EMOTIONAL THEMES IN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN’S PLAY NARRATIVES

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This research is an eight-month ethnographic study of preschool children’s play narratives. Children’s play narratives are examined over time and across situations in the daily life of one preschool classroom to uncover the emotional themes of the play narratives as well as the social work of the emotional themes (e.g., build relationships, negotiate power, & construct social identities). The researcher visited the classroom two to three times per week over the course of eight months. Data collection methods included participant observation, video-taping, video-revisiting with children and formal and informal interviews with teachers. Findings revealed that children used specific play narratives, defined as “anchor play narratives”, which provided weight and grounding to their social relationships. Anchor play narratives were reoccurring themes that children returned to over and over again in the daily life of the classroom.

A microethnographic approach to the discourse analysis of language use in the classroom was used examine two anchor play narratives: the “kitty” play narrative and the “boyfriend/girlfriend” play narrative. Findings revealed that female children used the kitty narrative to construct gender, to negotiate access into male play, to negotiate and contest positioning, and construct proper emotional display rules for females. Within the second anchor play narrative (boyfriend/girlfriend) children took up positions related to the romantic love storyline based on their social identities. The anchor play narrative constructed notions about the appropriate gender one could fall in love with,
implicitly constructing emotional display rules about the proper and correct actions and reactions as females and male negotiated power and positioning in their social relationships. Children not only drew upon their gender, but also their race as they engaged in the romantic love narrative, which lead to a misunderstanding about the meaning of specific romantic linguistic terms used within their play narrative.

Educators should become aware of the complexity of children’s play narratives in shaping children’s knowledge about their social and emotional worlds and how traditional roles and stories support and silence specific emotional themes.
Dedicated to my mother
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Emotions are an everyday part of our lives. How to do emotions are woven implicitly and explicitly through music, media, movies, books, oral stories, plays, classic fairytales, and everyday conversations with friends, lovers, family, children, and coworkers. For example, people feel angry when their child arrives home past their curfew, pride as they watch their 1 year old take their first step, romantic love as they say “I do” to their loved one, and sadness when a friend gossips behind their back. But how do people learn about emotions? Are emotions relational or individual? How and when do people begin to “do” the emotional theme associated with being a mother, wife, sister, and daughter? Are emotional display rules different for women than men? What are the stories constructed about how, when, where, and with whom an emotion such as love or sadness can be performed?
Emotion has traditionally been described as an inner psychological state. Emotions from this framework are defined not as social and cultural in nature, but rather as something that is created and centered internally within the individual child. That is, the child works through affective issues, resolves affect, or regulates affect. All of the terms imply that emotions are something to be controlled, regulated, and managed. Emotions are internal rather than external and individual rather than relational.

Conversely, social constructionist theory suggests that emotions are social in nature; they are transmitted, created, and maintained in social action and social life as people interact with each other (Harré, 1986, 1993; Gergen, 1994; Gergen, 1999; Lutz, 1988). When we talk about and display an emotion it is not representing some inner world, rather the act is the doing of the emotion, just as “language, in this sense, is not a mirror of life, it is the doing of life itself” (Gergen, 1999, p. 35).

Gergen’s (1999) main critique of the psychological western theory of emotion is that it forms a discourse about the individual and private nature of psychological experiences. He further suggests,

The conception of “private experience” relies on a pivotal metaphor of the person in the Western culture, one that views the mind as a form of container with certain specified ingredients inside (for example, what’s on my mind, in my thoughts, my private feelings) and the reminder outside (an “out there” as opposed to an “in here”). Yet, when you stop to locate what precisely is in vs. out, it becomes exceedingly difficult to distinguish. Where does outside stop versus where does the inside begin.

(p. 67.)

Thus, the two perspectives differ in that traditional research on emotion places emotion as an individual construct to be resolved, processed and expressed, while social constructionist research views emotion as social and cultural, something that is performed
in relations with others and located in discursive process (implying that emotions are *constructed* as people act and react to one another and exist in relationships).

When relating emotions to narratives, Gergen (1994) further suggests, “….emotional expressions are meaningful (indeed, succeed in counting as legitimate emotions) only when inserted into particular, cross-time sequences of interchange. In effect, they are constitutes of lived narratives” (p. 224). Building off this notion, rather than asking how emotions are expressed and resolved in narratives constructed by the individual child, I argue that we should ask how emotions are socially constructed in narrative events as people act and react to one another. It is important to note that by using the term emotional theme, the purpose of the study is not to understand the internal emotional states of children or uncover what people “feel” from a physiological or psychological perspective, but rather the purpose is to explore the overt and observable responses that occur in children’s interactions in the classroom.

A majority of research on young children’s emotional development has been conducted using experimental or quasi-experimental methods in which children are shown a wordless storybook and asked to identify the emotions of story characters (Allen & Bradley 2000; Bamberg & Rilley, 1996; Rilley, 1992). One problem with such studies is that they do not uncover the nature of emotions in young children’s narrative construction, nor do they examine the relation between emotions and narrative as they naturally occur in children’s everyday conversations. Given this critique, this research is grounded in a social constructionist theoretical framework to uncover how emotions are socially constructed as children act and react to one another in the daily life of their classroom through both verbal and non-verbal communication (Berger & Luckmann,
1966; Burr, 2003, Gergen, 1994, 1999). More specifically, the purpose of this study is to uncover how children construct emotional themes in their play narratives over time and across situations in the daily life of one preschool classroom. Play narratives are defined as imaginary and real life scenarios that children construct and perform. For example, a play narrative could consist of two girls being Ariel and another child being the Sea Witch from the Disney movie *The Little Mermaid*. It could consist of two males being the red and yellow power rangers and two females who are the lost kitties they are rescuing. In play narratives children act out and perform scenarios around activities such as going to the store, getting married, taking care of babies, building a chocolate factory, driving a car, rescuing a princess and fighting a monster.

Given the focus on play narrative and the actions and reactions of children, the study also uses the construct of positioning to describe how play narratives make available specific positions within the storylines that are constructed. For example, what are the positions made available to males when they are superheroes versus the positions made available to females when they are lost kitties that are rescued by the superheroes? What messages do these storylines transmit about the gender, racial, and cultural aspects of emotions?

Positioning is defined as “possible ways of being” as people take “themselves up” as individuals through various discourses as they are made available in spoken and written form (Davies, 1989; Davies & Harré, 1990; Fernie, Davies, Kantor, & McMurray, 1993). Possible ways of being are not static and linear, but rather they are multiple, complex, contradictory and related to power and dominance. Each day in the classroom setting children take up, reject, negotiate and construct various positions as well as assign
positions to others. Positions are always being negotiated as people act and react to one another. Positions involve categorization and often include the social construction of binaries (e.g., male/female, good student/bad student, insider/outsider, reader/non-reader), which are related to the ongoing process of discursively “narrating” who one is in relation to others.

In addition to positioning, I adopt a social constructionist perspective of emotion and play narratives, which views emotion as things we “do” rather than “have” (Burr, 2003). When using the statement “do” versus “have” the implication is not that people do not have an emotion or experience emotional states, the point is to highlight the performative nature of “doing” emotion and how this is related to discourse and language. From this perspective, emotion, and ways of being, are not simply individual inner constructs, but are social performances that are embedded in and shaped by social and cultural processes (Harré, 1986). Through this lens, narrative and emotion are viewed as collaboratively constructed by both macro and micro level discourses and social interactions as children act and react to one another.

Madrid et al (2005) showed how young children’s storytelling events were shaped by specific emotional themes. Using a formal method of storytelling in which children wrote and told stories to their classmates and teachers during a designated story time, the authors’ found that children who used an emotional theme of aggression were positioned by their peers as good storytellers. They also found that children often used an aggressive theme to elicit audience participation and to contest the teachers’ own emotional theme of happiness. Building off the above finding about emotional themes, the purpose of this study is to extend the previous research of Madrid et al (2005) by examining preschool
children’s use of emotional themes in informal play narratives, which is to be distinguished from formal storytelling events. The goal of this study is to move from understanding emotional themes in formal classroom events to understanding how children create, co-construct, and use emotional themes in play narrative events that arise in informal contexts within the daily life of the classroom. The study also aims to add to the literature on the social construction of children’s peer culture in the early childhood classroom. A peer culture perspective of emotion and narrative is grounded in the notion that an emic view of children’s daily world is needed to uncover the social work associated with the emotional themes. Past research on children’s peer culture has illustrated that children are active agents in the appropriation of adult roles and themes. While previous research on peer culture has examined friendship, social hierarchies and this study will focus on emotional meaning as constructed and used in children’s peer culture (Elgas, 2003; Fernie, Davies, Kantor, & McMurray, 1993; Kantor, Elgas & Fernie, 1993; Scott, 2003).

Given that most elementary schools are too structured to allow for informal events, I have chosen to focus on a preschool classroom that allows for unstructured time, which will give ample opportunities for children’s play narratives to occur and be recorded. Moreover, I have chosen to examine 3 to 5 year olds rather than younger children as research has shown that it is between the ages of 3 to 5 years that children begin to grasp the notion of people’s states, thoughts and emotions (Dunn, 1988).
Significance

By examining play narratives in the classroom over time and in a naturally occurring setting, questions about the types of play narratives that are constructed (by whom, where, when, how, and for what purpose) and the emotions associated with them, as well as how children learn to use emotional themes for social purposes (by whom, where, when, how, and for what purposes), can be uncovered. In addition, this study extends previous research on emotional themes by examining how emotional themes are socially constructed in informal classroom events rather than in formal or experimental events in the preschool classroom.

Further research in this area will not only add to the literature about young children’s play narratives in informal contexts, but will also allow educators to reconceptualize children’s emotion in the classroom as something that is relational rather than individual (Gergen, 1994). By understanding how children learn to talk about emotions (to whom, when, where, how and for what purposes) and by understanding the social function of such talk, the current study will provide a foundation for re-examining emotions from a theory that is grounded in a social constructionist perspective of psychological processes.

The goal of any educational research project should be not only to accumulate more knowledge about children’s learning and development, but also to understand how our own views about children’s emotional displays shape our interactions with them. This research may also help educators and researchers deconstruct and question assumptions about the social and cultural nature of emotions and emotional development in early childhood education. When spaces such as these are opened, educators can begin to
question how they support and/or silence specific emotions in the classroom and how this is related to a western discourse about emotions.

Research Questions

The study seeks to uncover the following questions:

➢ What types of play narratives are constructed and used over time and across situations within the daily life of the classroom by the children (how, when, where, by whom, and for what purpose)?

➢ How do emotional themes vary over time and across situations within the different types of play narratives that are told by the children (how, when, where, by whom, and for what purpose)?

➢ How are emotional themes constructed and used for specific social functions in children’s play worlds (e.g., to create relationships, negotiate power, and construct social identities)?

Overview of Research Approach

The research approach taken in this study is grounded in an ethnographic and microethnographic approach to the researching of language use in the classroom (Bloome et al, 2005, Bloome, Power-Carter, Morton-Christian, Madrid, Otto, Shuart-Farris, & Smith, in press; Kantor & Fernie, 2003; Kantor, Fernie, & Whaley, 1995). By using such an approach, children, teachers, and the researcher are viewed as active agents in the construction of knowledge and as participants in the research process. This perspective was chosen, as it allows the examination of the multiple layers and contexts of the
construction and use of emotional themes and play narratives. Multiple views were also used to get a complete picture of how children’s play narratives and emotional themes were situated in the broader context of the classroom as well as in the moment-to-moment interactions as teachers and children acted and reacted to one another.

Multiple methods were used to gather data (participant observation, interviews, field notes, audio taping, video taping, and video revisiting with children) over the course of eight months. Data was continually interpreted and re-interpreted through a recycling of questions and answers, both informing the other (c.f., Kantor & Fernie, 2003). Prolonged engagement and participant observation were used not only to gather multiple sources of data, but also to build relationships with teachers and children so that a deeper understanding of the construction of emotional themes could be uncovered from an emic perspective (Burr, 2003).

Interviews, field notes, video revisiting, and discussions with colleagues were used to establish trustworthiness and triangulate findings. The methods used aligned with the research questions and theoretical framework, as social constructionist theory suggests that objectivity and value free interpretations are unattainable. Constructs such as the mind, self, and emotions are socially constructed through thorough language and discourse. Thus, discourse analysis is a central methodology in this study given the emphasis on language and discourse.
Key Terms

Children’s Culture: Children’s peer culture is defined as “a stable set of activities or routines, artifacts, values, and concerns that children produce and share in interaction with peers” (Corsaro, 1997, p. 95). Peer culture is a shared and learned way of children being together as a group. Children are viewed as active agents in the appropriation and reproduction of their local childhood cultures as they socially construct knowledge in their interactions within in their daily lives.

Discourse: Discourse is defined as, “a way of speaking, writing, thinking, feeling, or acting that incorporates particular ideas as “truths.” Discourses provide a framework for how we think. They also carry messages about power and seek to establish a set of hidden rules about who has power and who does not, or who is right/normal and who is wrong/abnormal. Power, status, and privilege are constructed through discourse” (Blaise, 2005, p. 16).

Emotional Theme: A play narrative’s emotional theme is defined as the emotions that are centered in the event (i.e., mother love, male/female desire). The term emotion in emotional theme is defined not as an inner psychological trait, but rather as a construct that is located in discursive process. In this study the major assumption is that emotions are something people do, rather than things people have (Burr, 2003). The goal is not to determine the exact nature of emotions or where they reside (on the inside or the outside)
but rather it is to show the discursive nature of emotional themes and their social function.

*Play Narrative:* A play narrative is defined as a scenario that children construct and perform during their play. For example, a play narrative could consist of two girl’s being Ariel and another child being the Sea Witch. It could consist of two males being the red and yellow power ranger and two girls who are the lost kitties they are trying to save.

*Narrative:* Narrative is defined as, “A narrative is the text of the story. The text may or may not present the story chronologically…. Narratives do not exist by themselves. They exist only in storytelling events. Storytelling events can involve several people or one individual; they can be formally labeled storytelling events (e.g., show and tell) or embedded in events with other labels. In storytelling events people act and react to each other, while producing the narrative. That is, there are always at least two simultaneous activities in a storytelling event, the telling of a story or stories and the making of the storytelling event itself…” (Bloome, 2003, p. 299)

*Subject Position:* Subject position is defined as “possible ways of being” (Ferine, Davies, Kantor, & McMurray, 1993) and the “Implied position within a particular discourse which may be occupied or taken up by a person, providing a basis for their identity and experience” (Burr, 2003, p. 204).
Narratives, we have come to realize, are the means by which we gradually impart meaning to the events of our own lives. There is on all sides, a growing interest in narrative or on storytelling as a mode of sense making.  

(Greene, 1994, p. 14)

Introduction

This statement by Maxine Greene suggests that narratives give meaning to our lives. Narratives are modes for constructing, organizing, contesting, and negotiating meaning. They organize and bound experience, which gives structure to how we come understand ourselves and others (Bruner, 1980). Bruner suggests that we live our lives through narratives. He further suggests that children, at a very young age, begin to understand that they are judged by their actions as well as by how they talk about their actions. More specifically, Bruner (1980) argues that narratives bring children into their culture, “to be in a viable culture is to be bound in a set of connecting stories” (p. 96). In narratives, children learn how to associate actions with cultural interpretations of emotion, intentions, desires and beliefs.

Narrative is a complex construct that cannot easily be defined in simple terms. For example, Bloome (2003) argues that rather than asking, “What is a narrative?” we should
ask, “What is being called a narrative, where, when, how, by whom, and for what purpose?” (p. 289). The same question about narratives can also be applied to emotion. Rather than asking “What is emotion?” we should ask “What is being called an emotion, where, when, how, by whom, and for what purpose?

Given the complexity of defining narrative and emotion, I have structured my review of literature as follows: First, I will explore emotion from a social constructionist framework to illustrate how I am defining emotion within this research. The review of literature will elucidate how we do emotions in our everyday life and to understand how emotions are located in our social worlds as an alternative to the traditional psychological view of emotion.

I will then address traditional research on children’s emotional development and locate how emotions have been defined in narrative research. Next, I will turn my focus to the review of literature related to narrative performance and emotional themes, and then end with research on emotional themes and gender. Although I will limit my focus to young children and early childhood education, I will draw from research conducted on various age groups.

*Emotion as Socially Constructed*

Early psychologists postulated that emotions are biological and related to uncontrollable and irrational behaviors that are often associated with lower level animal processes. For example, William James, one of the first American psychologists and philosophers suggested that we feel (or have) an emotion because of a physiological response. That is, emotions arise from bodily feedback. This theory was named the
James-Lange theory of emotion (Zimbardo & Gerrig, 1999). This theory rests on the assumption that bodily feedback and sensations guide the emotions that we have. For example, we feel sadness because we cry (Zimbardo & Gerrig, 1999).

The notion that emotions were biological and evolved along with others human structures and functions was also set forth by Charles Darwin’s in his book “The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals” (1904). Darwin suggested that emotions served specific adaptive purposes related to the survival of the human species. Darwin’s theory of evolution was also influential in viewing emotions as innate, adaptive, and universal. Psychologists who postulate that emotions are innate and biological suggest that there are a set number of innate universal emotions.

Most notable is the work of Paul Ekman (Ekman, 1984), who studied emotional expression and facial recognition across cultures. Using photographs, he found that there are seven specific emotions (fear, disgust, happiness, surprise, contempt, anger, and sadness) that appear to be universally recognized. A major critique of his research is that, knowing that there are universal facial expressions associated with emotion does not tell us much about the nature of the emotion in the culture. Just because specific facial expressions can be found in many cultures does not tell us about the social work of the emotion within the culture. Being able to recognize a facial expression (e.g., happy, sad, or angry) does not tell us the social and cultural rules associated with the emotional display and the consequences that are associated with the expression or non-expression of the emotion in context.

Levy (1984) suggested that people do not simply show emotional expression. Emotional expression exists in context. We express happiness when we greet a friend, we
express anger when another driver cuts us off in traffic, and we feel romantic love when we gaze into the eyes of our partner. The important point is that emotion and expression occur within context. This context can be experienced alone or with another person. Either way our experience of an emotion is linked to some idea about the circumstances and settings in which it occurs. In addition, the non-expression of an emotion can transmit meaning just as loudly as the expression of an emotion. For example, Nussbaum (2000) reports that it is normal in some cultures to “cry big” at a loved one’s death. The non-expression or not crying big at a loved one’s death can signal disrespect for the deceased person and his or her family. Non-expression can speak just as loudly as expression if we understand the social rules and context of expression. In addition, just because one does not express a specific emotion does not mean that they do not experience the emotion. For instance, people can feel angry with their boss, but not express it (Harré, 1986). However, the non-expression of anger would still be linked to a social rule or norm that tells us that it is inappropriate or unacceptable to express anger to someone that holds power and authority over you. In other words, you would not want to jeopardize your position by showing anger towards your boss, if you knew he or she would not tolerate such a display. Thus, simply being able to recognize a facial expression is like trying to understand the meaning of a word outside of the sentence and context in which it is used. Emotional expression is meaningless unless we understand how, when, where, and in what circumstances the emotion is being displayed.

A more current and dominant theory of emotion in psychology is the cognitive appraisal theory (Zimbardo & Gerrig, 1999). Within this framework, emotions are seen as directly related to cognitive processes. For example, before one can feel the emotion
anger, they must first have the belief that someone has done something wrong to them or that there is some type of injustice. “Anger whether expressed or not is an insistence on our own ideals. Anger is usually direct and explicit in its projection of our personal values and expectations on the world” (Solomon, 1984, p. 250). Similarly, before one can feel the emotion of embarrassment, they must have an understanding of others thoughts and beliefs about their behavior, as well as an understanding that their behavior has gone against a particular social norm. Embarrassment is also related to an understanding about self in relation to others. It is directly tied to an appraisal of a behavior and how we think about how we appear to others in the situation. Recognizing the relationship between cognitive appraisal and emotions, the field of psychology began to move away from viewing emotions as simply bodily responses and toward viewing emotions as linked to how we process and appraise situations (Ellsworth, 1994).

A problem with the appraisal theory, however, is that it still views cognition and emotion as two constructs in opposition to one another. Although cognition and emotions are acknowledged to affect one another, they are still seen as separate systems that exist within the individual (Leavitt, 1996). Emotions are viewed as something that is controlled by cognition as well as something that is in contrast to rational thought. As such, cognitive-behavioral psychologists turned their focus to using cognition to control our thoughts, which then control our emotions. Cognition was seen as the master of our emotions (Lutz, 1988).

The western conception of emotion was created as researchers tried to locate and explain emotions as individual traits (Lutz, 1988). Emotions were seen as opposite of cognition, as irrational rather than rational, as feminine rather than masculine and as
subjective versus objective. According to Lutz (1988) emotions have been located within the individual rather than in history, culture, or ideology. Emotions, however, define who we are, what we do, and how we are positioned in the world, “What we call an emotion is an important part of our emotional life, and so is what we think of it and how we treat it” (Solomon, 1984, p. 249). Emotion, when placed in opposition to cognition, when placed as irrational, when viewed as internal, when located within the individual, when defined as universal, lends itself not to a theory of emotions, but to a western theory of emotions (Boler, 1999; Lutz, 1988).

More recently, researchers from other disciplines such as anthropology, cultural psychology, linguistics, and feminist studies, have begun to deconstruct this western theory of emotions (Ahmed, 2005; Boler, 1999; Burr, 2003; Gergen, 1994, 1999; Lutz, 1988). According to Gergen (1999), psychologists have been trying to measure and explain emotions with a Western conception of emotions that may not be universally valid because it is based on our own cultural assumptions:

As elsewhere, we in the west typically presume the universality of our truths, reason, and morals. Our scientific truths are not ours in particular, we hold, but candidates for universal truths. That the world is made out of atoms and individuals who possess emotions are not for us a matter of cultural beliefs. Any reasonable person would reach the same conclusion. Yet as we presume the reality and truth of our own beliefs, so do we trample on the realities of other.

(p. 17)

Gergen’s statement suggests that to truly understand emotions as they exist within a particular culture, we need to deconstruct the western definition to uncover the specific social, cultural and political functions that emotions serve. That is, emotions do not only
exist within the individual, they exist in the system of rules, values, morals and norms of a culture. They exist in social action. They are performed. They come alive in interactions with others (Harré, 1986, 1993). They are shaped and constructed by and through our social and cultural worlds. By examining the social and cultural functions of emotions we can start to systemically unpack the social work that is involved with them. The issue here is not if emotions are individual, but rather the issue is how social, cultural and knowledge spaces form notions about who, when, where, and under what circumstances one can and should express specific emotions. What are the social functions of love, anger, grief, and sadness? What are rules for displaying anger? How are emotions performed? How are emotions embedded in concepts of race, gender, and social class?

According to Nussbaum (2000), ways of performing and doing emotions will vary based on the norms and values of a culture. How we love, grieve, and show anger is based on cultural routines and rituals. For example, in the Western world, a way of showing grief when a loved one dies is to cry, to attend a funeral, and to wear black. In another culture the way to perform grief would be to “cry big” (Levy, 1984; Nussbaum, 2000; Soloman, 1984). In another culture, the way to grieve the loss of a loved one would be to show happiness, that is, to show no sadness at all. Underlying all of these performances are beliefs about the meaning of death and loss. For example, in the instance in which the script is to show no sadness, this is done because to show sadness after the death of a loved one is seen as having the effect of bringing evil spirits. Similarly, crying big in some cultures is seen as showing respect for the loss of the person.
As people engage in everyday activities, a performance becomes socially shared and in turn makes statements such as, “I would feel jealous if my husband cheated with another woman” normal. For example, not every culture would associate the emotion “jealousy” with a man’s infidelity. Perhaps in another culture a husband has the right as the head of the household to take as many wives as he wishes. Thus, how an emotion is performed in a monogamous society may be qualitatively different than that of a woman living in a polygamous society. However, it must be noted that Nussbaum (2000), in her account of social norms and emotions, suggests that emotions are more than just simply acquiring a cultural script about emotions. She suggests that people have agency and that we do not simply acquire a script about how to perform emotions, but that humans also actively create, transform, and construct new scripts about emotional display.

In contrast to Nussbaum’s (2000) position that people do not simply acquire cultural scripts about emotions, Ratner (2000), Wierzbicka (1994), and D’Andrade (1995) focus on the role of cultural scripts. It is through everyday interactions with others that people acquire knowledge and practice socially constructed modes of thinking and feeling. Ratner (2000) further posits that emotions are thoughtful feelings and thought-filled feelings. He suggests that emotions are processed through the mechanism of internalization in which the intramental (social) becomes intermental (personal). The basic argument is that the quality of emotions rests upon the interpretation of people and events, and how people conceptualize emotions.

Rather (2000) further suggests that a major problem with the current western theories of emotion is that scholars dichotomize emotions and cognition, and attribute them to different processes. Emotions do not cause us to be irrational or out of control.
Emotions are objective and in fact often motivate us to argue for our own views of what we believe is an “objective” stance on our part. Take for example the politics of educational reform. I recently sat in a class in which the Non-Standard English debate came up. After several minutes of “heated” discussion the class came to the conclusion that the topic was just “too emotional” to talk about. The emotion that came up during the discussion was anger; anger from those who believed that Non-Standard English should be accepted and used in the classroom and anger from those who believed that non-standard English should not be allowed and used in the classroom. Regardless of the position (for or against the use of Non-Standard English) both sides felt that their anger was objective and justifiable. Both sides believed that they had every right to feel emotional about this issue.

An important aspect of social construct framework of emotions is the notion that language and discourse bring psychological process into being. Given this, one way to uncover how emotions are performed is through the examination of language (Harré, 1993; Wierzbicka, 1994). That is, how and what does language about emotions say about our social life and the meanings behind emotions? For example, what does the term love index. What type of relationship is substantiated through the statement, “I love you”? What type of social action is accomplished by saying “You make me angry”? Do all cultures use the same emotions words? Do emotion words represent the same relationship and hold the same social meaning in all culture?

These are questions that many cultural anthropologists and sociolinguists have been trying to answer through ethnographic theory and methods. According to Boas (1995), the goal of ethnography is to get behind the veil of the participants so that we can
understand the mental phenomena and psychological make-up of the groups of people we are studying. If we can understand the psychological make-up of a culture, then we have a way of seeing through their lens. Moreover, it is through language that this task can be accomplished successfully, as words illustrate what is both explicit and implicit. To uncover the meaning embedded in a culture, it is critical to get past the secondary rationalizations to the language structures, which are largely unconsciously determined and contain the meaningful aspects of the culture.

Building on this notion, Sapir ([1927]1995) postulated that language was a means of socialization. However, not only was language a socialization tool, but also a mechanism in which cultural ways of being and doing were learned, which he believed were automatic and often thought of as the “standard” way by those in a culture. He further argued that reality is not given to us, but rather is shaped by how we relate to it through the unconscious patterns we impose on our external reality. For example, some cultures may have the same word for blue and green and therefore do not pay attention to the distinction between the two colors, while another culture may make distinctions, not only between blue and green, but also between many shades of blue.

The same notion can also be applied to emotions. Some cultures may have many different types of words for one emotion. For instance, a culture may make a distinction between love for a mother and love for a grandmother, while another culture may not make a distinction between the two types of love. It is through these language differences that the social work of a culture are made visible to the researcher, as those differences illustrate what is important in the culture. For example, in Japan they use the word amae to describe a type of love, usually between a parent and child or a husband
and wife, that is indulgent or dependant (sweet dependence). There is not an English word that captures the essence of *amae* (Doi, 1973; Morsbach, & Tyler, 1986). It could be further argued that the *amae* represents the collective nature of the Japanese culture, which is often categorized as being interdependent rather than independent (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Japan is often referred to as a collective culture that is characterized by a socialization process that emphasizes group harmony and a “we” self rather than individualistic society, such as the United States that emphasizes autonomy and an “I” self. Kim and Choi (1994) posit that members of collective cultures are more likely than those in individualistic cultures to emphasize the implication of their own behavior for others, to share resources, to emphasize harmony, and to be controlled by shame. Thus, *amae* illustrates the social work of interdependence in the Japanese culture and how the view of self in relation to others is an important aspect of doing life. As such, *amae* is an index of social life and relationships.

Benjamin Whorf ([1941] 1995) continued this line of thought with the notion of linguistic relativity, which suggests that language shapes people’s reality. For example, when he was a fire insurance agent, Whorf had a case in which a cigarette was thrown into an empty drum that still contained flammable fumes. He said that the accident was due to a linguistic misunderstanding, as the empty drum was placed under a sign that said “empty”. The linguistic misunderstanding of “empty” resulted in the fire. As a result, Whorf suggested that within culture, behavior and thought are influenced by language. Though Whorf’s views were criticized as deterministic and leaving little room for human
agency and transformation, the notion of linguistic relativity still can help us to understand the relationship between language and emotions.

Emotion words may contain different meaning depending upon the culture that it is used in. In other words, we learn to “feel” in relation to the expectations of our culture and language. Perhaps language provides a habitual pattern for thinking and feeling about things. Nussbaum (2000) posits:

The fact that we label our emotions alters the emotions we can have. We do not simply apply terms to antecedently organized items. In the process of labeling, we also organize, bounding some things off from others, sharpening distinctions that may have been experienced in an inchoate way. From then on, we experience our emotion in ways guided by these descriptions. (p. 48)

This statement suggests that it is through the process of labeling and naming emotions that we learn what emotions are salient in our social worlds as well their functions. It also relates to the essence of this study and the idea that it is through everyday language practices that children and adults learn how to talk about emotions and link these standards to social life. For example, Solomon (1984) describes research on Eskimos that supports the notion that emotions are not expressed universally and are linked to language and social structures. In his work, he cites a study from Jean Briggs (1970), which revealed that Utka Eskimos do not get angry. In fact, they do not even have a word for angry. Rather, the word the associated with the English word of “anger” is “childish.” In contrast, Tahitians talk a great deal about anger. They also assume that emotions have a place in the body which is out of the control of the person. Anger is seen as separate
from the person as they do not say “I was angry” but rather “it” (the anger) was inside me.

D’Andrade also (1995) points out that “While the cultural hypocognization of an emotion seems to result in a lack of conscious experience of that emotion, a high degree of cultural elaboration of an emotion seems not only to make that emotion salient as a conscious experience, but also to shape it’s experience in various ways” (p. 219). D’Andrade’s statement is important because it suggests that some cultures have many words to express a variety of degrees of anger, while others may not even have one word to describe anger. For instance, in a culture that emphasizes harmony, few anger terms are found, while in a culture that focuses on individual rights, anger becomes a tool for expression when these rights are denied. In this case there may be many words for different types of anger.

The question remains, however, as to whether emotions are created in speech or if emotions lead us to create a speech that matches our emotional world? We cannot assume that just because the English language does not have the word amaе that English speakers cannot experience the emotion of amaе for a child or loved one (Morsbach, & Tyler, 1986). What it does say is that, even if English speakers do have the emotion amaе, the lack of a word to describe this emotion states something about the social organization of the culture. As human beings, we may all have the biological wiring to experience specific emotions, but ultimately how we come to experience them is shaped by the emotions we pay attention to within our own culture (Markus & Kitayama, 1994). If we think of emotions in terms of universal color categories found by Kay, Berlin, and Merrifield ([1991]1995), it could be hypothesized that there are certain underlying
universal emotional structures that all cultures begin with, and that each culture
highlights or forefronts certain emotions over others. This process provides a unique
organization of those emotions in that culture; the “presence of a word proves that in a
society the concept is a salient one” (Wierzbicka, 1994, p. 19).

Catherine Lutz (1988), a cultural anthropologist who studied emotions and
language on a small atoll in Micronesia, found that the Ifaluk people do not have the
word “emotion” in their vocabulary. They do not make a distinction between emotion and
cognition but rather view this as one system; “sharp distinctions are not made between
thought and emotion, between the head and the heart, or between the conscious and
unconscious mind” (p. 91). Similarly, Josephides (2005), in his fieldwork with the Kewa,
found that they openly and highly regard emotions, “rather subordinate emotions to
something called “reason”…..expression of emotion and being swayed by emotion is not
seen as a sign of weakness but a sign of strength” (p. 81-21). Emotions for the Kewa are
perceived as something positive because they are viewed as serving specific social ends,
especially in regards to morality. An emotional response is something valued and
legitimate.

Lutz (1988) attributes the lack of dichotomizing emotions and thought to how the
culture views the person. She suggests that the Ifaluk locate the self as first social and
then individual. The self is viewed as collective and interdependent. Emotions are
similar; they are viewed as social in orientation. For example, the Ifaluk were found not
to show or display anger in the same manner as Americans. They do not have a word that
translates into our English word anger. The Ifaluk live in a village comprised of 430
people. It is necessary for their survival that they get along. Anger is not socially
acceptable. In fact, the only type of violence Lutz observed was when two shoulders touched. However, the Ifaluk do have *song* (justifiable anger), which reflects the Ifaluk emphasis on harmony and group survival. *Song*, while it does represent anger, it is not the same type of anger that an American may have. *Song* is a type of anger that is usually directed toward the self and does not lead to physical aggression. It also is related to the social hierarchy, as elders and people in higher positions are more allowed to show *song* than those in lesser positions. For example, a chief who was justifiably angry with someone who had done something that was morally unacceptable would show *song*.

Harmony and a sharing of resources are woven into the emotional discourse of their social life, the collective life, the life of a small group of people that are dependent upon one another. The good of the community comes before the good of the individual. Justifiable anger is located as a social action and it is something that is asked of another (this person has done me wrong and *we* should be angry with them). The use of “*we*” within their system illustrate that the *song* is something that is shared and collective, and used to control and maintain a community that can not afford more than *song* (justifiable anger) and cannot afford less than “*we*” (Lutz, 1988). What is important about Lutz (1988) and Josephides (2005) work is that they provide a framework for thinking about deconstructing our western definition of the word “emotion” in relation to cognition, as well as how emotions are located in social structures and the discursive practices of a culture.

In sum, a social constructionist framework of emotion argues that emotions are not internal but relational. Emotions are embedded in and reflect our social and cultural worlds and relationships. Moreover, there are social and cultural rules about when, when,
why, how, and by whom specific emotions can be performed. This process is not a simple one-to-one transmission, as people are active agents in taking-up, transforming, and constructing notion about how to perform emotion as wives, mothers, father, sister, brother, children, and friends.

One way that people learn how to do emotions is through the storylines and narratives that are constructed about emotions. The next sections will examine research on children’s emotional development and narrative.

*Emotion and Narrative*

Research on infancy and emotional development typically centers on attachment and temperament, which examines the development of social and emotional bonds between the child and the caregiver (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1969; Sroufe, 1996). However, during the preschool years, the focus moves from attachment and temperament to understandings children’s ability to understand other intentions, desires, and emotions (Dunn, 1988; Dunn & Brown, 2001). Child development research suggests that between the ages of two to five-years-old children begin to making discoveries about their own and others’ emotions. It is postulated that, at around two to three years of age, young children begins to understand self-conscious emotions such as pride, shame, and embarrassment, which are linked to the child’s recognition of a social self (Lewis, 2000).

The term self-conscious or “secondary” emotion does not imply a “less advanced emotion” but rather it is termed secondary because self-conscious emotions are thought to develop after primary emotions that appear early in infancy (e.g., distress, happiness, and
fear). It must be noted that there is not an agreement about what emotions appear when and how (nature versus nurture), and this study does not aim to answer this debate.

Most researchers do recognize that self-conscious emotions are social in nature; they require children to understand how others view them. It is not just how the children think about themselves, but what they think that others think about them. To feel shame, the child must understand that what they have done will be viewed as shameful by another person. To feel pride, one must understand that they have done something that will gain the approval of another. As such, self-conscious emotions are directly related to the view of self in relation to others. This does not mean that primary emotions are not also social. A smile at 3 months does not always express the same message as a smile at 6 years of age. As children get older they learn the rules of emotional expression, which are based on cultural norms, values, and beliefs (Markus & Kitayama, 1994).

Building on traditional western theories of child development, research in the area of children’s emotional development and narrative development have focused on developing and refining the empirical methods to test and measure how children understand their own and others’ emotions. For example, Allen and Bradley (2000) explored the place of emotions in stories with a cross-sectional sample of children aged seven to 12. The purpose of their study was to understand how emotions are located in stories at various ages. They hypothesized that children with a more advanced understanding of emotions would tell stories with more advanced affective content. To do this, they examined four classes at three schools. All children were given a verbal intelligence test. The children were then told by the experimenter that they were going to be told a story that a child their age had told. After the story the children were asked to
identify the feelings of the protagonist. Children were also asked to write about a time when they were very frightened. The stories were then coded and examined for affective structure. The authors concluded that verbal intelligence and story length predicted affective structure but not affective content. The authors further found that “two kinds of abilities are required to tell a good story: verbal intelligence and emotional understanding” (p. 399).

There are several problems with this research in relation to emotions and how to tell a good story. First of all, the children did not tell a story. In fact, it was the experimenter who told the story to them. The notion of story performance and the context of storytelling event were not considered. The storytelling event in this study was one created by the experimenter and not the child. The claim that two kinds of abilities are needed to tell a good story is based on the experimenter’s notion of what and how to tell a good story and does not address the performative aspect of emotion. Lastly, using more emotion words in a story does not necessarily make the story “better” as some cultures may value the use of few words. Moreover, not all cultures use the same emotion words. Some cultures may only have one word for anger while another culture may have 20, which would affect the amount of emotions words that may be inserted in the narrative (D’Andrade, 1995). What is a good story with regard to the use of the number of emotion terms is variable and based on the interpretation of what makes a good story.

While Allen and Bradley’s (2000) study on emotion and narrative focused solely on narrative structure and use of emotion terms, Reily’s (1992) study looked at young children’s emotions in both story performance and story structure. Reily used a cross-sectional sample (children aged three to eight) to examine the use of emotions in the act
of telling a story. Instead of looking at emotion terms, she examined affective prosodic features (i.e., pitch contouring, vocalic lengthening, and phonological stress). One problem with her study was that she used a wordless storybook from which the children told the story. Again, even though she did have older children tell the stories to younger children, performance was still contained and controlled in an experimental setting. The story performance was not one that the child constructed, but was based on a wordless storybook with a set storyline. The emotional themes of the story were already constructed by the experimenter as the situations they were trying to elicit were implied by the facial expressions and scenarios in the picture book. Furthermore, children knew that the adult experimenter was watching them, which may have affected their story performance. These types of studies tell little about how children use emotions in narratives that occur naturally as they act and react with their teacher, peers and parents. Moreover, they do not take into account the social function of the story as children actively construct and negotiate story performance and the narrative. It is also important to understand not only whether children can recognize facial expressions in a storybook and label emotional expressions, but also how they learn the rules about when, how and where specific emotional themes can be used.

These experimental models do not uncover the nature of emotions within storytelling events as they overlook complex interactional aspects that occur as children co-construct with their audience the emotional theme of the narrative, the emotional display of the narrator and the emotional display of the audience. When taking all of these factors into consideration, the storytelling event becomes a complex act of building a relationship as children negotiate their performance. Thus, during a storytelling event,
the child is doing much more than simply recognizing facial recognition. As such, these approaches to narrative and storytelling performance do not tell us how, when, where, by whom, and what emotions can be used in the story performances and narratives.

Another problem with research on emotion and storytelling is that emotion is examined as an individual internal construct that is expressed, controlled, and resolved through the act of storytelling. For example, Nicolopoulou (1997) lists five key elements in understanding children’s narratives:

- The critical task is elucidating structures of meaning, both individual and cultural, that informs and organizes the narrative.
- Narrative is a form of symbolic action, which gives shape and significance to reality even as it represents it.
- Narrative is a vehicle for the formation, assertion, maintenance, and exploration and redefinition of identity—both individual and collective.
- Narrative derives much of it impact from the extent to which it can engage both the speakers and listeners emotionally, and from the ways that they can use it to symbolically express and deal with themes that trouble, fascinate, and perplex them emotionally. We need to examine the ways that effective narrative embodies interplay between cognitive process and emotional life.
- A crucial feature of symbolic representation is that it can be used to mobilize emotions for cognitive ends. (p. 201)
In this excerpt from Nicolopoulou’s (1997) chapter on the interpretive and sociocultural approaches to narrative development, she does not define what an emotion is. As is seen in the list of five factors above, she suggests that narrators derive their impact from engaging the listeners emotionally. The term “emotion” is used quite frequently throughout the article but it is never formally operationalized. What exactly does it mean to engage the listener emotionally? What does it mean to mobilize emotions for cognitive ends? In narratives there are things to be emotionally expressed, to be dealt with, and to be mobilized. But what is the social work associated with using emotional themes in children’s narrative? In fact, many articles on emotion and narrative construct their own narrative about how researchers view emotions and young children’s storytelling (Dehart, 1993, Paley, 1999). Statements such as “the child works through affective issues,” there is “affective resolution,” there is “regulation of affect,” children “resolve emotions,” and the child is “affectively charged,” locate and imply that emotions are something to be controlled, to be regulated, to be managed, and to be turned on or off and released during the storytelling event. They are internal rather than external, individual rather than social. Narratives from this standpoint uncover hidden desires or resolve unconscious conflicts.

Emotion as it has been associated with storytelling is often viewed from a traditional Western psychological point of view, with emotions being located within the individual (Bamberg & Reilly, 1996). Rarely is emotion looked at as a social construct or as something that is shaped by cultural discourses about the individual, as something that is collectively constructed and negotiated by children in their storytelling events (Lutz, 1988). These two perspectives (traditional psychological approach versus social
constructionist approach) differ and lead to different questions. For example, are emotions “let out” and “processed” (implying that they existed within the individual prior to the event) or are they formed through and by the event (implying that they are constructed as people act and react and related to performance)?

Bamberg and Reilly (1996) suggests that “it is often assumed that narrators relive their past emotional experiences, i.e., that they feel parts or shades of the originally felt emotion, and that these feelings are expressed in the act of performing the narrative….the assumption that there is something natural in the experiences of emotions that is subsequently expressed in speech performance” (p. 330). The term expression, when associated with emotions, lends itself to being viewed as an internal trait which must be released or expressed in the act of storytelling. I am not suggesting that children do not express or release emotions during the storytelling performance, nor I am I claiming that stories do not elicit emotional responses from the audience and narrator. Rather, I am saying that it is important that the term emotion be defined broadly to leave room for possibilities; to leave room for understandings the nature of emotions as they are constructed in the act, rather than determining what they are a priori (Madrid, Grine, Katz, Kim, Miller, & SanGregory, 2005; Madrid, Grine, & SanGregory, 2005). If labeled as only a psychodynamic process, the researcher starts with a definition that locates emotion as something that moves from the internal to the external world (Burr, 2003). In this view, the child already contains the emotion or emotions before the event, which are then expressed. This shifts the focus away from seeing what is constructed through actions and reactions.
By putting aside the term emotional expression we can begin to ask how do cultural discourses about emotion and children’s emotional development shape the emotional themes that are constructed as people act and react to one another. This moves the research question from “traditional psychology’s concern with the nature of phenomena such as memory and emotions into a concern with how these are performed by people. Thus, memory, emotions and other psychological states become things we do rather than things we have” (Burr, 2003, p. 17). When we move away from viewing emotions as being a form of catharsis, of processing unresolved conflicts, and of regulating internal states, and view emotions as socially constructed we can begin to ask research questions about the relational and collective nature of children’s emotional development and the emotional themes associated with children’s narratives.

_Narrative Performance and Emotional Themes_

My definition of narrative as performance is grounded in Bloome and Solsken’s (1992, as cited in Bloome, 2003) notion of the relationship between narrative and storytelling events (as):

A narrative is the text of the story. The text may or may not present the story chronologically…. Narratives do not exist by themselves. They exist only in storytelling events. Storytelling events can involve several people or one individual; they can be formally labeled storytelling events (e.g., show and tell) or embedded in events with other labels. In storytelling events people act and react to each other, while producing the narrative. That is, there are always at least two simultaneous activities in a storytelling event, the telling of a story or stories and the making of the storytelling event itself.

(p. 299)
Narrative from this viewpoint is located in performance and social action. Narrative is actively constructed as people engage with one another. In any narrative event you have the creation of not just the narrative, but also the performance of the event. Any storytelling event involves not only the author, but also the audience. Similarly, narratives do not exist without storytelling events. Storytelling events are social and cultural activities as the process of storytelling follows culturally specific rules.

According to Bauman (1986), the act of storytelling is comprised of three interrelated events: the narrative text, the narrated event, and the narrative event. In Bauman’s ethnography of communication on lying and coon dog trading in Canton Texas, he postulates that oral narratives are best understood when observed in the context of the performance. Oral performance has been traditionally viewed outside of the narrative text. Bauman suggests that oral performance is situated. It is contextual. It is bound by culture and acts of meaning, by action, interpretation, and evaluation. Factors such as participant’s identities, roles, cultural norms, rules, and strategies of performance are salient aspects in understanding the storytelling event. Thus, he argues that oral narratives are best understood when observed in the context of live performances; when they are situated.

Oral narratives must be examined in performances and not simply as a text that is gathered and analyzed at a later point in time. When only the text of the narrative is examined, the social meaning and the complexity of the narrative event is lost as, “the structure of the event itself are all emergent in performance” (Bauman, 1986, p. 4). Thus, by studying the interdependence of narrated events, the narrative event, and the narrative
text, the relationship that takes place between the authors and the audience can be revealed.

Bloome, Katz and Champion’s (2003) study of African American children’s oral and written narratives revealed the complex interaction between narrative text, narrative performance and language ideologies. In their study of young children’s narratives and ideologies of language use in the classroom, they examined the tensions that exist when viewing narrative as text versus narrative as performance. They suggested that schools often promote the concept of narrative as text and overlook narrative as performance. As such, decontextualized ways of using narratives can lead to the marginalization of specific narrative styles. They further suggest that evaluation of the narrative in the classroom may rest on this decontextualized notion of narrative as text. However, in their research they illustrate the importance of language in use and in context. For example, they used a “telling case” to illustrate how Sheila used her story performance to construct a very complex and dynamic interactional event that included not only the “text” but also the performance. For example, during her storytelling performance Sheila often looked over the audience to determine whom to include in her story. When she did include them, they often responded with “oooo” and giggling depending upon the nature of the content. By doing this, Sheila, as a story performer, was building relationships with others as well as capturing their attention by making the story exciting. She also did this by adding in material that had social and cultural significance. For instance, she mentioned her teacher, the researcher, and her mama in her stories. She also included important places such as her home and the dollar store. The research illustrated that when only traditional schooled uses of narrative are examined (i.e., narrative as decontextualized text) that
other important social aspects of the narrative that occur in performance (i.e., building social relationships and identities) are overlooked.

In addition, when only text structure is promoted and supported, the context of the narrative is often ignored. This notion can be illustrated not only in classrooms, but in research on narratives in general. For example, McCabe (1997), along with her colleague Masahiko Minami, examined narrative development in Japanese and American children and their parents. They found that Japanese mothers evaluated and requested descriptive information less than American English speaking mothers when listening to children’s personal narratives. They suggested this difference lead to differing narrative styles for Japanese children as compared to American English speaking children. Based on this assumption, they provided a personal narrative from an 8 year-old Japanese American boy who was telling about receiving three shots and the pain that was associated with it:

As for the first shot
(I) got (it) at Ehime
(It) hurt a lot

As for the second shot
(I) knew (it) would hurt
(It) didn’t hurt so much

The next one didn’t hurt so much either
As for the last shot, you know
(It) didn’t hurt at all

(McCabe, 1997, p. 162)

The narrative above was told in Japanese and then translated by the researcher. They concluded that Japanese children tend to use the same number of lines and “tend to combine similar events that happened at different times and places into the same story”
(McCabe, 1997, p.162). A problem with this study is that by only examining the structure the authors took the narrative out of context. For example, what is the social function of this particular narrative? Why did the boy choose to share this particular narrative? What does it reveal about being a boy or a child in Japan? What does it reveal about the emotional display of pain in Japan? The factors that influence what is included in a story/narrative, and how children position themselves will vary depending on the audience (e.g., peers, parents, or teacher), where the story is being told (e.g., in the classroom, on the playground, or at home), when it is being told (e.g., at bedtime, during dinner, on the playground, or during sharing time) and by whom is it being told (e.g., a teacher, the principal, a parent, a sibling, or a peer)?

When narratives are only looked at for text structure, the social functions, social roles, and social identities embedded in the storytelling event are overlooked (Bloome, Champion, Katz, Morton, & Muldrow, 2001). For instance, McCabe (1997) also suggested that Japanese children tell shorter narratives. But how would this child’s story about pain be different if he was telling it on the playground? What about if he told it to his teacher, to boys or to girls, to his father or his mother? Simply knowing the number of lines used in the narrative or the length does not say much about how it would naturally occur in use. McCabe (1997) did suggest that the shorter length of Japanese children’s narratives could be a due to the socialization by Japanese mothers, which “ensures that their children’s turns do not extend beyond what is seemly appropriate in Japanese culture” (p. 162). The important point of this example is to illustrate that when only narrative structure is examined out of context, much information is lost. However, McCabe’s research did illustrate that narrative structures may vary according to culture.
and thus what is considered a “good” story will vary based on cultural differences, which also applies to the notion of what is considered a good story in the classroom.

The impact on children’s story performance and narrative structure when teachers and students hold different models about what is a good story is displayed in research by Michaels (1981) and Heath (1983). Their research has shown that children come to school equipped with various narrative styles that are linked to their home culture, which may limit or support their access to literacy depending upon whether their home narrative style matches that of the classroom. Sarah Michael’s (1981) research on sharing-time in a first grade classroom showed that children who used narratives styles that differed from the teacher were judged by the teacher as not being able to tell a coherent story. In her study, she found that African American students used a topic-associating narrative style, while Caucasian students used a topic-centered narrative style. She defined a topic centered narrative style as a story that was organized and centered with a clearly identifiable topic and a clear linear progression. In contrast, a topic-associating narrative style did not have a clear single identifiable topic and there was not a linear progression.

With regard to a topic-associating style, Michael’s noted that, “thematic development was typically accomplished through anecdotal rather than linear description” (p. 428). However, what her research illustrated is that topic-associating narrative styles were coherent and organized; they simply were not organized in a manner that was consistent with the dominant school discourse or the discourse style of the teacher. As such, the teacher often cut children off when they used a topic-associating narrative styles. Conversely, children who used a discourse style that matched the teacher’s narrative style were given more support and encouragement by the teacher. In fact, the teacher often
collaborated with the child in constructing the story when they held the same narrative style. The important point here is that Michaels’ research illustrates how children who use narrative discourse styles that differ from the dominant culture often struggle, not because they cannot construct or perform a “good story”, but rather because their narrative style is often viewed as inadequate because it is different.

While Michaels’ (1981) research was valuable in helping educators to understand how children with various narrative styles are marginalized in the classroom, her findings should not be generalized to all African American children, as her sample was limited to one first grade classroom. Nor should her results be taken to suggest that all Caucasian children tell topic-centered stories and all African American children tell topic associating stories, as more recent research on African American preschool children’s narratives has shown that African American children develop a repertoire of narrative styles (Champion, 2003). One of the ways identified by Champion (2003) was leapfrogging. Leapfrogging is a narrative style in which children do not follow a linear structure of one event, but rather move from one event to the other. She also found that African American children’s narratives are performance and moral centered. However, as with Michaels’ (1981) and Heath’s (1983) study, Champion notes that children often encounter difficulties when their way of telling stories in the home culture differs from the school culture. The main problem is that storytelling styles that are different from the mainstream culture are not valued and children who use alternative styles may be viewed as having a deficit. Thus, educators and researchers need to be aware that there is not one way to tell a story and that ways of telling stories vary based on what is valued both in the home and school culture.
Given that narratives are located and shaped by social and cultural processes, children’s use of specific narratives can become a site of struggle and resistance in the classroom when teachers and students hold differing norms (Dyson, 1994). Research has found that children are often taught to alter their narrative styles as well as edit the content of their narratives to match the narrative style associated with schooling, especially when a child’s narrative style contains actions and emotions centered on violence and aggression. (Kendrick & McKay, 2002; Dyson, 1994). Aggression and violence in young children’s written and oral narratives are often seen as “taboo” topics as they make the teacher uncomfortable and concerned about the students’ well being (Schneider, 2001).

One reason for this is that the use of physical violence in narratives is often seen to be associated with antisocial behavior and susceptibility to aggressive actions (Newkirck, 2000). Violence in children’s writings and drawings has been shown to be a part of a separate world in which children create their own space to explore literacy, even when the teacher has explicitly stated rules about non-violence. It often appears that the ban of violence in children’s written and oral stories often, ironically, actually supports and encourages the opposition that children display. For example, Dyson (1994) found that children negotiate the boundaries between the official world of the teacher and the unofficial world of children. In this space, children often used literacy practices to “express themselves” even when they understood the teacher’s objection to the use of violence in their writings. For example, in preparing to share writing with the class, one boy (William) suggested that he would write, ‘I love to get in fights”. Another girl in the class asked him to consider who would be his audience (i.e., teacher, parents, etc).
William stated back, “That’s too bad they don’t like it. I’m gonna express myself” (Dyson, 1994, p. 155). Dyson suggests that William was negotiating two worlds: the peer world and the classroom world. In the end however, she showed how William was able to bridge the official classroom world with the unofficial peer world. She concluded that powerful stories are created when, “they bridge feelings, and experiences, and language from the unofficial classroom world of peers and neighborhoods into the official classroom community” (p. 157).

While research has shown teachers’ resistance to narratives that center on guns, blood, and physical violence, children (especially boys) have been found to continue to construct oral and written narratives that center on aggression (Kendrick & McKay, 2002; Nicolopoulou, Scales, & Weintraub, 1994). For example, Nicolopoulou, Scale and Weintraub (1994) suggest that there are gender differences in girls’ versus boys’ narrative styles. Their research centered on stories that were told and then acted out by four-year-olds in a preschool classroom. Using an interpretive analysis which focused on the symbolic meaning of the story rather than linguistic structure, they found that boys’ stories tended to center on a strain toward disorder, while girls’ stories tended to focus on a strain toward order. They found that girls’ stories often centered around social and family relationships that have stable settings and stable relationships, while boys’ stories are centered on movement and destruction. They center on violence, aggression, and powerful characters. Boys’ stories are “chaotic” and often have with no resolution. Many of the images used in the stories were drawn from popular culture and the images differed based on gender. Girls’ stories tended to center on princesses and fairy tale characters,
while boys tended to center on action heroes. Through the use of popular culture, boys and girls form identities and build social relationships with one another (Dyson, 1994).

In a study on emotional themes and aggression, Madrid, Grine, Katz, Kim, Miller, and SanGregory (2005) found that both boys and girls construct story performances that center on violence and aggression. Aggression was used as a tool to elicit interactive participation from peers as was illustrated from laughing and positive feedback, which in turn prompted even more aggression in the children’s stories. Exchanges between the storyteller and the audience were a common occurrence in stories that contained physical aggression, even when the aggression was directed at members of the classroom. In fact, children often tried to squeeze as many classmates into their stories as possible. Thus, they found that aggressive narratives received a great deal of feedback from peers and that aggressive acts in the stories were used as a performance tool to capture the audience’s attention, to engage them, and bring them into the story.

Aggressive themes were used to get the audience involved in the story performance. With this tool, both males and females learned how to be identified as good storytellers. The following transcript by a female student, Tania, describes how children were labeled as good storytellers by their peers when the story characters used aggressive actions:

Tania: And then she had to decorate her Christmas tree, but she was dead and her father was so angry at her and her father decided to step on her and then her father shot her again.
Unidentified Child: Aw, that ain’t nice.
Tania: and stepped his foot on her face and then there was blood coming through her eyes.
Unidentified Child: Ugh. Tania is good sayin’ stories.
(Madrid et al., 2005, p. 12)
What is interesting about these findings is that the function and purpose of storytelling within peer culture versus the classroom culture varied based on the emotional themes. The teacher’s purpose was to promote, resolve and help redirect children’s aggression through the use of happy story endings (McClain & Tarkington, 2000), while the children used an emotional theme as an opportunity to be positioned as a good story performer within their peer culture.

This notion was also found in Dyson’s (1994) work, as William’s purpose seemed more to entertain and push the boundaries of the classroom culture than to please the teacher. Within children’s peer culture, the function and use of specific emotional themes can often vary for the child versus the teacher and can become a site of tension and social control in regard to the emotions that are at the center of the story. Madrid et al. (2005) also found that the emotional theme of aggression was contested by the teachers. As a result, teachers began to forefront the need for the children to have “happy endings”. However, despite the repetitive prompts (implicit and explicit) given by teachers to tell a happy ending, children continued, to the pleasure of the other students, to insert aggressive content into their stories. The issue, however, was not whether the children accepted or rejected the teachers’ need for a happy ending, but rather how children and teachers used the stories to negotiate narratives about how, when, where and by whom specific emotional themes could be told. It is important to note that this research was not advocating the use of aggressive themes by children in storytelling events. The research was also not meant to give a generalized account of African American children’s emotional themes. What the findings do suggest is that the use of aggression can serve
various functions and purposes and children may have different situated purposes within their peer culture for the particular uses of specific emotional themes.

*Emotional Themes, Race, Gender and Heteronormativity*

Pam Gilbert’s (1994) work supports the notion that emotions and narratives serve various functions and purposes. She posits that, “We learn to ‘be’ women or men, girls or boys, mothers or fathers, wives or husbands, sisters or brother, aunts or uncles, grandmas or grandpas partly in response to the stories that we hear and participate in” (p. 131). People also learn how to “feel” as women or men, boy or girls, wives or husbands through participating in collective stories about emotion. In stories, gendered concepts of emotion are constructed and revealed. However, not only are gendered conceptions constructed, but also radicalized and heteronormative are uncovered and revealed. When people learn how to do race and sexuality, they also learn the emotional themes that come with them. People are taught how to love as African American heterosexual female, to feel sadness as a homosexual middle class female, or to feel shame as a straight Muslim male.

Emotions are socialized at a young age and they guide who, when, where, and under what circumstance we should perform a particular emotion as a male, female, heterosexual, homosexual, African American, White, Chinese, and Muslim. In western society, women are often positioned as emotional, nurturing, and caring. Conceptions of emotion often determine how one displays emotions based on race, sexuality, and gender. This notion is illustrated in the following example taken from am 8 year old girl:
One day there was a little girl called Kathleen. She found a gold pot. It was a useful pot. She rubbed it. A genie came out of it. The genie said you have three wishes.

“I wish I had the prettiest dress in the whole world”
“But now it’s your second wish”
“I wish I had long blonde hair”
“I wish I was a princess in a castle”

Then she got her three wishes. Then she was happy. In the castle the next day she got married with a handsome prince and they lived happily ever after.

THE END.

(Gilbert, 1994, p. 124)

This narrative illustrates the representation of happiness for young girls. The cultural storyline is one that suggests to young girls what it means to achieve and obtain happiness; the long sought after and well-formulated happily-ever-after. What is most interesting about this particular story is that happiness is embedded with concepts of race, class, and gender. It begins with finding a gold pot; money being the road to the wishes which lead to her happiness. It also suggests a type of dependency upon another to be granted this happiness (a male in relation to a female). The girl in her search for happiness does not do this on her own, but rather is granted happiness from a genie that gives her the cultural tools needed to make her desirable. The cultural tools are the prettiest dress in the whole world, long blonde hair, and a princess in a castle.

What is striking in the narrative (besides racial identity being linked with blonde hair) is that the princess does not own, build, destroy, or live in the castle. Rather the princess is contained in the castle. Then she gets her three wishes and she is happy; her emotional state of happiness being a result of her beautiful dress, long blonde hair, and being in the castle. The story ends with the princess marrying the prince and they live happily ever after. Of course this storyline is not new and neither is my analysis of it.
However, what is not always recognized is how emotions and the concept of happiness are transmitted in and through cultural storylines such as these.

Not all girls, however, accept these gendered concepts of emotion in their narratives, and this is where the power of children’s agency is seen as they actively contest and construct their own emotional storylines (Corsaro, 1997). Children are not passive agents to whom culture is simply transmitted, but rather children actively create and recreate their own social, cultural and emotional worlds. They are active participants in the creation and maintenance of culture. Childhood is not just a stage or preparation for adult life, but rather it is life within itself. Corsaro (1997) argues that children, “do not simply imitate or take-up the worlds around them. They strive to interpret and make sense of their culture and to participate in it” (p. 24). From this viewpoint children are not blank slates that passively gather information about emotions, but rather they actively engage and act on their world to create their peer culture, which includes conceptions about gender and emotions:

Holly: You’re not supposed to slap girls; cause girls are not that strong, like boys.
Tina:   HUH! The yellow girls are. Like you. You just don’t know. You can use your strength. But you just don’t know you can. I used it before. *(Tina is African American; Holly is mixed race-African American and European American—yellow is Tina’s terms.)*
Holly: I can beat up Aloyse. You saw me beat up Aloyse—You saw me slap Aloyse twice.
Tina:   You saw me beat up that boy up. Right here. *(Tina points to the upper part of her arm, bent at the elbow)*
That’s your strength. Right there….
Holly: I know. I slapped Lawrence.
Tina:   I slapped him and punched him. *(Tina acts out her swift moves)*
Tina:   You must really like him. If you punch him and slap him, that means you like him.
Holly: I hate him *(distressed)*. I was just joking.

(Dyson, 1997, pp 11-12)

In this example taken from Dyson (1997), the two girls are contesting and co-constructing gender, emotion and racial identities. Holly begins with the assumption that girls are not strong, which is contested with a comment from Tina who states that girls are strong, *even yellow girls*. What is also interesting here is that Tina locates and defines where a girl’s strength lies (in her arms). This strength is something located within the body. It is something that girls have not been told about. The point being important enough for her to states it twice, “you just don’t know you can”. The next line illustrates how the narratives are not static, but are co-constructed as Holly accepts the notion and builds on Tina’s concept that she does have strength, and responds back with her own account of how she also beat up a boy.

In the next line Tina continues to illustrate with actions the strength in her arm and how girls too can be aggressive. Up until this point in the story, I would suggest that the girls are contesting gendered identities about power, strength, and aggression. They are showing that girls are not passive and do indeed carry a strength that they just don’t know about. However, the last two lines bring the story back to conceptions of love and hate as Tina suggests that Holly must really like the boy if she hits him. Tina reacts to this action with a sign of distress by saying that she hates him. In this story, being aggressive towards a boy is a sign of love, of romantically liking a boy. In contrast to the fairytale of the prince and the castle described above, this story’s love is associated not with long blond hair, money, and a prince, but with aggression and strength. There is a tension here that contests their gendered identities and conceptions of male/female
relationships. The exchange between the two girls illustrates how notions of gender, race and emotions (i.e., love and hate), are contested and constructed in children’s story actions (i.e., if you hit a boy you like him) as they try to define what love is and what actions as associated with it.

Dyson (1997) also suggests that these roles are located in popular culture and media’s notion of love and romance. That is, young girls begin to understand who they are and how they can love and be loved. What is loveable and who is loveable? What is also important about this excerpt is that is constructed by two African American girls who were trying to understand who they are as “romantic” partners in a culture that values the White blond female as the prototypical “love” object (hooks, 1995) as well as a culture that bases romantic love on heterosexual norms. Here the issue then becomes more complicated as young girls must not only determine what love is, but what does love represent for African American women and how is this related to issues of representation of African American females in the media and popular culture (hooks, 1995). Indeed, Dyson (1997) suggests that the story was “open to interpretation and reinterpretation as the two children struggled with their own desires to be seen by each other as both tough and female, desires complicated by ideologies of gender strength, love…” (p. 12). In this example, we see how stories and cultural storylines shape and transmit conceptions of emotion.

Not only do children learn about emotional themes through the storylines discussed above, but also through various discourses that children read and interpret the world in the process of becoming a person as “discourses provide us with the frameworks though which we make since of our social world” (Mac Naughton, 2000, p. 119).
Whether alone or with another; the stories we construct about our emotional lives are embedded in and reflect the discourses of our society and what it means to be a mother, father, child, lover, sister, brother, friend, and a colleague. Rules for display of emotion are embedded in conceptions of social identities (race, class, sexual orientation) and what it means to be male versus female.

Emotion plays a role in doing gender to two pivotal ways. First, beliefs about emotion reveal the distinctive “how” of being a gendered person; doing emotion – expressing emotional feeling and emotional values – signals one’s genuineness as female or male, feminine or masculine. For example, because emotionally expressive behavior is gender coded, an important component of the child’s gender practices (i.e., enacting a gendered identity) involve practicing emotion—its expression, values, interests – as befits gender. Doing gender through doing emotion encompasses not only emotional display, of course, but also emotional values (e.g., real girls value emotional self-disclosure) and beliefs about emotional experience (e.g., anger is appropriate only when one rights are violated).

(Shields, 2002, p. 55)

What is important about this statement is that it illustrates that emotions with regard to doing gender are related not only to displaying rules, but also are woven into how men and women construct social identities and the values associated with them. In addition, it is through the “taking up” of various discourses that children also learn how to be emotional beings. As emotional beings we “are spoken into existence” through the collective storylines about what it means to express and display emotions (Davies, 2001). Taking up of social identities and the emotional discourses that come with them is not a passive act, but rather is an active event in which we appropriate emotional discourses and the subject positioning associated with such storylines. For example, in the early
childhood classroom, girls act out being mothers and caring for babies in the dramatic play area. They wear high heels, bridal gowns, and “fall in love” with the prince in the dress up area. As such, it is both the macro level discourses (i.e., social, political, and ideological) as well as the micro level discourses (i.e., moment-to-moment actions) that discursively constitute ways of feeling, being, and doing.

It is impossible to separate gender, race and emotions. When we learn how to do gender, social class, race we are also learning how to do the emotions and emotional themes related to our social identities. How we learn to love as a mother, wife, or sister, is different that how we learn to love as a father, husband, or brother. What does feminine versus masculine love look and feel like? What does love look like for an unwed mother versus middle class women? What does love represent for an African American woman versus a White woman? How are they performed differently? How do we know the difference? Embedded in any emotion (e.g., love) is the performance of love itself, as well as the emotional theme of love that is being reenacted (i.e., the narrative of when, where, how and to whom we can love).

Summary

Although this review of research provides an initial investigation into how specific emotional themes are negotiated, constructed, and contested in narratives events, critical questions still need to be investigated from a research perspective that views both emotion and narratives as socially constructed. A majority of research on young children’s emotions have been conducted using experimental or quasi-experimental methods in which children are shown a wordless storybook and asked to identify the
emotions of story characters (Allen & Bradley, 2000; Bamberg & Rilley, 1996), or they have been viewed through a lens which positions play narratives as socially and culturally constructed, but emotion as something that is not (Nicolopoulou, 1997). There are two problems with such studies; one is that they do not uncover the nature of children’s social construction of emotional themes and narratives. Another problem is that it does not allow for the examination of the construction of emotional themes as they appropriated in children’s peer culture life. As Kantor and Fernie (2003) and Corsaro’s (1997; 2003) ethnographic research have shown, children place a great amount of significance and time on maintaining and creating a peer culture within the classroom. Peer cultures contain their own set of rules, norms, and values about how, when, where, and under what circumstances things can be done and said. Peers are an important part of learning how to negotiate the social world of the classroom (Elgas, 2003; Fernie, Davies, Kantor, & McMurray, 1993; Scott, 2003). Thus, dissertation addresses an area of unexplored research with regard the social construction of both emotion and narrative, as constructed within children’s peer culture in the daily life of the classroom.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to uncover how children construct emotional themes in play narratives over time and across situations in the daily life of one preschool classroom. The study addresses the following questions:

- What types of play narratives are constructed and used over time and across situations within the daily life of the classroom by the children (how, when, where, by whom, and for what purpose)?
- How do emotional themes vary over time and across situations within the different types of play narratives that are told by the children (how, when, where, by whom, and for what purpose)?
- How are emotional themes constructed and used for specific social functions in children’s play worlds (e.g., to create relationships, negotiate power, and construct social identities)?
This dissertation adopts a social constructionist view of emotions, which places an emphasis on “doing” rather than “having”. Emotions, and ways of being, are social performances that are embedded in and shaped by social and cultural processes (Burr, 2003; Harré, 1986). An ethnographic approach is used to address the research questions that guide this study. The term “approach” rather than “design” is used to forefront the dynamic, recursive, and responsive nature of the research undertaken in the study (Schwandt, 2000). In this chapter, I have organized my methodology according to the following sections: research approach, reflexivity, participants, description of the school setting, timeline, ethics, role of the researcher, selection of targeted children, corpus of data, discourse analysis and positioning theory, definition and selection of anchor play narratives, and selection of events.
Research Approach

This study is grounded in a social constructionist theoretical framework, which rests on the assumption that there is not a single objective “reality” that can be tested and measured, since all knowledge is constructed “through our collaborative activities” (Gergen & Gergen, 2004, p. 7). The methodological grounding, built on the notion that science and research are but yet another form of discourse that is socially constructed (Burr, 2003; Gergen, 1989), is used to support the theoretical framework of this study. One of the major assumptions of social constructionist framework is the notion that ways of being are “spoken into existence” through macro and micro level discourses. A social constructionist paradigm applies this notion not only to the construction of psychological processes (i.e., self, mind, and emotions) but also to the research process itself. The research process is not viewed as static and linear, in which the researcher takes an objective stance towards the those subjects, but rather the research process is viewed as being actively constructed, through language and discourse, as the researcher and participants engage collaboratively in constructing meaning around the study (Gergen & Gergen, 2004). Meaning is fluid, dynamic, messy and never stable (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

Data were not simply gathered and analyzed in linear fashion, but were continually interpreted and re-interpreted through a recycling of questions and answers, both informing the other (Kantor & Fernie, 2003; Spradley, 1980). There was a back and forth movement from a general broad perspective to a focused deeper approach. This allowed for continual reflection about data gathering techniques and interpretation of the data as they were situated in the daily life of the classroom. Multiple sources of data
(e.g., field notes, audio taping, videotaping, video-revisiting and interviews) were gathered, which allowed for the examination of multiple layers and multiple contexts of the classroom (both macro and micro), which was needed to get an “insiders view” or emic perspective. When studying children, and to learn about how they construct their peer culture, the researcher should “shed our adult point of view and get inside the children’s worlds” (Corsaro, 2003, p. 5). Thus, multiple sources of data were gathered as a way to triangulate the data, build trustworthiness, and support the “co-production” of the study among the researcher, children, and teachers (Burr, 2003).

To build relationships and acknowledge the co-production of the research process, participant observation and prolonged engagement were used to ensure continual reflection and collaboration with teachers and children in the daily life of the classroom. When discussing engagement in the research process and the social construction of meaning, Kantor and Fernie (2003) suggest that:

Ethnography as a methodology provides ways of revealing a group’s patterned life and the process through which such life is socially constructed by its participants. In order to do so, researchers must spend prolonged time within a setting of interest. This overtime involvement is necessary in order to become a relatively unobtrusive and unintrusive part of the setting, to gain access to the “emic” perspectives or insider perspective of the participants, and to make since of the complex and dynamic nature of life in such settings. (p. 8).

Prolonged engagement was used to build relationships with teachers and children so that a deeper understanding of the classroom life could be uncovered together, acknowledging the relational aspect of the research process (Gergen, 1999). Findings presented in this study are seen as just one out of the many constructions that could have been captured in
this classroom. It is one view of classroom life as seen through the lens of the researchers, teachers, and children.

It is important to acknowledge that I was an adult in the classroom, which added a new dimension to the interaction and behavior of both the children and the teachers. The goal was not to be accepted by the children as a childlike adult or a teacher, but rather to be accepted as a researcher who was interested in children’s narrative and emotional themes (Corsaro, 1997). That is, the role of the “knower” was not taken, but rather I positioned myself as being curious about children’s life in the classroom. Teacher-like behaviors (i.e., discipline and care giving) toward children were avoided (Corsaro, 1997). When asked to take on a teacher or care-giver role, children were redirected and told to ask a teacher for help. Over time, my role became well-defined as a person who was there to play and listen to the children. This role was taken to distinguish myself from the teachers as well as to open up a space to enter into children’s peer culture.

Reflexivity and trustworthiness

According to Peshkin (1988), researchers should systematically seek out their own subjectivity since subjectivity is unavoidable. Researcher subjectivity needs to be considered not only after data has been collected, but throughout the entire research process. Peshkin (1988) notes that he studied his own subjectivity by being aware of his feelings or what he calls “hot” and “cold” spots. Hot and cold spots alert the researcher to emotions when engaged in fieldwork. Given that my study was based on examining and reconceptualizing emotions, reflexivity was a useful and necessary tool for my study, as it alerted me to the judgments that I was making based on my own assumptions about
emotions as a 37 year old White middle-class female with roots to Hawaii and Southern California. Naming one self in relation to gender, social class, and race is important as it affects my own subject positioning within the classroom culture (Harding, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1994). My White female middle class status is not neutral. This will become especially salient in data collection and analysis, as gender, race, and social class emerged as central themes within the study.

Being aware of my social positioning allowed for the exploration of biases and preconceived notions about how my interpretations and interactions with teachers and children were bound to my past history, gender, social class, and race. To address such issues, interpretation of data were discussed in multiple research venues. Dillard (2006) suggests:

…qualitative research arises from a deep, sometimes even intimate relationship between human beings and within human being themselves. The researcher can not actually engage in the research by studying or reading alone. He/she must experience the research, the searching again, in the company of others. (p. 102)

The searching again in the company of others was an important aspect being reflexive in the research process. Each time I examined the data, alone or with others, I tried to view it from a fresh perspective. Try on a new framework, throw out an old one, and do the process all over again. I revisited the data over and over again.

Interpretations of the data were also conducted in collaboration with teachers through daily conversations and interviews. In turn, the teachers provided continual feedback about the interpretations of the children’s daily activities. Teachers were also given written drafts of the findings and analysis as a form of member checking to ensure
accurate representations were made. Video-revisiting was another method to build
trustworthiness, as children were asked to comment on their video-taped play narratives.

Consultation and collaboration happened not only with teachers and children, but
also with my colleagues. Meetings with my advisor were held as a way to reflect on my
own theoretical assumptions and research practices. Consultation with my advisor was
used to examine not only how interpretations, writings and findings would be interpreted
in the classroom, but also how the larger research community would interpret them,
acknowledging issues with regard to representation of participants.

Reflexivity and trustworthiness are vital aspects of a social constructionist
perspective as it foregrounds the power relations between the researcher and the
researched, which pushes the researcher to continually reflect on assumptions, beliefs,
and values during the research process. Burr (2003) suggests that the researcher “may
wish to find a way of building into their research opportunities for participants to
comment upon their own accounts and those of the researcher” (p. 156). This issue was
addressed though being a participant observer, the use of video revisiting with children,
and formal and informal conversations with teachers. These conversations were used as a
research tool for teachers and children to comment upon their accounts and promote
trustworthiness with regard to interpretation of the data.

Participants
One preschool classroom, consisting of 20 (11 female & 9 male) children at a
University Lab School and two White female teachers participated in the study from May
27, 2006 to December 15, 2006. Children who attend the school ranged from 3 to 5 years
of age and came from diverse backgrounds (i.e., White, Chinese, Asian American, African American, South American, & Saudi Arabian). This site was selected because of the structure and philosophy of the school. The school views children as active agents who are always constructing and negotiating knowledge with others. The teachers encourage children to make their own choices about what activities to engage in throughout the day. The school structure allowed for ample peer interaction as well as unstructured time in which anchor play narratives could be documented, which I anticipated would provide opportunities for gathering data on the nature of emotional themes in children’s play.

The School Setting

The study was conducted in the Waterfield Laboratory School that is located at a large Midwestern University. Figure 3.1 illustrates the layout of the classroom.
Figure 3.1 School Layout
To illustrate the school philosophy, overall goals, and daily schedule, the next section is taken from the school web site. The choice to use this artifact is based on notion of representing data from an insider’s perspective. Thus, rather than use my own words to describe their school, I have chosen to use the following document to make the school philosophy, goals and daily structure visible from their perspective.

Purpose Statement

The Waterfield School for Child and Family Studies has served the University and Lakeside community since 1923. The program is a setting where University students learn strategies to promote cognitive, physical, social and emotional development for young children. The setting is also a site for observation and research in human growth and adaptation. The goal is to offer an exemplary program for your children and their families through which students can learn about human development and the educational process.

Philosophy

Each child is unique. All children bring their own patterns of growth, abilities, life experiences, and values to the learning environment. We begin with a respect for each child's rights. These rights include active exploration of the world around them, security, warmth, autonomy, a positive self-concept, self-expression, peer relationships and acceptance. At the same time, we strive to help each child expand beyond his or her
current state to become a more fully developed person. We seek to create the richness and diversity of experience that will take the children along new paths, deepen their understanding and their skills, and give added complexity to the talents and personal qualities they bring to us. Our philosophy is soundly based in child development and educational theory including the work of Piaget, Vygotsky, Erickson, Dewey, and Reggio Emilia, Italy.

Facilities

The Waterfield Laboratory for Child and Family Studies is located on the Lakeside University Campus. It includes:

- a large, fenced play yard
- kitchen for snack preparation
- a wide variety of indoor and outdoor play equipment
- two large indoor play spaces observation and research areas

Calendar

The Waterfield Laboratory School is in session fifty-two weeks of the year, Monday through Friday (except for University holidays and several other days during the year for staff professional development). The Lab is open from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Goals of Program

We have four major goals for each child in our program:
1. to become independent and self-motivated,
2. to be a creative thinker and problem-solver,
3. to be able to accept and express himself as an individual, and
4. to function successfully in a group of peers.

In order to achieve these goals, we provide a program which focuses on the development of the whole child: physical development, social-emotional development, and cognitive-creative development. Our program is set up on the basis of the following principles:

1. All kinds of experiences should be made available to children, not just those considered "academic." Activities which enhance physical, social, emotional, and creative development must be included.
2. Young children learn by using all their senses to explore materials.
3. Consistency in the daily schedule helps children to feel secure about their experience at school.
4. Children who are pressured to perform beyond their ability feel frustrated and incompetent. Children who are encouraged to participate through a relaxed and non-evaluative atmosphere will gradually develop skills in each developmental area.
5. Children need to be with other children. Social involvement allows them to become accepting of themselves and others; provides them with opportunities to develop speaking and listening skills; and encourages appropriate social skills and social problem-solving behavior.
6. Children need to be self-motivated and self-directed. We achieve these goals by providing children with choices, by carefully explaining rules, and by helping children to understand and accept the responsibility for their own actions without evaluating these actions as "good" or "bad."

7. Teachers provide a warm, secure, and supportive learning environment for parents and children. High quality care is directly related to the educational training and professionalism of teachers. They must be caring individuals and who are knowledgeable about and responsive to the needs of families and children.

8. The bond between home and school is inseparable. Teachers and parents must work together with children to provide the best learning and growth experience possible.

**Daily Activities**

Children typically experience the following kinds of activities during the school day:

**Free Play:** During this time children select activities from the variety of resources in the room including make-believe, blocks, small building materials, art, books, music, large muscle activities, sand, and carpentry.

**Small Group Time:** Children spend time actively exploring materials and experiencing small group processes and interactions.

**Large Group Time:** Children all meet together with the teacher to sing, exchange ideas,
or hear about community news/plans for the week.

Outdoor Time: A time to play together outside using large muscle equipment.

Lunch Time: Children sit together at small tables. This is a time to develop social skills as well as to enjoy companionship.

**Timeline**

Formal entry into the site began March 27, 2006. The first five weeks of data collection focused on simply becoming a member of the classroom community. During this time, a broad lens was taken to situate local meanings around emotional themes and play narratives. It was also used to allow the children to discover and discern my role in the classroom and to provide me access into the children’s peer culture. Discussion around entry into children’s peer culture will be further examined in Chapter 4.

Videotaping begin on April 27, 2006. From April 27, 2006 to June 19, 2006 videotaping of various play narratives across that day was conducted. It was not until after entering the children’s peer culture, documenting children’s play narratives in field notes, holding informal and formal conversations with the teachers, that a focused micro
level observation of specific target children and one “anchor play narrative” that centered on children being kitties began. This focused micro level phase was conducted from June 19, 2006 until the August 8, 2006. The term “anchor play narrative” will be defined later in this chapter.

For the month of August, the lens was widened once more to get a broad view of the classroom. Then, after reentering the children’s peer culture, documenting children’s play narratives in field notes, daily informal conversations with the teachers, and a formal interview with the teachers, that a second focused micro level observation of specific target children and one ‘anchor play narrative’ that centered on being boyfriend/girlfriend begun. This second micro level phase was conducted from September 9, 2006 until November 20, 2006. The lens was widened once more as data collection ended December 15, 2006. Three formal interviews were held with the teachers over the course of the study. An interview was also conducted with the program coordinator. Below is a timeline of data collection and type of data gathered.

➢ March 27, 2006 to April 27, 2006: Entering Classroom Community
  o Distribution of consent forms
  o Participant observation
  o Field notes
  o Informal conversations with teachers
  o Visited classroom 2-3 times per week from approximately 3 to 4 hours per day.
April 27, 2006 to June, 8 2006: Focus Narrows

- Participant observation
- Videotaping
- Field notes
- Informal conversation with teachers
- Formal interviews with teachers
- Visited classroom 2-3 time per week for 3 to 4 hours per day

June 19, 2006 to August 8, 2006: Focused Observation: Kitty Anchor Play

Narrative

- Participant observation
- Field notes
- Video-revisiting.
- Daily conversations with teachers
- Focused videotaping 2-3 times per week for ½ to 1/12 hour per day (in classroom from 3-4 hours per day).

August 2006: Broad Focus

- Participant observation
- Field notes
- Informal conversation with teachers
- Formal Interview with teachers
o Visited classroom 2-3 times per week from approximately 3 to 4 hours per day

➤ September 9, 2006 to November 20, 2006: Narrow Focus: Boyfriend and Girlfriend Anchor Play Narrative

o Participant observation

o Field notes

o Video-revisiting.

o Formal interview with teacher

o Focused videotaping 2-3 times per week for ½ to 1/12 hour per day (in classroom from 3-4 hours per day)

➤ November 7, 2006 to December 15, 2006: Broad Focus

o Participant observation

o Field notes

o Informal conversation with teachers

o Visited classroom 2-3 times per week from approximately 3 to 4 hours per day

➤ January 2007 to June 2007: Data Analysis and Interpretation

o Informal and formal conversations with teachers

o Research presentation with teachers
Ethics

Children were recruited though a letter to the parents and kept on file by the researcher. No incentives, inducements, or reimbursements were given for participation. Children were also included in a classroom meeting (during circle time), where I explained the nature of my research and answered any questions raised by the children. Parents were informed about the purposes of the study and invited to attend the meeting. I also introduced myself to the parents as they picked up and dropped off children.

With regard to audio and videotaping, children were always informed when the audio and videotape recorder were on and given the choice not to be audio and/or video taped on any given day without negative consequences. With regard to video revisiting, children were encouraged to participate, but were told that they could leave at any time. Throughout the study children were eager and willing to participate and often asked when they could watch the video of themselves. Children also took an interest in the digital video camera and often asked to see the tape and what the classroom looked like through the camera. They especially took an interest in seeing what they looked like on the videotape.

Selection of Targeted Children

The choice to focus on female play narratives was based on the following: 1) the self segregation of male and females in the classroom, 2) the gendered patterns in the anchor play narratives that emerged and 3) the invitation by the females to have the researcher participate in their group. Males were not excluded from analyses, observations, or videotaping. Rather, the females were the ones who invited the
researcher into their peer culture, which was an important aspect of why female children were studied.

It is important to note that the researcher did not engage with male children in the same degree as she did with females. This was due to the emergent nature of the study and female children’s encouragement that permitted the researcher to enter into their “female peer culture”. For example, during the initial stages of the study, one of the teachers suggested that the girls saw me as their Jasmine. Jasmine was a researcher who had done a year long ethnographic study of superhero play. It was noted by the teachers that Jasmine often assumed the role of Lava Girl in the male superhero play. The teacher believed that the girls invited me into their peer culture because they felt it was their turn to have someone study them. On the same day as the conversation with the teacher about my role, one of the boys in the classroom called me a teacher. Ann told him that I was not a teacher and further stated to him, “She is ours. She listens to our stories”. Moreover, a student teacher had just completed a project in which she made a game with several males that centered on superheroes and the girls asked if they could also have a group that centered on their kitty play, which would be a girls only event. Taking all of this into consideration, the focus on females over time and across situations was mutually negotiated by the children, teachers and researcher and related to past gendered events within the classroom. The choice to focus on female children came about as a result of the actions and reactions of the children when the researcher entered into the classroom. I would also suggest that my own gender shaped this choice and how the female children responded towards me as a female researcher in the classroom.
Role of Researcher

Formal participation as a member of the classroom community began during the Spring Quarter of 2006. During circle time, I was introduced to the children as a researcher who was interested in their stories. The teacher told them that I was a friend of Jasmine who, as noted above, was a doctoral student that had just completed a yearlong ethnographic study on children’s superhero play. Several of the boys approached me and asked if I was really a friend of Jasmine. They were somewhat perplexed and appeared to find it hard to believe that I was her friend. They made inquiries like “Are you sure you are her friend? She would play the Sponge Bob game with us?” I did not engage in superhero play with the male students, but instead kept my distance and simply observed. Rather then being a replica of Jasmine, I wanted to find my own space within the children’s peer culture. I waited until I was invited in to play with the children to ensure that I was not exerting too much influence on the children. During this initial entry period, children already had a prior knowledge of what a participant observer did in the classroom. In fact, because of their positive experience with Jasmine, the children seemed to already understand and accept my role as a researcher in the classroom. However, this did not grant me instant access within their peer culture.

At times some of the children would call me a teacher, but other children would remind those who forgot that I was instead a student researcher. In one instance, Laura, a female child who was not in a key player in the kitty group, but who understood my role, tried to have a younger child (who was not familiar with my role) tattle to me rather than to a teacher. I was standing nearby as Amber and Laura fought over who would be the princess. Laura told Amber she was ugly. Amber cried. Amber, who was visibly upset,
told Laura, “I am going to tell a teacher.” Laura looked at me and then quickly back at Amber, “No tell this teacher.” I looked at Laura and she looked back at me with a glance that said, “Please don’t tell you’re not a teacher.” Amber left the area and Laura followed with no teacher being called. The point here is to illustrate that children understood that I did not discipline or interfere in their disputes and I did not take on any teacher-like behavior. However, there were a few instances when I did intervene long enough to make sure that a child was not hurt physically. For example, during one fight between Sally and Laura, Laura insisted that it was her right to poke Sally in her eye because Sally had accidentally poked her. I stepped in and said that they would need to take this disagreement to the teacher and that it was very dangerous to poke another person in the eye.

Selection of Tracer Unit

One White 4-year-old female was selected to act as “a tracer unit” over the 8 months (Kantor & Fernie, 2003). Using a tracer unit is an analytical tool that allows the researcher to follow children’s movement through the system of the classroom. It is used to illuminate context over time and across situations. The target child, who will be known as Sally, acted as a common thread throughout the study and was part of the two anchor play narratives presented in the analyses. The choice to use Sally as a tracer unit was based on her affiliation with the females in first anchor play narrative and her invitation to the researcher to participate in this group. The decision to use her as a tracer unit unfolded as I realized that she would be the only member of the first anchor narrative that would remain in the classroom after the first four months. This change occurred because
the four other females in the group left for kindergarten, which left Sally as the oldest and one of the strongest female’s players in the classroom. Thus, following Sally through classroom events allowed for coherence and grounding over time and across events.

Corpus of Data

Video Taping

Given that the current study employs a microethnographic approach to language use in children’s play narratives, videotaping of children’s play narratives was at the center of data collection. Videotaping lasted approximately a half hour to 1 hour per day, two to three times per week from April 27, 2006 until November 27, 2006, for a total of 88 hours of videotape (See Table 3.1). Video-taped events were described and documented in the field notes, highlighting important accounts that occurred.

Children’s anchor play narrative events occurred most frequently during morning free time play from approximately 8:30 till 10:00 (before circle time). As such, a majority of the data arises from free time play during the morning free play period. While a majority of the data comes from this time period, I stayed in the classroom until naptime. During focused observation, videotaping would be more frequent as compared to times when I would be taking field notes to get a broad perspective. Videotaped accounts were logged and indexed in field notes. During the video taping of the play narratives, the researcher would often participate by placing the camera in a stationary spot. If the play narrative were moving from place to place the camera would be carried along. A wireless microphone was also used to ensure that the audio would be clear. The wireless
microphone would be worn by one of the target children or placed in the center of children’s play space.

**Video Revisiting**

Video-revisiting was used to have children reflect upon their storytelling events and emotional themes. Each session lasted between 10 to 20 minutes. Video revisiting occurred within the daily routine of the classroom. The function and purpose of video revisiting with the children was to understand their point of view about their anchor play narrative and emotional themes, rather than having the researcher simply interpret that data outside of the setting. Video revisiting in the classroom allowed the children to participate and collaborate with the researcher in interpreting their action and reactions. One problem encountered with video revisiting is that the children were reluctant to discuss their actions and were more centered on the watching the video tape itself. Thus, the use of video revisiting tapered at the end of the study as its usefulness was questioned. Video revisiting occurred during focused observation of the two anchor play narratives and occurred approximately 2 times per week (see Table 3.1). Events were audio or video taped. Select events were transcribed.

**Formal Interviews and Informal Conversations with Teachers**

Interviews with teachers were conducted three times over the course of the study and lasted approximately 45 minutes. Interview questions were based on the audio and video recordings. Interviews were used to process the focus and direction of the research. Interviews were used as a tool to collaborate with teachers in understanding the daily life.
of the classroom. More specifically, the researcher viewed the teacher as having local knowledge about the classroom and children. Teachers were used as a resource in building a knowledge base. Interviews were audio taped and transcribed.

Given that my role was as a participant observer, daily conversations about the children and classroom were held. These informal conversations would range from comments upon children’s actions to more lengthy discussions about upcoming events and issues that might have arisen on days when I was not in the classroom. Throughout the study, informal conversations guided and shaped data collection and analysis. Conversations and comments were documented in field notes. Teachers were also shown several drafts of the findings and interpretation of the data (as a means of conducting a member check) and were asked to provide feedback about the trustworthiness of the data.

**Field notes**

Field notes were taken on a daily basis. Given that I was a participant observer, I kept a pen and journal while I was in the classroom, as I often took short notes when playing with the children (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). These short notes were expanded upon during breaks in the classroom or after leaving the classroom. At other times, field notes were taken on a laptop, which was set up on the observation deck of the laboratory classroom or on the top of the cubby area. The computer was used during periods when a broad look would be taken as it allowed me to step back and observe classroom happenings from a different perspective. Thus, field notes were recorded either in a journal or on my laptop. Field notes would be expanded upon at the end of the day. Personal reflections were also noted in field notes and were labeled as such.
Table 3.1

Summary of Corpus of Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Days in Classroom</th>
<th>100 days (from March 27\textsuperscript{th} to December 15\textsuperscript{th})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Video Data Collected</td>
<td>88 hours of Video.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with Teachers</td>
<td>3 formal interviews with each teacher, 1 formal interview with program coordinator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal Interview</td>
<td>Informal conversations were held each day I visited the classroom and were recoded in field notes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video-Revisiting</td>
<td>Video-revisiting occurred during the focused observations of the 2 anchor play narrative. Video revisiting occurred approximately 2 times per week during these focused periods. Video-revisiting was recorded on video and audio-tape.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Notes</td>
<td>497 pages of field notes were taken.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Microethnographic Discourse Analyses and Positioning

According to Bloome et al. (2005), the social work of language can be uncovered though examining how children act and react to one another. While their approach to discourse analysis centers on language and literacy events in the classroom, their theoretical tools are used to uncover the social work that is associated with emotional themes in children anchor play narratives. A microethnographic approach to the discourse
analysis of language use in the classroom focuses on what people do with language in context. This approach does not simply focus on situated language, use but also on *language in use* in “social events.” Bloome et al. (2005) defines an event as, “a bounded series of actions and reactions that people make in response to each other at the level of face-to-face interaction. Although seemingly a simple notion, its unpacking shows it to be complex and, taken in the context of academic scholarship, controversial. First, it is people who are acting and reacting to each other; that is, the basic analytic unit, as we noted earlier, it is not the individual but a group of people….” (p. 6-7).

Micro-level data analysis in this study focuses on anchor play narrative *events* that occurred in two anchor play narratives that were constructed as the children acted and reacted to one another. While the approach centers on the micro level, it also takes into consideration how the macro level *informs* and *pushes on* what is taken up by children in the early childhood classroom. The construct of positioning was also used in the analysis of children’s play narrative events. That is, analysis focused on how specific positions were taken up, rejected, negotiated and transformed by the children as they acted and reacted to one another’s (Davies 1989, Davies & Harré, 1990; Fernie, Davies, Kantor, McMurray, 1993).

**Definition and Selection of Anchor Narratives**

*Anchor play narratives* are defined as play narratives that reoccurred over time and across events in the daily life of the classroom. The term anchor is used as a metaphor to foreground the weight and grounding of specific narrative themes, which “anchored” children’s play and social relationships over time and across events in the
classroom. The choice to focus on “anchor play narratives” was not determined a priori, but rather unfolded during the research process. It is both a research finding as well as a methodological tool that was used during data collection to make visible the phenomena in question. While participating in the field, I realized that there were specific anchor play narratives that children used to “anchor” their play and social relationships. Given this, I chose to focus on two anchor narratives that were salient in the children’s play worlds, which allowed for an in-depth examination of the social work of emotional themes associated with them.

This does not mean, however, that observations only occurred when the children’s play centered on the anchor play narratives presented in the analyses. Nor does it mean that the two anchor play narratives examined were the only anchor play narratives that children constructed. Rather, focusing on two anchor play narratives allowed for a robust analysis of the social work of the emotional themes, which is at the heart of this study. By focusing on two anchor narratives deeply rather than on several anchors more broadly, moment-to-moment actions and reactions were made visible. Thus, the researcher chose to focus on anchor play narratives that reoccurred over and over again in the daily life of the classroom, resulting in a fine-grained micro view of the social work of the emotional themes.

The two anchor play narratives were chosen because they were replete in the data. A central defining feature of the anchor play narrative is that they appeared over and over again in my field notes and conversations/interviews with teachers. The two narrative anchors were noted [at least one] on each day that field notes were recorded. That is, anchor play narratives were play narratives that occurred and appeared on a regular
basis’s prior to and during my observation. Anchor play narratives were also themes that teachers noted in our interviews and daily conversations. Only anchor play narratives that could be triangulated to other data sources (participant observation, field notes, informal and formal interviews) were selected. Therefore, the anchor play narratives selected do not represent all children in the classroom, but rather focus on the anchor play narratives of the targeted children in the study.

Selection of Events

Selection of the video taped events used in the analyses were conducted during data collection as the researcher participated in the classroom and followed the children’s actions and reactions around the two anchor play narratives. After an event was recorded it was noted in the field notes, which the researcher returned to on the day of data collection or shortly thereafter as well as later during the study when related events occurred. Such events were also discussed with teachers formally and informally during and after they occurred. All events are situated in the broader classroom life through field notes taken prior to and after events transpired in the classroom. Prolonged engagement, participant observation, field notes, and interviews with teachers aided the researcher in choosing the specific events to use for micro-level analyses (Bloome et al, in press). It is important to note that videotaping was not gathered so that a frequency count could be conducted on the anchor play narratives or emotional themes. Rather videotaping of events was specifically conducted solely for the purpose of capturing select illustrative anchor play narratives, which could be used for micro-level discourse analyses. While several illustrative events were selected for micro-level analysis, they are situated with
data from field notes, teacher interviews, and videotaping that occurred over time and across situations in the daily life of the classroom.

A more in-depth examination of selected events was conducted during intensive data analysis from January 2007 to June 2007, in which the researcher re-examined the events using micro level analysis that centered on action and reactions of children during selected anchor play narrative. Analysis focused specifically on a careful examination of children’s actions and reactions around emotional themes of the anchor play narrative and the social work of the emotional themes (Bloome et al, 2005). After reviewing video taped events and accompanying field notes, select illustrative events were chosen for detailed micro-level analyses. While a micro view is taken, events are situated. That is, even though the researcher may have only video taped a half an hour anchor play narrative that occurred during free playtime in the morning, the event is situated in the daily life of the classroom and in the broader classroom context.
CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSES AND FINDINGS

Introduction

A microethnographic approach to the discourse analysis of language use in the classroom is used to uncover the emotional themes children constructed in their anchor play narrative events within the daily life of a one preschool classroom. That is, how did children actively construct emotional themes in their moment-to-moment actions and reactions? The following questions guided data analysis:

- What types of play narratives are constructed and used over time and across situations within the daily life of the classroom by the children (how, when, where, by whom, and for what purpose)?

- How do emotional themes vary over time and across situations within the different types of play narratives that are told by the children (how, when, where, by whom, and for what purpose)?

- How are emotional themes constructed and used for specific social functions in children’s play worlds (e.g., to create relationships, negotiate power, and construct social identities)?
Anchor play narratives

To answer questions 1, 2, and 3 this chapter centers on the analysis of two anchor play narratives, which included Sally who was selected as the tracer unit, as well as select-targeted children who entered her play world. The term “anchor” in relation to children’s play narrative is used as a metaphor to describe the play narratives that children used over time and across situations in the daily life of the classroom. Anchor narratives were constructed and used by the children anchor over time and across situations to anchor their play and social relationships. Table 4.1 illustrates number of video-taped observations of the play narratives during the two micro-level observations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation #1 (June 19 to August 8)</th>
<th>Number of times Documented/Videotaped</th>
<th>Observation #2 (September 9 to November 20): Boyfriend/Girlfriend</th>
<th>Number of times Documented/Videotaped</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kitty</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Boyfriend/Girlfriend</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Princess</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Dance</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wedding</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Tea Party</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Store</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Superhero Play</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boyfriend &amp; Girlfriend</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superhero</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 4.1 – Type and Number of times play narratives were video taped during micro level observations
This does not indicate that the two anchor play narratives presented in the analyses were
the only anchor play narratives that occurred, however, they were dominant and
reoccurring themes that were replete throughout the data (i.e., field notes, observations,
interviews, video taping, video-revisiting). Other female play narratives were also
regularly documented such as family, preschool, teachers, store, princess, weddings, and
dance. These narratives often overlapped with the two theses. For example, wedding play
ran into boyfriend/girlfriend and so did family play. Similarly, kitty play was woven into
family play and princess play. Thus, while two the two play narrative were examined as
“anchors narratives” and become the central focuses the study they were not discrete and
linear in relation to the other play themes listed above.

The choice to center data collection and analysis on two anchor play narratives
was determined in the process of data collection. I realized that to answer the research
question about the social work of emotional themes that I would need to go deeper into
interpreting micro level interactions. Focusing on two narrative play anchors was as a
methodological heuristic, which aided in thematic coherence and grounding when
observing, analyzing and documenting children emotional themes. As such, focusing on
two anchor play narratives allowed for an in depth analyses of children’s actions and
reactions around salient emotional themes.

The first anchor play narrative examined centered on five female children being
“kitties.” The focused observation lasted from the end of June to August (but was noted
in field notes prior to this). The second anchor play narrative was examined from
September to November, but also was noted in field notes and interviews with teachers
prior to this. Micro-level analyses were conducted on illustrative events to uncover the
emotional themes and the social function of those themes. Field notes, interviews with teachers, video data and video revisiting are used to triangulate the findings presented in the discourse analysis of the two anchor narratives. While two anchor play narratives will be discussed, it is the actions and reactions of the participants within the events as well as how children used the anchor play narrative within their peer culture that is at the center of the findings. For each anchor play narrative, I discuss the following:

- Account of the anchor play narrative
- Key players
- Entering children’s peer culture
- Emotional themes and social function of emotional themes.

Below is a list of the four central findings that arose from the data. In the next 70 pages, the following will be shown:

- How children use anchor play narratives to construct notions about gender and engage in "borderwork" within their peer culture
- How children appropriate gendered emotional themes
- How gendered emotional themes are related to social identities
- How emotional themes are relational
ANCHOR PLAY NARRATIVE 1

KITTY

Account of the anchor play narrative

The anchor play narrative account below is a composite of two narrative events captured on video-tape. It is used to provide the reader with an illustration of what the anchor play narratives looked like as children acted and reacted to one another.

Kitties! Kitties! calls Sally. It’s 9:43 am and Sally, Katie, Caitlin, Mary, and Ann have gathered in the block area. The block area is located on the far side of the classroom away from the main entrance. It is a popular spot for the children to gather.

The block area is a cove of sorts. There is a back wall on which the teacher has projected a picture of an airplane; there are blue gym mats on the floor, a climber in one corner and various sized wooden blocks. This area allows for privacy among the children, not only is the block area located furthest from the laboratory school observation deck (on which undergrad students are often perched and perplexed) as well as the classroom entrance, but also it has a side wall and cabinet, which allow the children to block off an area with a simple L shape construction made from large wooden blocks. Sally, Katie, Caitlin, Mary, and Ann are each taking turns carrying the large blocks to make the
barrier that will be used for their kitty home. Ann and Katie begin to set up home in the square they have created. As they set up, Max, dressed in an orange and black lion costume, enters into the girl’s kitty home and begins to knock over the structure.

“Stop it” says Ann. “Stop it” shouts Katie over and over again with a high pitch voice, “You’re knocking down our structure.” Ann and Katie motion with their voices as well as through sign language (part of classroom curriculum) and demand that Max stop destroying their home. Max complies with their request and leaves the area, but purposefully knocks down several blocks on his way out. At the same time that Max leaves the house, Regina enters with her buzz light-year in hand, “I am a space ranger.” Regina’s golden brown skin is in sharp contrast to the paleness of Katie. How they choose to present themselves is also in contrast. Ann and Katie have either a colorful bow or a tie to hold their hair in place. They wear skirts and t-shirts with hearts, butterflies, or princesses. Bracelets, necklaces, and frilly girly girl items adorn them. Appearance is constantly being discussed and evaluated among Ann, Katie, Caitlin, Sally, and Mary. Katie, being the mother, is wearing a White lacey bridal veil that was worn by Caitlin only few minutes earlier. The veil is worn as a crown to illustrate she is the mother. Mothers must be beautiful.

Regina on the other hand has short black hair, a band-aid over one eye, and is wearing only her White underwear. Katie and Ann do not acknowledge Regina as she enters their house. Regina, with her large black eyes, looks up at me as I videotape, and with one hand she holds up her buzz light year to the camera. I acknowledge her and she moves away with heavy steps. Growling and stomping she gets on top of the climber, puts
up one hand as if she is the king of the mountain and growls even louder scaring the kitties below.

Back in the kitty house, Katie begins to pick up the plastic toy food–pieces of lettuce, buns, and tomatoes off the floor, which were knocked down in the brief distraction made by Regina and Max. There is not a look of annoyance on Katie’s face, but rather she displays a calm presence that exudes confidence and control over her home, as if she’d been a mother all of her life. The distraction is simply part of her job—to scold the children as they run through the kitchen—and then get back to domestic work. In the far corner, next to the blue kitty dish, Caitlin shakes out the blankets revealing even more plastic food underneath. Katie begins to pick it up and states, “Ugh disgusting. It’s an onion.”

Laura, with her curly shiny black hair, excitedly approaches Katie from outside the kitty house. She leans over the wall, lifting one foot off the ground, and presents Katie with a yellow plate filled with plastic food, “Excuse me I made this for your family.” Keeping her stoic face, Katie accepts the gift, says thank you and carefully places the food on the shelf with the other items. Caitlin crawls past on her knees, looks up and states proudly, “I am a kitty, Meow Meow.”

Laura skips back toward the sociodramatic area and begins to gather more gifts for the kitty home. Max returns to the kitty house and this time before he enters Caitlin, Katie, and Ann begin to protest in unison, “Max! Max!”

Hearing their cries for help, a teacher intervenes, “Do you hear their words? Move your body away Max. If you don’t move your body I will have to move it for you.” Gently lifting him up she carries him to another area of the classroom.
Meanwhile, Sally and Mary have moved about 3 feet from the kitty house to the climber where they’ve joined Kai, a male student, in the quest of capturing Regina. During this time, Regina, on top of the climber, has been arching her back and hissing violently at Mary, Sally and Kai. Mary and Sally are holding tightly onto Kai for protection. “Hurry” says Kai “I need that sword to keep the bad guys away.” Sally runs to the safety zone inside the climber. Regina responds with another loud hiss. Sally screams, “Stop it! Stop it Regina! As fast as the words come out of Sally’s mouth, a teacher redirects her, “Sally use your normal voice. You can tell her that you are not playing that game anymore but it’s not a choice to tell her what she can and can’t do.” Sally gazes at Regina, keeping her words to herself. Kai approaches Sally and says, “I am hot lava boy.” Sally peeks out through the wooden bars of the climber, “Can you rescue us?”

The Key Players

When interviewing the teachers about the kitty anchor narrative they described the key players as five females who formed a rather tight-knit group. Kitty had been a reoccurring interest over the past year and was termed by a teacher as “a dynamic that repeats over and over again.” Teacher’s supported this anchor play narrative with items such as plastic connecting links (used for leashes), blankets, videos, animal dishes, books of cats, pictures of animals in the classroom, and small kitten figures. It was also documented in the community happenings (i.e., weekly curriculum emailed to parents) and was noted by teachers as a “thread of interest”.

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The teachers and I agreed that by the time I entered into the classroom that kitties had evolved from a simple interest in kittens to one which focused on building relationships, negotiating access into male play, and constructing and contesting gendered identities. When asked about the function of the kitty anchor narrative teachers noted that it might have started through Mary, a member of the “kitty group” who had two cats at home, as she had the most knowledge about real cats and seemed to be an instigator of the play narrative. Teachers noted that the anchor play narrative seemed to be more in-depth and richer when Mary was present. Teachers further noted that three out of the five children had pets at home, which could have also been a source for the reoccurring theme.

All of the children in the kitty group were described as well adjusted, which implied that they rarely presented trouble to the teacher and did not exhibit any behavior that would go against the classroom norms. The author takes the position that norms are socially constructed and by labeling someone as normal it implies that another must be abnormal which creates a binary that can lead to a deficit model (Cannella, 2002). The use of the term well adjusted in this account implies that these children understood the cultural practices and routines so that their behavior appeared normal within this context.

Four of the females, Ann, Mary, Katie, and Caitlin were 4.6 to 5.3 years old and were leaving for kindergarten during the summer, while Sally (age 4.3) was the youngest of the group and would continue in the classroom for another year. Description of the children was based on my observations and interactions with them as well as interviews and notes from the teachers.
Sally

Sally was a White female who was 4 years old. She lived with both her mother and father. She had started attending Waterfield in the infant toddler room and was the youngest of the 5 females who took part in the kitty narrative. Teachers noted that she struggled in the infant-toddler room with biting other children, but that it had resolved itself when she transitioned to the preschool classroom. She had a younger female sibling who was in the infant toddler room at the time of the study.

It was noted by teachers that Sally had always been interested in dramatic play such as dressing up, playing with little animals, and making them into families. In her quote on the Welcome Board at the entrance to the classroom, she noted that she liked to play kitty. She was an articulate, verbal and bright girl who was able to make friends easily with both males and females in the classroom.

While she identified with the “kitty group”, she often played with other children and was able to help them gain access into the kitty narrative if needed. At times, especially in the morning, she would tend to distance herself from the other children as she took some time to adjust to classroom life. However, after this initial period of adjustment, she maintained an active social life in the classroom. Even after the four females in the targeted group left for preschool in the summer, she was able to establish close friendships with others in the classroom. This transition will be discussed further in the findings.
Ann

Ann was a Chinese female who was 5 years old. She was in her last year at the Waterfield Preschool and left for kindergarten during summer 2006. She lived with both her mother and father and had a female sibling who was 6 years older than her. Both parents were born in China. English was her second language.

Teachers described Ann as a child who enjoyed other children. Referring to her role in the kitty narrative a teacher noted, “You know there is the usual common interest. You know we are all girls and we wear dresses and sandals and she is kind of tuned into the girl’s part. But I don’t think she dislikes other age groups or genders. She’s pretty compliant. Pretty flexible in her play. She has coping skills I guess that is what I am thinking. When things change or tweak she changes easily along with them.”

Ann was an active participant throughout the day and engaged in a variety of interest throughout the classroom. She was described as having some language difficulties when she was younger. However, I did not observe her having any difficulty communicating with the children during my time in the classroom. She was verbal and not afraid to speak up when things did not go her way. While she tended to only play with Katie, Caitlin, Mary, and Sally she often engaged with two dominant males in the classroom named Kai and Luke.

Teachers further noted that she was interested in dressing up, dancing, and make-up. The teachers noted that she was more flexible than other females in moving in between male and female play because she knew more about media and popular culture as she had an older sibling. This made her more knowledgeable about popular culture and superhero play, which made it easier for her to join in male superhero play. It was further
noted that because of knowledge she was able to bring other females into male superhero play.

Katie & Caitlin

Katie and Caitlin were White fraternal twins who were 5 years old. They had a younger male sibling in the infant-toddler room. They lived with their mother and father. Teachers described them as eager to please. They were students who were aware of the school rules and were internally motivated to follow them. They not only knew the classroom rules, but also made a point of following them and reminded peers when they were not following the rules. Both were described as articulate, creative and unique thinkers.

Katie was the more dominant of the two girls and tended to be a leader and was often an instigator and creator of the kitty narrative. She was most often the mom and/or the one who gave instructions about who would be the mom. While she tended to be a leader, her style was not overbearing or demanding, rather others naturally tended to listen to her. In fact, teachers noted that she was quite skilled in negotiation and frequently offered advice to her peers during conflicts.

Caitlin on the other hand was described by teachers as the more shy of the two girls. Teachers noted that she carefully observed play before entering, but was very able to express herself and her own ideas. She was a bit more sensitive and would get her feelings hurt easily, but was still a very strong part of the group. Her interests centered on writing, drawing, family play, princess, dancing, and signing.

Mary
Mary was a White female age 4 years old. She was an only child and had 3 cats at home. She lived with her mother and father. Teachers described her as a social and always wanting to be connected with others. She liked to engage in pretend and fantasy play. It was also noted that she had a tendency to be bossy and would often have to be redirected. Mary and Sally were noted as “best buddies.” While Sally and Mary were best buddies they often had conflicts that would need teacher intervention. Mary enjoyed pretend play, jumping, running, and would often bring stuffed animal to school to share with friends.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Age (year)</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Girl</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Caitlin</td>
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<td>Ann</td>
<td>Girl</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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TABLE 4.2 - Key Players in the Kitty Anchor Play Narrative

*Peripheral Players*

*Kai*

Kai was an African American 5 year-old male, who lived with his guardian who was his godmother and her partner who was also female, but had some contact with his biological mother. Teachers noted that he had emotional adjustment problems when he first entered the preschool, but had made a lot of progress since then. He was described as being happy at school and having a good sense of humor. He was a strong leader and key player in the classroom. He engaged often in superhero play. Other males looked to him
for friendship. When children were asked, “Who is your friend in the classroom?” they would often name Kai. He was also able to join in both male and female play and Sally, Ann, Katie, Caitlin, and Mary often sought his attention.

_Luke_

Luke was a biracial (African American and White) 5-year-old male. He lived with both parents and had an older female sibling. He was described as a child that was typically happy at school. He enjoyed superhero and pretend play. From my observations, it was noted that he often played with Kai, but also engaged with the female kitty players.

**Entering children’s peer culture**

Even though children understood my role as a researcher, it did not grant me instant access into their peer culture. Entering their culture took time. Like any other member of the classroom community, I had to earn group membership. The first instance of entering into children’s culture began in early May and occurred around the writing table. Ann, Mary, Katie, Caitlin, and Sally were drawing. I sat down with them and began to draw a picture of a sun. The girls stopped drawing and watched as I carefully sketched my outline of the sun and chose my colors: orange, yellow, and red. Carefully, I mixed the colors and drew sunbeams darting out from each direction. Before I could finish they had their papers by my hand. “Your sun is so very beautiful. Can you draw one for me?” As they crowded around me, I began to draw a sun for each girl.

After I completed a sun for each girl, they each took a turn drawing another item on each of our papers. According to the girls, Ann was best at drawing hearts, Mary was best at drawing kitties; Katie was best at drawing flowers. At the end of this session each
of us had taken turns creating and drawing for one another leaving us each with a
drawing that we all contributed too. We had appreciated each other’s drawing and noted
who the best at each portion was. I was not drawing for them, but with them. We were
cो-constructing meaning together through sharing our ability to draw. Drawing together
was a mechanism to illustrate our beginning friendship and affiliation. It was a way of
entering into their world. By drawing for one another we showed that we wanted to know
more and cared enough to share our special skill with another in the group. There was
power in knowing how to draw something that another girl could not draw and they often
relied on each other for this purpose.

It was on the same day above that Sally, the youngest member of the group,
leaned over to me during lunchtime and said, “I love my sweet little Samara.” With this
statement I knew I was being asked to engage in their world. In addition, the following
day, a group of children and a teacher were sitting in the quiet room watching *Cats*, when
Sally began tearing off small pieces of paper. Slowly and thoughtfully she walked around
and gave each of the four girls in her kitty group a piece of paper. She then walked over,
and with the last piece in her hand, she gave it to me, “This is an invitation to my party,
will you come? “Of course” I said. “I would love too.”

**Emotional Themes and Social Function**

**Constructing Gender**

As was illustrated in the narrative account described in the beginning of this
chapter, the anchor play narrative constructed by the five females in the target group
centered on a reoccurring theme of being kitties. Corsaro (2003) notes that children often
embody “wild and aggressive animals” in their animal family play. However, the females in this group choose to use a domesticated animal (i.e., kitty) associated with passiveness, rather than with being aggressive, wild, and/or harmful animals. The term “kitty” itself represents an animal that is the opposite of being wild and/or aggressive and also is a term linked in the popular culture and media to being female.

The play narrative was female as defined by Ann, Caitlin, Katie, Mary and Sally. From a peer culture perspective, the kitty narrative could be viewed as tool to engage in “borderwork” between males and females. Barrie Thorne, (as cited by Corsaro, 2003), defines borderwork as “activities that make and strengthen boundaries between girls and boys” (p. 75). For example, when asked if males could be a kitties Sally said, “No they can only be dogs.” The teachers also stated that if boys did play kitty (which was rare) that they would be the dad kitty or take on masculine roles. However, in my observations over the 8 months, I never saw one occurrence when a male acted as a kitten. Teachers also noted that when engaging in kitty play with the core male player named Kai that the females would be his kitties and/or he would be fighting, saving, or capturing the kitties, rather than him adopting a kitty role himself.

When the males were asked if boys could be kitties their response was often “no they are superheroes” “they are owners” or “they are dogs.” When asked further about this, the boys would acknowledge that males could be kitties but they did not like to be kitties. What is interesting in this statement is that the males understood that males could be kitties if they chose to do so. This implies that the males recognized that they could take on various positions within the peer culture; however, they tended to assume roles that matched with the gendered identities that had been constructed through their
borderwork, (i.e., boys are dogs (masculine) and girls are kittens (feminine)). Girls also did not assume the role of being the dog in their kitty narrative, suggesting that the girls also chose to endorse the kitty as a distinctly feminine position. Children understood that playing kitty or a dog was not inherently a masculine or feminine position per se, but rather it was the social identity assigned to the position as adopted within the peer culture, which made being a kitty female.

By setting up exclusive groups based on gender, the females were creating spaces that supported specific emotional themes. According to Shields (2002) in the act of creating narratives that are gendered, children limit the types of emotional themes and emotions that are available to be explored:

For example, the narrative themes and multiple characters that are the features of doll play afford situations to think about and practice emotion openly as a dimension of relationships and social exchange. Further the conditions within the group are such that different expectations are established regarding which emotions ought to occur and how they should be reacted to.


Assuming the position as kitties that were trapped, lost, and saved, the females in relation to males within the events were discursively positioning themselves within a traditional fairytale storyline in which the male hero saves and/or rescues the passive female (Davies, 1989), which implicitly limited the type of emotional themes that were available for females versus males to appropriate given the role they assumed within the narrative. For example, during one exchange I watched as Mary and Sally told Laura that they were dangerous lions, however, as soon as Kai joined into their play, they suddenly became
helpless baby kitties that needed to be rescued. Their actions toward Laura suggested that they were scary and might hurt her if she got to close. They were powerful and had the ability to harm as dangerous lions. On the other hand, when Kai came into the event they clung to the edge of the climber and transformed into helpless kittens that could not physically climb out. They turned from powerful dangerous lions into powerless helpless kitties. Interestingly, Laura, who was not a core member of the kitty group, joined in with Kai to rescue Mary and Sally.

Kitty as a female position was based not only on the researchers observations about who could be a kitty and what is typical in the wider popular culture, but was grounded in children’s actions and reactions. This is illustrated in the next transcript as the Ann, Caitlin, Katie, and Mary determine who can be part of a kitty meeting. Kitty meetings were used to conduct video revisiting with the children. The females also used this time to create a kitty game (which was similar to Candy land). The conversation below took place during a event on June 19, 2006.

1.1 Katie: Boys cannot come in.
2.1 Caitlin: I am a kitty.
3.1 Katie: You look gorgeous like that (to Caitlin)
4.1 Ann: Are you going to the meeting about kitties?
5.1 Katie: Yes, she plays kitty.
6.1 Caitlin: And Sally plays kitty so she’s in too. Yeah, but only girls.
7.1 Katie: Hi mom, hi mom.
8.1 Caitlin: I am a kitty.
9.1 Katie: Oh

10.1 Caitlin: but we can still dance

11.1 Katie: But I am going to be the big sister.

12.1 Ann: Remember that day when I was here first. That was a long time ago, Mary right? It was when all the boys were not here. It was when all the girls were here and no boys.

13.1 Mary: Only Luke can be…

14.1 Katie: Kai can chase us.

In line 1.1, Katie notes who cannot be in their kitty meeting. By stating that boys cannot be in, she was constructing borderwork when she defined it as “girls only” (Corsaro, 2003). Excluding males from the meeting made a clear distinction about the activities that males versus females could engage in within the classroom. In the exchange above, as well as in conversations prior too and after this discussion, membership was firmly established by gender.

Moreover, as shown in line 3.1 there was a strong emphasis on appearance among the girls as is seen in the compliment Katie gave to Caitlin about being gorgeous. Females determined who and what they were in society: a caring friend, a gorgeous mom, a beautiful bride, and a kitty princess. The females were exploring femininity not just through acting like kittens, mothers, and princesses, but also through highlighting and focusing on their appearance within these roles. Using terms such a gorgeous, beautiful, and pretty within play “create and sustains the gendered elements of the current social structure, as such praise values certain ways of being a girl while ignoring and marginalizing ways of being gendered” (Blaise, 2005, p. 80.). Focusing on appearance allowed them to explore and construct notions about being female on various levels:

The kitty role was also used as an “access strategy” for females to enter into male play narratives. However, Corsaro (1997) notes that a direct strategy such as asking, “Can I play?” is not a useful tool when attempting to gain access into children’s interactive space. Children must find creative ways to enter into other spaces. As such, the kitty narrative allowed the females to use their gendered position to negotiate access into male play spaces. An access strategy used by the females to enter male superhero play is illustrated in Katie’s response in line 14, which states that Kai can chase them. Both Luke and Kai were highly regarded peers by both males and females in the classroom. The females negotiated access into their play by shifting their kitty roles to fit in with the superhero storyline. That is, when entering male play the females would often become “trapped kitties”, “lost kitties”, or the boys would be “the owner” of the kitties. The girls often approached the males and asked, “Can I be your kitty?” “Will you be my owner?” “Can I be your lost kitty?” or “Can I be your trapped kitty?” Merging and shifting their roles as kitties allowed them to gain access by taking on a traditional female passive role that fit with male superhero play narrative. This role, in relation to males who they did not want in their play was used as well. For example, if they wanted to deny access to a male player (who requested to be a dog), they would say that dogs scared kittens and they could not play with them. Thus, the role of the passive kitten was used both to include and exclude males from their play.

However, it is important to note that while the girls assumed traditional passive roles within anchor play narratives in relation to males, they still held power in
controlling, constructing and directing the narrative account when engaged with males. For example, while they would “take up” the role of the passive helpless trapped kitty within the storyline, they would also be the one to shape how, with whom and what happened to the trapped kitties in the narrative. In several accounts, the male superheroes would “rescue” and save the kitties and/or give them “power” to escape, but the females would reject this power to keep the anchor play narrative alive and moving forward. If they were saved then the anchor play narrative would end.

From an adult perspective, the passive roles the females assumed in relation to male play might appear to be submissive, however, when considering who was actually constructing and directing the narrative, the females actually held a great deal of power over their positioning. One of the implications of this finding is that often adults transmit their own notion of power onto a storyline without taking into consideration the usefulness of the strategy within the peer culture (Kantor and Fernie, 2003). From a peer culture perspective, the females put themselves in positions to access male play as a kitty. This allowed them to access the anchor play narrative while keeping their own narrative intact (i.e., being a kitten). While they used the passive kitty role to gain access, they also positioned themselves in the dominant role through their actions by directing what, how, and when the kitties were captured and saved.

The five females not only used the kitten position to include males and/or enter male play, but also to negotiate how and when other females entered their interactive play space (Corsaro, 1997). One way that this was accomplished was by deciding where the kitties would live and how many baby kittens could be in the event. For example, during one event Amber was playing at the table in the kitchen area. Ann, who was being a kitty,
told Katie that if Amber was going to be in the kitchen area that they could live in the additional space of the block area.

Another way that they excluded others was by using co-constructed “save signs” on their structures in the block area when they would build a kitty home. This is illustrated in Figure 4.1. During the entire 8 months, these five females were the only children who I observed co-constructing save signs. Save signs, a classroom ritual, were brown pieces of paper that children would write their name on and tape to a structure they had built so that another child would not take it down. They would also paste their picture on the slips of paper. Paper, small pictures of each child, tape, and pens were readily available for the children for this purpose. However, the females in the kitty group would use one piece of brown paper and attach not just one, but also several females’ pictures to the brown paper. The save signs became co-constructed “affiliation makers” signaling and providing concrete evidence of their membership (Kantor, Fernie, & Whaley, 1995).
It is important to note that not all females in the kitty group would assume the “kitty” role within the play events. Most often there was a mother who took care of the kitties. However, at other times they would be kitty princess or there would be only one female who would be a kitten while the rest assumed various roles (mom, big sister, princess). While the roles and positions within the kitty narrative were not static and limited to being a kitty, the roles within the target group always centered on *being female*. Thus, one of the social functions of the anchor play narrative was to construct gendered positions around femininity and the emotional themes associated with being female.
Proper Behavior: What Ladies don’t do

As will be shown in the next theme, relational aggression was often used to negotiate the narrative that the girls constructed during the event as well as positioning within the event. The females often explicitly rejected the use of anger and physical aggression, while using relational aggression through verbal insults, threats to their friendship, threats to status, and/or exclusion from the group. Status aggression was often used as a way to position self as having more than another, suggesting that another person had less than they did. I use the term status aggression, as children did not threaten the loss of the friendship, but rather positioned other children as having less materially than them, which placed the other in a deficit position. However, even though they used relational aggression they also understood that it had social consequences. For example, in the following interaction on June 22, 2006, Mary and Sally had been playing kitty with Katie, Caitlin, and Ann, Sally moves to a chair behind the cubby area and the girls are having a disagreement because Mary approached Sally and told her that she had something to tell her. Sally said she did not want to hear what Mary had to say. This led to the following verbally aggressive interaction, which also address proper emotional display for females.

1.2 Sally: You are a booty

2.2 Mary: Booty is a bad word. It is a bathroom word

3.2 Sally: Your stink Mary.

4.2 Mary: You stink too. I am not your friend.

5.2 Sally: You stink like booty.
6.2 Mary: I am telling.
7.2 Sally: You stink like a tire swing.
8.2 Mary: I am going to be warmer than you.
9.2 Sally: Anyways I have better clothes than you.
10.2 Mary: I am telling.
11.2 Sally: You can’t tell anyone.
12.2 Mary: Well I have better pictures than you
13.2 Sally: Well I am going to steal your book
14.2 Mary: You can’t (Kai moves by Sally).
15.2 Sally: Yucky Mary. I am only letting Kai sit here.
16.2 Mary: I am only letting Samara sit here. Sally only ladies do lady stuff, so we have to act properly and not argue.
17.2 Sally: Anyway I am not your friend. Anyway Kai sat next to me.
18.2 Mary: Anyway I am done.

In line 1.2, Sally calls Mary a booty, which was considered a bad word within the peer and school culture and is used as an insult. This is seen in Mary’s response, which is to let Sally know that booty is a bad word. It is a bathroom word. The term booty in popular culture and slang has various meanings, however within the preschool peer culture it meant a bottom/buttocks. Mary responds by stating that Sally stinks and that she is not going to be her friend. Both of these statements, calling someone stinky and saying that they are not friends are verbally aggressive acts, which threaten the stability of relationship and ones social identity. Sally builds on this by stating that Mary not only stinks, but also she stinks like booty, which is even a greater insult than being called a
booty or stinky alone. Mary contests this by saying that she is going to tell. Sally ignores her and continues with another insult by stating that Mary stinks like a tire swing. Sally responds by stating she is going to be warmer than Mary. Sally responds with another status aggressive response by stating that she has better clothes. Mary once again says that she will tell and Sally reminds Mary that she is not allowed to tell.

In line 12.2, Mary continues with status aggression by stating that she has better pictures than Sally. Sally responds by saying that she will steal her book, which is another type of threat. Again, Mary begins to remind Sally that she can’t, but Mary is interrupted when Kai comes by and Sally quickly states how yucky (disgusting) Mary is. Here Sally uses the word “yucky” which is associated with the emotion disgust to negatively position Sally in front of Kai. To be called yucky positions Mary as someone or something that is revolting. Traditionally, the term disgust is viewed as an emotion that is “basic or instinctual.” However, in this exchange we see how the term is used as a social action to negatively position another person, without any biological basis for the feeling. Sally is not inherently yucky or disgusting, but rather the social function of the emotion term is used as an insult to another and positions them as revolting.

Kai’s presence is also used as a tool to position Sally as having something more and better than Mary by stating that only Kai can sit next to her (he is not yucky). Mary then used my position as an adult who was highly regard by the girls, by stating that only Samara could sit next to her. She then reminds Sally about their gendered position (i.e., ladies) and what ladies do (i.e., only ladies stuff) and the actions that should follow (i.e., being proper and not arguing). By saying “only ladies do ladies stuff, so we have to act
properly and not argue”, a discourse was being constructed about what ladies do and the emotions they show. Ladies act properly and ladies do not argue or engage in conflict.

More importantly, she assigned a social category to herself as well as Mary and drew on their common “femaleness” by saying that “we” instead of you or I have to act properly. Sally rejects this social positioning by saying that she is not Mary’s friend and that Kai sat next to her, which implies that she has something more than and better than Mary. This could be taken as ignoring the femaleness that Mary is naming by saying that she is not her friend and therefore does not need to follow her “females rules” or she could be using it to exclude Mary since Kai sat next to her, thus showing that a sought after male who held high peer status in the classroom sat next to her. In other words, she is using Kai as a commodity (i.e., something I have that you don’t). Mary ends the argument in a fashion that was typical of the females with the statement, “I am done”.

With regard to Mary, as a prominent leader of the play, she assumed the role of reminding others about proper female behavior and manners while also being an active agent in many conflicts that arose among the females.

By using a statement about what ladies do and what is proper, Mary is supporting dominant notions about what proper White female behavior, which suggests that females should not be argumentative. It also suggests that ladies’ only do ladies stuff, which further suggests that there are specific actions that ladies do and that name-calling and using bad words is not among them. According to Davies (2001), “one speaker can position others by adopting a storyline that incorporates a particular interpretation of cultural stereotypes to which others are invited to conform…” (p. 87). Mary, through her words, is inviting Sally to engage in the storyline about what it means to be a “good”
female within the typical White American norm about how ladies should act and react to one another. She does not state that *children* should not argue, that *people* should not argue, or that *they* should not argue, but rather she specifically points out that *ladies* should not argue.

Davies (2001) refers to this type interaction among children as “category maintenance work”. Mary was trying to “ensure that the categories of the person, as they are coming to understand them, are maintained in meaningful categories in their own actions and the actions of those around them” (p. 23). Through category maintenance work, Mary upholds dominant notions of White middle class femininity as both Mary and Sally deviated from “what ladies do” by insulting one another and using improper and non-polite terms (Davies, 1989).

The term lady has historically been located with women who are proper and polite. *Lady* is tied to specific social identities and historical figures such as the Virgin Mary (i.e., Our Lady) and Royalty (i.e., Lady Dianna), with its original meaning being tied to “mistress of a household”. Social class and race is also located and implicitly linked to “propriety and politeness” for upper middle class White women. The meaning of lady over time has changed and varies depending upon the context in which it is used. In general, a lady is considered to be the opposite of a *bitch* and or a *gentleman*. I would suggest that from my White middle class female perspective, the categorization of the binary within gender would be *lady/bitch* or *lady/tramp* and in between gender it would be *lady/gentleman*. When Mary reminds Sally that they are ladies and should be proper, she simultaneously subordinates and silences other forms of femininity that do not match the dominant notion that how females should not argue (Shields, 2002). In learning to
speak, Mary and Sally were also learning what should remain unspoken and not acted upon with regard to emotional display.

The term lady indicates not only what proper behavior for females is in general, but also what proper and polite behavior is for females in public. Being proper and polite is bound by what females can do in front of others. Interestingly, Mary chooses to use this statement about proper behavior of ladies when Kai, a sought after African American male, comes near them. The discursive interchange brings with it conceptions of female badness/goodness and what can and cannot be said between two “proper” White middle class females and illustrates that members of the group were constructing notions about proper gendered and racialized behavior. Mary’s “take up” about what ladies do (i.e., not argue) further illustrates how the macro level discourses about proper female emotional behavior were pushing on and informing the moment-to-moment interactions at the micro level as children take up those positions that fit with who they are and/or would like to be in the early childhood classroom.

Proper Behavior: What Ladies do

While the five females did engage in physically aggressive acts toward one another, they were infrequent and kept beneath the surface of the school culture. For example, during our first video revisiting two of the girls began pinching each other over who was going to talk first. This was one the only time that I saw them engage in any type of physical aggression. In addition, after this conflict Mary let me know that I needed to set the computer in the middle because they would argue over it and she did not want any arguing to happen. In a subsequent event the females discussed having a
kitty meeting, they talked about how to decide who gets to talk first so that conflicts would not arise:

1.3 Ann: Today are we having a meeting?

2.3 Katie: Yes

3.3 Caitlin: {Yes}

4.3 Ann: Oh yeah. What are we making again?

5.3 Katie: A game

6.3 Caitlin: {A stories}

7.3 Ann: Yes

8.3 Mary: And today I need to talk first because I last time did not to get to talk

9.3 Katie: Ann got to talk first last time.

10.3 Mary: And I didn’t

11.3 Katie: What about what about um um whoever wants to talk in the kitty group needs um um they raise their hand.

12.3 Yeah

12.3 Mary: Okay

13.3 Caitlin: Okay

The reason for showing this conversation is to note that the girls were aware that both physical and relational aggression occurred. As such, they were also explicitly focused on resolving and preventing circumstances that would lead to aggression and conflict, revealing an implicit emotional agenda centered on creating group harmony and
caring relations. How to avoid arguments was also part of the negotiation of the kitty narrative event by the females. For example, during one-kitty event, Caitlin told the group, “Time to build, not to fight” suggesting that there needed to be a focus on creating the kitty narrative itself rather than on the conflicts that arose around who, how, when and where the narrative would take place. The move away from being argumentive to group harmony and resolution is seen in the transcript below from June 26, 2006. Here Sally and Katie are being mothers who are taking care of the sick kitties. In this exchange, Ann and Mary have been continually negotiating the use of a bed/pillow that the mothers were making for the sick kittens to lie on. The emotional theme of the narrative centered on caring relations as mothers cared for the sick kittens. However, the actions and reactions within the event focus on conflict resolution. Prior to the event below, Ann, Caitlin and Mary are lying next to each other on the floor while Sally and Katie put blankets over them.

1.4 Katie: If you are arguing you will have to move. Mary move your head (Mary move away from Katie’s and Ann)

2.4 Mary: Well then I don’t get any. I still don’t have a pillow under my head (crosses arms and looks down)

3.4 Sally: Where is the blue one? (to Katie)

4.4 Katie: You had it

5.4 Ann: Oh I wish she would stop this (turns her body away from Mary)

6.4 Katie: Mary lay your head down

7.4 Sally: Want a cover? (to ann)
8.4 Mary: Why does Ann have two pillows?

9.4 Katie: Well that’s why you argue. There, now you will not argue (puts a pillow in the middle of the two girls). Ann put your head on the White pillow so Mary won’t get (unintelligible).

10.4 Ann: Pretend this is a pillow for my hand, right? (Ann place her hand on the pillow that Katie placed between them)

11.4 Caitlin: I want a hand pillow

12.4 Mary: Me too. Then I only have a head pillow and not a hand pillow.

13.4 Ann: There is space look. See (places hand on pillow and shows Mary where there is space)

14.4 Mary: No! (says to Ann and turns head away from her). I don’t want to have the same.

15.4 Sally: {Caitlin kitty} (gives her a blanket)

16.4 Mary: Well I can’t scoot up. See (to Ann)

17.4 Ann: You might want to lie on here

18.4 Mary: No! (short pause) No just scoot this over (moves pillow on the middle of them).

19.4 Sally: Who’s ready for all of you. The biggest blankie for all of you.

20.4 Mary: Me and Ann

21.4 Sally: No it’s for xxx (moves over toward Caitlin with blanket)

22.4 Ann: You need it on this side (Sally puts blanket on Ann and Caitlin)

23.4 Mary: I am not playing (puts head down and frowns). Maybe we can have a big one.

24.4 Ann: I don’t want t a big one
25.4 Sally: **Ann and Caitlin!**

26.4 Caitlin: I can’t see (*Sally puts blanket over Caitlin*)

27.4 Sally: Sorry, Sorry (*laughing*). **I am going to get another one for you Mary!**

28.4 Mary: Well well you make me sad Sally (*put head down and make a frown*)

29.4 Ann: Give it to Mary

30.4 Sally: Then Caitlin won’t have one

31.4 Katie: Caitlin you want this one?

32.4 Ann: {Let me share} with Mary (*Sally puts blanket in the middle*)

33.4 Mary: Cause I got sad. When you were giving it to Caitlin and Ann it made me sad and tears were going to flow in my eyes. (*rubs eyes with arms*)

34.4 Sally: There this is only for Caitlin. Here it’s only for Ann.

35.4 Katie: Mary what about this one?

36.4 Mary: I am trying to scoot over for Ann

37.4 Sally: Only for Ann

38.4 Ann: Share. Put this one here only one here so we don have to argue (*shares blanket with Mary*)

39.4 Sally: Caitlin do you have enough blanket? Is that fine for you Caitlin?

Katie and Sally, both taking the role of the mother, show actions and reactions that focus on restoring group harmony and making sure that each person is happy. For example, in line 1.4 Katie uses a warning statement that a parent might use, by telling Mary and Ann that if they do not stop arguing they will have to move. Mary responds, as a child would to a mother, by stating that she does not have a pillow under her head,
indicating that the conflict has not been resolved between her and Ann, and needs to be fixed. Ann becomes irritated with Mary’s complaint to Katie, which is illustrated both through her verbal and non-verbal reaction by saying she wishes Mary would stop and then, turning her body away from Mary, she shows disapproval by distancing herself. Katie gives Mary another directive by instructing her to lay her head down. Sally then asks Caitlin and Ann if they’d like a cover. Again, Sally in taking the mother role is using the question as a way to show care for the kitties. Mary again displays her dissatisfaction with Katie by asking why Ann has two pillows. This question “why” is used to let Katie know that Ann has more than her, which she does not like. Katie, as the mother, explains to the two girls why they argue and focuses her actions on resolving the tension by putting a pillow in the middle of the two girls. She then asks Ann to change her behavior so that Mary will not be upset.

In line 23.4, Mary says that she is not playing and displays that she is not happy by putting her head down. Sally raises her voice and scolds Ann and Caitlin. She then uses the same tone and intonation to tell Mary that she is getting one for her too. Mary responded to this scolding and Sally’s actions by stating that Sally made her sad. Mary’s use of sadness, and more specifically, that Sally made her sad, was a discursive tool that put responsibility on Sally to restore the situation, as she was the one who Mary blamed for her emotional state. Sadness indexed that Sally had done something wrong to Mary. It also suggested that others have power over our emotional display. That is, Mary was not responsible for her emotional display, but rather Sally was. The use of sadness, when used in relation to others, positioned Mary’s peers as being responsible for the emotion. Sally made Mary sad through her actions and words and it would be up to Sally to follow
with another action/statement that would change Mary’s emotion. The social function of
the statement, “you made me sad” was not just used to display sadness, but also served an
implicit purpose to hold peers accountable for their actions and reactions within the group
and placed blame and responsibility on the group to resolve the sadness that was
displayed.

However, in line 29.4, it was not Sally who responded to Mary’s use of the term
sad, but Ann who accepted Mary’s use of sadness by telling Sally to give the blanket to
Mary. Sally instead brings the focus back to Caitlin by saying that Caitlin will not have
one. Katie then responds and asks Caitlin if she wants the one she has. Ann once again
takes responsibility for Mary’s emotional display of sadness by sharing with Mary in line
32.4. More importantly, Mary explicitly states that Ann is sharing because of her sadness
and even states the emotional display that would follow (i.e., tears were going to flow
from her eyes). In this exchange, language was used not only to display sadness, but also
as a way for Mary to hold others accountable for her emotion. More importantly, the use
of “you made me sad” had the ability to change and shape the response of other group
members and was used not only to hold individuals accountable, but also to hold the
*group accountable*. Mary saying that Sally made her sad was not simply stated to let
Sally know what she had done wrong. It also informed the group that she was not happy.
It was a public display of sadness, which opened up the space for others to change their
actions to accommodate her emotional display.

The relational aspect of Mary’s use of sadness is part of an “emotional scenario”
which is defined as “informally scripted patterns of interchange” (Gergen, 1994. p. 224).
Mary shows that she is aware of these patterns of interchange by stating the reason that
Ann is sharing as well as the social function of sadness by stating explicitly the cause of her sadness. Sadness was a part of the emotional scenario and negotiation of the narrative as Sally contested her position. The term sad, used in this context, is a linguistic tool used to make a judgment. This statement is not meant to suggest that Mary’s display of sadness was a premeditated calculated emotional response but rather the point is to illustrate how the use of sadness was “itself a judgment” that occurred within an emotional scenario that was familiar to the group (Burr, 2003). Moreover, there was power in using sadness as it allowed Mary to obtain her goal, which was to have the girls share with her.

It is important to look at not only what was said and displayed, but also what was not said and/or displayed. In using the term sadness then, what other emotion terms were silenced? For example, why was the term “that makes me angry” not used? Given the situation, anger could have been a term interchangeable with sadness. Anger is also an emotion that could have been used to hold others accountable and/or to make a judgment about a wrongdoing. When the use of sadness rather than anger used by Mary is examined, as well as the construction of group harmony rather than argumentation, the role of the “good” female begins to be uncovered. It is through specific storylines, and images associated with them, that females were learning what it meant to be an emotional being in relation to others (Gergen, 1999). For example, in the kitty narrative they were not just learning how to be a mother, but also how to be a caring female in relation to the baby kitties. In joining in male superhero play, they were not just learning how to access male superhero play, but also how to be a passive female in relation to males. In using sadness to contest positioning, Mary was not just learning how to do sadness, but also
how to do sadness with her same sexed peers in a University Laboratory classroom. Sadness, when displayed properly with her peers, allowed Mary to make a judgment about a wrongdoing without displaying anger, which fit in with her notion about what ladies don’t do (i.e., argue).

The children in group as well as the researcher are from middle class and educated families, which is reflects the use of standardized English as well as the meaning associated with such language use. As such, it also important to note that the language used among these girls as well as my analysis is drawn from a White middle-class conception of emotions, emotional themes and what ladies do and don’t do.

Summary

The findings from this section showed how the children used the kitty theme as a reoccurring theme that was used over and over again to build relationships, to include and exclude peers, and to construct notions about gender. Finding moved from a broad look at the anchor play narrative to a micro level look of how emotional themes were used within the anchor. Females were active agents in constructing conceptions about what ladies do and don’t do and the emotional themes associated with the gendered position (i.e., female passivity versus aggressiveness). However, while the females “took up” roles associated with passivity in relation to male children, they were powerful agents in the construction of how, who, when and where the anchor play narrative occurred (e.g., co-constructed save signs, changing roles to access male superhero play, protection of interactive spaces, building kitty homes and changing rules to exclude and include other peers).
The focused observation also illustrated how Mary, a prominent player, in relation to the tracer unit, Sally, constructed notions about what ladies do and don’t do. That is, ladies do not argue and engage in name-calling. As such, the five females were also explicitly focused on *resolving and preventing* circumstances that would lead to aggression and conflict and there was an explicit and implicit emotional agenda, which centered on creating group harmony. Lastly, within the peer culture, sadness, when used in relation to others, held peers as being responsible and accountable for emotions, and the resolution of the emotion within the sadness emotional scenario.
ANCHOR PLAY NARRATIVE 2

BOYFRIEND/GIRLFRIEND

The discourse of “romantic love” is one which we are all subject to. We are surrounded by film and TV images of true love, young love, adulterous love, love at first sight and unrequited love. Singers sing of it, magazines publish letters about it, and each of us at some time has asked ourselves the question whether or not we are in “it”, ever have or ever will be. As a way of formatting our thought, emotions, and behaviors the discourse of romantic love must surely be one of the most prevalent in modern society (Burr, 2003, p. 73).

The next section uses a microethnographic approach to the discourse analysis of language use in the classroom to uncover the how children constructed emotional themes in an anchor narrative that centered on romantic love during a period of focused observation from September 2006 to November 2006. It will also explore how this emotional theme was used to negotiate power, build social relationships, and construct gendered identities in children’s peer culture. For the anchor play narrative, I discuss the following:

- Account of the anchor play narrative
- Key players
- Entering children’s peer culture
- Emotional themes and social function of emotional themes.
Account of the anchor play narrative

The anchor play narrative account below is a composite of two narrative events captured on video-tape. It is used to provide the reader with an illustration of what the anchor play narratives looked like as children acted and reacted to one another.

It’s been two weeks since the Katie, Caitlin, Ann, and Mary left the classroom for kindergarten. Amber, Tamara, and Sally, have taken the plastic links, which previously were used primarily to construct kitty leashes and have transformed them into a chain that is strung across the book area. The book area, similar to the block area, in also a cove of sorts and located far from the view of the observation desk and classroom entrance, however it is much smaller and intimate in comparison to the block area, as it only allows for about 4-5 children to gather at one time. Sally and Amber are using the chain link to block off the area. Instantly, the book area becomes a preschool classroom to them.

Sally glides past Amber with an arm full of stuffed animals and states, “These are the preschoolers and their names are Katie, Caitlin, Ann and Mary.” I am a teacher and you are a teacher too.” Tamara replies, “I am teacher.” Sally grabs an armful of blankets and the three of them begin to cover up the preschoolers, patting them and gently tucking them in under the blankets. Amber, with her golden brown hair, and using a whispered teacher voice (as the teachers do during naptime) says to Sally, “I am running to the bathroom okay? I will be right back.” Amber quickly returns and informs
Sally, “You can run to the restroom. That’s fine. You can go. I am going to pat Caitlin.”

Sally responds, “That would be so great.”

Over in the cubbies, Laura and Erick have been telling secrets to one another. They often gather here as it is a space that is hard for the teacher to monitor. Laura says to Erick with a stern voice, “If you don’t do what I say you will not have a play date.” Erick responds with a whine, “Laura. You are being mean Laura.” He puts his head down and there is a pause between them. “Are you my girlfriend?” his face showing the agony of rejection even before Laura replies. Laura throws back her thick black curly hair, shifts the weight in her hips and crosses her arms. She then places one hand on her hip and with her other hand she shakes one finger towards Erick, “I will not be your girlfriend if you don’t do what I say.” He takes a step back and responds, “I make my own choices Laura. You don’t make my choices for me.” With her head held high, Laura bats her large dark eyes and quickly turns her petite frame away from Erick, “Well then I am not letting you come for a play date.” With her body turned away, she looks back over her shoulder to monitors his reaction. He puts his head down, and slowly walks. Laura stays were she is and carefully watches as he leaves the cubby area.

Sally and Amber have now moved to the kitchen area where they are preparing lunch for the preschoolers. Sally and Amber have gotten into a dispute over how to care for the preschool children. Amber reaches toward Sally and states, “I am Sorry.” Sally and Amber hug. “I love you”, says Sally. “I love you too” says Amber. Together they begin to put the plastic bread in the oven and the plastic yellow plates in the cupboard
Erick walks up still looking rejected from Laura’s words and states. “Pretend I was Katie’s mom, I mean dad.” And pretend these are all twins” says Sally, and “Tamara is the mommy.”

Key Players

Laura

Laura was a 4 year-old Saudi Arabian female. Like Sally, she had begun attending Waterfield in the infant and toddler room and transferred to the preschool classroom at the same time as Sally and Erick. She lived at home with her two parents an older sister and a younger brother.

Laura was bright and articulate and liked to draw, sing, and play with both males and females. Teacher’s noted that they were keeping an eye on Laura as she would often whisper to Amber, Sally, and Erick as a way to control play situations. In my observations and conversations with teachers she was noted as using relationally aggressive statements such as, “I will not be you friend if you do that” or “You can’t come to my house if you don’t give me your toy.” While she would use these types of statements with peers, she was a well-liked peer.

Erick

Erick was an African American male who was 4 years old and lived at home with his mother, father, and two older siblings and younger brother. He has also begun in the infant toddler room and teachers noted that he and Laura had a close relationship. He also often engaged with other males in their superhero play, but also would join in
sociodramatic play with Laura and Sally. He had some speech difficulties and at times it would be hard to understand what he was saying. However, this did not appear to affect his play with peers and level of interaction within the classroom.

**Reentering children’s peer culture**

After the break up of the kitty group due to graduation to kindergarten, I decided to pull back and observe how and what groups would form among the existing the older children and the new younger children into the classroom. Being aware of my affiliation with the kitty group, I did not want that specific anchor narrative to continue because of my presence, but rather I wanted to see if and how the anchor play narrative would be taken up, rejected and/or reinvented by the remaining 2 oldest females in the classroom. Sally was a main player in the kitty anchor narrative. Laura would join in every now and then, but also engaged in superhero play as well as family play and princess.

As the two oldest females in the classroom, the transition seemed to be harder on Sally than it was for Laura. For Laura this was her time to shine and be the leader. For example, on the “Welcome Board” inside the classroom, children’s pictures were displayed with a small quote about what they liked to do at school. Laura’s stated the following, “I like to play with my best friends. Sometimes I make their choices, but they usually make their own choices. Sometimes my Daddy picks me up early. And I like everyone and everything at my school.” In this statement Laura, in her own words, acknowledges that she sometimes made other people’s choices. As will be illustrated in the findings, this was a tension between her and other children in the classroom.
Laura’s insistence to make choices for others was a concern that teachers were having, as she was very bossy and would tell anyone and everyone in the classroom what to do, even me. For example, Laura would often claim ownership to the wireless microphone used for data collection. She would pull me behind the cubby and give me explicit and stern directions about how and when it could be used. She wanted to make sure she decided who could use it.

Laura also understood the power of being the oldest in the classroom. During lunch the teacher noted that there might be a child who would be coming to the school that was older than both her and Sally. Laura exclaimed, “Oh no that would be scary.” Laura’s use of the emotion term scary is particularly revealing here in relation to her status in the classroom. Laura’s expression of her fear showed that she would like to remain the oldest in the classroom. She understood that such a position contained a certain amount of power and the loss of such power would be frightening to her.

Laura was also very aware of the difference between the peer culture and the school culture. Teachers noted that they were keeping an eye on her because she tended to pull children aside and whisper to them so that they could not hear. Laura understood that the teachers would not accept some of her statements. As such, Laura was somewhat wary of my role in the classroom. In contrast to the kitty group, Laura tried to move me out of her anchor play narratives. She was not sure where to place me. I realized that not only would Sally have to renegotiate her place within the classroom, but that I would as well.

Group membership was not something that was given, but something that had to be reestablished. Simply being a part of the classroom or having earned access with the
kitty group did not grant you automatic access when membership in the classroom and peer culture changed.

During August 2006, I continued taking field notes and following Sally’s anchor play narratives. Sally mentioned the kitty anchor narrative a few times when she asked the males if she could be their lost kitty, but it was not a theme that was “taken up” by Laura or Amber. But, what did occur was the construction of the preschool game.

The preschool game was an anchor play narrative that consisted of Sally and Amber being teachers and several stuffed animals serving as the preschoolers named Katie, Caitlin, Mary, and Ann. On the second day after Sally had constructed “the preschool narrative” described in the beginning portion of this section, I asked Sally if she would like to do video revisiting. She responded, “Can I bring Laura and Amber with me. Can we all come together? At first I hesitated, as sometimes I would get more in-depth responses from the children if they watched the video separately. However, realizing the importance of group membership, and the need to respect her request, I said, “Sure you can.” The girls were excited, they lined up at the door before I could set up the computer. “Can we come in now? Can we come in now?” They repeated over and over. Once inside, Laura being a leader and wanting to take the stage asked if she could tell us a story. Taking the audio recorder she told a story about being Ariel from The Little Mermaid, losing her voice to the evil sea witch Ursula, trading in her tail for legs, marrying the prince, and living happily ever after. Each girl took a turn telling the same story. At the end of our session, they asked if they could please tell more stories next week, and each week we did so they returned to the same theme. Video revisiting with
these females turned into a storytelling time, sparked by Laura’s lead, about being Ariel, about being a princess, and about getting married to the prince.

On the same day as the first video revisiting, Sally leaned over to me at lunch and said, “I want to marry you when I grow up.” While this statement can be taken and analyzed in various forms, from the perspective of the girls peer culture, this statement is a sign of a deep liking for another person. On this day when I left after lunch, Laura, Amber, and Sally both made a point of saying over and over again goodbye to me, “Good-bye baby samara” (they had been playing baby). They were asking me into their world of baby, mommy and marriage, allowing and positioning me to be a part of “their” group.

On the following day, however, I once again found it difficult to break into the group because of Laura’s whispering and secret telling. During playtime outside, I purposefully sat on the edge of the sandbox a few feet away from Laura and began to make a design with small wooden sticks and bark. Expressing interest in what I was doing, she asked what I was making. I told her I was making a picture and that she could see it if she wanted, but she had to wait until I was done. She covered her eyes and told me, “I am a princess you know. My mother said so. My mom is a queen and that makes me a princess.” I responded with “Okay well this is a picture for a princess then.” When I was done I told her to look. She slowly moved one finger from her eye, and then removed her entire hand and gave me a big smile, “That is beautiful. Now I will make one for you, but you have to close your eyes.” After several turns of making pictures and covering our eyes, she asked me to walk around the playground and collect more sticks with her. We found rocks and colored them with orange and blue chalk, we found a
beehive and told the teacher, we found sticks and put them in our pockets, and we talked about the rocks that we had at home. I listened to her directions, acknowledged that she was a princess and did not tell the teacher when she was bossy. The more I listened the more she began to open up; she began to allow me to hear the whispers she had been keeping from the teachers.

**Emotional Theme and Social Function**

**Constructing Romantic Love**

In the next portion, I will examine how the Sally, Laura and Erick constructed an emotional theme that centered on romantic love as a tool to negotiate power in their peer culture, to build relationships and construct social identities. Romantic love, as an emotional theme, is not defined as what the children desired from a internal standpoint, rather, romantic love it is being operationally defined as the performance of the romantic love narrative and how this related to “becoming male or female, as we are coming to understand these terms” (Davies, 1993, p. 145). Recognizing that the there are specific patterns of interaction that the romantic love storyline constructs for males versus females, Shields (2002) suggests that learning how to love as a male or a female within the romantic love narrative is based on different rules and norms, which are guided by notions about who, when, where and whom one can love romantically as a White females, a African American Male, and a Muslim female.

Over time a reoccurring theme appeared, which centered on Laura and Sally being the *girlfriend* and Erick being the *boyfriend*. For example, Erick would often approach Laura and Sally and ask, “Are you my girlfriend?” “Do you love me?” “Will
you marry me?” Erick did not state, “Pretend I am your boyfriend or pretend you are my girlfriend.” Erick used statements and questions about male/female pairing in the classroom with Laura and Sally. The position of being a girlfriend and/or boyfriend, within their peer culture, was directly tied to the male/female dualism and heterosexual matrix of romantic pairings. This is illustrated in the next scenario that occurred between Laura and myself as we colored in the art studio on September 21, 2006:

1.12 Samara: Where is Sally?
2.12 Laura: I am not talking to her
3.12 Samara: Why?
4.12 Laura: She’s not my friend. She loves Erick that’s why.
5.12 Samara: Who do you like?
6.12 Laura: Nobody. No one except John

In this exchange Laura appraises Sally’s act of loving Erick as negative, which is illustrated in her positioning of Sally as someone who is not her friend. Sally loves Erick and according to Laura that is a reason for them not to be friends. When Laura is asked who she likes, she states John, who was another male that they would name as their boyfriend. In this interaction, not only did Laura position Sally and herself within the romantic love narrative. Laura does not state that she is not Sally’s friend because Sally was playing with Erick or because Sally was Erick’s friend. Laura specifically states that she is not Sally’s friend because Sally loves Erick, which is negative (or appraised as such by Laura) and cause for a break in their friendship. It is the appraisal of Sally’s love
for Erick as well as the taking up of the heterosexual discourse about male/female relationships and exclusivity that is being constructed into a “lived romantic love narrative” within their peer culture.

Romantic love is inherently tied to notions about relationships and who can and cannot engage in such relations (Christian-Smith, 1988; Davies, 1993). Romantic love is not individual, but rather occurs in relation to another person. People fall in love with others (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992). Because of the relational nature of romantic love it inherently indexes an action (i.e., loving) towards another human being. It also denotes a specific type of relationship between two people and is a shared cultural model. There are cultural, historical and ideological rules and norms about the appropriate actions and reactions that should accompany the romantic love narrative. One of the discourses being taken up by Laura is seen in her reaction to Sally loving Erick, as he was often positioned as someone that Laura was in love with. Laura rejection of Sally is social judgment, which appears to be linked to exclusion, either her being excluded from the friendship of Sally or that of Erick, or perhaps both. Either way, the rejection is based on Sally and Erick relationship/friendship, which Laura does not approve of.

The exclusive nature of romantic pairing inherently made the boyfriend and girlfriend anchor play narrative problematic for Laura. On several events, it was noted that she would survey peers about who they were in love with (i.e., male and female pairing only) and then highlight the problematic nature of the relationship if more than one person loved the same person. For example, during one interaction, I observed as Laura orchestrated whom Amber would marry. She purposefully went around to all of the males and asked if they would marry Amber. More than one male said yes. Laura
returned to Amber and informed her that she had a problem because too many boys said yes. Laura understood the exclusive nature of the boyfriend and girlfriend pairing in the romantic narrative and not only excluded Sally from her play space because of it, but also used it as a way to transmit rules about it with other children in the classroom. It must be noted that Laura did not do this with same-sex relations. She would play with more than one female and did not “survey” the class to determine if two girls were best friends and then report that there was a problem in a person had more than one best friend.

Erick’s role as a boyfriend was not new and existed prior to my documentation of this narrative in September. Erick taking on the boyfriend position was noted during my first focused observation with the Ann, Marry, Sally, Katie, and Caitlin. When I asked the girls about it during video revisiting or while interacting with them, they would mostly ignore my questions or say, “oh that is nothing.” However, during one video revisiting with Ann, Luke came to the door of the quiet room and said he needed to ask Ann something. She walked over to the door and they whispered to each other. I overheard Erick’s name, but could not hear the rest of what they said. When I asked her about it she said that Erick wanted to marry her and she told Luke that she did not want to marry Erick.

During another observation, Luke entered the classroom somewhat late and approached Ann to find out if she was his girlfriend that day. She said no and he became visibly upset. To rectify the situation he went over to a door in the classroom, which was used to hold magnetic pictures of all the children at school. The door had black tape that was divided into two sections: who was at school and who was not at school. Luke carefully and purposefully took his picture and placed it next to Ann’s and then did a
similar pairing for Katie with Kai, and Caitlin with Erick, and then put them all under who was at school while placing the rest of the children in the classroom under who was not at school. Through manipulation of school items such as the “Who is at school” magnets, children within their peer culture, were constructing notions about heterosexual pairings among males and females, which were linked to the emotional theme of romantic love (Blaise, 2005). Within the school culture the magnets were used to build community, however, within the peer culture, the magnets become symbolic objects to signal heterosexual male/female pairing in the romantic love anchor play narrative (Elgas, 2003).

The romantic love anchor play narrative was not new within the peer culture, but rather existed over time and across situations over the eight-months in the daily life of the classroom. It was not constructed in the “overt” classroom world, but in the “covert” peer culture world, which was based on distinct heterosexual pairings. That is, the boyfriend and girlfriend narrative did not take place between two males or two females, but rather was specifically based on male/female relationships. Children would ask each other are you my friend, best friend, best buddy, but the use of the term girlfriend and boyfriend was used exclusively within this anchor play narrative.

Upon entering the classroom in March, I did not recognize the girlfriend and boyfriend pairings as a romantic love an anchor play narrative because of the implicit nature as well as children’s tendency to hide the theme away from teachers and adults. The teachers did not define the anchor play narrative as a thread of interest (i.e., an interest in the peer culture that could be brought into the school culture for mediation and support). It was not studied through documentation boards. It was not discussed in the
weekly curriculum guide sent out to parents. Rather, the anchor play narrative was implicitly woven within the daily life of the classroom and it often became a site of tension between children, parents, and teacher because of the “taboo” nature of the term boyfriend and girlfriend in the preschool classroom (Corsaro, 2003). However, as uncovered in the findings, the romantic love narrative was not about “taboo sexual desire”, but rather was about power and positioning within the peer culture, which will be illustrated more clearly in the microanalyses reported later in this section.

The “taboo” nature of using such a term is based on heterosexual norms and discourses about male and female romantic relationships (Blaise, 2005). The term girlfriend, when used in relation to another female, is typically associated with a non-romantic relationship within dominant heterosexual matrix and therefore is not “taboo”. The term girlfriend when used in relation to a male, however, traditionally indexes a romantic relationship between a male and a female. Thus, there is a significant difference in the subject position associated with the term girlfriend versus girl friend or friend.

Within the children’s peer culture, the term boyfriend and girlfriend was indeed used to indicate a friendship “pairing” with the opposite gender. Given this, the anchor play narrative, similar to the kitty narrative, was another way in which the male and female binary was strengthened and attended to through “borderwork” (Davies, 2001; Corsaro, 2003) between male and females in the classroom.

The teachers did not reject the boyfriend and girlfriend anchor play narrative nor did they support the heterosexual normative implied within such a pairing. In fact, it was noted that there were same-sex parents in the classroom and when issues around heterosexual marriage arose, it could be contradicted through their example. Thus,
teachers did not endorse the heterosexual marriage discourse nor reject boyfriend and girlfriend anchor play narrative, but rather the tension resided in parent reactions as well as in conflict’s that arose among the children. Teachers, aware of the boyfriend and girlfriend pairings, suggested adult conceptions should not be placed onto the children’s roles and viewed it as another way of constructing friendship in the classroom. However, a great deal of conflict arose as children would ask each other “Are you my boyfriend” or “Are you my girlfriend” and if one person was rejected it could cause tension. It was also used as a tool for relational aggression (I am not going to be your girlfriend if you don’t…). This is noted in the following exchange that occurred between Erick and Laura on September 26, 2006 behind the cubby area while getting dressed to go out to the playground. In this exchange Laura is using a “play date” as a form of relational aggression by stating that Erick cannot have a play date if he does not follow what she says.

1.22 Laura: Okay then you can’t have a play date
2.22 Erick: I want to go to the play date
3.22 Laura: I don’t have to let you it’s my house
4.22 Erick: Are other people going to it?
5.22 Laura: Yes
6.22 Erick: I want…
7.22 Teacher: Erick Erick that would be a plan she would have to make with her mom and dad
8.22 Laura: Last time my mom and dad made a plan
9.22 Teacher: When is that plan happening?
10.22 Laura: On on Saturday

11.22 Teacher: Hum I will check with them this afternoon. Come here Erick lets tie your shoes (unintelligible). Laura.

12.22 Teacher: (to Erick) What words was Laura telling you about that plan?

13.22 Erick: xxxxxx

14.22 Teacher: Laura his mom and dad would not say oh Erick couldn’t come over now because you Laura said so xxxxxx. Those words feel hard. It feels like you are trying to tease him by saying you can come to my house. Nope now you can’t come. Your mom and dad would not say “No now Erick can’t come because Laura said so”. I don’t know if that plan is really happening, but you telling him that no you can’t come to my house goes back to the plan we had yesterday. It feels like your trying to make him sad? Are you trying to make him sad? Why are you telling him that then?

15.22 Laura: xxxxxx …all cleaned up.

16.22 Teacher: So then that would be something you could talk with your mom and dad about. It seems that your mom and dad don’t mind if your house is not clean or maybe you will clean it in a lot of days before they come over. By telling him right now you can’t come to my house it seems you are trying to get him to do something you want by saying if you don’t do something that he can’t come to your house.

In this exchange, the teacher notes her concern with Laura using the play date as a tool for power over Erick, by asking if she is trying to make Erick sad. As was illustrated in the kitty narrative, sadness here is also seen as relational as Laura is held responsible for trying to make Erick sad. Laura, however, does not say she is trying to make Erick sad, but rather states something about her house not being clean (indicating that as a reason Erick can’t come over).

Not only did teachers have to balance children making other children sad through the use of the relational aggression described above, but they also had to balance the “taboo” nature associated with playing boyfriend and girlfriend with the concern of
parents who were uncomfortable with the subject. My personal reflection upon this was
noted in my field notes on July 10, 2006:

How come the girls and boys saying they are getting married is not okay? Why? They understand that this only happens for adults. Why can they pretend to have a baby, but not get married? Well they can pretend to get married, but maybe it is the notion of who is someone’s boyfriend in the class and then they argue over this…perhaps the difference is that having an “idea” about marriage is okay, but something that is “underground” (boyfriend and girlfriend) is not

In this entry, the narrative’s meaning(s) was being questioned. Marriage and boyfriend/girlfriend play was being questioned and examined. Trying to understand the meaning and relationship between the two and noting the underground nature of the male/female pairing in the classroom. Part of the discomfort with the romantic love narrative associated with the girlfriend/boyfriend anchor play narrative versus the marriage anchor play narrative rests on a prevailing discourse that romantic love is sexual (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992) and the linguistic implication of being boyfriend and girlfriend versus pretending to be married. Marriage, as a pretend anchor play narrative, appears to be more centered in fantasy and family play, while being a boyfriend/girlfriend is more closely linked to the present. Within the children’s anchor play narrative, even though children would be ones boyfriend and/or girlfriend it did not contain the same meaning for them, but did cause similar tensions related to the dominant discourse of love.
Social Tensions Around Romantic Love

Who loved Erick became a site of tension among Laura, Erick and Sally as they moved toward and away from Erick through the use of verbal and non-verbal communication. One problem that arose was the use of relational aggression with the role of boyfriend/girlfriend as it was used to negotiate power over others within the peer culture (Edmiston, in press). The teachers were very aware of the power relations embedded in the anchor play narrative. As result of the daily conflict, the teachers constructed a contract with Erick, Sally, and Laura. The contract is displayed in figure 4.3. It illustrates that the romantic love anchor play narrative caused enough tension that teachers intervened. The contract focused specifically on what friends, boyfriends, and girlfriends do (i.e., sit next to each other, make plans, and read). It also stated that you could have more than one friend, which is in contrast to the peer culture notion that you could only have one boyfriend or girlfriend at a time.

The contract that was constructed on September 25, 2006 shows how the romantic love anchor play narrative was situated in the daily life of the classroom as an underground anchor play narrative. By using the term underground, I suggest that romantic love was not explicitly discussed and labeled (e.g., such as family play, kitty play and/or superhero play), but rather it was made available and co-constructed within the children’s peer culture. The children however understood that tension exited around this anchor play narrative and tended to keep it on the peripheral. In fact, even though this contract made the narrative explicit, as it was a public document displayed in the classroom, Laura ignored my questions about it when I asked her to tell me more. While the children understood that teachers and myself were aware of these male/female
pairings the children tended to keep it beneath the surface of the school culture, through whispers, by simply ignoring questions, or taking the conversation behind the cubby area.

Friends play with each other, they sit next to each other, they play with each others toys, make plans together, read books with each other, they make plans with each other’s moms and dads to go to each other’s houses. You can have more than one friend!

If we are doing these things we don’t need to ask if you are my boyfriend or girlfriend or friend.

If someone is asking “Are you my girl friend/boyfriend/friend? They can just move away from that person.

(All three names were signed here) Sally, Erick, and Laura

FIGURE 4.3 – Boyfriend and Girlfriend Contract: 9-25-06
Negotiating Power: Are you in love with me?

The next section contains the analysis of two events that occurred on the day after the contract was constructed. The events uncover how children, in their moment-to-moment actions and reactions, constructed the emotional theme of romantic love and how the emotional theme was used for power and positioning. Both events presented occurred on the same day. This day was chosen to illustrate the tensions around the anchor play narrative. It was also selected because it is an illustrative case with regard to how Erick, Laura, and Sally used the theme differently across events for power and positioning with their play. It also illustrated misunderstanding in language use that occurred based on racialized differences in language use and the meaning associated with certain linguistic terms. The first event occurred during free playtime in the morning and the second event occurred on the playground on September 26, 2006. Analysis focuses primarily on interactions between Sally, Erick, and Laura.

The exchange below is a videotaped event that occurred during morning free-playtime. In the next exchange Laura, Erick, and Sally are gathered in the block area, which has a construction truck displayed on the overhead. Other children also come in and out of this play area and are engaged in their own anchor play narrative simultaneously. Erick, Laura, and Sally are in the block area touching Wally’s hair, which has been “spiked”. Wally, John, and Brian were playing construction. Wally, Sally, Erick and Laura begin to have a conversation about Wally’s new hair cut. More specifically, they are talking about whether or not it hurts to touch because it was so “spiky”. During this time, the following interaction occurs between Laura, Erick and Sally. The camera is pointed toward the block area.
1.32 Erick: Do I still get to go to your house first? *(Stands in front of Laura)*

2.32 Laura: Yes *(she walks past him)*

3.32 Erick: Okay mama *(gives her a hug from behind and she pulls away)*. Are you in love with me?

4.32 Laura: No *(She walks by him and gently pushes him so she can walk past. Laura walks over to Sally)*

5.32 Laura *(to Sally): Are you in love me? (With a laugh she repeats what Erick said to her to Sally, but looks at Erick as she states this).*

6.32 Wally *(to Erick): Touch it right here it’s xxx *(Erick touches Wally’s hair and then whispers something to Laura)*

7.32 Laura: Stop it *(low voice; she smiles at Erick and walks away from him)*

8.32 Laura: Sally move him away *(pointing at Erick and smiling).*

9.32 Laura: Stop it Erick *(runs past Erick smiling and leaves the area being video taped)* *(Sally, Cole, and John are building with tools, Laura approaches, and Erick leaves the area).*

10.32 Sally: I want to have…

11.32 Wally: you can’t

12.32 Laura: What’s in there Sally?

13.32 Laura: *(Looks at Erick as he comes in the area and smiles at him. He comes up to her and puts the plastic saw on her shoulder. She does not move, but keeps her gaze on him and bats her eyes. He falls down on the mat next to her and screams).*

14.32 Erick: *(He comes next to Laura) Hi mama.*
15.32 Laura: I am not your mama (she moves away from him and goes by Sally).

16.32 Laura: Sally move him away (smiling).

17.32 Laura: Come on Sally (Laura running and smiling).

(Girls are behind cubbies and Erick comes by them)

18.32: Sally: xxx for no…

19.32 Laura: Come on Sally

20.32 Sally: I don’t want to

21.32 Laura: (to Sally) You can bring that with you

22.32 Sally: It’s a measure

23.32 Erick: Okay mama.

24.32 Laura: Stop it. Stop it. Stop it. Erick

25.32 Sally: Erick

26.32 Laura: Come on Sally before he gets you (smiling and running around Erick)

27.32 Erick: My pooh pooh is on fire. My pooh pooh is on fire.

28.32 Laura: Come on come on, come on, come on Sally

29.32 Sally: I am going to get him

30.32: Erick: xxxxxx

29.32 Laura: Tie him up (Laura leaves the area being video-taped and goes behind the cubby area).

30.32 Laura: (says to self) I wonder if he is going to move away (she begins humming)

31.32 Sally: I got him. I got Laura (short pause) got him. I am bringing him to jail. (Sally has the tape measure around Erick. He stands there and let’s her capture him)

32.32 Wally: (pushes down Sally)
33.32 Laura: Are you okay Sally?
34.32 Sally: Yeah
35.32 Laura: Sally get him *(keeps singing and humming)*
36.32 Laura: *(singing)* xuxxxx Never go Erick, never go never go when you even know never go when he xuxxxx I am a beautiful princesses you don’t know if I am a real princess or not cause I am a real princess and I was xxx. *(humming to self—Erick and Sally leave block area and move to Laura behind cubbie area)*
37.32 Laura: You got out Erick
38.32 Sally: I got the alligator.
39.32 Laura *(humming to self)*
40.32 Laura: Sally he is over there. *(humming to self). Stop it Erick.*
41.32 Erick: Quiet room is open.
*(Laura and Sally both behind the cubby area)*
42.32 Laura: I am just singing a regular song. Like this *(she begins to hum).*
43.32 Laura: *(continues singing)*. Shining knight xuxxxx.
44.32 Sally: xuxxxx
45.32 Laura: *(to Sally)* I am singing a song because I am the princess okay? And you be the police girl.
46.32 Sally: No. I just want to be just a princess.
47.32 Laura: Okay but you are trying to catch for me okay?
48.32 Sally: Yeah
49.32 Laura: Can I be prettier than you?
50.32 Sally: No!
51.32 Laura: We are both pretty, we are twin princesses, but I am older okay?

52.32 Erick: I am the bad guy

53.32 Laura: Yeah you’re you’re the alligator.

54.32 Laura: (to Sally) Pretend you are the little princess.

55.32 Teacher: You know Sally you can be all done with that tape measure. It’s time to put it away.

56.32 Laura: Sally you are the little sister princess and I am the big sister princess.

57.32 Sally: Okay

In line 1.32, Erick asks if he gets to go to Laura’s house first. While the statement is a question directed to Laura, it also illustrates Erick’s concern about his relational status to her. The question was not only used to ask if he could go to Laura’s house, but also to determine his social positioning as he asks if he can go to her house first, indicating that he has higher social status (i.e., by being first) than his peers in the classroom. Laura accepts this by stating yes. By doing so she validates Erick’s social positioning as her friend as well as someone that has high status in the classroom, as she would invite him first, before other peers, to her home. He responds by calling her mama and gives her a hug. Giving her a hug is and calling her mama is used as a sign of affection and an entrance in to the romantic love narrative. The term Mama, within this anchor play narrative, does not refer to “mother”, but rather is used to address a female in an affectionate manner. Within African American English the term mama has various meaning’s depending on how, when, where and with whom it is used. Within this context and given the terms used by Erick before and after his use of mama with Laura, mama
does not mean “mother”, but rather is used as a term of address towards a female who is desirable.

Erick continues to build on the romantic love narrative presented to Laura by asking, “Are you in love with me?” Once more, this question is used as a tool to determine his social status in relation to Laura within the romantic love narrative he has initiated. He does not ask “do you love me, will you love me, can you love me, but rather use he states, “Are you in love with me?”

The “reference to affiliation” being used by Erick, as compared to Corsaro (1997) “Are we friends?” question contains a slightly different meaning. Being in love versus loving someone and/or being friend’s referents a specific type of relationship linked to a romantic love narrative, which Erick draws upon in the exchange between him and Laura. The meaning assigned to loving someone versus being in love is similar to the difference of being positioned as a girlfriend versus a girlfriend. Both index a particular type of relationship with another person. By asking, “Are you in love with me?” Erick uses an access strategy to enter the romantic love anchor play narrative with Laura (Corsaro, 1997).

In this brief exchange, Erick is signaling a type of relationship as well as assigning a social identity based on the romantic love narrative between males and females (i.e., boyfriend versus girlfriend). A response “yes, no, or I don’t know” from Laura would change the nature of the relationship and subsequent interactions based on her answer. For example, if Laura responds with a yes, indicating that she is in love with it would change their social positioning from two people who are friends to two people that “are in love” with one another versus, which would then guide future interactions
with one another. The act of being in love with another person changes how we relate to that person (e.g., friend, partner, teacher, colleague, and peer). The important aspect of the discursive positioning of being in love and asking someone if they are in love with you, is not whether Erick and Laura really are in love with one another, but rather it is the social work of the question and answer (i.e., to determine a type of relationship) as well as the subsequent performance of romantic love associated with asking “Are you in love with me?” that makes the question and the answer meaningful between two people (Kulick & Schieffelin, 2004). Asking, “Are you in love with me?” is a social act related to being or not being in love with another person. Moreover, asking someone “Are you in love with me?” is a request for information that indexes Erick’s concern with his position in relation to Laura.

This question also positions Laura as opposite to Erick in the male/female romantic love narrative. Laura recognizes the type of relationship that the questions brings, which is illustrated by her response in line 4.32, as she says no and pushes Erick away from her. Not only does she reject his positioning of her within the romantic love narrative, but she also repeats his statement to Sally in a mocking tone. The mocking tone could be an indication that Laura realizes this question is for “grown-ups” and taboo for children, or it could be to illustrate that she is not “in love” with Erick.

Laura looks directly at Erick while she states this, showing through her non-verbal actions that she wanted him to hear her statement to Sally. In the next lines, Laura’s actions move toward Erick while her words express a movement away from Erick in the romantic love narrative. While Laura’s words tend to focus on pushing Erick away from her (i.e., I don’t like you), her actions show her engaging in the romantic love
narrative through non-verbal actions of batting her eyes, pointing, smiling, laughing and calling on Sally to capture Erick for her. From a peer culture perspective, this move toward and move away from Erick as illustrated in Laura’s verbal and non-verbal actions and reactions is a form of approach-avoidance play documented by Corsaro (1997). At its core, approach avoidance play “is primarily a non-verbal pretend play routine in the peer culture of children in which they identify, approach, and then avoid a threatening agent or monster.” (p. 135). Laura identifies Erick as someone to avoid, but at the same time she approaches him though her non-verbal actions. She also asks Sally to engage in the routine of approach and avoidance with Erick as the threatening object, whom Sally must keep away. It is also linked to traditional boy/girl chase that is often seen on the playground among school age children.

Erick once again approaches and calls Laura mama, which she rejects by telling him she is not his mama. Laura’s rejection and stating the she is not his mama, could be 1) she understands the she is being positioned as a desirable female by Erick or 2) she interprets Erick’s use of mama as being positioned as a “mother.” Given the use of mama by Erick and Laura’s continual rejection of this term (I am not your mama), I would suggest that her rejection is due to her misinterpretation of the term mama as the “mother” position rather than as interned by Erick (i.e., as a desirable female). In this exchange it appears that there is a misunderstanding due to cultural difference as Laura, being from a Muslim background, most likely has not be exposed to African American English to the same extent as Erick, who . Thus, while both Laura and Erick come from similar education middle class background and both speak standardized English, a linguistic misunderstanding due to cultural backgrounds occurs.
Next, Laura asks Sally to join in the approach avoidance play in line 16.32 through 28.32 as she calls on Sally to capture him. She continues with the romantic love approach-avoidance play in the narrative as she hides behind the cubby and begins to sing a princess song while Sally ties him up and takes him to jail. Erick willingly engages in the avoidance-approach play, while Laura directs what is occurring. Laura, rejecting the mama position assigned by Erick, positions herself as princess. Throughout the exchange she rejects being positioned as Erick’s “mama”, while actively engaging in the approach-avoidance storytelling associated with the romantic love narrative. She even begins to narrate this in her song as she states, “Don’t go Erick… I am a beautiful princess, you don’t know if I am a real princess or not cause I am”. According to Davies, (2001), “When taking up in the discourse of romantic love there are two major complementary subject positions made available—the male hero or prince who has the agency and who usually has some heroic task to perform, and the female heroine or princess who is usually a victim of circumstance and is reliant on her prince to save her from whatever it is that fate has done to her (Brown-stein; Zipes, 1986)” (p. 98). While Laura is drawing upon such a discourse in her role as a “princess,” Laura, being a real princess, is the most powerful agent in the narrative as she negotiates roles and positions with Erick and Sally. She is a powerful agent in constructing the narrative and shaping both Sally and Erick’s actions.

As can be seen in line 45.32 to 57.32, Laura continues to position herself in roles that give her more power as compared to Erick and Sally. In line 45.32 she tells Sally that she is the princess and Sally is the police girl. Sally rejects Laura’s position of her as a police girl and says she wants to be a princess too. Laura accepts her negotiation, but also
negotiates this further by saying that Sally can be a princess, but one that has to catch for her. That is, she allows Sally to take an equal status position (i.e., both as princesses), but then shifts the power dynamic by saying that Sally must be doing something for her (i.e., catching Erick). Laura attempts to negotiate their princess position even further by asking Sally if she can be prettier than her. Sally responds with a loud no. In this exchange, both Laura and Sally draw from the traditional romantic love storyline, which centers on beauty as power for females. Laura does not mind if they are both princesses as long as she is more beautiful than Sally. Sally recognizes that being less beautiful than Laura places her in a lower social position, which is indicated by her stern reaction to this request. Laura continues to negotiate this, by stating that they are both pretty, they are twin princesses, but she is older than Sally. Erick then places himself as the bad guy, and Laura reassigns him as the alligator (aggressive animal role) and then negotiates with Sally once more by stating that Sally is the little princess. Sally is the little sister princess and Laura is the big sister princess.

In this exchange, Laura’s is trying to position herself in powerful female positions (most beautiful and oldest), both of which were considered desirable qualities within the female peer culture. The positioning that Laura is negotiating is important to her as each one indexes her status to Sally in various ways. Laura does not just want to be a beautiful princess. She wants to be more beautiful than Sally. Sally is not allowed to simply be a princess, but rather must be a princess that does something for her. Laura and Sally are not just twin princesses with equal status, but rather Laura is the oldest. Laura continually negotiates the power dynamics until Laura finally agrees that Sally is the big sister princess.
The important aspect to note in the exchange above among Erick, Laura, and Sally is that Laura’s definition of power is shifts when interacting with Erick versus Sally. Her negotiation of power and positioning with Erick is based on being his girlfriend and embedded in romantic love narrative. The position available as a powerful female in relation to Erick is different as compared to the position as a powerful female in relation to Sally. That is, power and positioning with Erick is used in relation to the romantic love narrative, while power and positioning with Sally is used in relation to age and beauty. However, as seen in the misunderstanding about the term mama between Erick and Laura, power and positioning becomes more complicated when two people do not understand the use of specific term. That is, Laura’s reaction to Erick’s use of mama towards her may have been different if she would have understood the positioning associated with the term as meant by Erick.

It is also important to note that Laura’s conception of a being a princess was also bound to her cultural identity as a Muslim. Laura conception of what is means to be a princess and the power associated with that position is noted in a conversation that occurred on November 20, 2007:

1.42 Samara: Tell me what it means to be princess?

2.42 Laura: You get all the things you want.

3.42 Samara: You get all the things you want.

4.42 Laura: Yeah

5.42 Samara: What do princesses do?

6.42 Laura: The live in castles until a prince comes and they get their hand on the xxxx and they fall asleep until the prince come and kisses them.
7.42 Samara: Until the prince kisses them. Do you want to be a princess?

8.42 Laura: Yeah

9.42 Samara: You do. Why?

10.42 Laura: I am a real one.

11.42 Samara: You are?

12.42 Laura: uh-huh.

13.42 Samara: So does that mean there will be a prince?

14.42 Laura: No I mean a Muslim princess.

15.42 Samara: A what?

16.42 Laura: Muslim princess means they don’t get kissed by the prince until they are married.

17.42 Samara: Muslim princess

18.42 Laura: And they don’t eat ham. They only eat chicken and fish. I don’t know what else they do.

19.42 Samara: What does the Muslim prince do?

20.42 Laura: The prince not the princess? They try to get from the mean things that have powers so they can save the princess.

21.42 Samara: What does it mean to have power?

22.42 Laura: Like this (*she snaps her fingers*) the house is clean.

23.42 Samara: Can a princess do that?

24.42 Laura: No only some mean stuff have powers

25.42 Samara: Who has more power a princess or a prince?

26.42 Laura: Prince
As can be seen in this conversation, Laura was not just pretending to be a princess; she was a real Muslim princess. As such, she notes that there are different cultural rules for engaging in the romantic love narrative as Muslim princess versus a regular princess, as a Muslim princess does not get kissed till they are married. In this statement, the cultural nature of romantic love is made visible as she explicitly states that there are different display rules given her cultural background. In addition, princesses, as she states at the very beginning of our conversation, “get all the things they want.” While Laura states that the prince has more power than a princess, and that it’s the prince’s job to save the princesses, it is not clear if she was referring to the traditional western fairy tale notion of the princess/prince or the Muslim princess role. Either way, Laura draws on her gendered as well as her cultural identity as a princess to socially construct the appropriate display rules in the romantic love narrative. At the same time, she also draws upon the traditional fairytale storyline, which positions females as being saved by the prince as the female is waiting for her prince to arrive. From this standpoint, the female princess does not hold as much power as the male prince, which is also noted by Laura. To be whole, a princess needs her prince to come and kiss her, however, in the Muslim account this happens after marriage, in the American account, it happens prior to marriage. The difference lies in when the princess gets kissed by the prince.

In Laura’s definition and response to the first question: What does it mean to be a princess? (noting that prior to this exchange she had told me over and over again that she was a real princess), she explicitly states that “they get all the things they want.” When I first examined this statement seemed contradictory to the traditional fairy tale as I was not sure if princess get all the things they want. The problem with this statement is in
determining what are the things that a princess wants? Another question not answered here is where do all the things that a princess wants come from? Is the prince the one who provides what she wants? While this is not answered, her statement is illustrative of how she positioned herself in the classroom—as a princess waiting for her prince and as a princess who get all the things that she want, which may have been indicative of why she was a key player in the boyfriend/girlfriend play narrative as well as a child who held a sense of entitlement when it came controlling play in the classroom with her peers.

In her everyday actions with peers, Laura was not a passive female player, but rather was an active and aggressive peer with both males and females as she was skilled at using relational aggression to negotiate power. Laura’s ability to control events and negotiate power was further illustrated on September 26, 2006 after the “are you in love with me” event. Laura continued to engage in the romantic love narrative and use it as a mechanism to negotiate positioning and power with Erick throughout the day. For example, after circle time Erick, Sally and Laura had been cutting flowers and putting them in vases with the teachers. Laura took (without the teachers knowledge) some pedals. Laura, holding the pedals tightly in her hand went behind the cubby area. Erick noticed that she had taken the pedals and tells her, “If you want to be my girlfriend you have to give me some pedal flowers”, in which Laura replied, “I don’t want to be your girlfriend. I’ve had you already for a boyfriend.” A few minutes later Erick and Nate have a conversation about being a boyfriend versus being a boy and Nate states, “A boy is just a boy. A boyfriend is when you are getting married.” Next Erick picks up the wireless microphone, which Laura had been holding earlier, and say’s into the
microphone, as if it is a recorder that Laura would be able to hear, “I want to kiss you mama Laura, Sally, mama, Laura.”

Sally then begins to construct “the preschool game” which is a play narrative in which the stuffed animals serve as preschoolers and the children are the teachers. Interestingly, the preschoolers are the five females from the “kitty group.” As this is going on, Laura picks up the wireless microphone and tells Erick to say something and he tells her “mama can I be with you mama Laura?” Laura responds, “I don’t really love Erick, but her loves me, blah, blah, blah, blah.” Later Erick approaches Sally and asks about who he can be in the preschool game, which Sally is leading, while Laura watches. Even though she is not “in” the preschool game, Laura tells Erick that he can be “the kissing boy.” He rejects this and states, “I want to be the brother.” Laura responds, “There are no brothers in the preschool game.” She then instructs Sally to move Erick away from her and the following exchange transpires between Laura, Erick and Tamara (another female student):

1.52 Laura (to Tamara): Are you going to marry Erick?
2.52 Tamara: Yes
3.52 Laura (to Erick): Erick you need to talk to Tamara about being married.
4.52 Erick (to Laura): I don’t want to marry her
5.52 Laura (to Tamara): He is not marrying you.

Erick and Laura then move into the quiet room and Erick whispers to Laura, “Are you my girlfriend”? “Yes”, she replies with a whisper. Again, the same dance between
Erick and Laura begins, in which Laura moves toward and then away from Erick in the romantic love anchor play narrative as they continually negotiate and define who they are to one another across the day. They are in love and then not in love. She is his girlfriend and then is not his girlfriend. The contradictory and changing roles reflect the tensions in the romantic love narrative as constructed by Laura, Sally, and Erick.

**Negotiating Power: You are not my girlfriend?**

Romantic love caused tension because it was used to negotiate power within the peer culture. Laura understood the power associated with the being a girlfriend and she used this position, similar to being the most beautiful or oldest with Sally, to negotiate who she “made choices” for. The gendered position associated with romantic love, guided how Laura, Erick, and Sally positioned one another as well as the roles each would take up in the narrative. This notion is illustrated in event below, which took place on the playground. Laura and Sally are playing chase on the playground with Erick. Sally then asks if Laura wants to play football and be the referee. Laura asks if girls are referees, which Sally says yes. The following exchange occurs in which Laura and Sally ask the males to play football with them:

1.62 Laura: Hey hey do you want me to be

2.62 John: {Erick}

3.62 Laura: Wait wait do you want me to be the referee? *(to Chase who is holding the football)*

4.62 John: Yeah

5.62 Laura: Okay go get Erick *(to Sally)*
6.62 Sally: No **no no** Erick does not want to play

7.62 Laura: But maybe he does. What about if he does

8.62 Sally: No hey Erick do you want to play? (*Laura, Erick, Nathan, Tamara are on the bench*)

9.62 Nathan: If I get hurt remember you were going to take me to (*to Laura who walks away from him to Erick*)

10.62 Laura: Erick do you want to play that you are the football guy and I am the referee

11.62 Erick: No

12.62 Laura: and I am the football girl?

13.62 Erick: No

14.62 Laura: Why?

15.62 Erick: You are not my girlfriend (*he sits on the bench with his arms crossed*)

16.63 Laura: (*laughs*) That is that’s silly

17.62 Sally: I am making my skir... I am taking of my Johnet and making my (*taking off Johnet and tying it around waist*)

18.62 Nathan: I got hurt. I got hurt (says to Laura) (*Laura is taking off her Johnet and tying it around her waist*)

19.62 Laura: I am not playing without Erick (*to Nathan*)

20.62 Nathan: I got hurt

21.62 Sally: You still you can play

22.62 Nathan: I got hurt

23.62 Sally: still you can play (*runs to ask teacher to tie sweater around her waist*)

24.62 Nathan: xxxxxx

25.62 Erick: I am not playing (*Erick moves from bench and tell this to Laura*)

26.62 Laura: That’s okay xxx pooh pooh guy
27.62 Erick: Stop it

28.62 Laura: No if you’re not playing I am xxx you (walks away from Erick)

29.62 Laura: Sally my xxx because of this
(John and nate are throwing the ball to one another. The other children are watching by bench. Amber walks over and John and Nathan come over)

30.62 Laura: xxxxxx we are playing a good game Amber

31.62 Nathan: (to Laura) I got hurt

32.62 Sally: He got hurt

33.62 Laura: (to Nathan) I am not playing without Erick

34.62 Amber: (to Amber) xxxxxx do you want a play date?

35.62 Laura: (to Amber) xxxxxx

36.62 Sally: You can still play without Erick. I am still playing without Erick.

37.62 Laura: Okay we are still playing. Times up. Rest time. Nathan got hurt (all children by the bench).

38.62 Erick: (to Laura) we can make our own choices

39.62 Nathan: (to Laura) you don’t make boys’ choices

40.62 Laura: You just want us to be your girlfriends and we don’t want to.

41.62 Erick: No I don’t I just want you to be nice to me

42.62 Laura: We are nice to you

43.62 Erick: I am not taking to you

44.62 Erick: You are trying to be mean to me not nice to me

45.62 Sally: NO were not

46.62 Nathan: Okay you just take the ball

47.62 Sally: I want to go with Nathan

48.62 Erick: You don’t tell Sally what to do
49.62 Laura: Nathan you come with me you are hurt.

In line 1.62 Laura approaches Nathan and asks if the boys want her to be the referee. John says yes. Trying to control the event, which was typical of Laura, she instructs Sally to include Erick in the game. Sally rejects Laura’s request and states that Erick does not want to play. Laura does not accept Sally’s response and states that he might want to play. In this exchange, Laura is trying to grant access to Erick by inviting him into the game. As is shown in the next few lines, however, Erick really does not want to play, but rather it is Laura who wants him to be a part of the game even though Sally has stated that he does not want to. Thus, in this instance Laura is not trying to grant Erick access into the play using power for Erick (Edmiston, in press), but rather she is trying to grant him access because she would like Erick to play.

In lines 8.62 and 10.62, Laura and Sally ask Erick if he’d like to play but do so in different ways. For example, in line 8.62, Sally simply asks Erick a direct question, “Do you want to play”? In contrast, Laura does not ask a direct question, but rather she draws upon a gendered discourse by stating the roles that each will play (i.e., Erick would be the football guy and she would be the referee girl). More importantly, Laura assigns herself in a power female role as the “referee girl”. Being the referee girl positions Laura in a role within the game that allows her to have agency over the rules, which the “football guys” must follow. While this is not illustrated in the transcript, after this event Laura used the role of referee to call time outs, to fix the boys legs in the gazebo (they would
pretend to be hurt), and to determine who made a touch down. Thus, the referee girl role positioned Laura in a more powerful role than the football boys.

Erick rejects Laura’s request by stating no. Laura, not accepting this answer, asks Erick why. In line 15.62, Erick draws from the romantic loves narrative by stating he does not want to play because Laura is not his girlfriend. In this statement, Erick uses the same relational aggressive tactic (i.e., I will not be your girlfriend is you do not....) that Laura often used with Erick. However, what is most striking about this exchange is how Erick versus Laura used the romantic love narrative for power and to negotiate positioning. For example, when Laura used the romantic love narrative for power over Erick she would draw upon the position of being his girlfriend as the way to negotiate what she wanted to get from him. In contrast, Erick, knowing that Laura wanted him to play the football game, used her desire for him to do something as a tool to negotiate his position as his girlfriend. Thus, Laura used the girlfriend role for power over Erick, while Erick used another role (i.e., being the football boy) as a means to get her to be his girlfriend (i.e., I will do what you want if you are my girlfriend). Thus, while the boyfriend and girlfriend position was used to negotiate power by both of them, Erick and Laura used it differently.

In line 16.62, Laura rejects Erick’s attempt to use the boyfriend/girlfriend position for power over her. Laura laughs at Erick tells him that his statement is silly (similar to when he asked if she was in love with him). Her use of the term silly along with the laugh could indicate that it’s silly (i.e., humorous) for her to be his girlfriend, or it’s silly (i.e., unreasonable) that he would not play because she is not his girlfriend. Either way, Laura does not let Erick use the boyfriend and girlfriend relationship as a mechanism to
negotiate power. Laura, ignoring Nathan's attempt to engage her in the game by being hurt, continues to say that she will not play without Erick. Erick also continues to state that he is not going to play. Laura finally responds to his unwillingness to play, by calling him a pooh-pooh guy. This name-calling upsets Erick as he tells Laura to stop it. Laura, once again using relational aggression, says she will not stop if he does not play. Eventually, they both move away from each other and Laura tries to get other children involved in the game.

Once again in Line 31.62, Nathan says he got hurt. This statement is used to let Laura know that he’d like to begin the game, but Laura continues to say that she will not play if Erick is not playing. In line 36.62, Sally then tells Laura than she can still play without Erick, as that is what she is going to do. Laura finally accepts this, and begins to construct the game “Okay we are still playing. Times up. Rest time. Nathan got hurt.” Laura uses this statement to signal that the game has begun. Up until this line, the children have been negotiating who will play, and it was not until Laura decided to play without Erick that the play event “officially began” according to her. Erick rejects Laura’s attempt to begin the game (without giving into his request about being his girlfriend) and tells her that they (i.e., the boys) can make their own choices. Nathan agrees with Erick and states that she does not make boy’s choices. In the next line, Laura draws on the romantic love narrative by saying that Erick is contesting her actions because he wants her to be his girlfriend. Erick rejects this and says that he just wants them to be nice. Sally tells Erick that they are nice to him and Erick informs her that he is not talking to her, illustrating that the tension resided not with Sally but between him and Laura. The event ends by Laura taking Nathan to the gazebo to fix his broken leg. The
important aspect to note in this exchange the boyfriend and girlfriend roles were used to negotiate power. Laura, being a skilled negotiator of the romantic love narrative, did not allow Erick to use the girlfriend position or any other position as a means to get their way. On the other hand, Laura was able to use the position as a form of relational aggression with Erick, which resulted in conflict between them.

Summary

In the analysis above, Sally, Laura and Erick constructed an emotional theme that centered on romantic love as a tool to negotiate power in their peer culture, to build relationships and construct social identities. Romantic love, as an emotional theme, was guided by specific patterns based on the romantic love storyline. The romantic love narrative was related to children’s social identities (gender and race), which were grounded in heteronormative and cultural conceptions about being a boyfriend and a girlfriend.

The romantic love anchor play narrative was not explicitly discussed and labeled (e.g., such as family play, kitty play and/or superhero play) in the classroom, but rather it was made available and co-constructed within the children’s peer culture. The children understood the tensions that exited around this anchor play narrative and tended to keep it on the peripheral. One of the tensions that arose within the peer culture was based on the notion that only one male and one female could love one another or be boyfriend and girlfriend at one time. In addition, Laura, being a real Muslim princess, negotiated power with Erick as compared to Sally based on her gendered position in relation to them. For example, Laura used her position as a desirable female within the romantic love storyline to negotiate what she wanted with Erick. However, when interacting with Sally she used
her position to negotiate powerful female roles related to age and beauty. Laura and Erick used their positions as boyfriend and girlfriend in the romantic love narrative in different ways. When Laura used the romantic love narrative to negotiate power over Erick she would draw upon the position of *being his girlfriend*, while Erick used other positions (i.e., being the football boy) *to negotiate her position as his girlfriend*.

Lastly, Erick and Laura not only drew upon their gender, but also their cultural background as they engaged in the romantic love narrative as an African American male and Muslim female, which often lead to a misunderstanding about the meaning of specific romantic linguistic terms used within their play narrative. For example, Erick would use the colloquia of “mama” to affectionately address Laura, which was resulted in linguistic misunderstanding between Laura and Erick.
Girls are lost kitties because there are no boy kitties. Boys are dogs
But they can be kitties if they want
Because they are just boys and that’s how Allah made them
I know Allah because I am Muslim
I wish for my hair to be straight
I wish for a prince to dance with me who is my size

(Laura, 9-11-06, Field Notes)

Introduction

The above statement is taken from Laura, one of the targeted females in the study. Her words capture the essence of the questions and implications of the findings that arose from the study: How do children become gendered and racialized emotional beings? How do children appropriate narratives about sadness, love, and anger? In this study, the children, locating themselves in anchor play narratives, “played” with notions about what it meant to be male and female. They also explored how to display sadness, use relational aggression, and fall in love as an African American male, a Muslim female, and a White female. The two anchor play narratives also demonstrate that these young females were not simply accepting and taking up emotional themes, but rather they were actively
appropriating notions about being gendered and racialized emotional beings as they engaged in the storylines that were socially constructed through their play narratives.

When I entered into the classroom culture to explore children’s play narratives and emotional themes, I did not expect gender to be such a prominent and powerful theme. The gendered aspect of emotional themes as well as how the targeted females “took up” as well as challenged roles associated with female passivity, relational aggression, and romantic love inspired and provoked me to question further what this research meant not just for 4 and 5 years old girls, but also for the White, Asian, and Muslim women they become (Davies, 1993; Mac Naughton, 1998; 2000). What are the stories about sadness, love, anger, hate and happiness that narrate women’s lives? How do we learn to love as a middle class White mother, an African American father or a Muslim wife? What are the cultural and social scenarios that guide how, when, where, and by whom an emotion can be displayed?

One implication of the study can be found in the quote taken from Laura at the beginning of this chapter. At 4 years old, Laura is already defining the roles that males versus females can assume. She is actively constructing notions related to the male/female binary as a Muslim female. Boys are dogs. Girls are kitties. This is so because boys are just made that way by Allah. Laura, at the age of 4, is longing to change her appearance. Her hair is curly. She wishes for it to be straight. She also wishes for a prince to dance with her. At 4 years old she is appropriating stories about beauty, love, and culture. She is appropriating images of being a female as she constructs her social identity as a real Muslim princess. Thus, one of the major themes that arose from this work is that when becoming an emotional being you simultaneously learn how to do the
emotional themes associated with your social identities. In this chapter, I will discuss the following four themes in my findings as they relate to extant theory and research:

- Significance of Anchor Play Narratives in Children’s Peer Culture
- Appropriation of Gendered Emotional Themes
- Emotional Themes and Social Identities
- Emotional Themes as Relational

After addressing these four central findings, I will then address the educational implications of the findings for early childhood educators, make recommendations for future research, and end with a final reflexive note.

*Significance of Anchor Play Narratives in Children’s Peer Culture*

The two anchor play narratives were salient play themes that occurred over and over again within the daily life of children’s social world in this classroom. Anchor play narratives were used to construct peer culture, to build friendships within their peer culture, to engage in border work between males and females, and to “take up” discourses around specific emotional themes associated with the narrative (i.e., passive kitty, caring mother, girlfriend who was in love, Muslim princess). This is consistent with Corsaro (2003) and Kantor and Fernie (2003) who have observed children’s use of play themes, objects, language and/or roles to create affiliation with other children and to construct and reconstruct a daily peer culture life.
The findings also illustrate that the anchor play narratives were highly gendered as defined by the children. Children determined the roles that males versus females could engage in within the two anchor play narratives. Although the children noted that males and females could take on various roles, they chose to endorse male/female dichotomies. This supported that notion that children engage in “activities that make and strengthen boundaries between girls and boys” (Corsaro, 1997, p. 182). For example, in the kitty anchor play narrative the roles available to females were based on being princess kitty, sister kitty, mommy kitty, baby kitty, all of which were labeled as a “girls only” role. Similarly, within the boyfriend and girlfriend anchor play narrative, only females could be “girlfriends” and only males “boyfriends.” In addition, Corsaro (1997) noted that this kind of borderwork involving chasing or approach avoidance play (i.e., labeled in this study as romantic love approach-avoidance play) as well as heightened tensions between males and females, which was also illustrated in the boyfriend and girlfriend narrative as Erick and Laura moved away from and toward one another in the boyfriend and girlfriend role which often led to tensions in the classroom.

The rule that only one male and one female could be boyfriend/girlfriend and that males were dogs and females were kitties was a social construction within children’s peer culture, as the separation of male and female roles in the anchor play narratives were not created by the teachers within the classroom curriculum, but rather they were created and maintained in the daily life of the classroom by the children. This suggests that children do not simply take-up ways of being, but actively engage in forming group and individual definitions about what it means to be gendered. The findings support Fernie, Davies, Kantor, and McMurray’s (1993) work on children’s peer culture and gender, which
suggests that children are active agents in the process of creating, maintaining, contesting, and transforming the shifting and multiple gendered positions that are assigned as male versus female within the peer and school culture.

The findings also highlight the importance of anchor play narratives in establishing and maintaining gendered peer culture routines in the classroom (McMurray-Schwartz, 2003). Anchor play narratives were not simple play themes, but rather they were significant narratives that were central to the daily life of the children within the preschool classroom. The anchor play narratives held significance in the life of the children as shown by their prevalence in everyday activities. They also provided “grounding” and stability to children’s social relationships over time and across events, as evidenced by children’s use of specific themes in relation to select peers.

The anchor play narratives were relational primarily and occurred when playing with select peers. Kitty was not a play theme used by one female or by all of the females, but rather it was a play theme used by a group of select females. Boyfriend and girlfriend was not a play theme of one individual child, but rather it was based on select male/female pairings. The importance of this finding lies in the social work that was conducted as groups and/or pairs of children engaged in anchor play narratives. The salience of the relational work that was being conducted within these anchor play narratives supports the notion that play narratives have significant value in children’s social relationships and emotional lives, as well as in the maintenance and construction of children’s peer culture and friendship groups (Elgas, 1993). Play in the early childhood classroom provides a space for children to learn how to engage in social relationships and to explore and co-construct the emotional themes associated with those relationships. In
sum, the social work is consistent with that observed by other peer culture researchers, but the work observed in this study was more focused on children’s constructions of emotional meanings/themes in peer culture, rather than on issues of social hierarchies, object use, and social competence.

**Appropriation of Gendered Emotional Themes in Children’s Peer Culture**

Females also illustrated that the gendered roles they created in their anchor play narratives were not static and linear, but rather were flexible and dynamic as they modified their positions to gain access into male play (Davies, 1989; McMurray-Schwartz, 2003). For example, females would often shift their kitty roles into the trapped and lost kitty so that they could enter and engage more easily in superhero play with males. Females did not simply “take up” these roles and emotional themes, but actively appropriated them within their peer culture as specific roles and emotional themes were used to negotiate entry into male play spaces, as well as to protect their own interactive play space when other males and females tried to gain access.

While it appeared that females supported and took up roles associated with passive emotional themes in relation to males (i.e., trapped kitty, lost kitty, helpless princess) they were active agents in determining when, where, what and how the roles would be used. This finding supports research by Corsaro (1997), which suggests, “appropriation enables cultural reproduction, which contributes to reproduction and change” (p. 41). Females, were not cultural dupes, but were active in the moment-to-moment negotiation of their actions and reactions within their anchor play narratives. Thus, when looking at play narratives it is important to look not only at the gendered
roles and emotional themes that are being appropriated within the play narratives but also *how* children use specific roles to negotiate and challenge positioning and power within their peer culture. If only the roles were examined, without considering what children were doing within the roles, it would have appeared that children were simply reproducing emotional themes from the adult world.

Using a peer culture perspective allowed for an uncovering of what children did with various roles within the anchor play narratives, making visible the social work associated with the emotional themes. While on the surface it appeared that females were simply reproducing passive feminine roles, when a deeper look was taken, their actions and reactions were not passive, as they often used relational aggression to negotiate power and positioning. They were active agents in negotiating their own subject positions as well as male positions in the anchor play narratives (use either positioning or positions in both parts of the sentence. While the dynamic and multilevel process of becoming a student, peer and gendered person within the classroom has been documented previously in the work of McMurray-Schwartz (2003) and Fernie, Davies, Kantor, and McMurray (1993), this is the first study on children’s peer culture that has illustrated the complexity of becoming a “gendered emotional being” in the early childhood classroom.

The finding that females took up contradictory positions in their anchor play narratives is consistent with poststructuralist feminist research that has documented the contradictions that exist when becoming female (Blaise, 2005; Davies, 2001; Walkerdine, 1990; 1994). The complex, contradictory nature of subject positioning found here and in previous research strengthens the argument that multiple readings of children’s actions
and reactions are needed understand the complex social work that is involved in becoming gendered in the daily life of the early childhood classroom.

*Emotional Themes and Social Identities*

Given the complexity of the social work being conducted in children’s play, it is important to look not only at the roles that are taken up within the play narratives (i.e., mother, sister, kitty, princess, girlfriend), but *how* children use their social identities (race, gender, and social class) to negotiate positioning and power within their peer culture. How did gender and race “provide for a range of subjectivities for us to take up, allowing individuals to be positioned or to position themselves in a variety of ways” (Blaise, 2005, p. 17). In this study, females used emotional themes to negotiate power and positioning differently when interacting with males versus females. For example, the boyfriend and girlfriend anchor play narrative was based on a heterosexual discourse that opened up as well as limited the positions that males versus females could take up, which also shaped how males and female negotiated power from these limited positions.

Within the boyfriend and girlfriend anchor play narrative, children took up positions related to the traditional romantic love storyline based on male/female pairings, which excluded the possibility of two females or two males taking the girlfriend and boyfriend position. Given the exclusionary nature of traditional romantic love storyline, which is constrained by only allowing male/female pairings, the social positions made available to males versus females were not the same. They were bound by conceptions about the appropriate gender of the person one could fall in love with, implicitly constructing emotional display rules about the proper and correct actions and reactions as females and male engaged in this narrative. Children did not take up the romantic love
narrative based on same-sex pairings. As such, the anchor play narrative used by the children silenced some types of romantic love (i.e., homosexual) while supporting others (i.e., heterosexual). The children, through their anchor play narratives, took up dominant discourses simply by limiting who could engage in the romantic love narrative (i.e., one male and one female).

As was illustrated by Erick and Laura, these heterosexual pairings were also embedded in cultural conceptions about romantic love as Laura defined herself as a Muslim princess and Erick as an African American male who used the term “mama” as a colloquium to address Laura. Not only were Laura and Erick learning how to be male and female in the romantic love narrative, but they were also learning how to be male and female as racialized beings within the romantic love narrative. Similarly, the females in the kitty narrative were also leaning who to use their emotional themes from a White cultural perspective as they determined what ladies do and don’t do.

Thus, one implication is that when we how to do “emotion” we also learn how to do the emotional themes associated with our social identities. The findings of this study open up questions about how the storylines of the two anchor play narratives (kitty and boyfriend/girlfriend) made available specific emotional themes and subject positions based on gender, race, and social class. In the anchor play narrative and role of being a kitty, the females were not just learning how to be kitties, but also how to be a White middle class mother and friend. In the boyfriend and girlfriend play narrative Erick and Laura were not just learning who to be a boyfriend and girlfriend but as a middle class Muslim girlfriend and a middle class African American male. Given the above finding, how can educators support storylines that promote and value all types of emotional
themes and social identities? Taking a critical view of children’s actions and reactions in their anchor play narratives can lead educators to question the emotional themes that are being perpetuated as well as the emotional themes are being silenced and/or oppressed. Educators should ask what emotional themes are made available within the play narratives that children construct and how can these be deconstructed/challenged to aide in the construction of new play narratives that do not oppress or silence ways of being.

The finding in this study also supports the work of postmodern researchers who also ask critical questions about the dominant and oppressive storylines that may be supported in the early childhood classroom (Davies, 1989). Mac Naughton (2005) suggests, “Deconstruction can not remove inequalities and injustices but it can be a tactic to help us or remain ethically attentive to them” (p. 108). While educators can not remove all oppressive discourses around emotional themes that may operate implicitly and in the classroom, they can challenge and question the positions made available to children and their reactions to children who do not conform to the traditional ways of being. For example, in the first narrative, Regina, a Chinese female who said she was allergic to girls, tended to be positioned as an outsider within the dominant core group of males and females. However, Regina did make friendships with younger male peers and often constructed narratives that were action oriented and centered on being an alligator, buzz light year, a fighting bee or a scary lion. What was striking about Regina’s narrative themes is that they were not focused on traditional “female” roles as she explicitly rejected being placed into those categories through the storylines she chose to engage in. The question then becomes centered on asking about the emotional themes that are silenced and/or made available to children who go against dominant norms. How did her
rejection of traditional emotional female themes position her as an outsider in the classroom by her peer and school culture? What was the relationship between her cultural background and the rejection of the princess and kitty narrative? By paying closer attention to the differences in play narratives and the emotional themes associated with them, educators and researchers can begin to uncover the functional aspect of emotional themes that appear to be abnormal simply because a child does not conform “emotionally” to the traditional developmental standard based on a western White middle class model. Furthermore, by taking a peer culture perspective, adult centered theories which might view children such as Regina as having an “emotional deficit” can be challenged when the system of social interaction within the classroom is explored, rather than focusing on the emotional problem of the individual child.

Emotional Themes as Relational

The last finding centers on emotional themes as relational. According to Gergen and Gergen (2004), “It is useful here to think of dance – of swing, tango, or salsa. The movement of the dancers makes sense only within the confines of the dance; neither partner alone can perform them. The movements of both partners are required to bring about the dance. Further to be successful, the movement of each partner must coordinate with the other. There are no purely solo movements” (p. 41). For example, romantic love was not an individual emotional theme, but rather it was a relational emotional theme. Erick asked Laura if she was in love with him. Laura excluded Sally when Sally liked Erick. Erick and Laura were boyfriend and girlfriend with each other. Romantic love denotes a specific type of emotional performance that occurs between two people. It also defines both our role and our partner’s role as we act and react to one another. The
“dance” of romantic love can’t be performed alone. To be meaningful it requires the movement of each person within the emotional scenario. The movements of the dancers and how the dance is choreographed may vary depending upon the storyline. For example, is one partner being rejected in the romantic love scenarios (Are both in love with one another)? How long two people have been engaged in the storyline (e.g., new versus old love)? What are the cultural rules associated with the storyline (e.g., White versus Muslim)? Regardless of how it is performed and the cultural norms associated with it, the relational nature of the emotional themes of romantic love remains constant.

Given the relational nature of romantic love, it also carries rules about how it should be performed, when, where and with whom. In this study, children drew upon dominant discourses based on heterosexual romantic love, which included rules about exclusivity in the relationship (one male and one female) and whom one could be involved with (male as boyfriend and girl as girlfriend). It also was based on where it could occur (in peer culture versus school culture spaces). Within children’s peer culture, the emotional scenario of romantic love held differing rules for male and females in the negotiation of power. For example, when Laura used the romantic love narrative for power over Erick, she would draw upon the position of being his girlfriend as the way to negotiate what she wanted to get from him. In contrast, Erick, knowing that Laura wanted him to play the football game, used her desire for him to do this as a tool to negotiate her position as his girlfriend. The notion that romantic love is about learning how to relate to others within the dominant heterosexual emotional scenario as well as for power and positioning within the female/male binary is consistent with the findings and theorizing
of feminist scholars who study gender and subject positions (Ahmed, 2005; Blaise, 2005; Davies, 2001).

Emotion words were also used to perform social actions when communicating with others. What social action is associated with, for example “you made me sad” or asking “Are you in love with me? Findings here showed how Mary used sadness to negotiate and contest her position with the females in the kitty narrative. The term sad, used within this context, was a linguistic tool used to make a judgment. It was a way for Mary to hold others accountable for their action and her reaction of sadness. More importantly, the use of “you made me sad” had the power to change and shape the response of other group members and was used not only to hold individuals accountable, but also to hold the group accountable.

In sum, asking “Are you in love with me?” is a social action that indexes a type of relationship between two people. On the other hand, telling someone “that made me sad” is a judgment about an action. These finding contributes to social constructionist research by uncovering how emotion terms do not simply label internal states, but also are discursive tools that serve specific social functions.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This research study sought to uncover and reveal the emotional themes in children’s play narratives and the social function of those themes. The findings illustrated how the two anchor play narratives supported and made available specific emotional themes related to not only being female and male, but also being a White female, a Muslim female, and an African American male. Future research should move past
describing emotional themes to examining how children’s play narratives could be deconstructed and transformed to question and challenge dominant discourses. It should also focus on helping educators to become aware of their own racialized and gendered emotional themes and how this may affect adult centered theories of emotion in the classroom:

- How can early childhood educators support and create spaces that allow for different anchor play narrative to be constructed that are not based on White heteronormative discourses?
- How can educators use the classroom to create new storylines and uncover multiple ways of becoming an emotional being, while also acknowledging the intersection of emotion with race, gender and social class?
- What is the role and purpose of anchor play narratives in various settings? How can educators use anchor play narratives to understand the social worlds of children?

Lastly, emotion research in early childhood studies have traditionally been examined from a developmental standpoint, which views play narratives as a tool in helping children “regulate,” “express,” or “control” their emotions. Childhood socialization theories as well adult centered theories of emotions tend to focus on the social aspect of children’s inner states, rather than on how discourse informs such processes. That is, further studies should continue to uncover the performative and discursive nature of how children learn “to do” emotional themes as well as how
emotional themes are embedded in gendered and cultural identities. Some future research questions to consider:

- What are the emotional themes and play narratives that exist across various communities (ethnic, SES, urban vs. rural).
- What conflicts might arise when various group hold different ideas about what are appropriate emotional themes?
- What are the stories that children, parents, and teachers construct about emotions such as love, hate, happiness, and compassion, and how is this related to race, gender and social class?

Final Reflexive Note

I end this research with reflecting on how my own race, gender and social class affected my relationship with the children in this study and the emotional themes uncovered. For example, if I was not a White middle class female would the females in the kitty group have allowed me into their female peer culture space? Was it my own femininity and understanding of princesses that encouraged Laura to open up to me? Was I given privilege because of my cultural knowledge of middle class norms and values? If I had tried to enter into their female play space as an older white female, an Asian American female, or an African American male, would the girls in the study have responded in the same manner? Would I have noticed the gendered aspect of the emotional themes? Being reflective and taking a social constructivist framework, I would suggest that my own social class, gender and race did indeed affect my role as a
participant observer with the children. It is part of the lens through which I viewed the stories, classroom and children. To deny such a claim would go against the very nature of the study and theoretical lens employed. However, taking a reflexive stance and recognizing and naming myself and the children in relation race, gender and social class also allowed for uncovering of the storylines that challenge and transform traditional ways of being. Thus, I leave this research with a renewed sense of hope that people will move past storylines and language that create dichotomies and contradictions, to narratives that open up spaces where no story has yet been constructed: to the possibilities of simply being.


Mac Naughton, G. (1998). Improving our gender equity “tools”. In N. Yelland (Ed), *Gender in Early Childhood* (pp. 149-174). London: Routledge


APPENDIX A

TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS
xxx = one word unintelligible

xxxxxx = more than one word unintelligible

**stress**

(short pause) = short pause (1-3 second)

(long pause) = long pause (> 3 second)

…Interruption

{} Speaker utterance that was overlapped

*Nonverbal behavior or Transcriber comments for clarification purpose*