from occupations that involve reading and school. Men now make up a smaller share of teachers than at any time in the past 40 years.

Dr. Leonard Sax, whose book *Why Gender Matters* is a lucid guide to male and female brain differences, emphasizes that men and women can excel at any subject. They just have to be taught in different ways. Sax is a big believer in single-sex schools, which he says allow kids to open up and break free from gender stereotypes. But for most kids it would be a start if they were assigned books they might actually care about. For boys, that probably means more Hemingway, Tolstoy, Homer and Twain.

During the 1970's, it was believed that gender is a social construct and that gender differences could be eliminated via consciousness-raising. But it turns out gender is not a social construct. Consciousness-raising doesn't turn boys into sensitively poetic pacifists. It just turns many of them into high school and college dropouts who hate reading.

MLA CITATION

Brooks, David. "The Gender Gap at School." 2006. *The Norton Reader: An Anthology of Nonfiction*. Ed. Melissa A. Goldthwaite et al. 14th ed. New York: Norton, 2016. 390–92. Print.

QUESTIONS

1. Does your experience support David Brooks's claim that boys and girls read differently? Use some examples from people you know.

2. According to Brooks, what is at stake if we don't recognize the differences between boys and girls?

3. Examine the evidence that Brooks uses to support his claim that girls' and boys' brains are different. Do you think Brooks produces enough evidence to support his claim? What evidence might he be omitting?

4. Do a brief survey of favorite books of males and females, and see if it supports Brooks's claim. Write up your findings in an essay in which you agree, disagree, or both with Brooks's argument.

DAVID EPSTEIN

Sports Should Be Child's Play

THE NATIONAL FUROR over concussions misses the primary scourge that is harming kids and damaging youth sports in America.

The heightened pressure on child athletes to be, essentially, adult athletes has fostered an epidemic of hyperspecialization that is both dangerous and counterproductive.

One New York City soccer club proudly advertises its development pipeline for kids under age 6, known as U6. The coach-picked stars, "poised for elite level soccer," graduate to the U7 "pre-travel" program. Parents, visions of scholarships dancing in their heads, enable this by paying for private coaching and year-round travel.

Children are playing sports in too structured a manner too early in life on adult-size fields—i.e., too large for optimal skill development—and spending too much time in one sport. It can lead to serious injuries and, a growing body of sports science shows, a lesser ultimate level of athletic success.

We should urge kids to avoid hyperspecialization and instead sample a variety of sports through at least age 12. 5

Nearly a third of youth athletes in a three-year longitudinal study led by Neeru Jayanthi, director of primary care sports medicine at Loyola University in Chicago, were highly specialized—they had quit multiple sports in order to focus on one for more than eight months a year—and another third weren't far behind. Even controlling for age and the total number of weekly hours in sports, kids in the study who were highly specialized had a 36 percent increased risk of suffering a serious overuse injury. Dr. Jayanthi saw kids with stress fractures in their backs, arms or legs; damage to elbow ligaments; and cracks in the cartilage in their joints.

Because families with greater financial resources were better able to facilitate the travel and private coaching that specialization requires, socioeconomic status turned up as a positive predictor of serious injury. Some young athletes now face surgeries befitting their grandparents. Young hockey goaltenders repeatedly practice butterfly style—which stresses the developing hip joint when the legs are splayed to block the bottom of the goal. The sports surgeon Marc Philippon, based in Vail, Colo., saw a 25-year-old goalie who already needed a hip replacement.

In the Loyola study, sport diversification had a protective effect. But in case health risks alone aren't reason enough for parents to ignore the siren call of specialization, diversification also provides performance benefits.

Kids who play multiple "attacking" sports, like basketball or field hockey, transfer learned motor and anticipatory skills—the unconscious ability to read

Published in the New York Times *(2014) shortly after the appearance of David Epstein's book,* The Sports Gene: Inside the Science of Extraordinary Athletic Performance.

bodies and game situations—to other sports. They take less time to master the sport they ultimately choose.

Several studies on skill acquisition now show that elite athletes generally practiced their sport less through their early teenage years and specialized only in the mid-to-late teenage years, while so-called sub-elites—those who never quite cracked the highest ranks—homed in on a single sport much sooner.

Data presented at the April meeting of the American Medical Society for Sports Medicine showed that varsity athletes at U.C.L.A.—many with full scholarships—specialized on average at age 15.4, whereas U.C.L.A. undergrads who played sports in high school, but did not make the intercollegiate level, specialized at 14.2.

We may prize the story of Tiger Woods, who demonstrated his swing at age 2 for Bob Hope. But the path of the two-time N.B.A. M.V.P. Steve Nash (who grew up playing soccer and didn't own a basketball until age 13) or the tennis star Roger Federer (whose parents encouraged him to play badminton, basketball and soccer) is actually the norm.

A Swedish study of sub-elite and elite tennis players—including five who ranked among the top 15 in the world—found that those who topped out as sub-elites dropped all other sports by age 11. Eventual elites developed in a "harmonious club environment without greater demands for success," and played multiple sports until age 14.

The sports science data support a "sampling period" through at least age 12. Mike Joyner, a Mayo Clinic physician and human performance expert, would add general physical literacy-building to the youth sports menu: perhaps using padded gymnastics gyms for parkour, which is essentially running, climbing or vaulting on any obstacle one can find.

In addition to athletic diversity, kids' sports should be kid-size.

In Brazil, host of this month's World Cup, kids are weaned on "futsal," a lightly structured and miniaturized form of soccer. Futsal is played on tiny patches of grass or concrete or on indoor courts and typically by teams of five players.

Players touch the ball up to five times as frequently as they do in traditional soccer, and the tighter playing area forces children to develop foot and decision-making skills under pressure.

A futsalization of youth sports generally would serve engagement, skill development and health.

USA Hockey (which has barred checking in youth games) recently invited adults to play on a 310-by-130-foot ice rink to show them what it's like for an 8-year-old to play on a regulation rink. The grown-ups' assessments: "too much time between the action"; "it's hard to communicate because everyone is spread out so far"; "you end up spending a lot of time in open space."

Futsal, basketball and . . . padded parkour? Sounds like a strange three-sport athlete, and a perfect model for kids.

MLA CITATION

Epstein, David. "Sports Should Be Child's Play." 2014. *The Norton Reader: An Anthology of Nonfiction*. Ed. Melissa A. Goldthwaite et al. 14th ed. New York: Norton, 2016. 393–95. Print.

QUESTIONS

1. David Epstein makes two arguments against early specialization in a sport—what he calls "hyperspecialization" in paragraph 2. Identify these two arguments. Do you find one more convincing than the other? Why?

2. Consider Epstein's use of evidence. What types of evidence does he use to support his arguments? Where is that support most effective? Where is it least effective? Why?

3. Among Epstein's solutions to the problem of children specializing too early is "futsalization," based on the game of futsal played in Brazil. What features of futsal does Epstein praise and believe should be modeled in other children's sports?

4. Interview three or four campus athletes who play a sport, asking them when they started their sport, what other sports they played, and what their goals might be in participating in collegiate sports. Write an essay in which you agree, disagree, or both with Epstein's position, incorporating the testimony of the athletes you interviewed.

JANE MCGONIGAL *Be a Gamer, Save the World*

Videogames make players feel like their best selves. Why not give them real problems to solve?

WE OFTEN THINK of immersive computer and videogames—like *FarmVille*, *Guitar Hero* and *World of Warcraft*—as "escapist," a kind of passive retreat from reality. Many critics consider such games a mind-numbing waste of time, if not a corrupting influence. But the truth about games is very nearly the opposite. In today's society, they consistently fulfill genuine human needs that the real world fails to satisfy. More than that, they may prove to be a key resource for solving some of our most pressing real-world problems.

Hundreds of millions of people around the globe are already devoting larger and larger chunks of time to this alternate reality. Collectively, we spend three billion hours a week gaming. In the United States, where there are 183 million active gamers, videogames took in about $15.5 billion last year. And though a typical gamer plays for just an hour or two a day, there are now more than five million "extreme" gamers in the United States who play an average of 45 hours a week. To put this in perspective, the number of hours that gamers world-wide have spent playing *World of Warcraft* alone adds up to 5.93 million years.

These gamers aren't rejecting reality entirely, of course. They have careers, goals, schoolwork, families and real lives that they care about. But as they devote more of their free time to game worlds, they often feel that the real world is missing something.

Gamers want to know: Where in the real world is the gamer's sense of being fully alive, focused and engaged in every moment? The real world just doesn't offer up the same sort of carefully designed pleasures, thrilling challenges and

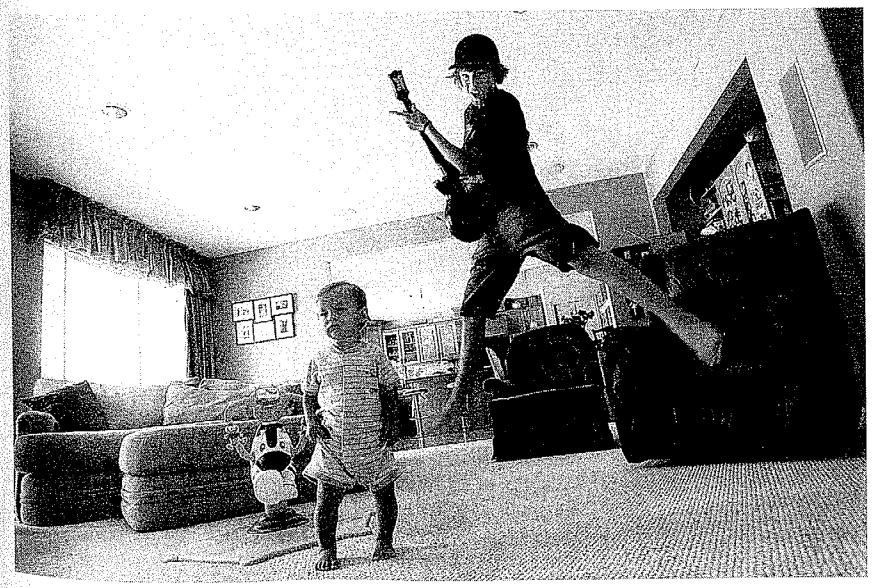
Published in the "Life and Culture" section of the Wall Street Journal *(2011), a daily newspaper covering international and national news with an emphasis on business and economics. Jane McGonigal is the director of game research and development at the Institute for the Future, a nonprofit organization based in Palo Alto, California, that, according to its website, provides "practical tools, research, and programs" to help a variety of organizations reach their future goals.*

powerful social bonding that the gamer finds in virtual environments. Reality doesn't motivate us as effectively. Reality isn't engineered to maximize our potential or to make us happy.

Those who continue to dismiss games as merely escapist entertainment will find themselves at a major disadvantage in the years ahead, as more gamers start to harness this power for real good. My research over the past decade at the University of California, Berkeley, and the Institute for the Future has shown that games consistently provide us with the four ingredients that make for a happy and meaningful life: satisfying work, real hope for success, strong social connections and the chance to become a part of something bigger than ourselves.

We get these benefits from our real lives sometimes, but we get them almost every time we play a good game. These benefits are what positive psychologists call intrinsic rewards—we don't play games to make money, improve our social status, or achieve any external signposts of success. And these intrinsic rewards, studies at the University of Pennsylvania, Harvard and U.C. Berkeley have shown, provide the foundation for optimal human experience.

In a good game, we feel blissfully productive. We have clear goals and a sense of heroic purpose. More important, we're constantly able to see and feel the impact of our efforts on the virtual world around us. As a result, we have a stronger sense of our own agency—and we are more likely to set ambitious real-life goals. One recent study found, for example, that players of *Guitar Hero* are more likely to pick up a real guitar and learn how to play it.



Could games like *Guitar Hero* help cure cancer and end poverty?