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Yo-Yo Man. 1978. Produced and directed by *John Melville Bishop*. 12 minutes, color. Purchase \$175 (16mm), rental \$15.00 (video cassette). From Documentary Educational Re-sources, 5 Bridge St., Watertown, MA 02172. (617/926-0491).

Aram A. Yengoyan
Michael Cullinane
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For American youngsters the yo-yo has long held a special place. It has allowed them not only to develop and demonstrate their expertise but also to be innovative by devising new tricks and styles. Yet the yo-yo is on the wane and the last of the major companies, the Duncan Yo-yo Company, went broke in the 1960s. Is this another lost art? Will the yo-yo go the way of the hula hoop, goldfish swallowing, and the like? Not if Nemo Concepcion can help it. Concepcion is a 77-year-old Filipino who started working for the Duncan Yo-yo Company in the early 1930s, first as a demonstrator and later as one of the leading yo-yo champions, winning contests throughout the United States from Washington to small rural playgrounds in California.

This short film is a demonstration of Concepcion's remarkable skill as a "yo-yo man." As he runs through his repertoire, one can see virtually the full range of tricks, such as "around the world," "walk the dog," "milk the cow," "the Betty Grable," "spaghetti," and the "spinner," in which Concepcion ends up with the yo-yo in his jacket pocket. In the dialogue, Concepcion relates a bit of his past and tells how he developed some of his tricks. For ethnographic interest it appears that in the past the yo-yo was not only a common toy among a number of upland and lowland Philippine cultures, but was also utilized as a weapon. In one shot a cigarette is snapped out of a man's mouth, leaving one to imagine what the yo-yo could have done when its full force was directed at a human target.

Unfortunately, the film is lacking in any substantive ethnographic content. The portrayal of the range and variability of yo-yo tricks and styles is interesting, but at least some discussion is needed on how the yo-yo entered American culture, how styles have changed, and what kinds of cultural representations exist in different societies which possess the yo-yo. Further more, since the film is about Nemo Concepcion — the "yo-yo man" -- more information about his life and struggles would have strengthened the film's content considerably. One suspects, for example, that for Concepcion, the yo-yo was not

simply a tool for winning contests and earning a living, but became a form of creative expression. Unfortunately this fascinating man is seldom asked to reflect on his past, either in the Philippines or in this country. In the end we are left with many questions, among them, what Concepcion would have been without the yo-yo and, inversely what the yo-yo would have been without Concepcion.

As a demonstration film, *The Yo-Yo Man* is quite effective and it is hoped that the Duncan Yo-yo Company can at least use it if they ever attempt to revive interest in the yo-yo. The filmmakers should also be thanked for at least recording for posterity the exceptional talents of Nemo Concepcion. If the anthropology of play ever enters the world of child-play this film will be useful. But until that time, the film stands simply as a brief piece of entertainment that leaves the viewer with a pleasant feeling but also with numerous questions about both the yo-yo and the “yo-yo man.”

Yengoyan, Aram A. & Cullinane, Michael *Yo-yo Man American Anthropologist* page 748, vol. 85, 1983.

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