

EDITORIAL:**PLAYING THE GAME: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL
EXPLORATION OF YOUTH, SPORT, AND PLAY**

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I am a distance runner, and one of the most essential pieces of being able to succeed as a distance runner is having an excellent crew; you simply can't run 50 kilometers or more without help. As the editor of NEOS, I am proud to present this issue to you. However, I would like to highlight the incredible team that has worked together to make it happen—a team I enjoy working with and would not be able to do this job without. Since the 2024 NEOS issue, this team has experienced incredible highs and lows, including completed dissertations, multiple international relocations, many, many job searches, and the publication of several books ([Tender Labour: Migrant Care Work, Filipina/o Young People, and Family Life across Borders - Jennifer E. Shaw, 2025](#) and [Anthropology in Sporting Worlds: Knowledge, Collaboration, and Representation in the Digital Age - Sean Heath, Co-Editor, 2025](#)).

If you are in academia, you are likely familiar with navigating some of the things on that list, so you know how challenging and stressful these big moments can be (however rewarding they also may be). The NEOS Editorial Team tackled all of those things and still showed up to put together this issue. For that, I want to say a huge “THANK YOU” to Jenny Shaw, Alexea Howard, Manya Kagan, Anne Marie Bedard, Alana Walls, Sean Heath, and Jessica Chapman.

In this issue, “Playing the Game: An Anthropological Exploration of Youth, Sport, and Play,” we present anthropological and interdisciplinary research focused on children's and youths' experiences with sport, play, recreation, and physical activity. We requested submissions that incorporated the various elements of controlled, free, and divergent sport and play. Collectively, the pieces that you will read address a range of children's and youths' experiences navigating agency and identity through their engagements with sport and play.

The issue begins with an invited commentary by Shamira Naidu-Young, who provides a concise overview of the relationship between the field of anthropology and the fields in which children and youth participate in sports and games. Naidu-Young helps make a case for why sport is a valuable focus of study for anthropology.

The first two research articles examine situations in which youth utilize their experiences with sport to challenge existing social and structural limitations. Julia Faulhaber's ethnographic study shows how, through the shared experience of playing football, young men in Jamaica forge connections across social boundaries, revealing how sport can be used to reshape oppressive structures. Sebastián Fuentes and Franco Balaguer's ethnography takes place in a private Argentinian high school with a sports-based curriculum, showing how sport in education becomes a way for youth to navigate societal values around competition, discipline, and success, while often reinterpreting norms related to those values.

Next, Xiaojie Tian's article about Maasai children in Kenya invites us to consider how work and play may blend together, challenging our understanding and definition of the concept of sport.

Tian argues that physically demanding chores are actively shaped by Maasai children to function as sport-like activities, highlighting children's autonomy and embodied learning practices.

The next two articles take us to Brazil and Madagascar, where we see children navigating gender through games. Fernanda Müller and Rafaela Nunes Marques walk us through a schoolyard checkers game in Brazil, where the game becomes a stage for reconfiguring gender hierarchies. Valentina Mutti shows how girls in Madagascar use play and a storytelling game (*kitantara*) to explore and question gender roles, mobility, and morality. Both pieces demonstrate how play becomes a medium for gendered cultural production, resistance, and envisioning change.

The theme of play as a tool for resistance and reinvention is continued in Nicole Sanches's piece, showing how Statian youth in Sint Eustatius use costume, dance, and playful performance at a Christmas parade to reconfigure and renegotiate expressions of tradition and post-colonial identity through symbols like Sinterklaas and Santa Claus.

Our issue concludes with a pair of connected commentaries. Angel Sobotta explores how play, story, and movement can be harnessed as powerful educational tools in teaching the Niimiipuu (Nez Perce) language and culture to Niimiipuu youth. Sobotta introduces us to the land-based learning practices that are part of culturally responsive teaching, as exemplified through the [Nez Perce Language Program](#). Sobotta's commentary is paired with a creative writing piece by our NEOS Intern, Jessica Chapman, based on an interview with Sobotta and a retelling of the story of 'iceyéeye (Coyote), a Niimiipuu character who embodies curiosity, creativity, and play.

I hope you enjoy reading and reflecting on these pieces as they connect the world of sport and play to the world of children and youth. This collection of articles highlights how useful sport can be as an arena for young people to exercise agency and challenge overplayed social and structural norms.

Finally, I invite you to consider joining the fantastic team that I began this column talking about. NEOS is looking for new team members! We will be sending out an official interest form and call for volunteers for the positions of Co-Editor, Assistant Editors, Peer Review Coordinator, and Peer Reviewers in the Fall through the [ACYIG ListServ](#), so make sure you are signed up for that. In the meantime, if you think you would be interested, please feel free to reach out to me for more information (acyig.editor@gmail.com).

These are trying times. Remember, in order to tackle difficult things, we need people supporting us. Who are you supporting today?

Take care,

Chelsea Cutright

NEOS Editor

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