

little on academics, and most activities are teacher directed with little free play. In contrast, six-year-old students in Victoria, Australia, focus on literacy and numeracy, also with little play. In both countries, the transition to school is important for children and their family's schedules. Indeed, the description of one Australian family illuminates some of the problems caused by disconnecting rules at home and school, as well as the lack of transportation and sufficient food.

The authors also demonstrate the potential effects of time constraints and poverty on family dynamics. These important insights are especially useful for family studies practitioners and researchers interested in the sociology of families from various cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds. However, the differences in the samples make it difficult to come to any sure conclusions from a cross-national comparison.

Both Broadhead and Burt and Hede-gaard and Fler draw heavily on the theories of Lev Vygotsky and the cross-cultural research of Barbara Rogoff. Yet the authors discuss play quite differently. For Hede-gaard and Fler, play and learning are separate concepts. They describe play as the free play that children do at home—including play with a train set, a family game of football, play with garden tools, construction and pretend play in the sand-box, and rough-and-tumble play as children jump on living room cushions. The authors discuss the importance of both play and learning as if they are two important but separate aspects of a child's development. For Broadhead and Burt, play and learning are not separate concepts. They focus instead on playful learning

during which children learn social skills, develop their imaginations, use language and drawings to communicate their ideas, and improve their coordination through child-initiated play.

Although these two books aim at slightly different audiences—family studies practitioners and researchers versus early-childhood educators—they both provide useful insights and a holistic view of children in home and school settings. Moreover, in the current test-driven culture of education, these books help demonstrate the importance of play in children's education.

---

—Olga S. Jarrett, *Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA*

### **Getting Physical: The Rise of Fitness Culture in America**

*Shelly McKenzie*

Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2013. Introduction, images, notes, bibliography, index. 254 pp. \$34.95 cloth. ISBN: 97807006196061

### **Making the American Body: The Remarkable Saga of the Men and Women Whose Feats, Feuds, and Passions Shaped the Fitness Industry**

*Jonathan Black*

Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2013. Introduction, images, notes, index. 223 pp. \$27.95 cloth. ISBN: 97808032143705

The recent American worry about obesity, the lack of exercise, and unhealthy diets

has elevated the subject of public fitness to a level of national discourse not seen since the early Cold War–era debates over our physical softness. Two recent works, Jonathan Black’s *Making the American Body: The Remarkable Saga of the Men and Women Whose Feats, Feuds, and Passions Shaped Fitness History* and Shelly McKenzie’s *Getting Physical: The Rise of Fitness Culture in America* attempt to inform these debates about public fitness by illustrating the arc of America’s fitness culture and its origins and role in American society.

In *Making the American Body*, Black argues unabashedly that the story of American fitness is “the tale of individuals” (p. ix) whose inventions, demonstrations, and innovations enticed, shamed, and cajoled Americans into fitness lifestyles. Black’s book, written in a breezy, accessible manner, identifies several definitive periods of fitness culture throughout the twentieth century, each becoming more distinctive and more profitable than the one before it. Based almost entirely on oral interviews and secondary sources, Black’s book is at its best in recounting the outsized personalities of these periods and their often contentious business and personal affairs, such as Arthur Jones, the inventor of the Nautilus machine, who was so protective of his invention that he used a bulldozer to bury earlier prototypes in his backyard.

Black shows that once Americans began to participate in fitness rather than simply to marvel at the bodily development of others, it became highly commercialized. Indeed, the business of fitness in the form of gyms and workout facilities now mostly falls under the umbrella of multimillion-dollar corporations as just another managed asset. Here, Black says,

is where contemporary fitness has become partially counter-productive. The commercialization of the fitness industry has sold fitness mostly as a product to be acquired for the purpose of making oneself physically attractive, not for lifelong health; and the marketing of both apparel manufacturers and gyms stress only the hyperattractive and super fit, creating a culture that tends to exclude those individuals most in need of a healthy active lifestyle.

While Black tends to focus on individuals and the business evolution of fitness, the academic Shelly McKenzie takes a more scholarly interpretive approach in *Getting Physical*. She argues that definitive cultural forces and historical events shaped an American embrace of fitness. McKenzie looks at outside influences such as Cold War–era fears about national preparedness and physical softness, particularly amongst children; the belief that it was a woman’s responsibility to manage the health and fitness of her children and husband and to maintain her own desirability given the effect of post–World War II affluence on both labor and diet and the so-called “cardiac crisis” of the late 1950s and 1960s (which featured alarmingly high heart attack rates for males). Thus, McKenzie claims, by the early 1970s, American culture broadly accepted the benefits and necessities of a fit and active lifestyle for men, women, and children. The two significant fruits of such a cultural sea-change were the running boom of the 1970s and the health-club craze that began in the 1980s. Both generated a passionate dialogue from supporters and critics about the cultural and physiological utility of such trends, and both were quickly separated from their individualist

origins by their commercialization.

In discussing the financial and cultural success of fitness clubs, both Black and McKenzie note the influence of sociologist Ray Oldenburg's concept of a "third place"—separate from work and home—as a locus of social and communal cohesion to combat the dislocating influences of modernity. And both books end on a note examining the future of fitness. They argue that contemporary fitness is seen not as a joyous, recreational activity, but as work, as something to be subjugated and checked off our daily list as an expression of our ability to master a demanding, complex, modern world. In this regard, while both clearly argue that fitness is securely ensconced in contemporary American culture, its benefits will continue to accrue mostly to those with the mentality, disposable income, and leisure time of the financial and social elite.

---

—Kurt Kemper, *Dakota State University, Madison, SD*

**Architecture on the Carpet:  
The Curious Tale of  
Construction Toys and the  
Genesis of Modern Buildings**

*Brenda Vale and Robert Vale*  
London: Thames & Hudson, 2013.  
Notes, images, acknowledgements, index.  
208 pp. \$27.95 cloth.  
ISBN: 9780500342855

Professors of architecture and experts in sustainable design, Brenda Vale and Robert Vale place new foundations in the field of twentieth-century toys with their most

recent book *Architecture on the Carpet: The Curious Tale of Construction Toys and the Genesis of Modern Buildings*. The authors take a nuanced approach that leads to few outright conclusions about the subject but rather to more questions about whether architecture inspires the toy or vice versa, about how toys inform child development, and about the extent to which consumer society influences toy design.

Ranging from Richter's stone blocks (actually, a composite of chalk, sand, and linseed oil) to plastic LEGOs (acrylonitrile butadiene styrene), the authors capture a broad spectrum of the types of construction and materials common to these toys. Through this survey, they make some innovative observations: Lincoln Logs "mimicked how such buildings are fundamentally constructed" (p. 80); "the Dutch [Mobaco] is an elegant system that makes models only superficially similar to buildings children would see, whereas the English [Bayko] is a complex and rather pragmatic system that makes quite accurate replicas of very familiar buildings" (p. 92); and Castos were a "model of the process of making concrete" (p. 144). Thus, toy design has to balance accuracy with assembly.

Throughout the book, the authors supply facts gleaned from playing with the objects. For example, it is impossible to build higher than ten units in Playplex, and it is difficult not to bend the rods in constructing with Bayko. Because they draw primarily from their personal collection, it is easy to spot the toys that inspired them. Despite relying heavily on their own collection, they do mention the National Building Museum's collection, but they overlook collections at other cultural institutions, such as that at The

Physical culture started to rise beyond practical necessities to become a means to an end — an *art de vivre*. Remains of a *gymnasia*, an early version of our modern gyms. Antique sculpture representing ideal athleticism. Catharine Beecher was one of the first pioneers to create an awareness of fitness in America. As a strong advocate for the inclusion of physical education in schools as well as daily exercises for both sexes, she developed a program of calisthenics that were performed to music. When Beecher established the Hartford Female Seminary in 1823, it was the first major U.S. educational institution for women to implement physical education courses as part of the program. At the same time, European physical culture traditions started to take root in America. Shelly McKenzie's *Getting Physical* reveals that these truths have a specific cultural history encompassing a range of understandings and experiences of the fit body from the 1950s to the present. "McKenzie highlights two important moments in fitness and exercise, governmental support for children's fitness and the rise of jogging culture." [A] well-crafted study of fitness culture in America from the 1950s through the 1980s. In the 1960s, the modern fitness industry was still in its infancy and the few regimens that existed prioritized finding and pleasing a husband, explains historian Shelly McKenzie, author of the book *Getting Physical: The Rise of Fitness Culture in America*. Berk encouraged women to please themselves — an attitude that complemented and contributed to the brewing sexual revolution.