

mentary to explore the gendered creation of youth-sports culture. Messner's is a necessary and critical perspective, one that needs further exploration.

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**From Children to Red Hatters:
Diverse Images and Issues of Play**

David Kushner, ed.

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From Children to Red Hatters: Diverse Images and Issues of Play, edited by David Kushner, shows that play scholars are as inventive and wide ranging in their ideas as are children and adults at play. What topic other than play could inspire such disparate areas of study as the interactions between a monkey named E.T. and some young sheep, the origins of play among atomic particles, or the dress-up play of elderly women? The diversity in this book makes a fascinating read but poses a challenge to a reviewer. The book defies synthesis. Like play itself, variability is the defining feature of this volume.

Some chapters focus on the centuries-old, perhaps unattainable, goal of defining play. Gwen Gordon, in chapter 1, conceptualizes play as a crossing of boundaries from an orderly and too-restrictive cosmos to one that is free and spontaneous. Her work is rich with metaphors: “trickster chaos stirs things up, disturbing the status quo and revitalizing play” (p. 12).

Her ideas are dense and challenging. Whether the chapter illuminates or muddles our understanding of play is beside the point; this work presents fascinating ideas. In chapter 2, Thomas S. Henricks provides a more organized, readable accounting of play. He categorizes play theories according to their orientation toward time: some treat play as preparation for the future, others as a revisiting of the past. He devotes most attention to theories of play that are grounded in the present. Such perspectives hold that play is stepping sideways, rather than forward or back—a distraction from the here and now. A powerful idea in the chapter is that views of play are shaped by a particular theorist's beliefs, research interests, and even culture.

Among the chapters focusing on defining play, Michael M. Patte's nicely constructed ethnography, presented in chapter 7, is unique in considering the definitions of players themselves—fifth-grade children. His young subjects' perspectives are refreshingly clear in contrast to the complexity of previous chapters. To these young philosophers, play is, fundamentally, fun. Work is what is not fun. It is no surprise that these students proclaim recess their favorite school activity.

Other chapters focus on play within social contexts. Peggy O'Neill-Wagner's peculiar and engaging chapter 3 chronicles the play of a rhesus monkey, E.T., growing up in a pasture with sheep. E.T. was observed, “climbing, bouncing, rolling and even somersaulting down [the sheep's] woolly coats” (p. 45). Such striking observations suggest that play is not only wired into the genetic makeup of all species, but, at its evolutionary root, it is

a social phenomenon. Interestingly, Harold Fishbein, Michael Malone, and Dolores A. Stegelin, in chapter 5, suggest that human children may be less accepting in their choices of playmates. This complex empirical study indicates that race and gender affect whom children will play with or name as preferred playmates; same-gender and same-sex preferences are common. Of particular interest was the finding that children's ratings of peers in sociometric interviews were sometimes inconsistent with direct observations of peer interactions, suggesting that children may tell adults one thing but do another.

In another study of social context, in chapter 6, Maureen Vandermaas-Peeler, Jackie Nelson, Melissa von der Heide, and Erica Kelly compare parent-child interactions in play and literacy settings. Findings indicate that parents give more guidance in story comprehension in the literacy context—not a particularly surprising discovery. The relatively brief time period for observations, the small and culturally homogeneous sample, and the decontextualized nature of the study limit what generalizations can be made of the findings. What makes the chapter worth reading are the rich narratives, which offer more nuanced and meaningful insights about play.

Marianne B. Staempfli, in chapter 8, examines the playfulness of adolescents within school contexts. Using a rigorously constructed survey to measure playfulness, she explores relationships between playfulness scores and extracurricular involvement. Several tangential findings are as interesting as the main results: Adolescent play is highly influenced by emerging gender roles, and, sadly, it is rarely

exercised during class time. A less-often-studied population—elderly women—is the focus of a fascinating investigation presented in chapter 9 by Careen Mackay Yarnal, Deborah Kerstetter, Garry Chick, and Susan Hutchinson. Findings indicate that females over the age of fifty in the Red Hat Society play in ways that are consistent with theories related to younger players. Props, masks, and disengagement from the real world characterize older women's play much as that of preschoolers.

In chapter 10, Elizabeth Wood examines teachers as part of the social context of play. After reviewing international policies, theories, and research, she formulates a four-dimensional model of classroom play that includes a child-initiated to teacher-initiated continuum on one axis and a work-to-play continuum on the other. Teachers are to position themselves at an appropriate place within both continua, depending on children's needs. Additional attention might have been given to factors that affect the decisions of teachers about where to place themselves in play: specific characteristics of children, social contexts, or intended learning outcomes. Including new research on scaffolding play by neo-Vygotskians would have added to the chapter and better informed the decision making of teachers.

The physical context of play is examined in historical perspective in Eva Nwokah's chapter 4. She demonstrates how societal trends influence the choice of toys for infants. Industrialization, the rise of commercialism, and shifts in political thought are linked to the toys offered from 1865 to 1930. The author makes a persuasive argument that childhood play can be shaped by some very unplayful, adult matters.

Many of these chapters would be strengthened by examining how culture shapes play. This is ultimately a book about American play and, in most chapters, Euro-American play. How would the authors rework their concepts (or even reframe their questions) if cultural diversity in play were more fully examined? In spite of this limitation, the volume is re-

plete with ideas on play that span time, the life cycle, and even species. Chapters offer more questions than answers and elevate our curiosity about play, rather than satisfy it, as any good book on play should do.

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