



GENDER REPLAY

On Kids, Schools, and Feminism

Edited by **FREEDEN BLUME OEUR** and **C. J. PASCOE**

GENDER REPLAY

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON YOUTH SERIES

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Gender Replay: On Kids, Schools, and Feminism

Edited by Freedom Blume Oeur and C. J. Pascoe

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Freeden Blume Oeur *and* C. J. Pascoe



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To Barrie: for always encouraging us to sing our song.

Children's interactions are not preparation for life; they are life itself.

As adults, we can help kids, as well as ourselves, imagine and realize different futures, alter institutions, craft new life histories. A more complex understanding of the dynamics of gender, of tensions and contradictions, and of the hopeful moments that lie within present arrangements, can help broaden our sense of the possible.

—Barrie Thorne, *Gender Play: Girls and Boys in School* (1993)

To use a metaphor I have long used and enjoyed . . . feminist academic spaces are oases from which we water surrounding deserts, create tools for survival, and nurture a next generation of scholars and teachers.

—Barrie Thorne, Interview with Laurence Bachmann (2013)

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Introduction

Playing with Gender

FREEDEN BLUME OEUR AND C. J. PASCOE

During research at a school for her groundbreaking book, *Gender Play: Girls and Boys in School* (1993), the sociologist Barrie Thorne had quite an unexpected moment. She listened one day as the school loudspeaker blared, “Barrie Thorne, the Principal would like to speak with you.” That commanding request, familiar to many of us from childhood, transported Thorne back to her own elementary school days. She would later recall her “middling status” as a kid (Smith and Greene 2014). The announcement likely provoked feelings of embarrassment and worry, perhaps even shame as “tugs of memory” (Thorne 1993:24) brought back impressions of Thorne’s child self. This poignant moment of self-reflection is a reminder that adults who study youth have one important thing in common: they were once children themselves. These childhood memories are both resources for and challenges to studying kids. Young people were the central actors of Thorne’s book—how they together create and experience gender, within school settings that constrain and enable gendered possibilities—but adults who study them become a part of their social worlds. Kids throughout the school likely giggled at the thought of Thorne being called to the principal’s office. She may have even wondered if the gatekeepers at the school were intending to scold her for some research violation! Thorne’s reflections in *Gender Play* are honest and personal, and they urge the same transparency of other youth researchers.

Our volume offers critical reflections on and celebrates *Gender Play*—its many lessons for feminism, childhood studies, the study of schools, and thinking on gender—as well as the larger research, teaching, and mentoring legacy of *Barrie*, its author.¹ By providing an intimate view of the worlds of kids, in the thirty years since its publication *Gender Play* has

had a lasting impact on how we understand the socialization of gendered lives, the place of children in feminist thought, and how schools often, in Barrie's memorable words, "divide in a familiar geography of gender" (Thorne 1993:1). We are joined in this volume by a feminist community of authors—representing a wide range of interests, career stages, and professional and personal connections to Barrie—that will revisit and critically assess the insights from the book and help gift it to new audiences.

The Play of Gender

The images on the front cover of *Gender Play* convey much more than the title alone. Across the top and bottom of the cover are photographs of a schoolyard, spliced together like a photo reel. In the bottom at the center stands Barrie: leaning against a basketball hoop, staring at the camera, and flashing a wide grin. The movement of children surrounds her, a scene "thick with moving bodies," as she wrote (Thorne 1993:14). You can hear the children laughing and shrieking, the pitter patter of feet, rubber balls bouncing on asphalt. You might be carried back to the playgrounds and schoolyards in your own past and feel those memories of play. And play is not the superfluous stuff of childhood. It is, rather, as Barrie explains, how kids make sense of, re-create, and resist the adult worlds they move in and out of.

Gender Play was the result of two periods of fieldwork in two different public elementary schools: at a school Barrie calls Oceanside in California during the 1976–77 school year; and at another she calls the Ashton school in Michigan in 1980. Barrie embarked on her research concerned with making sense of "group life," or how young people "actively come together to help create, and sometimes challenge, gender structures and meanings" (Thorne 1993:4). Barrie was dissatisfied with models of socialization that viewed children as incomplete adults or as individuals who were passively undergoing the process of becoming adults. In this deterministic view, children are "appropriated" by society and placed on future, linear paths (Corsaro 2018).² Instead of seeing kids as people in the process of becoming, Barrie took them seriously as social actors. The book traces the implications of kids' play and introduces the generative concept of borderwork to understand how kids negotiate gender and their often-unequal relations.

Play and Borderwork

Barrie's book offers four clusters of meanings for the word "play." Resonating with the idea that gender is "done" in the tradition of symbolic interactionism (West and Zimmerman 1987), the first meaning of play concerns action and engagement. This understanding of play "provides an antidote to the view of children as passively socialized" and embraces the view of children as actors in their own right (Thorne 1993:5). A second cluster of meanings underscores the notion of play as a kind of performance. A third meaning captures the sheer complexity of play, imbued with contradictory meanings as play refracts "crosscutting lines of difference and inequality" (Thorne 1993:5). Out of this prism emerge rays of possibility, including opportunities for social change. The final cluster of meanings suggests that play is also a grave matter. Young people laugh, act, speak, and move in ways that carry risks and consequences. An emphasis on play as trivial may therefore hide "serious and fateful encounters" (Thorne 1993:5). "Play" in this instance resonates with other well-known uses of the metaphor in a "deep" sense, where the stakes of collective action are high (Geertz 1972).

A central insight of *Gender Play* is how actors, including kids, take part in activities that reinforce and sometimes dissolve boundaries between the genders. Barrie identified three different forms of "borderwork," a term inspired by the Norwegian social anthropologist Fredrik Barth's research on ethnic classification.³ The first involves contests, in which boys and girls are separated into opposing teams for games and competitions. These more official games are supplemented by other games that are no less serious and become commonplace and help organize the everyday of school life. In these situations, for example, boundaries are reinforced through chasing and pollution rituals.⁴ A third form of boundary work is invasions, where boys disrupt girls' activities, often with impunity. Boys learn of the male privilege of property ownership through these incursions into girls' spaces.

Gender Play's reputation as advancing an "interactionist" view of gender—a careful view of the small and repetitive moments that make gender meanings, or the "micropolitics" that make up the social world (Henley 1977)—risks shortchanging Barrie's robust view of gender as both an essential part of people's lives and an analytic category. As Barrie

(2002) observed, an interactionist approach to gender brings together several related sociological traditions, including ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism, and sociolinguistics. An interactionist view carries many advantages, including showing how gender is a constituent part of everyday life and not a function of biology. Similarly, theories of gender performativity, in the hands of leading scholars such as Judith Butler (1990), would echo the insights of dramaturgical approaches to interaction (Goffman 1959) and attract a wide audience within sociology and across the social sciences and humanities. However, Barrie has cautioned against the “one-sidedness” of approaches that focus on face-to-face interaction at the expense of the “crossroads” (Thorne 2002:8) between interactionism and other levels of analysis, including the psyche, social structure, and history. These various crossroads at once penetrate even more deeply into the self (revealing, for example, gender’s affective dimensions, not easily accessed through macro-level analyses) while encouraging a more expansive and dynamic view of gender that is attentive to multiple levels of analysis and their respective advantages and limitations. To put it differently, Barrie’s “interactionist” approach is not merely concerned with the face-to-face interactions between people but also with the interaction between this level of analysis and those attuned to social structures. This “fuller” account of gender, as Barrie has described it, acknowledges a “loose coupling” between interaction and structures, an anticategorical approach that does not necessarily assume that people’s positions in larger structures (along lines of race, gender, social class, sexuality, and so on) determine in any rigid way how people will necessarily behave and act as they go about their daily lives. In a word, people play with gender in a manner that conforms to and resists larger social patterns and histories. The challenge for ethnographers is to be sensitive to when, how, and why gendered meanings and their implications change across situations (Thorne 2013).

Feminist Childhood Studies

In the thirty years since it was published, *Gender Play* has become an essential text in the growing and dynamic field of childhood studies. One of *Gender Play*’s major contributions has been to help tear down the unnecessary walls between feminist thought and childhood studies.

The book was the culmination of Barrie's decades-long work to situate youth—their concerns and playfulness, their standpoints, their agency and subordination—squarely in feminist concerns. While the study of childhood and children held a marginal location in mainstream sociology during the period when Barrie collected data for her book, feminism provided a language for Barrie to draw out issues of power, marginalization, and dependency (see also Best 2007). Like the ways in which feminist theory called into question a variety of dualisms (Ortner 1974), a feminist childhood studies approach troubled the dualisms of adult and child, independence and dependence, agency and passivity, and the public and the private. In Barrie's work this unsettling appears when young people are treated as experts on their own lives and as having experiences from which adults could learn. Viewing young people as legitimate social actors in these ways has ramifications for the ethics of research on youth. For example, in her 1980 essay “You Still Takin’ Notes?” Barrie reflected on how the notion of “informed consent” fails to capture the complexities of ethical judgments that researchers are forced to make when studying young people. While it is true that hearing from kids is important so that the adults in their lives are not always speaking on their behalf, the process of making proper accommodations for young people remains laden with power dynamics. For example, childhood scholars have found that the impulse to share what consent means to young people is sometimes motivated more by a desire to protect the interests of adult researchers. And in the process of sharing this information—replete with the technical language of “rights” and “dangers” typical of Institutional Review Board materials—researchers may find themselves talking down to young people and inducing conformity in them (David, Edwards, and Alldred 2001).

Why “Gender Replay”?

The chosen name for our book, *Gender Replay*, has several meanings that capture the aims for the edited volume. It is, first, a “replay” in the sense that it reflects on the legacy of Barrie's 1993 book. This retrospective situates *Gender Play* in Barrie's own larger strands of research: on feminism and families, feminism and children, schools, and childhoods in the United States and abroad. We view our volume as a reflection

on *Gender Play* as a “feminist life history,” to borrow from the focus of another influential 1997 volume Barrie coedited with Barbara Laslett, titled *Feminist Sociology: Life Histories of a Movement*.⁵ This approach encourages immersion in the “blurred genre” of sociological writing where “personal narratives and social theory come together” (Laslett and Thorne 1997:4). In fact, for several of the contributors, *Gender Play* was among the first influential books they read as undergraduate students, and one that helped motivate them to pursue a career studying and working with children.

Second, our volume reflects on the development of “play” in theorizing on gender, feminism, sexuality, and youth. Serious play—the kind that often parodies gender but sometimes challenges traditional gender categories and categories of difference—remains a vital metaphor in influential research (e.g., Ito et al. 2010; Pascoe 2007). Children, as Barrie wrote, engage in borderwork that marks and reinforces boundaries (e.g., through “contamination rituals” such as labeling others for having cooties). Yet young people also transgress boundaries, most powerfully illustrated by Jessie, the tomboy who played sports with the boys in *Gender Play*.⁶ In fact, scholars are increasingly documenting the way in which trans, queer, and gender-fluid young people are reconfiguring gendered boundaries many adults have long seen as fixed and timeless.⁷

Third, our volume reconsiders an important cluster of meanings of play from the original text: that which acknowledges the “sheer complexity of gender relations” and, within those relations, “possibilities for social change” (Thorne 1993:5). There have been exciting developments in topics related to the book (e.g., on men and masculinities, and the privatization of public schooling), as well as heightened visibility of nonnormative gender identities (e.g., trans youth) since the publication of *Gender Play*. In a section titled “Looking Ahead,” our volume will consider how the text continues to have an impact in newer areas of research. Another section is dedicated to examining the relevance of “play” in scholarship on race and ethnicity both within and outside of the United States.

The Making of *Gender Play*

Understanding what inspired us to create *Gender Replay* requires a better sense of how *Gender Play* came to exist in the first place. From her early undergraduate training as an anthropologist, Barrie developed a penchant for storytelling, a deep concern for the human condition, and a commitment to respecting the dignity of research participants. Even as Barrie changed disciplines, anthropology would remain close to her heart. Later, Barrie and her collaborator, Judith Stacey, in their 1985 call for a feminist revolution in sociology, would draw on the lessons of anthropology, which had earlier embraced the paradigm-shifting insights of feminism (Stacey and Thorne 1985).⁸ The “play” of biography and feminism is crucial here, and so it helps here to situate *Gender Play* in Thorne’s own *feminist life history*. As Barrie and her coauthor Barbara Laslett wrote, feminist life histories weave biographies and personal narratives with established knowledge and social theory. They are deeply human and emphasize vulnerability, revealing how emotions animate intellectual projects. And they are sensitive to historical context and change, and the “contingency, contradiction, and ambivalences” of life events (Laslett and Thorne 1992:3). In her own chapter in the *Feminist Sociology* volume, Barrie describes growing up in northern Utah, the second-oldest of five children and the daughter of parents who both held PhDs and who had met each other at Mormon Sunday School. As an undergraduate at Stanford University, Barrie grew distant from the LDS Church and was later sought out for excommunication (a story she shared often with delight and pride). Barrie’s new convictions were ideas and theory. She later enrolled in 1965 at Brandeis University for her PhD in sociology. The program was relatively new, and she found in Everett Hughes a supportive advisor. Barrie describes Brandeis during that time as a “generative institution” with a spectacular menagerie of characteristics: the program was deeply indebted to both European social thought and American phenomenology and pragmatism, invested in the teaching of qualitative field methods, and committed to nurturing a critical and political consciousness in its department members.

Against the backdrop of the Vietnam War and the professional field of sociology that at the time was resolutely conservative (Burawoy 2005), Barrie and several friends became involved in a women’s caucus and

local women's collectives, which eventually led them to found Bread and Roses, one of the first women's liberation organizations in New England (see figure 1.1). The name for the organization drew inspiration from the famous poem by the suffragist Helen Todd. At the Women's March in Boston in 2017, long after the organization had folded, those marching would continue to call for bread and roses.⁹ Barrie and her colleagues used their new feminist community to organize what they called "zap actions"—protests and other open acts of defiance against authority and patriarchal traditions—which Barrie would continue to embrace as a faculty member.¹⁰ Barrie's deep involvement in feminist and antiwar activism led her to write a dissertation on the draft-resistance movement. It was not until Barrie had children herself that she began looking at children with "an ethnographic eye" (Smith and Greene 2014:219). She was at that time surprised and disappointed to find that the feminist literature on children was so limited.

After Barrie had completed her fieldwork for *Gender Play*, she continued to build a feminist agenda for studying young people, which resulted in what she called her "manifesto," the essay "Re-Visioning Women and Social Change: Where Are the Children?," published in *Gender and Society* as an update to the 1986 Cheryl Allen Miller Lecture she had earlier given at Loyola University in Chicago. As Barrie argued, taking children seriously was principally a feminist concern because "the fates and definitions of children have been closely tied with those of women" (1987:86). For example, in much the same way that patriarchal customs characterize women as dependent and subordinate, an adult ideological viewpoint views children as helpless and *in terms of* adults (i.e., as "adults in the making"). The study of children, Barrie argued, shares with feminism a concern with how marginalized persons construct knowledge that is often dismissed or overlooked. And like feminism, the critical study of childhood seeks to problematize taken-for-granted dualisms that reinforce systems of power and deny agency to historically marginalized groups (Thorne 2009; see also Pugh 2014 for a review).

Barrie's scholarship was inspired by a social-constructivist branch of childhood studies that emerged from Europe (in places like the United Kingdom and Scandinavia) in the 1980s. At the invitation of sociologist and fellow scholar of childhood William Corsaro, Barrie traveled to Trondheim, Norway, in 1987 for a conference on children and ethnog-



Figure 1.1. Women's Bread and Roses March in Boston, Massachusetts, 1970. Courtesy of the *Boston Globe* and the Northeastern University Archives and Special Collections Department.

raphy, the first of many trips to Norway for her. From there Barrie met Hanne Haavind, a psychologist at the University of Oslo, who became a friend and collaborator and who helped introduce Barrie to a wider community of childhood and gender scholars in the region. Shortly after the publication of *Gender Play* in 1993, Barrie befriended Harriet Bjerrum Nielsen, a contributor to this volume; through this relationship, Barrie met other researchers and new collaborators at the Centre for Gender Research at the University of Oslo, where she was later an adjunct professor (Nielsen, this volume). As editor of the journal *Childhood*, housed at the Norwegian Centre for Childhood Research, Barrie would work closely with scholars across Scandinavia and Europe. These relationships led to Barrie's involvement with helping found research sections for the study of children and childhood for both the American Sociological Association and the International Sociological Association. While Barrie's primary research was conducted in the United States, she was committed to cross-national research in collaborations

with scholars from different countries; see, for example, a 2015 study of Chinese American girls that Barrie wrote with researchers from Norway, Sweden, and the United Kingdom (Haavind, Thorne, Hollway, and Magnusson 2015). Barrie was also committed to destabilizing Western and Eurocentric views of childhood in her own classes and to highlighting writings on the Global South.¹¹

A Legacy of Mentorship

Gender Replay will also reflect on Barrie's legacy of feminist mentoring. When research productivity and individual achievement in the academy are valorized above all else, it is easy to overlook the labor, time, and care that go into supporting the lives and careers of others. Mentoring is especially important for students from historically marginalized groups, who may have been denied access to cultural capital and models of professional success in the academy. While the third section of the book, "Feminist Praxis," is dedicated to these topics, mentorship is a thread that runs throughout the book. With Barrie's own life and work as models, we describe below our own feminist life histories and how our lives have intersected with Barrie's.

Freedden's Story

I arrived at the University of California–Berkeley in 2005 as an excited and nervous twenty-four-year-old. I had just completed two years as a sixth-grade teacher in Philadelphia, a member of the city's inaugural cohort of Teach For America (TFA) instructors. At the time, I was aware of the strong criticisms of TFA but was not totally prepared for the level of scrutiny the organization would face in the coming years. My coursework in sociology and education (and particularly courses and topics on antiracism and feminism) urged me to think more critically about my own positionality: the politics and ethics surrounding what it meant that I was an outsider who had taught in West Philly and had intentions of studying the historical dynamics of racially segregated public schooling.

The impostor syndrome that first year of graduate school was debilitating. I gave serious thought to leaving graduate school. I spent my first two years of graduate school spending a lot of time away from campus,

at a record store in Oakland. I was curious about how the store brought together people from within and beyond the community, just as the Bay Area was gaining national recognition for its distinctive brand of hip-hop, called “hyphy.” A lucky thing happened: I took a course on participant observation with the wonderful Dawne Moon, who helped me to sharpen my ethnographic sensibilities. My original research question (How does a record store create a sense of community for men who pass through its doors?) evolved, with Moon’s encouragement, into, How are women artists positioned in the Bay Area music scene?

My growing interest in the study of gender led me to Raka Ray, who assured me I had a home in the Sociology Department. I soon found myself in Barrie’s seminar on feminist theory, an experience like none other for me in graduate school. Intense and rollicking discussions were punctuated often by laughter. We viewed authors as full people with noble ambitions but with their own biases and flaws, and class participants were challenged to build and reimagine the serious work of theory. I took the questions raised in Moon’s seminar and (without yet having the language of feminist life histories to guide me) asked them of myself and my own work. How had misogyny and gendered power structured my own upbringing in a Cambodian American family? What were the relations between gender, on the one hand, and race and class, on the other, the latter being more familiar coordinates in discussions of inequality in public schooling?

These new ways of considering the “twists of gender” (to borrow a favorite phrase of Barrie’s)—and how gender boundaries are maintained and sometimes challenged—in a history of racially segregated schools motivated me to study single-sex public education targeted to Black children. It became the topic of my final paper in Barrie’s seminar and later the subject of my dissertation. After I shared my new interest with Barrie that semester, she arrived to class one day with a large bag overflowing with materials that were relevant to the topic: articles, unpublished manuscripts, reports, grant proposals, policy briefs, clippings of newspaper articles . . . even copies of email correspondences with other scholars! The margins of these materials were full of her scribbled comments, and there were pages of handwritten notes torn out of notebooks. More than an archive of knowledge that helped launch my dissertation, those materials became for me a model for how to approach research.

The pages were full of passion, attention to detail, an eagerness to listen and learn, and humor.¹² And I came to understand from the documents that Barrie had played a major part in early debates on public single-sex education. While she was intimately familiar with the topic, she never imposed her point of view on me. She instead encouraged me to read widely and carefully and to be attentive to history and to the demands of the current political moment. Barrie encouraged me to fight for the story I believed in telling. One of the highest compliments I can offer Barrie is that, though I was her advisee, she urged me to write a book that is likely very different from one she would have written on the same topic.¹³

Like Barrie, I had been an anthropology major in college and had come to graduate school wanting to study the human condition with great care. In *Gender Play* I found an exemplar in how to think about the ways people in the rituals and daily pacing of life spin “webs of significance,” and how ethnographers can use metaphors (including that of “play”) to give meaning to those moments (Geertz 1973).¹⁴ Barrie taught me that theory need not be some abstraction divorced from the details of everyday life but can be a way of organizing those many details and helping craft a story out of life’s moments. She encouraged me to think imaginatively about my work and to stay clear of borderwork between sociology and other fields. And she taught me to think boldly and creatively—and to think “out of the box,” actually; to mention one of my favorite Barrie sayings, she encouraged her students to avoid doing their work as if it were a crossword puzzle, merely switching letters to fit boxes that others had created.

Barrie’s mentoring has also shaped how I relate to my own students. While it took some time for me to develop this language, I came to understand that feminist notions of care shaped Barrie’s teaching and mentoring. The same spirit animates the teaching and mentoring I now aspire to, but with my own “twists.” These forms of care require transparency concerning hierarchies and power relations between faculty and students. They urge paying careful attention to student work, and the wisdom to know when a critical approach or a gentler touch is needed in working with students and advisees (see Pugh’s chapter in this volume). I find myself helping students learn not just to speak up with confidence in intellectual conversations but to listen well to others: a

skill rarely taught and valued in the academy. And Barrie taught me that good teaching and mentoring require a dedication to self-care: to attend to our own needs and personal well-being so that we can create healthy relationships with others.

CJ's Story

Of the many types of discussions I had with Barrie over the years, one genre in particular stands out: discussions reflecting on our own versions of “gender play” over warm bowls of soup in a café next to our department at UC–Berkeley. Barrie would marvel at my shifts in gendered styles, from a period of wearing fitted black shirts and baggy cargo pants with combat boots to one sporting long, highlighted hair and the occasional dress. For my part, I expressed wonder at her dedication to gender-neutral clothing and short, nondescript haircuts. These discussions circled around our shared identity as feminist scholars and activists, while simultaneously revealing our different, often generational, engagements with what it meant to be feminist. Our feminism, our sociological imaginations, and perhaps our forms of gender play were forged in similar intellectual and activist traditions and reflected generational engagements with those traditions. Both of us were Brandeis University graduates (her graduate training, my undergraduate), and, as such, we had been steeped in a tradition that placed liberationist approaches like feminist theory at the center of the intellectual project. While this training launched me as a naïve twenty-two-year-old into one of the most prestigious universities in the country, it led me there with very little understanding of sociology as a discipline. I had been taught Marx, sure, but only, as per the Frankfurt tradition that characterized Brandeis Sociology at that time, along with Freud. I had only a passing acquaintance with Durkheim and had never heard of Weber. In my first year of graduate study, I could still talk to you in great depth about repressive desublimation but had little understanding of organizations or collective action.

Thankfully I found Barrie, whose Brandeisian subjectivity shone through her pedagogy and mentorship. Take, for example the story she often told about the response she would have liked to have given when a colleague told her, “You’re not a scientist.” In retrospect, she wished she

had said, “Okay, you can have science; I approach sociology like an artist” (Laslett and Thorne 1997:119). This creative, playful, and flexible approach characterized not only her research but her mentorship as well. Rather than impart some sort of methodological dogma or strict boundaries around what counted as sociology, Barrie instead encouraged me and her other advisees to “sing your song.” Rather than setting her graduate students up to write about her own data or enforcing particular visions on her graduate students’ projects, Barrie, even if unfamiliar with or even skeptical of my theoretical approach, always provided me with an array of intellectual possibilities, processed them with me, and allowed me to chart my own path. Nowhere was this approach more evident than in the manuscripts I had received from Barrie, covered in all manner of comments, musings, linkages, suggestions, and the occasional drop of sweat due to Barrie’s proclivity for reading while on the Stairmaster. These little drops always reminded me of her dedication to her graduate students, letting us and our sometimes brilliant and sometimes inane ideas intrude on her solo time. The meetings that accompanied these responses were free-flowing brainstorming and sometimes rant sessions, occasionally punctured by a moment in which Barrie would underscore a comment that was important and should be heeded. Never directing my research, even if she was not particularly sure of my desire to bring together symbolic-interactionist approaches with queer-theory ones, she continually encouraged me to sing my own song.

Of course, singing my own song as a graduate student was not an entirely rosy experience. It meant that Barrie allowed me to make my own mistakes and was ready with words of support and wisdom when I did so. I wince when I think about some early missteps on my part. I, as my publication record suggests, have a penchant for provocative titles, a penchant that Barrie generously let me develop. An important part of becoming an academic is figuring out what concepts are boundary pushing, which are derivative, and which are just stupid, and thankfully Barrie allowed us to figure out how to discern the difference. Most importantly, Barrie empowered me and her other advisees to succeed. She continually passed on opportunities for research, funding, academic talks, publications, and media appearances without once needing acclaim, instead beaming in support as she watched her students go out into the world to carry on the intellectual traditions she has passed to us.

Just looking at the varied work Barrie's students have produced speaks to what she has bequeathed to us intellectually. Her focus on the embodied and lived experiences of gender, sexuality, race, nation, class, and *age*, as well as her encouragement to attend to the complexity, conflict, and emotion in these experiences appears in all of our work. Whether our work is about young people's romantic relationships, the experiences of immigrant kids in schools, or young people's use of technology, we all learned from Barrie the ethnographic skill of taking kids seriously as social actors and as social analysts.

Whether celebrating my successes or picking me up from, yet another, failure, Barrie always offered a soft place to land. I may have been over the moon with excitement about a new publication, job offer, or book contract, or crying about the job market, a particular tough review, or just graduate school in general. Regardless, Barrie was ready with tea, chocolate, and an appropriate dose of feminist fury. In fact, one of my favorite memories was visiting her office, teary and rageful about a particularly sexist insult levied by a man in the department. Fuming, I interrupted Barrie and Arlene Kaplan Daniels midconversation. Both of them responded with hugs, sage advice about the "old girls' network," and stories of how they too had encountered these sorts of things and worse. I carry with me this wonderful moment of three generations of feminists, Arlene with her "just one of the boys" attitude and flair; Barrie with her gentle, righteous anger; and me, as usual, in tears. Indeed, the bonds joining these feminist generations across shared experiences, from encountering sexually exploitative male professors at our shared alma mater to grappling with sexism at UC–Berkeley to insisting that children's concerns should be central to feminist concerns in activism and scholarship, all shape the legacy of Barrie's intellectual work, activism, and mentorship. It is a legacy that I hope to pass on to my own students.

A Feminist Community of Authors

To help explain the enduring influence of *Gender Play* and Barrie's overall body of scholarship in the "abundant present" (to borrow Barrie's words) of childhood studies, *Gender Replay* has assembled a talented group of contributors, working inside and outside the United States. The

authors come from a range of institutions, from research universities to liberal arts colleges to organizations outside the academy, and an array of disciplinary backgrounds. Barrie herself, while trained as a sociologist and so eager to help cultivate a sociological imagination in others, expressed ambivalence towards the increasing disciplinarity of sociology and its tendency to impose constraints (and therefore constrain creativity) in seeking legitimacy (see Thorne 1997). We have envisioned the process of curating a list of contributors as an act of feminist community building, which was at the heart of Thorne's work, teaching, and mentoring.

The fourteen essays in our volume are organized into four sections. The first section, "Kids as Actors, Studying Kids," highlights how adult researchers can approach young people as meaning-making agents in their own worlds, and the possibilities and challenges of doing research with and on children. The leading gender theorist Raewyn Connell opens this volume with an overview and introduction to *Gender Play* in her essay, "The Play of Gender in School Life." Connell places *Gender Play* in the context of its time, describing how it was part of a larger and ongoing intellectual transformation in gender studies. In "With Love and Respect for Young People," Marjorie Elaine Faulstich Orellana addresses the analytic power of Barrie's discussion of the "adult ideological viewpoint" (Speier 1976) as the one that shapes research and what we think we know about young people. This essay makes clear how Barrie's work helps us to center, honor, and value the perspectives of those who have fewer years on the planet and how this helps reframe our own perspectives, encouraging us to imagine new possibilities. Eréndira Rueda, in her essay, "From Classrooms to Bathrooms," documents how the approaches in *Gender Play* helped her to find a way out of the "resistance" narratives that for so long dominated research on youth and education. Under Barrie's mentorship, Rueda learned to study from and with kids, and to use asset-based frames that view children as seeking a sense of belonging in their schools.

Barrie (1993:9) confesses that she was "less sensitive to [the] interconnections" among race, ethnicity, and gender than she should have been while doing fieldwork for the book. Her school sites were predominantly (about three-quarters) white and working-class.¹⁵ In the second section of our volume, "Racial and Ethnic Borderwork and Play," the authors

consider the relevance of *Gender Play* for issues of race and ethnicity in schools. Jessica S. Cobb's essay, "Playing to Resist," explains how patterns of criminalization in the United States have denied Black and Brown youth the privileges of childhood, including the freedom to make mistakes and to play. Cobb describes how movements led by marginalized youth fought back against surveillance tactics in the Los Angeles Unified School District, "subverting authority, crossing into forbidden spaces, and upholding their right to exuberant joy." In "Learning from Kids," Margaret A. Hagerman and Amanda E. Lewis draw on their respective and influential ethnographic studies—Hagerman's study of how affluent white children learn about race in their everyday lives, and Lewis's study of schools as race-making institutions—to challenge the long-held assumption that young people are passively socialized into accepting messages about race. Instead, Hagerman and Lewis find that young people's views of race and racism are sometimes at odds with those of the adults in their lives. The next chapter, "From Gendered Borderwork to Ethnic Boundaries," is also a collaborative effort featuring two different research studies. After completing their independent research in schools in Oslo, Norway, Ingrid Smette (who studied a junior high school) and Ingunn Marie Eriksen (who observed a high school) came together and discovered important differences. Smette and Eriksen update the concept of "borderwork" to explain how distinctions between who counts as "Norwegian" and who counts as a "foreigner" harden as young people move into their high school years.

The third section, "Feminist Praxis," reflects on Thorne's legacy of mentoring and advising.¹⁶ As Barrie shared in an interview with Laurence Bachmann, "Feminist academic spaces are oases from which we water surrounding deserts, create tools for survival, and nurture a next generation of scholars and teachers" (Bachmann 2013:9). The essays in this section show how Barrie carried out this work. Michael A. Messner, in his essay "Breaking Up the Pavement," expands on this verdant growth metaphor in his description of "feminist sproutings." He links Barrie's mentorship practices with a feminist approach to theorizing in which a commitment to a collective democratic future and feminist love opens up space for creative and progressive intellectual work. Allison J. Pugh's reflections exemplify a rich ethnographic tradition in her essay "The Legacy of Relationship." She explores the question of what consti-

tutes feminist mentoring by returning to her past communications with Barrie. In doing so she demonstrates that cultivating interpretive sensitivity through feedback, conflict, and disappointment is central to feminist mentorship. Next, Christo Sims reflects on his experience of joining Barrie at a protest in New York City and how that illustrated the ethic of care that is central to *Gender Play*. In “Living Theory” he proposes that *Gender Play* productively troubles boundaries between work and life. The following chapter, “Teaching Education, Talking Childhood, Troubling Gender,” by Ingrid E. Castro and her students at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, is a unique example of feminist praxis in action. Castro documents a conversation about *Gender Play* with her students and their reflections about the gendered generational forces that shape children’s lives—and, indeed, how those forces have shaped their own lives.

Barrie could not have anticipated the ways in which our understanding of gender has changed for children since the publication of her book. “Looking Ahead,” the final section of our volume, shines a light on *Gender Play* in our contemporary moment, showing the book’s enduring influence while opening new lines of inquiry and reflection. To revise Barrie’s own language in *Gender Play*, all research projects have their own borders: outer limits that may preclude alternative viewpoints or confront unforeseen issues, or walls in need of building on (or dismantling) to meet the needs of today. At the close of *Gender Play*, Barrie charged adults with helping young people to disinvest from arrangements of oppositional gender and to seek out “sources of resistance, of opposition, of alternative arrangements based on equality and mutuality” (Thorne 1993:172). That spirit animates these final essays.

In the first chapter in this section, “Making Space,” Cassidy Puckett and Brian E. Gravel take us inside a high school’s makerspace, a creative and collaborative workspace designed for young people to explore forms of technology and engineering. The experiences of a group of Haitian girls revealed how the ambiguous categorization and valuation of certain activities inside makerspaces promoted more equitable schooling and challenged historically male-dominated STEM spaces. The next chapter, “Nordic Gender Play?” by Harriet Bjerrum Nielsen, explains how progressive changes in gender relations in Norway beginning in the 1980s likely resulted in the construction of gender categories in schools that do not necessarily square with Barrie’s own observations. Through

dialogue and later collaboration, Nielsen and Barrie merged situational views of play and borderwork with understandings of socialization found outside of a US context. In “Changing Youth Worlds,” Amy L. Best draws on several of her own ethnographic studies to reveal the “new coordinates shaping youth worlds” since the publication of *Gender Play*. In the face of growing challenges—a dwindling sphere of youth autonomy, increased surveillance, and intensive parenting—young people struggle to fashion and refashion their identities, and to lead lives of dignity on their own terms. Near the end of *Gender Play*, Barrie urges a “fluid and contextual approach” to understanding gender and power, one that embraces “play as possibilities” (Thorne 1993:159). Hava Rachel Gordon’s “When Kids ‘Play’ Politics,” the volume’s final essay, takes up this very call in its reflections on youth activism. By encouraging intersectional and age-diverse coalitions, young people’s political engagements, Gordon demonstrates, represent the “serious stuff” of play.

The Continuing Play of Gender

Our book, *Gender Replay*, is a retrospective on Barrie’s classic text and how the book has continued to shape how we think about kids, feminism, and schools. We—Freedon and CJ—have been blessed with Barrie and *Gender Play*. Our volume is our own small contribution to the feminist gift economy—to use one of Barrie’s favorite sayings—which helps sustain a feminist community of researchers. As we put the finishing touches on *Gender Replay*, we at last had an opportunity to talk about our book with Barrie and to present it as a gift to her. This book is *very Barrie* in the sense that it is guided by generosity and great care, resolutely committed to feminist principles, dedicated to craft, and welcoming to all. Our work and all it entails—our scholarship, our teaching, our mentoring, the support and encouragement we offer—are gifts we give one another, with the hope that our mutual relations will spur social change and build feminist futures. To return to and revise (with love) Barrie’s own language one final time, as we traverse the concrete of academic theorizing, we hope our volume encourages creative sproutings, lining new paths to change amid the continuing and evolving play of gender, in ways that will help students, researchers, activists, and classroom instructors—young and old.

NOTES

- 1 We have chosen to refer to Barrie by her first name in this introduction. Partly this is to convey a sense of intimacy, as we and many of our contributors have been close to Barrie (and so using her last name, particularly later in the introduction, when we share our own personal stories and how we met her, would be awkward). We also imagine that she would want to be referred to in that way. At the same time, we acknowledge that this practice risks undermining Barrie's earned authority as a scholar and professional. We have left it to the discretion of each of the authors in their own chapters to choose how they wish to refer to her.
- 2 Barrie's work can be situated here in a new sociology of childhood that is critical of traditional views of socialization and more open to the view of childhood as "interpretive reproduction," or how young people are creative actors who participate actively in cultural production (Corsaro 2018; see also James, Jenks, and Prout 2005).
- 3 In the United States, Barth's research has been foundational in comparative theories of ethnicity (e.g., Wimmer 2013). Barrie drew on Barth's writings with the encouragement of the anthropologist of education Frederick Erickson.
- 4 While same-gender chasing is unremarkable (and reveals gendered patterns themselves, e.g., boys are more physically aggressive), cross-gender chasing made for lively discussion. In pollution rituals, girls as a group are viewed as more contaminating than boys (e.g., as having "cooties"). Barrie has joked that she is the world's leading expert on cooties.
- 5 While doing preliminary research for this volume, Freeden found that he had misplaced his copy of *Feminist Sociology*. He purchased a used copy online and was stunned to find that it had once been owned by Dorothy E. Smith, who had written an inscription—"The fault line bifurcated at last!"—inside the front cover. (The comment is a play on Smith's notion of a "bifurcated consciousness," referring to the tension women academics feel between their own life experiences and the scientific vocabularies that have historically failed to account for those experiences, a rupture Smith [1987] has called a "line of fault.") Laslett and Thorne had hoped that Smith, a leading feminist theorist, could contribute a chapter to their volume. Smith was unable to but her influence can be felt throughout the pages of *Feminist Sociology*. In 1992, Laslett and Thorne had organized a symposium aimed at showing how Smith's writings could help tear down the "wall of science between . . . sociological theory and feminist theory" (1992:60). In 2021, Freeden was able to connect with Smith (on Twitter!) and to chat about how much she influenced Barrie's own work, and to let her know about the present volume. We had hoped to give Smith a copy of *Gender Replay* once it was published. Smith passed away on June 3, 2022, shortly before we submitted the final manuscript to our publisher.
- 6 In her book *Dude, You're a Fag* (2007), CJ named one of her respondents—an athletic, lesbian homecoming queen—Jessie in homage to the girl of the same name in *Gender Play*.

- 7 See, for example, Tey Meadow's book *Trans Kids: Being Gendered in the 21st Century* (2018) and Ann Travers's book *Trans Generation: How Trans Kids (and Their Parents) Are Creating a Gender Revolution* (2018).
- 8 As Judith Stacey and Barrie observed, anthropology's abiding concern with kinship is one reason why issues of sex and gender have long been more central concerns for this field than for the other social sciences. The family would remain a scholarly interest for Barrie. With Marilyn Yalom, Barrie gathered anthropologists and sociologists together to assess the family through a feminist prism in the volume *Rethinking the Family: Some Feminist Questions* (1982).
- 9 Posters at the march read, "We Still Want Bread and Roses." See the Digital Repository Service of the Northeastern University Library. Available at <https://repository.library.northeastern.edu>.
- 10 For example, in 2011 Barrie was involved in the Occupy Wall Street Movement and related efforts, including the fight against tuition hikes at UC–Berkeley. These efforts serve as the backdrop to Christo Sims's chapter in this volume.
- 11 A favorite book of Barrie's to teach was Tobias Hecht's *At Home in the Street: Street Children in Northern Brazil* (Thorne 2013). *Gender Play* has been influential outside of Europe as well. A Korean translation of the book appeared in 2014.
- 12 In one exchange Barrie had with several women colleagues about a scheduled panel on single-sex education, they joked that their participation in the "semin-ar" (highlighting the popular media narratives at the time about a boys' crisis in schools and a men's crisis more generally) was more accurately a "semin(ovul)ar."
- 13 Barrie had been a consultant for the National Organization for Women, which had in the early 1990s challenged efforts by the city of Detroit to open all-male academies targeted to Black boys. Freeden's own book, *Black Boys Apart* (2018), opens with a discussion of NOW's legal challenges. The title of the book nods to Barrie's favored language of "with and apart" to describe gender integration and separation (Bachmann 2013).
- 14 I (Freeden) am not at all trying to reduce Barrie's own interpretivist approach to that of the well-known anthropologist Clifford Geertz. The writings of the latter, in fact, emerged and became influential contemporaneously with Barrie's time in graduate school and in her early years as a junior faculty member at Michigan State University. Reading Geertz—including "Deep Play" (1972)—in college, however, sensitized me to microscopic approaches to the social world, and later, with Barrie's guiding hand, how a feminist perspective deepens understanding of how emotions saturate the "webs of significance" (in Geertz's words) that people spin. And as my own scholarship has evolved to consider feminist questions for African American history and politics, I remain interested in how writers can use metaphors to explain the social world like a text. (Several authors in this volume reflect on Barrie's special gift for using metaphors.) However, I have learned that this work should be done with great care since metaphors can hide as much as they reveal (e.g., Blume Oeur 2021).

- 15 Barrie expressed regret for not spending more time with and listening to the Spanish-speaking children at these schools.
- 16 In 2011, Barrie was recognized with the Distinguished Faculty Mentor Award from UC–Berkeley. She retired the following year.

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