

Handout To Accompany Peter Gray's Plenary Addresses, IPA 2017 Sept 13 & 15

Sept 13 Plenary: THE DECLINE OF PLAY, AND MENTAL HEALTH CONSEQUENCES OF THAT DECLINE

I. The Decline of Play

- What do I mean by play? Activity that is (1) self-chosen & self-directed; (2) intrinsically motivated; (3) guided by mental concepts; & (4) imaginative.
- Historical & social science evidence for huge decline in play over 60 years, in US and elsewhere.
- My observations of play's decline, from 1950s to today.
- Some reasons for the decline: Spread of fears; weight of school; schoolish view of child development.

II. Psychological Consequences of the Decline of Play (and reasons for thinking they are consequences)

A. Increased depression, anxiety, and suicides in young people.

- Five- to 8-fold increase in Major Depression and anxiety disorders in young people, based on estimates from the MMPI and Taylor's Manifest Anxiety Scale, since the 1950s. Rise in suicides.
- A world without play is depressing and anxiety-provoking.
- How children learn to control fear in play.
- Play deprivation experiments with monkeys & rats.

B. Decline in young people's sense of control over their lives.

- Continuous decline in "internal locus of control," based on standard assessments.
- A causal relationship: Decline in play → loss of sense of control → depression and anxiety.

C. Decline in empathy and rise in narcissism in young people

- At least since late 1970s, based on Narcissistic Personality Inventory & Interpersonal Reactivity Index.
- How children overcome narcissism and acquire empathy in play.

D. Decline in creativity among US school children at all grade levels

- Since 1984, based on Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking.
- Why the increase in academic training and decline in play would reduce creativity.

Sept. 15 Plenary: HOW TO RESTORE CHILDREN'S PLAY IN TODAY'S WORLD

A. At the individual and family level: See Lenore Skenazy's *Free Range Kids*. Examine our own values (what do we really want for our children?). Examine our own fears (how rational are they?). Be brave, and let our children be brave.

B. At the neighborhood level: See Mike Lanza's *Playborhood*. Create neighborhood play opportunities.

C. At the community level: Schools as places to play; supervisors in parks; adventure playgrounds.

D. Initiatives of the Let Grow Foundation. See <https://letgrow.org> Creation of play-friendly communities.

(References on other side)

Some References

Books on the problem of play deprivation and what to do about it

Peter Gray. *Free to Learn: Why Unleashing the Instinct to Play Will Make Our Children Happier, More Self-Reliant, and Better Students for Life*. Basic Books.

Lenore Skenazy. *Free-Range Kids: Giving Our Kids the Freedom We Had Without Going Nuts*. Wiley.

Mike Lanza. *Playborhood: Turn Your Neighborhood into a Place for Play*. Free Play Press.

Some references relevant to decline of play and rise of psychopathology

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Animal Research on Play Deprivation

Panksepp, J. Attention deficit hyperactivity disorders, psychostimulants, and intolerance of childhood playfulness: A tragedy in the making? *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 7, 91-98. (1998).

Pellis, S. M., et al. "The Function of Play in the Development of the Social Brain," *American Journal of Play* 2 (2010): 278-296 (2010).

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Suomi, S. J., & Harlow, H. F. Monkeys at play. *Natural History*, Dec., 1971, pp 72-75.

Van den Berg, C. L., et al. Play is indispensable for an adequate development of coping with social challenges in the rat. *Developmental Psychobiology* 34, 129-138. (1999).

See also Peter Gray, Freedom to Learn blog: <http://blogs.psychologytoday.com/blog/freedom-learn>
 and follow me on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/peter.gray.3572>