

enjoyed the process and learned from it.

I recommend *Playful* to anyone who wishes to increase their playfulness and reduce their stress. It is not explicitly a self-help book, but implicitly it is. As such, I rank it right up there with Bernard De Koven's *A Playful Path* as a book that will inspire readers to rethink how they approach daily living.

---

—Peter Gray, *Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA*

### **The Therapeutic Powers of Play: Comparing Theories and Practice**

*Athena Drewes and Edward Franc Hudspeth, eds.*

New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2025. List of figures and photos, list of tables, about the contributors, about the editors, foreword, preface, in memoriam, and index. 456 pp. \$49.95 paper. ISBN: 9798216277613

In 2018 Charles Schaefer invited me to contribute a chapter to a book he was editing. At the time, I was knee-deep in my own teaching, scholarship, and journey as a new parent, and I declined the opportunity. I have often reflected on my limited interactions with Schaefer since then. His warmth, generosity, and deep commitment to play therapy left a lasting impression—one that has prompted me to think not only about a missed professional opportunity but also about the enduring influence he has had on the field itself.

It is difficult to imagine how play therapists conceptualize the therapeutic

powers of play without acknowledging Schaefer's foundational contributions. His seminal 1993 volume, *The Therapeutic Powers of Play*, helped launch and shape one of the field's most important conversations. In this updated volume, *The Therapeutic Powers of Play: Comparing Theories and Practice*, edited by his longtime coeditor and play therapy pioneer Athena Drewes, alongside former *International Journal of Play Therapy* editor Edward Franc Hudspeth, Schaefer's legacy is thoughtfully extended.

Drewes and Hudspeth note that “many play therapists do not have a full understanding of what the therapeutic power of play is, how it interplays with theory, and how the change agent operates” (p. xxv). This observation captures a central challenge within the field. Care givers may reasonably say, “So you are going to play with my child? I can do that at home.” And educators and other stakeholders may ask the value of removing a child from class for play therapy. Too often, play is misunderstood as mere recreation rather than recognized as a sophisticated therapeutic medium. As a play therapist and educator, I consistently emphasize to my students that effective practice requires more than skillful intervention; it demands the ability to articulate clearly why we do what we do, how play supports social and emotional development, and what mechanisms contribute to meaningful therapeutic change. In this regard, this text offers a valuable framework for clinicians, educators, and helping professionals seeking to answer these essential questions.

The book is organized into four sections: “Understanding the Therapeutic Powers of Play,” “Comparing Theoretical Approaches Through the Lens of the

Therapeutic Powers of Play,” “Integrative Approaches and Applications,” and “Closing Thoughts: Practical Use of the Text.” Together, these sections make the volume both a compelling graduate-level resource and a practical reference for clinicians seeking broader conceptual grounding. Particularly timely is chapter 4 (in part 1), in which Hudspeth and Karlie Lynn Zabin begin an important conversation connecting neuroscience to the therapeutic powers of play—linking neurodevelopmental language to the therapeutic relationship, personality development, and the brain’s response to play.

Parts 2 and 3 are significant contributions of the text and hold particular value for the education of both emerging and seasoned play therapists. Major theoretical models—including child-centered, Adlerian, gestalt, psychoanalytic, and integrative approaches such as trauma play and EMDR (eye movement desensitization and reprocessing) play therapy—are presented with attention to philosophy, psychopathology, treatment goals, cultural considerations, role of care givers, and supporting research. The use of the same “Herman” case study across chapters creates a particularly effective comparative framework, allowing readers to examine how differing theoretical orientations conceptualize treatment while still identifying shared therapeutic powers. This structure helps clinicians move beyond simply practicing within a model toward articulating why specific interventions matter. For example, a cognitive behavioral play therapist may be better equipped to explain to care givers how early interventions foster communication and relationship building, while later phases promote psychological development, attachment, and social com-

petence. When paired with Mary Anne Peabody’s chapter on case conceptualization, the volume offers readers a stronger conceptual and practical foundation for delivering thoughtful, high-quality care.

The robust and challenging case of Herman provides significant narrative depth as well as meaningful conceptualization and treatment challenges. The high level of traumatic material present in Herman’s life creates a realistic and useful foundation through which the therapeutic values of play can be applied. However, the book misses an important opportunity by not including a chapter focused on the types of trauma, trauma neurobiology, dissociation, and trauma’s developmental impact. Such a discussion might also explore how trauma emerges in play and how the therapeutic values of play may support the processing and resolution of posttraumatic play. Although the book includes two useful chapters on trauma play and EMDR and play therapy integration, the depth of Herman’s experience warrants a nontheory-focused chapter that would help readers conceptualize his case through multiple clinical lenses.

*The Therapeutic Powers of Play: Comparing Theories and Practice* serves as both a scholarly continuation of Schaefer’s previous work and a meaningful contemporary resource. For play therapists, educators, and helping professionals, the text not only reinforces the importance of play as a mechanism of healing but also strengthens the field’s capacity to explain, defend, and refine its work.

---

—Stephen P. Demanchick, *Nazareth University, Rochester, NY*