FOUND PHOTOGRAPHS AND CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE

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Children's folklorists do not always have the luxury of studying live children. Because children live largely in an oral, material, and customary world, leaving little written evidence (aside from the occasional diary or autograph book) of their worldviews, reconstructing the history of the everyday lives of children requires the creative use of what scant evidence we do have of their elusive worlds. Folklorists are accustomed to reconstructing the historical cultures of children using written materials, such as autobiographies, diaries, letters, ethnographic accounts dating back to the late 19th century, and other sources largely created by adults. Folklorists and historians also have learned to make creative use of the material culture of childhood in reconstructing the everyday lives of past children (e.g., Bronner 1999). We necessarily make a great many guesses about what the evidence really means, and we know that in most cases the evidence has gone through a great deal of editing, as adults ultimately are the gatekeepers for what evidence of children's lives survives and what perishes.

The rise of photography after its invention in 1839 introduced a new genre of evidence of the everyday lives of people, and children have been the subjects of countless photographs since then. In what follows, I aim to examine what are sometimes called by dealers and collectors "found photographs" in order to discover how these snapshots might be used to help write the history of American children's lives, especially their folk cultures. First, I provide a bit of history of the photography of children and describe in more detail the nature of "found photographs." Then I briefly characterize the sorts of questions the folklorist would have about past children's lives, for my aim here is to treat the photographs as true evidence and not merely as pretty pictures accompanying generalizations of the sort we make from other sorts of historical evidence. Finally, I offer some close readings of a few representative snapshots I have collected as of this writing. That final section amounts to a test of the proposition that snapshots actually might teach us something new about American children's folklore.

Children's folklorists share with, historians, sociologists, and anthropologists the desire to understand children's cultures on their own terms, but I believe folklorists are especially inclined to brush aside as best as possible the adult contaminations of our evidence of children's lives. Photographs are especially seductive evidence in trying to recreate the autonomous worlds of children, and with proper caution scholars can use photographs to see what might otherwise go unseen. At the same time, photographs seduce us into believing what we are seeing. I provide here

only a beginning for navigating these tough issues of evidence, authority, authenticity, power, and subversion in found photographs of children.

Photographs of Children

The earliest photographs of children, given the bulky technology and the long exposure times required by that technology, are usually set in studios. These have some value as historical evidence in that photographic studio portraits borrowed from painted portraits certain conventions, which in the case of children meant that the photographic portraits often include toys and the more formal dress for children. In many cases these probably were toys and other props provided by the photographer, so it is hard to sort out those photographs where a child is holding or otherwise posed with a favorite toy. The clothes in these studio portraits are, one presumes, chosen by the adults and do not necessarily (or likely) represent the everyday dress of children.

Studio portraits fulfilled the family's need for more formal images, but the 1890s saw an explosion of stereoviews, from commercially produced sets to snapshot-like views taken by those amateurs who could afford a stereoscopic camera and developing. Many of these stereoviews are still set in the studio, but George Eastman's invention of the gelatin dry plate in 1878 freed the photographer from the constricting limits of the earlier technology and made it possible for the photographer to move outside. Most stereoviews were still posed, though collectors find the occasional one-of-a-kind snapshot-like stereoview. There is a very interesting history of adult views of children that could be written using stereoviews as the texts; briefly, we can note that some of these photographs captured some of the folklore and other dimensions of children's everyday lives. Frozen in the images of these stereoviews are children's more formal games, such as Maypoles and Blind Man's Bluff, and play with toys, but the stereoviews also record more informal play in snow and sand, for example.

Professional art and commercial photography in the late 19th century and well into the 20th still operated from the romantic era view of the innocent child (Higonnet 1998). The adults' romantic view of childhood crept into more documentary views of children's lives. To be sure, a social realist strain of the documentary photography of children-practiced by Lewis Hine, Jacob Riis, James Agee and others-has had its place up to
the present, but in the wake of World War II many photographers of children seemed to adopt the ideological position so evident in the famous "Family of Man" exhibit Edward Steichen created for the Museum of Modern Art in 1955 (see Sandeen 1995), namely, that all human beings share a universal human nature and that children everywhere are inherently

innocent. Barbara Morgan's 1951 photographic essay, *Summer's Children*, for example, seems driven by this ideology as she documents kids at summer camp. These two traditions in documentary photography-some showing children innocently at play in middle-class, benign settings and some showing disadvantaged children (still innocent) in some of the most squalid settings-have co-existed for the past seventy-five years or so.

Some of this documentary and art photography does reveal a bit of children's worlds under their own control. Salinger's photo essay of teenagers in their bedrooms, for example, is wonderfully provocative for those scholars interested in the material culture of teens, but Salinger's only use of words are the kids' brief self-descriptions; she bypasses the opportunity to analyze the larger meanings of the visual and oral testimony. Similarly, Lauren Greenfield's two color photo essays--*Fast Forward* (1997) and *Girl Culture* (2002)--give voice to the teens themselves without offering much analysis of what we are to make of these affluent kids and their worlds. The photographer winks knowingly at us, as a sort of postmodern joke between photographer and audience, but also some true affection for the subjects comes through, just as in Bruce Weber's *Branded Youth: And Other Stories* (1997). Weber, like Andy Warhol before him, straddles the already fuzzy art/commercial photography boundary to offer a photoessay wherein punks and Boy Scouts seem equally freaky and wherein Weber seems to love them all in a Warholian, postmodern move that refuses to judge and refuses to make distinctions.

All of these photoessays, and more, are produced by professional, adult photographers who aim to say something profound about the lives of children and adolescents in contemporary American culture. These, really, are not the texts for my analysis here, but the whole constellation of photographs of children serve as a contextual background for what does interest me here--namely, the snapshot, the found photograph.

Snapshots of Children

George Eastman's invention of the gelatin dry plate in 1878 made the true snapshot possible. In 1888 Eastman introduced his Kodak Camera No.1, the first portable camera containing a roll of film that would take one hundred shots developed as 2-1/2 inch round images. The amateur photographer would send the whole camera back to Eastman, who developed the roll and sent back the developed prints and the camera loaded with a new roll of film. In 1889, Eastman brought out Kodak Camera No.2, which produced larger (3-1/2 inches diameter), still round prints (King 1964, 6). It was then possible for the amateur photographer to create what came to be called "snapshots," borrowing for photography

a term that described the hunting shot hurriedly taken **in** the field (Kouwenhoven 1982, 161-62).

What collectors and dealers call "found photographs" are plentiful and perplexing. These are the snapshots that we find at yard sales, at estate sales, at vintage photography shows, and on the Internet in online auctions and on the sites of dealers in vernacular photography. These are orphaned photographs usually tom from their original contexts; they no longer live as texts interacting with human memories. Now they are objects for collectors with a variety of tastes and aims. Unless there is writing on the back ("real photo" postcards often have a full message and were mailed), a date included as part of the printing process, or some internal clue to place and time, we often are forced to guess where and when the snapshot was taken. These snapshots sometimes are of poor quality, as the amateur misjudges the light and the shadows, blurs the image with the camera or with film too slow to capture a moment in motion, frames the picture oddly, accidentally creates a double exposure, or commits any number of other "errors" that help signal an image as a snapshot (King 1964, 4957). At the same time, these telltale signs of the snapshot also help certify the authenticity of the moment; its spontaneous, unposed, candid, opportunistic qualities help persuade the viewer that the image captures a "true" moment in time and perhaps a "truth" about the subject.

A very few scholars have begun the work of using snapshots to write the history of children's lives. The most important to date is Thompson and Austin's massive 2003 work, *America's Children: Picturing Childhood from Early America to the Present.* Using a range of sorts of photographs of children, some by professional photographers but also many "found" snapshots, the authors "read" these photographs as evidence for writing the history of American children's lives. Rather than following a simple chronological scheme for organizing the photographs and commentary, the authors present thematic chapters around family life, mobility, community, work, learning, play, and courtship and marriage.

There are billions of snapshots of children out there in the world. I have at hand a small sample of these for the analysis I present here, though I have looked at enough snapshots at antique fairs, vintage photography shows, and on the Internet to have a firm grasp of what the genre has to offer. My generalizations have to be modest and provisional. There is also a bias in my sample toward snapshots of boys, as this project arose out of my research on the Boy Scouts and on the larger question of the social construction of masculinity in boys and young men (see Mechling 2001). And, of course, the snapshots at hand have survived editing of one sort or another. People have made choices about which snapshots to save and which to discard; dealers select snapshots deemed interesting enough to sell, sometimes poring through hundreds of thousands of snapshots to

yield a few hundred images. And for my own collection I have chosen to buy some images and not others. So there is cultural bias galore in these existing snapshots. Still, they have an oddly powerful grip on the collector, as we gaze into the faces of these kids now aged or dead.

Before examining the genre, we have to acknowledge at the outset that most snapshots of children and youth very likely have been taken by adults. Kids have had access to cameras across the 20th century, and doubtless some surviving snapshots have been taken by kids, especially in settings such as schools, playgrounds, summer camps, and neighborhood play spaces. Some researchers actually teach children how to use cameras and analyze the sorts of visual conventions and topics the kids adopt in using snapshots to capture their everyday lives and to communicate with other kids and with adults something about their kids' worlds (e.g., Ewald 1985, 2000; Hubbard 1991, 1994; and Padilla 2002). We even have snapshots of kids with cameras, so we know that some images from the past were captured by children and youth.

One sort of kid with a camera, of course, is the school yearbook photographer, and yearbook pictures are a surprisingly neglected source of information about the cultures of teens. In the United States, yearbooks tend to capture the worlds of adolescents, generally kids twelve and older, teens in junior high and senior high schools. Yearbook photography includes three sorts of photos-posed pictures (individual portraits plus pictures of classes, clubs, sports teams, performing arts groups, formal
events, and so on), action shots (e,g, sports), and "candid" snapshots of students in less formal and usually unposed contexts. Yearbook photography works under adult supervision and surveillance, usually, so there are several layers of censoring behind each "candid" snapshot published in a yearbook. Still, these photographs capture teens in some unguarded moments and, presumably, represent a version of the "story" of going to that school as seen from the students' viewpoint. The historian always hopes that someone "cleaning house" in an organization did not throwaway the invaluable evidence the historian is looking for, and one wonders how many boxes of old yearbook snapshots (or contact sheets of negative strips) are out there in boxes and file cabinets. The folklore historian would be especially interested in the photographs that were *not* selected for publication, photographs that did not get through the self-censoring and adult censoring processes because they are photos judge inappropriate or even disruptive.

The one island in this sea of general neglect of yearbook photographs is a little-known book, *School Spirit* (2003), by Pierre Huyghe and Douglas Coupland, who is perhaps the quintessential Generation X novelist. In this quirky, but fascinating, book, the authors (compilers, really) use real California high school yearbook pictures and inscriptions to create a quite

open and ambiguous narrative about life for high-schoolers, which is to say that Huyghe and Coupland provide no meta-narrative of their own other than the order of photographs and handwritten texts from the yearbooks. Coupland must have been working on this book at the same time he was writing his novel, *Hey, Nostradamus! A Novel* (2003), a postmodern fiction telling the story of a Columbine-like school shooting. Coupland comes no closer than do filmmakers Michael Moore *(Bowling for Columbine,* 2002) and Gus van Sant *(Elephant,* 2003) in understanding what was going on in the worlds of the perpetrators and victims of the Columbine High School massacre and similar shootings, but I think *School Sprit* is an attempt to do visually what Coupland attempts to do in his novel.

The value in *School Spirit* lies in its suggestion that coded somewhere in high school yearbook pictures are the answers to questions adults have been asking about teenagers for some time now. I am not prepared to explore this lead here and now, but I hope an army of folklorists and historians gets out into the schools to rescue this photographic record from oblivion.

Returning to the body of snapshots we know are available, what can be said of the found photos with children's lives as the subject? Most of these snapshots of kids and teens hold few surprises. Setting aside the posed photographs of kids with families, often in front of the family home or car or on a family vacation, the snapshots that capture kids' play and rituals tend to feature familiar scenes. Birthday parties, First Communion, Halloween costumes, playing in the sand at a beach, playing with the electric train under the Christmas tree, posing outside with the new bike, and playing with a family pet are common images. Yet, among these images are a few that I think can be used as texts for revealing something about children's folklore, and in offering close readings of a few of these I hope to provoke folklorists and historians into making more of found photographs. First, though, I need to inquire what we think we know and don't know about children's folklore, for it would be unanswered questions that would be the only justification for taking found snapshots seriously as historical evidence.

What's Missing in Our Knowledge of Children's Folklore?

What do we think we know about American children's folklore? Although we have earlier accounts of children's games and play, some of which are still useful today for recognizing the continuities and discontinuities in children's play, I would have to say that the modern (maybe postmodern, a topic for another time) study of American children's folklore began in the mid-l970s, in large part in response to the emergence

of the performance paradigm in folklore studies. (The mid-1970s also saw the emergence of the animal rights movement, and I believe that the two movements are connected, though that also is a topic for another time.) Independent initiatives in the University of Texas, Indiana University, and the University of Pennsylvania graduate programs in Folklore sent a good many graduate students into the field to study children's folklore in performance, and from then on the study of children's folklore seems to have split into two strands, the one still operating from a text-base approach and the other committed to studying children's performances of folklore in natural contexts. By the mid-1980s that second, ethnographic strand, had also come under the influence of the postmodern approach to ethnography, especially the view that objective, scientific ethnography was not possible. Many ethnographers in several disciplines made this "linguistic turn," but the epistemological questions were especially relevant and vexing for those of us who conduct fieldwork-based study of children. Children's worlds are inaccessible to us in so many ways that we understand more than most folklorists, I think, the tentative and provisional nature of our generalizations about children.

When, in that mid-1980s period of upheaval in the epistemological basis for studying the lives of other people, I came to write a chapter on "Children's Folklore" for Elliott Oring's textbook, *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres* (1986), I attempted to generalize about American children's folklore by alerting readers to certain themes in the lore they might observe, themes like power and the child's body as a symbol of the society. I wrote then about some binary tensions in children's folklore--order/disorder, hierarchy/equality, male/female, and dynamism/ conservatism ("Newell's Paradox," as Gary Alan Fine *[1980]* named it)and I recommended a Batesonian approach to the paradoxes of play in children's folklore (see Bateson 1972).

I wrote that essay nearly twenty years ago, and in thinking what I might change if I revised that essay today, I would add a much more thorough section on the ways folklore and popular culture continuously fold back upon one another, proving every day the point of Newell's Paradox-namely, that children's folklore is simultaneously very dynamic in its content and very conservative in its forms. I touched on this point only slightly in the 1986 essay, but I have come to think of this interaction between mass-mediated, commercial, popular culture produced with kids and teens in mind as the consuming audience, on the one hand, and children's and teens' folk cultures on the other as one of the most important set of relationships in understanding children's everyday cultures. Commodity culture endlessly appropriates children's folklore and sells the folklore back to the children, but children's folklore endlessly

appropriates popular culture and uses that culture for the children's own motives.

Several things have changed or, at least, accelerated in American culture since 1986. First, it has become clear that kids and their cultures have become the sites for political battles in the adult "culture wars" (see Hunter 1991). Second, adult panic over kids' popular culture has led parents, teachers, politicians, and others to blame the violent and sexual content of a great deal of mass media aimed at kids for a range of social evils, including the murder of children by children, teen suicide, gang rapes, and the series of school shootings in the last half of the 1990s and into this century (see the special section on "Folklore Responds to Columbine and Adolescence" in the *Children* s *Folklore Review* in 2002). Third, the mass-mediated cultural products aimed at kids and teens shows signs of belonging to a global, international culture. In the most visible example, *manga* (graphic novels, comic) and *animé* (cartoon versions of the *manga)* created initially for Japanese audiences now find voracious consumers among children, teens, and young adults in the United States. What are the implications of the Internet and other globalizing forces on the folk cultures of children?

So the workings of Newell's Paradox in the dialectic between children's folk cultures and the mass-mediated, popular, commercial cultural commodities produced for youthful consumers is the first new, real question I expect the found photographs to help illuminate. The second open question in the study of children's folklore has to do with "dark play" (Sutton-Smith & Kelly-Byrne 1984) or "dirty play" (Fine 1988). Both sorts of play challenge adult notions of the innocence of children. "Dark play" is the phrase Sutton-Smith and Kelly-Byrne use to describe play that relies on some degree of danger or transgression for its pleasure, a form of play more likely found in older children and teens. "Dirty play" is Fine's phrase for the transgressive play of children, especially if it involves forbidden words and actions.

"Dark play" and "dirty play" usually take place away from adult surveillance, so we should not have high hopes that snapshots will capture a great deal of such play. Polaroid and digital photography bypass many of the possibilities for adult censorship, so it might be that there will be an increasing number of available images recording dark and dirty play. Still, existing snapshots point in some interesting ways to transgressive play and traditions, as I shall show.

A third sort of question about children's folklore and folklife that snapshots might address has to do with gestural culture and proxemics. Moving pictures (film or video) are the best media for capturing how children move their bodies in space, how they position themselves in relation to playmates, how they touch or don't touch other children, and

so on, but still photography can capture some of the ways children use bodies and space, and snapshots of children reach much farther back into history than do home movies and home video.

Finally, it seems to me that snapshots might help write the history of children's emotional lives. Emotions are fundamentally human (probably fundamentally mammalian), but cultures shape human emotions, socializing fear, jealousy, love, anger, sadness, grief, and so on into forms the cultures deem acceptable and minimally likely to disrupt social relations. Historian Peter N. Stearns almost single-handedly created the interdisciplinary field of "the history of emotions," but he and others have relied almost exclusively on written evidence to chronicle the history of the socialization of particular emotions across time and space (e.g., Stearns and Stearns 1986). The family is the primary setting for the socialization of emotions, the setting where a child learns, for example, how to express or repress anger. Children's folk groups certainly must be another site for the socialization of emotions, and it is possible (as is so often the case) that the socialization in the children's group resists and undermines the socialization in the family. In any case, since we have good reasons to believe that facial expressions, gestures, and other visual cues signal a person's emotional condition, we would expect snapshots to provide some sort of evidence of the contexts for the emotional lives of children.

Some other issues in children's folklore and folklife will arise as I discuss particular images below, but this list of four sorts of questionsabout popular culture, about dark and dirty play, about proxemics, and about the socialization of emotions-helps orient the analysis to come. Note that in all four cases we have very little historical evidence reflecting the children's point of view. Snapshots might be our only evidence for some insights about children's everyday lives.

All of this hope I bear for the usefulness of snapshots for understanding the everyday lives of American children in the past relies upon "reading" the photographs. This matter of "how to read" photographic images is the subject ofa great deal of useful criticism (e.g., Chalfen 1975,1987,1991; King 1984; Ohm and Bell 1975; Ibson 2002). When we look at any snapshot, we tend to read meaning into it from the nonverbal clues the image offers. We draw upon our experiences with other images and the history of our interpretive successes and failures-as, for example, when we may have misread a facial expression. These readings of found photographs involve a great deal of speculation, but then (I would argue) so does the folklorist's observation of a live folk performance in context. The inner meanings of the immediate event for the participants are no more accessible to us, really, than are the meanings to the participants of an event photographed a hundred years ago. Still, these are not wild guesses but may be reasonable and persuasive interpretations of the

meanings of the event captured in a snapshot. Let me illustrate some of the interpretive possibilities with a few select snapshots.

Children's Lives in Snapshots

Up to this point I have laid out some issues we should be on lookout for as we peruse found photographs for evidence of children's everyday folk lives, but rather than organize the remainder of this essay according to these analytical categories, I prefer to work instead from a sample of interesting and provocative snapshots in my collection, always on the lookout for the more theoretical issues I have laid out. When I choose to buy a found photograph, I am drawing upon these issues in finding a photograph "interesting," but I am also open to being surprised by a photograph that taps some issues I had not expected. This is why it is best to begin with some compelling snapshots. The sample photos and the interpretive comments I offer here are illustrative, meant to be suggestive and provocative rather than definitive and comprehensive. With these qualifications in mind, let us look at some actual snapshots.

Some photographs serve the text-based approach to the history of children's folklore, as in snapshots that capture a traditional game or a calendrical custom, for example. As we gaze at the real photo postcard (Fig. 1) of a school playground in 1912, we recognize that the very nature of photography is to capture a brief moment in time, a micro-second slice of the continual flow of everyday life. Seeing such photographs adds a visual memory and impact to the historical point that, say, children have played the traditional game of Red Rover across time and space. Now in
our mind's eye we can put real faces and settings to a past performance of the game. But the photographs seem poor evidence for a performancebased approach to children's folklore in context. In this real photo postcard, for example, we do not know if the girls chose to play the ring game or were directed to do so by an adult. We do not have the contextual background for this playground scene that Linda Hughes (1993) had, for example, in her ethnographic study of the game of Four Square as it was played by the same kids over several months' time. We do not know the players, their relationships, or the other information we would need to answer the characteristic folklorist's question (based on Kenneth Burke's pentad-see Rueckert 1982): Who performed what traditional item of folklore, how, for what audience, in what time and place, for what reasons, and what was the outcome? The photograph does suggest some things about gender segregation on the playground and children's clothing for a time period, but that is about the extent of information we're going to glean from this photograph.

But other photographs suggest thicker interpretations might be possible. Let me narrow my gaze to snapshots revealing boys' everyday folk lives, with the understanding that we could put the same fine lens on girls' folk cultures and on a mix of the two. Masculinity studies generally agree that the social construction of masculinity in cultures across time and space is a fragile project, and that a good many observable features of boys' and men's group cultures arise as adaptive responses to this fragility. For western middle-class cultures like ours, the emotional structure of the nuclear family and the fact that mothers have primary care of young children lead to a developmental circumstance in which boys must separate from the mother and identify masculinity as "not female." One's masculinity must be proven constantly, and cracks in the male façade must be repaired quickly and effectively. This leads to certain features of male friendship group cultures, including stylized aggression, hierarchy, misogyny, the deprecation of men perceived to be too feminine (in some contexts full homophobia), and a tendency to communicate relationships through "doing side-by-side" rather than through speech. There is a "boy code" enforced largely by a shame culture (Pollack 1999).

I think some snapshots help us see the workings and affective impact of these features of growing up male in the United States. For one thing, unlike formal, posed portraits, snapshots show us the everyday dress of boys and how boys used their clothing and hairstyles to perform masculinity in a particular social, cultural, and historical context. This snapshot of a teenage boy (Fig. 2), probably from the 1940s or early 1950s, features the wide-rolled dungaree cuffs necessary for the performance of a "cool" masculinity. The squared body language and the direct stare into the camera by the young man standing in front of the car is aggressive and confrontational, and even his hairstyle connotes challenge. He frames his genitals with two hands, fingers spread for added attention, intensifying this male performance.

The automobile in that photograph signals a common convention in American snapshots. Americans love their cars, and kids of all ages can be found posing in front of or in the family car. In some cases-this is one, I suppose-the car actually belongs to the teenager. This American infatuation with the automobile-an affection that tells us much about American culture, as lots of scholarship has shown-extends to kids, often photographed playing with cars and trucks or, more interestingly, posed in a commercially produced pedal car or, more interesting still, some version of a home-made car. These snapshots range from the more formal "boxcar derby" cars (Fig. 3) to the far more *ad hoc* constructions from scavenged parts, evidence of a continuing tradition of *bricolage* among boys.

Some snapshots capture kids in the process of making things or even constructing folk playthings (Fig. 4). Snapshots of kids of both sexes building castles and other forms in sand on the beach (Fig. 5) confirm one important point-namely, that kids' folk constructions tend to follow what Robert Plant Armstrong (1981) calls an aesthetic of syndesis rather than the aesthetic of synthesis we are used to in western art. Working from a syncretic aesthetic, kids create things through addition and accretion such that creations might never be finished. As kids get older, the great preponderance of snapshots with constructions are of boys. Sometimes (Figs. 6, 7) the constructions are of materials provided by the commercial culture-another instance of Newell's Paradox at work-while in other cases the constructions demonstrate the *bricolage* we see in the folk constructions of playthings, such as this raft (Fig. 8).

Some snapshots provide fascinating, concrete detail to the generalizations we make about boys' friendship groups. For example, some of the photos of boys building things capture the point made by Pollack (1999) and others who write about boy cultures that boys often express and experience closeness through engaging in activities "side by side." Whereas girls more often favor face-to-face play and come to understand intimacy as requiring face-to-face communication, boys tend to rely upon "doing side-by-side" as an expression of intimacy. Some scholars make a sociobiological argument that boys experience face-to-face gazes from other boys as aggressive, as an invitation either to fight or to back down, so that expressions of intimacy between boys generally avoid the face-to face contact. And, as Bateson notes, the very act of sharing a frame--such as "we're building this raft together"--communicates to the participants in the frame important things about their relationships.

Just like the male gaze, male touching must be managed in the friendship group. In general, boys touch each other only in stylized ways, such as playfighting. One of things we see in some snapshots is rough-and-tumble play. This 1957 snapshot (Fig. 9) of eight early teens boys on what must be a school playground in Southern California speaks volumes; the racial mix here--at least black, white, and Asian--is unusual for the time period, but the photo also confirms the view that touching between males in American society must be framed very carefully as heterosexual. Touching in the frame of some sort of "horseplay," for example, is permissible. In fact, a number of the snapshots in my collection of rough-and-tumble play by boys will not reproduce well here for publication because their blurry focus is a product of a spontaneous action barely caught by the photographer. More problematic than rough touching are the less aggressive ways boys touch each other in snapshots portraying friends in an affectionate embrace (Fig. 10). It is interesting that Internet auction sellers often insert the phrase "gay interest" in the description of

a snapshot of two boys or men posing with their arms around each other in a clearly affectionate embrace. How to sort out affection between two heterosexual males and between two homosexual males is not easy from the appearance of this touching alone, and heterosexual male friends constantly must construct and maintain a frame that the touching is not sexual while still powerfully emotional. These matters are highly contextual, of course, as conventions of male touching and the meanings of those conventions change over time, across ethnicity and social class, and across social contexts (e.g., all male settings versus mixed groups). John Ibson's (2002) study of the changing conventions of such touching in snapshots of men (some of which Ibson knew, through their provenance, were of gay men) deals mainly with males college age and older, but if we were to write a similar snapshot history of boys we would find the same ambiguities, albeit with a much larger proportion of the snapshots capturing touching framed as horseplay.

Many of these points about the ways boys relate to each other physically are made in a photographic album in my possession. An album often provides context and narrative flow missing for a single found photograph. This is an "orphan album" in that the dealer from whom I purchased it on eBay could not provide any information about its provenance. In more than two hundred photos, the album records high country mountain hiking and camping trips stretching from February to September (and maybe beyond) in 1938. The photos for the first three fourths of the album have captions recorded in white ink on the black pages, and it seems clear from the captions for the many mountains and lakes in the photos that these are the Cascade Mountains of Oregon and Washington. Nine to a dozen boys and young men appear in group photos, sometimes just in pairs, and sometimes doing more than posing-such as cooking, eating, fishing, and swimming.

In the posed, group photos these boys and men are hanging on each other just as we see in so many group photos. We also find some horseplay, such as this snapshot (Fig. 11) of boys having a playfight with knives, and, late in the album, photos of a group of younger boys swimming and huddling around campfires, Spread throughout the album are photos taken during "skinny dipping" swims in the mountain lakes and streams (Fig. 12), and the naked bodies remind us that one sort of framed, safe intimacy between boys and men is expressed through casual nudity in each others' presence.

I also have in my possession a remarkable set of negatives of a Cub Scout Den and Pack (a collection of the smaller Dens). The pictures of the Pack record a banquet, with each Den's boys and his parents sitting together by Den. Judging from the women's clothing and hairstyles, I would guess that these photos are from the 1940s or early 1950s. The

photos of the Pack banquet are not what is so remarkable about the collection, however. Dens typically prepare skits for such Pack gatherings. (I was a Cub Scout in the 1950s and my mother was a "Den Mother," so I know this world.) Amongst the pictures of the Pack gathering are pictures of these white Cub Scouts dressed in blackface and white gloves, clearly prepared to perform a minstrelsy skit (Fig. 13). We know well the racism embodied in minstrel shows, and we also know well the racially segregated world of the 1940s and 1950s when these Cub Scouts were growing up. But even this knowledge does not prepare the viewer fifty-some years later for the jolting impact of seeing these eight- or nine-year old white boys performing blackface minstrelsy. In this case, no written historical record or testimony can convey the alarming mix of innocence and social evil captured in these photographs, just as some lynching photographs slap us when we see children in the crowd of onlookers laughing, posing, and even gathering souvenirs (Allen, Als, Lewis, and Litwack 2003). The lynching photographs seem like "dark play," but can we say the same of the Cub Scout minstrels? Possibly.

Also in this category of white children dressing up as something they are not are the photographs of kids "playing Indian." Such snapshots are plentiful, and they reinforce our understanding of the power of such play for white children in the 20th century. Adults created youth organizations based on "Indian Lore" almost as soon as real Native Americans were no longer a threat (Mechling 1980, Deloria 1999), but the snapshots show how pervasive was "playing Indian" in the informal, folk play of kids (Fig. 14).

This snapshot (Fig. 15) of young kids playing with guns also counts as dark play. I think most adult viewers would have shuddered a bit at this snapshot even before the Columbine and other school shootings, but in the post-Columbine world, where kids have become demonized and are scrutinized closely to see who is the next sociopath to bring an arsenal to school, it is impossible to view this snapshot without invoking those meanings. In fact, there is good reason to believe that a great deal of "dark play" by kids and teens involves firearms. At the same time, in other contexts snapshots of children holding guns would not be dark play but merely evidence of the socialization of boys and girls into the hunting cultures of their fathers and mothers (Mechling 2004).

There is no logical place to stop with examples, so let me end with a snapshot showing a moment of hazing (Fig. 16). This snapshot from 1941 shows the very public paddling of a fraternity pledge, one assumes, as part of the hazing process for bringing new members into the fraternity. College students are no longer children, in most cases, but children's folklorists easily extend "childhood and adolescence" into the college years because they find so many continuities between adolescent folklore

and college student folklore. In the case of hazing, high school and college fraternities haze pledges as a more formal version of the informal hazing quite common in male friendship groups, where a young man must pass a "test" to show himself worthy of belonging to the group. Hazing-which is now generally outlawed by colleges and by the national offices of fraternities, but still practiced nonetheless-has its private moments and its public moments, and both sorts of moments have been captured in snapshots. Snapshots capturing public moments of hazing (as in Fig. 16) remind us that this was not "dark play" but socially recognized and accepted "fun" for boys of certain ages. In more private contexts away from public scrutiny, humiliation, power, dominance, submission, shame, nudity, and even some homoerotic moments show up in hazing, and a vernacular photographic record of the hazing appears to play an important role in marking the moments and in "remembering" them (an accidentally wonderful word in this context, given the uses of the photographs to rehearse again the conversion of a pledge into a "member" of the group) once the pledge can look back fondly upon hazing as a test passed. The now infamous photographs, made public in the spring of 2004, of the humiliating treatment of Iraqi prisoners by American soldiers in the Abu Gharib prison seem familiar to the folklorist who knows the male folk culture of the military. Some commentators have blamed Internet sadomasochistic pornography sites as the sources of the visual tableaux that led the American soldiers to pose the Iraqi prisoners in certain positions and nude; but any folklorist of male cultures knows it is fraternity and military boot camp hazing, not pornography, that provides the visual commonplaces re-enacted in the prison photos. This is disturbing dark play, but it has a long pedigree.

CONCLUSION

As these examples demonstrate, found photographs provide a potentially rich body of evidence for writing the history of children's everyday lives, especially their folklore. In the case of boys, the bulk of my examples, the vernacular photographic record is invaluable in reconstructing the rich nonverbal worlds of boys' friendship groups. Nearly thirty years ago in a special issue of *Folklore Forum* a group of folklorists attempted to alert their colleagues to the value of photographs as evidence of folklore as a form of visual communication (Ohm and Bell, eds. 1975).

It is time that we return to that invitation and mine this evidence for all it reveals.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1. 1912 Playground

Fig. 2. Teen boy with car and attitude

Fig. 3. Boy in soap box derby car

Fig. 4. Boys play with Legos

Fig. 5. Sand castles at beach

Fig. 6. Boy with erector set construction

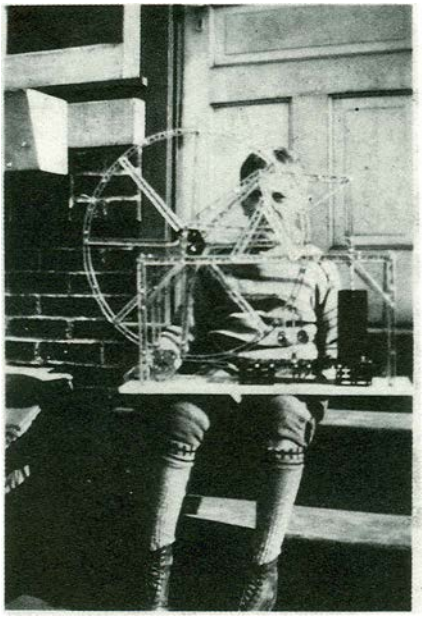

Fig. 7. Boy with tinker-toy airplane

Fig. 8. Boys on raft

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Fig. 9. Boys on Los Angeles playground, 1950s

Fig. 10. Affectionate boys

Fig. 11. playfighting with knives (album)

Fig. 12. skinning dipping (album)

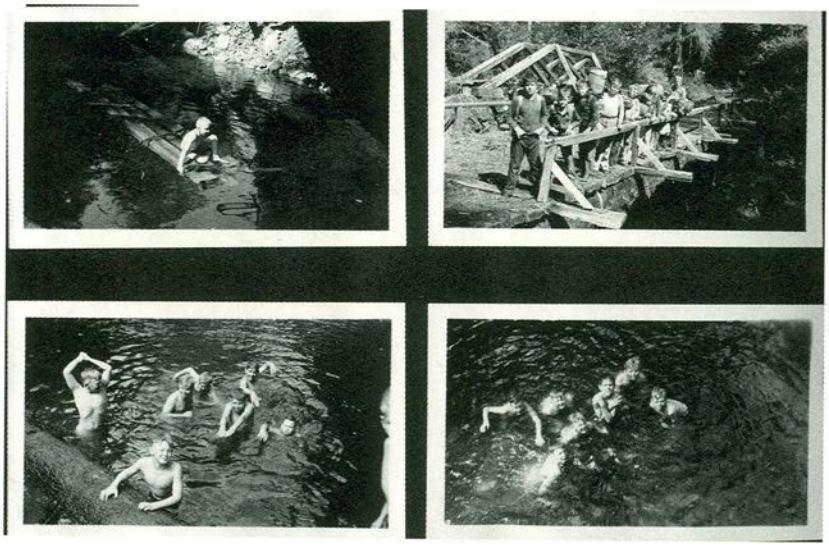

Fig. 13. Cub Scout minstrels

Fig. 14. Boy Playing Indian

Fig. 15. Boys with guns

Fig. 16. Fraternity hazing, 1941