

## INTRODUCTION

The present volume is to honor a colleague upon the occasion of his retirement from the University of Pennsylvania. Like most such volumes, this one brings together a group of distinguished scholars to comment on the work of a major thinker in the field. Brian Sutton-Smith is certainly a distinguished scholar; his distinction, however, covers a number of different fields, such as children's play and games, narrative language and thought, and sibling relationships. Additionally, he has crossed a number of disciplinary boundaries in his research, including anthropology, folklore, history, literary criticism, and psychology. This volume, like Brian's career, draws scholars from these various disciplines, literally from anthropology to zoology. He has had a major impact on all these fields. As an indicator of the diversity of his work, an appendix listing his research in play is included. (The efforts of Dr. F. F. McMahon in assembling these references is gratefully acknowledged.)

When I approached Brian on the subject of this volume celebrating his retirement he responded that such a volume "was an intellectual replica of the Golden Bough where an old man gets beheaded and his place taken by the young and new King." In true fashion, Brian prefers to remain alive. He wished this volume to be a genuinely interdisciplinary venture, like his career. Thus, I have gathered together a group of scholars to write about one aspect of Sutton-Smith's work: children's play. The volume is organized around four ways in which Sutton-Smith viewed play: Play as Progress, Play as Power, Play as Fantasy, and Play as Self. The concluding chapter will be a synthesis by Sutton-Smith.

The idea that scholars should take the perspective of the child when studying play is inherent in much of Sutton-Smith's writing. Perhaps the clearest examples of this perspective come from observing children's play in relation to power. This notion is very evident in his writings on children's play-fighting and play with "war toys." Sutton-Smith has insisted that play-fighting and play with toy guns, and the like, is just that, "play." Thus, if we want to understand the function of this behavior we must sweep away our biases and try to understand the phenomena for what it is. John W. Loy and Graham L. Hesketh's chapter addresses competitive play among the Plains

Indians of North America. In this chapter the psychological origins of the agon motive of this “composite culture” are explored. Drawing upon Barkow’s (1975) biosocial theory of prestige and culture, Loy suggests that the use of competitive play enhances self-esteem in warrior societies.

A similar argument is developed in the chapters by Anthony D. Pellegrini and Jeffrey Goldstein. Pellegrini’s chapter is on rough-and-tumble play (R & T) in childhood and adolescence. R & T as used by Pellegrini is similar to the notion of agon, as used by Loy, to the extent that players are exhibiting quasi-agonistic behaviors which serve some positive function in the development of young males. Goldstein looks at three different forms of quasi-agonistic play: R & T, play with war toys, and play with videogames having aggressive themes. While much less research has been conducted on the last two topics, as compared with the first, Goldstein suggests that some of the same anti-play biases, and anti-male-play biases especially, may be operating. He calls for a clear distinction between playful aggression and real aggression so that the outcomes of these sorts of play can be more clearly charted. Thus, the idea in each of these chapters is that these sorts of behavior may serve important societal functions and should not be confused with less functional aggressive behavior.

Biologists, of course, have made very important contributions to the study of play. For example, the theoretical work of Fagen (1981) has helped me, at least, to begin to understand this very complex phenomena. In part 1, *Play As Progress*, there are two biologically oriented chapters (Smith’s and Fagen’s) and one leisure studies-oriented chapter (Chick and Barnett’s). All three examine the commonly held belief that play is adaptive and leads a species towards higher developmental status. Peter K. Smith’s chapter, however, goes beyond the mere reporting of a research program to utilizing an autobiographical genre to trace the career of a play researcher interested in biology, play, and education. Smith’s interests in the many aspects of play parallel those of Sutton-Smith in some ways; for example, both have been interested in both fantasy and rough play. Smith also examines the distinction between rough play and aggression. Like the other researchers, Smith finds a clear distinction between the two.

More interestingly, Smith, also like Sutton-Smith and Fagen, warns against the “play ethos,” or what Sutton-Smith called the idealization of play. The warning pertains to the all-too-frequent assumption that play is all good to all players, be they chimps or children. Robert Fagen points out that play can have a darker side as well as serving some positive functions. For example, he notes (echoing Pellegrini’s findings) that some sorts of play can be exploitive. Some forms of rough play can turn into bullying. Fagen goes on to suggest that scientists should begin to consider play from an aesthetic perspective. Of course this is consistent with Sutton-Smith’s view of play as performance. Fagen goes

on to warn, however, that aesthetics, like more traditional theories applied to play, have limitations: Aesthetics may explain human adults' social interaction but they probably don't explain the play-fighting of rats or chimps!

In their chapter on children's play and adult leisure, Gary Chick and Lynn A. Barnett explore the degree to which children's play leads to other forms of play, or leisure, in adulthood. Such issues are embedded in a larger theoretical discussion of socialization, culture, and the extent to which children, and their play, contribute to or copy culture.

Differentiating the child's perspective on play from that of the adult can also be applied to "functions" of play. Specifically, play researchers have often taken an "outsider" perspective on studying children's play. "Detached objectivity," many of these researchers argue, is necessary to study children scientifically. Sutton-Smith has questioned the ways in which children and their play are represented (Sutton-Smith & Kelly-Byrne, 1984). It has been suggested that the view that play is preparation for adulthood is a typically adult-centric interpretation of play. For example, such an interpretation would hold that fantasy play is best understood in terms of the ways in which it relates to future cognitive or emotional well-being. A child's interpretation of fantasy would hold that it may be antithetical to adult culture.

Four chapters are concerned with a specific sort of play: fantasy play. Greta G. Fein's chapter continues the theme that play has a "darker side" as she discusses results of clever experiments designed to explore what motivates children's play narratives. Like Sutton-Smith, she concludes that fantasy is sometimes troubling and chaotic.

Stephen Kline examines the role of toys and television advertising for toys on children's fantasy play. He embeds his discussion of toys in the larger play literature, particularly that work studying symbolic play and rough-and-tumble play. Kline reports interesting age-differences for the influence of television on play.

Jerome L. Singer also examines the relation between television viewing and fantasy but he embeds it in a larger life span perspective. In a provocative chapter, Singer suggests that fantasy play during childhood may influence daydreaming and pretending games during adulthood.

What are the origins of fantasy play in childhood that have such long-lasting effects? Probably the most frequently assumed source is the play of the mother-child dyad. Various theoretical orientations, such as attachment theory and psychoanalytical theory, assume that play with the mother provides the basis from which spring subsequent forms of play, and indeed of other social relationships. The chapter by Lisa M. Youngblade and Judy Dunn questions this assumption. Their data, collected in various large, long-term and naturalistic observations, suggest that the social fantasy of preschoolers with their siblings is *not* related to the play of the target child and his or her

mother. Siblings seem to provide an important and different relationship context from which children's social skills develop. This important finding should remind us, as Sutton-Smith's earlier work on siblings did twenty-five years ago (Sutton-Smith & Rosenberg, 1970), to look beyond the mother-child dyad if we want to understand children's social development.

The final section addresses the notion of play as self. The chapter by Helen B. Schwartzman specifically addresses the ways in which children and their play have been represented in ethnographies. Extending her earlier and often-cited work on fantasy play, *Transformations* (Schwartzman, 1978), issues related to researcher/informant are addressed. Bernard Mergen's chapter is an historical examination of the play of children. His premise is that to understand children's play we must examine it in its everydayness. Consistent with Sutton-Smith's folklore and historical work, Mergen examines different sorts of evidence, such as television programs, autobiographies, and surveys to provide meaning to the concept of play in lives of American children throughout our history. In the final chapter, Brian Sutton-Smith reflects upon his work in play and upon the chapters in this volume.

In short, this is a provocative volume. It provides various perspectives, both theoretical and methodological, on children's play.

#### REFERENCES

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