

that in which many of the adults reading this book engaged as children. It is not easy to re-create. I listened and laughed when a playground developer, years ago, in Canada, explained the expensive engineering and certification process his company completed to have logs, rocks, and streams certified to meet national safety standards. On this front, Tai's book has set a path for those who have not yet seen the way through the policy and standards forest. Follow along, learn from the case studies, and get excited about the learning and growth opportunities for children.

Most impressive for the reader are the book's layout and the easy-to-follow narratives of the development and management of five adventurous playgrounds across three nations. The selection of playgrounds featured help demonstrate the range of opportunities for designers and developers to build for idealized outcomes: physical challenges, risky play, creative and constructive elements, exploration, and the levels of supervision and parent involvement that may be needed. Is there a tree fort already built, or would your city by-laws allow for moving parts that kids may use to build their own structure? Will water be involved and interacting with other materials (think streams, mud, and messiness), or are there shrubs along walkways to keep everyone on the durable surfaces and out of the natural spaces? This book sets up readers well to begin answering many questions that will arise and helps in decision making. As these case studies show, some areas will allow freedom for nature-based play and some will replicate natural elements to represent nature. Tai also provides key references throughout the text for those

research areas readers may be most interested in exploring.

Ultimately, *Letting Play Bloom* provides a refreshing spin on the intersection of child development and outdoor play and should serve to inspire, instruct, and stimulate readers to bring nature and risk into child play spaces.

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—Nevin J. Harper, *University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada*

## **Doll**

*Maria Teresa Hart*

New York: Bloomsbury, 2022.

Introduction, conclusion, acknowledgments, and index. 176 pp.

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In summer 2023, in response to the *Barbie* movie, the American cultural zeitgeist took a sudden interest in the deeper meaning of our unofficial national doll. The world was buzzing with curiosity about who designs and sells the iconic doll, what kinds of play it invites, the gender identities encoded in its molded body, and its impact on the socialization of children. Maria Teresa Hart's *Doll*, a 2022 addition to Bloomsbury's Object Lessons series, also begins with Barbie and then takes the reader on a journey to explore these same questions about other dolls of the past, present, and future. Each chapter examines the history and sociocultural implications of a type of doll: porcelain bisque, American Girl, celebrity look-a-likes, and virtual avatars. Peppered with personal anecdotes and punctuated by a critical feminist lens, Hart provides a highly accessible introduction

to the field of doll studies.

As a lifelong collector, Hart is no interloper in the doll space. She sprinkles her cultural analysis with humorous memories of doll conventions during her childhood in the Northern Virginia suburbs and a sentimental story about a special doll found at a flea market on a visit to family in Santiago, Chile. To establish that doll play can be fun and must also be taken seriously, Hart balances memoir and cultural critique, moving fluidly between the two genres. Her childhood as a Latina growing up with a love for Victorian porcelain dolls is given the same weight as her adult recognition that play with such dolls has historically been a “rehearsal for a lifetime of class-signaling” (p. 49).

Dualism is also at the core of Hart’s thesis. Rejecting a popular tendency to view dolls through either a feminist or celebratory lens, Hart argues that dolls can simultaneously serve as tools of socialization through which we learn dominant ideologies about gender, race, and social class and as landscapes in which children (often girls) can explore various identities. A short monograph, *Doll* offers a broad sweep covering more than a century of dolls and thirty years of scholarly research and analysis. In her first three chapters on Barbie, porcelain dolls, and American Girl, Hart does not chart new territory as much as she provides a well-crafted literature review about how these dolls communicate cultural expectations and value systems around femininity, race, and social class. The chapter on celebrity dolls adds new insight, bridging celebrity studies and doll studies, as the author unpacks the desire to own, hold, embrace, and preserve our cultural idols. Hart discusses

how various types of dolls—paper, baby, fashion, and wax—allow us to pull celebrities off the screen and into the home, challenging the temporality of beauty, youth, and fame. The final chapter on avatars suggests that as we create virtual selves, such as bitmojis (personal cartoon avatars or emojis) and online game characters, we are engaging in a new form of play in which we are becoming dolls—constructed replicas of humans. Although Hart provides a thoughtful examination of the self and its digital avatar, this chapter felt out of place in a book about physical objects of play.

Hart recognizes doll makers often intentionally use their wares to transmit norms and expectations. However, she positions toy companies as generally “responding to cultural moments rather than creating them,” claiming they are often “late to the party” when it comes to social change and equality (p. 9). Here, the book perhaps leans too heavily into the notion of dolls as reflections of our social world rather than as objects that construct that world. In one example, Hart notes that a titular Black Barbie did not hit the market until the 1980s, two decades after the civil rights movement. She brushes aside the fact that Mattel released the poorly named “Colored Francie” in 1967 and a Black doll named Christie, whose back story positions her as Barbie’s friend, in 1968. There were many problematic elements to these dolls, including and beyond nomenclature, that are explored in Ann duCille’s (1994) classic essay “Dyes and Dolls: Multicultural Barbie and the Merchandising of American Culture,” about how the Barbie brand has manufactured and sold Blackness. DuCille’s work demonstrates that Mattel was not simply

responding to society; the company was involved in the cultural centering of white femininity and the commodification of Black identities. We might also consider that by establishing Christie and Barbie's friendship in the late 1960s—while school desegregation was still being battled in the courts and white flight from cities was on the rise—Mattel also challenged racist ideologies by constructing an opportunity for children to imagine cross-racial friendships. Doll narratives and doll play can be complicated and messy; more than “vehicles through which [ideologies] are transferred and internalized,” dolls are often the landscape in which and through which these ideologies are constructed and negotiated (p. 10).

For those new to the consideration of dolls as objects to be taken seriously, Hart's review of the field, interwoven with feminist analysis and personal anecdotes of doll collecting and play, offers a solid introduction.

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—Emilie Zaslow, *Pace University, New York, NY*

### **The Privilege of Play: A History of Hobby Games, Race, and Geek Culture**

*Aaron Trammell*

New York: New York University Press, 2023. List of figures, preface, introduction, conclusion, acknowledgments, notes, index, and about the author. 240 pp. \$30.00 paper. ISBN: 9781479818402

We generally understand games and play

as a universal aspect of social interaction. And, although we usually consider play as the province of children, Western society has embraced the notion of “young at heart” to emphasize how an appreciation of play and interaction with games can transcend developmental concepts associated with age cohorts and be a component of the lives of many. However, as individuals age, responsibilities and expectations creep in, limiting how much time we can spend on play. Further, with the expectation of responsibility, activities that we characterize as gaming and play can be construed as frivolous, counterproductive, or illustrating a lack of maturity. Following this logic, it becomes easier to stereotype and normalize those who might see themselves as participating in gamer culture as socially inept, disconnected, and “nerdy”—stereotypes that began to emerge in the late twentieth century. The common idea of the adult gamer came to mean mostly white men who were apparently able to devote inordinate amounts of time to exploits surrounding gaming and play. Individuals outside the typical gamer stereotype—women, ethnic and racial minorities, and other groups—became harder to “see” as adult purveyors of games, encouraging the use of terms like “girl gamers,” “Black gamers,” and “gaymers” to synthesize these other populations within the social category of gamer.

But is there, in fact, more to this? In *Privilege of Play*, communication scholar Aaron Trammell theorizes a deeper relationship between gaming, adulthood, and the social realities that exist in Western cultures. The book builds on Trammell's groundbreaking work found in various