



# NEVER STOP PLAYING: AN IMPLICATION OF “A DIFFERENT ADULTHOOD”

In Seattle this past summer, around 1,000 people attended Adult Recess so that they could participate in games such as kickball and hopscotch and enjoy foods such as peanut butter sandwiches and macaroni and cheese. In July, about 600 people turned out in Greensboro (NC) for an adult recess program at a local park that offered hula hoops and games such as Twister. In San Francisco, there is the so-called Play Recess league, with 500 adult participants paying \$74 a year to play a different game every week. These events, and others like them around the country, illustrate the attractiveness of play – one of the defining aspects of what we have called A Different Adulthood. Four years ago, we suggested that play had become an important component of adulthood rather than something that would be left behind as young people aged. Now, playing games traditionally associated with children, or watching others play these games, is an increasingly popular adult pastime that is driving sales, event crowds and mainstream media viewership. (*Guardian Weekly*, 9/27/19; *Wall Street Journal*, 8/19/9)

**The Original Context** “There is no longer a clear script for adulthood,” we noted in June 2015. In the past, there was a clear path from youth to adulthood: “A person reached a certain age, attained a certain level of education, started a career, enjoyed financial stability through employee benefits, got married, bought a house, bought life insurance, had children...” At some point along the way, that person was clearly living an “adult life.” The transition usually happened quickly, and when it did, people would put away the trappings and habits of youth, like video games, comic books, youth literature, and expectations of instant gratification. However, challenges brought on by both the pervasiveness of digital technology and the limitations of the New Economy have changed all that, “obscuring the once-clear image of adulthood” (see [IF 3609](#), “Growing Up Isn’t What It Used to Be: Society and an Emerging New Concept of Adulthood,” 6/1/15).

## New Observations: Fun, Distractions and Escape Through Play

### Pinball

- Between 2010 and 2018, the number of pinball tournaments per year increased almost tenfold, and attendance at these events increased from 16,625 to 133,751 over the same period, according to the International Flipper Pinball Association.
- Marco Specialties, the largest supplier of pinball components, has seen its business grow between 20 and 30 percent every year for the past five years.
- Numerous pinball players are now livestreaming their games on Twitch or Facebook Live. One Twitch account, DeadFlip, has 2.7 million unique views in aggregate.

(*Fast Company*, 6/28/19; *Washington Post*, 7/29/19)

## Tag

- In August, the 2019 World Chase Tag championships were held in London, and Channel 4 in the UK aired highlights of the event.
- Chase Tag events are attracting millions of viewers on YouTube.  
*(The Guardian, 8/23/19)*

## Bowling

- Last spring, Fox acquired the rights to broadcast matches from the Professional Bowlers Association (PBA). This February, Fox coverage of the PBA Tournament of Champions delivered 1.13 million viewers, up 75 percent in viewership from 2018, and an increase of 70 percent from 2017.  
*(The Ringer, 7/25/19; SportsMediaWatch, 2/14/19)*

## Wiffle Ball

- Hundreds of Wiffle Ball tournaments take place around the United States. At July's World Wiffle Ball Championships in Illinois, there were teams from 12 different states.  
*(The Ringer, 8/15/19)*

## Ping Pong

- Coaches and volunteers from Brighton Table Tennis Club visit HM Prison High Down in Surrey (England) to train inmates as table-tennis coaches. Since the program began, two years ago, violent behavior has fallen 83 percent among attendees, and 250 prisoners have passed through the program.
- SPiN is an international bar and restaurant chain featuring open tables and a table-tennis club. It now has nine locations, including two in New York City.  
*(The Guardian, 8/28/19; Wall Street Journal, 5/26/18)*

## Pickleball

- Pickleball is described as a sport that fuses elements of badminton, tennis and table tennis. The USA Pickleball Association claims there has been a 650 percent increase in participation during the last six years.  
*(The Virginian-Pilot, 10/1/19)*

## Video Games

- In 2016, 38 percent of Americans ages 50 and older said they played video games.
- A 66-year-old man who goes by "GrndPaGaming" has more than 200,000 subscribers who regularly watch him play video games on the streaming service Twitch.

•Shirley Curry, an 83-year-old, has more than 700,000 subscribers who watch her play video games on YouTube.

(NBC, 8/29/19)

## More Play

•The number of British citizens who identify as members of the Church of England has dropped by more than half since 2002. In an attempt to boost attendance, this summer various cathedrals filled their naves with carnival rides, mini-golf courses and in one case a colorful 55-foot-tall slide, known as a helter skelter, which moved people through twelfth-century stone pillars.

•Ballie Ballerson is a cocktail bar with two London locations offering a giant “kids” playroom ball pit (for adults only).

•A library in Ohio offers adult patrons Play-Doh.

(New York Times, 8/14/19; Guardian Weekly, 9/27/19)

In our initial 2015 *Briefing* on this context we wrote, “Much of what the New Adulthood conceptualizes is the pursuit of something better, a context we have called From a Better Living to a Better Life. As economic and cultural realities shift, more and more individuals are turning away from focusing intensely on increasing their wealth and standard of living to focusing on things like meaning and more pleasurable activities.” Numerous generations, not just the Millennials, have lost interest in or have lost the ability to obtain the model of adulthood that Americans once aspired to, including the traditional rites of passage such as marriage, children, home and auto ownership and steady careers with retirement plans. All of these seem to be getting postponed or done away with. As adulthood, and what comes with it, continues to be redefined, age is nothing but a number, and today’s adults don’t consider any number too high for them to participate and enjoy games that were once considered to be only for children. The ability to find a respite from current troubles and stresses and the ability to connect with friends and strangers in the “real world” make it easier and easier to resort to a wide variety of games to play in A Different Adulthood.