Stuart Brown says Play is more than fun

[So, here we go: a flyby of play.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[It's got to be serious if the New York Times](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [puts a cover story of their February 17th Sunday magazine about play.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [At the bottom of this, it says, "It's deeper than gender.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [Seriously, but dangerously fun.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And a sandbox for new ideas about evolution."](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [Not bad, except if you look at that cover, what's missing?](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [You see any adults?](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[Well, lets go back to the 15th century.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [This is a courtyard in Europe,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and a mixture of 124 different kinds of play.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [All ages, solo play, body play, games, taunting.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And there it is. And I think this is a typical picture](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [of what it was like in a courtyard then.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [I think we may have lost something in our culture.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[So I'm gonna take you through what I think is a remarkable sequence.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [North of Churchill, Manitoba, in October and November,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [there's no ice on Hudson Bay.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And this polar bear that you see, this 1200 pound male,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [he's wild and fairly hungry.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And Norbert Rosing, a German photographer, is there on scene, making a series of photos of these huskies, who are tethered.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And from out of stage left comes this wild, male polar bear,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [with a predatory gaze.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [Any of you who've been to Africa or had a junkyard dog come after you,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [there is a fixed kind of predatory gaze](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [that you know you're in trouble.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [But on the other side of that predatory gaze](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [is a female husky in a play bow, wagging her tale.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And something very unusual happens.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [That fixed behavior -- which is rigged and stereotyped](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and ends up with a meal -- changes.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And this polar bear](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [stands over the husky.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [No claws extended, no fangs taking a look.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And they begin an incredible ballet.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[A play ballet.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [This is in nature: it overrides a carnivorous nature](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and what otherwise would have been a short fight to the death.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [If you'll begin to look closely at the husky that's bearing her throat to the polar bear,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and look a little more closely, they're in an altered state.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [They're in a state of play.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And it's that state](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [that allows these two creatures to explore the possible.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [They are beginning to do something that neither would have done](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [without the play signals.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And it is a marvelous example](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [of how a differential in power](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [can be overridden by a process of nature that's within all of us.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[Now how did I get involved in this?](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [John mentioned that I've done some work with murderers, and I have.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [The Texas Tower murderer opened my eyes --](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [in retrospect, when we studied his tragic mass murder --](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [to the importance of play,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [in that this individual, by deep study,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [was found to have severe play deprivation.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [Charles Whitman was his name.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And our committee, which consisted of a lot of hard scientists, did feel at the end of that study that the absence of play and a progressive suppression of developmentally normal play](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [led him to be more vulnerable to the tragedy that he perpetrated. And that finding has stood the test of time --](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [unfortunately, even into more recent times at Virginia Tech.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[And other studies of populations at risk](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [sensitized me to the importance of play,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [but I didn't really understand what it was.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And it was many years in taking play histories of individuals](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [before I really began to recognize that I didn't really have a full understanding of it.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And I don't think any of us has a full understanding of it, by any means.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [But, there are ways of looking at it](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [that I think can give you -- give us all a taxonomy, a way of thinking about it.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[And this image is, for humans, the beginning point of play.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [When that mother and infant lock eyes,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and the infant's old enough to have a social smile,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [what happens -- spontaneously -- is the eruption of joy on the part of the mother.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And she begins to babble and coo and smile, and so does the baby.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [If we've got them wired up with an electroencephalogram,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [the right brain of each of them becomes attuned,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [so that the joyful emergence of this earliest of play scenes](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and the physiology of that is something we're beginning to get a handle on.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[And I'd like you to think that every bit of more complex play](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [builds on this base for us humans.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And so now I'm going to take you through sort of a way of looking at play,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [but it's never just singularly one thing.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[We're going to look at body play,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [which is a spontaneous desire to get ourselves out of gravity.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [This is a mountain goat.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [If you're having a bad day, try this:](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [jump up and down, wiggle around -- you're going to feel better.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And you may feel like this character,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [who is also just doing it for its own sake.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [It doesn't have a particular purpose, and that's what's great about play.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [If its purpose is more important](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [than the act of doing it, it's probably not play.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[And there's a whole other type of play, which is object play.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And this Japanese macaque has made a snowball,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and here she's going to roll down a hill.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And -- they don't throw it at each other, but this is a fundamental part of being playful.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [The human hand, in manipulation of objects,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [is the hand in search of a brain.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [The brain is in search of a hand,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and play is the medium by which those two are linked in the best way.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[JPL we heard this morning -- JPL is an incredible place.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [They have located two consultants,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [Frank Wilson and Nate Johnson.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [Who are -- Frank Wilson is a neurologist, Nate Johnson is a mechanic.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [He taught mechanics in a high school in Long Beach,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and found that his students were no longer able to solve problems.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And he tried to figure out why. And he came to the conclusion, quite on his own,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [that the students who could no longer solve problems, such as fixing cars,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [hadn't worked with their hands.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [Frank Wilson had written a book called "The Hand."](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [Ahey got together -- JPL hired them.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [Now JPL, NASA and Boeing,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [before they will hire a research and development problem solver --](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [even if they're summa cum laude from Harvard or Cal Tech --](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [if they haven't fixed cars, haven't done stuff with their hands early in life,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [played with their hands, they can't problem solve as well.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [So play is practical, and it's very important.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[Now one of the things about play is that it is born by curiosity and exploration. (Laughter)](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [But it has to be safe exploration.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [This happens to be OK -- he's an anatomically interested little boy and that's his mom. Other situations wouldn't be quite so good.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [But curiosity, exploration, are part of the play scene.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [If you want to belong, you need social play.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And social play is part of what we're about here today,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and is a byproduct of the play scene.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[Rough and tumble play.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [These lionesses, seen from a distance, looked like they were fighting.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [But if you look closely, they're kind of like the polar bear and husky:](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [no claws, flat fur, soft eyes,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [open mouth with no fangs, balletic movements,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [curvilinear movements -- all specific to play.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And rough-and-tumble play is a great learning medium for all of us.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [Preschool kids, for example, should be allowed to dive, hit, whistle,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [scream, be chaotic, and develop through that a lot of emotional regulation](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and a lot of the other social byproducts -- cognitive, emotional and physical --](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [that come as a part of rough and tumble play.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[Spectator play, ritual play -- we're involved in some of that.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [Those of you who are from Boston know that this was the moment -- rare -- where the Red Sox won the World Series.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [But take a look at the face and the body language of everybody](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [in this fuzzy picture, and you can get a sense that they're all at play.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[Imaginative play.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [I love this picture because my daughter, who's now almost 40, is in this picture,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [but it reminds me of her storytelling and her imagination;](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [her ability to spin yarns at this age -- preschool. A really important part of being a player](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [is imaginative solo play.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[And I love this one, because it's also what we're about.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [We all have an internal narrative that's our own inner story.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [The unit of intelligibility of most of our brains is the story.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [I'm telling you a story today about play.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [Well, this bushman, I think, is talking about the fish that got away that was that long,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [but it's a fundamental part of the play scene.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[So what does play do for the brain?](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [Well, a lot.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[We don't know a whole lot about what it does for the human brain,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [because funding has not been exactly heavy for research on play.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [I walked into the Carnegie asking for a grant.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [They'd given me a large grant when I was an academician for the study of felony drunken drivers, and I thought I had a pretty good track record.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And by the time I had spent half an hour talking about play,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [it was obvious that they were not -- did not feel that play was serious.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [I think that -- that's a few years back -- I think that wave is past,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and the play wave is cresting,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [because there is some good science.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[Nothing lights up the brain like play.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [Three-dimensional play fires up the cerebellum, puts a lot of impulses into the frontal lobe --](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [the executive portion -- helps contextual memory be developed,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and ... and, and, and.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[So it's -- for me, its been an extremely nourishing scholarly adventure](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [to look at the neuroscience that's associated with play, and to bring together people](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [who in their individual disciplines hadn't really thought of it that way.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And that's part of what the National Institute for Play is all about.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And this is one of the ways you can study play --](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [is to get a 256-lead electroencephalogram.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [I'm sorry I don't have a playful-looking subject, but it allows mobility](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [which has limited the actual study of play.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And we've got a mother-infant play scenario](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [that we're hoping to complete underway at the moment.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[The reason I put this here is also to queue up](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [my thoughts about objectifying what play does.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [The animal world has objectified it.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [In the animal world, if you take rats](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [who have -- are hardwired to play at a certain period of their juvenile years](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and you suppress play -- they squeak, they wrestle,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [they pin each other, that's part of their play.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [If you stop that behavior on one group that you're experimenting with,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and you allow it in another group that you're experimenting with,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and then you present those rats](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [with a cat odor-saturated collar,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [they're hardwired to flee and hide.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [Pretty smart -- they don't want to get killed by a cat.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [So what happens?](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [They both hide out.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [The non-players never come out --](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [they die.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [The players slowly explore the environment,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and begin again to test things out.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [That says to me, at least in rats -- and I think they have the same neurotransmitters that we do](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and a similar cortical architecture --](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [that play may be pretty important for our survival.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[And, and, and -- there are a lot more animal studies that I could talk about.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[Now, this is a consequence of play deprivation. (Laughter)](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [This took a long time --](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [I had to get Homer down and put him through the fMRI and the SPECT](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and multiple EEGs, but as a couch potato, his brain has shrunk.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And we do know that in domestic animals](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and others, when they're play deprived,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [they -- and rats also -- they don't develop a brain that is normal.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[Now, the program says that the opposite of play is not work,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [it's depression.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And I think if you think about life without play --](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [no humor, no flirtation, no movies,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [no games, no fantasy -- and, and, and.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [Try and imagine a culture or a life, adult or otherwise](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [without play.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And the thing that's so unique about our species](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [is that we're really designed to play through our whole lifetime.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[And we all have capacity to play signal.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [Nobody misses that dog I took a picture of on a Carmel beach a couple of weeks ago.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [What's going to follow from that behavior](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [is play.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And you can trust it.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [The basis of human trust is established through play signals.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And we begin to lose those signals, culturally and otherwise, as adults.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [That's a shame.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [I think we've got a lot of learning to do.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[Now, Jane Goodall has here a play face along with one of her favorite chimps.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [So part of the signaling system of play](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [has to do with vocal, facial, body, gestural.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [You know, you can tell -- and I think when we're getting into collective play,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [its really important for groups to gain a sense of safety](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [through their own sharing of play signals.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[You may not know this word.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [But it should be your biological first name and last name.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [Because neoteny means the retention of immature qualities into adulthood. And we are, by physical anthropologists,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [by many, many studies, the most neotenous,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [the most youthful, the most flexible, the most plastic of all creatures.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And therefore, the most playful.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And this gives us a leg up on adaptability.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[Now, there is a way of looking at play](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [that I also want to emphasize here,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [which is the play history.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [Your own personal play history is unique,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and often is not something we think about particularly.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[This is a book written by a consummate player](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [by the name of Kevin Carroll.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [Kevin Carroll came from extremely deprived circumstances:](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [alcoholic mother, absent father, inner-city Philadelphia, black, had to take care of a younger brother.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [Found that when he looked at a playground](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [out of a window into which he had been confined,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [he felt something different.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And so he followed up on it.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And his life -- the transformation of his life](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [from the deprivation and what one would expect -- potentially prison or death --](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [he become a linguist, a trainer for the 76ers and now is a motivational speaker.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And he gives play as a transformative force](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [over his entire life.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[Now there's another play history that I think is a work in progress.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [Those of you who remember Al Gore,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [during the first term and then during his successful](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [but unelected run for the presidency,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [may remember him as being wooden and not entirely his own person.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [At least in public.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And looking at his history, which is common in the press,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [It seems to me, at least, looking at it from a shrink's point of view](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [that a lot of his life was programmed.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [Summers were hard, hard work, in the heat of Tennessee summers.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [He had the expectations of his senatorial father and Washington, D.C.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And although I think he certainly had the capacity for play -- because I do know something about that --](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [he wasn't as empowered, I think, as he now is](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [by paying attention to what is his own passion](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and his own inner drive, which I think has its basis in all of us in our play history.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[So what I would encourage on an individual level to do,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [is to explore backwards as far as you can go](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [to the most clear, joyful, playful image that you have.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [Whether it's with a toy, on a birthday or on a vacation.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And begin to build to build from the emotion of that](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [into how that connects with your life now.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And you'll find, you may change jobs --](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [which has happened to a number people when I've had them do this](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [in order to be more empowered through their play.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [Or you'll be able to enrich your life by prioritizing it](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and paying attention to it.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[Most of us work with groups, and I put this up because](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [the d.school, the design school at Stanford,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [thanks to David Kelley and a lot of others](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [who have been visionary about its establishment,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [has allowed a group of us to get together](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and create a course called "From Play to Innovation."](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And you'll see this course is to investigate](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [the human state of play, which is kind of like the polar bear-husky state](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and its importance to creative thinking.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [To explore play behavior, its development and its biological basis.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [To apply those principles, through design thinking,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [to promote innovation in the corporate world.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And the students will work with real-world partners](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [on design projects with widespread application.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[This is our maiden voyage in this.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [We're about two and a half, three months into it, and it's really been fun.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [There is our star pupil, this Labrador,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [who taught a lot of us what a state of play is,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and an extremely aged and decrepit professor in charge there.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And Brendan Boyle, Rich Crandall -- and on the far right is a person who I think](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [will be in cahoots with George Smoot for a Nobel Prize -- Stuart Thompson,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [in neuroscience.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [So we've had Brendan, who's from IDEO,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and the rest of us sitting aside and watching these students](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [as they put play principles into practice in the classroom.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And one of their projects was to](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [see what makes meetings boring,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and to try and do something about it.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [So what will follow is a student-made film](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [about just that.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[Narrator: Flow is the mental state of apparition](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [in which the person is fully immersed in what he or she is doing.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [Characterized by a feeling of energized focus,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [full involvement and success in the process of the activity.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[An important key insight that we learned about meetings](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [is that people pack them in one after another,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [disruptive to the day.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [Attendees at meetings don't know when they'll get back to the task](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [that they left at their desk.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [But it doesn't have to be that way.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[(Music)](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[Some sage and repeatedly furry monks](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [at this place called the d.school](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [designed a meeting that you can literally step out of when it's over.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [Take the meeting off, and have peace of mind that you can come back to me.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [Because when you need it again,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [the meeting is literally hanging in your closet.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[The Wearable Meeting.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [Because when you put it on, you immediately get everything you need](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [to have a fun and productive and useful meeting.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [But when you take it off ...](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [that's when the real action happens.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[(Music)](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[(Laughter) (Applause)](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[Stuart Brown: So I would encourage you all](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [to engage](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [not in the work-play differential --](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [where you set aside time to play --](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [but where your life becomes infused](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [minute by minute, hour by hour, with body,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [object,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [social, fantasy, transformational kinds of play.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And I think you'll have a better and more empowered life.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [Thank You.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[(Applause)](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[John Hockenberry: So it sounds to me like what you're saying is that](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [there may be some temptation on the part of people to look at your work](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and go --](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [I think I've heard this, in my kind of pop psychological understanding of play,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [that somehow,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [the way animals and humans deal with play,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [is that it's some sort of rehearsal for adult activity.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [Your work seems to suggest that is powerfully wrong.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[SB: Yeah, I don't think that's accurate,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and I think probably because animals have taught us that.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [If you stop a cat from playing --](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [which you can do, and we've all seen how cats bat around stuff --](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [they're just as good predators as they would be if they hadn't played.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And if you imagine a kid](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [pretending to be King Kong,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [or a race car driver, or a fireman,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [they don't all become race car drivers or firemen.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [You know, so there's a disconnect between preparation for the future --](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [which is what most people are comfortable in thinking about play as --](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and thinking of it as a separate biological entity.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[And this is where my chasing animals for four, five years](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [really changed my perspective from a clinician to what I am now,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [which is that play has a biological place,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [just like sleep and dreams do.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And if you look at sleep and dreams biologically,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [animals sleep and dream,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and they rehearse and they do some other things that help memory](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and that are a very important part of sleep and dreaming.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[The next step of evolution in mammals and](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [creatures with divinely superfluous neurons](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [will be to play.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And the fact that the polar bear and husky or magpie and a bear](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [or you and I and our dogs can crossover and have that experience](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [sets play aside as something seperate.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And its hugely important in learning and crafting the brain.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [So it's not just something you do in your spare time.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[JH: How do you keep -- and I know you're part of the scientific research community,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and you have to justify with grants and proposals like everyone else --](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [how do you prevent --](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and some of the data that you've produced, the good science that you're talking about you've produced, is hot to handle.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [How do you prevent either the media's interpretation of your work](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [or the scientific community's interpretation of the implications of your work,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [kind of like the Mozart metaphor,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [where, "Oh, MRIs show ...](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [that play enhances your intelligence.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [Well, let's round these kids up, put them in pens](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and make them play for months at a time. They'll all be geniuses and go to Harvard."](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [How do you prevent people from taking that sort of action](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [on the data that you're developing?](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[SB: Well, I think the only way I know to do it is to have accumulated the advisers that I have:](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [who go from practitioners --](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [who can establish through improvisational play or clowning or whatever --](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [a state of play.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [So people know that it's there.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And then you get an fMRI specialist, and you get Frank Wilson,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and you get other kinds of hard scientists, including neuroendocrinologists.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And you get them into a group together focused on play,](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [and it's pretty hard not to take it seriously.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[Unfortunately, that hasn't been done sufficiently](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [for the National Science Foundation, National Institute of Mental Health](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [or anybody else to really look at it in this way -- seriously.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [I mean you don't hear about anything that's like cancer or heart disease](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [associated with play.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [And yet I see it as something that's just as basic for survival -- long term --](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html) [as learning some of the basic things about public health.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[JH: Stuart Brown, thank you very much.](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

[(Applause)](http://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital.html)

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