explore safely", said Mr Balls, a father of three young children. (Ward, *The Guardian*: 18<sup>th</sup> July 2007)

The article goes on to identify how Ed Balls suggests that in some cases, parents express fears based on risks present when they were children which have to some extent lessened. A point illustrated by reference to government data which identifies that since the 1990s, deaths or serious injuries caused by road accidents have reduced by over half, compared to a recent survey by the Children's Society which found that concern over traffic is a key reason for the reluctance of many to let children out unaccompanied. Another article that reports on the campaign also turns to Ed Balls for his comments, in which he said that 'he was shocked by research suggesting that one third of children aged seven to 12 were never allowed to play outside because their parents were so concerned about their safety' and that 'the Government would be mounting a public education campaign to encourage parents to let their children play outside' (Frean, *The Times*: 18<sup>th</sup> July 2007).

A similar campaign encouraging parents to let their children outdoors to play is found in connection with the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents. For example, an article in *The Daily Mail* quotes Peter Cornall of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, who says, 'parents must allow their children to play outdoors even if it means they get hurt' and continues, 'when children spend time outdoors, they learn important lessons what hurts, what is slippery, what you can trip over or fall from. We need to try to break down the perceived safety barriers to playing outside. The society wants to encourage parents to talk to their children about the risks and how to cope with them' (*The Daily Mail*: 12<sup>th</sup> June, 2007).

#### ***5.4.3 Using digital technology indoors riskier for children than playing outdoors***

Claims problematising children's play in relation to children playing computer games, as well as using various other forms digital technology, instead of playing outdoors, continue to appear in the UK print news media in this period in much the same way as the previous section. However, as technology develops, so too do some of these claims. The growing popularity of one technological advance – the internet – begins to feature increasingly in these claims, particularly in relation to comparing the risk of children using the internet and playing computer games to

children's outdoor play.<sup>13</sup> For example, one article in 2008 refers to a study from which waves of articles follow in the UK newspapers, commissioned by the then Prime Minister Gordon Brown and by the television psychologist Dr Tanya Byron, which finds that 'allowing children to surf websites freely was the equivalent of letting them outside without supervision. Yet parental fears, Byron concluded, had 'driven a generation of children indoors' (Asthana and Revill, *The Observer*: 30<sup>th</sup> March 2008a). Reporting on the same Byron study, an article in *The Daily Mail* states that Byron said that 'allowing children to play on computers unsupervised is as dangerous as letting them play outside on their own' (Martin, *The Daily Mail*: 28<sup>th</sup> March 2008). Another example goes even further and by referring to the results of a study by the CPC/Play England claims that children are at more risk from using the internet unsupervised than outdoor play unsupervised:

By sticking our children in front of screens, so we know where they are, we put them at risk of encountering sights far more damaging than any they are likely to meet in the outside world. While 73 per cent of seven to 12-year-olds surf the internet unsupervised, according to a study by Play England, 42 per cent are not allowed to play in their local park without an adult. Yet a grazed knee heals quickly and is nothing compared to the long-lasting scars left on young minds by viewing violent, degrading porn, according to neurologists. (Carey, *The Daily Mail*: 6<sup>th</sup> September 2012)

The trend of mobilising concerns about online bullying and paedophiles to indicate that indoor play holds as many (if not more) dangers as outdoor play is observed by Frank Furedi in *Paranoid Parenting: Why Ignoring the Experts May Be Best for Your Child* (2008), who states that such claims 'have a fatalistic and rhetorical character' and that 'in recent years childhood has become the focus of competitive scaremongering' (Furedi, 2008, p. 3).<sup>14</sup>

In addition to claims that playing on a computer indoors is riskier for children than playing outdoors, it would appear that children playing violent computer games could also have consequences for parents, with around dozen articles in the past couple of years featuring claims

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<sup>13</sup> It is worth pointing out that the divide in this period towards the 2016 between the internet and computer games has become blurred to a point where it is non-existent. For example, many games consoles can be connected to the internet, meaning you can play against other people from all around the world.

<sup>14</sup> It worth briefly noting here that Furedi in *Paranoid Parenting* discusses a decline in children's outdoor play, which he refers to as 'the slow death of outdoor play' (2008, p. 8).

that parents letting children play violent computer games constitutes to parental neglect and will be reported to the police. For example, one article states that:

Parents who let their children play 18-rated computer games could be reported to police and social services for neglect, warn head teachers. A group of primary school heads claim that adult video games such as Call of Duty, Grand Theft Auto and Dogs of War could lead to early sexualised behaviours'. The latest version of Grand Theft Auto allows players to have virtual sex with a prostitute before punching her unconscious or even murdering her. Now, head teachers have issued a strong warning to parents who allow their children to play such violent games. (Eccles, *The Daily Mail*: 30<sup>th</sup> March 2015)

Reporting on the same claims, another article simply states that 'headteachers have warned parents that they will report them to the police and social services for neglect if they allow their children to play computer games rated for over-18s' (Khomami, *The Guardian*: 29<sup>th</sup> March 2015).

#### **5.4.4 Counterclaims**

Despite all the claims problematising children's play in relation to a decline or lack of outdoor play that appear in the UK newspapers, very few criticisms question the importance of such play or its decline. Such claims that argue in direct opposition of original claims are referred to by Best (2008) as *counterclaims*. Fewer than only a handful of counterclaims appear from 2007. An example can be found in *The Sunday Times* in which reporter Sian Griffiths, following the aforementioned 2007 open letter on the loss of children's outdoor play, asks 'Is the panic warranted? Are children really playing less than previous generations? Or is this a slightly whipped-up crisis?' (Griffiths, *The Sunday Times*: 16th September 2007). The article features comments from author Steve Roud, who at the time was undertaking a national survey of youngsters' games which were published in 2010 in *The Lore of the Playground*, Roud claims that 'fears that children no longer play outside enough are misplaced' and the article goes on to say that he believes that:

Many of the games played 50 years ago are still enjoyed today, albeit possibly in modified form. His preliminary research suggests that boys have been swept up by the omnipresent marketing of organised games such as football which they play and watch obsessively in their spare time. As a result games such as kiss chase, which boys and girls played together, may

be disappearing from playgrounds - but, he says, children's play generally is alive and well. (Griffiths, *The Sunday Times*: 16<sup>th</sup> September 2007)

The article concludes with a quote from Roud, who says that 'I don't agree with this moral panic that children don't play' (Griffiths, *The Sunday Times*: 16th September 2007). However, criticisms do appear slightly more in relation to proposed solutions to a decline or lack of outdoor play. One article in *The Sunday Times* for example, claims that:

Local authorities in many countries have been inundated with complaints from residents demanding that the road humps and chicanes be removed over concerns that they are causing huge tailbacks through the streets. People have shown concern that encouraging children to play in roads, even specially adapted roads such as home zones, has introduced a danger which was not previously there. (Cochrane, *The Sunday Times*: 15<sup>th</sup> February 2004)

Rob Wheway, a consultant for the Child Accident Prevention Trust (CAPT) and involved in the Fair Play for Children, also criticises Home Zones, which generally have a 20mph speed limit, as needing to have even lower speed limits by saying that 'A 20 mph limit doesn't make a road safe, it just makes the injuries sustained less severe. At that speed, parents still don't let their children play outside' (Harris, *The Daily Mail*: 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2011). Another example is found from sociology professor Frank Furedi, who in relation to the announcement by Ed Balls of the government campaign to encourage parents to let children play outside, is quoted in one article saying that he 'welcomed Mr Balls' attack on the risk-averse culture, but cautioned also against trying to institutionalise play' and that 'Kids should feel open to play however they want. We should not regard play as part of the curriculum' (Fread, *The Times*: 18<sup>th</sup> July 2007). A further example is an article reporting on a council spending £80,000 of lottery grants on employing play rangers, which contains the following quote by nursery supervisor and mother-of-two Teresa Ganner, who said that 'the money for the play ranger would be better spent on places for teenagers to spend their free time. It's laughable quite honestly, totally barmy. It's quite insulting' (*The Daily Mail*: 8<sup>th</sup> September 2007).

## 5.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has attempted to answer how uses of *children's play* in print news media discussion over recent decades has changed. It has identified subtle changes in the usage of



the term *children's play* and a distinct trend towards the problematisation of children's play, as well as describing the distinct characteristics that the problematisation of children's play takes. As such, it reveals some of the fundamental developments that have occurred over recent decades, thus providing a foundation for more detailed analysis.

## 6 Children's Play Claimsmakers

The previous chapter described how the term *children's play* has appeared in the UK news media over recent decades. It is clear that the past two decades have seen a shift in discussions about children's play, which begin to focus on children's play as a central concern rather than in passing and secondary to another primary interest. Moreover, these emergent discourses have problematised children's play. Since QMA is an emergent methodology in which the researcher is central, these insights that emerged from tracking the discourse of children's play informed the progression toward the next phase of data gathering and analysis. This chapter details the results of an analysis of a sample of 420 newspaper articles from four UK national newspapers between 2003 and 2016, in which individuals and organisations commenting on the issue are identified and investigated. It attempts to answer the first of the five questions that guide this research: Who says that children's play is a problem? That is, who are the 'claimsmakers'? Firstly, the general composition of the sample is explored, followed by a discussion on the diffusion of the problem. Lastly, the major categories of claimsmaker that have yet to be discussed are addressed, including experts, journalists and politicians.

### 6.1 Composition of sample

In the sample composed of 420 articles, 302 individuals and 144 organisations are identified making claims about the issue (see Appendix A for individuals, Appendix B for organisations). As detailed in Chapter 4, an individual or organisation is recorded if they make at least one claim, positive or negative, about children's play in relation to its: importance, constitution/definition, present state (including reason(s) for its present state), need for intervention, or problematic nature. Organisations are recorded if claims or commentary emerged from, or in connection with, these groups.

Two preliminary observations emerge from an analysis of the data in relation to the general composition of the sample. Firstly, a large number of people and organisations from diverse backgrounds comment on the issue or refer to children's play claims. As mentioned in the

previous chapter, claimsmakers are distinguished according to the social roles in which they primarily act in the sample and categorised accordingly. Distinguishing claimsmakers according to their broadly recognised social roles is one of two methods Best (1990; 2008) proposes to distinguish claimsmakers.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, there are very few consistently appearing claimsmakers. A third and separate point which requires more elaboration is that the most significant commentary emerges from one specific Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), namely the CPC/Play England. Notably, the term NGO is used in this study to refer to charities and non-profit organisations that are independent from national and international governmental organisations. The use of the term is discussed in more detail later in the Chapter.

### ***6.1.1 Characteristics of the claimsmakers***

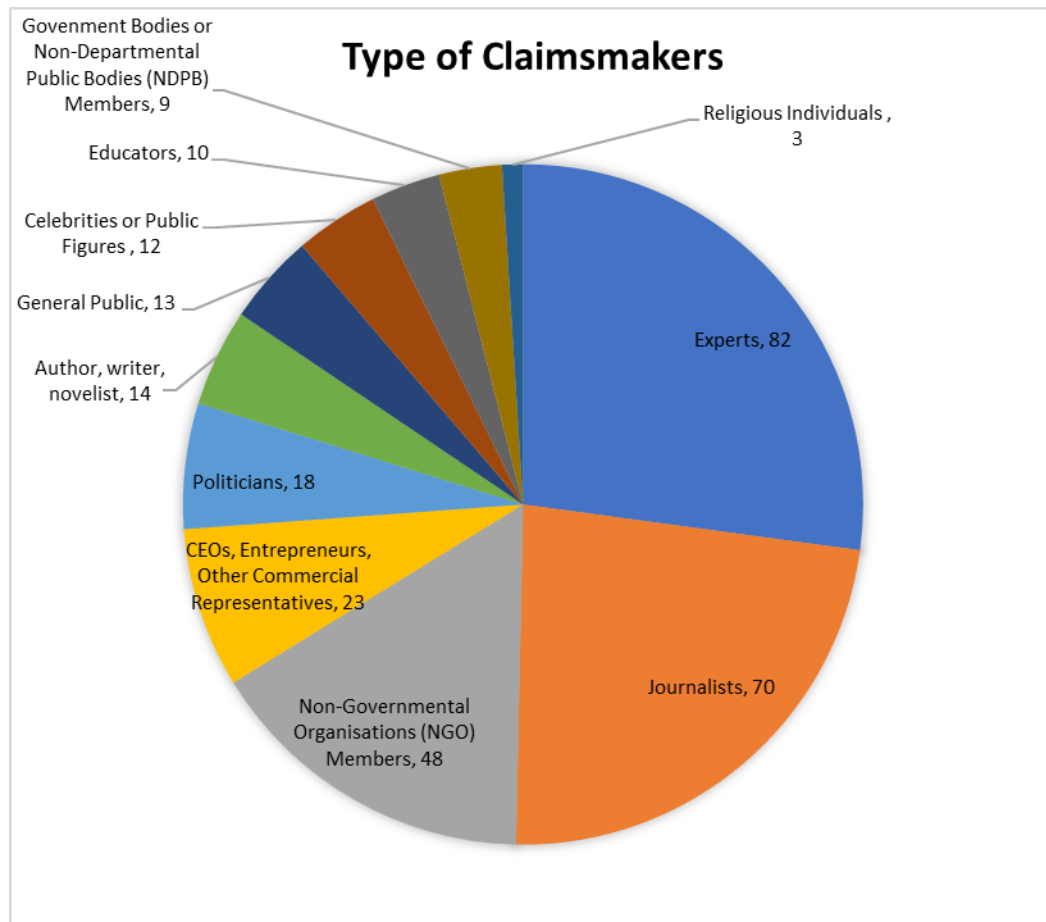
In relation to the first of these observations, which is perhaps the most significant characteristic, is the diversity of claimsmakers that appear. They include, for instance, psychologists, a building engineer, a sleep neurologist, geographers, an archbishop, a nutritionist and an ophthalmic surgeon.

The figure below shows the types of claimsmaker identified and the corresponding proportions by which they make up the total population of claimsmakers in the identified sample.<sup>2</sup>

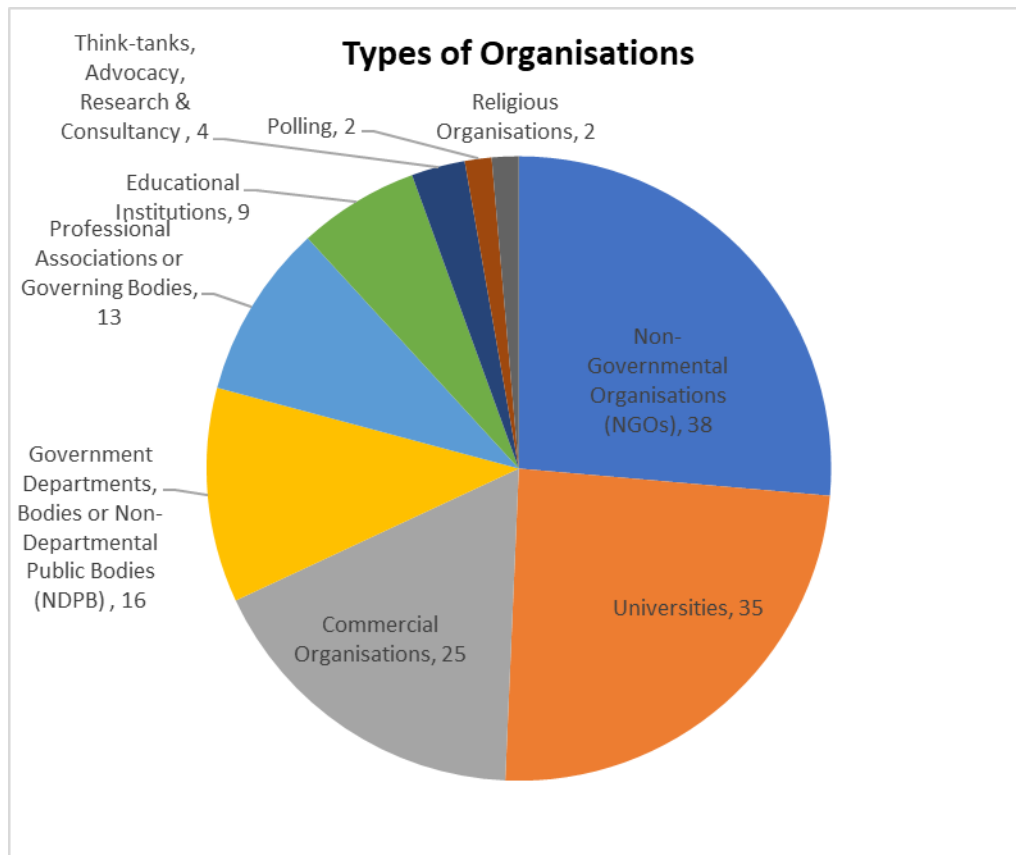
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<sup>1</sup> The other method Best (2008) proposes to distinguish claimsmakers is according to their position in the claimsmaking process, referred to later in this current Chapter.

<sup>2</sup> A Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) identified in Figure 6.1 is a ‘body which has a role in the processes of national government, but is not a government department or part of one, and which accordingly operates to a greater or lesser extent at arm's length from ministers’ (Cabinet Office and Efficiency and Reform Group, 2016). It is important to emphasise that NDPB do not make policy rather they advise policymakers as ministers.

**Figure 6.1 Types of individual claimsmakers identified in sample**

Experts are clearly the most frequently appearing claimsmaker, followed by journalists and Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) members. It is also observed that in addition to individuals as a source of information, claims are often made in connection with organisations or indeed that the organisations alone are sometimes sited as the source of a claim. The types of organisation appearing in the sample and the corresponding number of organisations belonging to each category are listed in the figure below.

**Figure 6.2 Types of organisations identified in sample**

These categories help to identify from which general areas commentary has tended to come. However, although it would appear from the above figures that experts have been leading the problematisation of children's play, this is not the area from which most of the sustained interest has emerged. For instance, of the 83 experts identified only 13 appear more than once, of those 13 only six appear more than twice, and of those six, none appeared in more than eight articles. The most sustained interest emerges, as will be discussed in more detail in the following sections, from the NGO category. However, although the NGOs category appears near or at the top of the above figures, with 48 NGO members and 38 NGOs, only a couple appear consistently. For instance, of the 48 NGO members identified, only 13 appear more than once, and of those 13 only eight appear more than twice, and of those eight only two appear more than seven times. Similarly, of the 38 NGOs, only 11 appear more than once, and of those 11 only seven appear more than twice, and of those seven only two appear more than six times.

### ***6.1.2 Lack of sustained campaigning***

This leads to the second observation in relation to the general composition: the sizeable difference between the most regularly appearing claimsmakers and other claimsmakers. Even though a large number of individuals and organisations comment on the issue, many of whom it should be pointed out have contributed to and affirmed its importance (a point which will be discussed later in the chapter), very few have taken it up and made it their own, or put another way taken what Best (1990) calls "ownership". This is clear from the data, in which only 21 of the total 302 individual claimsmakers appear three time or more, 22 twice, and 259 only once. Similarly, only 14 of the total 144 organisations appear three time or more, 16 twice and 114 only once. As identified in Chapter 3, ownership is a critical element in the construction of a social problem and if it is not assumed, it is difficult for the social problem process to proceed (Best, 2008). So, even though many claims about children's play have appeared throughout the history of its problematisation, without the activities of the very few who have taken up the issue and made it their own, it is unlikely it would have seen the prominence and success that it has. Consequently, it is important to focus of the few claimsmakers who have taken ownership and made a disproportionate impact on gaining recognition and establishing the problem.

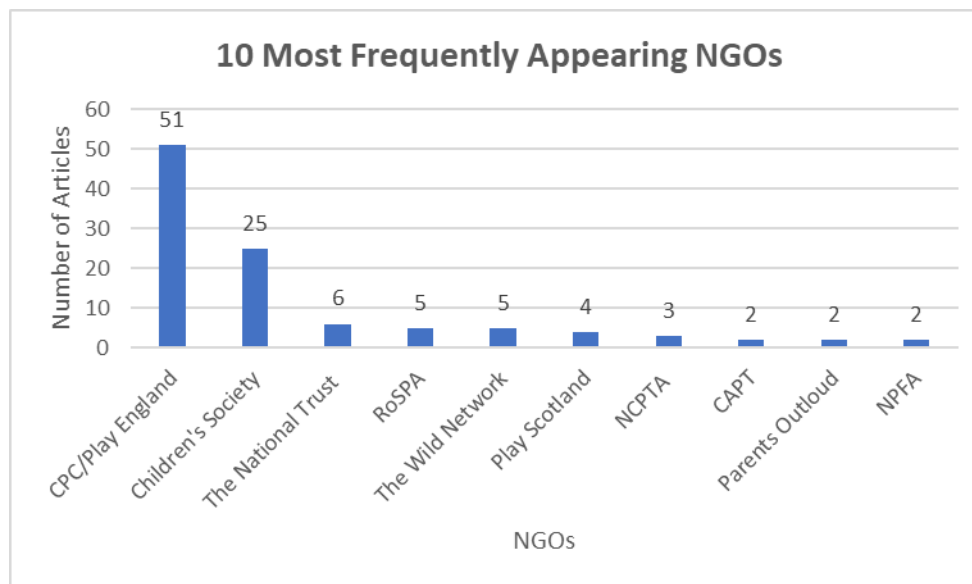
It is worth briefly reiterating here from Chapter 4 that such a focus on these few chairmakers (or indeed any specific claimsmaker or category of claimsmakers) is possible since QMA is an emergent methodology that allows the researcher to identify emergent trends toward the problematisations of children's play. NVivo played an important role in this regard since it is helpful in situating the researcher centrally within the analysis.

## **6.2 The CPC/Play England and issue ownership**

An interpretation of the data reveals, as briefly mentioned above, that the most sustained claimsmaking comes from one NGO and their members. The figure below shows the ten most frequently appearing NGOs.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The figure includes articles containing claims made by individuals in connection with an NGO or by the NGO itself.

**Figure 6.3 Most frequently appearing NGOs**

It is clear from the above figure that one NGO, the CPC/Play England, appears most frequently in more than double the number of articles than any other NGO. Furthermore, although the figures only consider NGOs, no other organisations or indeed claimsmakers that are not members of NGOs have appeared in the sample ten times (see Appendix A and B).

Through a comparison of the earlier problematisation of children's play and the 2003-2016 period, it is evident that in both cases, the CPC/Play England have taken ownership. However, only in the latter period does their claimsmaking take the form of a focused campaign.

Before discussing the CPC/Play England and examining how it has taken ownership, it is necessary to briefly discuss what NGOs are. The term NGO carries different connotations in different circumstances and diverse types of bodies can be described as being NGOs, therefore it is necessary to specify exactly how the term is used. For the purpose of this current study, the term is used to refer to charities and non-profit organisations that are independent from national and international governmental organisations (significantly of the 38 NGOs identified 32 were

registered charities in the UK).<sup>4</sup> Such organisations can, and often do, endeavour to influence politics or the policies of government. The status of NGOs can and often does vary considerably, for instance from international, well-established organisations with close links to policymakers to local, unestablished organisations with no links to policymakers. Consequently, some NGOs according to Best's (1990) distinction of claimsmakers regarding their position in the claimsmaking process, can be identified as operating as an "insider" (i.e. those who have easy accesses to people in powerful positions such as policymakers) while others are "outsiders" (i.e. those who have limited access to policymakers and lack ready access to the media) in the claimsmaking process.<sup>5</sup> It is of significance to point out that outsider NGOs, which is how the vast majority of NGOs start out, like all outsider claimsmakers, through the achievement of ownership of an issue can transform themselves into "insider" claimsmakers.<sup>6</sup> One way to assist such a transformation, which is becoming increasingly popular and evident in the following discussion on the CPC/Play England, is through the formation of coalitions between NGOs. For instance, there are international and national umbrella NGOs, providing an institutional structure for different NGOs that do not share a common identity. Alternately, an outsider NGO can form an alliance with an insider NGO. It is also worth noting that NGOs, according to prominent contextual constructionist Philip Jenkins (1992), enjoy a particular importance in the British political system due to the limited resources available to Members of Parliament (MPs) in regard to support staff, budget, and research facilities. Jenkins (1992) states that MPs can profit from the information supplied from these organisations.

### ***6.2.1 1992-2002: The emergence of the CPC/Play England***

The previous chapter argued that "the emergence of the problem" began in the 1990s. The first claims to problematise children's play did not come from the CPC/Play England. As will be identified later, their claims only started to appear in the UK print media in 1995. The initial

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<sup>4</sup> Many of these NGOs could be identified as 'SMOs' and their individual members as 'activists', both of which are defined in reference to Best (2008) in Chapter 3. However, it was deemed that identifying these organisations as 'NGOs' and the respective members as 'NGO members' was a more accurate description of these organisations and their members.

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 3 for more information on both insider and outsider claimsmakers.

<sup>6</sup> As discussed in Chapter 3 an advantage of ownership is that outsiders can become familiar figures with a large network of social contacts, most notably with people in powerful positions such as policymakers, that they transform themselves to insider claimsmakers.



claimsmaking of the problem before 1995 can be attributed predominantly to members of various outsider NGOs. The table below shows the first claimsmakers for children's play as a social problem between 1992 and 1994, their position in the claimsmaking process as either insider or outsider (or blank, in the case of journalist) according to the characteristics listed in Chapter 3, and their claim.<sup>7</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, these initial claims assert a decline or lack of outdoor play.

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<sup>7</sup> Because *The Daily Mirror* and *Sunday Mirror* are not covered in the LexisLibrary holdings until 1995 claims that appeared in them could not be considered here.

**Table 6.1 First claimsmakers problematising children's play between 1992-1994**

<i>Claimsmaker and description</i>	<i>Insider or outsider</i>	<i>Claim</i>
Elizabeth Stutz NGO Member Founder of Play for Life	Outsider	'The problem is that computers are very seductive, and children spend too long sedentary, simply staring at a screen using keys, when they should be experiencing social intercourse and relationships and developing emotional responses and craft skills and outdoor activities. That world is becoming totally lost to them.' (King, <i>The Times</i> : 10 <sup>th</sup> March 1992)
Rob Wheway NGO Member A consultant for the Child Accident Prevention Trust (CAPT) and is involved in the Fair Play for Children	Outsider	'Because of traffic danger, parents are keeping their children inside or asking for play facilities where their children will be safe. The motorists don't care where the children are, as long as they are out of the way. And local authorities and play organisations provide "reservations" to keep both sets of adults happy.' (Wheway, <i>The Guardian</i> : 12 <sup>th</sup> August 1992) <sup>8</sup>
Margaret McGowan Government Bodies or Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPB) Members Press officer for the Children's Play and Recreation Unit (CPRU)	Insider	'Ferrying your children to organised sporting activities once or twice a week is not the same as old-fashioned play and the constant activity it involves. Children used to play out of doors for hours, with a great feeling of contentment.' (McKee, <i>The Times</i> : 11 <sup>th</sup> November 1992)
Sheila Awoonor-Renner Member of the general public	Outsider	'I am sad to say that the sight of running, jumping, climbing, skipping, ball-throwing activities of free range children is now as rare as the sight of a child playing with whip and top. If we do catch sight of free range children, our very next thought is likely to be censorious - that they are too noisy, it is too dangerous and where are their parents.' (Awoonor-Renner <i>The Guardian</i> 18 <sup>th</sup> November 1992)
Hilary Weedon Government Bodies or Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPB) Members Joint director the Children's Play and Recreation Unit (CPRU)	Insider	'Children don't remember how to play anymore. Parents don't feel happy letting them out because of increasing traffic and other safety problems, so the only real provision for children playing together is in schools and other supervised schemes.' (Beaumont, <i>The Observer</i> : 7 <sup>th</sup> March 1993)
Barry Hugill Journalist		'The Nintendo [computer game console] generation sure have nimble fingers but are prisoners of the video screen and the TV cartoon. Children who do not play outside are prime candidates for an early coronary.' (Hugill, <i>The Observer</i> 8 <sup>th</sup> August 1993)

<sup>8</sup> This article particularly in relation to its reference to The Hillman et al. (1990) study is discussed in more detail in the previous chapter.

Judy Jones Journalist		'The time when children could play safely and without inhibition in the streets and parks on their own have all but disappeared. Any parent who lets his or her child roam the neighbourhood would today be considered irresponsible, because of fear of crime and traffic accidents. With children's independence becoming so restricted, is it any wonder they turn inwards and play endless video and computer games at home to fill the gaps?' (Jones, <i>The Observer</i> : 12 <sup>th</sup> December 1993)
Sandra Melville NGO Member Director of Playlink	Outsider	'They [children] lack independent mobility and there's no investment in neighbourhoods. Play provision should replace what kids have lost in access to wild, open spaces.' (Roberts, <i>The Guardian</i> : 4 <sup>th</sup> October 1994)
Anne Longfield NGO Member Director of Kids' Clubs Network	Outsider	'Fear of busy roads, racism or abduction means that children are less and less likely to be allowed to play out.' (Fisher, <i>The Observer</i> : 30 <sup>th</sup> October 30, 1994)

It can be observed from the above table that the first problematising claims came from NGO members who were relatively unestablished with no connections to policymakers and thus operated in the outsider domain of the claimsmaking process. Indeed, most claims (five of the initial nine) came from outsiders. It can also be observed that all but two of these initial nine claims in the period 1992-1994 appeared in articles in *The Guardian* and its sister newspaper *The Observer*. It could be suggested that these newspapers, since they identify with liberal values, may have been more receptive to publishing claims problematising a decline or lack of outdoor play than the other newspapers in the sample. Another interesting observation is that none of these initial claimsmakers' claims appeared in more than one article. Two claimsmakers do, however, appear from the same organisation. Both McGowan and Weedon were members of the Children's Play and Recreation Unit (CPRU). The CPRU and its predecessor Playboard (1982-1986) played a significant role in how the CPC/Play England as an organisation arose. Therefore, it is important to briefly discuss them both, starting with Playboard.

Initially known briefly as the Association for Children's Play and Recreation, Playboard was awarded the first government funding solely to support and promote children's play. Lobbying the government to provide funding for such a national play organisation notably emerged from a number of organisations such as, for example, the Association of Adventure and the National Out

of School Alliance (NOOSA), later to become Kids' Club Network and then 4Children.<sup>9</sup> The initial government contract awarded to Playboard was terminated after only three years because of their refusal to merge with the Sports Council – an arm's length public body for the promotion of grassroots participation in sport – because it believed it was not in the best interests of children's play. Playboard dissolved shortly after. In 1987, the Sports Council were asked by the Government to take on the responsibility for the growing non-commercial play sector and thus the CPRU was established within the Sports Council as a non-departmental government agency to take forward play policy after the demise of Playboard (Voce, 2015). The CPRU issued contracts to two organisations, one of which was the National Playing Field Association (NPFA), who were issued a contract for play information services. The NPFA, rebranded in 2007 as Fields in Trust (FIT), is a national charity for outdoor sport play and recreation founded in 1925 working to ensure the value of protected outdoor spaces is recognised by legislators and policymakers. It is worth making the point that the issuing of a government contract to the National Playing Field Association (NPFA), provides a clear example of an NGO being utilised as a resource for politicians.

Following the demise of Playboard the different organisations that lobbied for it regrouped arguing that:

Notwithstanding the CPRU and the two government contracts - there was a need for an independent body to promote children's play and to freely campaign for more and better provision. The National Voluntary Council for Children's Play [NVCCP] - later to become simply Children's Play Council (CPC) - was born. (Voce, 2015, p. 40)

Voce (2015) importantly identifies that initial members of the organisation were former playworkers, schooled in the UK's adventure playgrounds. Adventure playgrounds are typically defined in this way: 'An Adventure Playground is an area fenced off and set aside for children. Within its boundaries children can play freely, in their own way, in their own time. But what is special about an Adventure Playground is that here (and increasingly in contemporary urban society, only here) children can build and shape the environment according to their own creative vision' (Shier, 1984, p. 3). Shier continues by stating that 'The vital ingredient that makes this

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<sup>9</sup> For a more exhaustive list see Cranwell (2009), and Voce (2015).

possible is the presence on every Adventure Playground of workers [playworkers]: full-time permanent staff through whose efforts the playground is able to offer many of the exciting, adventurous and creative play opportunities which children need so badly if they are to develop to their full potential' (1984, p. 3).

The adventure playgrounds in which these playworkers were schooled and worked multiplied during the 1970s. By the 1990s, they faced challenges with the local authority grants that most relied on being minimal, playworkers being poorly paid and often with little or no access to training. Moreover, many of the playgrounds were being closed since the waste ground they typically occupied (local authority land) had become prime real estate that the council had decided to cash in (Voce, 2015). Given the background of the CPC/Play England members as playworkers from adventure playgrounds, their campaigning for more and better provision often means campaigning for more and better provision for adventure play grounds and playworkers, a point particularly evident after 2003. Significantly, the CPRU was axed in March 1993 by the Conservative Government led by John Major. As such, the claims identified above by members of CPRU problematising children's play were to be some of the last to come from CPRU. The Department for National Heritage, created in 1992, accepted responsibility for children's play policy in 1994.

Adrian Voce, who is discussed in more detail later in the chapter as a former director of the CPC/Play England and prominent claimmaker, in his book *Policy for Play* (2015) provides detailed information about the CPC/Play England and its activities which is drawn upon here as well as in the following section. The CPC/Play England can be categorised as an NGO since it was a membership body of voluntary and public play organisations. Significantly, it was hosted by another NGO: the National Children's Bureau (NCB). The NCB at the time was a children's charity specialising in research and child policy development and providing support for a wide range of groups, alliances and councils working for different aspects of children's rights and wellbeing. The arrangement, according to Voce (2015), suited the CPC/Play England members well, as essentially being an alliance to other organisations, it allowed them to be involved in the formulation of joint policy positions and work without the responsibility of becoming trustees of another organisation. The arrangement also had the cost efficiency benefit of sharing premises and the other core functions with other councils and alliances under the NCB umbrella, and the

advantage of being part of a highly influential national children's charity with strong links to government. Additionally, the arrangement meant that NCB were legally responsible for their work, employed all their staff, and received and accounted all their finances. Perhaps unsurprisingly due to being hosted by NCB, the CPC/Play England made a decision to base its campaigning and influencing activity on children's rights to play as recognised in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (discussed in the opening chapter of this study). Voce states that it was during the 1990s that it organised its campaigning and advocacy work around a document that it produced in consultation with its members and allies, known as the Charter for Children's Play (CPC, 1998). The charter took Article 31 as a starting point and set out 10 principles, each aiming to expand on the child's right to play in different contexts.

In sum, then, the CPC/Play England can be classified as an NGO, which through their campaigning about more and better provision for play (particularly adventure play staffed by play workers) and children's rights to play endeavour to influence politics or the policies of government. As a newly formed NGO without direct contact to policymakers, they started out as operating outsiders within the claimsmaking process.

It is during the mid-1990s that the CPC/Play England's commentary on children's play starts to appear in UK newspaper articles and, indeed, continues with a consistent focus on children's play as a social problem. Such a dedication to claimsmaking on the issue until this point, as discussed above, had not yet appeared, with claimsmakers typically appearing in only one article. Between 1995 and 2002, CPC/Play England's claims appear in 16 articles (see Appendix C).<sup>10</sup>

Most of the articles that feature the CPC/Play England's claims (11 of the 16) appear in the form of comments on either other articles or others' research or campaigns. Although dominated by comments, it is worth highlighting that by 1999 claims begin to feature their own research findings. This research was born out of a relationship with another NGO called The Children's Society, a national organisation founded in 1881 seeking to 'fight child poverty and neglect, and

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<sup>10</sup>Appendix C shows the CPC claimsmakers from 1995 to 2002, some brief information about the article in which the claim appears, as well as the claims themselves.

help all children have a better chance in life' (The Children's Society, 2017), who operate in the insider domain of claimsmaking. The two organisations in the August of that year published a survey they had produced together to coincide with Playday, an annual event both organisations at the time helped coordinate that traditionally takes place on first Wednesday in August to celebrate children's right to play and campaigns on issues affecting children's play. The idea of a day for play was conceived in 1986 by a group of playworkers and went national in 1991. Events scheduled in advance, such as Playday, are suggested by Best (2008) to make it easier for the media to cover claims since the news workers, who have the job of locating and presenting news to the larger public, will know when and where to go and get their story. In other words, it shows sophistication in their claimsmaking since they are taking into account news workers' concerns. The findings of this research by the CPC/Play England and The Children's Society for Playday 1999 is reported in *The Times* and *The Daily Mail* (see Appendix C). Over the course of the following five years or so, this relationship produced several pieces of research which are published to coincide with Playday; all received a lot of attention in the media.

It can also be observed, similar to the initial claims problematising play between 1992 and 1994, that six of the first seven articles to feature claims by the organisation before 1999 appeared in either *The Guardian* or its sister newspaper *The Observer*. This again indicates that these newspapers are more receptive than others in the sample to claims problematising children's play. It also indicates how the production of their own research in partnership with an NGO that operates as an insider claimsmaker in 1999 attracts the attention of newspapers other than *The Guardian* and its Sunday edition.

An additional observation is that 11 out of the 16 claims are made by Tim Gill, who was firstly the policy officer and later become the director of the CPC/Play England. Tim Gill as a prominent claimsmaker for the organisation is discussed in more detail later.

### **6.2.2 2003-2016: The CPC/Play England as owners**

Although the CPC/Play England had started and continued to make claims with a degree of consistency up until 2002, their claims only appeared in a few articles each year. From 2003, their claimsmaking begins to take the form of a more focused campaign.

This focused campaigning follows the CPC/Play England research document *Making the Case for Play: Gathering Evidence* (Cole-Hamilton, Harrop and Street, 2002) and its companion report *Making the Case for Play: Building Policies and Strategies for School Aged Children* (Cole-Hamilton and Gill, 2002). The research, as mentioned in Chapter 2, finds that there were many restrictions to children's outdoor play opportunities. It also highlights the wide disparity of opportunities experienced by children in different locations. Although the factors creating barriers to children playing outside are found to be common across the country, the responses of different local areas vary greatly. Fewer than 40% of local authorities are found to have any kind of written play policy or service plan, not to mention an area-wide or crosscutting strategy. Spending on children's play is found to vary greatly, with many authorities spending only a tenth on play provision compared with those spending the most. The report proposes a number of solutions, or as they called them recommendations, to tackle these barriers to outdoor play which tend to focus on more provision (see Chapter 2). The report's key recommendation is that:

Government departments work with the play sector to develop a National Strategy for play, along the lines of the National Childcare Strategy, grounded in agreed values, principles and desired outcome for children, which identifies targets for local play provision based on an assessment of the needs and wishes of children and their communities. (Cole-Hamilton and Gill, 2002, p. 57)

The report is produced as part of a government contract for play that the organisation tendered for and were awarded in 2000. The contract was awarded by the newly formed Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) which had inherited the responsibility for children's play policy from its predecessor, the Department for National Heritage, following the election of the New Labour Government in 1997.<sup>11</sup> The CPC/Play England were initially told about the contract being up for tendering by the then Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport Chris Smith, who let it be known that he wanted to consider other potential alternatives to the NPFA as the Government's voluntary sector partner for play policy (Voce, 2015). Chris Smith, according to Voce (2015), was one of the saving graces of play policy residing at the DCMS as during his time as MP for Islington had become a long-term friend of the Islington Play Association (IPA) and he

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<sup>11</sup> The Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), formally the Department for National Heritage, was the government department responsible for play policy between 1994-2010 (jointly with the Department for Children, Schools and Families [DCSF] 2008-2010).



attended the first annual meeting of London Play (a regional play charity established in 1998 which worked with the Mayor of London on play policy for the city) in which he gave a speech stating that ‘I cannot think of anything else that offers so much to children [...] play is not only important to [their] quality of life [...] it is of great importance for our country’s future, to the creative industries and for the economy’ (see Voce, 2015, p. 64). Smith then according to Voce, went on to state that as secretary of State he wanted to support the play sector as it had an important role.

Significantly, in relation to the production of the *Making the Case for Play* research, the government contract included a specific policy and research element requested by the CPC/Play England at the time of tendering. Additionally, at around this time, the organisation, in partnership with an insider NGO that was also a longstanding member of the Council, made the successful bid to become the National Lottery distributor called the New Opportunities Fund (NOF) award partner for the £10.8 million *Better Play Programme*, England’s first publicly funded national programme for children’s play. It is worth noting that the NOF was accountable to the same department responsible for play policy and which awarded the CPC/Play England with its government contract, namely the DCMS.

It is in light of their government contract and their significant role in delivering the first publicly funded national programme for children’s play, coupled with being called on for their comments by the media as a go-to authority on the issue, that it can be concluded that it is around this time that the organisation achieves ownership of the issue. A significant advantage of taking ownership and becoming familiar figures with a large network of social contacts, particularly policymakers, is that the CPC/Play England transformed themselves from outsiders to insider claimsmakers.

During the period between 2003 and 2016, as identified in Figure 6.3, CPC/Play England claims feature in 51 articles. The majority (33 articles) appear over a five-year period (2003-2007) before the first ever national government Play Strategy is unveiled in 2008. Of these 33 articles, 19 feature findings from their own research as well as research they had been involved in

producing in partnership with other organisations, most notably the Children's Society.<sup>12</sup> This research typically identifies a decline or lack of outdoor play because of a dangerous adult culture, for example:

Researchers for national Children's Play Day [Children's Society's and the CPC/Play England] asked more than 2,500 youngsters what interfered with playing outside. They cited "no ball games" signs in the streets, or being told off and even threatened by adults for activities such as riding a bike in the street. (Hinsliff, *The Observer*: 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2003)

Such claims allude to the need for more specifically designated play areas for children that protect children from the dangerous adult culture, a point explicitly evident in the following example:

A survey of seven to 14-year-olds revealed that one in five plays outside for less than an hour a week. Nearly two in five say they do not play outdoors as much as they would like. According to campaigners, a fear of venturing outdoors may be contributing to spiralling obesity among children. They say safer, cleaner play areas are urgently needed to combat the problem. The poll of 670 youngsters, released ahead of National Playday today, was carried out last month by the Children's Society and the Children's Play Council. (Clark, *The Daily Mail*: 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2005)

As discussed above, the CPC/Play England was initially conceived by former playworkers who had witnessed a steep decline of adventure play in the 1990s in order to promote children's play and freely campaign for more and better provision (particularly adventure play grounds staffed by playworkers). Therefore, such claims for safer and cleaner play areas fit with and are motivated by the CPC/Play England agenda for more and better provisions for supervised adventure play grounds. These claims, it can also be observed, draw on the wider culture that emerged around the beginning of the twenty-first century that sees children's everyday lives as contaminated by a harmful adult world. The significance of conceptualising children's play as a problem around prevailing cultural concerns about children and childhood is discussed in Chapter 7. Indeed, the claims appear to be motivated by a desire to free children from problematised adult behaviour, as the following example illustrates in relation parents' behaviour regarding their children play:

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<sup>12</sup> During this period 2003-2007, the CPC/Play England and the Children's Societies' claims about or in relation to the research they had produced together appeared in 11 articles.

The Children's Play Council says a great many parents don't know how to play anymore with their own offspring. They're too competitive, don't let their children take risks, or use their imagination. Adults "lead" play too much, they turn it into something structured and organised and, actually, not much fun at all. But is it any wonder? If these adults, as children, were being rushed into the next "phase" of life and up, up into adulthood by their parents, what do they remember of playing? (Barbieri, *The Guardian*, 6<sup>th</sup> August 2004)

It is significant that, as the owner of the problem, the CPC/Play England's construction is generally recognised and acknowledged as the best way of understanding the issue. Their construction is adopted by experts, journalists and politicians in their claims, as is evident later on in this current chapter and the next.

As the go-to authority on the issue, the remaining 14 of the 51 articles that feature the CPC/play England include comments on: stories, other articles, other research or campaigns and government policies or funding. For instance, an article in 2005 about a boy receiving £4,000 compensation after falling one foot from a tree in a school playground asks the then director of the organisation, who at the time was Adrian Voce, for his comment and is quoted as saying: 'This is a worrying trend [...]. Local authorities are all too willing to pay and encourage future litigation for this type of accident that most reasonable people would think is a natural part of growing up' (Condron, *The Daily Mail*: 15<sup>th</sup> October 2005).

During the five-year period 2003-2007, in which the CPC/Play England appeared in the greatest number of articles, the organisation underwent two significant changes. Firstly, 2004 saw a change in directorship. Tim Gill, who had been the director for eight years since 1997, who in addition to being a prominent claimmaker (see Table 6.2) co-wrote the report *Making the Case for Play*, was seconded to Whitehall 2002. He was to work with DCMS officials on the research and consultation for a national play review to advise the government and the National Lottery distributor, the New Opportunities Fund (NOF), on how to best spend £200 million of Lottery funding. The report was chaired by Frank Dobson, a former Health Secretary (1997-1999) and someone who has had a longstanding association with play. For instance, before entering parliament as a Labour MP for Holborn and St. Pancras in 1979, he had been a leader of Camden council, a London borough with a strong tradition of staffed play provision, and he was a long-serving chair of Coram's playground in central London. It is important to note that advising the

government on how to best spend £200 million of Lottery funding was the sole objective of the review, it was not in any way concerned with play policy or more specially a national strategy of play as recommended by *Making the Case for Play* (Voce, 2015). The report of the play review, *Getting Serious about Play* (DCMS, 2003), received coverage in a few articles at the beginning of 2004 which feature claims from Tim Gill, as well as Frank Dobson (Frean, *The Times*: 21<sup>st</sup> January 2004; Smithers, *The Guardian*: 27<sup>th</sup> January 2004). The report again received coverage around the time of the Playday event in August, alongside claims from other research the organisation had been involved in conducting (Roberts, *The Guardian*: 4<sup>th</sup> August 2004; Gill, *The Guardian*: 20<sup>th</sup> September 2004). The new director was to be the aforementioned Adrian Voce, a former playworker and director of London Play (1998-2004). In their role as director, the two appeared as frequent claimsmakers in the UK print news media. The table below shows the 10 most frequently appearing claimsmakers in the sample between 2003 and 2016, along with additional details on each claimsmaker. The table illustrates the prominence of Tim Gill and Adrian Voce.

**Table 6.2 Description of 10 most appearing individual claimsmakers**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Number of Articles (n=420)</i>
Adrian Voce	Former playworker Director of London Play (1998-2004) Director of the of CPC/Play England 2004-2011 Consultant on public provision for children's play	Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) Members	18
Tim Gill	The CPC/Play England Policy Officer 1996-1997 Director of the CPC/Play England 1997-2004 Writer and consultant	Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) Members	12
Ed Balls	(Labour MP) Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, 2007-2010	Politician	9
Psychologist - Tanya Byron	Psychologist TV Personality Author of <i>The House of Tiny Tearaways</i>	Expert - Psychologist	8

	Policy advisor		
Bob Reitemeier	Chief Executive of The Children's Society 2002- 2011  Commissioned and oversaw The Good Childhood Inquiry	Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) Members	7
Margaret Morrissey	Parents Outloud founder  OFSTED Lay Inspector and National PTA public relations/press officer	Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) Members	5
Rob Wheway	A consultant for the Child Accident Prevention Trust  Director and Principal Consultant Children's Play Advisory Service	Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) Members	5
Tim Linehan	Director of Campaigns and Media at The Children's Society 1997-2009  Campaign consultant for various charities	Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) Members	5
Sue Palmer	Author Toxic Childhood 2007 and Detoxing Childhood 2007	Author, writer, novelist	5
Mark Griffiths	Psychologist at Nottingham Trent University	Expert -Psychologist	4

Although Voce appears in more articles than Gill, with 18 and 12 respectively in the sample between 2003 and 2016, it is worth pointing out that Gill, as identified above, appeared in 11 articles prior 2003. It is also worth briefly mentioning that after their time as directors, both men gained many personal advantages through social visibility and a rise in prestige. For instance, Gill, who had gained high regard from the government for his work on the national play review, after being director has gone on to advise political parties and think tanks across the political spectrum. He co-authored the government funding publication *Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation Guide* (2008). Also in 2008, he shared the platform with David Cameron and David Willets at the launch of the Conservative Party's Childhood Review. Since being the director, he has come to be regarded as one of the leading writers and thinkers on childhood, appearing regularly on radio and television and he is a consultant to a number of different clients including the National Trust, London Legacy Development Company, Forestry Commission, Mayor of London, Argent plc, UK Play Safety Forum and the CPC/Play England. In a similar vein, after being director, Voce has become a writer and consultant on public provision for children's play and serves on the board of the European Child in the City and is involved in the development of a new non-for-profit vehicles for play work. Voce has also appeared often in the

national media speaking and writing about play policy and was awarded an OBE for services to children in 2011.

Secondly and perhaps more importantly, the organisation evolved from the Children's Play Council (CPC) to Play England in 2006. Voce explains the reasons for this change. He identifies how the Big Lottery Fund (BIG) – a charity sector lottery distributor created as a result of the merging of the NOF with the Community Fund 2004-2005, who are responsible for £200m lottery pledged for children's play programmes across the UK by the Labour Party following the recommendation of the 2004 Play Review – awarded the CPC with a strategic grant to support the Children's Play Initiative (2006-2011). The Children's Play Initiative was a £155m funding initiative for children's play with the aim of creating, improving and developing inclusive play provision across England in the areas of greatest need. The initiative was based on the recommendations of national play review. However, the CPC according to Voce (2015) had begun to get the impression that Big Lottery Fund (BIG) had concerns about their capacity. This was due to the CPC not being a registered charity in its own right, or indeed any other kind of constituted body. As discussed above, the National Children's Bureau (NCB) was legally responsible for the CPC's work, employed all their staff and received and accounted all their finances. Even the use of the term *council* in Children's Play Council (CPC) is argued by Voce to be misleading since it suggests a formal responsibility the organisation did not have. Thus, they decided that 'the time seemed right to establish an independent national play charity. The Play England Project was conceived' (Voce, 2015, p. 101). Voce (2015) explains how the CPC proposed to BIG that Play England should be conceived as a project in its own right. The CPC wanted to create a national body that, in addition to supporting Lottery programmes for play, would have its own broader aims, including 'establishing itself as an independent charity, raising the profile of play, increasing awareness of the benefits and barriers to play opportunities and, crucially, developing the case for play policy with national as well as local government' (Voce, 2015, p. 101-102). In February 2006, following the submission of a grant application, the CPC were awarded £15 million over five years for the "Play England project" and thus the transition from CPC into Play England began. Voce importantly points out that the BIG grant was wide ranging, giving them the capacity for the campaigning and influencing activity needed to make the case for government for play policy, specifically a national strategy of play which they recommended in *Making the Case for Play* (Cole-Hamilton and Gill, 2002).

Voce (2015) states that this campaigning and influencing was notably followed by the CPC/Play England broadening their alliance for play policy to include advocates and campaigners outside the play sector, in order to amplify their message to the public. According to Voce, the highest profile example of this is the 2006 *Dirt is Good* campaign with Persil, which included a national television commercial that was shown for a few weeks between July and August 2006 which coincided with the national Playday event. As well as the CPC/Play England presenting the policy case for government action from some new and different platforms in ways they knew – or hoped – would attract interest from policymakers. For example, the CPC/Play England commissioned Demos, an influential cross-party think tank, to produce a report in order to bring children’s play to the centre of the debate about our relationship with public space, following a Demos essay on the subject by the most senior minister with responsibility for play, Culture Secretary Tessa Jewell (2005b cited in Voce). The report was published in early 2007 entitled *Seen and Heard: Reclaiming the public realm with children and young people* (Beunderman, et al. 2007). The report, according to Voce (2015), resulted in growing support by Ministers for a strategic government play policy. Such Ministers according to Voce (2015) included: David Lammy, The Culture Minister 2005-2007 and former chair of the CPC/Play England and Helen Goodman, who at the time was a junior Minister and had agreed to chair a new All Party Parliamentary Group on Children’s Play.

In 2008, following their campaigning and influencing activity for a national strategy for play, which they recommend in their 2002 DCMS funded report *Making the Case for Play*, the first ever national government Play Strategy was unveiled. In the consultation document for the 10-year strategy called *Fair Play* it is stated that:

All children and young people should be able to find places, near their homes, where they can play freely and meet their friends. They should feel confident and safe to play, both indoors and out, and in a manner that is appropriate to their needs and interests. (DCSF/DCMS 2008b, p. 1)

A summary of the *Fair Play* consultation document by the CPC/Play England states that ‘The strategy sets out government’s proposals on play and is backed by funding of £235 million. The investment, over three years, is to create 3,500 play areas and 30 staffed adventure playgrounds or play parks across the country’ (Play England, 2008, p. 1). The summary also lists the main aims of the strategy, which are as follows:

- In every residential area, there is a variety of places for play, free of charge, supervised and unsupervised,
- Local neighbourhoods are, and feel like, safe, interesting places to play,
- Routes to children's play spaces are safe and accessible for all children and young people,
- Parks and open spaces are attractive and welcoming to children and young people, and are well-maintained and well-used,
- Children and young people have a clear stake in public space and their play is accepted by their neighbours,
- Children and young people behave in a way that respects other people and property,
- Children, young people and their families take an active role in the development of local play spaces, and
- Play places are attractive, welcoming, engaging and accessible for all local children and young people, including disabled children, children of both genders, and children from minority groups in the community. (Play England, 2008, p. 1)

The CPC/Play England were awarded the main government contracts by the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCFS) for the Play Strategy. The DCFS were notably the government department jointly responsible for play policy with DCMS between 2008 and 2010. Interestingly, according to Voce (2015), integral to the Play Strategy was a growth in staffed adventure playgrounds for the first time since their 1970s and 1980s peak. This is perhaps unsurprising given the strategy was recommended and campaigned for by Play England, whose founder members, as well as the director Adrian Voce, were former playworkers schooled in the UK's adventure playgrounds. The unveiling of the Strategy was warmly welcomed by the CPC/Play England in a number of articles, for example, the chair of the CPC/Play England Sandra Melville – who notably in her role as director of Playlink was one of the first claimsmakers to problematise play (see



Table 6.1 above) – states that:

The strategy itself, signals a significant shift in thinking about children and play in our society. The new policy lines are clear. Free play, particularly outdoors, is fundamental to children's learning, healthy growth and development. Children must have access to opportunities for risk taking and planning for play should strike the balance between risks and benefits. Children have a legitimate claim both to places designed specifically for play and to share in the use of public space for their enjoyment. (*The Guardian*: 9<sup>th</sup> April 2008)

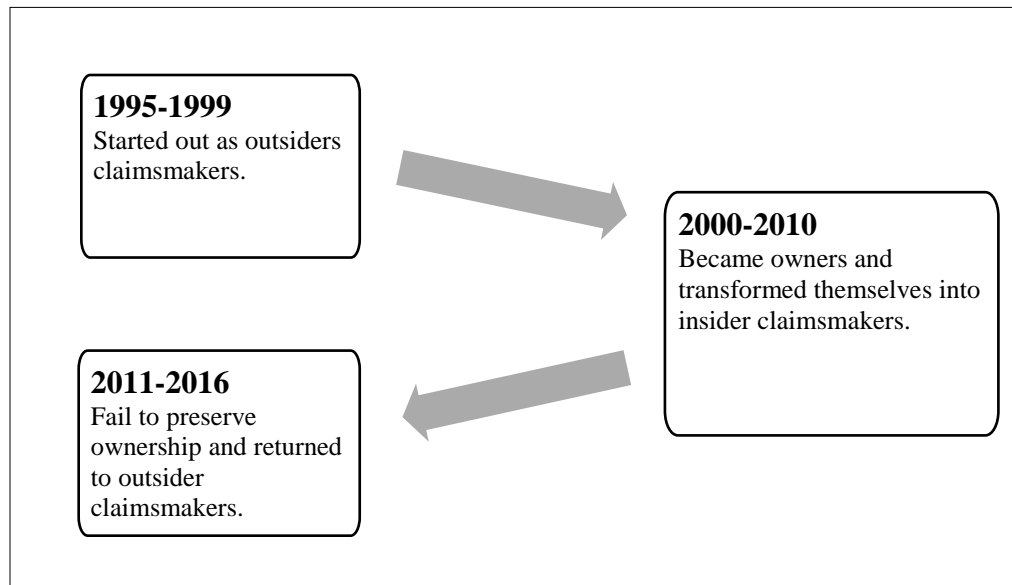
The Play Strategy, as well as the support contracts held by the CPC/Play England and its other partners, were, however, to be one of the first casualties of the new Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government's policy cull, which began soon after it took office in the summer of 2010 (HM Treasury, 2010a, 2010b). Consequently, the 10-year plan was cut less than two and half years after it was unveiled. Following the Play Strategy being discontinued, the CPC/Play England feature in only a few articles condemning the action. For example, a spokesman for the organisation is quoted as saying:

The cuts would be a big disappointment to communities in which playgrounds had not yet been built. We don't argue that play spaces should be out of bounds for cuts when all areas of public spending are being cut [...]. But play shouldn't be seen as a soft target, either - play should not be first in line for cuts, or suffer disproportionately to other areas of children's services. (Vasagar, *The Guardian*: 12<sup>th</sup> August 2010)

However, after 2010 claims by the organisation in articles begin to tail off significantly, with only one or two claims each year and after 2013 not a single claim by the organisation appears in the sample. Since 2014, the organisation has been an independent registered UK charity and is thus no longer hosted by NCB. Interestingly, a consequence of this apparent lack of tending to the topic, coupled with their lack of easy access to policymakers following the demise of the Play Strategy, resulting in the loss of government contracts, is that it can be argued that they have failed to preserve their status as owners and instead returned to operating as outsider claimsmakers once more. As such, it can be observed that the organisation has been through

some significant transformations from their initial problematising claims to 2016 regarding their ‘status’ in the claimsmaking process.<sup>13</sup> These transformations are illustrated in the figure below.

**Figure 6.4 Transforming status of the CPC/Play England in the claimsmaking process**



The figure shows how the CPC/Play England, between 1995 and 1999, started out as a newly formed NGO that operated as an outsider claimsmaker without direct access to policymakers. During the 2000-2010 period, the CPC/Play England then went on to become the go-to authority on the issue and gained direct access to policymakers, transforming themselves into owners of the issue and insider claimsmakers. From 2011 to 2016, they went on to lose their status as owners through their failure to tend to the issue and returned to outsider claimsmakers with a loss of direct access to policymakers following their loss of government contracts.

It is important to emphasise that the CPC/Play England, although they can be argued to no longer be the problem’s owner or an insider, state on their website that the organisation:

Campaigns for all children and young people to have freedom and space to play throughout childhood. We work with national partners, corporates and other organisations with shared aims to raise awareness about the importance of play. We lobby government to make fundamental policy

<sup>13</sup> The term ‘status’ is used here to refer to ownership and insiders or outsiders.

changes to protect and promote play, and encourage everyone who has an impact on the lives of children and young people to recognise and plan for children's play. (Play England, 2017)

One of the national partners with whom they work is the Wild Network, an NGO that can be described a collaboration between large and small organisations to let children get back what they refer to as "wild time", thus reversing the trend of children losing touch with the natural world and playing outdoors. Since 2013, when the organisation was launched, it has appeared in five articles in the sample. In one such article, Mark Sears from the network says that 'Parents see the value of outdoor play and still it doesn't happen. Outdoor time is shrinking. It is a gigantic paradox' (Carrington, *The Guardian*: 25<sup>th</sup> March 2016). It is also important to emphasise that despite the owner's failure to maintain their ownership and no other individual or organisation taking ownership through sustained claimsmaking, claimsmaking about the problem in the past few years has remained. This perhaps gives some indication of how well established the problem has become.

Finally, it is worth taking a few moments here to discuss Play Scotland (Scotland's version of Play England) and the 2013 Play Strategy for Scotland. Although Play Scotland only featured in four articles in the sample following the axing of the National Play in 2010, according to the Play Scotland's website they took their petition for a statutory duty for play to the Scottish Parliament in 2012. The Public Petition's Committee considered Petition PE1440 and the evidence presented by Play Scotland, the British Medical Association and the International Play Association in September and December 2012. In response to the Petition's Committee the Minister for Children and Young People, Aileen Campbell announced there would be a National Play Strategy for Scotland in July 2013 and in October 2013 The Play Strategy Action Plan was launched. The Action Plan states that the Play Strategy 'seeks to improve the play experiences of all children and young people' and that:

It aims to ensure all children and young people can access play opportunities in a range of settings which offer variety, adventure and challenge. They must be able to play freely and safely while learning to manage risks and make choices about where, how and when they play according to their age, stage, ability and preference. (The Scottish Government, 2013)

The actions of the action plan are set in the short-term (approximately six to 12 months), medium-term (approximately one to three years) and long-term (three plus years). More recently in 2017, Play Scotland, building on the Play Strategy, developed and promoted Scotland's first inclusive Play Charter. The charter has received cross-party support at the Scottish Parliament, it 'is for all those with an interest in and responsibility for play. This includes service providers, professionals, elected members and community representatives as well as children and young people and their families' (Play England, 2017a). Regarding the charter, Play Scotland's website states that 'Children and young people have the need and the right to play indoors and outdoors in welcoming and stimulating environments' and goes to say that 'Through play children have fun; develop and learn; assess and manage risk; use their imaginations and create new experiences that contribute to their health; wellbeing and a happy childhood' (Play England, 2017b).

### **6.3 Diffusion of the problem**

Before discussing the diffusion of the problem, it is worth briefly reiterating what diffusion is and its relevance to the sociology of social problems. As discussed in Chapter 3, diffusion refers to the process by which things spread among people, involving the spread of innovation from transmitter to adaptor via channels. Best (2001; 2008) suggests that the study of diffusion has particular relevance to the sociology of social problems. He proposes that all claimsmaking is a form of diffusion, which is the spread of some innovation from the claimsmakers (transmitters) to try to persuade audiences (adapters) about social problems (the object of diffusion).

#### ***6.3.1 Rapid diffusion, widespread affirmation***

Many different types of people and organisations from diverse backgrounds comment on the issue or variously mobilise their claims in support of arguments, without necessarily taking up a position as a dedicated proponent. This suggests the issue's character is relatively fluid and permissive. While attempts are on occasion made to define the problem, they are rarely precise or static.<sup>14</sup> Avoiding specifying a problem's exact scope means the problem can be appropriated to

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<sup>14</sup> Definitions of the problem, as discussed in detail in Chapter 7, are achieved implicitly through concerns being linked to and/or causes of a decline or lack of children's outdoor play.

suit a wide array of claims, linking it to diverse concerns about, for example, children's health, childhood, parenting and so on. Therefore, the communication of social problems in such imprecise terms, far from being an analytical weakness, aids a rapid diffusion (or spread) and widespread affirmation. As discussed in Chapter 3, *theorization* (i.e. the presentation of claims that emphasise general, abstract principles and arguments) makes diffusion of a problem easier and more rapid.

Further contributing to a social problem's rapid diffusion and widespread formation is the valence character of the issue, which as discussed in Chapter 3 refers to an issue's uncontroversial character and its tendency to foster consensus. The valence nature of the issue means that although advocates may not agree on particular aspects of the problem, the importance of the issue itself tends to receive widespread affirmation. The valence character of claims about children's play is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

### ***6.3.2 The claimsmaking process and channels of diffusion***

Another conclusion can be drawn from the above results regarding how the problem has been diffused. The diffusion of the problem can be observed to follow the typical route of a new social problem, as modelled by Best (2008), whereby problems are articulated by the initial claimsmakers (as shown, most of the initial claimsmakers, to problematise the issue between 1992-1994 were from outsider NGOs and so too, albeit initially, were the most influential and determined claimsmakers the CPC/Play England), given a hearing via the media (particularly important given the initial claimsmakers status as outsider claimsmakers), and finally move on to policymakers who take them on board if they fit with their wider policy views and aims at the time.

In addition, two channels of diffusion can be observed to be at work: relational channels and nonrelational channels. Relational channels of diffusion occur through formal ties (such as memberships and government contracts) and informal ties (such as acquaintances at conferences and events or from involvement in other previous campaigns or organisations). At the same time, information about the problem flows through nonrelational channels, through the press and to the general population. As Best notes (2001, 2008), this is far from unusual: the diffusion of claims usually combines both channels and both channels are mutually reinforcing.

These points, however, cannot be understood without considering additional major categories of claimsmaker as identified in the sample, and the symbiotic (or mutually beneficial) relationships between them which have fostered the success of claims about children's play as a problem. These include the *experts*, who although not taking the issue and making it their own, affirm its importance. The *journalists*, and more specifically those journalists who go beyond translating and transforming claims for media consumption and passing judgment on the issue, make recommendations, or raise concerns. Finally, *politicians* affirm the claims made about the issue and take on their significance as central to their activities. Each of these different types of claimsmaker are the subject of the subsequent sections.

## 6.4 Experts

So far, it has been shown that a diversity of claimsmakers have affirmed the existence of the problem, commented on it and/or institutionalised its claims into policy. The role that outsiders, and more specifically the CPC/Play England, have played in broadcasting the problem to the general population via the media and pressing it into the policy agenda has also been investigated. The present section will consider the role of experts in affirming the importance of the problem. It will go on to consider the knowledge that experts are presumed to possess having such a high value in the claimsmaking process that it is used as a commodity.

### 6.4.1 *Experts' affirmation of the importance of the problem*

As previously noted, it is the category of "experts" to which the majority of claimsmakers identified in the sample belong. However, as also previously noted, none of the 83 experts who appear in the sample are dedicated campaigners for the issue in the news media. Despite this lack of dedicated expert campaigners, through constant dissemination of claims, experts have played an essential role in affirming the importance of the problem. A major reason is that people turn to experts since they presume they command "special knowledge" (e.g. training, equipment, vocabulary, etc.) that they themselves don't have and which qualifies them to interpret social problems, therefore according to Best (2008) they rank among the most influential

claimsmakers.<sup>15</sup> Significantly, these expert claims have played an essential role in affirming the importance of the problem. The type and relative portions of expert claimsmakers identified in the sample are illustrated by the figure below.<sup>16</sup>

**Figure 6.5 Types of expert claimsmakers identified in the sample**



<sup>15</sup> It is worth pointing out here, as argued in Chapter 3, all knowledge is socially constructed, people consider experts knowledge to be more accurate than gossip or other less authoritative sorts of knowledge that from our own experience we know can often prove wrong. Therefore, people tend to consider expert knowledge as relatively correct. Put simply people turn to experts for their sound information base and high-quality evidence. Experts are commonly assumed to be impartial judges, e.g. their scientific findings grounded in fact rather than opinions. Best (2008) however, emphasises that experts often have an interest in promoting claims (e.g. experts stand to benefit from the ownership of social problems as discussed in Chapter 3), and when they become advocates for particular positions or policies, they are not necessarily guided exclusively by their expert knowledge.

<sup>16</sup> The category of experts identified as 'Psychologist, psychiatrist, other "psychs"' also includes two neuroscientists, one therapist and one counsellor. The category of experts identified as 'Medical' also includes one immunologist. The category of experts identified as 'others' includes: an architect, a building engineer, a nutritionist, a researcher, a town planner. As well as an expert in an art, an expert in English, Media and Drama, an expert in humanities an expert in social policy, an expert in transport studies, and an expert in toy research.

It can clearly be observed that psychologists, psychiatrists and other "psychs" are the most frequently appearing type of experts. It is worth pointing out that psychologists since the twentieth century have studied the importance of play in relation to the psychological value of play and its significance to a child's intellectual, social, and emotional development (see Chapter 1). It is worth pointing out that psychologists (such as, for example, Mark Griffiths and Aric Sigman) also made claims problematising the issue in the previous period, 1992-2002 (see Chapter 5). The claims from this type of expert that appear most often argue that a decline of play may have a detrimental impact on children psychologically. For instance, consider an article in *The Daily Mail* which reports on psychologist David Whitebread's research titled 'The Importance of Play':

Children's play is under threat from adults who over-supervise and over-scheduled a report says. It says youngsters cannot develop normally and are play deprived because of our risk-averse, regimented lifestyles. This means many lack vital skills such as resourcefulness, independence or self-regulation. (Harris, *The Daily Mail*, 1<sup>st</sup> June 2013)

In a similar vein, psychologist Peter Gray in an article also in *The Daily Mail* argues that a decline of unsupervised play in local neighbourhoods is creating a generation of children who have not learned how to empathise with others. He states that 'Free play is how children practise taking charge of their own lives. When children are continuously managed by adults, they don't develop an internal locus of control [...]. To play with other children you must please them as well. That means overcoming narcissistic tendencies' (Freeman, *The Daily Mail*: 17<sup>th</sup> March 2014). Psychologists also argue that playing on computer games instead of playing outdoors may have a detrimental impact on children psychologically. A prominent example is psychologist Mark Griffith, who also notably makes similar claims in the previous period 1992-2002 (see Chapter 5). Comments on his research on addiction to playing online fantasy games, said that:

Most online games do not have particularly 'adult' content, and children could succumb to the same addiction symptoms as adults. In the last 20 years, I have shown there is a small but significant number of children who do play computer games to excess, [...]. If it's not affecting their schoolwork and social skills, there is nothing wrong. But in the 90s I found that one in 20 children were playing for 30 hours a week. Children should be out doing physical activity, interacting-with friends and carrying out their education. (Hale, *The Daily Mail*: 29<sup>th</sup> November 2006)



Another similar example is comments made by psychologist Dr Tanya Byron on her review for the government on the risks of computer games and the internet that featured in around half a dozen articles in 2008 (discussed in more detail in Chapter 5).

The second most noticeable type of expert is medical experts, whose claims similarly reflect their field of expertise. For example, one article reports on a study by immunologist Ken Jones, which argues that 'modern trends of keeping the PlayStation [a computer game console] generation in a "sterile bubble" and not allowing them to play out and get dirty could be damaging their ability to fight infection' (Cook, *The Daily Mirror*: 26<sup>th</sup> September 2007). Another example is an article reporting on a British Medical Association (BMA) annual conference, which reports how doctors demanded that the government invest in children's play to help to boost children's health and tackle obesity. The article quotes Sue Robertson, a hospital doctor in Scotland, who argues that:

We must not forget the benefits of encouraging children to play outside. It's free, it's fun, it makes you feel better and everyone can do it. Children are becoming less active for a number of reasons, but primarily because there are less outdoor areas where children can play and many parents are concerned about the safety of those areas. (Campbell, *The Guardian*: 26<sup>th</sup> June 2012)

Similar examples affirming the importance of the problem by experts that reflect an expert's field of expertise can be found across many of the different types of expert identified. Therefore, as well as affirming the importance of the problem through their continual claims, because their claims typically reflect an expert's field of expertise, they contribute to expanding the problem's domain which in turn helps the topic to remain fresh and interesting. As Best (2008) notes, this is important in preventing audience members shifting away as soon as a new issue arrives. Additionally, the constant dissemination of claims by experts on the topic also provides an opportunity for the problem's owner, the CPC/Play England, to be turned to by the media as the go-to authority on the issue for their comments on the expert claims. For instance, an article reporting on the study of Roger Mackett, Professor of Transport Studies at University College London, on Children's Physical Activity, includes a comment by Tim Gill who said that 'the research provided scientific evidence of the importance of play in reducing obesity' (Frean, *The Times*: 1<sup>st</sup> June 2004).

### 6.4.2 *Knowledge as a commodity*

Experts are presumed to have "special knowledge" in claimsmaking, which is utilised by many of the non-expert claimsmakers who try to draw attention to the issue (Best, 2008). Knowledge can therefore be thought of as an important commodity in claimsmaking, as social problems claims begin with grounds statements (as discussed in Chapter 3, these are statements about the facts concerning the troubling condition). The grounds of claims for the problem at hand will be analysed in the next chapter.

One way in which non-expert claimsmakers utilise this "special knowledge" is by referring to expert claims on or related to the issue. For instance, an article by Tim Gill in 2004 (who by this time was the outgoing director of the CPC/Play England) on the decline of children going out to play refers to two pieces of research conducted by experts. He refers to the classic *One False Move* study conducted by Hillman et al. (1990) on children's independent mobility, saying that 'It suggests that, in a single generation, the "home habitat" of a typical eight-year-old – the area in which children are able to travel on their own – has shrunk to one-ninth of its former size' (Gill, *The Guardian*: 20<sup>th</sup> September 2004). He then discusses the negative consequences of this decline by stating that: 'Health experts agree that the decline in outdoor play is linked to child obesity - a position supported by recent research on children's activity levels from Professor Roger Mackett at UCL' (Gill, *The Guardian*: 20<sup>th</sup> September 2004). Importantly, claimsmakers sometimes refer to an expert's research without referring to the experts who originally conducted the research. For example, Adrian Voce in relation to expert findings states that: 'Research suggests that child mental-health problems, including hyperkinetic disorders such as ADHD, may be due to constraints on play' (Voce, *The Guardian*: 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2008). It is important to emphasise, as does Loseke (2003), that the claims made by experts might be interpreted by non-expert claimsmakers in ways the experts did not intend or even support.

Another way non-expert claimsmakers utilise this knowledge is by commissioning experts to carry out research on their behalf. Notably, in this sense, this knowledge is used as a literal commodity being marketed and sold. For example, an article in 2008 which reports on research carried out at a university on behalf of the CPC/Play England, states that: 'Next month, research carried out at the University of Gloucestershire, for Play England, will show that playing builds

and shapes regions of the brain that concern emotion, motivation and reward' (Asthana and Revill, *The Observer*: 30<sup>th</sup> March 2008a).<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps the most significant way non-expert claimsmakers utilise this knowledge in regard to making claims that draw attention to the issue is to collect their own information by conducting research. In other words, non-expert claimsmakers adopt some of the "special knowledge" to make claims. This is particularly relevant regarding the problem's owners. For instance, from the discussion above, it is evident that from the late 1990s the CPC/Play England uses "special knowledge" to generate their own information by conducting research. This initially happens in coalition with other NGOs and in later years it is possible because they become more skilled in conducting such research, coupled with their government contact including a policy and research element. However, and with whomever the research was conducted, the information produced dominates the CPC/Play England's claimsmaking and undoubtedly plays an essential role in them achieving ownership of the issues. Other non-experts in addition to the CPC/Play England use "special knowledge" to collect their own information by conducting research. Prominent examples include Barnardo's and Child Accident Prevention Trust (CAPT), both of which are discussed in more detail in the previous chapter. A major reason why these non-experts begin to collect their own information, particularly during "the emergence of the problem" period, is that little information was available and no experts were studying the issue yet. The only information on the issue that did come from experts, the most prominent example of which is the Hillman et al.'s (1990) study on children's independent mobility, are not focused on the issue. Therefore, these non-expert claims generated the sort of information that experts had failed to collect in order to fill what would otherwise have been a gap in their claimsmaking.

## 6.5 Journalists

News workers, like all media workers, do not only just transmit primary claims made by others (e.g. experts, NGOs, and so on); they typically translate and transform them by making them shorter, more dramatic and less ideological. Best (1990) refers to these as *secondary claims*.

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<sup>17</sup> Notably as well as commissioning experts to conduct research on nonexperts behalf they may commission polling organisations, who although not classed as experts in the present study use this special knowledge to conduct their research.

Secondary claims are important according to Best (1990) since the public's sense of social problems is more likely to derive from this type of claim rather than from primary claims, which is a key reason why the media is chosen as the ideal site to study the problematisation of children's play. Some journalists, however, play a more active role in problematising the issue which goes beyond simply translating and transforming the issue for media consumption, by passing judgment, making recommendations, or raising concerns. These journalists, as explained in Chapter 4, for the purposes of this study, are the only journalists identified as claimsmakers. To clarify, journalists were only identified as claimsmakers if they packaged claims in an overtly supportive or negative way, offered criticism or encouragement or otherwise communicated the issue in a manner that revealed their own opinions or views.

It is essential to emphasise two points here. First, although it is only journalists who play a more active role in problematising the issue who are identified as claimsmakers, this is in no way meant to suggest that other journalists not identified as claimsmakers are inconsequential in the social problem process, since they are media gatekeepers for claims and translate and transform them into secondary claims. The importance of this is discussed in detail in Chapter 4. Secondly, although 70 of the 302 individual claimsmakers in the sample are journalists (see Figure 6.1), this should not be taken to suggest that journalists play a leading role in the problematisation of children's play, but reflects the medium from which the data were collected.

Before examining these journalists, it is important to point out that in addition to the importance of competition stressed in Chapter 3 (which culminates in the analysis detailed in Chapter 7), certain characteristics of *news work* – 'The job of locating and presenting news to the larger public' (Best 2008, p. 340) – make it more likely that the claimsmakers detailed so far are able to gain an audience for their claims. One such characteristic in particular is the tendency for journalists to focus on affirmative claimsmaking over being critical. Peter Sandman, in his insightful study on mass media and environmental risk, suggests that, 'Missing a problem is a much greater journalistic sin than overstating it. The possibility that X is dangerous thus makes the story worth covering' (Sandman, 1994, p. 254). The nature of the problem as a valence issue intensifies the tendency toward affirmative claimsmaking, since journalists will not consider themselves obliged to balance their coverage and thus take and affirm the rhetoric (Best, 2008).

In investigating the content of journalistic claims, it is clear that the vast majority do not question the validity of the claims or their basis or justification on which they are based. For example, one journalist described a survey by the CPC/Play England and the Children's Society for National Playday as revealing 'worrying figures about children's lack of freedom to play outside' and goes on to state that children's play:

[...] stimulates the imagination, develops social skills, introduces the young to calculating risk, encourages exercise and excitement. Yet, whenever two or more children are gathered together, sooner or later a crabby grown up, influenced by those two magic words, "antisocial behaviour", will start bellowing objections and issuing orders. (Roberts, *The Guardian*: 6<sup>th</sup> August 2003)

Another journalist, regarding research conducted at the University of Plymouth finding that children don't play enough, writes that they are 'in full agreement with the core of the Plymouth findings' and that 'Children – big and small – simply don't play anymore, unless you include sitting like a lump in front of a computer screen' (Knight, *The Sunday Times*: 11<sup>th</sup> September 2005). A further journalist states that research conducted for National Playday by the CPC/Play England and the Children's Society 'show[s] that many of today's youngsters are being kept in by nervous parents and the lure of PlayStations and TV' and concludes that 'So what has progress brought us? A generation living in fear. Stuck indoors, growing fat and pale through too many e-numbers and a lack of exercise' (Reade, *The Daily Mirror*: 4<sup>th</sup> August 2005).

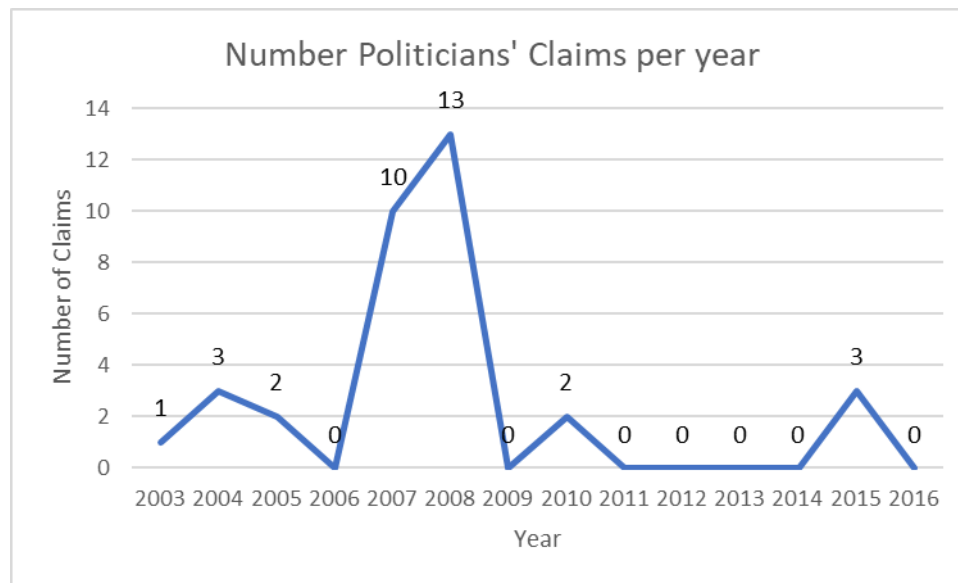
As gatekeepers to the media, journalists transform primary claims for media consumption and, as such, securing the contact, interest and the support of journalists can be a crucial element in the successful dissemination of claims about a new problem. Notably, in some cases, journalists go beyond being merely gatekeepers and play an active role in problematising an issue. Whether acting as gatekeepers to the media or playing an active role in problematising an issue, the attention and support of journalists has undoubtedly enabled children's play claims to gain a hearing.

## 6.6 Politicians

Politicians joined claimsmaking about children's predominantly between 2007 and 2008, when the Labour government launched a campaign to encourage parents to let children play outside

(discussed in the previous chapter), and more significantly announced and then later launched the national Play Strategy. The Figure below show that the highest number of claims by politicians was in 2007 and 2008.

**Figure 6.6 Number of politicians' claims per year identified in the sample**



The most prominent of these politicians is former Labour MP Ed Balls, who was Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families between 2007 and 2010. Balls' claims appear in nine articles (see Appendix D), all of which were between 2007 and 2008. That Balls' claims appear in nine articles as shown in Table 6.2 makes him the third most frequently appearing individual claimsmaker in the sample behind Adrian Voce and Tim Gill. In one of his first acts as the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, Balls launched a campaign to encourage parents to take children outdoors to play following a 2007 consultation document entitled *Staying Safe*, which calls for more children to play outdoors. In launching this campaign, his claims about the issue appear in a several articles in the sample. For example, consider one article titled 'Let our children take more risks, urges Minister' where Balls is quoted as saying that 'Parents who are too protective and keep children "locked up indoors" are leaving them unprepared for adult

life' and that parents should "strike the right balance" between protecting children and allowing them the freedom to play' (Clark, *The Daily Mail*: 18<sup>th</sup> July 2007).<sup>18</sup>

Later on that year, Balls announced the government's plans for a national Play Strategy. It is important to note that Balls announced the government's intentions to produce such a strategy at the end of 2007, according to Voce (2015), as it was a central part of his new Children's Plan. This was the government's renewed policy for integrated education, social care and health services that aimed to refresh its Every Child Matters framework of universal outcomes for children, with the even bolder aim to make England 'the best place to grow up in the world' (DCSF, 2007). Balls' announcement appeared in a number of articles in the sample, along with his claims about why such a strategy is important. For example, in one article Balls is quoted as saying that 'he wanted to move away from the "no ball games" culture of the past, which curtailed the freedom of children and young people to learn and develop by playing independently outside the home' and in outlining the strategy went onto say that the 'The main message that children and young people have given us is that they wanted more and better things to do, particularly after school and at the weekends' (Frean, *The Times*: 12<sup>th</sup> December 2007). Balls' claims also appeared in articles just before and during the launch of the Strategy in 2008. For instance, just before the launch of the strategy, Balls stated that:

We know 80 per cent of children prefer to play outside and 86 per cent of parents agreed that on a nice day their children would prefer to go to the park than watch TV [...]. Yet children spend less time playing outside than they would like and less than their parents did as children, (Asthana and Revill, *The Observer*: 30<sup>th</sup> March 2008a)

At the launch of the Strategy by Balls and Culture Secretary Andy Burnham at an adventure playground in south London, Balls emphasised that children want more than "boring" swings and slides, stating that:

There is a general lack of quality, supervised adventure play for 8 to 13-year-olds. If you don't want to do something a bit risky, too often people say, 'We can't do that because of health and safety'. It is the risk aversion in

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<sup>18</sup> See the previous chapter for other similar example of articles that feature claims from Ed Balls in relation to the launch of the campaign.

some cases which stops things happening, which I want to tackle. (Freaan, *The Times*: 4<sup>th</sup> April 2008)

Ed Balls, however, is not the only politician making claims during this two-year period. For example, some politicians such as Labour Party member and Deputy Mayor of London, Nicky Gavron, supported the Strategy, stating that ‘This couldn't be more welcome. It's the first serious national play strategy and it's backed by serious investment’ (*The Guardian*: 9<sup>th</sup> April 2008). Other politicians, particularly those from opposing political parties, disagreed with the action the Labour government had taken to deal with the problem.<sup>19</sup> A prominent example comes from Conservative Shadow Children's Secretary Michael Gove, who argues that ‘Parents and children need more than warm words from Ed Balls about creating exciting areas to play’ (Freaan, *The Times*: 4<sup>th</sup> April 2008). In another article with the headline ‘Ministers attacked over school fields sale: Pledge to safeguard play areas broken £ 225m boost for children's activities’, Gove argues that at the same time the government are launching a strategy to get children to play, they are also selling off school playing fields: ‘It is ironic that the government is selling off school playing fields on the eve of a campaign to get children to lead more active lives’ (Asthana and Reville, *The Observer*: 30<sup>th</sup> March 2008b). Notably, it is Gove, following the general election in 2010 in which the coalition government took office and axed the Strategy, who is quoted to have said that ‘the government believed play was "an important part of childhood" but stressed that leisure facilities had to be subject to budget cuts alongside other services’ (Vasagar, *The Guardian*: 12<sup>th</sup> August 2010).

Politicians, then, only tend to enter claimsmaking on the issue regarding policies to address it. By the time they did this, the issue had already been receiving growing attention in the media over the course of a number of years, while many different types of claimsmaker had added their voice to the issue and expanded its domain. As such, the issue follows the typical route of a new social problem, in which the initial claims flow from initial claimsmakers, to the media and finally onto policymakers who take them on board if they fit with their wider policy views and aims at the time.

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<sup>19</sup> Disagreement over the action that should be taken to address the problem, i.e. claims conclusions, are discussed in detail in the next chapter.



## 6.7 Summary and Conclusions

Some important conclusions on the construction of children's play as a social problem can be drawn through consideration of the preceding discussion as a whole. Although many people make claims about children's play, only one claimmaker – the CPC/Play England – can be identified as the "owner" in the sense of being integral to the construction of the issue. The large number of claimmakers reveals the issue's expansive and growing reach, but it is the CPC/Play England that enacts a concentrated campaign to push the issue to the forefront of the public agenda. As an NGO that is an outsider to claimmaking processes, as most of the initial claimmakers on the issue are, the CPC/Play England started their campaign with limited resources. However, in their early years of claimmaking, they collected and assembled the resources needed to make their claims successful. For example, they formed coalitions with other NGOs, often those that operated as insiders and were more skilled in claimmaking and attracting the media. Through their achievement of ownership, the CPC/Play England obtained a number of benefits, not least being awarded the main government contracts for the Play Strategy which included investment for to create 3,500 play areas and 30 staffed adventure playgrounds or play parks across the country. Such investment for more and better provision, particular adventure playgrounds, is the organisations key agenda behind their claims.

Diffusion of the issue follows a typical path of a new social problem, beginning with outsider NGOs claims, which, via a receptive media, are finally taken up by policymakers. The diffusion of claims also fosters a symbiotic relationship between the CPC/Play England (and other NGOs), experts, journalists and politicians. Experts, as one of the most influential claimmakers, are assumed to be best placed to interpret social problems; their claims play an essential role in affirming the importance of the problem and, moreover, the initial claims made by outsider NGOs. Outsider NGOs also utilise the "special knowledge" associated with experts in various ways to add authority to their claims. The support of journalists, who are gatekeepers to the media, is critical to NGOs claims getting attention, particularly initial claims made by outsider NGOs like the CPC/ Play England. One particular characteristic of news work has facilitated journalists support of the issue is the tendency to favour affirmative claimmakers. Politicians awarded the CPC/Play England government contracts related to children's play following their claimmaking on the issue. As part of these contracts the CPC/Play England produced research

for the government and aided in the governments implementation of play policies. It was in relation to these play policies that politicians made a number of claims about the issue.

## 7 Rhetorical Analysis of Children's Play Claims

The preceding chapter examined the diverse array of claimsmakers who have contributed to the image of a lack or decline in children's play as a social problem. However, as Best (1987) in his seminal work on the study of rhetoric in claimsmaking observes: 'While the success of claimsmaking may well depend, in part, on the constellation of interests and resources held by various constituencies in the process, the way claims are articulated also affects whether they persuade and move the audience to which they are addressed' (p. 102). Therefore, to explain the success of the problem in national newspapers, it is necessary to analyse the rhetoric of claims in addition to those claimsmakers who make them.

As was the case in the second phase of the study presented in the previous chapter, this third and final phase takes the most recent period (2003-2016) as its starting point. The focus in this most recent period is to analyse in depth the result of insights emerging from tracking the discourse of children's play, which in 2003 to 2016 was observed to have reached significant heights. Insights emerging in the process of data gathering and analysis is in line with the core tenets of QMA. This chapter details the results of a rhetorical analysis of claims from a sample comprising 79 articles and seeks to describe what the problem "is" as a series of persuasive arguments. It hence offers answers to the remaining questions two through to five that guide this research: What sort of problem do claimsmakers say that children's play is? How do the constructs evolve? How did they come to prevail? And what are their consequences? In addition, since claims must reflect the cultural understandings about how the world works – or should work – in order to be persuasive (Best, 2008),<sup>1</sup> it follows that successful claims provide a window into the culture that produced them. In this way, the study of the problematisation of children's play becomes the study of culture.

The ensuing analysis follows Best's (1987) analytical technique for analysing the rhetorical structure of claims and therefore begins with grounds, which are 'statements about the nature of the problem' (Best, 2008, p. 31). Warrants that justify taking action are considered next, followed

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<sup>1</sup> The importance of taking into account the cultural context when analysing social problems is discussed at length in Chapter 3.

by conclusions that explain what action should be taken. It is important to note the researcher is central here as the study of rhetoric in terms of grounds, warrants and conclusions is an analytical device and not a conscious approach taken by claimsmakers, the centrality of the researcher in QMA, as stated in Chapter 4, is a key reason for selecting QMA as opposed to other similar methodologies. Although a larger number of claims about the problem have been forwarded, the main types of grounds, warrants and conclusions into which claims fall are examined with an emphasis on claims that recur most frequently and their development over time. Discussion about the relationship between rhetoric and cultural context is presented towards the end of the chapter.

## 7.1 Grounds

Grounds are usually assertions of fact: that is, they argue the condition exists and offer supporting evidence (Best, 2008). Although facts themselves are socially constructed knowledge, they serve as the foundation on which arguments are based (Best, 1987). Best (1987) importantly goes on to state that ‘Claimsmakers and their audience may agree to accept grounds statements without question, or one or both may have reservations about the statements’ truth, their relevance, the methods used to establish them, and so on’ (p. 104). In reference to this statement, Best (1987) notes that his approach to analysing the rhetorical structure of claims ‘treats the empirical truth of claims as problematic’ and that ‘examining the rhetoric of claimsmaking does not require establishing the validity of a particular claim’ (p. 104).

Six types of ground are identified in the sample: (1) concerns linked or attached to a decline or lack of outdoor play, (2) causes of a decline or lack of outdoor play, (3) terminology and names for outdoor play, (4) definitions and descriptions of outdoor play, (5) statistics identifying a decline or lack of children’s outdoor play, and (6) identifying the people harmed by a decline or lack of outdoor play (all grounds are fully listed in Appendix E). Although it could be argued that both grounds (3) and (4) do not fit Best’s definitions of grounds exactly, they do define the problem’s keywords which is essential to establishing the nature of the problem and therefore are identified as grounds.

The six grounds identified can be described as falling into four groupings: defining the problem, defining the problems keywords, numerical estimates of the problem, and statement about the people involved. The first grouping includes both grounds (1) and (2), which are used

individually and together to implicitly define the problem. The second grouping includes grounds (3) and (4), which name and define the problem's keywords (although the two do not always coexist). The third grouping includes ground (5), which suggests the scope of the problem. The fourth and final grouping includes ground (6), which identifies the kind of people affected by the problem. These groupings are illustrated in the table below which lists each of the groupings next to their corresponding grounds.

**Table 7.1 Groupings of the grounds**

<i>Groupings</i>	<i>Grounds</i>
Defining the problem	(1) Concerns linked or attached to a decline or lack of outdoor play (2) Causes of a decline or lack of outdoor play
Defining the problems keywords	(3) Terminology and names for outdoor play (4) Definitions and descriptions of outdoor play
Numerical estimates of the problem	(5) Statistics identifying a decline or lack of outdoor play
The kinds of people affected	(6) Claims about the people harmed by a decline or lack of outdoor play

These grounds frequently combine to form a successful 'rhetorical recipe', but deviate from the 'basic rhetorical recipe' observed by Best (2008, p. 31-33) as existing across the construction of many social problems – moving from a *typifying example*<sup>2</sup> presented as characteristic of an issue, a name (that is often "catchy"), followed by statistics suggesting the scope of the problem. Each of the four groupings of the grounds are discussed in turn below.

### **7.1.1 Defining the problem**

According to Best (2008), many social problem claimsmakers tend to avoid explicitly defining a social problem. This is because defining any particular social problem condition is not only potentially limiting but long and detailed definitions are unlikely to grab audience members' attention in the competitive *social problems marketplace*.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, according to Loseke (2003), claimsmakers also tend to avoid explicitly defining the condition of a social problem, as what should be included in any social problem condition is a potential source of disagreement. For instance, 'Some people, [...] evaluate the "recreational" use of marijuana very differently

<sup>2</sup> Best (2008) defines typifying examples as 'A particular instance chosen to illustrate a troubling condition - often a dramatic, disturbing, or memorable case' (p. 342). Typifying examples are also discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 of this study.

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion on the *social problems marketplace*.

from cocaine or heroin use, others believe that marijuana is no different from cocaine or heroin' (Loseke, 2003, p. 56). Claimsmakers do name problems, for example child abuse, racism, road rage, etc., although as Best (2008) points out, this is not the same as defining a problem. According to Best (2008), instead of defining the condition, they focus on typifying examples that are chosen to illustrate the seriousness of the problem, so they tend to be extreme, dramatic, disturbing, memorable cases which offer an implicit definition. In other words, claimsmakers use one or two examples and then allow the audience to "fill in the blanks", as opposed to explicitly specifying the condition (Loseke, 2003). Additionally, because these typifying examples tend to be especially extreme, dramatic, disturbing, memorable cases, they are not only as Best (2008) notes usually anything but typical, but perhaps more significantly particularly emotive and serve to moralise a problem in a way that would be more difficult were claimsmakers to offer an explicit definition. Consequently, audience members are more likely to evaluate the social problem as intolerable.

As mentioned above, the successful "rhetorical recipe" diverges from Best's (2008) "basic rhetorical recipe" of typifying examples, a name, and a big number. The rhetorical recipe for children's play claims, although it includes statistics suggesting the scope of the problem discussed later in the chapter, does not include disturbing typifying examples that offer an implicit definition of the problem. Neither does it include the problem being named. Instead, the rhetorical recipe for children's play claims defines the problem through concerns being linked to and/or causes of a decline or lack of outdoor play.

By working in this way, claimsmakers avoid the potential limitations and sources of disagreement that often come with explicitly defining the problem, and instead offer implicit definitions of the problem in a similar way to the typifying examples. However, they do so in a way that is more appropriate for a problem like children's play, which is not straightforwardly problematic with extreme, dramatic, disturbing, memorable cases such as new crimes.

The following typical examples below illustrate how defining the problem in claims is achieved implicitly through grounds (1) concerns linked or attached to a decline of children's play through concerns being linked to a decline or lack of outdoor play, and/or (2) causes of a decline or lack of outdoor play. Regarding grounds (1), an example of how defining the problem in claims is achieved implicitly through concerns linked or attached to a decline or lack of outdoor play

comes from Adrian Voce, director of the CPC/Play England, 2004-2011. As argued in the previous chapter on claimsmakers, the CPC/Play England were the problem's owners until around 2011 and Voce was the most frequently appearing individual claimmaker.<sup>4</sup> The claim by Voce links concerns about children's restricted freedom compared to previous generations to a decline in children's opportunities for outdoor play.

Children are not being allowed many of the freedoms that were taken for granted when we were children, said Adrian Voce, director of Play England. They are not enjoying the opportunities to play outside that most people would have thought of as normal when they were growing up. (Asthana, *The Observer*: 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2008)

By linking concerns about children's restricted freedom or independence to reduced opportunities for outdoor play, the problem is defined in a more implicit and open way than an explicit definition that would identify the exact features and characteristics of the condition. This allows audience members to infer, or as Loseke (2003) puts it to "fill in the blanks" that opportunities to partake in activities that used to be an essential part of childhood are being lost or significantly reduced as children's freedom is restricted.

It is worth making the point here, although it is one that will be revisited in the next section on defining outdoor play, that the claim from Voce also provides an implicit definition of the term *play outside*. The context in which the term is used allows the reader to infer that freedom is critical for children to "play outside" regularly and this was normal for the childhood of previous generations. An advantage of implicitly defining the term "play outside" through the context in which it is used is that it avoids the limiting potential of explicit definitions. This is beneficial since it allows audience members to associate their own positive experience and memories playing outside with the term, whatever they may be. As a result, a claim about the decline of outdoor play seems more salient and can appeal to a wider audience.

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<sup>4</sup> Ownership is defined by Best (2008) as 'having one's construction of a troubling condition become widely excepted' (p. 340).

Regarding grounds (2), an example of how defining the problem in claims is achieved implicitly (through *causes* of a decline or lack of outdoor play) comes from Tim Gill, director of the CPC/Play England 1997-2004, who is identified in the previous chapter as the second most frequently appearing individual behind Voce in the period 2003-2016. Gill, commenting on a report he co-authored two years prior in 2002 commissioned by the Department for Media, Culture and Sport (DCMS), claims:

Children and young people say that they are stopped from playing outdoors because of fears for their safety, especially from bullying, traffic, dirty or run-down play areas and parks, and lack of choice or because play provision is too far away. (Freen, *The Times*: 21<sup>st</sup> January 2004)

It is worth reiterating here a point from the previous chapter. Such claims from the CPC/Play England and its members that posit a decline or lack of outdoor play because of a harmful adult culture, and call for more specifically designated play areas for children that protect them from the dangerous adult culture, fit with and are motivated by their agenda for more and better provisions for play (particularly adventure play grounds staffed by play workers). In a similar vein to the then director of the CPC/Play England quote above, an article in *The Guardian* commenting on research by the Children's Society claims that:

The UK has never been a child-friendly nation, but a new survey for the Children's Society shows how bad we have got. It documents the difficulties children face just to play outside. A combination of spreading local authority bylaws, shrinking public playing spaces and parental concern over unsupervised children's play has drastically reduced outside activities. (*The Guardian*: 7<sup>th</sup> August 2003)

By identifying the causes of a decline or lack of outdoor play, the claims describe the problem in terms of the obstacles to outdoor play without explicitly defining what the problem is. Because such definitions are implicit and thus avoid the limiting potential of an explicit definition, claimsmakers can potentially add any number of different causes for the decline. This point is discussed in more detail later in this section.

The implicit definition of the problem is also achieved through both grounds (1) concerns linked or attached to a decline or lack of outdoor play, and (2) causes of a decline of outdoor play presented together. For example, Journalist Sarah O'Sullivan links concerns about children's time being filled with appointments, i.e. "overscheduling" and a decline or lack of outdoor play as well



as the causes of a decline or lack of outdoor play, to implicitly define the problem: ‘Safety fears are a common reason parents cite for filling up children's time with appointments. Many are afraid to let their children play outside, due to "stranger danger" and heavy traffic’ (O'Sullivan, *The Sunday Times*: 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2008). It is important to highlight that parental anxiety and parents’ fears about their children’s safety as a central cause of the problem is particularly evident in this example, as well as the majority of other examples above. Parental anxiety and parents’ fears lying at the heart of the issue is discussed later in this section.

Both grounds (1) and (2), whether individually or together, define the problem implicitly and appear in 62 of the 79 articles in the sample, which is 78 per cent of articles. Before moving to the next grouping of grounds, the following paragraphs analyse the various concerns linked to the causes of a decline or lack of outdoor play in order to identify some of the most frequently recurring claims. The advantage of linking the problem to a large and increasing variety of other concerns and social problems in a context of intense competition in the news media for social problems is also considered.

Four different concerns are linked or attached to a decline or lack of outdoor play by claimsmakers. All four are listed below.

**Table 7.2 Grounds identifying concerns linked or attached to a decline or lack of outdoor play**

<i>Claims</i>	<i>Number of articles containing claim</i>
Bedroom culture linked to the decline or lack in outdoor play	23
Children being "overscheduled " linked to a decline or lack of outdoor play	15
Children's freedom to roam independently is being restricted linked to a decline or lack of outdoor play	13
Children becoming disconnected from the outdoors and nature linked to a decline or lack of outdoor play	10

It is worth pointing out here that the concerns linked or attached to the decline of children’s play listed almost exactly mirror the categorisation of concerns adopted in the literature review (see chapter 2).

Twenty-three general different causes of a decline or lack of outdoor play were identified by claimsmakers. The ten most common of these are listed in the table below.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 7.3 Grounds identifying causes of a decline or lack of outdoor play**

<i>Claims</i>	<i>Number of articles containing claim</i>
Parental anxiety about letting their children out to play regarding their children's safety	25
Parents fear of stranger danger means they stop their children playing outdoors	15
Parents fear of traffic deters them from letting their children out to play	13
Adult intolerance of children playing outdoors in public prevents such play	10
V- Children playing outdoors seen as up to no good 'antisocial behaviour'	4
Outdoor play area designs have become boring and sterile because of risk aversion prevents children playing outdoors	8
'Cotton wool culture' in which children are mollycoddled is to blame for children not being allowed out to play	8
Increased volume of traffic prevents outdoor play	7
Parents don't have enough time to take their children outside to play	7
Lack of public spaces in which children can play prevents them from playing outdoors	6
V- The sale of school playing fields and neglected parks prevents children from playing outdoors	5
V- Lack play areas and parks etc. near to where children live preventing them from playing outdoors	3
V- Lack of safe play areas prevent children from playing outdoors	1
V- Lack of public funding for children's play areas prevent children playing outdoors	1
V-The streets is no longer a place where children can play prevents them play outdoors	1
Local authority bylaws such as 'no ball games' signs prevent children from playing outdoors	5

To many claimsmakers, parental anxiety and parents' fears about their children's safety lie at the heart of the problem. Of the 23 general causes, seven are related to parental anxiety and parents' fears about their children's safety and three of the seven are the most frequently appearing causes of the problem in the sample, identified in Table 7.3 above. As discussed in Chapter 5, parental anxiety was first suggested by a number of different studies to be the prominent cause of a decline or lack of outdoor play from the mid-1990s. An example is a study by McNeish and Roberts (1995) for the children's charity Barnardo's, which found that parents were keeping children indoors with 44 per cent of parents saying their children hardly ever play outside unsupervised.<sup>6</sup> Notably, the causes of a decline or lack of outdoor play listed above, similar to the

<sup>5</sup> V=Variations of claim. For more information on coding see Chapter 4.

<sup>6</sup> For more similar examples see Chapter 5

concerns linked or attached to a decline or lack of outdoor play, almost exactly mirror the categorisation of causes identified in the literature review (see Chapter 2).

In defining the problem by linking it to various causes and/or concerns, the claimsmakers not only avoid explicit definitions, which are potentially limiting and unlikely to grab audience members' attention in a competitive social problems marketplace, but as Loseke (2003) suggests, linking social problems either through *domain expansion* or *piggybacking* is an effective claimsmaking strategy for two reasons.<sup>7</sup> The first is that claimsmakers can build upon the success of previous claimsmakers by linking a new problem (or indeed any problem) to a problem that has already achieved some level of audience acceptance. For example, if people already care about parental anxiety, they are more likely to affirm the significances of the problem of a decline or lack of outdoor play which it is claimed to be related. Thus, linking the problem of a decline or lack of outdoor play to a large variety of other problems "casts a broad net", connecting the widest possible audience of potentially interested parties. The second reason is that as the social problem marketplace is competitive, with countless claims struggling to be heard at any one time, claims must seem fresh and interesting, claims linking one social problem with another can spark new interest and avoid *audience saturation*, which happens when audience members become bored with hearing the same claims. For example, adults' intolerance of children in public areas was claimed to be a cause of a decline or lack of outdoor play by The Children's Society in 2003 and received a lot of attention in the sample. Another example is being afraid or scared to go outdoors being claimed as a cause of the decline or lack of outdoor play in 2005 by The Children's Society and the CPC/Play England (both examples are discussed in more detail in Chapter 5).

The most commonly used of the two strategies of *domain expansion* and *piggybacking* when constructing the problem at hand is *piggybacking*, particularly when the problem was new. However, when the problem became increasingly established, other issues attempted to piggyback upon it. This, coupled with children's play being valued as important to the extent that is defined as right (see Chapter 1), means that children's play can act as a warrant for a variety of

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<sup>7</sup> The strategies of *domain expansion* and *piggybacking* which are used for linking social problems are discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

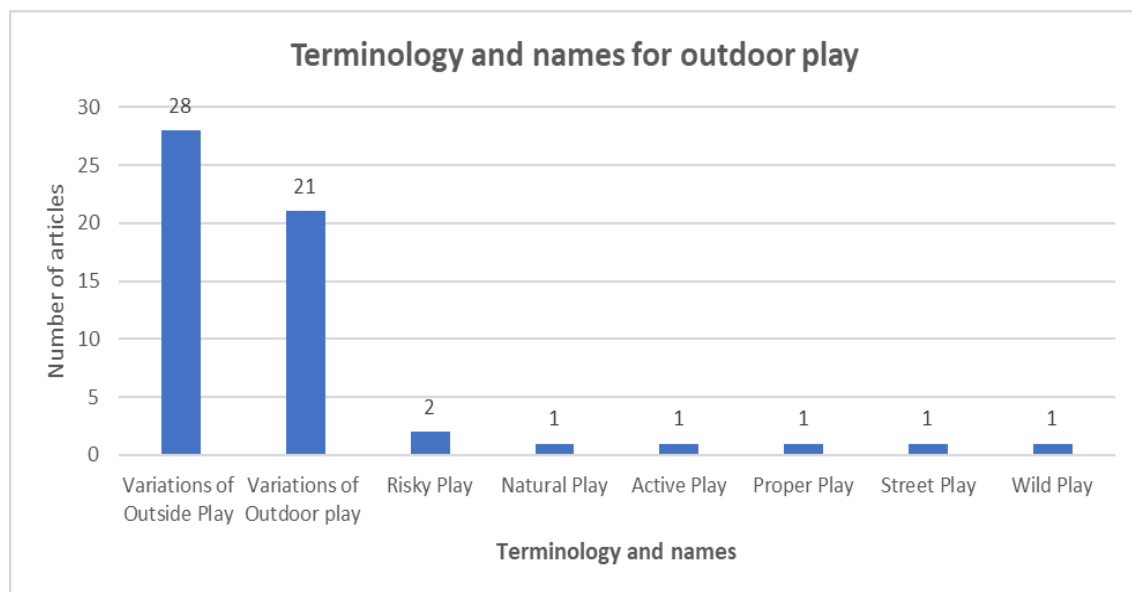
other issues, making it difficult to decipher which issue is piggybacking on which. Therefore, specific reference to *piggybacking* as well as *domain expansion* in relation to the problematisation of children's play is avoided here, as well as later in the chapter.

### ***7.1.2 Defining the problem's keywords***

Although it may seem that defining or describing outdoor play would be the first logical step in claimsmaking forwarding its decline or lack as a problem, this was rarely the case. Instead, "outdoor play" and other similar terms are often used by claimsmakers with no explicit definitions and descriptions offered to define the characteristics and features of such play. When outdoor play is explicitly defined or described, it is generally after the implicit definitions of the problem and regarding its importance to children's development and learning, and/or health. The terminology and names for outdoor play, identified as grounds number (3) above, will be discussed first. This will be followed by the definitions and descriptions of outdoor play, identified above as grounds number (4).

#### ***7.1.2.1 Terminology and names for outdoor play***

By far the two most commonly used terms are variations of *outside play* (e.g. play outside, playing outside) and *outdoor play* (e.g. play outdoors, playing outdoors). The dominance of these two terms is illustrated in the figure below, which shows all the terms used to refer to play that occurs outside, alongside the number of articles where each term appeared.

**Figure 7.1 Terminology and names for outdoor play**

Before discussing these terms, it is worth reiterating that defining play in relation to its immediate context such as its location, the level of adult involvement/intervention, whether it is physically active, etc., as argued in Chapter 1, is evident from the very late twentieth century. Notably in the sample, a number of terms other than those used to refer to play that occurs outside appear that define play in relation to its immediate context. These terms included: "indoor play"/"play indoors" (6), "free play" (5), "soft play" (3), "structured play" (2), "unstructured play" (2), "child-led play" (1), "freeform play" (1), "regimented play" (1), "spontaneous play" (1), and "unsupervised children's play" (1).

As identified in Chapter 5, the first appearance of terms referring to outdoor play start to appear in the early 1990s, which is notably around the same time that claims forwarding a decline or lack of such play as a problem. In addition to the variations of *outside play* and *outdoor play*, several other less commonly used terms appear in the sample referring to outdoor play. However, these terms rarely appear in more than a handful of articles and the majority only appear in one, indicating that audience members (including other claimsmakers) do not find the terms persuasive. As Best (2008) importantly emphasises, audience members for claims are not passive: they react to claims and therefore claimsmakers must take those reactions into account

and adjust their claims accordingly so they are effective and pervasive. In other words, 'claimsmakers and their audiences engage in a *dialogue*' (p. 44).<sup>8</sup>

The terms are often presented as though they are either self-explanatory, indicating that claimsmakers believe that the people who make up the audience for these claims probably assume they already understand their meanings or the terms' meanings could be inferred by the audience members in relation to the context in which they are used. This latter way of implicitly defining terms is illustrated above regarding the term "play outside" in a quote from Voce that appeared in an article in *The Observer* on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2008.

The terms used to refer to outdoor play are on occasion also used interchangeably as well as in a way that acts to mutually define each one. This is most common regarding the less frequently used terms such as *proper play*, *active play*, etc. For example, an article in *The Times* about a new range of furniture for children by Swedish furniture company Ikea quotes research the company carried out in a large number of countries into children's play:

When you realise that its research into children's play in 25 countries has shown that only one in three has the chance of playing outside, and that for nearly half our children computers are the favourite toy, it will be immediately clear how badly chances for proper play are needed. (van der Post, *The Times*: 1st August 2003)

The claim states there are limited chances for "playing outside" and therefore chances for "proper play" are needed. As such, not only do the terms refer to the same thing, they act to mutually define one another i.e. "playing outside" is "proper play" and "proper play" is "play outside".

Claimsmakers receive advantages when they use terms without defining them. These are similar to the advantages claimsmakers receive when they don't explicitly define the problem, as discussed above. One advantage of claimsmakers presenting terms without defining them is that it avoids the limiting potential of definitions. This is beneficial for a number of reasons, but one worth emphasising is that it allows audience members to attach their own personal experiences of their outdoor play, whatever that may have been. Therefore, a claim on the decline of such play is more likely to resonate with a larger audience. Another advantage is it avoids long and detailed

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<sup>8</sup> For a more detailed discussion on the relationship between claimsmakers and their audience see Chapter 3.

definitions, which can be potentially boring and are unlikely to grab audience members' attention. A final advantage of claimsmakers presenting these terms without defining them is that it avoids disagreements about the characteristics and features of outdoor play. This is of particular importance given that defining children's play in general has been the subject of great debate for many centuries (see Chapter 1).

### ***7.1.2.2 Definitions and descriptions of outdoor play***

On those occasions when claimsmakers do explicitly attempt to define and describe outdoor play, it tends to be regarding its importance for children's development and learning, and/or health. Seldom, however, do claimsmakers attempt the potentially more limiting descriptions and definitions of such play's characteristics and features.

The most frequent way of defining and describing outdoor play – as well as other terms referring to such play in the sample – is regarding its importance to children's development and learning. The different elements of children's development and learning which such play is identified as being important for are listed in the table below, along with the number of articles in which they appeared in the sample.

**Table 7.4 Descriptions and definitions regarding development and learning**

<i>Claims</i>	<i>Number of articles containing claim</i>
Outdoor play is necessary for testing physical boundaries and learning about risks	11
Outdoor play is how children learn important social skills	10
Outdoor play is important for children to learn how to be creative	7
Outdoor play helps children learn about and understand their emotions	6
Outdoor play allows children to use and develop their imaginations	4
Through outdoor play children learn to solve problems/be resourceful	4
Outdoor play is how children learn about the natural world	3
Outdoor play helps develop self-discipline	3
Outdoor play helps children to concentrate and their learning ability	2
V- Outdoor play is connected to children's academic achievement	1
Outdoor play helps children build resilience	2
Outdoor play is an important part of developing into a well-rounded adult	2
Outdoor play helps children learn to persevere	1

Outdoor play helps children learn about independence	1
Through outdoor play builds self-confidence	1

Children's play in general being defined as important for children's development and learning is nothing new. Chapter 1 identified that as far back as the ancient Greeks in the writings of Plato, children's play was suggested as important to their learning. The chapter also identified how Rousseau argued that children's play was connected to the development and efficient use of the senses, while in the twentieth century psychoanalytic and cognitive child development approaches to children's play emphasise the psychological value of play and its significance to a child's intellectual, social and emotional development. Indeed, play theorist Brian Sutton-Smith (2001) suggests that the belief in play as progress is something that most westerners cherish.<sup>9</sup>

Although defining play in terms of its importance for children's development and learning is not new and many of the elements of development and learning that appear in the sample could be applied to play in any location, not just outdoors, there are some elements of development and learning that are perhaps more specific to outdoor play. For example, that outdoor play helps children learn about independence, the natural world, and testing physical boundaries and understand risks. Interestingly, testing physical boundaries and understanding risks – which is the most commonly occurring elements of development and learning in the sample – only started to appear in claims from 2007, following a campaign by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents that aimed to increase the amount parents let their children play outdoors as it is through such play that they learn about risk.<sup>10</sup>

Despite being listed individually here, these different elements of development and learning are more often presented together by claimsmakers to define outdoor play. A typical example is found in Dr Noirin Hayes, a lecturer in early childhood education in DIT (Dublin Institute of Technology), who said that outdoor play is central to a child's development and that children:

Need to be challenged, to take risks and the playground is often where they will find the best education. It also teaches them softer social skills such as negotiation and sharing. (Coyle, *The Sunday Times*: 2007 18<sup>th</sup>)

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<sup>9</sup> The work of Sutton-Smith (2001) is discussed in more detail in Chapter 1 as well as later in this current chapter.

<sup>10</sup> Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents campaign is discussed in Chapter 5.



Another example comes from Hunter Blair, chief executive of the group Play Scotland (Scotland's version of the CPC/Play England), who states that:

Children benefit hugely from playing outside. They pick up a wide variety of life skills: how to get on with their peers, how to resolve differences, as well build self-confidence and self-reliance. (Nutt, *The Times*: 17<sup>th</sup> November 2012)

In addition to claimsmakers presenting different elements of development and learning together, they also combine these with the second most frequently appearing way of defining outdoor play regarding its importance to children's health, or more exactly, physical and mental health. For example, in one article Leonie Labistour – a development manager of networking play organisation Playwork Partnerships – defines play outside in terms of both its importance to development and learning and health, stating that 'Playing outside reduces stress, increases physical activity and taps into emotion as well' (Lacey, *The Guardian*: 6<sup>th</sup> November 2007). A further example defines outdoor play in a similar vein by stating that it 'strengthens friendships, keeps children healthy and helps them to cope with risky situations' (Asthana and Reville, *The Observer*: 30<sup>th</sup> March 2008a). The importance of outdoor play regarding both physical and mental health used to define and describe such play are listed in the table below.

**Table 7.5 Descriptions and definitions regarding health**

<i>Claims</i>	<i>Number of articles containing the claim</i>
Outdoor play is good for children's physical health	11
V- Outdoor play important for reducing obesity	1
V- Outdoor play increase physical activity	1
Outdoor play is good for children's mental health	3
V- Outdoor play improves happiness	3
V- Play critical part of children's wellbeing	2
V- Outdoor play improves ADHD symptoms	1
V- Outdoor play reduces stress	1
V- Outdoor play reduces aggression	1

Defining and describing play in terms of its importance to children's physical and mental health only appears in UK newspaper articles with any degree of significance after 2003 (as discussed in Chapter 5). Expanding the descriptions and definition of outdoor play in such a way serves to

increase the number of interested parties in such play, alongside making claims about play's decline seem fresh and interesting as well as more salient.

Another way of defining and describing outdoor play identified in the sample, not regarding its importance for children's development and learning and health, considers such play as an essential part of childhood, as appears in eight articles. An example is found in the Children's Society, who state that 'Playing outdoors is a fundamental part of everyone's childhood' (*The Guardian*: 7<sup>th</sup> August 2003).

On the very rare occasions when claimsmakers do attempt the potentially more limiting descriptions and definitions of outdoor play's characteristics and features, they tend to provide a list of traditional children's play activities such as climbing trees and hopscotch. For example, in one article outdoor play is defined by a child psychologist: 'Traditional children's play activities such as hopscotch, climbing trees or playing tag' (*The Daily Mail*: 28th July 2009). Such definitions and descriptions appear in 10 articles in the sample. Even though definitions of such play's characteristics and features are potentially more limiting compared to regarding the importance of such play for children's development and learning and health, claimsmakers notably manage to sidestep this limiting potential by referring to traditional children's play activities (or similar variations) and a non-exhaustive list of such activities. Consequently, audience members can attach any activities in which they engaged as children to such a list of traditional activities. This means that claims on the decline of such play would still appeal to the largest possible audience.

A final point regarding these explicit descriptions and definitions of outdoor play, which tend to be in relation to its importance for children's development and learning and health as well as it being essential to childhood, is that they are clearly more about the attitudes and beliefs of adults than the characteristics and features of the play itself. Notably, as argued in Chapter 1 of this study, descriptions, definitions and indeed perspectives of children's play over the course of history have always been more about the attitudes and beliefs of adults than the characteristics and features of such play itself.

### 7.1.3 *Estimating the problem's extent*

The third grouping of grounds identified from the sample that make up the successful rhetorical recipe for the problem at hand concern some sort of statistic, a number that suggests the scope of the problem. As discussed above and in Chapter 3, statistics estimating the problem's extent are also an ingredient in Best's (2008) basic rhetorical recipe. Statistics in our contemporary culture imply accuracy and precision, that someone must have counted something (Best, 2008). For the claimsmakers of the present problem, these estimates take three different forms. Each will be discussed in turn.

One way in which claimsmakers attempt to establish the dimensions of the problem is to estimate the decline in the amount children play outdoors compared to the previous generation. This type of estimate appears in 12 articles in the sample. Before providing some examples of these estimates, it is worth pointing out that for claimsmakers to be able to calculate a decline in outdoor play, they needed some previous point in history with which to compare the amount children are presently playing outdoors. However, a distinction between children's play in terms of context did not occur until recent decades, and children's play was either taken for granted or simply ignored, no one would have been keeping statistics on outdoor play. Consequently, claimsmakers faced with this absence of statistics of outdoor play in the past conducted studies that asked adults to compare *memories* of their own outdoor play with the amount children presently play outdoors. A notable exception of this in the earlier problematising claims is the use of Hillman et al.'s (1990) findings identifying a decline in children's independent mobility to illustrate a decline in outdoor play.<sup>11</sup>

A prominent example of these estimates of a decline in outdoor play by comparing the amount children play outdoors compared to the previous generation comes from the problem's owners the CPC/Play England who in an opinion poll found that:

[...] Only 21% of children now play regularly in the street or area near their homes, while 71% of adults can recall doing so when they were children. The latter recalled a world in which, to quote one respondent, children were "free, relaxed, enjoying themselves". (Wilby, *The Guardian*: 1<sup>st</sup> August 2007)

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<sup>11</sup> For more detail and examples of the use of Hillman et al. findings in earlier problematising claims see Chapter 5.

Another similar example comes from Eco Attractions, an alliance of visitor hotspots including the Eden Project and Kew Gardens, which found in their study of 2,000 parents that ‘the average child spends just under five hours a week playing outside, less than half the 11 hours their parents' generation enjoyed’ (Parveen, *The Daily Mail*: 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015).

Although 11 of 12 articles in which these statistical estimates appeared after 2007, these estimates first started to appear far earlier in the problematisation of the issue at hand. Perhaps the most prominent example is the survey by the Children's Society and the CPC/Play England for National Play Day – an annual celebration of children’s play – which received a lot of attention in the UK newspaper media. As the following examples illustrate:

Eighty per cent of parents questioned in a joint poll for the Children's Society and the Children's Play Council said they regretted the fact that their children spent far less time playing outside than they did as children. (*The Times*: 4<sup>th</sup> August 1999)

Most parents in the Children's Society and the CPC/Play England survey say their youngsters spend far less time outside playing than they ever did (Brocklebank, *The Daily Mail*: 5<sup>th</sup> August 1999).

Significantly, as argued in the previous chapter, it is statistics such as these that are generated by the CPC/Play England’s own research that resulted in their problematising claims receiving attention from UK national newspapers other than *The Guardian* and also played a key role in the CPC/Play England achieving ownership of the problem.

A second claim made about the problem’s dimensions is estimates of the amount of time children play outdoors. This type of estimate appears in 10 articles in the sample. A prominent example, which is commonly cited and received a lot of attention in 2007, is a statistic quoted (although not referenced) in the 2007 government consultation document *Staying Safe*, which finds that a third of children aged seven to 12 have never played outside. This statistic is most often quoted by the then Children, Schools and Families Secretary Ed Balls. For instance, in one article Balls is quoted as saying ‘he was shocked by research suggesting that one third of children aged seven to 12 were never allowed to play outside’ (Frean, *The Times*: 18<sup>th</sup> July 2007). In another article, he is similarly quoted citing ‘that more than a third of children are never allowed to play outside and most adults now believe youngsters should not be allowed out alone before the age of 14’

(Clark, *The Daily Mail*: 18<sup>th</sup> July 2007). A more recent example comes from an article quoting statistics from a nationally representative survey of 2,000 parents of five- to 12-year-olds by The Wild Network, an organisation who as identified in Chapter 6 work with the CPC/Play England, that found that ‘74% of children spent less than 60 minutes playing outside each day’ and that a ‘fifth of the children did not play outside at all on an average day’ (Carrington, *The Guardian*: 25<sup>th</sup> March 2016).

A third way claimsmakers attempt to establish the dimensions of the problem, appearing in eight articles in the sample, is to estimate the number of children who wanted to play outside but were restricted or feel unable to do so. For example, an article states that:

Children want to play outside, and research from the Playday campaign group has shown that 72% would like to do so more often but parents are often dubious about safety issues, from traffic to "stranger danger". (Lacey, *The Guardian*: 7<sup>th</sup> November 2007)

Another example refers to international surveys in general that have found children say they want to play outdoors more, stating that: ‘In repeated international surveys, children say they want to play outdoors more, but an increasing number see urban and suburban areas as polluted and dangerous’ (Coyle, *The Sunday Times*: 18<sup>th</sup> February 2007).

Interestingly, despite parents’ restriction on outdoor play being a prime reason identified by many claimsmakers for why children are prevented from playing outdoors, parents are identified as wishing they could let their children play outdoors more. Estimates of the number of parents who wish they could let their children play outdoors appear in a total of five articles in the sample. For example, one article reporting on research by the National Trust states that their survey finds ‘about 87% of parents wished their children spent more time outside, but one in four would not allow them to because of safety concerns’ (*The Guardian*: 13<sup>th</sup> July 2009). On a couple of occasions, both these estimates of the number of children who want to play outside and parents who wish their children could play outside are presented in claims together. For example, Ed Balls is quoted as saying:

We know 80 per cent of children prefer to play outside and 86 per cent of parents agreed that on a nice day their children would prefer to go to the park than watch TV, [...]. Yet children spend less time playing outside than

they would like and less than their parents did as children. (Asthana and Revill, *The Observer*: 30<sup>th</sup> March 2008a)

Additionally, Balls at the end of the quote also refers to a decline in outdoor play by comparing parents' outdoor play with that of their children.

#### ***7.1.4 The kind of people affected (victims and villains)***

A final grouping of grounds identified from the sample that completes the successful rhetorical recipe for the problem being analysed is to identify the kind of people affected. In Best's (2008) basic rhetorical recipe, this ground would be identified as an "additional ground" beyond the basic three ingredients. Best (2008), referring to Loseke (2003), notes that claims often identify categories of people involved in the troubling condition and explain how their involvement should be understood. Therefore, claimsmakers not only construct conditions, they also construct people. The most common person categories in this exercise of "people production" are victims and villains (Best 1995, 2008). Best (2008) defines victims as 'those harmed by the problem, who may be characterized as bearing no responsibility for their plight, and therefore meriting societies' support and sympathy' and villains as 'those responsible for the problem, usually depicted as deserving blame and punishment' (p. 35).

Children are pointed to as the victims of the problem in 71 articles, so approximately 90% of the sample. Such a high volume of articles identifying children as the victims of the problem is perhaps unsurprising giving the nature of the problem. Although evident in many of the problem's grounds identified above, children being the victims of the problem is perhaps most evident in the problem's warrants (discussed in the following section), in which a decline or lack of outdoor play is argued to have negative consequences on children's development and learning, health (both physical and mental), and even infringe on their human rights. The construction of children as victims of the problem is consistent with the twenty-first century social construction of children and childhood as vulnerable and "at risk", needing protection from what is perceived to be a dangerous adult world. It is important to reiterated here from Chapters 1 and 2 that the basic definitional features of "childhood" as we might think of it today emerge in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Here, the sentimental perspective of childhood emerged, where children increasingly became viewed in 'romanticized, sentimental terms as priceless innocents who need

protection from a harsh world' (Best, 1998, p. 199). The sentimental value of childhood is discussed in more detail in relation to the rhetoric of claims in the next section.

The "villains" implicated in the problematisation of the issue are most evident in the causes of a decline of children's play outside used to implicitly define the problem. By far the most frequent villains implicated are parents and more especially their anxiety and fear about their children's safety, which is observable from Table 7.3 above. Given that children are constructed as the victims of the problem, which is consistent with the twenty-first century social construction of children and childhood as vulnerable and "at risk", needing protection from what is perceived to be a harmful adult world, it follows that parents and their anxieties are implicated as the villains. This is because, as discussed in Chapter 2, parents have become seen as risk-mangers tasked with optimising their children's outcomes, a corollary of which is that parents who engage in "risky" or "toxic" behaviour can be framed as a danger to their children (Lee et al., 2010). A particularly prominent example of parents implicated as the villains in the problematisation of the issue is found in journalist Colin Coyle, who argues that 'fretful parents are to blame for emptying playgrounds, greens and public spaces' and goes on to state that:

It is clear parents view the world today as more dangerous than the one in which they grew up, but does the evidence stack up? Crime figures are irrelevant, academics suggest, as they bear little relevance to parents' fears. Instead, parents' anxieties are rising largely because of a misplaced nostalgia for a crime-free past. (Coyle, *The Sunday Times*: 18<sup>th</sup> February 2007)

Other examples identifying parents as the villains include that 'parents are too scared to let their children play freely' (Hill, Davies and Hinsliff, *The Observer*: 1<sup>st</sup> February 2009), and 'Parents are too wary to let them play out unsupervised as our generation did' (*The Daily Mirror*, 11<sup>th</sup> November 2015).

## 7.2 Warrants

Effective grounds create a sense of the problem and convince audience members the condition is real. This sets the stage for a claim's warrants. Warrants justify drawing conclusions from the grounds. They 'argue that the condition identified in the grounds is inconsistent with what we value, and therefore we need to do something about it' (Best 2008, p. 36). That is, claimsmakers

in warrants evoke values as a *cultural resource* (Best, 2008).<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that although all claims to some extent evoke the values of the broader culture, it is in warrants that ‘values often come into play’ (Best, 1987, p. 109). Significantly, warrants according to Best (1987) are often implicit and are offered as self-evident truths that require little if any discussion – and no debate. This implicit nature makes warrants somewhat difficult to analyse.

The following discussion considers four warrants that figure prominently in claimsmaking problematising children’s play. These comprise: the value childhood, the value of progression, the value of rights and the value of health. Before discussing each of the four warrants identified in turn, it is worth making a few points regarding them. Firstly, there is some overlapping across the four warrants, a point considered on several occasions below as well as in the discussion at the end of the chapter. Secondly, the warrants help turn the problem into non-controversial *valence issues*, which elicit ‘a single, strong, fairly uniform emotional response and does not have an adverbial quality’ (Nelson, 1984, p. 27). The valence nature of the problem is perhaps best illustrated by there being only nine criticisms or counterclaims identified in the whole sample. Several of these criticisms and counterclaims are identified and discussed in relevant sections throughout this chapter. Finally, the warrants bear a number of resemblances to the negative consequence of a decline or lack of outdoors identified in the literature review (see Chapter 2).

### ***7.2.1 The value of childhood***

As briefly mentioned above, the basic definitional features of "childhood" as we might think of it today emerge in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with the sentimental vision of childhood. The sentimental and romanticised value bestowed upon childhood is evident when claimsmakers argue that a decline or lack of outdoor play has contributed to childhood being in crisis, as discussed in both Chapters 1 and 2 in general and regarding a decline or lack of outdoor play in particular. An example of these claims, which appear in seven articles in the sample, is: ‘Playing in the mud, making daisy chains and climbing trees are simple pleasures that have defined childhood for generations. But such youthful pursuits appear to be dying out’ (Parveen, *The Daily Mail*: 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015). Other examples include claimsmakers arguing that a decline or lack in

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<sup>12</sup> Best defines cultural resources as ‘Cultural knowledge that can be incorporated in claims’ (2008, p. 338). Cultural resources are considered in more detail in Chapter 3.



outdoor play has ‘transformed how they experience childhood’ (Asthana, *The Observer*: 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2008) and that children ‘miss out on a proper childhood’ (Harris, *The Daily Mail*: July 29, 2006).

The sentimental value of childhood can be observed in warrants when claimsmakers argue that the digital technology which is often suggested to be replacing outdoor play also puts ‘priceless innocent’ children at risk, or indeed as the following example illustrates, puts children at more risk: ‘By sticking our children in front of screens, so we know where they are, we put them at risk of encountering sights far more damaging than any they are likely to meet in the outside world’ (Carey, *The Daily Mail*: 6<sup>th</sup> September 2012). She goes on to state that ‘a grazed knee heals quickly and is nothing compared to the long-lasting scars left on young minds by viewing violent, degrading porn, according to neurologists’ (ibid).

Another prominent example which featured in a wave of articles in 2008, four of which appear in the present sample, is comments from psychologist Tanya Byron on her review for the government on the risks of computer games and the internet (discussed in Chapter 5). The table below identifies the number of articles containing claims that digital technology replacing outdoor play also put children at risk and includes the multiple variations of the claims.<sup>13</sup>

**Table 7.6 Digital technology putting children at risk**

<i>Claims</i>	<i>Number of articles containing the claim</i>
Digital technology replacing outdoor play also puts children at risk	9
V- Children can be groomed by paedophiles over online games and social media websites	3
C- Digital technology is not bad for children	3
V- Cyberbullying	2
V- Children copying and becoming desensitised to violence from playing violent video games	2
V- Indoors more dangerous than outdoors	2
V- Spending countless hours on the video games can cause children to have mental problems	1
V- Computer games are as addictive as drugs	1
V- The digital technology causing children to have insomnia	1
V- Too much screen time is a danger for children	1
V- Digital technology can stifle children	1

<sup>13</sup> C= Criticism or counterclaim. For more information on coding see Chapter 4.

Chapter 5 discusses the trend in which claims that mobilise concerns about online bullying (or cyberbullying) and paedophiles to indicate that indoor play holds as many (if not more) dangers, observed by Furedi, who suggested that such claims ‘have a fatalistic and rhetorical character’ (2008, p. 3). It is worth mentioning here a point discussed later in this current chapter, that as children are viewed as innocent and needing protection from a harsh world, the other side of that coin is that they are also viewed as corruptible.<sup>14</sup> Children being seen as innocent but corruptible is evident in the claims that children may copy and become desensitised to violence because of their exposure to violent computer games.

Finally, it is of great significance that Best (1994) argues conceptions of social problems involving children reflect definitions of both social problems and children. The sentimental value of children is therefore central to claims problematising the issue at hand, a point evident in the remaining warrants, as well as the discussion at the end of the chapter.

### ***7.2.2 The value of play as progress***

Play theorist Brian Sutton-Smith (2001), as noted in both Chapter 1 and above in this current chapter, suggests that the belief in play as progress is something that most westerners cherish. He refers to the notion that children adapt and develop thought their play as *the rhetoric of play as progress*. Play being viewed as having extrinsic developmental functions occurred according to Sutton-Smith (2001) because of child developmental theorists being primarily concerned with child socialisation and maturity and children’s civilised progress in general. As a result, their broader sentiments about child development carried into their attitudes towards play, which then become as much determined by what he calls the *rhetoric of progress* as by any empirical data about the causal value of play itself.

Sutton-Smith (2001) states that the rhetoric of progress ‘derives from the historical view, said to originate in the eighteenth century, that progress is inevitable, or at least achievable, in human society’ (p. 19). He continues by noting that this view, known as historicism, which was backed by the theory of evolution, ‘led to the general expectation that child development could be seen as a form of progress and adaptation’ (p. 19). Sutton-Smith points out that its current application to

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<sup>14</sup> Cunningham (2006) suggests that children are viewed as innocent but corruptible in his four characteristics of contemporary childhood in western societies, see Chapter 1.

the interpretation of children's play is associated with its application to child development in general. Significantly referring to the 1938 work of the anthropologist Ruth Benedict, Sutton-Smith contends that 'The main tenet of the rhetoric of progress in adulthood and childhood are quite separate, with children being innocent, nonsexual, and dependent' (p. 19).

It should be emphasised here that play being identified as having extrinsic developmental functions, as discussed above as well as in Chapter 1, arguably occurs much earlier in the writing of Plato, who in his late dialogue *Laws* emphasises the positive significance of children's play regarding learning.

The value of progress, and more specifically the value of play as progress, is evident in the grounds by way that outdoor play is most frequently defined and described in the sample regarding its importance to children's learning and development. It is also evident in the warrants where claimsmakers argue that a decline of lack of outdoor play will have detrimental impacts on children's learning and development.

The different elements of children's development on which outdoor play is claimed to have a detrimental impact are listed in the table below.

**Table 7.7 Detrimental impacts on children's learning and development**

<i>Claims</i>	<i>Number of articles containing the claim</i>
A lack of outdoor play means that it is hard for children to learn about risks	4
Not playing outdoors can affect emotional development	4
Without outdoor play children don't get the opportunity to learn important social skills	4
Without outdoor play children will lack the skill of independence	3
Without enough opportunities for outdoor play children will not develop resilience	2
A lack of opportunities for outdoor play threatens children's creativity	2
A lack of outdoor play means that many children will not develop self-regulation	2
A lack of outdoor play damages children's physical development	2
Not playing outdoors may contribute to long term intellectual problems	1
Children lack problem solving skills/resourcefulness by being deprived of outdoor play	1

It can be observed that these different elements of children's development, on which a lack of outdoor play is claimed to have a detrimental impact, are largely the reverse of the different

elements of children's development and learning that children's play is claimed to be important for (see Table 7.4). So for example, where it is claimed that a detrimental impact of a lack of outdoor play means that it is hard for children to learn about risks, this is the reverse of the claim that outdoor play is necessary for testing physical boundaries and learning about risks. Or where it is claimed that a detrimental impact of a lack of opportunities for outdoor play threatens children's creativity, this is the reverse of the claim outdoor play is important for children to learn how to be creative. Another similarity between these two sets of claims is that claimsmakers typically present the various elements of development together in claims. A prominent example is found in an article referring to an open letter, signed by a group of almost 300 teachers, psychologists, authors and childcare experts on the loss of outdoor play warning of 'a tragic decline in children playing outside, threatening their creativity and independence' (Griffiths, *The Sunday Times*: 16<sup>th</sup> September 2007). In another example, it is claimed that outdoor play is under threat and that 'this means many lack vital skills such as resourcefulness, independence or self-regulation' (Harris, *The Daily Mail*: 1<sup>st</sup> June 2013).

### **7.2.3 *The value of health***

Loseke (2003) suggests that one value often appearing in social problem warrants in the United States, and the same can be argued to be true in the UK and many other western cultures, is the importance of health.<sup>15</sup> With outdoor play often being defined as important to children's health, claimsmakers also argue that a lack of outdoor play has detrimental impacts on children's health. Children's physical health is most often evoked by claimsmakers in warrants. These claims, appearing in 15 articles in the sample, argue that a lack of outdoor play fuels obesity in children. For instance, 'a lack of outdoor play is contributing to childhood obesity' (Freen, *The Times*: 6<sup>th</sup> August 2003), and 'Not playing outdoors, the report [by the Irish Preschool Playgroups Association (IPPA)] says, is a recipe for obesity' (Coyle, *The Sunday Times*: 18<sup>th</sup> February 2007), and 'Obesity is perhaps the most visible symptom of the lack of such[outdoor] play' (Henley, *The*

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<sup>15</sup> It should be pointed out that Loseke (2003) uses slightly different terminology than Joel Best's contextual constructionist approach. She refers to cultural themes as opposed to values and motivational frames instead of warrants. This is because Loseke adopts the vocabulary of social movement scholars as opposed to the vocabulary constructionist scholars in her book titled *Thinking about Social Problems* (2003). Social movement scholars speak of framing (e.g., diagnostic frames, motivational frames and prognostic frames) as opposed to the grounds, warrants, and conclusions. Best (2008) importantly notes that these two classification schemes are essentially similar.

*Guardian*: 17<sup>th</sup> August 2010). Only in one article does a counter-claim appear regarding a lack of outdoor play fuelling obesity in children. Journalist Lynsey Hanley argues that ‘the problem of mass childhood obesity, is the result of a combination of factors that have little to do with the young spending less time playing outdoors’ (Hanley, *The Guardian*: 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2015).

In addition to physical health, claimsmakers also claim that a lack of outdoor play leads to mental health problems; this appears in six articles in the sample. Interestingly, these claims are often presented alongside claims that a lack of outdoor play is fuelling childhood obesity. For instance, Voce argues, ‘An obesity epidemic may be just the tip of the iceberg in terms of potential damage’. Research suggests that child mental-health problems, including hyperkinetic disorders such as ADHD, may be due to constraints on play’ (Voce, *The Guardian*: 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2008). In a similar vein, Mark Sears of The Wild Network claims that a lack of play outdoors is ‘increasing obesity and lower[s] mental wellbeing in children’ (Carrington, *The Guardian*: 25<sup>th</sup> March 2016). In addition, claims that without proper opportunities for outdoor play, stress-related illnesses begin to arise appear in two articles (O’Sullivan, *The Sunday Times*: 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2008; van der Post, *The Times*: 1<sup>st</sup> August 2003), and a claim from the CPC/Play England that a lack of freedom to play outdoors will leave children less happy appears in one article (Asthana and Slater, *The Observer*: 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2009).

It is worth highlighting here that claims that a decline or lack of outdoor play has a detrimental impact on children’s health only appear in UK newspaper articles significantly after 2003 (see Chapter 5). Adding an additional warrant to existing warrants, like claimsmakers have here regarding health since 2003, makes claims seem more fresh and interesting, which is essential in the competitive social problem marketplace. Furthermore, another warrant may mean that more different people now agree that there is a need for something to be done about the problem.

#### ***7.2.4 The value of children’s right to play***

Since the end of the twentieth century, play has become defined as a human right specific to children by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, campaigning about children’s right to play, together with more and better provision for play, as mentioned in

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<sup>16</sup> For more detail on play being defined as a human right specific to children, see Chapter 1.

the previous chapter, are key objectives of the problem's owner CPC/ Play England. Claimsmakers invoke children's right to play in a total of eight articles in the sample. Notably, Best (2008) frequently refers to rights as a prominent example of values that claimsmakers invoke in social problems' claims warrants.

An example of claimsmakers invoking children's right to play is provided by Patricia Durr – the parliamentary advisor for the Children's Society – who warns that 'We must protect children's right to play and ensure every child has access to outdoor public space' (*The Guardian*, 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2005). Another similar example is from the Children's Society and the CPC/Play England, who called for 'local authorities to stand up for the rights of children to play' (Freen, *The Times*: 6<sup>th</sup> August 2003). A further example is a headline in *The Observer* that simply states 'Children losing the right to play in fresh air' (Hinsliff, *The Observer* 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2003).

### 7.3 Conclusions

Every claim offers justification for taking action: grounds identify a condition and warrants explain the way something should be done. Therefore, all claims lead to conclusions. Conclusions are 'statements that specify what should be done, what action should be taken to address the social problem' (Best, 2008, p. 39). As all claims lead to conclusions, they are often shaped by the grounds and warrants that proceed them (Best, 2008). Claimsmakers, according to Best (1987), may have an agenda with several goals. In the case of the current problem, claimsmakers hope to affect official policy as well as parents. Significantly, claimsmakers focus on the former, given that the sample being analysed is from a later stage in the social problem process, is to be expected because 'At later stages in the process, when the problem has become widespread policy choices become a more central focus' (Best, 2008, p. 40). Best (2008) calls these conclusions that seek policy change *long-range goals*.<sup>17</sup> The discussion below considers the two main categories which conclusions can be observed to fall into: more provision, or parenting education campaigns and strategies. These conclusions, similar to the solutions identified in literature review concerning a decline or lack of outdoor play, typically aim to address the fears and concerns that parents have about letting their children outside to play, which as shown above is the most commonly identified cause of the problem. These conclusions, based on Jago et al.'s

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<sup>17</sup> See Chapter 3 for more detailed definitions and discussion on long as well as short range goals.

(2009) distinction between indirect and direct strategies for managing parental anxiety,<sup>18</sup> attempt to tackle parental anxieties "indirectly" through reducing risk with more provision and 'directly' through parental education schemes and campaigns.

### 7.3.1 *More provision*

Consistent with several of the causes of the problem's grounds as well as the problems owner-the CPC/ Play England – main agenda, claimsmakers frequently call for more provision for outdoor play (particularly adventure play grounds). The most common of these claims, appearing in 10 articles in the sample, is for more spaces for outdoor play. These claims not only include calls for more play areas with fixed play equipment (e.g. slides and swings), but also calls for "natural" places for outdoor play (or more accurately adventure play grounds). The examples below illustrate claimsmakers' calls for adventure play grounds:

For me, creating playful environments means following children's instincts and creating neighbourhood spaces where kids can play daily in natural outdoor settings, free of charge. That's what the authorities in Freiburg are doing. More than a decade ago the German city's parks department stopped installing off-the-shelf artificial play areas and instead began creating "nature playgrounds": landscapes full of mounds, ditches, logs, fallen trees, boulders, bushes, wild flowers and dirt. Children love them, and they are cheaper to build than conventional play areas. (Gill, *The Guardian*: 3rd August 2005)

There should be investment in "playable space" – not just fenced-in playgrounds – in parks. Children need more creative designs for their play areas, where a risk-averse bureaucracy does not override their need to challenge themselves (Voce, *The Guardian*: 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2008).

We [Play Scotland] want provision to move away from two swings, a roundabout and a rubberised surface. What children are looking for is activities that bring them into contact with the natural environment. Something like a flying fox [a type of cable ride] might make them go into a park, but once inside they can explore a fallen tree, play in mud puddles or in a sand pit. These things needn't be expensive, it's just a matter of thinking differently: using trees as objects for play, not cutting the long grass and not fencing things off. (Nutt, *The Times*: 17<sup>th</sup> November 2012)

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<sup>18</sup> See Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion of Jago et al.'s distinction between indirect and direct strategies for managing parental anxiety.

The MPs and peers (of the all-party parliamentary group on childhood) recommend that local authorities change their approach, creating "wild, naturalistic" environments where children can play as part of a plan drawn up by each council (Hurst, *The Times*: 14<sup>th</sup> October 2015).

Claimsmakers also call for provision for adult supervision at outdoor play areas, parks and other outdoor spaces in which children could play. This adult supervision, as well as including play workers for adventure playgrounds, is most frequently proposed in the form of "play rangers". Play rangers, as noted in both Chapters 2 and 5, are individuals trained in supporting children's play in various locations, including housing estates, village greens and other open spaces. An example is found from Tim Gill (director of the Children's Play Council 1997-2004), who after emphasising the importance of some form of adult supervision at places where children play outdoors, states that:

One suggestion is for play rangers, who would be a cross between play workers and parkies (park keepers). They would have the people skills needed to organise play, and also the authority to ensure that equipment and facilities are looked after and are safe. (Freaun, *The Time*, 21<sup>st</sup> January 2004)

Another example comes from Voce, who in relation to play rangers states that 'an adult presence helps to create a level playing field [...]. There is no bullying or exclusion. It's also cost-effective' (Lacey, *The Guardian*: 6<sup>th</sup> November 2007). In the same article, the development manager of a networking play organisation, Playwork Partnerships Leonie Labistour, says that 'Parents are receptive to play ranger schemes and goes on to state that 'As children, they will have played outside, and they understand the benefits, though today they don't feel they can let their children play out' (Lacey, *The Guardian*: 6<sup>th</sup> November 2007).

Efforts for more provision for outdoor play are successful most notably regarding the government launching a national strategy for play in 2008 (discussed in detail in Chapter 6). The Play Strategy, as it was called, was a 10-year plan backed by funding of £235 million. This investment, over the first three years of the strategy, was to create 3,500 play areas and 30 staffed adventure playgrounds or play parks across the country. However, the success of these efforts was to be short-lived with the strategy cut short in 2010. Significantly, in only one article did a counterclaim regarding these calls for more provision appear and it came from Margaret Morrissey, of the National Association of Parent Teacher Associations, regarding the play strategy's proposal for creating 3,500 play areas. She argues in the article on the launch of the



play strategy that ‘Even with 10,000 new public spaces, parents would still fear for their children’ (Asthana and Revill, *The Observer*: 30<sup>th</sup> March 2008a).

Regarding more provision for outdoor play, claimsmakers also call for more home zones. These claims appear in six articles. Perhaps the best example comes once again from Voce, who simply states ‘we need more traffic calming and "home zones"’ (Voce, *The Guardian*: 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2008). Calls for more home zones are also ratified in the ill-fated Play Strategy. Significantly, as discussed in Chapter 5, initial solutions proposed for the problem before 2003 tend to focus on traffic calming measures, most notably home zones. A leading campaigner on this solution is the CPC/Play England’s director at the time, Tim Gill (See Table 5.2). However, with growing research being conducted specifically on outdoor play – most notably by the CPC/Play England together with the Children’s Society – which identifies other causes of the problem, coupled with home zones being piloted and installed in a number of areas in the late 1990s early 2000s, the focus of conclusions has gradually shifted away from traffic. In addition to calls for more home zones, two articles feature claimsmakers proposing closing selected streets at various points in time in areas where traffic calming measures don’t exist in order for children to play in them. For example:

But not every residential street has an experimental road layout. So some parents have taken matters into their own hands. In Glasgow, the Playin' Out project aims to close selected streets in the Battlefield area for one Sunday afternoon a month, to encourage local kids to play in the street. A similar scheme is being planned in Edinburgh. The idea comes from the Playing Out scheme pioneered in Bristol. (*The Times*: 5<sup>th</sup> February 2016)

The CPC/Play England proposes similar sorts of road closures in the other article in the sample (Miles and Rumbelow, *The Times*: 4<sup>th</sup> August 2007).

### ***7.3.2 Parental education campaigns and strategies***

Although parents, and more specifically their anxieties about their children’s safety, are often signalled as the main cause and villains in the problem grounds, conclusions far less frequently attempt to tackle parental anxieties "directly" through education schemes and campaigns than they do "indirectly" through provision. Very few calls are made for parental education schemes and campaigns and only a few education schemes and campaigns concern parents being urged by claimsmakers to let their children play outdoors. The most frequently appearing of these in four

articles is a 2007 government campaign was led by the then newly appointed Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, Ed Balls. The campaign, as mentioned in Chapter 5, is a public education campaign to encourage parents to let their children play outside in ‘safe environments’ and take part in other ‘positive activities’ that follows the publication of the consultation document *Staying Safe* which calls for more children to play outdoors. Only once in an article is there criticism of this campaign. Sociologist Frank Furedi, who has on a number of occasions written about a decline of children’s play outdoors, a prominent example of which can be found in the introduction of the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of *Paranoid Parenting* (2008), cautions against trying to institutionalise play and stated that ‘Kids should feel open to play however they want. We should not regard play as part of the curriculum,’ (Fread, *The Times*: 18<sup>th</sup> July 2007). Another campaign also in 2007 appearing in two articles in the sample is by Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (see Chapter 5). Other claims calling for parents to let their children play outdoors include: encouraging parents to take their children outdoors and spend more time outdoors (three articles), and that parents should take groups of children out to play (one article).

In addition, claimsmakers call on parents to reduce their children's access to digital technology. Such claims appear in five articles, a prominent example of one of these claims is from a report entitled the *Trouble With 21st Century Kids*, by psychologist Peter Smith and nutritionist Rachel Biggins, which states that:

Parents need to encourage more physical activity among their children, [...]. We need to begin encouraging children to go out and play, rather than sitting glued to the TV. Parents can help by removing their child from these distractions so they almost have no choice but to go and physically play. (Harris, *The Daily Mail*: 30<sup>th</sup> May 2006)

Furthermore, headteachers from a group of 16 schools in Cheshire, whose claims appeared in two articles in the sample, went as far as to warn parents that they will report them to the police and social services for neglect if they allow their children to play computer games rated for over-18s.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Headteachers warning parents over their children playing age inappropriate video games is also discussed in Chapter 5.

It is worth pointing out here that regarding parents being encouraged to reduce children's use of digital technology, advocates are clearly highly selective about the kind of "freedoms" they think children should be allowed. This is an insightful point made by Jennie Bristow in one of her chapters in *Parenting Culture Studies* on helicopter parents (who hover over the child, preventing them from taking the risks necessary to develop independence) and cotton wool kids. She states that:

[...] While unsupervised, outdoor play is increasingly lauded as important for children's development (and parents are blamed for restricting children's access to it), parents are being increasingly pressured to engage in the children's activities on the internet, providing more supervision rather than less. (Bristow, 2014, p. 211)

## 7.4 Discussion

The use of Best's (1987) scheme for categorising claims reveals some interesting features about the problematisation of children's play. One of these features is its grounds, that is, the facts and data that support it, appear weak. For example, the most popular way of estimating the scope of the problem in the sample is asking adults to compare memories of their own outdoor play with the amount children currently play outdoors. This way of estimating the scope of the problem is also used prominently in the earlier stage of claimsmaking in the 1990s, most notably by the CPC/Play England playing a significant role in the achievement of ownership. The reason why such methods are so popular is that a distinction between children's play in terms of context did not occur until recent decades and in order for claimsmakers to be able to calculate a decline in outdoor play they needed some previous point in history with which to compare the amount children are presently playing outdoors. Such methods, based on adults' memories of childhood, however, include a potential for "misremembering" and the risk of being overshadowed by particularly negative or non-logical memories (Jones, 2003).

Another of these features is that its conclusions seem to be ineffectual in the face of what claimsmakers are describing as a serious social problem. For example, by far the most commonly appearing conclusions call for more provision for outdoor play (in the form of more play areas (particularly adventure play areas), professional adult supervision, and home zones) to tackle parental anxiety, which is argued by claimsmakers to be the main cause of the problem. However, such provision that aims to tackle parental anxiety "indirectly" means very little, and

for two reasons. Firstly, children are not permitted freedom and independence by their parents to travel regularly to and from an area, or in fact even use it, because of parental anxiety and fear about their children's safety. Secondly, as noted in Chapter 2, as well as parental anxiety about their children's safety being argued as "rational" (e.g. about traffic), it is also argued to be "irrational" (e.g. about stranger danger). Thus, no matter how much more risk reducing provision there is, it would be unsuccessful in reducing their "irrational" anxieties.

Furthermore, such provision, with its designated areas and professional adult supervision, formalises and professionalises outdoor play. This is far removed from the largely informal and unsupervised outdoor play that previous generations of children were argued by claimsmakers to have regularly partaken in. It is also significant to emphasise here regarding claimsmakers' calls for such provisions being the focus of conclusions, that the CPC/Play England – who are identified in the previous chapter as the problem's owner and as such have their construction of the troubling condition widely accepted – is an organisation whose main agenda is for more and better provisions for play (particularly adventure play grounds staffed by play workers). Therefore, it is of little wonder that the focus of conclusions is on provision for play, more specifically adventure play grounds and professional adult supervision.

Notably, on far less frequent occasions when conclusions did attempt to address parent's anxieties and fears about their children's safety in the sample directly, they seem as ineffectual as the calls for more provision. For example, claimsmakers in a handful of articles call for parents to take their children, or groups of children, outdoors to play. However, this means that their outdoor play is determined on their parents having the time and motivation to take them places to play. Also encouraging parents to get children to play outdoors may mean that children will not feel open to play however they want.

As the problem's grounds appear weak and its conclusion seems ineffectual, common sense would predict that the claims being made would not be particularly persuasive, and that the problem would only have a brief natural history within the increasingly competitive social problem marketplace. Nevertheless, as sociologist Mary DeYoung states, in her 1996 study which uses Best's (1987) scheme to conduct a rhetorical analysis of claims being made in the construction of satanic ritual abuse of children, similarly found weak grounds and ineffectual concluded, that:

Common sense, however, very well may not recognise that it is the resonance between warrants, those implicit ‘self-evident truths’ offered by claimsmakers, and prevailing cultural concerns that largely account for the persuasiveness, and the persistence, of claims about satanic ritual abuse of children. (p. 68)

The same can be argued here in relation to claims about the decline or lack of outdoor play. A brief examination of two prevailing cultural concerns will frame this discussion about the link between rhetoric and cultural context.

#### **7.4.1 Cultural concern about childhood in crisis**

It is argued in Chapter 1 that since the late twentieth century, and more especially since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the modern sentimentalized construction of childhood has increasingly been seen as under threat. Neil Postman in his book *The Disappearance of Childhood* first published in 1982, argues that childhood is "disappearing" because of the role played by television. He contends that with the rise of television, which ‘not only requires no skills but develop no skills’ (Postmen, [1982] 1994, p. 79), modern society is rendering ‘irrelevant those "traditional skills" on which literacy rests’ (Postmen, [1982] 1994, p. 119). As such, the basis of an ‘information hierarchy’ collapses, he argues, as there is no longer knowledge that is exclusively for adults. Postman also claims that there is evidence that children are no longer playing games, eating food, or wearing clothes specifically designed for them (discussed in Cunningham, 1995, p. 179). The final result is that children are unambiguously treated as adults in today’s society.

Postman’s concerns, particularly in the face of the rise of digital technology and specifically the internet, have come to be widely echoed in academic and media discourse (see Lee et al. 2014, p. 41 who provide several examples). Certainly, since the turn of the century, the tendency towards what Furedi (2008, p. 12) refers to as ‘the diseasing of childhood’ has intensified. It is routinely claimed that childhood is toxic and dangerous. In fact, the diseasing of childhood Furedi suggests is frequently represented through the metaphor of toxic childhood. One of the most prominent proponents of this idea is Sue Palmer, who in her book *Toxic Childhood* (2006) argues that children have become damaged and impaired by technological changes and cultural changes (such as rampant consumerism, incompetent parenting, the pressure of school exams). These concerns certainly engender a context for claims about a decline or lack of outdoor play. Not only

does it provide a frame of reference for interpreting claims, but it is also makes claims believable as one of the clearest examples of the crisis of childhood. Warrants about the value of childhood become powerfully persuasive under these conditions.

These cultural concerns about childhood being under threat also resonate with warrants about children's health. For much of the twenty-first century, there has been daily warnings from campaigners, scientists and government spokespeople about the health effects of the "escalating rates" of childhood obesity. One warning that appears regularly in the media comes from the House of Commons Health Select Committee in 2004, which claims that this will be the first generation where children die before their parents as a consequence of childhood obesity (Health Committee, 26<sup>th</sup> May 2004). It is assumed, without any doubt, that today children are more unhealthy than at any time in living memory. 'In the early years of the twenty-first century, the people of the developed world have suddenly noticed we've been poisoning our children' writes Palmer in the first line of chapter one in *Toxic Childhood*. She immediately goes on to state that:

The food we let them eat over the last decade or so - ever rich in sugar, salt, additives and the wrong sort of fat - now contains very little actual nourishment. Instead of building healthy bodies, it's simply making children fatter and healthier by the year. (Palmer, 2007a, p. 21)

It is not only children's physical health that has been of concern over this period, so too has children's mental health. There has been daily warnings about an "epidemic" of childhood depression, anxiety and misery. In 2001 a report by the World Health Organisations (WHO) claimed that between 10 and 20 per cent of young people suffer from mental health or behavioural disorders. WHO's director for child and adolescent health, Han Troedsson, later warned that the status of children's mental health 'is a time-bomb that is ticking and without the right action millions of our children growing up will feel the effects' (WHO, 2005, p. 83). Similar research commissioned by the UK Department of Health apparently shows that serious mental health problems are far more common than previously recognised. Palmer also warns that 'the developed world especially the most economically successful countries – the USA, Japan, Germany and the UK – is suffering an epidemic of misery amongst its young' and continues 'the knock-on effects of this epidemic are already obvious in statistics on drug and substance abuse among teenagers, along with binge drinking, eating disorders, self-harm and suicide (attempted and successful)' (Palmar, 2007a, p. 2).

### 7.4.2 *Cultural concern about not optimising children's development*

At around the same time that a cultural concern was emerging about childhood being under threat at the end of the twentieth century, cultural concern about not optimising children's development began to intensify. This cultural concern, however, first started to emerge a few decades earlier during the 1960s when the theorists Sigmund Freud and Jean Piaget on psychological and cognitive child development respectively were popularised in the childrearing literature (Hays, 1996). Sociologist Sharon Hays in her book on motherhood suggests that, taken together, the popularised versions of these theories draw on the idea about "stages" of child development (following Freud and Piaget), with infancy and early childhood the most critical of these stages to children's overall development. The popularisation of these theories during this period is also stressed by professor of childhood development David Elkind, who in his classic book *The Hurried Child*, first published in 1981, states that:

During the 1960s, [...] parents were bombarded with professional and semi-professional dicta on the importance of learning in the early years. If you did not start teaching children when they were young, parents were told, a golden opportunity for learning would be lost. (2007b, p. 6)

These cultural concerns about childhood being a golden opportunity for development, something lost if not used in the "right" way by exposing children to the most beneficial activities and environment, has over recent years intensified. For instance, "educational" programmes for infants have become increasingly popular for parents wanting to give their children a head start, programmes such as *Baby Einstein* and *Baby Van Gogh* (see: Quart, 2006). There has also been a growth in nurseries and other early years providers. Indeed, in March 2007, the government published a framework document, The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), updated in March 2017, which aims to set:

[...] the standards that all early years providers must meet to ensure that children learn and develop well and are kept healthy and safe. It promotes teaching and learning to ensure children's 'school readiness' and gives children the broad range of knowledge and skills that provide the right foundation for good future progress through school and life. (EYFS, 2017, p. 4)

The intensifying cultural concern about not optimising children's development over recent years is also evident in growing numbers of extracurricular activities focused on the development of

older children, as argued by advocates of the overscheduling thesis, the first being David Elkind's 1981 book *The Hurried Child* (see Chapter 2). This intensified cultural concern increases the persuasiveness of claims that appeal to value play as progress.

## 7.5 Summary and Conclusions

This chapter, using Best's (1987) scheme for categorising claims, has attempted to give insight into what sort of problem claimsmakers say that children's play is, as well as how the problem has evolved and come to prevail. There is little doubt that without the activities of claimsmakers, these claims would not have been so successful. Yet at the same time, there are particular aspects of how these claims are constructed that have made the problem particularly likely to succeed, to be picked up and spread by others and become a popular way of making sense of the world amongst claimsmakers from a diversity of backgrounds. These particular aspects are not the claims' compelling facts or effective conclusions but rather their persuasive warrants. These implicit "self-evident truths" resonate well with recent cultural concerns about children and childhood.

The claims' constructions also have consequences. As claimsmakers overwhelmingly draw on the value of childhood and child development, children's play and particularly outdoor play becomes conceptualised as an instrumental activity, so if children do not partake in it they will become the victims of number of social ills. Given parents are seen as a determining force in how their children turn out, they find themselves under contradictory pressures, not only to keep their children safe in a culture that emphasises the need for protection above all else but also to avoid stifling their children to the point where they miss out on outdoor play and its associated benefits for health and development. Under these contradictory pressures, outdoor play becomes another supervised activity at a set time and location, making the notion of play that is free, independent and for its own sake even less likely and increasingly problematic. Another consequence of the claims' constructions is that where children's play would have traditionally been a private affair and the responsibility of parents, it becomes the focus for policymaking. The politicisation of children's play undermines parents' ability to raise their children without official intervention and thus further fuels their anxiety, which is the main cause of a decline or lack of outdoor play identified by claimsmakers. One more consequence of the claims' constructions is that their institutionalisation contributes to formalising the pre-existing notion of a harmful adult world



from which children should be insulated or “freed”. Ultimately, this means that many of the benefits that some claimsmakers argue come from children playing outdoors, such as independence and socialisation, are even more unlikely to occur. These consequences are further explored in more detail in the next chapter.

## 8 Conclusion

This study approaches the growth in attention to children's play from a constructionist orientation to social problems. It has thus aimed to ask a different set of questions from those asked by the dominant objectivist orientations that begin by taking the existence and severity of the problem as their starting point. Instead of seeking out causes, consequences and solutions, the study has considered objectivist approaches themselves as claimsmaking (i.e. claims and the claimsmakers who forward them), forming the central point of investigation. The study has thus sought to show how the growth of the problem of children's play in news media discussions cannot be considered separately from the activities of those for whom such a conceptualisation has become an appealing way of making sense of the world at a certain time. This chapter concludes the study by reviewing some of the answers to the core research questions, with a specific focus on the consequences of the claims' constructions. It then moves to a consideration of the contribution made by the study and potential areas for future research.

### 8.1 The construction of children's play as a social problem

Five questions guide this research concern: (1) who claimsmakers are, (2) what sort of problem they claim children's outdoor play is, (3) how these constructs evolve, (4) how they prevail, and (5) what their consequences are. The movement of children's play to the forefront of public debate has followed a typical path. In a similar way to issues of the past, like the civil rights campaigns or environmentalism, children's play emerged predominantly from outsider claimsmakers whose claims were given a hearing via the media and finally by policymakers. The first claimsmakers, as well as the owner – the CPC/Play England – were not, in the beginning at least, well-established members of the polity already in possession of crucial resources (such as easy access to the media, status, expertise and legitimacy). This made it harder for their claims to gain a hearing compared to insider claimsmakers who are already well-connected members of the polity. However, over time, symbiotic (or mutually beneficial) relationships developed with increasingly more NGOs, experts, journalists and policymakers joining the crusade, becoming personally invested in the problem, both literally and figuratively, and in their interest to refresh claims and keep the issue in the public eye. These relationships helped to foster the success of claims about children's play as a problem.

Through the activities of claimsmakers, children's play moved from being something on the periphery to being a central focus of public discourses. The term *children's play* began in the study by being used either in a secondary way, contributing to the things being described, or merely coincidentally, with little significance being placed on the nature of children's play apart from it being good for child development. Over time, there has been a shift in focus towards the nature of children's play, specifically the immediate context in which it takes place. Claimsmakers distinguish outdoor play, arguing there is a decline or lack of such play. Early claims often draw on research from subjects other than children's play, such as children's independent mobility, to identify a decline or lack of outdoor play that, it is frequently suggested, is caused by increased traffic. Later claims draw from research that, as well as research focused on outdoor play. This research focused on outdoor play is produced by the claimsmakers themselves – most notably the CPC/Play England – and suggests most commonly that a decline in outdoor play is caused by parental anxiety. These claims over time increasingly underscore that a decline or lack of outdoor play will have detrimental effects on child development and health, as well as childhood, creating the need for their particular proposed solutions aimed at tackling parental anxiety.

These activities, however, would not have been so successful had claimsmakers chosen to rally around ideas that bore little relationship to the contemporary context in the UK. Claimsmakers conceptualised children's play as a problem around prevailing cultural concerns about children and childhood. As argued in Chapter 1, childhood at the beginning of the twenty-first century has been socially constructed in such a way that children and childhood is seen as vulnerable and "at risk", needing protection from what is perceived to be a harmful adult world. In such a cultural context "what children do" in their everyday lives has become framed as a social problem/cultural or political debate. When claimsmakers conceptualise the problem around prevailing cultural concerns about children and childhood, it gives the claims popular appeal and resonance. Moreover, it means that children's play fits neatly alongside all the other areas framed as social problems/cultural or political debates within the debates about "what children do". These problematised areas of children's lives are notably often mobilised by claimsmakers as a way of implicitly defining the problem or in a fatalistic way to indicate that indoor play holds as many (if not more) dangers as outdoor play.

Significantly, since children are cast as particularly vulnerable in today's society with their health and safety seen as compromised by a harmful adult world, parents become increasingly seen as risk-mangers tasked with optimising their children's outcomes. A corollary of this is that parents who engage in "risky" or "toxic" behaviour can be framed as a danger to their children. It is hard to overestimate the symbolic significance of parental determinism in the debates about "what children do". For example, in the construction of children's play as a problem, parents, and more specifically their anxiety, is claimed to be the most common cause of a decline in outdoor play that results in detrimental effects on child development and solutions being aimed at tackling parental anxiety.

Conceptualising the problem in this way has consequences. Three prominent consequences emerge from this research in particular. First, children's play becomes instrumentalised, making play that is free, independent and for its own sake even less likely and increasingly problematic. Second, children's play that would have traditionally been a private affair and the responsibility of parents becomes the focus for policymaking, undermining parents' ability to raise their children without official intervention and thus (further) fuelling their anxiety. Third, the institutionalisation of claims contributes to formalising the pre-existing notion of a harmful adult world from which children should be insulated or "freed". Each consequence is discussed individually in detail below.

### ***8.1.1 The instrumentalisation of children's play***

Children's play used to be understood as an activity that children would have naturally partaken in when and wherever the mood may have taken them, requiring little thought and consideration from the adult world. Due to the conceptualisation of the problem, children's play, particularly outdoor play, has come to be understood as an instrumental activity in which parents must ensure their children engage. If they don't, they will stunt or damage their children's development, making them victims of what is perceived as a harmful adult culture.

Critically, the instrumentalisation of play is informed by the central tenets of intensive parenting culture, which as discussed in Chapter 2 presumes that what parents do (or don't do) is central and of determining importance – 'God-like' – and that any problems with what parents do or do not do should be measured by their presumed impact upon the child. Therefore, the

conceptualisation of the problem – which can be seen as a backlash against intensive parenting culture where parents overprotect and overschedule their children, meaning they don't play outdoors – provides little in the way of a counter to intensive parenting. This means parents continue to behave in a way that is entirely consistent with intensive parenting culture.

Ultimately, the instrumentalisation of play puts parents under contradictory pressures. Not only are parents under pressure to keep their children safe in a culture that emphasises the need for protection above all else, but they also are supposed to avoid stifling their children to the point where they miss out on outdoor play and as a result negatively impact on their development and health. These impossible contradictory pressures on parents, where they should actively seek to protect their children from being over protected, can be argued to be symptomatic of what Bristow (2014) terms the 'double bind' of parenting culture in which parents 'can't do right for doing wrong' (p. 204). The main outcome of which is the further development of what Furedi (2008) refers to as the "normalisation of parent-bashing". Furedi (2008) observes that 'we have a culture that not only continually promotes hyper-alarmist orientation towards the wellbeing of children but also blames parents for internalising its message' (p. 4).

With parents put under these impossible contradictory pressures, the instrumentalisation of play means that outdoor play ends up becoming another activity like ballet classes or football practice that parents take their children to at a set time, location and with supervision for the purpose of their children's development. This makes play that is free, independent and for its own sake even less likely and increasingly problematic.

### ***8.1.2 The politicisation of children's play***

Due to the way the problem is conceptualised, children's play has become a focus for policymaking. With play understood as an activity instrumental for child development and a perceived harmful adult world as the cause of its absence from children's lives, the government have launched several initiatives aimed at protecting children from what is perceived as a dangerous adult world. This is particularly evident in the government's first ever national strategy for play, launched in 2008, which proposed both "direct" and "indirect" strategies for tackling parental anxiety with the aim of freeing children from their overprotective parents preventing them from playing outdoors.

It is important to emphasize that the intervention of the government into of an area of children's lives would, in the not too distant past, have frowned upon since it would be seen as a private affair and the responsibility of parents. Furedi (2008) refers to such government interventions as 'official intrusion into the domain of child rearing' (Furedi, 2008, p, 192). Furedi (2008) argues that it is vital to take the politics out of child rearing, since such official intervention only serves to fuel parental anxiety further.

It is also important to emphasize that the politicisation of children's play, and indeed other areas of children's lives, reflects a wider moral confusion about the distinction between the child and adult worlds. For example, government initiatives are very selective about the kinds of "freedoms" to which they think children should have access. The point is perhaps best illustrated by the government: in 2008, following the 2007 publication of the consultation document *Staying Safe*, the government launched a public education campaign to encourage parents to let their children play outside, while in the same year they published *The Byron Review Action Plan*, which called for parents to be more involved and supervise their children's use of digital technology, specifically the internet and video games.

Since the politicisation of children's play is only likely to fuel parental anxiety, as it indicates to parents that they need officialdom to raise their children, it exacerbates the main cause of a decline or lack of outdoor play identified by claimsmakers. Moreover, just because children's play is deemed important for child development, this does not mean it requires the regulation of the state.

### ***8.1.3 The formalisation of the pre-existing notion of a harmful adult world***

The institutionalisation of claims, that is, the official recognition and endorsement of claims in various realms of public life, and the programmatic and legal changes that occurred accordingly, contributes to formalising the pre-existing notion of a harmful adult realm from which children should be insulated or "freed". For instance, policymakers' proposed solutions to a decline or lack of outdoor play often involve providing more provision in the form of specifically designated outdoor play areas. This is perhaps best illustrated by the government investing £235 million in the Play Strategy in 2008 to create 3,500 play areas and 30 staffed adventure playgrounds or play parks across the country in the first three years of the strategy. Such

specifically designated areas for children to play, often with fences around the perimeter, confirms to parents, children, and adults that the adult world is indeed "toxic" and that the child and adult worlds should be kept separate to protect children from becoming "contaminated".

The formalisation of the pre-existing notion of a harmful adult world that children should be insulated or "freed" from has several side effects. Firstly, children's ability to grow into and learn from the adult world becomes both less likely and problematic, since the two worlds are kept apart by a specifically designated play area. Secondly, it affirms to parents that rather than being expected to bring their children gently into the adult world and being entrusted with the task of doing so, as it was traditionally, their role is keeping their children apart from the adult world and continually checking their own behaviour to avoid imposing their own problematic anxieties and expectations upon their children. Thirdly, it affirms to adults that the child and adult worlds *should* be kept separate, with the consequence that adults will feel uncomfortable around children and be less tolerant of them in areas not specifically designated for their play. Lastly, it contributes to what Furedi (2008) calls the 'breakdown of adult solidarity', described as:

[...] one of the unspoken facts of life that people used to take for granted. Most of the time in most places, people practice adult solidarity, even though they have never heard the term. In most communities throughout the world, adults assume a modicum of public responsibility for the welfare of children even if they have no ties to them. (Furedi, 2008, p. 29)

However, Furedi (2008) argues that in England and other western countries, adult solidarity has broken down. Parents can no longer rely that other adults will take responsibility for looking their children by stopping to help if they are in trouble, to discipline them if they are misbehaving or to help parents look after their children as a matter of course. Adults are hesitant to engage with other people's children or assume responsibility for their welfare. This reluctance, according to Furedi (2008), is not a simply a matter of selfishness or indifference but fear that their actions might be misunderstood and resented. The formalisation of the pre-existing notion of a harmful adult world that children should be protected from contributes to this breakdown, as adults will feel that not only are they not expected but that they are actually prohibited from stopping to help children if they are in trouble, to discipline them if they are misbehaving, or help parents look after their children as a matter of course in accordance with the own judgment. Therefore, parents

will feel even less able to rely on other adults to take responsibility for their children's welfare and the socialisation of children more generally.

Ultimately, the formalisation of the pre-existing notion of a harmful adult world means that many of the benefits that some claimsmakers argue come from children playing outdoors, such as independence and socialisation, are even more unlikely to occur when they are insulated from the adult world in specifically designated areas. Additionally, it exacerbates two of the causes of a decline or lack of outdoor play identified by claimsmakers i.e. adults' intolerance of children play in public areas and a reduced sense of community or "eyes on where children play". Moreover, the formalisation of the pre-existing notion of a harmful adult world indicates that what adults and the adult world has to offer children pale into insignificance when compared with the potential harm they may cause.

## **8.2 Contributions and ways forward**

This section concludes this study by assessing its contribution to current sociological understandings of the problematisation of children's play. These contributions flow from the study's social constructionist approach to children's play as a social problem, as opposed to dominant objectivist approaches, which allows it to answer neglected questions. This also opens up additional avenues of study to be explored or considered in future research. At the end of this concluding section, my own ideas on the children's play problem as discussed in the introductory chapter are re-examined.

This research has attempted to contribute to sociological understanding in several ways. First, it has attempted to provide an account of the rise, changing meanings, and popularity of children's play in current public debates. It has offered a conceptualisation of the construction of children's play not only in abstract terms but as a problematisation mediated through the activities of claimsmakers, and existing within the cultural context from which claims draw and with which they resonate, in accordance with the contextual constructionist approach forwarded by Joel Best.

In doing so, the research reveals that the way the claimsmakers, and more specifically the CPC/Play England who as the problem's owner create and influence the public definition of a social problem, have conceptualised the problem around concerns about children and childhood



being at risk from a perceived harmful adult culture to give them some popular appeal and resonance. However, such a conceptualisation makes the notion of outdoor play that is free, independent and for its own sake even less likely and increasingly problematic. However, a close analysis of the problem's owner in terms of their background and interests suggests that encouraging such play was never their key objective. Indeed, the very conception of the CPC/Play England in the 1990s by disgruntled playworkers who had witnessed a dramatic decline in adventure playgrounds from their height in the 1970s and 1980s, was far more motivated by promoting the need for and importance of playworkers and adventure playgrounds. This point is made particularly clear by a 2007 quote by the then director of the CPC/Play England:

Yes, children maybe should play with no adult supervision, in an ideal world, with no crime, and the roads were really safe, and there weren't different factions of kids. But we don't live in that world, so there's a big role for the playworker. (Miles and Rumbelow, *The Times*: 4th August 2007)

Therefore, anyone who is tempted to produce a report decrying the erosion of outdoor play with the hope of encouraging outdoor play that is free, independent and for its own sake should avoid conceptualising the problem around the cultural concerns about children and childhood being at risk from a perceived harmful adult culture, since this is more likely to make such play even less likely and increasingly problematic. The authors of such reports that hope to encourage outdoor play that is free, independent and for its own sake should also acknowledge the reality, which is that such an activity directly contradicts the prevailing ethos surrounding child protection – the paranoia about which is only getting worse (Furedi, *The Independent*, 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2014).

The research has importantly only considered the development of these claims in one, albeit significant, arena of public discourse. This raises questions about how claims develop across other additional public arenas. Diffusion, as Best (2001: 2008) suggests, occurs in many ways and may occur in different ways in different channels and via different claimsmakers. Therefore, future research may seek to consider how claims change, evolve, are incorporated or resisted, as they pass into other realms of communication. Also, in taking a broad focus, the present research may have neglected a more direct study of a particular type of children's play, a particular

claimsmaker, a particular claimsmaking organisation, or a particular policy. Future research may seek to undertake such a study building on the findings from this as useful as a starting point.

Second, the thesis contributes to the understandings of children and childhood as it provides a clear illustration of the development of a clear cultural trend, insightfully observed by Bristow (2014) and Furedi (2008), in which childhood experience (positive and negative) is framed in the language of competing risks. Furthermore, it reveals how the problematisation of an area of children's lives conceptualised around the notion that children and childhood are "at risk" from a harmful adult world has made it worse, i.e. outdoor play that is free, independent and for its own sake becomes even less likely and increasingly problematic. Building on these findings, future research could examine if other areas of children's lives that have been framed as social problems/cultural or political debates have been made worse rather than better and the impact this may have on the experience of childhood.

Third, this work contributes to understandings within the contextual constructionist orientation toward social problems forwarded by Best (2008) and more broadly the sociology of knowledge developed by Berger and Luckmann ([1966] 1991). Regarding the former, the research contributes to understandings within the contextual constructionist orientation by offering a case study in the rhetorical construction of a social problem in the competitive news media, where there is intense struggle for recognition and acceptance between competing definitions of reality. Additionally, the study shows the utility and adaptability of the three-phase methodology developed by Frawley (2012) for her study of the construction of happiness as a social problem which fuses together the contextual constructionist approach with Qualitative Media Analysis (QMA) for future research to examine how and why certain issues emerge as social problems. Regarding the latter, by grounding the media analysis in the contextual constructionist orientation to social problems, the research contributes to the sociology of knowledge, by showing how a powerful idea within UK culture and policy today – that children's play constitutes a social problem – has been developed, framed and articulated according to the wider political and cultural dynamics of its time.

In the introductory chapter of this study there is discussion about what the children play problem means to me. Within this discussion it is identified how my attention was first drawn to the

problematisation of children play. I observed a distinction between those who argue that the decline or lack of children's play is a problem because of a perceived harmful adult world, thus preventing what was seen as an instrumental activity for child development, and those who argue that it is a problem because of the extent to which it prevents children from growing into the adult world. Also, this discussion identifies how I found the idea of the decline or lack of outdoor play troubling, in a similar vein to the latter argument, because I believe, like Guldberg (2009) and Skenazy (2009), that it is outdoor play, and more specifically unsupervised outdoor play, that gives children the ability to develop an understanding of the adult world and learning to navigate its risks (e.g. traffic) and relationships (e.g. accounting and dealing with other adults such as neighbours as opposed to just their parents, school teachers and organised activity leaders). It also enables children to go it alone and work things out for themselves and use trial and error – so in that sense, it builds resilience/autonomy or independence, all of which helps to prepare for adult life. Additionally, but equally significant, outdoor play gives children something to do for its own sake, because it is interesting and enjoyable to them and not because they have "a need" to do it.

It is evident from this study that it is claims from those who argue that a decline or lack of children's play is a problem because of a perceived harmful adult world, preventing an activity instrumental for children's development, that have transformed children's play into a social problem. From conducting this research, it has become increasingly clear to me that although I find the idea of a decline or lack of outdoor play troubling, the claims that have served to transform children's play into a social problem have in fact made the idea of outdoor play that is free, independent and for its own sake – and which provides children with the opportunity to grow into the adult world – even less likely and increasingly problematic. Therefore, there needs to be a move away from framing children's play in the language of competing risks, i.e. if children play outdoors, they are risk of getting hurt but if they don't play outdoors, they are at risk having their development damaged and becoming victims of what is perceived to be a harmful adult world. Moreover, there should be a distancing from framing the whole experience of childhood (positive or negative) in the language of competing risks. Such a move would present more scope for discussions on the kind of world we want for ourselves and our children, and how we might go about achieving it.

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## Appendix A. Individual Claimsmakers

<i>Type and name of claimsmaker</i>	<i>Number of articles containing claims (n=420)</i>
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Adrian Voce	18
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Tim Gill	12
Politician - Ed Balls	9
Expert: Psychologist - Tanya Byron	8
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Bob Reitemeier	7
Author, writer, novelist - Sue Palmer	5
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Margaret Morrissey	5
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Rob Wheway	5
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Tim Linehan	5
Expert: Psychologist - Mark Griffiths	4
Politician - Frank Dobson	4
Politician - Michael Gove	4
Educator - Mary Hennessy Jones	3
Expert: Psychologist (child) - Amanda Gummer	3
Expert: Psychologist (child) - Richard Woolfson	3
Expert: Psychologist (Educationalist) - David Whitebread	3
Expert: Sociologist - Frank Furedi	3
Journalist - Alexandra Frean	3
Journalist - India Knight	3
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - David Yearly	3
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Patricia Durr	3
Author, writer, novelist - Jay Griffiths	2
Author, writer, novelist - Stephen Moss	2
Author, writer, novelist - Steve Roud	2
Expert: Early childhood studies - Penny Holland	2
Expert: English, Media and Drama - Andrew Burn	2
Expert: Immunologist - Ken Jones	2
Expert: Policy Studies - Ben Shaw	2
Expert: Psychologist - Andrew Przybylski	2
Expert: Psychologist - Peter Gray	2
Expert: Psychologist (developmental) - Colwyn Trevarthen	2

General Public - George Pretty	2
Journalist - Tanith Carey	2
Journalist - Sarah Harris	2
Journalist - Vivienne Parry	2
Journalist - Yvonne Roberts	2
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Hunter Blair	2
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Issy Cole-Hamilton	2
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Mark Sears	2
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Peter Cornall	2
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Simon Stevens	2
Politician - Baroness Floella Benjamin	2
Politician - Don Foster	2
Author, writer, novelist - Dominic Sandbrook	1
Author, writer, novelist - Elizabeth Hartley Brewer	1
Author, writer, novelist - Eric Clark	1
Author, writer, novelist - Fiona Danks and Jo Schofield	1
Author, writer, novelist - Gerard Jones	1
Author, writer, novelist - Heather Welford	1
Author, writer, novelist - Lenore Skenazy	1
Author, writer, novelist - Nikki Sheehan	1
Author, writer, novelist - Paul Martin	1
Author, writer, novelist - Richard Louv	1
Celebrity or Public Figure - Anne Diamond	1
Celebrity or Public Figure - David Domoney	1
Celebrity or Public Figure - Esther Rantzen	1
Celebrity or Public Figure - Jeff Brazier	1
Celebrity or Public Figure - Kate Humble	1
Celebrity or Public Figure - Lee Unkrich	1
Celebrity or Public Figure - Marlon Devonish	1
Celebrity or Public Figure - Michaela Strachan	1
Celebrity or Public Figure - Raleigh Ritchie	1
Celebrity or Public Figure - Sir Steve Redgrave	1
Celebrity or Public Figure - Tony Hawks	1
Celebrity or Public Figure - Trevor Brooking	1
CEO, Entrepreneur, Other Commercial Representative - Chris Lindgren	1
CEO, Entrepreneur, Other Commercial Representative - David Chan	1
CEO, Entrepreneur, Other Commercial Representative - David Hardy	1
CEO, Entrepreneur, Other Commercial Representative - Davina Ludlow	1
CEO, Entrepreneur, Other Commercial Representative - Debbie Sterling	1
CEO, Entrepreneur, Other Commercial Representative - Elaine Halligan	1



CEO, Entrepreneur, Other Commercial Representative - Esther Guy	1
CEO, Entrepreneur, Other Commercial Representative - Gary Grant	1
CEO, Entrepreneur, Other Commercial Representative - Graham Grant	1
CEO, Entrepreneur, Other Commercial Representative - Harold Galley	1
CEO, Entrepreneur, Other Commercial Representative - Joanne Davies	1
CEO, Entrepreneur, Other Commercial Representative - John Burt	1
CEO, Entrepreneur, Other Commercial Representative - Julia Hilton	1
CEO, Entrepreneur, Other Commercial Representative - Mark Schlichting	1
CEO, Entrepreneur, Other Commercial Representative - Melissa Wallace	1
CEO, Entrepreneur, Other Commercial Representative - Natasha Crookes	1
CEO, Entrepreneur, Other Commercial Representative - Phil Hooper	1
CEO, Entrepreneur, Other Commercial Representative - Roy Jennings	1
CEO, Entrepreneur, Other Commercial Representative - Sarah Allen	1
CEO, Entrepreneur, Other Commercial Representative - Sarah Crown	1
CEO, Entrepreneur, Other Commercial Representative - Stuart Brown	1
CEO, Entrepreneur, Other Commercial Representative - Toby Rowland	1
CEO, Entrepreneur, Other Commercial Representative - Vu Bui	1
Educator - Alison Sherratt	1
Educator - Chris Davis	1
Educator - Davina Wakelin	1
Educator - John Carr	1
Educator - Lynnette Kobus	1
Educator - Mark O'Donnell	1
Educator - Morian Morgan	1
Educator - Sir Alan Steer	1
Educator - Stephen Drew	1
Expert: Architect - James Pike	1
Expert: Art - Marientina Gotsis	1
Expert: Building Engineer - Dominic Church	1
Expert: Child Health and Development - Jack P. Shonkoff	1
Expert: Child Therapist - Kate Smith	1
Expert: Childhood Studies - Priscilla Alderson	1
Expert: Educationalist - Becky Francis	1
Expert: Educationalist - Jackie Marsh	1
Expert: Educationalist - Jane O'Connor	1
Expert: Educationalist - Jonathan Simons	1
Expert: Educationalist - Mary Bousted	1
Expert: Educationalist - Russell Hobby	1
Expert: Educationalist - Sir Ken Robinson	1
Expert: Educationalist (early childhood) - Noirin Hayes	1

Expert: Educationalist and Employment Researcher - Alan Smithers	1
Expert: Geographer -Colin Pooley	1
Expert: Geographer - John Adams	1
Expert: Humanities - Jeffrey Goldstein	1
Expert: Marketing - Agnes Nairn	1
Expert: Marketing - Russell Laczniak	1
Expert: Medical - Sir Liam Donaldson	1
Expert: Medical - Sue Robertson	1
Expert: Medical (general practitioner) - Ian Campbell	1
Expert: Medical (general practitioner) - Paul Docherty	1
Expert: Medical (general practitioner) Andrew Green	1
Expert: Medical (general practitioner) Thomas Stuttaford	1
Expert: Medical (ophthalmic surgeon) Andy Luff	1
Expert: Medical (orthoptist) - Kathryn Rose	1
Expert: Medical (paediatrician) - Maya Shetreat-Klein	1
Expert: Medical (paediatrician) - Alan Craft	1
Expert: Medical (paediatrician) - Deirdre Murray	1
Expert: Medical (paediatrician) - Mark De Ste Croix	1
Expert: Medical (paediatrician) - Paul Sacher	1
Expert: Medical (paediatrician) - Tim Lobstein	1
Expert: Neuroscientist - Baroness Susan Greenfield	1
Expert: Neuroscientist (Sleep) Jim Horne	1
Expert: Nutritionist - Rachel Biggins	1
Expert: Physiotherapist - Sammy Margo	1
Expert: Psychiatrist - Daniel Freeman	1
Expert: Psychiatrist - Robin Berman	1
Expert: Psychoanalyst - Susie Orbach	1
Expert: Psychologist - Aric Sigman	1
Expert: Psychologist - Brad Bushman	1
Expert: Psychologist - Chireal Shallow	1
Expert: Psychologist - Dearbhla McCullough	1
Expert: Psychologist - Frans Folkvord	1
Expert: Psychologist - Gregory West	1
Expert: Psychologist - Kathy Hirsh-Pasek	1
Expert: Psychologist - Melissa Hines	1
Expert: Psychologist - Pat Spungin	1
Expert: Psychologist - Peter Smith	1
Expert: Psychologist - Richard Joiner	1
Expert: Psychologist - Sally Goddard Blythe	1
Expert: Psychologist (child development) - Kathy Hirsh-Pasek	1

Expert: Psychologist (child) - Emma Kenny	1
Expert: Psychologist (child) - Sam Wass	1
Expert: Psychologist (child) Tiffany Pempek	1
Expert: Psychologist (clinical child) - Anne O'Connor	1
Expert: Psychologist (clinical) - Anna Symonds	1
Expert: Psychologist (educationalist) - Kairen Cullen	1
Expert: Psychopathologist (developmental) - Isabela Granic	1
Expert: Psychotherapist - Richard House	1
Expert: Relationship counsellor - Susie Hayman	1
Expert: Researcher - Norah Nelson	1
Expert: Social Psychologist - Sonia Livingstone	1
Expert: Sports Sociologist - Sean Connor	1
Expert: Town Planer - Phil Grant	1
Expert: Toy Researcher - Krister Svensson	1
Expert: Transport Studies - Roger Mackett	1
General Public - Claire Barker	1
General Public - Emma Kane	1
General Public - Hilda Kennedy	1
General Public - Jackie Owsnett	1
General Public - Kelly Steer	1
General Public - Ma Dunning	1
General Public - Marianne Mannello	1
General Public - Michelle Ferret	1
General Public - Paul Osborne	1
General Public - Rebecca Hutchinson	1
General Public - Rhona Macdonald	1
General Public - Tony Marsella	1
Government Body or Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) Member - Helen Phillips	1
Government Body or Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) Member - Laura Jopson	1
Government Body or Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) Member - Lindsay Newton	1
Government Body or Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) Member - Maggie Atkinson	1
Government Body or Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) Member - Margaret Eaton	1
Government Body or Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) Member - Michael Follet	1

Government Body or Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) Member - Michael Starrett	1
Government Body or Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) Member - Perry Else	1
Government Body or Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) Member - Richard Simmons	1
Journalist - Aida Edemariam	1
Journalist - Alexandra Blair	1
Journalist - Alice Miles	1
Journalist - Alison Benjamin	1
Journalist - Alison Phillips	1
Journalist - Amanda Blinkhorn	1
Journalist - Antonia Hoyle	1
Journalist - Bel Mooney	1
Journalist - Ben Machell	1
Journalist - Ben Parfitt	1
Journalist - Bill Mouland	1
Journalist - Brian Reade	1
Journalist - Chris Sealey	1
Journalist - Clare Longrigg	1
Journalist - Colette Douglas	1
Journalist - Colin Coyle	1
Journalist - Damon Syson	1
Journalist - David Boyle	1
Journalist - David Smith	1
Journalist - Eleanor Burton	1
Journalist - Fiona Gibson	1
Journalist - Frank Cottrell Boyce	1
Journalist - George Monbiot	1
Journalist - Helen Nugent	1
Journalist - Helen Rumbelow	1
Journalist - Homa Khaleeli	1
Journalist - Ian Cambell	1
Journalist - Jan Moir	1
Journalist - Jennai Cox	1
Journalist - Joanna Goodman	1
Journalist - Jon Henley	1
Journalist - Jon Rouse	1
Journalist - Judith Kneen	1
Journalist - Justine Smith	1

Journalist - Kevin Lynch	1
Journalist - Kevin Myers	1
Journalist - Libby Purves	1
Journalist - Lisa Seward	1
Journalist - Lucia van der Post	1
Journalist - Lucy Siegle	1
Journalist - Lynn Cochrane	1
Journalist - Lynsey Hanley	1
Journalist - Madeleine Bunting	1
Journalist - Maria Miller	1
Journalist - Marina Gask	1
Journalist - Mick Hume	1
Journalist - Murad Ahmed	1
Journalist - Nathan Ditum	1
Journalist - Paul Brown	1
Journalist - Peggy Crane	1
Journalist - Peter Wilby	1
Journalist - Phil Hilton	1
Journalist - Rachel Murphy	1
Journalist - Ray Connolly	1
Journalist - Ray Massey	1
Journalist - Richard Morrison	1
Journalist - Robert Hardman	1
Journalist - Roland White	1
Journalist - Ryan Shorthouse	1
Journalist - Sanda Parsons	1
Journalist - Sarah O'Sullivan	1
Journalist - Stephen Glover	1
Journalist - Tim Dowling	1
Journalist - Zoe Williams	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Alan Sutton	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Alison Moore-Gwyn	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Andrea Quaintmere	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Anna Coote	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Anne Longfield	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Cath Prisk	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Charlotte Egmore	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Christine Lehmann	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - David Bond	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Eileen Hayes	1

Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Elsa Davies	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Fiona Reynolds	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Greg Childs	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Helena Brown	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Jeanne Key	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Kate Housden	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Leonie Labistour	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Leslie Morphy	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Lisa Williams	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Liz Cameron	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Lorna Redden	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Lucy Hellier	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Mary Sinclair	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Mr Mullarkey	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Naomi Fuller	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Natalie Johnson	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Neil Leitch	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Paul Cooper	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Paul Ennals	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Richard Webb	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Sam Brier	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Sandra Melville	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Steve Goode	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Tom Mullarkey	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Members - Ute Navidi	1
Politician - David Cameron	1
Politician - David Lammy	1
Politician - John Whittingdale	1
Politician - Liam Fox	1
Politician - Margaret Bannister	1
Politician - Nicky Gavron	1
Politician - Nigel Farage	1
Politician - Richard Caborn	1
Politician - Ruth Kelly	1
Politician - Tessa Jowell	1
Politician - Tim Loughton	1
Politician - Tom Watson	1
Politician - Yvette Cooper	1
Religious Individuals & Authorities - Father Slawomir Kostrzewa	1
Religious Individuals & Authorities - The Archbishop of Canterbury	1

Religious Individuals & Authorities - The Right Rev Colin Lowe	1
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**Total: 302**

## Appendix B. Claimsmaking Organisations

<i>Type and name of organisation identified in sample</i>	<i>Number of articles in sample containing name (n=420)</i>
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): The CPC	51
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): Children's Society	25
Government Department, Body or Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB): Natural England	7
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): The National Trust	6
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents	5
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): The Wild Network	5
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): Play Scotland	4
University: Cambridge University	4
University: Nottingham Trent University	4
Commercial Organisation: The Early Learning Centre	3
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): National Confederation of Parent Teacher Associations	3
University: Roehampton University	3
University: University of Kent	3
University: University of London	3
Commercial Organisation: Fisher-Price	2
Commercial Organisation: Lego	2
Commercial Organisation: Powergen	2
Educational Institution: Boston College	2
Government Department, Body or Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB): Children's Services	2
Government Department, Body or Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB): National Health Service (NHS)	2
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): Child Accident Prevention Trust	2
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): Parents Outloud	2
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): The National Playing Fields Association	2
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): Toffee Park Adventure Playground in London	2
Religious Organisations: Church of England	2
University: Cardiff University	2



University: Edinburgh University	2
University: Radboud University	2
University: Temple University	2
University: University of Westminster	2
Commercial Organisation: Children's Play Advisory Service	1
Commercial Organisation: Eco Attractions	1
Commercial Organisation: Eden (TV channel)	1
Commercial Organisation: Fitness 4 Kids manager	1
Commercial Organisation: Green Dreams	1
Commercial Organisation: Ikea	1
Commercial Organisation: International insight and strategy consultancy	1
Commercial Organisation: LateRooms.com	1
Commercial Organisation: Mattel	1
Commercial Organisation: Mojang	1
Commercial Organisation: Naturally Nurturing clinic	1
Commercial Organisation: NoodleWorks Interactive	1
Commercial Organisation: North Ayrshire Leisure	1
Commercial Organisation: Persil	1
Commercial Organisation: PGL	1
Commercial Organisation: Pixar	1
Commercial Organisation: School together now (website)	1
Commercial Organisation: Skipping Workshops	1
Commercial Organisation: Tesco	1
Commercial Organisation: Toca Boca	1
Commercial Organisation; Manga High	1
Educational Institution: Brentwood County High School	1
Educational Institution: Coed-y-Brain Primary School	1
Educational Institution: Dublin Institute of Technology	1
Educational Institution: Hult International Business School	1
Educational Institution: Meeching Valley Primary school	1
Educational Institution: Riddlesden St Mary's Church of England Primary school	1
Educational Institution: St James Children's Centre	1
Educational Institution: Waterford Institute of Technology	1
Government Department, Body or Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB): Activity Sheffield, the council's child play service	1
Government Department, Body or Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB): Department for Culture, Media and Sport	1
Government Department, Body or Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB): Bath & North East Somerset council	1
Government Department, Body or Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB): Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP)	1

Government Department, Body or Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB): Department for Education	1
Government Department, Body or Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB): Local Government Association (LGA)	1
Government Department, Body or Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB): Sport England	1
Government Department, Body or Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB): The British Library	1
Government Department, Body or Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB): The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment	1
Government Department, Body or Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB): The Equal Opportunities Committee	1
Government Department, Body or Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB): The Heritage Council	1
Government Department, Body or Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB): The Parliamentary Group on Childhood	1
Government Department, Body or Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB): US government's National Institute of Health	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): Brake (road safety charity)	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): Culture and Sport Glasgow	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): Give Us Back Our Game	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): Gransnet (website)	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): Groundwork	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): Irish Preschool Playgroups Association (IPPA)	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): Islington Play Association	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): KIDS	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): Kids Clubs Network	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): London Play	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): National Play Resource Centre	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): Out of School Network charity	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): Parentport	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): Playing Out	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): Playwork Partnerships	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): Prince's Trust	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): Save Kids' TV	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): Save The Children	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): Start to Move	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): Sugradh a children's charity	1

Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): The Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): The National Children's Bureau	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): The Pre-school Learning Alliance	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): Weight Concern	1
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO): Women's Aid	1
Polling: Mintel	1
Polling: Mori	1
Professional Associations or Governing Body: Association of Teachers and Lecturers	1
Professional Associations or Governing Body: British Medical Association	1
Professional Associations or Governing Body: Chartered Association of Building Engineers (CABE)	1
Professional Associations or Governing Body: Chartered Society of Physiotherapist	1
Professional Associations or Governing Body: Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management (ILAM)	1
Professional Associations or Governing Body: National Association of Head Teachers	1
Professional Associations or Governing Body: National Primary Headteachers' Association	1
Professional Associations or Governing Body: Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland	1
Professional Associations or Governing Body: Royal Institute of Town Planners	1
Professional Associations or Governing Body: The British Toy and Hobby Association	1
Professional Associations or Governing Body: The Football Association (FA)	1
Professional Associations or Governing Body: The Irish National Teachers' Organisation	1
Professional Associations or Governing Body: The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors	1
Religious Organisations: Catholic Church	1
Think-tank, Advocacy, Research & Consultancy: Future Foundation	1
Think-tank, Advocacy, Research & Consultancy: International Toy Research Centre in Stockholm	1
Think-tank, Advocacy, Research & Consultancy: Policy Exchange	1
Think-tank, Advocacy, Research & Consultancy: The King's Fund	1
University: University of Southern California	1
University: Birmingham City University	1
University: Curtin University	1
University: Dublin City University	1
University: Georgetown University	1
University: Harvard University	1

University: Lancaster University	1
University: London Metropolitan University	1
University: Loughborough University	1
University: Iowa State University	1
University: Newcastle University	1
University: Oxford University	1
University: Sheffield University	1
University: The Ohio State University	1
University: The University of Sydney	1
University: University College London	1
University: University College Cork	1
University: University of Bath	1
University: University of Buckingham	1
University: University of California	1
University: University of Exeter	1
University: University of Limerick	1
University: University of Montreal	1
University: University of Oxford	1
University: Utrecht University	1

**Total:144**

## Appendix C. The CPC/Play England Claimsmakers 1995-2002

<i>Claimsmakers</i>	<i>Article information in relation to the claim</i>	<i>Claims</i>
Anna Lubelska, co-ordinator for the NVCCP <sup>1</sup>	Letter to <i>The Guardian</i> : following their publication of an article about Havant Borough Council may be banning children from playing football in the streets.	‘Cllr Carruthers needs to be reminded that the child's right to play is enshrined in the UN Convention on The Rights of The Child, adopted by the UK government in 1991’ (Lubelska, <i>The Guardian</i> : 24 <sup>th</sup> June 1995).
Anna Lubelska, co-ordinator for The NVCCP	Commenting on a story about a suggested increase in organised indoor activities for children.	‘So many parents feel pressurised to do all the fashionable things for their child's development, [...]. But it can be a real mistake to over organise play time. Children need a degree of independence and sometimes to do things without adult interference’ (Francis, <i>The Sunday Times</i> : 29 <sup>th</sup> October 1995).
Tim Gill The CPC/Play England Policy Officer 1996-1997 Director of CPC/Play England 1997-2004	Commenting on research by Plymouth University on the increased time children spend play video games.	‘It's not a matter of these things being good or bad. These games are a consequence of children kept indoors more because of concerns about the safety of the outdoor environment’ (Millar, <i>The Guardian</i> : 20 <sup>th</sup> June 1996).
Tim Gill The CPC/Play England Policy Officer 1996-1997 Director of CPC/Play England 1997-2004	A letter sent to <i>The Guardian</i> by Tim Gill.	‘Children learn right from wrong by being moral agents. We can all remember moral skirmishes from our own childhoods: such as kicking a ball through the neighbour's window. But today, where do these encounters take place? No longer in the streets where we live. This generation is kept in by worried parents. It may be no coincidence that the home and the school are cracking under the strain’

<sup>1</sup> The Name the CPC/Play England were very briefly known under, See Voce (2015) for more information.

		(Gill, <i>The Guardian</i> : 1 <sup>st</sup> November 1996).
Tim Gill The CPC/Play England Policy Officer 1996- 1997 Director of CPC/Play England 1997- 2004	Commenting on research by Research Business International increased use of board games.	'We welcome the recognition of the importance of play and quality time, especially with parents working longer hours and more mothers going out to work. But we are concerned that board games are an indoor pursuit, which underlines that children are being restricted from access to the outdoor environment' (Millar, <i>The Guardian</i> : 26 <sup>th</sup> July 1997).
Tim Gill The CPC/Play England Policy Officer 1996- 1997 Director of CPC/Play England 1997- 2004	Article by Tim Gill campaigning for home zones. <sup>2</sup>	'We believe that the home zone is a creative and practical response to the dominance of the car in residential streets. It is not anti-car; it simply redresses the balance between cars and people. In doing so, it could help recreate the sense of community so many people feel has been lost' (Gill, <i>The Guardian</i> : 3 <sup>rd</sup> December 1997).
Tim Gill The CPC/Play England Policy Officer 1996- 1997 Director of CPC/Play England 1997- 2004 and Sandra Melville Director of Playlink.	A letter sent to <i>The Guardian</i> by Tim Gill and Sandra Melville in response to an article published the previous day highlighting the plight of children prevented from playing freely outdoors or hanging out in privacy with their friends.	'it is time to reinvest in those [adventure] playgrounds that remain and establish new ones' (Gill and Melville, <i>The Guardian</i> : 3 <sup>rd</sup> September 1998).
Tim Gill The CPC/Play England Policy	Commenting on a National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC)	'Caution over strangers is important, but too many parents seem to feel they have to keep their children

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<sup>2</sup> Tim Gill is identified in chapter 5 as being a leading supporter of home zones as a possible solution to a decline or lack of outdoor play.

<p>Officer 1996-1997 Director of CPC/Play England 1997-2004</p>	<p>Campaign.</p>	<p>under house arrest. A much bigger threat is that from traffic, which causes much more damage to children. In recent years, something like 50 times as many children as have been killed by strangers have died from being run over by cars while out playing in the street' (Brindle, <i>The Guardian</i>: 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1999).</p>
<p>The CPC/Play England</p>	<p>Report on research findings by the CPC/Play England and the Children's Society.</p>	<p>'Eighty per cent of parents questioned in a joint poll [...] said they regretted the fact that their children spent far less time playing outside than they did as children. Of these, 78 per cent said that it was their own fear of the dangers posed by strangers and traffic that kept their children indoors' (<i>The Times</i>: 4<sup>th</sup> August 1999).</p>
<p>The CPC/Play England</p>	<p>Report on research finding by the CPC/Play England and the Children's Society.</p>	<p>'Most parents in the [...] survey said their youngsters spent far less time outside playing than they ever had' (Brocklebank, <i>The Daily Mail</i>: 5<sup>th</sup> August 1999).</p>
<p>Tim Gill The CPC/Play England Policy Officer 1996-1997 Director of CPC/Play England 1997-2004</p>	<p>Commenting on the governments creation of the Children's Unit.</p>	<p>'children today had fewer chances to play outside than any previous generation because their parents were too afraid to let them out alone. As a result, many were missing out on a vital part of growing up and on the chance to develop independence and self-confidence' (Freaan, <i>The Times</i>: 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2000).</p>
<p>Tim Gill The CPC/Play England Policy Officer 1996-1997 Director of CPC/Play England 1997-2004</p>	<p>Article on the campaign for UK home zones.</p>	<p>'At the heart of the home zone philosophy is the push to reclaim the streets for residents. Tim Gill, director of the Children's Play Council and a leading home zones supporter says their introduction has benefited all residents, not just the young. In addition, they can foster greater community spirit' (Langton <i>The Guardian</i>: 12<sup>th</sup> May 2001).</p>

<p>Tim Gill The CPC/Play England Policy Officer 1996- 1997 Director of CPC/Play England 1997- 2004</p>	<p>Comment in article titled 'Kids Who Can't Play'.</p>	<p>'We're in danger of stifling our children's development with a culture of caution' (<i>The Daily Mirror</i>: 29<sup>th</sup> July 2002).</p>
<p>The CPC/Play England</p>	<p>Report on research finding by the CPC/Play England and the Children's Society.</p>	<p>'almost half of the 500 children interviewed are already not allowed to play with water and a quarter are forbidden to ride a bike or use a skateboard' (Hilpern, <i>The Guardian</i>: 14<sup>th</sup> August 2002)</p>



**Appendix D. Politician Claimsmakers**

<i>Name of politician claimsmakers identified in sample</i>	<i>Number of articles containing claims (n=420)</i>
Ed Balls	9
Frank Dobson	4
Michael Gove	4
Baroness Floella Benjamin	2
Don Foster	2
David Cameron	1
David Lammy	1
John Whittingdale	1
Liam Fox	1
Margaret Bannister	1
Nicky Gavron	1
Nigel Farage	1
Richard Caborn	1
Ruth Kelly	1
Tessa Jowell	1
Tim Loughton	1
Tom Watson	1
Yvette Cooper	1

## Appendix E. Grounds

The following claims are divided into the broad categories to which claims were observed to relate:

1. Concerns linked or attached to the decline of children's play outdoors
2. Causes of a decline in children's play outdoors
3. Terminology and names for play outdoor
4. Definitions and descriptions of play outdoors
5. Statistics suggesting the extent of the problem
6. Those harmed by the problem (Victims)

V = Variation of claim

C = Criticism or counterclaim

<i>1. Concerns linked or attached to the decline of children's play outdoors</i>	
<i>Claims</i>	<i>Number of articles containing claim</i>
Bedroom culture linked to the decline in children's play outdoors	23
Children have no time to play as they are 'overscheduled ' linked to the decline of children's play	15
Children's freedom to roam independently is being restricted linked to the decline of children's play outdoors	13
Children becoming disconnected from nature linked to the decline of children's play outdoors	10

<b>2. Causes of a decline in children's play outdoors</b>	
<b>Claims</b>	<b>Number of articles containing claims</b>
Parental anxiety about letting their children out to play regarding their children's safety	25
Parents fear of stranger danger means they stop their children playing outdoors	15
Parents fear of traffic deters them from letting their children out to play	13
Adult intolerance of children playing outside in public prevents such play	10
V-Children playing outdoors seen as up to no good 'antisocial behaviour'	4
Outdoor play area designs have become boring and sterile because of risk aversion	8
'Cotton wool culture' in which children are mollycoddled is to blame for children not being allowed out to play	8
Increased volume of traffic prevents children playing outside	7
Parents don't have enough time to take their children outside to play	7
Lack of public spaces in which children can play prevents them from play outdoors	6
V- The sale of school playing fields and neglected parks prevents children from playing outdoors	5
V- Lack play areas and parks etc. near to where children live preventing them from play outdoors	3
V- Lack of safe play areas prevent children from play outdoors	1
V- Lack of public funding for children's play areas prevent children playing outdoors	1
V-The streets is no longer a place where children can play prevents them play outdoors	1
Local authority bylaws such as 'no ball games' signs prevent children from play outside	5
Risks averse culture prevents children from playing outdoors	3
Health and safety regulations putting a stop to outdoor play activities	3
V-Health and safety regulations are not to blame for children being denied opportunities to play outdoors	1
Parents afraid to let the children play outdoors in case they get bullied	3
Children's worry they will get bullied if they play outdoors	2
A reduced sense of community prevents parents letting their children play outdoors	2
Parents don't let the children out to play as they don't want them getting dirty	2
Parents don't let their children out to play as they are worried about gems	2
Children not wanting to get dirty, so they don't play outside	2
Children's fears for their own safety so they don't play outdoors	1

Parents don't let their children out to play as they are worried their children will fall in with a bad crowd	1
Society ambivalent attitude towards children means that they play is not a priority	1
Parents who let their children play outdoors are branded irresponsible	1
Lack of understanding of the importance of outdoor play has contributed to its decline	1

<b>3. Terminology and names for play outdoor</b>	
<b>Terms</b>	<b>Number of articles containing claims</b>
'Outside play' and variations of - e.g. 'play outside', 'playing outside'	28
'Outdoor play' and variations of - e.g. 'play outdoors', 'playing outdoors'	21
Risky play	2
Active play	1
Natural play	1
Proper play	1
Street play	1
Wild play	1

<b>4. Definitions and descriptions of play outdoors</b>	
<b>Claims</b>	<b>Number of articles containing claims</b>
Play outdoors is good for children physical health	11
V-Play outdoors important for reducing obesity	1
V- Play outdoors increase physical activity	1
Play outdoors is necessary for testing physical boundaries and understand risks	11
Play outdoors involves traditional play activities such as hopscotch and climbing trees	10
Play outdoors is how children learn important social skills	10
Playing outdoors fundamental part of childhood	8
Playing outdoors is key to children's development	7
Play outdoors is important for children to learn how to be creative	7
Play outdoor helps children learn about and understand their own emotions	6
Through play outdoors children learn to solve problems	4

Play outdoors allows children to use and develop their imaginations	4
Play outdoors is how children learn about the world	3
Play outdoors is good for children's mental health	3
V- play outdoors improves happiness	3
V-play critical part of children's wellbeing	2
V-play outdoors reduces stress	1
V- play outdoors Improves ADHD symptoms	1
V- play outdoors reduces aggression	1
Play outdoors helps develop self-discipline	3
Play outdoors helps children to concentrate and their learning ability	2
V- Play outdoors is connected to children's academic achievement	1
Play outdoors is an important part of developing into a well-rounded adult	2
Play outdoors helps children learn about independence	1

<b>5. Statistics suggesting the extent of the problem</b>	
<b>Claims</b>	<b>Number of articles containing claims</b>
Estimates of a decline in the number of children who play outdoors compared to the previous generation	12
Estimates of a of time children spend play outdoors	10
Estimates of number of children who want to play outside but are restricted from doing so	8

<b>6. Those harmed by the problem (victims)</b>	
<b>Claims</b>	<b>Number of articles containing claims</b>
Children	71
Society as a whole	2