little on academics, and most activities are teacher directed with little free play. In contrast, six-year-old students in Victoria, Australia, focus on literacy and numeracy, also with little play. In both countries, the transition to school is important for children and their family’s schedules. Indeed, the description of one Australian family illuminates some of the problems caused by disconnecting rules at home and school, as well as the lack of transportation and sufficient food.

The authors also demonstrate the potential effects of time constraints and poverty on family dynamics. These important insights are especially useful for family studies practitioners and researchers interested in the sociology of families from various cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds. However, the differences in the samples make it difficult to come to any sure conclusions from a cross-national comparison.

Both Broadhead and Burt and Hedegaard and Fleer draw heavily on the theories of Lev Vygotsky and the cross-cultural research of Barbara Rogoff. Yet the authors discuss play quite differently. For Hedegaard and Fleer, play and learning are separate concepts. They describe play as the free play that children do at home—including play with a train set, a family game of football, play with garden tools, construction and pretend play in the sandbox, and rough-and-tumble play as children jump on living room cushions. The authors discuss the importance of both play and learning as if they are two important but separate aspects of a child’s development. For Broadhead and Burt, play and learning are not separate concepts. They focus instead on playful learning during which children learn social skills, develop their imaginations, use language and drawings to communicate their ideas, and improve their coordination through child-initiated play.

Although these two books aim at slightly different audiences—family studies practitioners and researchers versus early-childhood educators—they both provide useful insights and a holistic view of children in home and school settings. Moreover, in the current test-driven culture of education, these books help demonstrate the importance of play in children’s education.

—Olga S. Jarrett, Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA
has elevated the subject of public fitness
to a level of national discourse not seen
since the early Cold War-era debates over
our physical softness. Two recent works,
Jonathan Black’s Making the American
Body: The Remarkable Saga of the Men and
Women Whose Feats, Feuds, and Passions
Shaped Fitness History and Shelly McKen-
ze’s Getting Physical: The Rise of Fitness
Culture in America attempt to inform these
debates about public fitness by illustrating
the arc of America’s fitness culture and its
origins and role in American society.

In Making the American Body, Black
argues unabashedly that the story of Amer-
ican fitness is “the tale of individuals” (p.
ix) whose inventions, demonstrations, and
innovations enticed, shamed, and cajoled
Americans into fitness lifestyles. Black’s
book, written in a breezy, accessible man-
ner, identifies several definitive periods of
fitness culture throughout the twentieth
century, each becoming more distinctive
and more profitable than the one before
it. Based almost entirely on oral interviews
and secondary sources, Black’s book is at
its best in recounting the outsized per-
sonalities of these periods and their often
costentious business and personal affairs,
such as Arthur Jones, the inventor of the
Nautilus machine, who was so protective
of his invention that he used a bulldozer
to bury earlier prototypes in his backyard.

Black shows that once Americans
began to participate in fitness rather than
simply to marvel at the bodily develop-
ment of others, it became highly commer-
cialized. Indeed, the business of fitness in
the form of gyms and workout facilities
now mostly falls under the umbrella of
multimillion-dollar corporations as just
another managed asset. Here, Black says,
is where contemporary fitness has become
partially counter-productive. The commer-
cialization of the fitness industry has sold
fitness mostly as a product to be acquired
for the purpose of making oneself physi-
cally attractive, not for lifelong health; and
the marketing of both apparel manufactur-
ers and gyms stress only the hyperattractive
and super fit, creating a culture that tends
to exclude those individuals most in need
of a healthy active lifestyle.

While Black tends to focus on indi-
viduals and the business evolution of fit-
ness, the academic Shelly McKenzie takes
a more scholarly interpretive approach in
Getting Physical. She argues that defini-
tive cultural forces and historical events
shaped an American embrace of fitness.
McKenzie looks at outside influences such
as Cold War-era fears about national pre-
paredness and physical softness, particu-
larly amongst children; the belief that it
was a woman’s responsibility to manage
the health and fitness of her children and
husband and to maintain her own desir-
ability given the effect of post–World War
II affluence on both labor and diet and
the so-called “cardiac crisis” of the late
1950s and 1960s (which featured alarm-
ingly high heart attack rates for males).
Thus, McKenzie claims, by the early 1970s,
American culture broadly accepted the
benefits and necessities of a fit and active
lifestyle for men, women, and children.
The two significant fruits of such a cul-
tural sea-change were the running boom
of the 1970s and the health-club craze
that began in the 1980s. Both generated a
passionate dialogue from supporters and
critics about the cultural and physiologi-
cal utility of such trends, and both were
quickly separated from their individualist
origins by their commercialization.

In discussing the financial and cultural success of fitness clubs, both Black and McKenzie note the influence of sociologist Ray Oldenburg’s concept of a “third place”—separate from work and home—as a locus of social and communal cohesion to combat the dislocating influences of modernity. And both books end on a note examining the future of fitness. They argue that contemporary fitness is seen not as a joyous, recreational activity, but as work, as something to be subjugated and checked off our daily list as an expression of our ability to master a demanding, complex, modern world. In this regard, while both clearly argue that fitness is securely ensconced in contemporary American culture, its benefits will continue to accrue mostly to those with the mentality, disposable income, and leisure time of the financial and social elite.

—Kurt Kemper, Dakota State University, Madison, SD

Brenda Vale and Robert Vale
Notes, images, acknowledgements, index. 208 pp. $27.95 cloth.
ISBN: 9780500342855

Professors of architecture and experts in sustainable design, Brenda Vale and Robert Vale place new foundations in the field of twentieth-century toys with their most recent book Architecture on the Carpet: The Curious Tale of Construction Toys and the Genesis of Modern Buildings. The authors take a nuanced approach that leads to few outright conclusions about the subject but rather to more questions about whether architecture inspires the toy or vice versa, about how toys inform child development, and about the extent to which consumer society influences toy design.

Ranging from Richter’s stone blocks (actually, a composite of chalk, sand, and linseed oil) to plastic LEGOs (acrylonitrile butadiene styrene), the authors capture a broad spectrum of the types of construction and materials common to these toys. Through this survey, they make some innovative observations: Lincoln Logs “mimicked how such buildings are fundamentally constructed” (p. 80); “the Dutch [Mobaco] is an elegant system that makes models only superficially similar to buildings children would see, whereas the English [Bayko] is a complex and rather pragmatic system that makes quite accurate replicas of very familiar buildings” (p. 92); and Castos were a “model of the process of making concrete” (p. 144). Thus, toy design has to balance accuracy with assembly.

Throughout the book, the authors supply facts gleaned from playing with the objects. For example, it is impossible to build higher than ten units in Playplex, and it is difficult not to bend the rods in constructing with Bayko. Because they draw primarily from their personal collection, it is easy to spot the toys that inspired them. Despite relying heavily on their own collection, they do mention the National Building Museum’s collection, but they overlook collections at other cultural institutions, such as that at The...
Two recent works, Jonathan Black's Making the American Body: The Remarkable Saga of the Men and Women Whose Feats, Feuds, and Passions Shaped Fitness History and Shelly McKenzie's Getting Physical: The Rise of Fitness Culture in America attempt to inform these debates about public fitness by illustrating the arc of America's fitness culture and its origins and role in American society. Black shows that once Americans began to participate in fitness rather than simply to marvel at the bodily development of others, it became highly commercialized. Shelly McKenzie's Getting Physical reveals that these truths have a specific cultural history encompassing a range of understandings and experiences of the fit body from the 1950s to the present. McKenzie highlights two important moments in fitness and exercise, governmental support for children's fitness and the rise of jogging culture. McKenzie's Getting Physical is a well-crafted study of fitness culture in America from the 1950s through the 1980s. In McKenzie's account, it was the lifestyle of suburban consumerism that both encouraged fitness and produced the medical need for it while helping us make sense of what it means to be 'fit' in America while complicating the place of physical fitness within our culture of body surveillance and rigid beauty standards.