

renowned paper doll artists, popular characters and icons, and contemporary paper doll projects.

Paper Dolls serves as a significant resource on paper dolls for those interested in scholarly pursuits and for those who collect the medium or other ephemera. The book is well researched and engaging. Although paper dolls are a fragile type of ephemera, they remain current and prove a unique cultural artifact.

—Michelle Parnett-Dwyer, *The Strong*,
Rochester, NY

Families at Play: Connecting and Learning through Video Games

Sinem Siyahhan and Elisabeth Gee

Cambridge, MA, 2018. Series foreword, preface, appendices, notes, bibliography, and index. 200 pp. \$30.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780262037464

Individuals learn in contexts that depend on social and cultural connections to each other and to their environments. They are learning all the time, in fact, as they adapt to their changing environments—for learning is essentially a change in behavior often informed by a change in understanding contexts. Realizing this opens up the conversation to a new set of questions and makes moot many others when we talk about video games and children. Children are always learning. Asking do they learn with video games proves facile—the answer is always yes.

Families at Play: Connecting and Learning through Video Games, by Sinem

Siyahhan and Elisabeth Gee, helps readers understand the sociocultural nature of learning by presenting them with descriptive accounts of families and their relationships with video games. Siyahhan and Gee are especially adept at highlighting the nuance and diversity in each of the five family's experiences. Concentrating on families adds a much needed context for understanding children's experiences with games. Clearly, video game playing and other activities that stem from it are opportunities for families to nurture and learn together. Most importantly, the five families approached games with care and treated playing them as opportunities to bring family members closer together.

Families at Play begins with an overview of the authors' research agenda and then, just to get it out of the way first, quickly delves into dispelling myths associated with video game playing and its perceived negative effects. This book focuses on positive interactions between children and their family members with and around games. Negative experiences occur with some (other families not described in the book), but much of the dysfunction within families regarding video games comes from a lack of understanding video game play as a situated opportunity for sharing and learning (which is true with basically all media). Common mistakes include assuming that all video games are the same (not true) and that play is likewise monolithic. In fact, one individual's experience with a game (and whether it isolates him or her from family) may be drastically different from another's due to the social contexts of play. For family play, not the games, but the familial support around playing them matters.

At the heart of the book lies a rich portrait developed during a decade of observation of five families about how parents engaged in game playing with their children (and siblings with each other). The families came from different socioeconomic backgrounds, and they all exhibited different forms of engagement, ranging from actual coplaying to supervising to exploring common affinities involving particular genres of games or specific game worlds. In all cases, the important thread seems to be that the families who spent time together, participating in shared interests or desires, had extremely positive relationships (and some negative ones) with video games in which children and parents learned and explored together. The different families all had different arrangements with games and family members, but Siyahhan and Gee usefully categorize their connectedness as occurring both vertically and horizontally. Vertical connectedness occurred among several family members over a shared interest (for example, a father and son both loving the Star Wars franchise). Horizontal connectedness occurred when a child took a deep dive on a specific topic across multiple mediums (for example, enjoying both Star Wars games and Star Wars movies) within a nurturing environment.

The learning in these cases was interest-driven, and parents fostered and cultivated their children's situational interest into deeper learning opportunities, mostly through participating with their children, sharing or being receptive to their interests, and socially engaging with them as they played with and around video games. The most important commonality seemed to be that parents spent time with their

children; in fact, they often deliberately made time for their children and took an active interest in the video game play.

Siyahhan and Gee argue that the actual practice of playing or participating in video games spans across a "constellation of literacy" domains, borrowing from a study by Constance Steinkuehler about online game players' literacy practices. As such, it behooves researchers to understand the talk in which families engage as they play. Examining their discourse elicits insight into their thinking and learning. Siyahhan and Gee use the established concept of learning conversations to describe these moments, detailing how they often happened spontaneously depending on the events occurring in the video games the families played.

In addition to developing a discourse around their game play, families also formed their own (mini) communities around it. If games are ritual spaces, it seems fitting that game playing in a larger context also produces particular familial rituals and routine. Indeed, Siyahhan and Gee suggest that families develop what Papert calls a "family learning culture" around their gaming. The five families also engaged in specific forms of identity formation that could be examined on the level of individuals as well as of the families as whole units. This could potentially be another layer for James Paul Gee's description in *What Video Games Have to Teach Us about Learning and Literacy* of three identities that occur when an individual plays a game, adding complexity to shared formation of real-world identities and shared projection of particular identities onto game avatars.

The book ends with practical advice.

First, Siyahhan and Gee give parents a list of potential questions to ask their children who play and suggests ways for families to engage in game modding and making, including naming specific useful tools (such as Twine) and offering advice on how to approach them. Second, the authors provide guidelines for developers to encourage intergenerational play through their video game design. Developers would do well to think about incorporating moments of relevance for different ages and skill levels, designing challenges that can be shared, and how play can be divided among players to meet these joint challenges.

Overall, *Families at Play* is a welcome addition to the sociocultural story of learning with games because it provides much needed nuance to the discussion by expanding what we know to include specific details how families engage in productive play.

—Mark Chen, *University of Washington Bothell, Bothell, WA*

Super Power, Spooky Bards, and Silverware: The Super Nintendo Entertainment System

Dominic Arsenault

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Introduction, notes, researches, and index. 226 pp. \$29.95 cloth.

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Dominic Arsenault's book, *Super Power, Spooky Bards, and Silverware: The Super Nintendo Entertainment System*, offers a valuable reminder of what all scholarly

activity should have at its core—the willingness to challenge firmly held beliefs. After all, a belief that does not stand up to rigorous scrutiny is not a belief worth having. Arsenault's work allows us the chance to do exactly that, rigorously to scrutinize the widely held belief that the Super Nintendo Entertainment System (SNES) video game console was a stellar piece of hardware that enabled some of the greatest software in video game history. Arsenault uses extensive research and novel information to reframe most major factors that contribute to that belief. Ultimately, his book is not designed to change the reader's mind regarding these widely agreed-upon beliefs of the Super Nintendo. However, it demands the reader flex some mental muscles that may have grown weak after decades of simply adopting the same old assumptions about the platform.

Not everything in the book runs contrary to popular opinion. Peppered throughout Arsenault's argument are bits of what would pass as common knowledge among video game historians. He describes how the advent of CD-ROMs and polygonal graphics made the original Sony PlayStation console an enticing platform for third-party developers. And the fact that Nintendo constantly relies on current or last generation technology for its hardware forms a key tenet.

In its quest to provide new information, the book offers some truly novel facts and observations. Many people are aware of Nintendo and Sony's inability to work together in creating a CD-ROM addition to the SNES. Nintendo abruptly, and publicly, severed the deal with Sony in favor of one with Philips. But the author adds to the discussion that this extremely abrupt