

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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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

publications, such as the journal *Analog Game Studies* and the book *Masculinities in Play*, which note how racial and gender inequality need to be considered when thinking about interactions in the gaming space. Trammell aligns his analysis first with a socio-historical examination of model train enthusiasts, who in the early twentieth century turned an interest commonly associated with adolescent boys into an adult male passion. Trammell notes the social significance of who is, indeed, involved in these spaces and how the identities of the participants, namely being economically secure men, allowed them superior access to the resources surrounding their passion and a social standing that afforded them some insulation from critiques of what might be written off as “childish.” By infusing cash and effort into their pastime, these men could create a circumstance of expectation that both protected their esteem while inadvertently keeping others out. Trammell then discusses the creation of the social spaces surrounding board games—Diplomacy and role-playing game publications such as *Alarums & Excursions*—that provided gamer subcultures in which racially and sexually coded ideas could flourish under a thinly veiled act of gatekeeping.

Trammell identifies in his work what he refers to as a network of privilege, discussing how the “social advantages enjoyed by hobbyists were an important feature of the network structure they were embedded in” (p. 12). There are resources, skills, and abilities that are prized in any social network, and spaces of leisure and play are not immune. Thus, the possession of certain knowledges, cultural artifacts, and demeanors work to benefit individu-

als who are a part of a gaming subculture. However, as Trammell deftly points out, this privilege is mediated by expectations set out by those seen as significant, which tends to mean that those with the easiest path to full access, particularly in gaming subcultures, are affluent (middle-class or higher) white men. There is an apparent straightforwardness in the accumulation under the network of privilege for these individuals, even though others in the subculture must work to gain that same access. This might require uncomfortable adaptations for some, Trammell notes, because hobby spaces are heavily influenced by what he labels the “politics of Whiteness,” with a none-too-subtle effort to segregate the action of gaming from social issues such as racism, sexism, and homophobia. The argument of play, “this is only a game,” allows for a dismissal of concern, which would further impede other groups in gaming spaces and encourage them to assimilate through their silence.

The *Privilege of Play* beautifully provides an accessible chronology of analog gaming, inclusive of board games and eventually shifting to digital elements of the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries. It leans heavily on both history and scholarship but is not overpowering in its use of either. Trammell demonstrates how push back against what could be seen as racism or sexism runs the risk of being weaponized, implying that the aggrieved parties are not as interested in gaming as they might be in a social agenda. Trammell subtly notes that this is a result of who is seen as dominant in gaming spaces, which can complicate matters. He concludes with a hopeful interpretation of activism and change that is occurring in hobby and

game spaces but notes that globalization (where “race” has different meanings in different cultures) might complicate efforts. The book represents a point of critical consideration, a “save point” if you will, from which future work—both academic and within the game industry—can position itself.

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Monster Kids: How Pokémon Taught a Generation to Catch Them All

Daniel Dockery

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Monster Kids: How Pokémon Taught a Generation to Catch Them All is a media history of the Pokémon franchise in twelve chapters. The author, Daniel Dockery, is a staff writer for the American anime streaming site Crunchyroll. Dockery focuses on the United States but seamlessly incorporates information about Japanese media and its cultural and economic background. Along with the myriad manifestations of the Pokémon franchise, Dockery also discusses thematically and commercially connected media such as Digimon, Yu-Gi-Oh!, Tamagotchi, and Cardcaptors.

Appropriately enough, Dockery opens *Monster Kids* with the childhood of Satoshi Tajiri, the creator of Pokémon. As a teenager, Tajiri published an amateur arcade game fanzine called *Game Freak*,

which would later become the name of the Pokémon video game development studio. After partnering with Nintendo, Tajiri and Game Freak brought on additional creative talent to fill out a roster of trainable monsters for the first pair of Pokémon games in 1996. This pair of games, *Pokémon Red* and *Pokémon Green*, became a sleeper success that was soon adapted into a manga, an anime, and another set of games. This evolution is concisely recounted in the book’s first chapter, which would serve as excellent stand-alone reading for someone interested in the early history of the Pokémon franchise in Japan.

Meanwhile, in the United States, the Kids’ WB and Fox Kids network television programming blocks were looking for their next big hit. This is where the true story of *Monster Kids* emerges as a study of the broader media ecology of the late 1990s and early 2000s. While the Kids’ WB won the rights to the *Pokémon* anime, Fox Kids acquired *Digimon*, another import from Japan. *Monster Kids* uses the Pokémon and Digimon franchises as twinned case studies to explain the business of children’s television programming and the various attempts of media companies to expand Japanese cartoons into localized franchises of toys, card games, movies, music videos, fast food tie-ins, and other marketing ventures of varying success.

The final chapter, “Catch and Release,” provides an excellent summary of the transformation of the Pokémon franchise after its initial boom. This summary, which touches on the changes in media fandom as Internet access became more widespread, is capped by a clear-sighted description of the legacy of imported Japanese cartoons in the brief but impactful