

particular attention to issues of gender.

The collection draws on a wide range of sources and approaches to explore the main topic. While some of the contributors work with texts—films, dolls, books—about princesses, others discuss the interactions girls have with the culture of princesses. By doing this, the authors provide a voice to girls, often quoting extensively while keeping their own views as the researchers to a minimum. This approach to highlight girls' voices aligns with the primary goals of girlhood studies.

An important aspect of this book is that it provides different ranges for what constitutes a “girl,” especially according to her cultural context. For instance, in her chapter about princess culture in Qatar, Kristen Pike employs the term “girl” even though her participants were between eighteen and twenty-four years old because in Arab countries the term “woman” refers to married females. In this context, “girl” expands meaning of the term beyond its common use in Western scholarly works about girls. Pike's use of “girl” provides an example of the fluidity of the term “girl” around the world.

I grew up loving the princess culture offered by Disney, and the essays in this collection speak to my childhood and the ways in which I enjoyed princesses through movies, play, dolls, and costumes. At the same time, as an emerging scholar of girlhood, I can look at princesses with a careful and critical eye, understanding the problems they present. As some of the authors point out, girls' experiences and viewpoints suggest that, “princess media narratives are best understood when the pleasures and possibilities they offer to

girls are considered alongside criticisms of their textual limitations” (p.154). In this sense, *Princess Cultures* appeals to readers on both a personal and critical level.

My only criticisms are minor editing issues such as the appearance of incomplete sentences that can be distracting to readers and slight inconsistencies in the spelling of words across chapters. For example, the fictional location of the movie *Aladdin* is referred to as “Agraba” in chapter 2 and “Agrabah” in chapter 3. These are minor discrepancies, but they can distract readers.

Despite these, Forman-Brunell and Hains have created a rich collection of essays that significantly contribute to the growing literature that examines girls' popular cultures. *Princess Cultures* is the first scholarly collection to discuss the princess from a wide range of perspectives. In so doing, *Princess Cultures* adds to the growing literature that examines girls' lives, cultures, and the way they mediate their identity through popular artifacts and popular constructions of girlhood. Play scholars interested in the ways in which girls mediate their identities through their play with princess dolls will also find much to consider here. Academics from a wide range of disciplines, including play scholars, as well as general readers interested in childhood, girlhood, or the princess will enjoy it.

—Emily R. Aguiló-Pérez, *Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA*

Players and Pawns: How Chess Builds Community and Culture

Gary Fine

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015. Prologue, introduction, acknowledgments, notes, index. 288 pp. \$26.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780226264981

The subtitle of Gary Fine's new book on chess is significant, for he is an ethnographer who is most interested not so much in the game itself as in the communities that develop around it among the players, the teachers, and the kibitzers who comment ceaselessly on matches in progress. Chess, Fine points out, is relentlessly social, for even a brilliant move (and he notes "brilliance" is a much sought-after quality in chess) requires that an opponent help create the position that makes the move possible.

This emphasis on the social is missing from most chess books, which reduce the game to the calculation of optimal moves on a board of sixty-four squares. Pick up a guide to chess strategy like Alexander Kotov's classic study of the middle game, *Play Like a Grandmaster*, and you find a relentless focus on the individual mind at work, assessing, strategizing, and calculating. Fine pulls back from the board to emphasize how the game is played through the expression of emotion, the performance of the body, and the cultivation of networks of relationships. In this respect, the book resembles Robert Desjerlais's *Counterplay: An Anthropologist at the Chessboard* (2011), which also examines the social aspects of chess, though that work weaves even more personal reflections into the narrative than Fine's book does.

A sociologist, Fine has plumbed other leisure spheres such as Little League baseball, speech and debate tournaments, and the role-playing game Dungeons &

Dragons. An accomplished scholar, he has read widely, not only in the extensive body of work on chess but in a wide array of books dealing with ethnography, society, and play. He liberally references this scholarship throughout the book, and anyone interested in understanding chess can find no better source for insight into the cultures that surround the game than his analysis.

And Fine gets it right. Having played competitive tournament chess for many years from ages eight to twenty-one, I found myself again and again remembering some incident that meshed perfectly with Fine's anecdotes, analyses, and descriptions of the players he observed. While reading the book, I thought of the pipe-smoking club player who blew his acrid-brand of pipe smoke into my face during crucial moments of games and of the tournament opponent who stared at me unblinkingly while her state champion of a brother came by from time to time, making soft sounds of contempt whenever I moved (I drew that game). In his section, "Child at the Board," I recalled the middle schooler who had the nerve to ask me if I wanted to resign after I blundered and lost a knight early (I refused and went on to win).

Fine's emphasis on the stories that players tell about the games and the communities they form helps readers understand the sociology of chess culture. He begins by exploring how best to position the book within the multiple scholarly lenses that have been used to study chess, then shifts to an exploration of the conceits and deceits of tournament chess where players scheme how best to defeat their opponents. Fine then explores the role of time in governing each individual

game, as well as tracing how the game has evolved and developed historically.

Ultimately, the sociologist in Fine is most concerned about the communities that aggregate around the activity, and here he is at his best, showing how the relationships of individuals around the chessboard, not just across it, perpetuate the game. Traditionally, this has taken place at chess clubs and tournaments, but, increasingly, digital tools mediate these relationships through a host of chess websites, virtual communities, and ever more powerful programs. Fine's insights into how digital tools are transforming the world of chess seem particularly pertinent.

If there are flaws in the book, they are flaws of commission rather than omission. At times the author circles back to pet anecdotes (for instance about the high school team that favored the "fried liver" opening) several times. And some discussions feel repetitive, perhaps because sections of the book were published earlier as separate and distinct articles. Fine knows his scholarship well and sometimes slows the narrative to mention the works of other scholars, material that might have found a better place in the footnotes. The book's basic structure of previewing each chapter, then summarizing it at the end, ensures the reader gets the point, though occasionally by belaboring it.

Yet these are minor cavils with a fine book that rewards the novice with an excellent overview of the worlds of competitive chess and benefits the expert with new insights into an ancient game that is still fresh today.

—Jon-Paul C. Dyson, *The Strong, Rochester, NY*

**Once Upon a Playground:
A Celebration of Classic
American Playgrounds,
1920–1975**

Brenda Biondo

Lebanon, NH: ForeEdge, 2014.

Foreword, introduction, afterword, acknowledgments, photo locations, historical image credits, images. 154 pp. \$22.95 cloth. ISBN: 9781611685121

With *Once Upon a Playground: A Celebration of Classic American Playgrounds, 1920–1975*, author Brenda Biondo has compiled a beautiful collection of images of American playgrounds that spans over fifty years. She frames many of these colorful pieces of playground equipment within spacious landscapes and skiescapes, and in doing so these apparatus tend to jump off the page. The absence of children on these play structures accentuates the structural qualities of each piece.

By grouping the play equipment by the decades in which they were popular, Biondo provides a historical context for each picture. The foreword, authored by art historian and playground scholar Susan G. Solomon, astutely offers the sociocultural foundation underlying the construction of apparatuses in each era. As Solomon proffers, beginning in the early twentieth century, playgrounds were designed to acculturate immigrant and poor children growing up in an ever-changing urban environment. During the 1920s and 1930s, the purpose of playgrounds shifted to creating a place where children could find both enjoyment and excitement, not only in urban settings but also in rural communities.

Biondo artistically captures the