specific memories and how deeply they have done so, reflecting on their meaning to an evolving sense of self, and being aware of others. This book can help us build a more differentiated and integrated construction of play selves from personal lives, thereby enriching our understanding and employment of play theory and practices, by becoming more reflective and self-aware of play over the life span.

—James Ewald Johnson, *The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA*

Rethinking Weapon Play in Early Childhood

Samuel Broaden and Kisa Marx
New York: Routledge, 2024. Foreword, introduction, and acknowledgments. 108 pp. $32.99 paper. ISBN: 9781032649122

For as long as there have been children, many youngsters, particularly boys, have engaged in weapon play. Youth have fought mock battles with wooden swords and tiny bows for centuries. In the modern age, kids have played cops and robbers or war (and, indeed, the now politically incorrect cowboys and Indians) with guns that often looked fairly realistic until recent years. Now, guns tend to come with bright colors and exaggerated designs, so as to distinguish them better from real firearms and reduce the risk of accidental shootings by police officers mistaking them for real guns. But, particularly since the 1990s, weapon play has also become controversial.

Boys, in particular, appear to be drawn to weapon play, perhaps as an evolutionary adaptation to evolved male social roles (hunting as opposed to gathering). But such play is often frowned upon, either because of the beliefs that it reinforces gender norms or that it encourages violence in real life. These issues can be particularly salient in communities wracked by real-life gun violence.

So, with great interest, I turned to the new book *Rethinking Weapon Play in Early Childhood* by Samuel Broaden and Kisa Marx. This book looks at weapons play from an early childhood educator perspective, examining whether young children's centers should allow weapons play in their facilities. Overall, the authors take a fairly positive perspective on the idea, encouraging youthful autonomy and suggesting adults often get in the way given their own hang-ups. The book is quite short (108 pages from cover to cover) and a brisk read.

Overall, I found myself liking it and appreciating the authors' fresh perspective, despite some weaknesses I think may limit its audience. This is a tough issue because there just are not that many empirical studies on weapons play in childhood (I, in fact, coauthored one of the very few). The book is written in a very folksy, conversational style (indeed, the two authors quite literally converse back and forth in different points of the book), and they come across as charming, thoughtful individuals. I think the book will succeed in convincing many early childhood educators (who are overwhelmingly women) to rethink their natural aversion to weapons play (which, of course, may end up foisting female values onto many boys to whose motives the median female educator may not relate). But there are two issues that I think limit the book.

First, the book is not very empirical—again, partly simply because not many studies exist on weapons play in childhood. Nonetheless, what few do may have offered more empirical grounding for the authors' point. For instance, the 2018 study in which I was involved (along with Sven Smith and Kevin M. Beaver), "Learning to Blast a Way into Crime, or Just Good Clean Fun? Examining Aggressive Play with Toy Weapons and its Relation with Crime," found that early weapons play did not relate to later juvenile crimes. Admittedly, there is very little other research on which the authors can rely in terms of toy guns and other weapons. However, there is a vast, parallel world of research on aggressive play in video games which, after decades of controversy, ultimately revealed that shooting games played little to no role in youth aggression or gun violence (e.g., Aaron Drummond, James Sauer, and Christopher J. Ferguson, "Do Longitudinal Studies Support Long-Term Relationships between Aggressive Game Play and Youth Aggressive Behavior? A Meta-Analytical Examination" (2020) and Simon Goodson, Kirstie J. Turner, Sarah L. Pearson, and Pelham Carter, "Violent Video Games and the P300: No Evidence to Support the Neural Desensitization Hypothesis" (2021). Unfortunately, much misinformation on this also still exists. This could be a good opportunity for the authors to note the absence of links between aggressive play in games and real-life aggression, particularly for early childhood educators who may be particularly prone to "spun glass theory" (the belief that youth are fragile and need to be relentlessly "protected" from anything even mildly untoward such as computer games or toy guns).

The other criticism I have concerns the authors taking what some in the potential audience for the book might see as a social-justice warrior tone, complete, for example, with such academic usages as "folx" with an x for "folks," all of which I worried could distract from their overall message. They often framed this message as antiracist. To be fair, when talking about early childhood education in areas where gun violence is tragically common, the authors certainly raise important issues. However, these issues are as relevant in poor white communities in Appalachia as they are in Black or Latino communities in inner cities. Indeed, the entire concept of antiracism as a paradigm in relation to this topic has been controversial. This makes the work feel at times as if it indulges in progressive truisms and an academic jargon that perhaps will be off-putting to many who might otherwise enjoy and benefit from the book. I hope that the authors continue their work in this area, and I would encourage them to consider this issue to become more inclusive and accessible to a wider audience.

That said, I certainly think the book is worth a read and offers an important contrast to many individual's assumptions about the purported evils of weapons play.

—Christopher J. Ferguson, *Stetson University, DeLand, FL*

Playhouses and Privilege: The Architecture of Elite Childhood

Abigail A. Van Slyck
Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2025. Introduction,