

★Play: How it Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination and Invigorates the Soul

Stuart Brown with Christopher Vaughan. Avery, \$24.95 (240p) ISBN 9781583333334

Doctor, psychiatrist and public speaker Brown (founder of the National Institute for Play) disagrees with conventional wisdom stating that success depends on keeping your nose to the grindstone. Now 75 years old, Brown condenses decades of first-hand experience and research, cautioning that “play-deficient” lives can burn out adults as well as children; in fact, Brown says, it’s serious like a heart attack: “when we lack that feeling of lightness in what we do it should be... as alarming as chest pain.” He makes several convincing cases for play’s importance: that social play—joking, teasing, flirting—is “the lubrication that allows human society to work and individuals to be close to each other”; that today’s college-bound adolescents often lead lives over-structured by parents and teachers, leading to instability and worse (working with “young murderers,” he found they were often deprived of “rough-and-tumble play” in childhood); that play “lies at the core of creativity and innovation” for all animal species, especially humans. This close psycho- and sociological examination will yield insights for parents and educators, adults who have a hard time opening up, and anyone else curious about the everyday games people play. (Mar.) *Publishers Weekly on line*