

## **Eyes on play, eyes on the alley: Linking the experiences of childhood play between parents and children in Toronto amid socio-cultural and spatial change**

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A growing body of scholarship has sought to examine how play occurs across space. Recent scholarship has examined the impacts urbanization is having on children's independent mobility and the extent to which play is limited by parental decision-making. This study therefore seeks to merge these two areas of scholarship to understand how children's agency over the play experience manifests itself in the neighbourhood of Riverdale (Toronto). This study finds that while children are limited in many ways based on parental anxieties about the socio-spatial composition of the neighbourhood, certain vestiges of play reminiscent of previous generations resurface amid the particular infrastructural circumstances present in Riverdale. Specifically, alleys provide a socio-spatially contained space where children are capable of exercising agency over their play experience through the creative appropriation of the alley as a place of play that stresses dimensions of play fostering positive physical, behavioural, social, and cognitive development among children.

*Key words: children's independent mobility, children's agency, dimensions of play, loose parts theory, alleys, Toronto*



An alley in Riverdale; a prominent site of play where children can express agency  
(Photograph by author. Summer 2016)