

LUCIANO L'ABATE

THE PRAEGER HANDBOOK OF

PLAY

ACROSS THE LIFE CYCLE

Fun from Infancy to Old Age



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Luciano L'Abate

Foreword by
Arthur M. Horne

PRAEGER

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To Brian Sutton-Smith who contributed more about play and playing than anyone else I know, and to my two beloved grandchildren, Alessandra and Ian, who may value play just as much as work.

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FOREWORD

What a delight to be involved with Luciano L'Abate and his book on play, *The Praeger Handbook of Play across the Life Cycle: Fun from Infancy to Old Age*.

As a family therapy teacher, researcher, and practitioner for more than three decades, I had long been familiar with Lu's writing—everyone in the field has been influenced by his scholarship and originality of thinking on families, therapy, and the world of mental health. But although I knew much of his writing, I did not know Lu personally until about a decade ago, when we met at an international conference on family psychology. Our first evening together I became acquainted with a Dr. L'Abate I had not known from his writing: one who was quick of wit, mischievously engaging, and eager to finish the night with singing, dancing, and robust stories of Italy. In short, in addition to being a scholar and academic, he was a fun person and a delight to be with. So when Lu informed me he was writing a book on play, I knew it would represent great integrity of scholarship and thoroughness of the literature review, but more importantly, would also be fun to read and experience. Thus, long before having the manuscript to read, I anticipated a most enjoyable experience—one that would educate, inform, and even entertain. Having now read the material, my anticipations have been fulfilled. It is a L'Abate book, with exceptional scholarship and also very personal and engaging material that will have readers learning about Lu's extensive life experiences related to play and fun, and reflecting on their own experiences

and how those events have shaped their lives and influenced their world view. This is a book on play that is fun to read.

The Praeger Handbook of Play across the Life Cycle: Fun from Infancy to old Age provides the reader with an in-depth review of what play is and how it influences all stages of life development, certainly in a positive manner when done well, and with sad results when play does not occur or is thwarted. Fun is such an integral component of life that the psychiatrist William Glasser includes the concept as one of his five essential components to life. Glasser (2001) explains that when people are having fun, when they play and engage, they are learning, and that continued learning provides the health and growth necessary to be fully functioning people; without play, we are not fully experiencing life. Play in childhood allows children to experience, learn, and be engaged. These characteristics are necessary through all developmental stages of life and are particularly essential for providing balance and perspective.

Dr. L'Abate is a natural storyteller, and throughout the book he provides wonderful and moving anecdotes, illustrations, and descriptions of play. In doing so, he illustrates how important play is. The humanness of his examples brings to life the way that play can impact and connect. By telling tales of poker groups that continue for decades, or travel that expands knowledge, or sewing circles that bring people out to share together, he illustrates how very differently we can find ways to play and how we can experience others in many enjoyable and engaging ways.

A characteristic of modern times is that we have accumulated greater wealth, which allows us to create lifestyles that are more isolated than in the past. For example, many families fear for the safety of their children, so the children are not allowed to wander around neighborhoods or have unsupervised time with friends; instead, their time becomes more circumscribed, and they are often provided with gadgets rather than people to serve as their companions: game boxes, televisions, computer monitors. Although children can play with these devices, they lose the interactional and relational aspects that were generated in the past through friendships and neighborhood gatherings, and thus their lives are stunted from what they could be.

Play has taken a different form for adults as well, as Dr. L'Abate so clearly illustrates. As adults have become aware of the need for physical activity to stay healthy, they have often moved to more isolated forms of exercise than previously. Rather than participating in neighborhood projects, city ball clubs, and energetic family picnics, many adults today gain their exercise through isolated machinery in the form of treadmills and home gyms or through solitary or isolated workouts at fitness centers, where the object is serious exercise rather than play and fun. Others

ignore the importance of exercise and define their entertainment through television and computers, experiencing the engagement of the devices, but losing out on the relational and friendship characteristics that arise from team sports, neighborhood clubs, and family gatherings.

Another characteristic of our modern society is that we have less visiting than previously. In decades gone by, “drop-in” visits, weekly family gatherings, and church or work groups that visited and shared, often with storytelling, card games, jokes, and shared memories, were common and represented a way to play, to engage, and to have fun. Today’s loneliness of cubicles at work, isolated living conditions, and an abundance of solitary entertainment equipment have made opportunities for fun, playing, and relationships more difficult to create and maintain.

Tied to the concern of isolated living circumstances, free time is less available than it has been for years, and rather than reducing the number of hours we work, we have been steadily increasing them. In 2000, for example, we worked 36 more hours in the year than in 1990 (CNN.com, 2001), in essence adding a full week of work to the average yearly workload over a ten-year period. In the 1970s, as machinery and computers became more sophisticated, there were predictions of enormous leisure, and there was concern that people would be unprepared for their extra time. Universities even created programs called health and leisure studies, or recreation and leisure training. And yet, as the CNN report indicates, we are working more with less leisure time. It is important that we establish a better understanding of the role of play and the effective use of leisure time in our lives to gain the balance and perspective that provides for healthy aging. Addressing the means of being engaged, having fun, playing, and being athletic will require a national focus that moves toward relationships and away from the level of consumerism that has been so prevalent in our lives recently.

An area of concern some have had is that play and relational competition can lead to aggression and violence. L’Abate addresses the concern, emphasizing that just the opposite is likely to happen with effective play: that, through the interactions and the learning of play rules, people can develop an appreciation of others and learn empathy, cooperation, and team building—all essential characteristics. In our own studying of bullying over the past decades, we have learned that effective learning and play interactions result in reduced aggression and greater cooperation, essential characteristics in our busy and isolated worlds today (Orpinas & Horne, 2006).

I can see this book being an essential addition to libraries of all people involved in helping foster healthy development and fulfilling lives. Psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, counselors, and all other mental health

workers will benefit from the knowledge provided by L'Abate in this text. Yet this book is more than an informative call to play; it is an awareness-developing experience for the reader to recognize the importance of making personal, family, community, and cultural changes to endorse the value and role of play in our lives. Dr. L'Abate has provided a scholarly review that provides policymakers and program leaders with the information necessary to find ways to incorporate play and fun into the lives of our citizens, thus providing information about the role of prevention through fun, play, and engagement. This is important, the message is essential, and the book will be a great find for so many people.

Arthur M. Horne
Dean and Distinguished Research Professor
The University of Georgia

PREFACE

One purpose of this book is to overview the evolution of play, summarizing current research and theory, showing how we play at various ages and stages of the chronological life cycle, through the interplay of development and socialization. Do play and playing help us develop into healthy people—physically, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually? In spite of the vast literature on this topic emphasizing the importance of play in relational competence and socialization, there is very little written about the life cycle aspects of play. We still subscribe to the notion that play is for children; adults have “leisure time,” but if they play, it is for competition, from sports to card games, bridge, poker, or board games such as Scrabble. Otherwise, in old age, leisure time may mean sitting passively watching someone else play on television or listening to numbers called in Bingo.

Trying to include all the information available about play would require an unending and encyclopedic effort (and one beyond the contractual limit of pages set for this work), so I will indicate, where needed, where the interested reader can find further information. There is no need for me to repeat information that is available in finer and greater detail elsewhere. Therefore, the information included in this volume is by necessity selective and, oftentimes, condensed.

A PsychINFO search of relevant research and publications failed to find any references to “play” cross-referenced with “life cycle.” However,

cross-referencing “play” with “personality development” yielded 5,291 references. A more restricted search substituting “socialization” for “development” yielded 291 references. In other words, there is plenty of literature to mine. When this search was restricted to stages of development, “infancy” included 516 references, “preschool” and “pre-kindergarten” over 2,000, “kindergarten” 185, “elementary school” 264, “puberty” 148, “adolescent youth” 147, “adulthood” 505, “middle age” 39, and “old age” 13. Cross-referencing for “play,” “games,” and “health” yielded 120 references. Of course, there are at least sixteen additional academic search engines under psychology that can be used in a review of the relevant literature. This shows how selective I had to be in writing this book.

For specific games in old age, the numbers of references were as follows: “bowling” 12, “cards” 123, “golf” 26, and “tennis” 35. There is substantial literature on adulthood and beyond when, instead of “play,” “leisure” is cross-indexed with “age.” Hence, there is a vast reserve of additional information that can be included at each stage of the life cycle for preventive and psychotherapeutic purposes. When “play therapy” was included in this search, literally thousands of entries were found; for that reason I asked Dr. Lauren Wynne to help on Chapter 15, dedicated to that topic. There is no question in my mind, therefore, that play throughout the life span is an important aspect of any health promotional, preventive, psychotherapeutic, and rehabilitative interventions because play, in its various forms, has been and still is an important part of my life. It is also the best form of self-help (Harwood & L’Abate, 2009).

I must confess regretfully, and warn the reader from the outset about, four major gaps present in this book because of space and time limitations. First, I kept my focus on human beings, and by necessity I neglected the important topic of play in nonhumans. I am sorry for this failure, but I must admit to my personal and editorial limitations. To include this literature would require more time and space that can or should be devoted to it. Readers who are interested in this topic can consult excellent introductions on the topic of play in the great apes (Gomez & Martin-Andrade, 2005; Pellegrini & Smith, 2005), monkeys (Bolig, Price, O’Neill-Wagner, & Suomi, 1998; New, Cunningham, & Sughrue, 1998), and other animals (Biben & Champoux, 1999; Champoux, Shannon, Airoso, & Suomi, 1999; De Long, 1999).

The second unfortunate gap that I had to leave has to do with the exciting and extremely promising literature of neurological and cerebral functioning on play (Burghardt, 2004; Greenberg, 2004; Rike, 2004; Wilkinson, 2004). With the advent of neuroimaging and other technological breakthroughs, it is relatively easy to predict that this specialty field in the study of play has a brilliant future.

Another gap lies in my skimpy historical and theoretical coverage of play advocates (“Children should play”), apologists (“Play is good for you because . . .”), and theorists (“This is how, what, when, and why play is”). I must also admit my inability to interpret and integrate a variety of conclusions and data that were obtained by a frustrating diversity of methods and participants, which make it a stretch to arrive at definite conclusions. I have attempted to make up for both of these deficiencies by interpreting and integrating play within a theory of relational competence (L’Abate, 2005; L’Abate & Cusinato, 2007), as presented in Chapter 19 here.

As Americans and people in other developed societies worldwide focus more and more of their time and energy on work, “playtime” has plummeted, and playful activities have too often become been equated with “idleness,” “laziness,” or at least “pointlessness.” Even with children—now being overscheduled, trained, and prepared for college as early as elementary and middle school—play is sometimes seen as a dispensable draw on time, with schools reducing or altogether cutting recess and classes in physical education (Linder, 1970). But are we losing anything vital with these ideas and actions? Play, as one scholar puts it, “is not a luxury but rather a crucial dynamic of healthy physical, intellectual, social and emotional development at all age levels.” (Elkind, 2007, p. 5). This conclusion is so strong that there has been one attempt to reclaim “childhood and letting children be children in our achievement-oriented society” (Crain, 2003) and a strongly worded 1977 Declaration of the Child’s Right to Play by the International Play Association (2004).

In other words, play seems a necessary component for healthy body and healthy mind. Play and playful activities have developed and changed across past and recent history, and their necessity has been the subject of changing cultural and educational views and controversies. Disgracefully, there are still undeveloped countries, such as Egypt among many others, where children are exploited to work from an early age, as early as 10 years old (*Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, Sunday April 6, 2008).

Supposedly, the more leisure time people have the greater the possibilities are of engaging in play and playful activities. Unfortunately, that is not the case (Linder, 1970). In spite of the many technological advances that should save time both at home and at work, leisure time available to us has not increased. Why? It is indeed true that we are not only achievement oriented but also performance and production oriented (Pershing, 2006), to the point that we do not know how to be together unless there is a special reason, such as refreshments, a football game, or, at best, a book club (Spiegel, 1971). Doing and Having are more important than Being together with family and friends just for the pleasure of being together.

I will never forget the experience of being a tourist in the major square of Salamanca, Spain, toward the evening hours, and observing a ritual that I have never seen anywhere else. Individuals lined up arm in arm, up to six or seven abreast, talking and laughing with each other, were walking together around the center fountain, like the moving spokes of a wheel. At the same time, on another part of the square, there were two elderly men, talking with each other while walking back and forth from a predetermined spot to another predetermined spot. Apparently, these pursuits were performed for the pleasure of being together and nothing else! To make sure about the reliability of this phenomenon, in a second visit to Spain, I went to the same square in the same town at dusk. Sure enough, the same phenomenon was occurring as a natural happening, though I did not see the two old men.

When I discussed this phenomenon with my graduate class on personality theory in the family, I asked the students whether they had seen anything resembling this phenomenon in the United States. One student commented that if people walk, often they do it for exercise and not for being together, because while walking they are not talking with each other, as senior citizens do inside malls during the cold or bad weather. Another student recalled the same scene about two elderly men talking with each other while walking back and forth from set places. However, this instance did not happen in a public square. It happened in a state hospital!

The issue here is how and how much play occupies our lives and what effects, if any, it has on personal, interpersonal, intimate, and family relationships throughout the life cycle. Furthermore, it is crucial to find whether play is beneficial, as asserted by various authorities. Consequently, a review of the professional and research literature at each stage of the life cycle should concentrate on the supposedly beneficial, immediate and long-term outcomes of play, using studies, if available, that include experimental (play activities) and control (no play or other no play activities) groups.

Play behavior and play therapy were the subject of a great deal of attention and speculation during the last third of the past century (Avedon & Sutton-Smith, 1971; Ellis, 1973; Herron & Sutton-Smith, 1971; Lieberman, 1977; Millar, 1968; Piers, 1972; Schaefer, 1979; and Slovenko & Knight, 1967). There is no question that play and playfulness are important activities supposedly related to personality development and functionality (Brown & Gottfried, 1985; Caplan & Caplan, 1973; Cohen, 1987; Hein, 1969; Herron & Sutton-Smith, 1982; Levy, 1978; Lieberman, 1977; Norbeck, 1969; Piers, 1972; Sadler, 1969; Schwartzman, 1978; Sutton-Smith, 1986), in spite of environmental constraints (Barnett & Kane, 1985a, b).

This handbook is a follow-up to a recently edited work (L'Abate, 2007) and another on self-help in mental health (Harwood & L'Abate, 2009). Even though a variety of verbal, nonverbal, relational, and nonrelational activities were included in those volumes, the specific topic of play as a low-cost approach to promote physical and mental health was not included, in spite of the fact that here there is a great deal of advocacy about play and play therapy. This literature recognizes the importance of play in personality socialization in the early years, supposedly fostering creativity and imagination in health promotion, prevention, psychotherapy, and rehabilitation in older years. However, the literature is bare about play during the rest of the life cycle. Why? Because play in the later stages of life is conceived as leisure and, supposedly, there is lots of it for some people after retirement but not before (Wade, 1985).

I call the sustained but unsystematic advocacy about the goodness of play "regressive advocacy" that laments the way children play now (with computers) versus the way we used to play as children when we had more time to play and we were not as overscheduled, as many children are today. Of course, the ways children play now are completely different from the ways we used to play. We did not have as many toys and games as there are available, and easily obtainable, today. We operated our toys or we made them. I remember making my own kites with inexpensive materials. Now toys operate themselves with microchips, batteries, and self-operating mechanisms. They operate us. There is little group-play at close physical face-to-face contact; children now play at a distance from each other through the Internet (Ciofi & Graziano, 2003; Elkind, 2007; Goldstein, Buckingham, & Brougere, 2004).

What are the profound consequences to personality socialization of these dramatic changes? How will they affect children growing up in a cyberspace technology who, when grown, will need professional help at whatever stage of the life cycle? Will they seek face-to-face talk-based psychotherapy, or will they seek help online from mental health professionals or others? In spite of the vast literature on this topic cited above, emphasizing the importance of play in personality competence and socialization, there is very little written about the life cycle aspects of play in their applications to health promotion, prevention, psychotherapy, and rehabilitation. Furthermore, a superficial perusal of the contents of major personality psychology treatises fails to find any references to play, with the sole exception of Erikson's theory about developmental stages in the life cycle (Ewen, 1988). Even more relevant, an important treatise on adult development (Demick & Andreoletti, 2003) did not make any reference to play. This is a very important gap. Personality theorists do not acknowledge the importance of play or are unable to

extend their theories to play. By the same token, play theorists rarely refer to personality theories, because they seem irrelevant to the whole enterprise of play.

INTERESTED AUDIENCES FOR THIS HANDBOOK

Despite the gaps in academic interest just described, play in its various forms occupies a great part of our lives from infancy to old age (Orthner, Barnett-Morris, & Mancini, 1994; Wade, 1985; Witt & Goodale, 1985). What, then, are the empirical bases for recommending play activities across the life cycle? Who is interested in play? Likely, buyers/readers of this Handbook would be mental health professionals working with children in the usual disciplines of medicine, psychology, social work, school counseling, teaching, and educational psychology, as well as pediatricians. One would guess that there are approximately 1,000,000+ mental health professionals working with children, not including students wanting to work with children, even including undergraduates.

More specifically, who should read this book? Informed and interested adults, of course, but who in particular? If play is an important activity throughout the life cycle, a great number of lay, nonprofessional people might be interested in reading about this topic. Additionally, since to my knowledge, there might not be a resource of this type available professionally, there are at least four potential professions that could be interested in play across the life cycle: (1) play therapists as a secondary audience who would be interested in this topic; (2) leisure time and recreation specialists, health promoters, and prevention advocates, including child specialists; (3) psychotherapists in the various specializations (individuals, couples, and families); and (4) developmental and personality scholars and researchers who could use this volume as a base for courses in child and personality development and socialization.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS HANDBOOK

This Handbook is organized into five Parts. Part I concentrates on definitions, history, theoretical, and empirical backgrounds of play from Chapters 1 through 6. Part II is organized chronologically, according to various stages of play across the life cycle, from Chapters 7 through 13. Part III is concerned with the benefits of play and its applications in play therapy and rehabilitation, from Chapters 14 through 16. Part IV concentrates on various controversies that have existed throughout the evolution

of play, including the technology of play and of media, and especially how play fits, does not fit, or should not fit into educational pursuits, Chapters 17 and 18. Finally, Part IV concludes with Chapter 19, devoted to answer questions such as: “Why is there no contemporary theory to describe and explain play? Is there one that can?” I shall attempt to answer both questions to the best of my knowledge and wits in that concluding chapter.

Luciano L'Abate
Atlanta, Georgia
April 21, 2009

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book would not have been written if it were not for the absolute dedication to this topic by Debora Carvalko, Senior Acquisitions Editor at Praeger, and for her belief in my being able to carry out my original proposal. Her idea that I should write for accessibility to nonpsychologists in addition to professional readers was a challenge. However, the topic has long been of interest to me; especially intriguing since I started to conduct play therapy more than half a century ago. I started play therapy with my first child participant at the Wichita Child Guidance Clinic, and that child started to destroy practically the whole playroom, while I helplessly and nondirectively was mumbling “Hum, hum,” à la Carl Rogers. Then, I became aware of the importance of play for a much larger audience than professionals. I hope I have fulfilled and satisfied in some measure Debora Carvalko’s trust in me and her continuous support throughout the writing of this book. I am also indebted to Jerome Colburn, Theresa Lawrence, and Lisa Connery for their superb copyediting and project management, and to Dr. Laura Sweeney for drawing Figure 6.1 and to Raj Bojambi for retouching Figure 6.2. I am grateful to Andy Horne for his willingness to write a Foreword to this book in spite of his many important commitments. I am very grateful to Dr. Lauren Wynne for writing the major part of Chapter 15. I would not have been able to accomplish this task without her competent help and professional expertise.

I am also grateful for Sarah Steiner, Learning Commons Librarian at Georgia State University for her help and expertise in finding, within minutes, references that would have taken me hours to locate.

Part 1

DEFINITIONS AND A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF PLAY

This introductory part attempts to give the reader a systematic and historical background for understanding how play has been part of life since times immemorial.

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1

COME, LET'S PLAY

Play is not a luxury but rather a crucial dynamic of healthy, physical, intellectual and social emotional development at all age levels (p. 4). Play, love, and work are operative throughout the human life cycle.

(Elkind, 2007, p. 5)

Play is a voluntary activity which permits freedom of action, diversion from routines, and an imaginary world to master. Play has unique power for building body control and interpersonal relations. Play provides a base for language learning and investigation. Play is the most dynamic childhood learning method.

(Caplan & Caplan, 1973, p. xi)

Alessandra

When my beloved granddaughter was about two years old, after almost random use of toys, which I would define as exploration, between infancy and toddlerhood, Alessandra and I built more Lego-blocks castles than I can remember. She had great fun building one and then laughing, with a quick swift of her hand, broke it into pieces. From castles we progressed to simple card games. From 2 to 3 years, she was an ardent viewer of *Teletubbies* on TV, graduating then to *Barney*. Now she watches the Cartoon Network and *Hannah Montana*, joining the craze about this program, including the *American Girl* on the Internet. At about three years of age, Alessandra entered a pretend phase where she would insist in serving us (her maternal

grandmother and grandfather, who are absolutely gaga over her) elaborate, multi-course meals complete with an appetizer, main entrée, and dessert. This pretend phase lasted until she was about five years old, when her play was diverted to other children in her neighborhood and she started kindergarten. At this stage she began to be interested in dolls and computers, discovering on the Internet the *American Girl* web pages, which offer a whole colorful panoply of solo-parallel, or multi-player games, puzzles, and creative opportunities for girls from kindergarten to puberty. At seven years of age Alessandra has no problem in searching and surfing the Internet and becoming proficient in playing many of the competitive games produced by the *American Girl*. Indeed, she has shown me on my Mac how to use bookmarks and such that I was not familiar with after 25 years of computer use.

Her pretend play still exists and is present when she plays with her dolls, making them converse with each other and, with a boy doll and a girl doll, even kissing each other. She attends an International School that integrates children from forty-three different countries. Ethnically, even though she knows the Italian background of her grandfather, she defines herself as being American-Greek, after her maternal grandmother, who is of the same ethnic background. In a recent United Nations Day Parade at her International School where the children wore ethnic clothing and carried the flags of their respective countries, Alessandra wore traditional Greek clothes and carried the Greek flag and a corresponding sign. She also attends regular lessons of Greek dancing and now is starting to learn Greek at the same church her grandmother is attending. To even out things, she informed her grandparents that in the next United Nation celebration at school she will wear Italian clothes and carry a corresponding flag and sign.

She lives with her single mother in a gated co-op community where parking is completely separate from condominiums. The streets, free of car traffic, are a veritable, consistently used playground for children of any age, including an open-air playground with swings, parallel bars, and a sandbox. Next to this playground there is a large lawn for soccer and volleyball, and in another section of the community there is a court for basketball. Quite a few toys are found right on the street, for almost any child to use freely.

Consequently, when she is not in school, Alessandra uses the streets as common playgrounds with other children, and she also plays in the homes of children her own age and they in hers. In the common house of this community, there is also a playroom full of toys and games at whatever age level from toddlerhood up to elementary school age. I spent quite a few hours in that playroom while baby-sitting Alessandra. Now, however, as far as I know, she no longer goes there to play. Since first grade, she has participated in a local soccer league for elementary school children, playing once a week with competing teams during the fall season. Recently, a few months from her eighth birthday, when I gave her my

cell phone to call her mother, she found games on it and started playing them as if she were a veteran. I would not know how to access those games, let alone play them.

Ian

My beloved grandson, Ian, who is six years old and in the first grade as of this writing, has had completely different sets of toys and games from his cousin. He lives with his father and mother in a house in an open subdivision chosen for the excellence of its school system in a well-to-do section of a northern suburb of Atlanta. His major toys, among many others, consist mainly of model cars, trucks of all kinds, and, in the last two years, Lego Bionicles. To my amazement, these Bionicles are extremely threatening-looking, warrior-type figures, but can be configured in thousands of ways. We started playing by throwing balls at each other and building forts with Lego blocks between two and four years of age, but since four years of age, Ian became more interested in building incredible-looking Bionicles that waged wars with each other. We played one group of Bionicles against each other, and my grandson always won.

He is also interested in why the world spins around, and in the nature of the solar system. He has stated clearly his goal to become a "scientist." He plays at home with selected friends from kindergarten and neighborhood by invitation only. He is not allowed to go on the street, and his outdoor playing is limited to the school playground and the house's backyard. Last year he was enrolled in a kindergarten soccer league, uniform and all. This year he has switched to T-ball, where he has shown excellent eye-hand coordination.

An interesting development took place for Ian in his kindergarten class of twelve children, almost equally divided by gender. The girls apparently expressed a uniform liking for him. Ian, by the same token, has expressed his reciprocal liking for one specific girl. This apparently obvious liking has produced extreme jealousy in another boy, who lives also in the same neighborhood where Ian lives. This boy has become cruel and mean toward Ian to the point that Ian would come home and, crying, would relate to his mother how mean that boy had been to him. The teacher confirmed the validity of this rivalry and after the boy's mother was informed about it and became "horrified" to hear about her son's behavior, she had him apologize profusely to Ian. Five years old and already involved in a love triangle!

The North Georgia Lego Train Club

The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (March 15, 2008) reported about a family whose father founded the North Georgia Lego Train Club after he started using Lego Bricks as a hobby that spawned into a fun family activity. Now, the father's two children, a 5-year-old girl and an 11-year-old boy,

are helping him build train sets. With the help of a friend, the older boy created a Lego robot that plays tic-tac-toe.

Lu

Writing this vignette was fraught with many qualms about writing what could be interpreted as a self-serving narrative. On the other hand, I needed something to link the youth of my two grandchildren and the play of the preceding family with the narratives that follow, dedicated to playing cards in old age. Consequently, I hope readers will forgive me for this personal exposition of my "play history." I remember very little about my playing in the preschool years. I do remember, however, my seventh birthday. That was a watershed year because we moved from Florence, Italy, to my mother's hometown, Brindisi, where I was born.

We lived in my maternal grandfather's palace, which had ample room for us and for some of his children and grandchildren when they came to visit him. Calling it a palace may sound pompous. However, it was certainly not a house and it was not a castle. Whatever it could be called, however, it was large enough to accommodate adult children comfortably and allow many children and grandchildren to live, come, go, and visit. More importantly, this building had a garden where my brother, our cousins, and I could play hide-and-seek. Its attic was enormous, contained all sorts of old junk that we used to play with in the adjoining large terrace, where we practiced "flying" from the steps of the turret, using "wings" made out of the junk in the attic. For my birthday, I was given a mechanic set that, I guess, was the predecessor of plastic games. Apparently, I was able to work on it and built a bell that somehow matched the sound of the house bell. Therefore, my game consisted of playing this bell and enjoying seeing the amazement in the face of whoever opened the door and found no one was there. After one year in Brindisi, we went back to Florence, where I lived until I came to the United States, after attending the School of Architecture at the University of Florence for one year.

In late elementary school years, my leisure time consisted of playing with little clay balls that correspond to marbles in the United States, in either one of four garden or square playgrounds in Florence, a group game that includes two to four players. Weather permitting, after school I would go, with my little satchel of clay balls, to play in any of the playgrounds where the "action" was, all within blocks of our condominium. If there was no action in one playground, by word of mouth, my buddies and I would move to another playground where the action might be taking place. As I reached middle school, this clay ball game no longer interested me because it was for smaller children. With the help of my mother's scaffolding (a concept discussed in Chapter 5 of this volume), I graduated to Monopoly and spent most of middle school playing that game in a friend's house.

However, two important happenings occurred when we spent two wonderful summers (1941–1942) on the beautiful island of Lussino, a small

island off the coast of Croatia that used to belong to Italy between the two world wars, where my father was commander of the naval base. Lussino was, and apparently still is, an old Austro-Hungarian resort with lots of pines and many small coves for bathing and swimming. During the summer of 1941 our hotel (otherwise empty of guests because of the war) was close to the seashore, and I therefore obtained a bamboo pole, to which I attached a line and a hook to start fishing. On my first attempt in the afternoon, I went to fish at the pier of a nearby cannery that threw all its fish entrails right in the sea. Consequently, the pier brimmed with thousands of fish that came to feast on the entrails. While I was trying to hook fish, my parents and my younger brother, Alberto, came by as they were taking a leisurely afternoon stroll. Predictably, my brother asked me to let him use my fishing pole. I had not caught any fish yet. Very reluctantly, due to the insistence of my parents, I gave my fishing pole to my brother, who proceeded to catch thirty-four fish in as many minutes or less time. To add insult to injury, my brother took the fish to the hotel and we had them for supper. I have never used that pole nor fished ever since.

The next summer (1942) my father rented a relatively isolated house next to a cove that was, however, within walking distance of town and other summer homes. This time, I asked my parents for a BB gun to go hunting. Once I received it, my brother tagged along in our first hunting expedition into the nearby woods. After I had tried unsuccessfully to bring down birds perched on trees, my brother asked me to let him try shooting the gun. I did let him have it, and in just a few minutes he shot three birds. That was the end of my first and last hunting expedition. The irony of this episode is that my brother, years later, became one of the most nonviolent pacifists of Italy.

After we came back to Florence, while I was still in middle school, after much begging from my parents, I received a bicycle, which enabled me to join my buddies as they went to visit in each other's home in less time than walking, also competing in how fast we could go from one part of town to the other. That bicycle came in handy during the war, when I could go into the country outside Florence and buy bread from farmers. What had initially been a source of enjoyment became a means of survival. In high school I graduated to sports, where, in addition to playing volleyball and practicing gymnastics intramurally, I was involved also in Greco-Roman wrestling extramurally, and dabbled in skiing and mountain climbing.

During this war time (1944-1945), after American forces liberated Florence, my bicycle buddies and I discovered the American Big Band music from records belonging to American officers who rented part of an apartment where one of my buddies lived. With the help of the first movie imported from the United States that we saw, *Sun Valley Serenade*, with music by Glenn Miller and his Orchestra, and with the help

of various girlfriends, we learned to dance American style, a skill that I have been able to retain over the years with occasional practice, whenever possible, with my wife. I still love to "cut a rug" whenever I can.

In my senior high school year, because of my wrestling record, I was invited to join the University of Florence rugby team even though I had not yet graduated. By American standards, I guess I could have been called a jock. In addition, I became a volunteer, part-time director of sports for the Florence YMCA, where soccer was the major sport, because soccer was and still is the most popular game in Italy, followed by bicycle racing.

One day at the YMCA office, we were visited by three Italian American representatives who were offering to give us uniforms and equipment to play baseball, a game unknown to Italians at that time (1947). When I asked for soccer balls and shoes instead, these representatives emphasized their investment in *baseball* equipment. When I raised the question about who would coach this game, they drew a blank, but nonetheless, supplying this equipment was their primary mission. Talk about cultural attunement even at a game level! Consequently, I resigned from my position. Now baseball is an accepted but secondary sport in Italy.

Fifty years later, during a visit with my family, I took a ride around the playgrounds of my elementary school years with my brother, who has lived in Florence all his life. I remarked to him that I could not see any children playing there. Why? He answered: "They are all at home, playing with their computers."

After I moved to the United States, I was not able to spend too much time in any leisure activity until after completing my studies and starting to work. During my first job, while I was still a bachelor in Greenville, North Carolina, I joined the local theater club to break the monotony of what was then a rather small but very hospitable Southern college town. To amuse myself, I played the parts of the Greek landowner in *My Sister Eileen* and the Italian smuggler in Agatha Christie's *Three Blind Mice*. I also joined a pottery club, whose members either were so ashamed of my production or else felt so sorry for me that they each gave me one of their pieces when we progressed to a final show of our "masterpieces."

While working in St. Louis during my second job, I picked up tennis, a sport that I continued to pursue in Atlanta until I could no longer play because of an arthritic spine and neck, which also prevented me from walking for an extended period of time. After retirement from GSU, I picked up tai chi, but I became bored with it, and I quit after four years of practice. However, I continue to exercise 30 minutes almost every day on a foam mattress with ankle and hand weights. During the summer months I also swim for the same length of time. I hope to continue both activities as I reach my eightieth birthday and beyond. Over the years I have been collecting art stamps, but I have not yet had time to arrange

them. Perhaps, when I really retire, I may be able to really enjoy working on them.

When Pigs Play

Too many people reach a point in life where they feel that being silly or childlike and indulging in activities usually associated with people several decades younger is unbecoming. How sad for them. For our group of women, play is a major factor. We have been friends over a period of about 30 years. We became a "serious" group in 1991, when we had our First Annual Triathlon Summer Outing (FATSO). We wore shirts printed with pigs, and we became Pigs. We decided that we liked the FATSO acronym so much that we became Friends Acquired Through Spiritual Organizations because we had met at church. Since then we have gone on a cruise (Fat Asses Tour Southern Oceans) and celebrated Festivals Acknowledging The Significant Occasion. We take "pigtures," and we go on "pignics." Our children are "piglets," and our grandchildren are "grandpiglets." The great thing about "Pigness" is that none of us is embarrassed or ashamed of the word.

The joy of reaching a certain age is accepting that there is little to be embarrassed about. We have nothing to prove, other than that we can adapt as circumstances allow. If an activity becomes too strenuous, we adjust. If we like the game pieces, but not the rules, we change them. There is no need to conform to what has been laid out as structure. We have wisdom and experience at our beck and call, and we enjoy the opportunity to make play more appropriate to our capacities, physical and mental.

In the past few years a number of us had turned 60. So for such a significant event we "forked" each other's lawns on that special day. Forking is sticking plastic forks in the ground in the shape of a large 60. Since we are getting older, we've decided that forking takes too much energy, so we are looking for other options, since some of us are now getting ready to turn 70, and obviously we must celebrate.

Once a year, in February, as many of us as possible take off for the North Georgia Mountains. This gives us an opportunity to spend time together, be silly, and just enjoy ourselves. Over time the weekend has evolved into an actual schedule of events. The first night, Thursday, is for those who can get away early. By Friday night everyone has arrived. We have dinner and relax. At some point someone brings out some game, perhaps Trivial Pursuit or Taboo. It depends on what games anyone has had the foresight to bring. The rule is that there are no rules. A game of Balderdash becomes an opportunity to use rarely encountered words in a new and totally inappropriate way. Each game has its own set of challenges, and we adapt the rules. The flexibility of reaching a certain age is having the confidence to know when the rules apply and when they don't. One of the women is extraordinarily talented artistically, and each year she brings materials for a "project." These projects frequently involve some simple skill, but, amazingly, there is always someone who doesn't "get it." Does this hinder anyone? Not

at all. It's like being in kindergarten, where there are those children who get the concept and those who don't. There is always someone who is willing and patient enough to show the unskilled what to do. Over the years a pattern of "teacher" and "student" has evolved. The beauty of it is that the talents of the group shift, so that each person's strength has become evident.

So when one thinks about old people and how they play, think about this, that no matter what the chronological age, it's not the years that count, but what you have in you. It's one's ability to look at all sides of the matter and then approach it with the logic of experience. It's having the wisdom to accept one's limitations, live within them, and be generous with the gifts one has been given. We are at an age when fighting on principle is not necessary. We learn to laugh at ourselves and with our world. We know who has what talents and respect each other's privacy when it's needed. And, above all, we love to play.

Contributed by Mary Costa with the permission of her Pig friends.

Poker Games

Even before my family and I settled in Atlanta in 1965, I used to belong to a poker group in Florence during my late school years and in St. Louis. Since moving to Atlanta then, I have been a member of a poker group that meets on a monthly basis in each of its members' homes in rotation. There are now only three members remaining from the original group of six or seven. Over the years we have lost members to moves, death, or loss of interest. We play dealer's choice with nickel-dime bets up to a quarter (against my will) but no more than three raises. Chips in the amount of five dollars are used as exchange currency to play. At the end of the game, the host collects from the losers and pays off the winners. In addition to beer and soft drinks, the host is responsible for providing munchies such as peanuts or potato chips for while we are playing and the makings of sandwiches for when we are not. In our younger days, when we started playing in our thirties or forties, it was not uncommon for us to drink an average of two to three beers per member. The average age now is about 80 plus or minus a couple of years, and we may drink a couple of beers among all six players, otherwise sticking with soft drinks or water. We used to smoke cigarettes and cigars, but no one smokes anymore.

At the present, this group is composed of one child psychiatrist, two clinical psychologists, a former head of a specialty department in a medical school, a former executive from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and a retired construction and real estate owner who fought in the Battle of the Bulge during World War II. In addition to our reduced drinking, age is beginning to show in the increasing number of errors we make while playing, to the point that we spend a great deal of time correcting each other as we play. Now we use a mechanical shuffler to mix cards after each

hand because some members have arthritic hands and find it difficult to shuffle cards by hand. Frequently some members are absent on leisure travels with their wives or families or because of sickness. Consequently, to reach a suitable quorum of five to six players, we sometimes invite occasional fill-ins. We are all completely or partly retired, living within 20 or 30 minutes from each other. In this group, travel seems to be the most prevalent leisure-time activity in addition to poker. I am not aware of any other leisure or recreational activities in this group, except for attending symphonic music concerts or operas.

Thirty years ago, I was invited to become a member of another neighborhood poker group that is still going on at the present. This group meets every two weeks and plays only nickels and dimes, with 15 cents on a pair of cards showing on the table, but no more than three raises. This group plays with real change instead of chips, so we all carry satchels with our change in them. This group originally offered only beer and munchies. More recently, it has begun to offer candies, chocolates, and sometimes fruit as well. Again, our beer intake has decreased considerably over the years, at the same rate as the other group. However, this group has suffered more serious illness recently than the other group, with five knee replacements and occasional hospitalizations for sundry medical problems, with forgetfulness and errors increasing from one meeting to the next. However, we still shuffle cards with our hands. Two members in this group attend movie theaters regularly.

Occupationally, this group is composed of two retired members of the CDC, a former successful operator of beauty salons, a former representative of a pharmaceutical company, and a retired Air Force colonel with a second career as treasurer of a county mental health clinic. Some members do have other play interests. One gambles in casinos in nearby states or Las Vegas and, in the fall, goes hunting for deer or quail. Another member plays golf regularly and takes a cruise with his wife practically three or four times a year. We are all retired from our previous jobs and live within 5 to 10 minutes' distance of each other. When we are sick or in hospital, sometimes we visit each other at bedside or call at home.

There are some similarities between these two groups. They are composed exclusively of men. Some wives sometimes greet members when they come into the house, but they make themselves scarce after meeting the guests. In the second group, two wives used to play bridge with two other women friends in a different house from the host. That group, however, came to an end because of sickness and because some of them were no longer able to drive at night.

La Societa Italiana of Atlanta, Georgia

Early in 2008, I became informed of the existence of this club, composed of middle-aged individuals and couples of Italian origin that are members of a Catholic church in the northwest part of Atlanta. This group meets on

a regular basis in their members' homes except for formal occasions, when they celebrate religious or patriotic holidays such as Columbus Day. Otherwise, there are potluck dinners in the homes of members on an almost regular monthly basis. What is relevant to play in this group is the fact that at least three members of this club built bocce courts in the backyards of their homes. This game is the Italian equivalent of bowling, and the equipment consists of one small ball (the pallino), which serves as a target, and eight larger balls, which either two or four players try to get as close as possible to the small ball. Whichever side (individual or pair) throws a large ball closest to the small ball wins. As a result of playing with this group, during the summer months I was able to compete in two bocce tournaments, complete with referees (with a measuring stick to judge distances between balls) and scorekeepers.

In addition, every year in February there is a formal Masked Ball in a local country club complete with dance band, raffle of prizes, King and Queen of the Ball, and announcements about forthcoming officers of the organization. That was the first time I got together with this club, and I had so much fun dancing and meeting so many men and women from my home country, feeling very much at home, that I joined this club and I have had fun ever since, looking forward to many other joyous occasions in the future. Maria Costa, who wrote the earlier segment "When Pigs Play," was my official sponsor and made sure that I would be taken care of at whatever meeting I attended.

WHAT IS PLAY?

Play has been studied scientifically mainly in the first half of the last century, even though play (as discussed in Chapter 2) has existed since the beginning of time (Caplan & Caplan, 1987). For a complete list of definitions by many educators, philosophers, and advocates of play, the interested reader is referred to the work of Saracho and Spodek (1998a, pp. 3–4). In spite of this growth in studies and theories of play, there are still some critics who look at play as Utopia (Fingarette, 1969), to the point that there is no such a thing as "pure play" because there are so many factors entering into it, such as sensuality (according to Sigmund Freud) and power (according to Herbert Marcuse):

What might be termed pure play is an ideal, an ideal which is more and more approachable only as one has learned to master anxieties, learned technical skills, learned the complex forms and arts of civilized existence. Then, as culmination, a person may engage, at last, in activities for their own sake . . . to satisfy . . . communion. . . . The ability to play, in this sense, is an ideal trait of personality. We aspire to it. We partially achieve it (Fingarette, 1969, pp. 18–19).

Play could also be considered a "primitive form of communication" (Sutton-Smith, 1986, p. 137).

One of the major criticisms of play, especially for the mature years, lies in its being for the rich and not for the poor. Rather than attempt to counter this criticism, I will consider differences in socioeconomic status (SES) as an important factor in the study of play throughout the rest of this book.

Interviewing 103 children aged 2 to 6 years and surveying 73 parents and 60 preschool teachers about their perceptions of play, Rothlein (1987) found that most parents defined play as something for fun or amusement, while teachers saw it as fun and as an opportunity for cognitive and social development. The majority of teachers did not view play as an integral part of the curriculum but instead described a learn-play dichotomy. Parents did not support having their children spend a large amount of time in play during preschool. Children's favorite play activities according to all three sources of information were outdoor play, dramatic play, and art activities.

In pragmatic, strictly mechanistic circles, play could be considered a complete waste of time. More specifically, there are certain driven personalities, such as Type A, workaholics, and addictive personalities, who are unable to play, because, in their drivenness, play and leisure do seem to them a "waste of time." To play one needs to be relaxed, with a minimum of need to impress anybody, including the self. This is why play represents an intrinsic pleasure that is self-reinforcing and self-propagating. In the extreme, especially in adulthood, it may be such a pleasure that it becomes an addiction, to the point that it occupies more and more time that could and should be used for more useful pursuits, including sleep.

In addition to the foregoing considerations, there are other characteristics of play:

1. Play involves exaggeration and repetition of motor acts and the reordering of behavioral sequences following tacit or stated rules and regulations.
2. Play is initiated by play signals (Bateson, 1986).
3. Play occurs when basic needs are met and the individual is in a relaxed state.

This latter characteristic is important because it essentially states what has not been affirmed clearly in the extant literature on play: that play occurs when the individual has time and inclination to play, a state that may not be available to troubled individuals.

4. Sequences of motor acts may start as incomplete and fragmented, but with time and practice they may become more differentiated and integrated within a total personality functioning (see Chapter 19 this volume).