SEX-ROLE SOCIALIZATION AND PLAY BEHAVIOR
ON A RURAL PLAYGROUND

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by
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Approved by

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Sociology saw a surge of research activity on gender behavior in the 1950s. Literature through the 1960s and 1970s shows increasing research in areas related to the study of gender. During this time, researchers were looking at the significance of play in the social development of children. Piaget and Mead wrote classic studies on the importance of play in socialization. This theme was again picked up in the late seventies and early eighties in a renewed interest on play behavior and gender socialization.

Playgrounds have been one of the field settings where this research has taken place, however, this research is not plentiful. These studies have contributed significantly to the development of an understanding of gender behavior and socialization. Children on playgrounds have been observed to participate in activities organized along gender lines. Some researchers have described that such behavior is spontaneous, that sex-segregated play groups emerge naturally. This homosocial play behavior is the focus of the research here.

Previous research has also examined the point at which we learn gender behavior. Some studies indicated that such sex-role socialization begins at an early age, and is seen in the play of
pre-school children. Other studies have emphasized the role of the school, family, and peer groups as agents of socialization. In contrast, there have been a few studies which have found no significant differences in the play of children by gender.

In order to comprehend the importance of sex-role socialization in play, I have chosen to examine the playground behavior of children at recess. This unique setting was chosen because of what I perceive as the nature of the play. Recess is a time set aside by the school for the children to play. Adults often see recess as a free time for frivolous, meaningless play. Recess activity often seems unstructured to adults, as if there are no rules or norms to follow. In any social situation, however, there are rules and norms which structure activity and make interaction possible. What are the rules and norms in children's playground activity? Do these rules and norms provide support for theories of sex-role socialization?

I have chosen to limit the study in the following manner. The field setting is to be a traditional playground, by which I mean a blacktopped area with various play apparatuses. This playground is in a rural area, within a consolidated school district. Previous researchers suggest that gender behavior is more likely to exist in such an environment. If gender play is found on this playground, then support for this previous research will be evident. Should no patterns of gender play be observed, then a new research direction will emerge. This underlines the exploratory nature of this research.
This research differs from others in the choice of field setting. Many studies have specifically examined agents of socialization within the school, such as textbooks, teachers, and role models. Others have used laboratory settings to test play hypotheses. My research will be within the child's natural play environment, the playground at recess. The chosen time of recess is a period when the children are supposedly free from the constraints of such agents of socialization. I will be observing the play patterns directly, in an uncontrolled setting, using nonreactive measures for research. I have chosen this method specifically to eliminate my interference in the children's play, thus producing findings defined largely by the children's activities.

I have chosen qualitative methodology for this study. The children are to be studied in their natural environment. In order not to interfere in their play patterns, observation will be used to limit reactive responses. I intend to use covert observation to further this objective. It is anticipated that I may need to make adjustments to this initial methodology in order to obtain a true picture of the playground behavior. I am concerned foremost with the ethical implications of studying children. Therefore, I do not intend to interfere in the setting if at all possible. One possible exception to this may be if the need arises for more detailed information. Interviewing could be the method by which I will resolve this problem.

There are two possible results in this study. Either gender behavior will be found or it will not. If gender behavior is found,
then an analysis will be undertaken to determine if sex-role socialization is the basis for such findings. Should gender behavior not be found, then a possible new research direction might be to understand why there are no sex-roles present. Most of the recent sociological literature says that such gender behavior will be found, and that sex-role socialization will be responsible for such findings.

The following chapter will examine the findings of recent research on the subject of gender behavior and play in children. There are four categories in this literature review. The first section looks at studies in sex-role differentiation. Second, the agents of socialization for such sex-roles are discussed. Third, I will explore definitions of play. Finally, a wide variety of sources on playground research are looked at.

The third chapter is an in-depth discussion of the methodology. I will explain the inception of the research and social relations experienced in the conduct of my inquiry. Initial observations and any modifications in the methods discussed briefly above will be examined. I will also describe ethical implications of this research in further detail. The manner in which personal feelings affected and perhaps changed the direction of the research will follow. Finally, a last section will analyze materials collection and questions of validity and reliability.

In the fourth chapter, I will present my findings on the question of whether gender behavior in children's play was found on this playground. An analysis of the basis for the existence or non-existence of such sex-roles will attempt to explain the findings.
A concluding chapter will summarize the work done for this thesis. Implications of this research will be examined, and directions for future research will be pointed out.
Chapter II
LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review suggests that the study of playground behavior as a research focus is a neglected area of inquiry. Prominent sociological theorists such as Mead and Piaget have looked at play behavior in children. Recent studies are again looking at play, and using the playground as a research setting. This thesis is an exploration of playground behavior, and contributes to the growing field of such literature. Current literature can be defined as falling into four main categories.

First, studies have been conducted in the research of sex-role differentiation. Consequences of such sex-role development are delineated and explained in terms of longitudinal effects. A second category focuses on the agents of socialization which initiate and reinforce sex-roles in children. Third, the definitions of play are discussed. Difficulties in isolating one acceptable definition are outlined. Finally, research on playgrounds serves as a final category for play-related literature. The majority of the information in this last section is found in educational and recreational journals.
I. Sex Role Differentiation

The sex-role is considered to be the most salient of all social roles, according to Lott (1978) who studied sex-role ideology and play. Children in school environments which discouraged sex-typed play exhibited less gender-related behavior than other children. Boys were found to play in less areas than did girls. Behavior of boys tended toward peer relationships and activities. Girls were more adult-centered and more likely to play alone, be quiet, and reserved. Lott discussed the observation that similarities in play were greater than differences. Six of forty-one behaviors clearly differentiated boys and girls.

In a 1980 article, Frasher and others found that sex-role stereotypes influence children's behavior at an early age. This is viewed as disadvantageous to both sexes, particularly when carried into adult years as "attitudes, beliefs, and behavior." Hutt (Mc Gurk, 1978) also looked at sex-role differentiation in social development. The findings center on the forces of socialization agents on childhood development;

In the process of becoming a boy or girl, man or woman, an individual is constrained in certain ways, primed in others, and biased to accept, reject or modify the manifold impresses of society.

Children, then, adopt the norms and behavior patterns imposed on them by society.

Studies indicate that sex-role differentiation occurs early in life. The sources of such differentiation have been a focus of research. Liss (1979) states that children develop sex-typed toy and
activity preferences during pre-school years. This study used video modeling and toys. Girls who viewed the videotape played with a doll regardless of model's choice. Boys, similarly, chose to play with a truck. Children tended to imitate the same sex more than the opposite sex regardless of traditionalism associated with behavior for models or subject. Modeling, over-all, convinced children to play with cross sex toys despite sex-typed choices. Data supports the same sex hypothesis of modeling. This illustrates the importance of a socialization network and same sex peer groups. Observation and imitation of peer behavior does occur.

Moely, Skarin, and Weil (1979), in studying sex differences, discovered boys tend to make a greater number of competitive responses than girls. Girls were more responsive to instructions and sex of a game partner. Girls expressed more competitiveness with boys than with girls as partners. An early responsiveness among children to the differential character of game partners was significant. Girls consistently showed less competitive behavior with other girls than with boys. This has implications for play behavior. Maccoby and Jacklin were cited in illustrating how children show spontaneous segregation of play groups by sex at four years of age. This is referred to as homosocial play behavior, or same-sex play groups.

Sex-role differentiation can be linked to toy preference in children. Toy preference is shaped, says Blakemore, LaRue, and Olejnik (1979), by knowledge about what is sex appropriate. The researchers determined that a significant relationship exists be-
tween sex and age. As age increases the child is able to identify toys as sex related. Boys preferred toys they identified as masculine. This trend was strong at all ages. Maccoby and Jacklin were again cited in stating that boys experience more parental pressure to choose sex related toys.

The previous studies are evident in the work of Tryon (1980) who studied elementary school children's beliefs about competence of their peers. Kindergarteners and second graders have clear cut conceptions about which sex can use certain objects. These beliefs coincide with societal norms. Stereotyping increases with age and exposure to society, as second graders are more sex biased than kindergarteners.

DiLeo, Moely, and Sulzer (1979) were able to link toy preferences with occupations. This provides an important link between the apparent simplicity of children's play and segregation of adults by sex related occupations. It has been shown that boys are more consistently pressured into masculine sex roles than girls are into feminine roles. Slight generalization effects to games and occupations appeared. These were stronger among boys than girls.

A child observer in the DiLeo, Moely, and Sulzer study was noted as imitating the behavior of a model. Modeling effects occurred even when obvious reinforcements were not delivered to either the model or the subject. Children were able to conceptualize a model's behavior as sex typed. Boys reacted less positively to feminine toys than to either masculine or neutral toys. Children learn, at an early age, to like what adults expect them to like. Peer
pressure is used to reinforce expected behavior.

Teglas (1981) observed a stronger correlation between toys and occupations. Children in elementary school grades stereotype jobs according to sex. Toys which reinforce cultural role expectations and stereotypes have implications for career development. Non-traditional sex-role objects are increasingly avoided with age. Internalization of sex-roles and acquisition of one's self perception in sex roles have a long-term impact. Choices of careers and toys are significantly related. Kindergarteners through sixth graders chose sex appropriate toys and jobs for boys and girls. Career choices were sex typed in kindergarten; the degree of stereotyping increased with advancing age level.

Janet Lever (1978) has studied sex differences in the complexity of children's play and games. This study focused on a wide range of play and game activities in which crucial learning takes place. Mead and Piaget have both analyzed single games; Lever's work is a significant step beyond these two social theorists. The central concern is to examine sex differences in children's play and "to speculate on the sources as well as the potential effects of those differences." The complexity of play as it relates to emergent aspects of modern industrial society is also explored. Her basic thesis is that boys games are more complex than those of girls. This results in sex differences which develop social skills used in childhood and later life.

Lever gathered observational data while watching children's play activity during recess, physical education classes, and after
school. Observations confirmed a preliminary hypothesis; boys activities are more complex than those of girls. Girls engaged in cooperative, single-role play. The only spontaneously organized team sport for girls was kickball. Traditional girls games, such as hopscotch, appeared with regularity.

Boys games were team sports with multiple roles and distinctions in power. The boys were also more likely to be engaged in direct, face-to-face confrontations. Size of play group was also a function of sex of child. Boys played in much larger groups than girls, team sports often required this. Girls usually played in dyads and triads, seldom involving themselves in groups of more than five or six. These differences in play indicate a decidedly different set of socialization experiences for both sexes. Lever recommends that researchers give serious attention to play patterns and their consequences.

The significance of children's play in later work roles was presented by Mueninghoff and Borman at the American Educational Research Association (March 22, 1982). Skills and attitudes which children develop at school, especially in their play, have long term consequences. Mueninghoff and Borman found that children's social roles were preparatory socialization experiences for later work roles. Girls learn different rules in play than boys do. Boys games reflect the organizational structure of the workplace, whereas girls games do not.

This type of play behavior results in differential outcomes for children. Boys learn to emphasize autonomy, separation, and individ-
ualization while girls' social/work role orientation stresses interdependence, responsibility, and attachment. These values translate into advantages for males and disadvantages for females in the workplace, thereby penalizing women based on their early socialization experiences.

II. Sources of Sex-Role Socialization

Sources of sex-role socialization were discussed by Tauber (1979). Cultural value systems, television, and parental socialization techniques cue children to sex appropriate behavior. Mother's occupational status, for Tauber, related to doll play for both sexes, positively for girls and negatively for boys. For example, girls who engaged in aggressive fantasy play were from all girl families with the mother in a relatively high status job. Girls also chose to sit more often in play than boys. Children may try to exhibit behavior conceptualized as pleasing to the cross sex parent.

Schau (and others, 1980) found that both parents expected sons to play with masculine toys and daughters to play with feminine toys. Only boys, however, consistently and significantly played with culturally defined sex appropriate toys. This study was conducted in a midwestern city.

Minuchin (Gelfland, 1969) has discovered a significant correlation for girls between traditional family orientation and sex typed play. Girls from modern families are significantly less sex typed in play than either girls from traditional families or boys from either group. Results of traditionalism were higher aggression in
boys and stronger family orientation and dependence in girls.

Fu and Leach (1980) also looked at traditionalism, but more specifically at this trend in a rural community. It was found that boys and girls, in a rural setting, preferred traditional toys. Boys, however, preferred masculine toys more often than girls preferred feminine toys. The masculine role may have been discerned as one of more value.

The sociocultural environment and lifestyle of a small rural community may be more consistent and traditional in defining and maintaining traditional sex-role stereotypes.

Fu and Leach state that girls appear to have greater flexibility in choosing toys and activities than boys do.

Serbin, Connor, and others (1979), specifically examined peer pressure on sex typing of children's play behavior. Reinforcement can occur through differential attention and praise. Peers encourage conformity to sex role stereotypes. Reinforcement is learned by conforming to peer expectations. The hypothesis, which was supported, stated that peers function as discriminative stimuli, as in limiting play to sex appropriate activities. Peer presence, especially opposite sex peers, appears to reduce the probability that children will play with opposite sex typed toys. Peer presence, by itself, may be significant enough to encourage sex appropriate behavior.

Fagot (1979) found that children who chose traditional play styles in early childhood were given more positive feedback from peers. Sex typed behavior was looked upon with approval by one's
playmates. This data suggests that peer intervention can change a child's play style(s). Sex differences, it was noted, had developed prior to entering the play group. Particular combinations of play also had differential rewards for boys and girls. Girls received few rewards for high activity levels, while boys were positively rewarded by peers. Sex stereotyped behavior will result in positive peer (and teacher) feedback.

Bandura (Gelfland, 1969) conceptualizes that children watch socialization agents such as television and adults in learning behavior. The behavior the children observe is then modeled in "real-life playground activities." A content analysis by Rickel and Grant (1979) found that media and the schools portray females as "male adjuncts", usually as homemakers or sex objects. Males are illustrated as outside the home, and are achievement oriented toward professional roles. Schools pay greater total attention to boys. Greater space is given to male stereotyped activities, and more money is spent for related equipment. The result is an over dependence by girls on institutions, and minimal personal challenge. Boys feel alienated and have to deal with unnecessary personal stress.

Fagot (1981) build on previous research in looking at the effectiveness of peer and teacher feedback in changing a child's style of play over the period of one year. This can be helpful in isolating a mechanism by which children learn expected sex appropriate behaviors. Fagot (in press) found that high activity level for girls received few positive reactions from either peers or
teachers. Boys experienced a great deal of positive peer feedback for high activity level.

Children who elected to engage in traditional sex-role behavior received more positive feedback from peers. Boys who exhibit female sex-typical behavior were given negative feedback from peers. Girls high on male sex typical behavior did not encounter such negative feedback. Fagot confirms her hypothesis that peers and teachers can change play styles of some children by intervention. This provides researchers with agents of socialization to study for origins of sex-role behavior.

III. Defining Play

A central idea in defining play is outlined by Brenner and Omark (1979). This main proposition is that one would not expect sex differences if make believe play is central to development. Play behavior is defined as . . .

... neither routine nor self-maintenance behavior. It is not instrumental behavior, nor is it competitive or achievement oriented. It often looks like socially prescribed, institutionalized, or ritual behavior but occurring outside of the context in which the behavior is socially sanctioned and enforced. It is not games with rules since these are, developmentally, a later play form. It is behavior that is intrinsically motivated and non-goaled.

Brenner and Omark, in contrast to some studies, found no differences in the way in which preschoolers use their free play time.

The study of play is useful in understanding children's behavior. Play is of assistance to children in developing social interactions, and provides a mode of acting out role models. Hawkins
(1970) defined play as an "essential element in growing up as a healthy, productive, and socially aware person." Children obtain information from their environment through play (Ellis, 1970). Adults often consider play to be trivial, but Ellis sees the activity to be crucial to child development. Interaction through play provides knowledge of the physical surroundings and individual roles in a social group.

'Free play' is not necessarily free, according to Steinman (1970). Parents and educators can arrange the play environment to achieve a specific result. This is not seen as intervention but an attempt to assist in the social and intellectual development of children. Steinman suggests that it may be possible to prevent increases in the number of children who later require remediation.

Varma (1980) extends this concept through recognition that sex stereotyping in play materials affects and reinforces stereotyping in children's overall development. Parental and educational manipulation of sex-role socialization could have significant effects in child development.

IV. Playgrounds

It has been established that children perceive objects as sex related. The reinforcers and agents of sex-role socialization are in the child's immediate environment. In this thesis, playgrounds are looked at as one specific external environmental stimulus which contribute to the exhibition of sex-roles in play behavior. Wuellner (1970) pointed to a lack of communication between behavioral
researchers and designers of play environments. Attempts are being made to correct that problem. Current literature indicates some work in this area; sociology has recently seen renewed interest in this topic of playground behavior.

We can now examine research specifically related to playgrounds. Wuellner studies the distinctions children made in playground equipment. He developed five categories for analysis. First, there is moving apparatus such as swings and teeter totters. Second, realistic apparatus include objects identified as turtles or fire engines. A third category is that of non-moving apparatus, for instance, monkey bars and slides. Sitting or standing characterizes a fourth category of inactive play. Finally, there is non-apparatus play including tag and follow the leader. Girls were found to spend more time on the apparatus. All children preferred moving to non-moving and realistic apparatus.

Peterson (and others, 1973) reported that children do have a preference in playground equipment. The most highly preferred apparatuses were swings and slides. These selective choices may be due to the relatively low level of strength and coordination required. Peterson recommends the use of photography as a visual method of understanding childrens' preferences. The data obtained can then be used to integrate user preference with environmental engineering.

Various journals have examined different types of playgrounds. Most articles are based on qualitative research rather than most of the previously mentioned studies which used some type of quantitative
measures. The playground is identified as a major vehicle for learning and development (Parnell and Ketterson, 1980). Traditional playgrounds are criticized for unimaginative and nonresponsive shortcomings. Such playgrounds are characterized by being one dimensional, anchored, and having no natural landscaping. Traditional playgrounds eliminate child experimentation and are accused of not meeting basic play needs.

A new design, proposed as an alternative to traditional playgrounds, is the contemporary playground. These designs emphasize the use of wood, sand, railroad ties, cable spools, and scrap piping, or materials which are flexible. Children can use these objects to create change. Such built-in options and control over one's environment are central features of contemporary playgrounds.

The adventure playground, which originated in Denmark, is a specific contemporary design which allows children to manipulate playground materials, and to construct and reconstruct a play environment of changing interests (Parnell and Ketterson, 1980). Adventure designs require an adult supervisor who acts as a play leader and resource person. Passantino (1975) recommended that adventure playgrounds could be used to modify behavior, particularly to defuse destructiveness and vandalism of school property. Gonzalez (1974) reported that a Champaign, Illinois, adventure playground experienced little vandalism. This design was able to maintain a low budget and was judged successful by a University of Illinois study.

Adventure playgrounds were also a source of research for Thompson and Rittenhouse (1974). The Champaign, Illinois Park
District, the Department of Recreation and Park Administration, and
the University of Illinois initiated and operated an adventure play-
ground. Space and materials were provided to the children to con-
struct their own outdoor play areas. The autonomy of individual
play was emphasized, in relation to "general surroundings, the lea-
der, the child, and the child's peers". Adult intervention was kept
to a minimum. Results indicated that children made nearly twice as
many new friends as those at conventional playgrounds. A strong
natural selection of friends developed.

The relationship between new friends made and the
favorite activities engaged in was of significant
strength to set this playground apart as being a
unique alternative to aiding social development.

An essential difference between traditional and contemporary play-
grounds is thus established.

Additional playground designs are concerned with providing a
play area for handicapped children. Fiberglass slides, waterfalls,
and tunnels are recommended. A new approach to play space design
is the environmental playground. Environmentalists are largely re-
sponsible for the development of these areas. Concern with the
preservation of natural resources is emphasized. It is assumed that
respect and appreciation for the natural environment will carry over
into the adult years (Parnell and Ketterson, 1980).

In summary, play is a critical factor in the development of
children's conceptions of their social, intellectual, and physical
environments. Physical movement, including recess, is a "basic
route to self concept, to social awareness, and to intellectual un-
derstanding," (Hymes, 1973). Play is of significance to children
who later exhibit learned childhood norms in adult behavior.

V. Conclusion

Children have proven to be adept in identifying sex-roles. This sex-role differentiation has consequences for the toys and play behavior which children choose. Learned gender based behavior patterns are translated into work and social roles. Socialization agents encourage and support such sex-role development. Play is an area of children's activity traditionally seen as an arena of free and natural behavior. Studies on play and playgrounds indicate that sex roles also exist in what is popularly perceived as unstructured play behavior. The following research is an exploration of whether play behavior in a naturalistic setting is gender-related.
Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

This thesis is based on qualitative methodological measures, rather than quantitative, or statistical testing. The reason for choosing qualitative measures is the nature of the research focus. I have chosen to observe the playground behavior of children in a natural environment. Designing a study of children's behavior seems best based on some type of empathic interpretation rather than precategorized tests. The nature of the study is explorative, with the theory developing inductively from the observation data. As the research progressed, I was able to outline categories of behavior from observation notes. This emergent character of the research necessitates the use of qualitative methodology as opposed to quantitative study.

Observation was the principal means of gathering data. After a number of sessions had passed, questions emerged which required further entry into the setting. I first chose to interview administrators, staff, and faculty on an informal basis. Upon arriving at the setting, a few minutes prior to the recess periods, I engaged in conversation with various individuals. This proved beneficial and added a second data-gathering method to the research. A third
which emerged was the manner in which to best illustrate the observations that were gathered. Several members of a qualitative methodology class suggested the use of photography to document my research. This proved advantageous in enabling others to visualize the research date, and in helping me to recall specific behavior I had observed.

The school I observed is located in a midwestern, rural area of a major industrial state. It is primarily an agricultural area. The children are mostly from working class to middle class families, with farming and factory work being two of the occupational categories. The school district is a consolidated system covering 120 square miles. There are four elementary schools, with each school having different grades. The elementary school I observed held classes for students from kindergarten through third grade. There is also a junior high for seventh and eighth grades, and a high school (grades 9-12) for approximately 600 students.

This school district was chosen for several reasons. First, the literature review in chapter two noted differences between rural and urban schools, indicating that traditional sex-role stereotypes exist much longer, and to a stronger extent, in rural areas (Fu and Leach, 1980). A central purpose of this research is to understand the extent to which sex-roles still exist in some of the more traditional areas of the United States. Second, entry to the setting was accomplished with reasonable ease. The reasons for this ease are discussed below. Third, I was familiar with this area from a pilot study done there in the spring of 1981. I had left the pos-
sibility of returning to the setting open with the administrators.

Play is defined here as the behavior which children engage in during time set aside, by the school, as a respite from classroom work. The type of playground is identified as a traditional playground, according to Parnell and Ketterson (1980), which means that it is one-dimensional, anchored, and with no natural landscaping. This playground is adjacent to a large field used by the students for various games. Children from kindergarten through third grade compose the sampling frame.

There are twenty-two total kindergarteners; thirteen are female, and nine are male. The first grade is composed of nine female and fourteen male students, a total of twenty-three. Twenty-three second graders include eleven female and twelve male students. In the third grade, there are seventeen children, eleven of which are female and six are male. This makes a total of eighty-five students who were observed; forty-four are female and forty-one are male. My field notes indicate that approximately 50 to 70 students were on the playground at any one time. This is due to three reasons.

First, attendance at recess was diminished by the attendance of the children on a given day. Absence at school therefore reduced the number of children on the playground. Second, a teacher informed me that children often remained inside while the others went outside to play. Some were kept inside for disciplinary reasons, while others were working on school projects not completed during normal class hours. I also observed that children sometimes
left the recess play to go inside. After I had entered the setting, I discovered this is to attend special reading classes. Third, kindergarten students attended only in the afternoon, thereby inflating the number of children present on the playground.

The racial composition of the children's play groups is significant. Of the eighty-five children, eighty-two are Caucasian. This is ninety-five percent of the total population. There is one Black child, and two children who are of Filipino-Japanese descent.

I. Inception and Social Relations

I chose to use observation as the principal means through which to understand playground behavior. The decision to use observational methods had two bases. First, the observation was to take place in a natural environment as opposed to an artificial, or laboratory setting. This natural environment, the playground, was used to look at play groups which children enter into and interact within. Second, I was concerned about the effects of deliberately intruding into the children's play groups. Ethical considerations included disturbing seemingly natural play groups and causing reactions. The problem of causing reactions, or using reactive measures, can distort the setting. I felt that observation provided a means through which a minimal amount of interference with children's natural play patterns could be avoided.

The entrance into the setting was facilitated in several ways. The school superintendent I spoke with knows that I am a graduate student at The Ohio State University. This provided a legitimate
background to the research. In addition, prior acquaintance with the superintendent, some faculty, and some staff eased the entrance and acceptance of my research. I first initiated contact with the school superintendent by writing a letter explaining the study, outlining the observational methods, and providing a rationale for the research. The superintendent then telephoned me and said, "we'd love to have you." Further correspondence and telephone calls arranged and confirmed research dates for the observations.

I explained to the administrator and the elementary school principal that covert observation would be used. This was understood to mean that I would remain separate from the playground, in an unobserved position. Both the superintendent of the school system and the principal agreed to this arrangement. They both offered further access to the setting, such as entering classrooms and the playground for observation and conversation with children and teachers. I agreed that they would be informed should further entry into the setting prove necessary.

As time passed, I did need to become an overt observer. Images of children interacting on a playground are not easily visualized unless one is familiar with such activity. Explanation of field notes to interested individuals illustrated this problem. A suggestion from class members in a qualitative methodology course was to incorporate photography into the research. Photography, or visual sociology, is a useful means of understanding social interaction and is seen as an integral part of study designs. Curry and Clarke (1977) indicate that photography can be helpful in "facilitating and
generating new ideas and new methods for proceeding."

I discussed the use of photography with the elementary school principal. I identified and considered several concerns before approaching the principal. First, how would the children respond to being photographed at close range (I used 50mm and 135 mm range camera lenses)? Second, how would the research role and presence be explained now that covert observation had changed to overt observation? Third, would the use of a camera in a field setting and the presence of a newcomer distort the scene and social interaction? Fourth, does the use of photography with children as subjects in any way exploit or endanger them?

The change in roles to overt observer would distort the situation, and this was accepted as a condition upon entering the setting. I did find, however, that as time passed, the children returned to the play patterns I had seen emerge while a covert observer. Exploitation of the children through the photography is lessened through limiting access to the photographs only in academically related settings; this would restrict access to the photographs by the general public. The principal allowed the use of photography and placed no restrictions on such activity.

The first photography session was educational in the amount of data that was gathered and the interaction required to adjust to a new role. I first introduced myself to the playground teacher. She remembered that I had given a speech to a group of teachers at the school in 1980. This familiarity was helpful in establishing a rapport with the teacher. The first female student to enter the
playground asked the teacher to be today's helper. The teacher responded that she had one today, apparently referring to me. One new role was thus apparent.

"Why are you taking pictures?", inquired one child. I responded, "for a class." This seemed to satisfy the children temporarily. At subsequent photographic sessions, the children asked, "why us?" This presented a problem for me in explaining a detailed study to small children. I told them I wanted to photograph playgrounds and "liked theirs." I then asked them if they would like to see the photographs. The children eagerly responded "yes!", so I promised to return and bring the photographs. At my return, the pictures became the subjects of immediate curiosity and were made into a bulletin board by a teacher.

Initiating Observations

There are both advantages and limitations in the role of unknown observer. These will be referred to in additional parts of this chapter, but it may be helpful to outline the benefits and problems here first. An initial advantage to being an unknown observer is that the researcher is largely employing non-reactive measures. I was concerned with interfering with the social behavior of the children and thus altering the results of the study. Unknown observation can reduce the problems of interference. I did take some comfort in knowing that I had not intentionally caused reactive behavior based on my presence in the setting. An additional concern with unknown, or covert observation is that of the ethical
considerations. Is it proper to observe children without their knowledge? Am I still intruding on their rights as subjects? The Human Subjects Committee of The Ohio State University does allow such covert observation without the subjects knowledge. Administrators did approve of my observation.

A second major limitation was that I was often isolated from the subject. This incurs further disadvantages, for example, I had to rely on my ability to interpret what I observed. An error did result on my part in the early segments of analysis. The discovery of the error, and subsequent solution was made evident only after I became a known observer. This has implications for future research, as will be discussed in the concluding chapter. I also reached a point in the research where the same behavior was being repeated. The same categories of behavior kept being repeated, causing me to wonder if all the knowledge that could be gained from the setting had been gathered. I did use several observation sessions to focus on deviations from the categories of behavior, to ascertain the reliability of my observations. As an alternative method of validating my findings, and which proved supplemental to the research, I decided to seek further entry to the setting.

I entered the setting, in part, on the advice of colleagues and professors who recommended the addition of photography to my research. I decided to enter the setting to photograph the playground recess periods, after obtaining permission from the elementary school principal. I introduced myself to the playground teacher and several children. One of the children, a kindergartener, naturally fell
into the role of an informant, through offering information on a game she was playing. It was through this five year old that I discovered an error in my observations and in one of my underlying analytical/methodological assumptions.

I had observed a game involving the kindergarten children which centered around several of the poles standing on or near the playground. The children ran around on the playground, being chased by others. As the child neared a pole, s/he was usually caught or tagged by the chaser. This was a game familiar to me from my own child play experience. The game was then known by the title of "prisoner". (I have here entitled the activity the pole-base game.) Boys, at the time of my childhood, usually were the aggressors in the game. They chased the girls and made prisoners of us by capturing us while we were running. The girls were then taken to the prison, such as a pole or building corner. Only another girl could free you by touching your hand, or sometimes you could be rescued by another male.

An error was made in the assumption that the game I observed currently was the same as the prisoner game of my childhood. An important lesson was learned when the five year old told the ground rules for her pole-base game. Either sex can run to and from the poles anywhere on the playground. If you are captured while running, you are automatically taken onto the side of the capturers. You are then eligible to capture others. The five year old who served me as an informant was one of the runners (as opposed to a capturer). This is similar to a game of tag, except for the
multiple poles which serve as a type of home base where you cannot be captured.

An important lesson was learned: behavior must be understood in terms of its own social context and not in reference to other experiences/settings. This lesson is taught in introductory sociology courses, but was re-learned as a graduate student. The lesson checked my eagerness to understand the social behavior and was instrumental in underlining the rule of not making false assumptions based on my own past.

Additional informants were used in gathering information. These informants are identified as individuals encountered while I was establishing research integrity, making consistent observation visitations, and in developing new research roles and methods. I was able to identify various levels in the educational stratification system at this school (see Chart 1). Four main strata (administration, faculty, staff, and students) can be identified, with varying sub-strata in each layer. My research was supplemented by information from individuals in each layer. This information was generally gathered in informal conversations with teachers, for example, while observing the children.

The administrative level included the superintendent and the elementary school principal. Background data on the more formal aspects of the study setting was provided by the school superintendent. Such information included some demographic data and referrals to personnel with additional knowledge. The superintendent sent me to the elementary school principal for access to the playground.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Layer</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Roles</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>Superintendent</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Principal</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Staff</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Students</td>
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<td>Third Grader</td>
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The principal was difficult to find in his office, as he often travelled to other elementary schools in the system. He was able to provide information concerning the grade composition of the school and was instrumental in allowing me to gain access to the playground for overt observation. Teachers, on the second level, were primarily encountered on the playground during recess. They proved to be valuable sources of information, even offering explanations for why a certain child joined with another (thus creating a dyad). Teachers were also helpful in pointing out the deviations in playground behavior, thereby confirming what observations indicated were recognized categories of play behavior and what behavior was the exception.

I found that information flow increased as I moved down the stratification levels in the school system. This may be due in part to the amount of access I enjoyed. Staff members, on the third level, were the most accessible. On the day of observation, I usually made my presence known to the secretaries. We often engaged in casual conversation. The staff offered information on current events in the school system, as well as their knowledge about the community environment. Secretaries also suggested people to talk with and classrooms to visit to further the research. Some of the advice was pertinent, while other was not significant in terms of the research direction. Cultivating informants and establishing/maintaining a good rapport within the school system occurred most effectively on this level.

The fourth level of the school system was the stratum composed
of students. Children from kindergarten, first, second, and third grades were observed. The photography/observation sessions necessarily involved verbal communication, primarily due to the questions raised about the picture-taking. Girls interacted verbally with me more than boys, so informants on this level were overwhelmingly female. (A female researcher/photographer may have encouraged more female student informants). As stated above, the kindergarten student of five years of age was able to explain a rather simple game to a seemingly ignorant graduate student. Other children explained the language used by their playmates to describe play behavior (such as "teeterin"). The use of informants in this study proved to be important in checking the accuracy of my observations, in providing setting and background information, access to key sources, and in correcting observational errors.

Return of Services

A final question in this section is what kind of services were provided for the participants. Administrators were offered copies of the final research results (partially to establish legitimacy of the study). A second service I provided was that of furnishing copies of the photographs to the children. The photography session sparked the interest of the children. Many of the students asked to have their photograph taken, and one group had their teacher come outside to join the picture. These posed pictures were of limited value as illustrations of my findings, but satisfied the participants. Some costs developed in duplicating the photos for the
school. The expense, however, was considered minimal to the valuable data that was gathered and confirmed.

II. Private Feelings

I found it helpful to record personal feelings as part of my field notes. Seemingly minor details sometimes proved to be significant in terms of research direction(s). An example of this is embarrassment or anger at the manner in which one child treats another. An incident I observed raised some fundamental questions:

Example: A female child approaches an all male baseball group, apparently to join the play. Within minutes, she has withdrawn from the males and observes their game. I felt anger at this seemingly deliberate exclusion. Questions this personal feeling raises include:

Was the exclusion deliberate?
Why is this occurring?
What motivations are involved in the child's behavior?
Is sex-role socialization an explanation for this phenomenon?
Why do I feel angry toward this type of behavior?
Does this feeling reflect my childhood experiences?
Does this imply a typical play experience?

Feelings change throughout the research process, as I gradually discovered. The first observations produced confusion and frustration. Perseverance often turned these emotions into useful tools for analysis. As I attempted to alleviate the confusion, for example, working categories for understanding observed behavior began to emerge. Frustration also served as a motivator for intense analysis and a return to the reading of methods textbooks to improve my
skills. I believe that feelings should be watched most carefully. A certain amount of frustration/confusion was advantageous. Over-confidence did prove to unintentionally distort preliminary analyses, as mentioned in the pole-base game. My emotions did prove effective in tempering initial enthusiasm to understand as quickly as possible.

Moving from one role to another was sometimes difficult. I became quite comfortable in the role of unobserved observer. Taking on the new role of observed observer was uncomfortable at first. I believe this occurred because of the progression from a marginal role to one of face-to-face interaction. Prior to entering the setting, I had been minimally involved in terms of social interaction with the subjects. After entering the setting, verbal communication and interaction became a basis for doing research.

The use of a camera seemed to intensify my discomfort. Some individuals may believe that the camera can be used as a shield to hide behind. I felt, rather, that I had made a deliberate intrusion into the children's private lives. Children can be adept at putting others at ease, however, and this proved to be the case here. The children were intrigued by both my presence and the use of photography. Several children discussed the varying types of cameras their families owned, such as the Polaroid brands. They were disappointed when my 35mm camera did not produce pictures automatically.

After I had been involved with the subjects, I found it difficult to leave the field. The feeling, of desiring continued interaction, has never been entirely dismissed. I do have a type of open
understanding with faculty and administrators to return "whenever you want to." I do not believe that this reluctance to leave the field was based completely on emotional attachment. The research process had realized valuable information and pragmatic experience. I hesitated to leave a positive learning environment. Weeks after the data-gathering has ended, I still tend to stop at the school and visit the children and staff.

I did leave the field with feelings that the environment and associated play behavior patterns were understood. There are still areas that could be researched to supplement this study. A content analysis of textbooks, or personal interviews with each child, for example, would provide additional information. I do have the understanding with the school system to return for further research. The research here has stimulated continued intellectual curiosity which will hopefully be pursued to provide further explanations for sex-role differentiation in a rural school.

The degree of difficulty associated with observing and analyzing is also encompassed by personal feelings during the research process. As an unobserved observer, I could behave in as unique a fashion as I desired. If I had been observed while doing the observation, the situation might have proved humorous for the person observing me. Analysis often accompanied observation, and I found it necessary to record methodological, observational, and theoretical notes as rapidly as possible. Pages of observations were filled in minutes, and these pages often went flying over my shoulder in order that I could reach a clean sheet of paper. Fortunately, I was always
able to retrieve any field notes that took an unexpected flight.

As an unobserved observer, I could not always record data and had to rely on mental notes. One child observed a notebook in my back pocket and inquired as to its function (without my use of it previously in the child's presence). I replied it was for "writing down what pictures I take." This revealed a potential awkwardness in recording observations in the subjects' presence. Some of the difficulties of observation and note-taking were lessened as I grew more comfortable in the setting. It soon became possible to observe and jot down a few notes (such as key words for later recall) without interrupting the natural environment unnecessarily.

A careful balancing of paying attention to personal feelings and relying on academic training in observation/analysis was the most pragmatic for my research. As discussed above, my feelings often served as springboards for further detailed observation and thoughtful analysis. Techniques and information gathered in academic settings provided the structural framework for movement in the field. These two components of research proved complementary in reality and most fully utilized my skills and capabilities. Without one or the other, I feel the research would have lacked an integral facet of the overall process, thus rendering the findings useless.

III. Materials Collection

The original pilot study for this research was done in April and May of 1981. This was valuable in providing insight into problems and areas where I lacked sufficient knowledge to do research. Time
was spent correcting these initial missteps. The research process for this thesis began in October of 1981, when I began to reestablish myself in the setting, conduct casual interviews with administrators and staff, design the project, and continue the literature review. Actual observation sessions were conducted during the first six months of 1982.

Recess periods varied from ten to twenty minutes. This time differential was dependent on cold weather (shorter recess periods) and warm weather (longer recess periods). Once I had entered the setting, teachers often extended the play period for a minimum of twenty minutes (as a gesture of aid). One teacher asked me, at one session, if I had enough time to complete my photography. This research included thirty-one observation and photography sessions. There were approximately twelve informal conversations with administrators, faculty, and staff; a number of students served as informants. Usually, I spent the morning and afternoon recess periods at the school, and every day of the week was sampled.

**What to Observe and When**

My decisions regarding what to observe were partially defined by the literature review. The pilot study provided some early ideas of what to examine in the setting. This study is exploratory in nature, so additional areas to analyze were generated in the progress of the research. These are discussed in the following chapter.

As a naive researcher, I first tried to record as much as possible. Practice and experience, however, did temper my eagerness.
Categories of behavior began to emerge from the observations. Alt-
man's scan sampling (1974) best describes how data was gathered. 
Scan sampling occurs when data on all of the children being obser-
ved is recorded as simultaneously as is possible. As mentioned 
previously, I found it advantageous to record apparent deviations 
from the emergent categories. When I reached a point where no fur-
ther progress was apparent, I found it necessary to evaluate whe-
ther the research had reached a concluding point.

Note-taking during the informal conversations was minimal, in 
order to retain the informality. My memory played a key role in 
later recalling information for notes. I often rushed from the 
office of an administrator or staff person directly to the play-
ground. It was not unusual to write down notes while walking from 
one setting to the other. I used a tape recorder early in the 
unobserved sessions, but quickly abandoned it due to malfunctions 
and unreliable batteries. I later decided that transcriptions of 
taped notes would have proven too time-consuming, thus hindering 
progress of the research.

I also jotted down notes during observation sessions and then 
left the setting. The drive from playground to home nearly always 
produced insights and/or remembered information. Rapid notes were 
then added to the field notes upon the return home. This quiet 
time was also advantageous in discerning new directions for re-
search, and in pulling together past notes and thoughts.

I encountered few, if any, social barriers to gaining informa-
tion. This may have been due to the roles and entry process. The
various levels in the school's stratification system yielded information of different types. Staff, especially secretaries, obtained demographic data from files for me. Problems in this type of materials collection centered on identifying the proper source and locating the correct file. Official school records established according to state law were shared by the secretaries. Racial groups were not recorded, however, the secretaries were able to explain the racial background of students from their personal knowledge.

I felt that difficulties in making observations and gathering information were minimal. Materials were easily collected, and notes rapidly accumulated. Entrance to the setting was facilitated by my prior acquaintance with a number of individuals within the school district. This probably eliminated some of the social barriers restricting access to information. An acquired understanding of the school's stratification system also helped in gathering data. Materials collection was a less painful segment of the research process than I had anticipated. Perhaps this was due to the warm and pleasant social interaction between the informants and myself.

IV. Analysis

Lofland (1971) was used as a source for learning how to begin analysis. Files were identified by Lofland as "perhaps foremost among concrete procedures." The idea of filing and organizing has an appealing, logical flavor. I did follow some of Lofland's types of files for my own purposes. First, there are mundane files, or those which are used to "keep track of people, places, organizations,
documents, and the like." I also found it helpful to duplicate field notes, since they often contained references to the mundane. These mundane files represent a primary source of demographic data and informal information.

Second were the analytic files. Here I found it useful to include the questions raised in field notes. Lofland recommends that these analytical comments be recorded in various places. In retrospect, I could have been more elaborate in recording multiple sets of field notes. I also feel now that I should keep several sets of files, perhaps at the home and the office. A recent fire in an apartment complex adjacent to my home underscored the potential jeopardy of a year's worth of research.

One file I found especially useful was an overall folder for all observations. The rationale for doing this was to have original field notes located in one place. Memory can be jogged by recalling the day's weather or events. Chronological mental ordering can result; having one set of files in one folder—in chronological order—eased the problem of locating desired information.

Validity and Reliability

I believe that the question of validity and reliability can best be answered by describing several facets of the research process. Initial concerns on validity and reliability centered on the behavior categories I began to see in the observation sessions. After I had entered the setting, these categories and additional observations were verified by the subjects. Teachers I spoke with on the
playground pointed out children playing in a manner deviant from the categories.

I had not explained the categories to the teachers, who were actually describing the behavior as "unique", "different", or exclaiming "look at that!". I then asked if, for example, girls ever played baseball. The teacher replied "rarely", and that boys rarely jumped rope.

The students, as informants, helped in verifying my observations. As mentioned above, one student corrected an error. Others could be overheard to say "girls don't play that", or to describe their play groups as female dyads/triads, or males sports-oriented teams.

The introduction of photography proved valuable in confirming my observations. After having the photos developed, I asked professors and other graduate students to explain what they saw in the images. They, too, saw group boundaries, competition/cooperation, traditional gender games, and so on, in the photos. I would also like to acknowledge that these individuals were able to identify some patterns of behavior which were supported by the literature review.

The literature review itself supported many of the observations I noted, and explained why some of these occurred. This was especially satisfying to discover professional research which corroborated my findings. The findings, as presented in the following chapter, build upon and confirm many articles in chapter two.

This research should be understood as an exploratory study.
As such, additional work should be done to critically examine all hypotheses generated by my observations. Other settings can alter the findings, perhaps. A question to ask is whether varying playground types alter behavior.

V. Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the methodology used to research playground behavior. Observation was the main method used to gather data. Both covert and overt observation were used in recording field notes for later analysis. Informal interviews/conversations were essential to fill in demographic data. Visual sociology, particularly photography, served to illustrate my observations. The observations generated a number of categories of behavior. These are discussed in the following chapter.
Chapter IV

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter I will discuss findings from my research on playground behavior. Several categories have emerged from the observations. First, gender space seems evident from the way in which children segregate themselves by sex. Second, girls and boys experience different group structure and process. Some of these differences include boundaries, maintenance, and norms of the groups. Third, play behavior is defined by gender. Boys and girls play varies according to sex. I will begin with a look at children when they first enter the playground.

I. First Impressions

At the first observation session, approximately seventy children streamed onto the playground from the elementary school building. There did not seem to be a particular pattern of action at first. As time passed, however, a sequence did develop. Children ran out of the building to various areas of the playground, whether these areas were for apparatus or basketball play, for example. Groups formed after most of the children had entered the playground.
and were centered on a number of activities.

A first activity which groups formed around was that of apparatus use. Second, homosocial play groups organized into traditional gender play. Boys, for example, either went to apparatus play or to groups for organized sports games. Girls went to either apparatus play or to jumprope or hopscotch. Most children stayed in traditional play and in sex segregated play groups. Girls used the apparatus more frequently. Each of these observations are explored in detail below.

II. Gender Space

The playground can be divided into two main areas. The first area is the traditional blacktopped section with various playground apparatus (Photo 1). This includes swings (not pictured), teeter totters, jungle gym, slide, and a merry-go-round. The second area of the playground is the playing field where baseball and kickball are played (Photo 2). A smaller section of area two is the basketball court (Photo 3) which is also used by the kindergarteners for their pole-base game.

Additional sections within the blacktopped area are used for non-apparatus play (Diagram 1). Children use these spaces for traditional gender play. The girls use their spaces for jumprope, hopscotch, and jacks. Boys use their space for throwing a baseball against the building wall and playing catch. Building-baseball play diminished with the onset of spring weather and a dry playing field. Kindergarteners of both sex play their pole-base game in both this
Photo One: Area One--Traditional blacktopped playground with various apparatus (slide, teeter totters, jungle gym, merry-go-round, swings to the right, out of the picture).
Photo Two: Area two--the playing field where baseball and kickball are played.
Photo Three: Area two--a smaller section of the playing field is used for basketball and the pole-base game.
Diagram 1: The Playground

Blacktopped Area
1 - Building - Baseball Catch
2 - Jump rope
3 - Jacks
4 - Teeter-totters
5 - Jungle Gym
6 - Slide
7 - Merry Go Round
8 - Hopscotch
9 - Swings

Playing Field
10 - Baseball
11 - Kickball
12 - Pole Base Game
13 - Basketball
blacktopped area and near the basketball court.

Gender spaces appear to be well-defined, with the exception of the kindergarteners. As age increases, gender related play spaces develop. A look at these play areas can identify the characteristics of playground spaces by gender. Girls prefer playground apparatus more than boys do, according to a count of apparatus use by sex. My observations revealed that girls do use the blacktopped area more than the boys do. The use of this space is qualitatively different for children according to sex.

Girls play takes place on the blacktopped area. This play is generally centered on the apparatus. Children, overall, tend to prefer the moving apparatus. Their two favorite pieces of playground equipment are the swings and the merry-go-round. The non-apparatus spaces on the blacktopped area are used for the traditional types of play. I will concentrate here on the girls' games. Because the boys moved their game to the field when playing conditions were favorable, I consider their game a temporary blacktop activity. The girls' games, however, necessitate use of a blacktop area.

The nature of girls' play limits the spaces for their activity. Hopscotch requires that an area be marked for this jumping game. A diagram had been painted on the blacktop for this purpose. In effect, the girls had been told where they could play a non-apparatus game, thereby theoretically reducing some of the spontaneity. (In contrast, boys could play baseball, a non-apparatus game, anywhere on the field). Jumprope requires an area where a rope can be turned
and there is level space for jumping. The playing of jacks also uses a level space to bounce the ball and pick up the jacks.

Boys' play, especially during the spring, centers on the playing field. Their one dominant game is baseball, in which a large group of boys can play. Their non-apparatus play is qualitatively different from the girls. The boys are freer to move around in their space and are not limited to one area by the nature of their non-apparatus play. The play spaces used by each sex are related to gender, and as such have consequences for play behavior.

Separate and distinct play experiences emerge from the use of gender spaces. Boys are permitted a much larger playing area, but are seen in one type of activity. This activity is nearly always baseball. Girls are confined to a smaller play area, but use it for several types of non-apparatus play, as described above.

Gender spaces can be further analyzed as being reinforcers of traditional play behavior. As the children are socialized into the school system, each understands there are certain types of play behavior appropriate to their sex. Spaces are designated on the playground where their play is to occur. Traditional games are taught by the older students. Kindergarten play provides support for this statement. In their play, kindergarteners experience less sex-segregation. By the time the children become full-time first, second, and third graders, gender play is more identifiable. Norms of gender play and an understanding of gender space is internalized.

Group boundaries, examined in the next section in detail, also exist in gender spaces. When a child of the opposite sex attempts
to enter a cross-sex gender space, the move is obvious to all. Girls' space can be invaded more easily by boys. Boys' space, however, is rarely (if ever) invaded by girls. The play space normally occupied by girls is more interruptible. Boys are usually accepted in girls' space if the boys so choose the cross sex activity. Girls are not welcomed into boys' space. The only exception to this is the kickball game where opposite-sex teams compete.

Baseball and basketball games are played in boys' space, and girls were observed in these areas. Girls' presence, however, was not for playing purposes, but rather for spectator-oriented behavior. They generally sat near the game while watching the boys. Their activity sometimes included cheerleading or serving as bat-girls. Boys were never such marginal spectators in girls' space. Their presence was sometimes viewed with humor, such as an inept male jumprope player. Other male intrusions were deliberate attempts to disrupt the girls' play. This did not seem to be viewed as intolerable by the girls, but rather as a channel for receiving attention. Girls' space(s) are, therefore, interruptible.

A final look at the nature of play in gender spaces again concerns the use of such space. On a naturally landscaped playing field, a male child does not have to worry unduly about the consequences of his play. He can fall down or roughhouse with fewer injuries or tears in clothing than a girl can on the blacktop surface. Girls' play space is confined to the blacktop where harm to clothing or body are much more likely. Caution must be exercised in girls' play to avoid any type of damage, whereas boys are freer to express
themselves. Such built-in inhibitions restrict girls' activity even further. Girls have a narrower path of acceptable play behavior, due to play space, than do boys.

This section on gender play spaces has looked at how groups utilize specific areas of the playground. But, how do these groups form? How are they defined by boundaries? How are they maintained? These questions are best answered by analyzing how groups are structured. Boys and girls experience different processes in forming groups. This has consequences for children's play behavior.

III. Group Structure and Process

After children enter the playground, they form groups in which to begin their play. These groups occupy gender spaces on different areas of the playground. How these groups are structured and maintained is the focus of discussion in this section. The initial question I wish to address is whether there are differences in group structure by sex. The answer to this is yes. There are structural gender differences by size of group, boundaries, permeability of the group, age, and maintenance.

A first difference in group structure is by size. Boys and girls form play groups of different sizes which affects group structure. Boys are most often seen in relatively large groups of five or six when playing on the apparatus. For example, a large group of boys could be seen on the jungle gym or merry-go-round. The only exceptions to this group size were on the other apparatuses which accommodated one or two children, such as the swings, slide, or
teeter totters. These types of apparatus, however, were most often used by the girls. This raises the possibility that boys will not use such equipment because they do not permit large groups to use them.

A second type of group for boys is the sports team. Boys were most often seen in several types of sports activity which required teams to be formed. Baseball catch can be an exception (two can play) but was not. The type of catch that was seen most often was played against the building. A large group (five or six) of boys would throw the ball against the wall and someone would catch the rebound. Basketball was also played in teams, yet this game can be played one-on-one. It was important for boys' group structure that teams were usually chosen even in sports which could be played with a dyad or triad.

The team sport for boys which required the most amount of players was baseball. Anywhere from six to ten boys played on a team (Photo four). With the onset of spring weather this sport peaked in popularity. First, second, and third grade boys intermingled on teams. Boys also closely identified with the sport by wearing school colors in clothes, hats, and jackets. I observed several afternoon sessions where the high school varsity boys' baseball team practiced adjacent to the playground. Their clothing was identical to the male children. This similarity suggests that the children are emulating the varsity players as positive role models. This provides positive reinforcement of gender roles, behavior, and group identification.
Photo Four: Group structure and process; boys play in relatively large groups of five or six. One prominent group type is the sports team.
In contrast, girls do not play in large groups. Girls' group size is primarily seen in dyads and triads, as in Photographs five and six. The structure of a dyad implies some form of cooperation. A triad also involves cooperation, or it will dissolve into a dyad. The playground apparatus which girls appear to dominate, encourages this type of play group. The teeter-totters and swings are best suited for dyadic play. Cooperation is necessary for successful "teeterin'", as the girls described their activity. Girls' play groups, then, are based on cooperative play behavior which is best suited to dyadic and triadic relationships.

Slightly larger girls' groups were observed as deviant. Some girls played jump rope with more than three participants. This is non-apparatus play, but can also be used by a triad. There were never more than four or five girls playing jump rope at any one time. Triads were usually observed playing jump rope. Other non-apparatus play such as hopscotch and jacks are also played in dyads and triads. Boys' play does not always permit these smaller, cooperative groups to emerge. The connection between playground apparatus and gender is group size. Girls' cooperative dyads and triads are best suited to traditional playground equipment.

Group size is maintained through the establishment of boundaries. In photograph seven, boys are observed in a team sport on the playing field. Girls are seated on the periphery of the team, again in small groups. The girls are spectators for the male group, and have not entered the boys' play. An invisible boundary excluding the girls from active participation seems to exist. Both sexes are
Photo Five: Group structure and process; girls play in dyads and triads. Playground apparatus, which girls dominate is best suited to dyadic, cooperative play groups.
Photo Six: Group structure and process—girls play in dyads and triads. (This triad was arranged by the girl in the back.)
Photo Seven: Group structure and process; boundaries maintain groups. Here the girls are spectators while the boys engage in team play.
aware that it exists, as is evidenced by the self-imposed sex-segregation. This type of exclusionary boundary endows certain rights and privileges.

The in-group members, the boys here, have several rights. They are permitted more space in which to move. In-group members are also allowed to be actively involved in the recess play activity. The girls, as an out-group, do not enjoy this privilege. They are relegated to an inactive role, and tolerated as marginal participants at best. I should state at this point that the boys and girls seem to be following typical sex-role socialization patterns. These socialization patterns are often responsible for such exclusionary boundaries.

Non-verbal communication was used in maintaining group boundaries. Girls were rarely looked directly in the eye by the boys when they approached a male activity. Goffman (1963) calls this civil inattention. The boys are aware of the girls' presence, but choose to ignore them. This reinforces the boundaries of the exclusive male group. Girls did not do this. When approached or interrupted by a boy, girls always paid attention to his entrance into the group. Males were sometimes made the center of attention in the girls' group. This did not happen in male groups.

Children involved in apparatus play also exhibit exclusive group boundaries. A group of girls, for example, will be playing on the jungle gym. When a group of boys begin to climb on the jungle gym, girls soon leave. Other playground play on the blacktop
shows examples of boundaries. Girls generally dominate playground apparatus numerically. Non-apparatus play space on the blacktop is also girls' territory. This territory, however, is easily invaded by the boys. When boys play on an apparatus, they assume domination over girls' groups. The non-apparatus play is also interrupted by boys, such as the boy whose ineptitude in jumprope was tolerated with humor by the girls. Girls' group boundaries, therefore, are more permeable than are boys' boundaries.

Another type of group boundary between the sexes is seen on apparatus play. Most playground equipment is supported by metal bars. These bars are also used as boundaries. In Photo eight, this physical boundary is shown. A girl is swinging on the left and a boy is playing on the right. Close observation reveals that a swing and two supportive bars are separating the boy from the girl. This was observed frequently on the swings, merry-go-round, and teeter totters. Not only norms, but physical structures serve as boundaries separating the sexes.

The emphasis on socialization is confirmed by observation of age groups. Kindergarteners have distinctively different group sizes and boundaries. These youngest children attend only in the afternoon, thus separating them slightly from first, second, and third graders. Their smaller physical size aids in identifying their play groups. Because of their easily identifiable characteristics, I noted differences in their group structures.

Homosocial play behavior is not the norm in kindergarten play. Their groups are relatively large, and composed of both male and
Photo Eight: Group structure and process; physical boundaries such as swings and supportive bars, also separate the sexes.
female members. The pole-base game is a non-gender based play activity (Photo nine). Kindergarteners do not exhibit exclusive group boundaries as the older children do. This absence of clearly defined sex-roles provides support for previous statements.

These statements have emphasized that gender play is learned. As age increases, sex-roles are more prevalent. Gender play is therefore a function of sex-role socialization. Homosocial play behavior is socially learned. As the child grows older, s/he learns the behavior which is socially appropriate according to sex. This is learned in the play periods adults often regard as a time for frivolous fun. Sex-segregation in play behavior is not spontaneous but learned through sex-role socialization.

In addition to boundaries, groups are also maintained by patterned interaction. Boys' groups tend to interact on the basis of competition. Games are organized along activities which make competition possible. This is especially true in non-apparatus play. The team sports activities of baseball, basketball, and catch all involve competition of varying degrees. On a continuum of competition, baseball and basketball are high in competitive behavior and catch is (can be) lower. Cooperation among teams is necessary for teams to win. The ultimate goal in these boys' games, however, is to win. This can be fulfilled only through competitive behavior. Either you are a winner or a loser. This competition closely resembles the adult workplace. Boys' play mirrors adult male work roles, thus preparing male children for future roles in the adult world.

Since girls play on structured apparatus requiring cooperation,
Photo Nine: Group structure and process—the kindergarteners in the foreground do not exhibit homosocial play behavior. Sex segregation in play behavior is not spontaneous but learned through sex-role socialization.
the nature of their interaction is cooperative play behavior. Dyads and triads are best suited to this type of play, which reinforces the observations of girls' group size. Swings and slides are generally thought of as singular activities. Girls also turn singular play into a cooperatively based activity, such as when one girl will push others on the swings. This cooperation is pervasive in girls' play.

In cooperative play there are no winners and losers. Girls' play does not mirror the adult workplace. Girls, then, are not adequately prepared to function successfully in the adult workplace. Their play behavior can have consequences for later economic and professional achievement. This raises the consideration that ascribed status is of greater significance to girls; achieved status may be more attainable for boys. In a society where achieved status is a primary indicator of one's status, girls are being devalued even as children at play.

Children exhibit a further consciousness of kind through their clothing. At first observations, I was confused as to how to identify males and females. This identification was essential if I was to understand whether gender behavior was prevalent on the playground. I was able to distinguish between males and females by what they wore. This proved important in understanding some of the ways children can associate within groups.

Girls exhibit a consciousness of kind by the feminine clothing they wear. Feminine clothes are here defined as pastel colors, fur on parkas, dresses, and blouson detailing. Favorite girls' colors
were pinks, blues, yellows, and greens. Spring weather brought more dresses out of the closet. These dresses did not always limit activity. Girls who climbed on the jungle gym or flipped around the empty teeter totter bar often wore shorts under their dresses.

Boys' clothing emphasized their team sports groups. Favorite wearing apparel for the boys were the more durable baseball caps, tee-shirts, and jeans which allowed more aggressive play behavior. Girls, in contrast, were constrained to be more conscious of showing dirt or tears on their pastel clothes. In addition, dresses often limit the choice of apparatus, because of modesty. Boys also wore the school colors more frequently. Other professional sports team colors were also worn. Even as children, boys identify and emulate socially acceptable male adult roles. Gender-identifiable clothing suggests that it is important to distinguish male children from female children. This supports a consciousness of kind which functions to maintain gender groups.

In summary, there are norms to follow in forming play groups. Homosocial play groups are formed and occupy gender spaces. Boys have exclusive rights over certain playground territories. Their group boundaries are rigid. Girls' gender spaces and groups are penetrable. Their space is not always their own and must be shared with boys. Boys engage in competitive play interaction while girls play patterns are cooperatively based. Group structure and process is learned through sex-role socialization. This is supported by the non-conforming play groups of kindergarteners. As age increases, so does the prevalence of gender play.
IV. Gender Play

I have previously discussed that playground apparatus is related to gender. Equipment such as swings and teeter totters are best suited to the cooperative dyadic play of girls groups. A simple counting of the children, by sex, who use the apparatus shows that girls do use playground structures more than boys. The nature of the play is qualitatively different by gender.

Girls and boys use playground equipment differently. During the winter months boys use the apparatuses more frequently than they do in the spring. (This is due to the move from blacktop space to the playing field). Girls are always seen on the playground apparatuses. I counted both sexes using the equipment, but gender play was observed.

When boys use the play structures, they are generally more aggressive. Boys swing higher, push the merry-go-round faster, and dangle precariously from the jungle gym as compared to the girls. Teacher discipline was infrequent. When teachers did speak to the children about their play, it was always to boys and usually concerned their potentially hazardous use of the apparatus. An example of a teacher scolding a child occurred when a boy hung onto the underside of the merry-go-round as it spun around. Girls did not roughhouse in such a manner.

Group structure remained the same when moving back and forth between apparatus and non-apparatus play. Relatively large groups of five or six boys played either catch or on the jungle gym. The
jungle gym and merry-go-round are favorites for the boys. I would surmise this is so because these apparatuses are most conducive to large group play. Boys also continue the invasion into girls play areas. If, for example, girls are playing on the jungle gym, boys will move to play on this structure. Girls then move to another type of play. At first, this seems to be simple invasion and succession. It is not.

Invasion occurs when a lower status group moves into an area occupied by a higher status group. Succession is complete when the lower status group dominates their new area. An example of this is when new immigrants invade an area occupied by an older immigrant group. In this way, a lower status group has succeeded a higher status group. The playground behavior I observed at first seemed to indicate invasion and succession had occurred. If the status of boys and girls is examined, however, the boys are seen as having higher status.

I define the boys as higher status because of the rights they enjoy. The boys have a playing field for their exclusive use, which is larger than the girls' space. Boys' groups are not penetrable. Girls' space and groups are permeable. Boys have rights over the entire play area, while girls' rights to space are limited and conditional. The boys then are a higher status group. The reverse of invasion and succession has occurred. Boys, a higher status group, have invaded the girls play area, or that which is occupied by a lower status group. This is colonialism, rather than invasion and succession.
Girls use playground apparatuses differently than boys. Their group structures of cooperative dyadic and triadic play are seen in both apparatus and non-apparatus play. Girls share their play space with boys and actually have no space entirely their own. Hazardous, aggressive play was not observed in girls activity. The only non-conforming play on the girls part was when they sat backwards on the teeter totter or were on the merry-go-round when boys were pushing it. The only piece of play-ground equipment that girls used in an aggressive manner was the merry-go-round. When boys were present, girls would participate in the faster rotations. The girls soon left, however, as boys continued the high merry-go-round speed.

Children appear to accept these norms of gender space, group structure and process, and gender play. There are consequences if these norms are not internalized and accepted. Girls, for example, will be excluded from activity if they choose to attempt penetration of male boundaries. If a boy chooses girls' groups for play, he is risking stigma and ostracism. Based on the norms I observed, boys who might choose girls' play may eventually be excluded from the girls' group when they realize he is violating a norm.

Kickball at first seemed an exception to the norms discussed above. This game is a playing field activity which is engaged in by both sexes. The group structures are sex-segregated. Male norms apply in this game between the sexes. Relatively large groups of teams face each other, boys versus girls. The ultimate goal is to win, thus basing the only communication between the sexes on competition. Girls are nearly always on defense, attempting to put the
boys out and take an offensive position to score some points. The girls always lose, unless some boys assist them in playing defense. This tended to reinforce ideas that boys and girls have separate spheres of play activity. Gender play reflects a sex-role based group structure. Play behavior is learned and reinforced along gender lines.

V. Conclusion

Playground activity is defined by gender. Spaces on the playground are defined as gender areas. Boys have a larger playing area and can invade girls territory at will. Girls cannot play in boys' spaces. Groups also form differently according to sex. Male groups are relatively large, consisting of five or six members. Competition is often a basis for these groups. Girls' groups are usually dyads and triads. These female groups are based on cooperative play behavior. Gender play results from these groups.

Evidence which at first seemed to disprove these ideas is now seen as reinforcing the concept of differentiation between the sexes on the basis of sex. The kickball game of both sexes polarizes groups of male and female into competition against each other. Girls are incompetent in this game supported by male group norms. The kindergarteners pole-base game shows that sex-role identification increases with age.

In the final analysis, it is evident that play behavior is learned through sex-role socialization. Further research is indicated to identify these agents of socialization which define children's
play.
Chapter V
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

I. Summary

The research for this thesis focused on the nature of children's play behavior. The research data was gathered through qualitatively based field work. I chose this type of methodology because qualitative methods were best suited to the question I researched. This principal question was whether there are gender differences in children's play styles, groups, and behavior. Quantitative measures would have counted the number of children present on an activity. Merely counting, however, did not produce any significant understanding of how children played or what their behavior looked like. Qualitative methodology did provide this insight.

The research setting was the playground of a small, rural, elementary school. I chose this because of the ease of entry and the literature review which suggested traditionalism lingered in children's play in rural schools. If gender roles had changed, then a rural school would be one of the last settings for gender play to continue. Eighty-five children attended this school, which had kindergarten, first, second, and third grades. Kindergarteners
attended only in the afternoon. The total number of children using the playground fluxuated between fifty and seventy. I chose to observe recess periods only. These were time slots of ten to twenty minutes set aside by the school for the children's play. There was always a teacher present, however she did not engage in intense interaction with the children and did not suggest play or games.

I used two qualitative methods. The first was observation. When I entered the setting initially, I was a covert observer. I chose covert observation because of concern for interfering in children's play patterns and possibly altering the environment. After I had gathered data for several weeks, questions emerged which required further entrance into the setting to be answered. I then became an overt observer, as I entered the playground with administrative approval. This move was beneficial in that I was able to confirm many observations and correct some initial misconceptions.

The second method was interviewing. These were not formal interviews, but were more along the lines of informal conversation. When I arrived at the setting, I usually informed the secretaries that I was present. We generally engaged in casual conversation, which served as a source of information. After I became an overt observer, I began to talk with the playground teachers. They often offered their own observations which often confirmed my own. The children on the playground also offered information about their play, thus serving as willing informants. I believe this type of input was essential in pulling together my own observations, identifying categories of behavior, and interpreting apparent deviations.
I used photography to illustrate my findings. The use of a camera proved a bit awkward at first, because it made an overt observer even more obvious. The children were intrigued by the camera and enjoyed being the objects of much picture-taking. These photographs were used to confirm my observations. I showed the pictures to professors and other graduate students who often saw the same behavior I had observed in the field. Quite unexpectedly, photography had served as an ice-breaker when I became an overt observer. The pictures reaffirmed my observations and provided some reliability for my research.

I found three major areas which pulled my observations and interviews into a coherent whole. These areas were gender space, group structure and process, and gender play. Each area, and the findings in each, can be explained by sex-role socialization. Children's play is dependent upon the type and extent of sex-role socialization they are exposed to. Gender behavior on the playground increases with age. Kindergarteners were observed in non-gender play. First, second, and third graders consistently exhibited gender behavior in their play patterns.

The first gender play pattern observed was in the use of space. Boys and girls each have their own areas of play on the playground. Girls and boys both use the playground apparatus, however, it is dominated by the girls. Girls play spaces are only on the blacktop, on the periphery of the apparatuses. These gender spaces are easily invaded by boys. The space for males is larger than the girls spaces. Boys play in the field adjacent to the playground. Their
space is inviolable. Girls are welcome only as spectators or in the sex segregated competitive kickball game.

Group structure and process affects the use of playground apparatus and gender space. Girls play in cooperative dyads and triads. Their games and chosen apparatuses are best suited to cooperative, dyadic play. Boys play in relatively large groups of five or six. Their play is based on competition. One boys group which was often observed was that centered on a team sport. Girls groups are more permeable than boys groups are. The boys groups had clear boundaries, especially in the team sports where girls were excluded. Children also exhibit a consciousness of kind through the type of clothing they wear.

Finally, play is specific to gender. Playground apparatus is used more by girls than by boys. When boys choose to play on the apparatus, however, girls will leave the equipment to the boys use. Boys are more aggressive in their use of an apparatus, perhaps because they exhibit competitiveness in group maintenance, thus transferring this to apparatus play. Homosocial, or same sex play behavior was seen in both boys and girls play groups. This is not spontaneous but learned through sex-role socialization. The non-gender based play of the kindergarteners is evidence of learned gender play.

II. Implications

There are implications of sex-role socialization for children's play behavior. Boys who learn to play in teams based on competition
are being prepared for the capitalistic economy they will work in as adults. The cooperative dyads and triads of the girls do not adequately prepare them for future work roles. Boys learn early how to function in networks of competitively based groups. Girls are not learning this type of networking, which has been discussed in the literature as necessary for success and advancement in the workplace.

The successful penetration of girls play groups by boys indicates that girls games are interruptible. Girls play is not taken as seriously as that of the boys. The girls do not have a space of their own for their play and must tolerate territorial invasion and colonization. Boys play spaces, however, are not penetrated by the girls. Boundaries of boys groups have been defined and understood to be inviolable. This characteristic is seen not only in children's play but in adult spheres. Adult spheres, such as the political arenas, have traditionally been dominated by males. Women are achieving limited entrance to these arenas today. If this is to continue, then perhaps we need to socialize our children that this is a possibility.

When children's play mimics the adult world, there is a socialization pattern learned which continues from childhood roles to adult roles. I must point out, however, that this research took place on a traditional, rural playground where previous research has shown gender roles do exist. Future research needs to be done in settings other than the traditional, rural playground. Literature suggests that alternative playgrounds have seen decreased
vandalism and increased friendships. Such playgrounds should be examined for their influence in gender play.

Alterations on the playground need to be studied, also. Toward the end of my research, a play leader entered the playground. This person altered the nature of the play by introducing organized games. I was not able to gather enough data to accurately assess the implications of this person's presence. Other research focuses could be on the influence of male teachers on children, amount and type of discipline as reinforcers of gender behavior, and playgrounds in urban settings. Other methods such as content analyses of textbooks, personal interviews with children, and intensive surveys of parents might focus on the agents of sex-role socialization.

III. Suggestions for Future Research

Suggestions for future research center on three main concerns: theoretical, methodological, and practical. Since this was an exploratory study, I began with a general knowledge of research on children's play behavior. Most of these theories center on sex-role socialization. The data I gathered supported sex-role socialization as the determinant of gender play. I would suggest for future research that other theories be examined for their aid in understanding gender behavior. One such suggestion is Bandura's learning theory and the influence of role models on gender play.
The methods used in future research could use observation and interviews as a basis. These qualitative measures were more accurate in describing behavior than quantitative measures would have been. Overt observation also proved more effective than covert observation. One specific recommendation is to go onto the playground where you are in direct contact with the subjects of your research. I believe this will help to eliminate some of the early errors in covert observation. Another recommendation is to use photography to ascertain the accuracy of your findings. Confidentiality of the playground setting cannot be assured if you take someone with you to corroborate your observations. The use of photography, with an appropriate methodological framework, as well as the informants, will help to alleviate this problem.

The third concern is practical. This is what shall be done with the research findings. Do we want to break down or support sex-roles? Research on the effects of such sex-role socialization on children's play can suggest ways to achieve a more egalitarian world. Do we want to deliberately interfere in children's play to change gender behavior? Is such interference ethical? Perhaps we should look at sex-role socialization in the same manner. Socializing children into gender patterns of behavior is also an intrusion into their freedom of choice. Defining what is free play behavior and what is socialized play behavior may be the next question to be addressed in future research on children's playgrounds. Whether or not free play behavior exists remains to be seen.
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