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## Science News

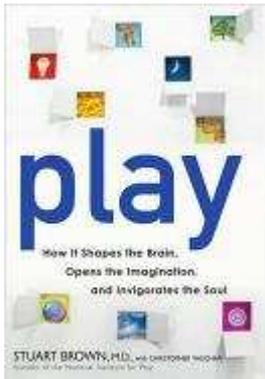
### Book Review: Play: How It Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul

Review by Rachel Zerkowitz

By Stuart Brown with Christopher Vaughan

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Play: How It Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul by Stuart Brown with Christopher Vaughan

Long days and warm weather can make the urge to put down work and go play almost impossible to resist. So don't. The drive to play is as natural as the drive for food and sex, the authors of this book convincingly argue. "Play shows us our common humanity," they write. "It is the genesis of innovation, and allows us to deal with an ever-changing world."

Play defies easy definition, write Vaughan and Brown, founder of the National Institute for Play. Sliding down a mountain in sub-zero temperatures while strapped to two thin planks thrills some but petrifies others. But, in general, play is voluntary and flexible. Most important, it is seemingly purposeless.

"Seemingly" is the key idea. The authors discuss research showing that rats that played with toys and other rats when young developed larger brains than those barred from joining the fun. In people, play has been linked to relationship satisfaction, emotional adjustment and creativity.

In one striking example, Brown describes Charles Whitman, who in 1966 murdered his wife, mother and 14 people at the University of Texas at Austin before police shot him. Brown helped investigate the incident. Besides a controlling father, Whitman's life was distinguished by an utter lack of play, which contributed to his psychopathology, Brown concludes.

Whitman's case was extreme, but many people feel the dearth of play in their lives. The book includes tips for how to get the activity and its benefits back. Fun yet deeply serious, this book shows that people ignore the urge to play at their own peril.

Avery, 2009, 240 p., \$24.95