

General

Different types of relationship are important in development, as each has their own ability to provide distinctive experiences. Both **Harris** and **Pinker** have also argued that the tendency to study parental relationships has grossly overstated their influence in developmental processes and claim that it is within children's peer groups that socialisation occurs.

Focus of the chapter is on what happens in normal interactions between children at home, school and the playground - this is where sibling and peer relationships are made.

Nature and Features of Peer & Sibling Interactions

Schaffer:

Adult (parent or teacher) relationships with children characterised by differing knowledge and power - interactions are about *complementarity of roles*.

Peer relationships are characterised by similar levels of knowledge and power - such interactions are about *reciprocal processes*.

Sibling relationships are distinguished by differences in knowledge and power, but this is not so great that they sometimes cannot talk on the same level on occasions. The combination of complementarity & reciprocity is what makes sibling relationships influential.

Dunn:

Friendship with peers is the start of independence from parents. The ability to interact with other children allows them to work out how power, status, shared experiences, understanding/manipulating feelings works. Different in character to relationships with parents.

Book 2 Chapter 3 - Children's Interactions: Siblings and Peers

Conflicts, disputes, disagreements: playful & real

General: caregivers 'scaffold' interactions, but this is not the case with peer interactions - the pressure on the child to acquire skills to enable them to take part successfully in joint interactions is much greater (**Schaffer**.) Playing together is a skill - requires sensitivity to other's perspectives, negotiation and conflict management competencies. (c.f. 'Theory of Mind')

Play as interactional accomplishment

Often investigated through transcripts (e.g. **Fein** - 'Dracula Monster & Monster-vanishing Hero study); but as **Ochs** notes, 'transcription is a selective process reflecting theoretical goals and definitions' - i.e. they can't capture everything and they are subject to the biases and interests of the researchers making the transcriptions.

Line by line analysis is of interest to qualitative researchers. **Fein's** study illustrates how the two children continually negotiated their roles; instruct each other on what to do or say and switch effortlessly between play and non-play (occurs in very young children - this study is of two 3½ y.o. boys) - an illustration of **Göncü's** concept of communication within play vs. communication about play - *metacommunication* - "a desire to have fun by playing with representations."

Significance of playfighting

Smith et al argue important social skills are practised and developed this way:

- The ability to understand (play/non play) signals
- Regulation of emotional & physical displays
- Turn-taking and understanding another's view (e.g. role reversals; self-limiting behaviour)

The 'dracula' game shows how a thin line exists between play and conflict. True in other cultures as well - **Whiting & Edwards** report of play fighting in a Mexican playground turning into a real fight.

Presence / absence of laughter (**Smith et al**) is one way of distinguishing the difference. 'Cheating' occurs - and the public humiliation of a play partner can be used to display dominance & increase status within a peer group.

Pelligrini study of adolescent's rough and tumble (R&T) play; observation & interviews used. Raises two issues w.r.t dominance & aggression:

- When thinking about developmental significance of R&T, the age of the children is important as the meaning of such interactions change with age.
- There are gender differences too (even when at the same age) - boys engage in R&T to emphasise dominance; girls regard it as playful - possibly as an early, low-risk form of heterosexual interaction.

Smith et al suggest that even -ve aspects of a child's experience, like having to deal with aggression, is a useful preparation for adulthood.

Importance of playground experiences

Blatchford et al and others argue the use of self-report data, not just observation, is important to understand the significance of play and playground experiences.

Longitudinal study; into changing perspectives on the playground as children move from junior school to secondary education.

Most children enjoy break times; they play games and socialise. Minority (mostly girls) didn't like going out in poor weather. Also disliked the bullying, teasing, fighting that takes place.

By the time age 16, the only game that remains is soccer - younger children play this, other ball games and chasing games. Talking with friends much more prevalent at age 16 - the beginnings of a 'youth culture', where social life and friendships are more important than the actual activity.

There is a child-governed culture of the playground. Not always benign - racism & sexism, fighting occurs. However, v. important to children as it provides freedom from adults, the experience of regulating behaviour and how to deal with -ve experiences, helping to develop a set of sophisticated social understandings.

Adult interventions not likely to be successful unless they take children's views/knowledge into account - **Cowie**.

Children's cultures

Conflicts/disputes are normal and healthy in the context of our society. Learning to deal with conflicts of interest and negotiate solutions are inevitable and desirable childhood experiences.

The boundary between +ve experiences (play fighting & chasing) and -ve (bullying) is not well defined and cannot be determined from observation alone (**Smith et al**) Analytical criteria are dependent on cultural customs & beliefs; the standards set by adults; the child's subjective experience.

Ground rules set by children is particularly relevant to teasing - it is the context of the preceding relationship that determines if a word is an exercise of provocative power.

Bullying - behaviour has to be intentional, unprovoked, repeated and dominant to qualify.

Friendship types are not homogeneous - **Pollard** identifies 3 types - 'goodies'; 'jokers'; 'gangs'

'Good' groups have a +ve attitude towards themselves & teachers; conform to rules; quiet & studious. Group members identify with high moral standards; everyone has a nickname.

'Jokers' were similar; but liked to laugh and play around.

'Gangs' do not have a coherent sense of group identity; membership changes as patterns of like and dislike change. Members identify as 'I', not 'We' when talking about the group and their place in it.

Role of Gender in conflicts and disputes

Maccoby notes boys play is more frequently towards aggression - which appears to confirm commonly held assumptions about the differences of how boys & girls interact (conflict vs consensus.) But, there is clear evidence girls do take part in conflicts and disputes. It is the discourse style that differs between genders.

Sheldon - *single voice discourse* - boys - no attempt at persuasion or adaptation of perspective in the light of their partner's perspective. *Double voiced discourse* is used by girls in a dispute - while still pursuing their own objective, there is evidence of negotiation.

Negotiation and the joint development of ideas

Also important outside the play context - e.g. **Littleton et al** note its importance in learning situations (fluffy the hamster story.) Through negotiation and evaluation, progress emerges; knowledge and understanding are created jointly. It is important than children are taught to understand the difference between constructive conflict and criticisms of ideas vs personal criticism & conflict.

Emotion and sensitivity in sibling relationships

Children react to interactions with others with sensitivity and emotion - especially true in sibling relationships.

Dunn & Kendrick - characterised by pleasure, affection, hostility, aggression, jealousy, rivalry, frustration. It is the emotional quality of these relationships that are significant in the development of social understanding.

Sibling interactions are not emotionally neutral - personal interests are at stake! However, while they fight and squabble, they can also be highly protective of each other - e.g. **Stalker & Connors** research into disabled siblings.

Co-operation, Collaboration & Participation

Dunn & Munn - Cambridge Sibling Study; observations of siblings in own homes from 43 families.

Conducted when second sibling was 18;24 and 36 m.o.

One observation was fantasy pretend play.

At 18 m.o., 15% played in this way with their sibling(s) At 24 m.o., 80% did, with > 1/3rd understanding they took on different identities during the play.

At 8 m.o. the child can share/recognise the mood of a sibling. At 14 m.o. they can recognise and co-operate in another's goals.

Dunn concludes from a very young age, children can co-operate with each other.

Study highlights the significance of complementary & reciprocal features of sibling's relationships. E.g. instruction welcome in the context of pretend play but young children are far less tolerant of help at other times.

Co-operation more often observed when relationship between siblings is friendly & affectionate => learning from siblings is not the only process that contributes to role playing ability. E.g. participation in discussions leads to this - otherwise only children would be unable to do this. **Kantor** notes social competence is not a fixed set of capabilities.

Socio-dramatic play = pretend activities based on domestic scenes.

Fantasy play - fictional narratives & imaginary events.

Fantasy and Socio-dramatic play

Corsaro demonstrated language & discourse in these types of play are very different from each other. Fantasy play has two functions:

- Facilitates the development of interpersonal skills
- Allows children to get control over fears and anxieties - developing mutual coping strategies

Three main themes emerge - lost-found; danger-rescue; death-rebirth. **Wickes** & other Jungian's argue the reason for this is they are three basic human themes that unconsciously preoccupy us throughout all cultures and life.

Stone - socio-dramatic play is an 'anticipatory socialisation' device. Evidence in western societies suggests s-d play more characteristic of girls; boys indulge in more fantasy play. In other societies (e.g. Malawi), both boys & girls take part in s-d play - e.g. boys playing at law courts (**Read**)

Peer collaboration and learning

Not just play - children work together to solve problems from a young age. **Brownell & Carriger** have shown toddlers under 3y.o. collaborate to solve simple problems and establish joint goals; they adapt their behaviour to achieve such goals.

The boundary between play and work-related interactions often blurs - e.g. **Vass** - story planning example. Verbal humour used to make sense of the task; later, they use these ideas conceived as jokes as part of the creative process.

Limitations of psychologist accounts of peer & sibling interactions

1. Research to date has placed great emphasis on face to face interactions. Technology (mobile 'phones, internet) change the way in which children interact, particularly in affluent societies.

Maybin notes that use of the mobile 'phone allows children to contact each other at any time without the use of a parental intermediary - greater privacy and independence.

2. Much research has been done in Western societies - therefore care is needed in over-generalisation of results. **Schaffer** notes the time spent with parents, grandparents, siblings, peers varies from culture to culture. Descriptions of particular patterns of relationship <> prescriptions for healthy development!
3. While some attempt has been made by researchers to move from observation to involving children through interview (for example), other researchers (**Kellet et al**) argue for children being empowered to set research agendas and conduct research themselves.