

Social Class Differences in Sociodramatic Play: A Critical Review

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Studies of children's sociodramatic play as a function of socioeconomic status report conflicting and marginal findings which militate against unqualified generalizations that economically disadvantaged children engage in less and poorer-quality sociodramatic play. Further, definitive conclusions on the basis of these studies are unwarranted because of flawed methodological procedures, confounding variables, and insufficient consideration of how verbal behavior, a critical component of sociodramatic play, is affected by situational variables. It is concluded that data from play intervention studies with low-income children and ethnographic studies of children from non-Western societies are virtually irrelevant to the issue of social class differences. The theoretical significance of social class differences in pretend play in general, and sociodramatic play in particular, even if found consistently, is unclear. In future research, priority should be given to both improved assessment of social class differences and clarification of how these differences relate to competences thought to be consequences of socio-dramatic and pretend play.

Preschool children's pretend play is no longer regarded as "just play," but serious business indeed. The seriousness with which developmental psychologists have come to regard play has fomented interest in its determinants. Variation in pretend play, particularly sociodramatic play, as a function of social class has been the focus of a number of research studies. This paper presents a critical examination of these studies and related literature to clarify the limits of our existing knowledge on this issue.

Pretend play is defined here as a transformational activity marked by an "as if" or make-believe quality in which objects, actions, and/or verbal behavior are used to symbolize imaginary persons, objects, and situations (Piaget, 1962; Sutton-Smith, 1972a). Sociodramatic play is one type of pretend play and has as its distinctive markers organization and cooperation. Two or more children enact an imaginary episode via differential

Discussions of the issues reviewed in this paper with Ernest Washington, Mutombo Mpanya, Lorraine Rocissano, Harold Stevenson, Henry Wellman, Michael Lamb, and Ewart Thomas were invaluable, as were their critical readings of earlier drafts. Portions of this paper were prepared while the author was a Visiting Scholar at Stanford University and held a National Research Council Postdoctoral Fellowship for Minorities sponsored by the Ford Foundation. Requests for reprints should be sent to Vonnie C. McLoyd, Department of Psychology, Mason Hall, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109.

roles and behavior (Smilansky, 1968). Because of its interdependent nature, sociodramatic play is generally thought to both reflect and demand greater social and cognitive maturity than solitary, parallel, or associative pretend play.

A prevailing assumption in the literature is that economically disadvantaged children, compared to middle-income children, engage in less frequent and lower-quality sociodramatic play, and play that is characteristically unimaginative, desultory, repetitive, simplistic, and dependent on realistic, rather than improvised or ideational, toy representations (Lovinger, 1974; Murphy, 1972; Sigel & McBane, 1967; Smilansky, 1968; Sutton-Smith, 1971, 1972b). A central thesis of this paper is that this assumption has gained considerable acceptance in the play literature in the face of marginal, conflicting, and ultimately inconclusive evidence. Not only is there considerable disagreement among the findings regarding social class differences in sociodramatic play, in a number of these studies, factors which seriously undermine their validity are evident, including flawed methodological procedures, confounding classroom and school-related variables, and insufficient consideration of how verbal behavior, a primary component of sociodramatic play, is affected by situational variables.

It is further contended that the ascendancy of this assumption has severely circumscribed the nature of questions that have been asked about pretend play among low-income and working-class preschool children. Little research has been directed toward clarification of either the social and cognitive correlates of their sociodramatic and pretend play, or alternative expressions of imagination. This paucity of research is in decided contrast to the more abundant research on training and modification of play, particularly among low-income children.

This paper is divided into four major sections. In the first, a discussion of the significance of the study of social class differences in pretend play is presented. Research related to the functions and correlates of pretend play is briefly summarized, as it clarifies probable interpretations and implications of reliable differences which may exist between children from different socioeconomic backgrounds. The second section is devoted to a review of studies of children's sociodramatic play, and to a much lesser extent, of pretend play in general, as a function of socioeconomic status. Included is a discussion of factors which militate against drawing firm conclusions from this body of research and ways future research might proceed in view of these considerations. Other researchers have pointed out some of the methodological and conceptual problems characterizing research on social class differences in sociodramatic play (Fein, 1981; Rubin, Fein & Vandenberg, in press; Schwartzman, 1978). In the second section of this paper, however, an attempt is made to provide a more detailed and comprehensive review and critique of this

and related research. The third section includes a brief examination of studies designed to increase the frequency and quality of sociodramatic play and related behavior among predominantly low income children. In the fourth section, consideration is given to the implications, or lack thereof, of ethnographic findings for social class differences in pretend play.

RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL CLASS DIFFERENCES PRETEND PLAY

A number of correlational and experimental studies indicate that among preschool children, play and make-believe role playing are associated with or facilitate divergent thinking (Dansky & Silverman, 1976; Johnson, 1976; Lieberman, 1965; Sutton-Smith, 1971), problem solving (Bruner, 1976; Duncker, 1945; Klinger, 1969; Sylva, 1977; Sylva, Bruner, & Genova, 1976; Vandenberg, 1980), social role and physical conservation (Fink, 1976; Golomb & Cornelius, 1977), perspective and role taking (Burns & Brainerd, 1979), and spatial relations and classification skills (Rubin & Maioni, 1975).

The explanations of these findings generally emphasize the similarities in processes underlying play and these skills. For example, one explanation of the relationships found among play, divergent thinking, and problem solving is that all involve variation of response (Dansky & Silverman 1976; Lieberman, 1965; Sylva, 1977; Sylva et al., 1976; Sutton-Smith, 1971). Similarly, it has been hypothesized that pretend play, conservation, and perspective taking are related because all involve ignoring contraindicative stimuli (Fink, 1976; Golomb & Cornelius, 1977; Sutton-Smith, 1971). In pretend play, the child decenters and ignores properties of the substitute object which differ from those of the imagined object (Griffiths, 1949; Stern, 1924). He or she recognizes the temporary make-believe transformation of the object, but continues to recognize the "real" identity of the object. Analogous decentration and reversibility are embedded in conservation and perspective taking. Pretend play is thought to be related to representational competence because both involve separation of thought from physical reality (Sigel & McBane, 1967; Sutton-Smith, 1971).

Social class differences in pretend play have been studied for theoretical and practical reasons which are directly related to the functions and correlates of pretend play. First, pretend play has been viewed as evidence of cognitive, most specifically symbolic, competence, and thus, as a diagnostic tool by which to assess social class differences in this domain. Second, there has been an underlying theoretical interest in whether social class differences in pretend play may be a source of differences in symbolic skills, specifically their underdevelopment in low-income children. This view assumes that pretend play enhances symbolic

development, and that its absence or attenuation, conversely, impedes development to a similar degree. Third, there has been an explicit practical interest in determining whether there are social class differences so that if such differences exist, intervention can be implemented for those preschool children who exhibit depressed levels of play.

Despite these rationales, empirical investigations of those competences thought to be consequences or correlates of pretend play, precisely as they relate to social class differences in pretend play, have yet to be done. If low-income children engage in less and poorer-quality pretend play, and if pretend play is a significant facilitator or correlate of representational thought, for example, one might therefore expect that these children would show diminished competence in these behaviors. This hypothetical relationship is implicit in suggestions that deficiency in pretend play among preschool children is accompanied by an "act- and object-minded" orientation, the absence of a "concept- and word-minded" orientation (Smilansky, 1968, p. 27), and underdevelopment "in the use of symbols and concepts existing apart from concrete objects" (Freyberg, 1973, p. 135).

Nevertheless, a spate of studies on social class differences in representational competence, as reflected in performance on classification tasks with high- versus low-imagery objects (e.g., Cocking & Sigel, 1979; Sigel, Anderson, & Shapiro, 1966; Sigel & Cocking, 1977; Sigel & McBane, 1967; Simmons, Note 1), has produced little solid evidence of representational immaturity in low-income children (Davis, 1971; Kogan, 1976; White, 1971). Further, in concept learning tasks which employ high- versus low-imagery materials, low-income children display representational skills comparable to those reported in studies with middle-income children (Dixon & Saltz, 1977). There is also evidence that social class differences in the ability to identify other people's emotional responses are tempered by a number of situational factors and are not uniformly in favor of middle-income children (Borke, 1973).

Social class differences have been found, however, in behaviors assumed to be related to pretend play, such as conservation (Almy, Chittenden, & Miller, 1966; Deutsch, 1973), but it is far from clear that differential pretend play is implicated in such findings. In the same vein even if consistent social class differences were found in representational competence, role taking, or other behaviors, they may well be unrelated to differences in pretend play. That is, it is not clear that pretend play is the only, or even primary facilitator of those skills at issue. Low-income and working-class children may engage in alternative expressions of imagination and other activities which serve cognitive and social functions equivalent to those served by more conventional displays of pretend. There has been a decided lack of attention to these issues in previous research.

With a notable exception (Johnson, 1976), studies which provide information on the social and cognitive skills associated with pretend play among economically disadvantaged preschool children have been training intervention studies (Freyberg, 1973; Lovinger, 1974; Rosen, 1974; Saltz & Johnson, 1974; Saltz, Dixon, & Johnson, 1977). Generally, *postintervention* pretend play is related to social and cognitive skills (e.g., role taking, creativity), which, if enhanced by training, are assumed to be functions of pretend play. The possibility has been ignored that pretend play which has been subjected to or is the result of systematic training may be linked to skills which are quite different from those of pretend play which has not been subjected to such training.

These gaps in our knowledge undermine, to some extent, the theoretical significance of social class differences in pretend play and the legitimacy of intervention. Nevertheless, it is important to critically review these findings since they have both immediate practical implications (e.g., intervention) and implications for the kinds of knowledge researchers are most likely to seek (e.g., the most effective intervention strategies) as well as forego (e.g., alternative expressions of imagination and their significance for social and cognitive development, situational determinants of pretend play) about economically disadvantaged children.

STUDIES OF CHILDREN'S SOCIODRAMATIC PLAY AS A FUNCTION OF SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

With the publication of her book, *The Effects of Sociodramatic Play on Disadvantaged Preschool Children*, Smilansky (1968) firmly established the notion that low-income children from certain cultural backgrounds suffer play deficits and spawned adult intervention as an explicit remediation strategy. In a number of subsequent studies of social class differences, researchers have adopted Smilansky's play definitions (Rosen, 1974; Rubin, Maioni, & Hornung, 1976) and components of play (i.e., imitative role play, make-believe with objects, make-believe with actions and situations verbally expressed, verbal communication, persistence, and interaction) (Fein & Stork, 1981; Griffing, 1980). Further evidence of the seminal nature of Smilansky's work comes from intervention studies with low-income children, virtually all of which cite it as evidence of play deficits in socially and economically disadvantaged children and justification for intervention (Freyberg, 1973; Lovinger, 1974; Rosen, 1974; Saltz & Johnson, 1974; Saltz et al., 1977). Smilansky's work warrants critical examination then, because it continues to play a pivotal role in research on pretend play.

Smilansky's interest in individual differences in pretend play began when she failed in an attempt to use sociodramatic play as a medium to enhance scholastic performance among low-income Israeli children of

Asian–African descent. To her surprise, “children from the low socio-cultural strata *play very little* and most of them *do not participate in sociodramatic play at all*” (p. 4). They did not proceed through the stages of play as delineated by Piaget (1962), from motor play to pretend play, and finally to rule-governed games, but rather skipped the pretend stage altogether, going directly from motor play to games with rules. To verify these observations, Smilansky conducted a comparative study of 3- to 6-year-olds attending 36 kindergarten and nursery-school classes. Half of the classes were attended by low-income Israeli children of Asian–African descent and half by middle-income Israeli children of European descent (Study 1). The latter children engaged in less sociodramatic play, enacted a greater variety of roles and richer episodes, made more verbalizations, and showed a preference for symbolic rather than realistic play objects.

The results of this study depended largely on qualitative, descriptive analyses. No quantitative data nor statistical tests of significance were reported for the pretend content of the children’s verbalizations, nor the six play components. Quantitative data were presented, however, for the amount and linguistic quality (e.g., proportion of nouns, and adjectives used, number of words in sentence, range of vocabulary) of the children’s verbalizations during sociodramatic play in the home and hospital corner, the brick-building corner, and the drawing and painting corner. Even here, however, no statistical tests of significance were reported and it is unclear whether certain children contributed disproportionately to the total scores on these measures.

Subsequent to this comparative study, Smilansky implemented an extensive intervention program to increase the frequency and quality of sociodramatic play among the low-income children of Asian-African descent (Study 2). To establish different baselines with which to contrast the effects of the intervention, two control groups were included, one comprised of low-income Israeli children of Asian–African descent and one of Israeli children of European descent. Surprisingly, *the latter control group was comprised by combining low- and middle-income children* because, as Smilansky (1968) noted, “we did not find significant differences in their sociodramatic play” (p. 109). This nonsignificant effect of social class within the group of Israeli children of European descent, of course, was in great contrast to the differences found in Study 1. The collective findings were interpreted by Smilansky as evidence that environmental stimulation (e.g., television) afforded economically disadvantaged Euro-Israeli children and differences in the “ways of growth and development” mitigated the potentially depressive effects of economic privation. In light of the nonsignificant effect of social class in Study 2, the depressed frequency and quality of play among low-income children of Asian–African descent (Study 1) may have been due more to cultural, than social class,

background. This ambiguity notwithstanding, the differences have been attributed most often to social class (e.g., Barrett, 1977; Freyberg, 1973; Griffing, 1974; Rubin, 1977; Rubin et al., 1976; Tizard, Philips, & Plewis, 1976). Other possible explanations have also been generally ignored, such as temporary inhibition among the low-income children resulting from fear in the new and strange schools (Schwartzman, 1978).

Apart from the brief comments noted above, the nonsignificant effect of social class found in Study 2 was not highlighted or underscored by Smilansky. Further, it has gone unnoticed, unexplored, or ignored, but in any case, uncited by subsequent researchers, with one notable exception (Stern, Bragdon, & Gordon, Note 2). It is paradoxical that the research most often cited as evidence of social class differences in sociodramatic play also provided support for the null hypotheses. Even more paradoxical is the fact that the clearest challenge presented by this research, i.e., disentanglement of the effects of social class and culture, and more specifically identification of those cultural conditions which mediate the adverse effects of poverty on pretend play, has yet to be satisfactorily addressed in the empirical literature. Smilansky may have encouraged uncritical generalization of the differences she found in Study 1 by her suggestion that "a similar lack or deprivation is felt among culturally deprived kindergarten children in America in their sociodramatic play" (p. 62).

Excluding Smilansky's work, studies of children's sociodramatic play as a function of socioeconomic status are summarized in the following section, specifically with regard to amount and quality of sociodramatic play and use of objects during pretend play. Consistency of within-study findings, as well as the existence of significant social class \times age interactions, is also examined.

A Pattern of Conflicting and Marginal Findings

Studies of social class differences in sociodramatic play are presented in Table 1. As can be seen, there is a pattern of conflicting findings between studies and of mixed results within studies which militates against a generalized notion that low-income and working-class children, compared to middle-income children, engage in less and poorer-quality sociodramatic play.

Amount of sociodramatic play. While a number of studies indicate that middle-income preschoolers do engage in more sociodramatic play than low-income children (Fein & Stork, 1981; Rosen, 1974; White, 1978), some studies report no differences between middle-income children and low-income and working-class children (Golomb, 1979; Stern et al., Note 2). In one study (Eifermann, 1971), low-income first- and second-graders were actually found to engage in more sociodramatic play than middle-income children. Rubin et al. (1976) found a marginally significant differ-

TABLE 1
STUDIES OF SOCIAL CLASS DIFFERENCES IN SOCIODRAMATIC PLAY

| Study | Sample ^{a,b} | Social class/ school confound? | | Observation time | Measure | Findings |
|------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|----|---|---|--|
| | | Yes | No | | | |
| Eifermann (1971) | Age 1st- to 8th-graders LI Ethnicity unspecf (1 school) MI Ethnicity unspecf (1 school) | Yes | | One 10-min time sample/week for 14-18 months | 1. Prop children in collective pretend | MI 1st- and 2nd- graders < LI MI 7th- and 8th- graders > LI NS for 3rd- to 6th- graders |
| Fein & Stork (1981) | Age 3-6 LI Afro-Am & Cauc (23) MI Afro-Am & Cauc (22) | No | | Six 5-min time samples/ child | 1. Freq of verb 2. Length of utter 3. No. min/scene diversity/originality of: 4. 5. Self-ref role 6. 7. Other-ref role 8. 9. Make-believe scene 10, 11. Obj transf | MI > LI on 1 MI > LI on composite score NS on 2-11 |
| Golomb (1979) | Age 3-6 WC Ethnicity unspecf (30) MI Ethnicity unspecf (30) | Unclear | | Unspecf | 1. Prop of pretend play 2. Level of complex 3. Soc cooperation 4. Socialized or egoc speech 5. Components of symb play | NS on 1-5 ^c |
| Griffing (1980) | Age 5-6 LI Afro-Am (87) MI Afro-Am (82) | Yes | | Groups of 4 in structured playroom, 30 min/group | 1. Imitative role play 2. Make-believe w/ obj 3. Verbal exp of make- believe situations 4. Persistence 5. Interaction 6. Verbal interaction | MI > LI on 1-6 |
| Rosen (1974) | Age Kindergarteners LI Afro-Am (58) MI Cauc (23) | Yes | | Three 20-min time samples/ child | 1. No. children engaging in sociodramatic play | MI > LI |

| | | | | | |
|------------------------------|--|-----|--|---|--|
| Rubin et al. (1976) | Age 3-9 LI Cauc-Canadian (16) MI Cauc-Canadian (24) | No | Thirty 1-min time samples/ child | 1. cooperative dram play 2. Total dram play 3. Solitary dram play 4. Parallel dram play 5. Associative dram play | MI > LI on 1 NS on 2-5 |
| Smilansky (1968, Study 1) | Age 3-6.6 LI Asian-African (18 classes) MI Euro-Israeli (18 classes) | Yes | Minimum of 10 examples of play each in block, hospital, house, and doll corner and playground/ class | 1. Dynamic role play 2. Diversity of roles 3. Range/depth of depicted relations 4. Dev of play episode 5. Imitative talk 6. Verbal make-believe 7. Play management via verbalizations 8. Dependence on obj 9. Dominance of play leader | MI > LI on 1-7; MI < LI on 8-9 |
| Smilansky (1968, Study 2) | Age 3-6.6 LI Euro-Israeli MI Euro-Israeli | Yes | Each child observed on 3 separate days; amt of time unspect | Presumably same as above | |
| Smith & Dodsworth (1978) | Age 3-4 WC Cauc-English (32) MI Cauc-English (32) | Yes | Three 5-min time samples/ child | 1. Amt of fantasy play 2. No. of play particip 3. Present obj use 4. Replica obj use 5. Length of episode | MI > WC on 1-3 MI < WC on 4 NS on 5 |
| Stern et al. (Note 2) | Age 3-4 LI Afro-Am (19) and Cauc (5) MI Cauc (24) | Yes | Two or three approx 1-hr time samples/child | 1, 2. Type of fantasy play 3-6. Type of signif 7-10. Clarity of meaning 11-20. Complexity 21-23. Organization 24-26. Involvement 27-31. Language use 32-34. Communication 35. Amt of Verbalization | MI and LI virtually alike or only slightly different on 26 (74%) categories, very dif- ferent on 9 (26%) categories at one or both ages; further explanation in text ¹⁰ |

TABLE 1—Continued

| Study | Sample ^{a,b} | Social class/ school confound? | Observation time | Measure | Findings |
|----------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Tizard et al. (1976, Study 1) | Age 3-4 WC MI | Yes | Ten 10-min time samples/ child | 1. Freq of symbolic play 2. Themes 3. Freq of dramatic impersonation | MI > WC on 1 NS on 2-3 |
| Tizard et al. (1976, Study 2) | Age 3-4 WC MI | No | Ten 10-min time samples/ child | 1. Freq of symbolic play | MI > WC ^c |
| White (1978) | Age 1-2 (1-year longitudinal) mixed ethnicity social classes: I, J = 11, II = 5, III = 15, IV = 6, V = 2 | No | Twenty-seven 10-min samples/ child in home setting | 1. Prop time spent in pretend/role play | r between SES and I = (a) 18-21 mo, r = .02 NS (b) 24-27 mo, r = .25 NS (c) 30-33 mo, r = .53, p < .05 |

^a LI = low income; MI = middle income; WC = working class.

^b Numbers in parentheses indicate number of children.

^c p value not reported.

^d Similarities and differences between social classes defined arbitrarily according to percentage of occurrence in each category. Difference of 5% or less, 6 to 14%, and 15% or more defined by Stern et al. as "no difference," "slight difference," and "large difference," respectively.

^e Based on Hollingshead and Redlich's Index of Social Position.

^f Upper class.

^g Lower income.

ence in sociodramatic play in favor of middle-income preschoolers, but no differences in solitary-, parallel-, or associative-dramatic play, nor in the total amount of dramatic play.

Two studies of social class differences in pretend play among working- and middle-class English children have been conducted, though their findings with respect to sociodramatic play are not entirely clear (Smith & Dodsworth, 1978; Tizard et al., 1976, Studies 1 and 2). In the Tizard et al. study, any instance in which children treated either objects or themselves as other than they were was taken as evidence of pretend play, even if the child did not speak. Middle-class children engaged in more overall pretend play than working-class children, but were no more likely to perform dramatic impersonations nor engage in a higher level of social play (ranging from solitary play to cooperative play with role differentiation). Because symbolic and nonsymbolic play were not distinguished within level of social play, however, it is unclear whether the latter finding suggests that no differences existed between the two groups in frequency of sociodramatic play.

Smith and Dodsworth (1978) regarded as pretend any nonliteral or make-believe use of verbalizations, actions, or objects. They found that middle-class English children spent more time in pretend play and had more participants in pretend episodes than working-class English children (2.60 versus 2.03, respectively). Since sociodramatic play can occur with a minimum of two children, it is unclear whether this finding speaks to differences in the occurrence of sociodramatic play or in the number of participants in sociodramatic play, or whether it speaks to sociodramatic play at all. "Participation" as such may not distinguish between interactive play without division of labor (associative dramatic play) and cooperative play with role differentiation (sociodramatic play). There were no significant differences between the two groups in the amount of group play (associative and cooperative play).

Quality of sociodramatic play. Findings regarding the overall quality or components of sociodramatic play as a function of social class are quite sparse. In the Griffing (1980) study, middle-income children received consistently higher ratings than low-income children on a variety of dimensions (see Table 1). Middle-income children in the Fein and Stork (1981) study received a significantly higher composite play quality score than low-income children, though only 1 (frequency of play verbalizations) of 11 individual measures which comprised the composite score yielded a significant social class difference. In contrast to these findings, however, Golomb (1979) found no differences between working- and middle-class children in the level of complexity of pretend play, including sociodramatic play. Middle-income children have been found to enact longer and presumably more complex pretend episodes in one study (Griffing, 1980), but not in others (Fein & Stork, 1981; Smith & Dodsworth, 1978).

The studies also indicate a pattern of mixed or tempered within-study findings. Of the seven studies which used more than one index of pretend or sociodramatic play, one reported across-the-board differences in favor of middle-income children (Griffing, 1980), one reported no differences on any of the indices employed (Golomb, 1979), and five reported mixed results (Fein & Stork, 1981; Rubin et al., 1976; Smith & Dodsworth, 1978; Tizard et al., 1976, Study 1; Stern et al., Note 2). More specifically, while middle-income children have been found to engage in significantly more and a higher level of sociodramatic play (Fein & Stork, 1981; Smith & Dodsworth, 1978; Tizard et al., 1976, Study 1), the two groups have been found to be similar in complexity of language employed during sociodramatic play, originality and diversity of object, role, or scene transformations (Fein & Stork, 1981), frequency of dramatic impersonations, complexity of social play (Tizard et al., 1976, Study 1), mean length of pretend episodes (Fein & Stork, 1981; Smith & Dodsworth, 1978), and total amount of dramatic pretend (Rubin et al., 1976). Stern et al. (Note 2) found no differences between the two groups on approximately 74% of the 30-plus indices of pretend play, and "large" differences (defined as a difference of 15% or more in occurrence) on 26% of them. The only "large" difference found in favor of middle-income children at both age levels (3 and 4 years) was a tendency for the latter to enact highly specific roles and persons (e.g., mother as opposed to parent or human being). The remaining "large" differences were found either at both ages but in favor of low-income children, or at one age and not the other.

Object use during pretend play. Four studies have examined social class differences in the use of objects during pretend play and their findings are not in full agreement. The inconsistency does not appear to be due to differences in the ages of the samples. Economically and socially advantaged preschool children have been found to show greater imaginary and elaborated use of objects and inventions of imaginary objects, and less conventional use of objects (replica use) (Griffing, 1980; Smith & Dodsworth, 1978). However, other studies indicate no social class differences in the frequency with which preschoolers use objects as though they possess imaginary properties, use representative and nonrepresentative objects as referents, or invent imaginary objects for which concrete referents are absent (Fein & Stork, 1981; Stern et al., Note 2).

Social class \times age interactions. Eifermann (1971) found that low-income first- and second-graders residing in Israel, but not third- through eighth-graders, engaged in symbolic play more frequently than their economically advantaged counterparts. Eifermann (1971), therefore, contended that rather than being generally less facile and disposed toward pretend play throughout childhood as suggested by Smilansky (1968), disadvantaged children reach the peak of their symbolic play activity later than middle-income children and specifically after the age period ob-

served by Smilansky. Eifermann did not provide clear-cut support for her hypothesis as data for the preschool ages were unavailable.

Apart from the research by Smilansky (1968, Studies 1 and 2) and Eifermann (1971), social class and age effects have been examined simultaneously in four other studies (Fein & Stork, 1981; Golomb, 1979; Smith & Dodsworth, 1978; Stern et al., Note 2). They provide little support for Eifermann's hypothesis. Neither Fein and Stork (3- to 4.5-year-olds vs 5- to 6.5-year-olds), Golomb (3.4- to 6.1-year-olds), nor Smith and Dodsworth (3- vs 4-year-olds) found significant age \times social class effects. Moreover, in the only study which reported both significant age and social class differences, the pattern of the latter was dissimilar to that of the former, further discounting the developmental lag hypothesis (Fein & Stork, 1981).

Only Stern et al. (Note 2) found evidence that middle- and low-income children peak at different ages on certain components of pretend play, but the direction of these differences was not consistently in line with what would be predicted on the basis of Eifermann's hypothesis. At age 3, middle-income children exceeded low-income children in verbalizations, use of accessories, and use of three or more signifiers, while at 4, low-income children exceeded middle-income children on these variables. At the same time, however, low-income children exceeded middle-income children at age 3 in the degree to which their play was understood on the basis of verbalizations made about the play, while at age 4, middle-income children exceeded low-income children. An adequate test of Eifermann's hypothesis will require study of children representing a wider age range, encompassing preschool and early grade school years.

Perhaps because of the relative paucity of data, there appears to be less controversy about the onset and very early development of pretend in children from different socioeconomic backgrounds. What little data are available suggest that there may be no social class differences during these early stages. White (1978), for example, found no significant correlation between pretend play and social class for 1½- or 2-year-olds, but reported a significant positive correlation for 3-year-olds. Comparative studies by Kagan, Kearsley, and Zelazo (1978) of American infants and Guatemalan infants living in a "modern" versus impoverished village also suggest that very early pretend may be unaffected by socioeconomic status.

Taken as a whole, studies of social class differences in sociodramatic play are inconclusive. Substantial disagreement with respect to the major dependent variables is apparent. There is far less evidence of lower quality than depressed frequency of sociodramatic play among economically disadvantaged children, though findings with respect to the latter have not been univocal or particularly robust.

Irrespective of the findings themselves, this body of research is incon-

clusive because of problematic data gathering and processing procedures, confounding classroom and school variables, and insufficient consideration of how the primary medium of sociodramatic play, namely, verbal behavior, may be affected by ecological variables. Perhaps some or all of these factors are implicated in the disagreements among studies. The discussion of these issues which follows is not predicated on the assumption that there are or are not real social class differences. Consideration of confounding variables, for example, should not be interpreted necessarily as an argument for the null hypothesis. There may well be reliable social class differences, but existing information is inadequate to make such a determination. Indeed, as noted in the following discussion, studies which report no significant social class effects themselves are characterized by a number of problems which undermine their validity and generalizability. Consideration of each of these issues does concede, however, that future research should make vigorous attempts to eliminate potentially confounding variables and methodological biases so that systematic variation between children from different social classes, if found, can be confidently attributed to social class rather than a host of contaminating factors.

Methodological Problems and Issues in Studies of Social Class Differences in Sociodramatic Play

Problematic data gathering and processing procedures. It is unclear whether variation in previous findings is due to differences in how social class groups were operationally defined. Higgins (1976) aptly noted that the use of social class as an independent variable requires, at the very least, specification of both the indices used to determine social class and the exact nature of the social class samples that were actually compared. In most studies, social class was based on parents' occupation and/or education level (Eifermann, 1971; Fein & Stork, 1981; Griffing, 1980; Rubin et al., 1976; Smith & Dodsworth, 1978; Tizard et al., 1976; White, 1978; Stern et al., Note 2), though only two of these studies actually used standardized indices of social class (Griffing, 1980; White, 1978). In some studies, supplemental information was provided about whether the family was a welfare recipient or at the poverty level (Griffing, 1980; Rosen, 1974; Rubin et al., 1976; Stern et al., Note 2).

Comparability of samples across studies, though more difficult to ascertain when nonstandardized rather than standardized measures of social class are used, is virtually impossible to determine when the exact nature of the social class sample eventually formed (Rosen, 1974; Smith & Dodsworth, 1978) and the criteria for social class differentiation are unspecified (Golomb, 1979; Smilansky, 1968, Studies 1 and 2). Mueller and Parcel (1981) recently criticized the imprecise, if not impressionistic,

criteria psychologists use to identify social class levels, and the use of outdated measures (e.g., Hollingshead) when they are used at all. Their suggestions regarding specific alternative measures of social class which take into account recent societal changes (e.g., increase in single-parent families) and specific changes in the labor force (e.g., increase in families with multiple wage earners) merit careful attention if social class research is to be both valid and cumulative.

Rosen's (1974) research makes clear the hazards of indexing social class on bases other than detailed demographic information. The pretest-post-test design called for a group of "culturally advantaged" children (all Caucasian), contrasted with a group of "culturally deprived" children (all Afro-American). Demographic data gathered after pretest observations revealed that a substantial number of the Afro-American children were actually from "middle-class-oriented" families. Rosen subsequently contrasted Afro-American low- versus middle-income children, serendipitously circumventing the social class-race confound in the original research design.

Future research should also make greater differentiation among social class groups, especially within the lower-income stratum. The life circumstances and conditions of the underclass are different from those of the more stable, upper-lower- and working-class segments of society (Billingsley, 1968; Higgins, 1976), factors which may well impact on children's pretend play. Previous research tentatively suggests that children from middle-class backgrounds may be most different from children whose parents are members of the nonworking underclass (e.g., Griffing, 1980; Rosen, 1974), though there appear to be exceptions (Rubin et al., 1976; Stern et al., Note 2), and somewhat less different from children whose parents are manual, semiskilled, or unskilled workers (e.g., Fein & Stork, 1981; Tizard et al., 1976).

Previous studies are plagued by a number of other methodological flaws and ambiguities. In the Griffing (1980) study, groups of four children, two boys and two girls, were asked to play "mommies and daddies" (also "house"), despite the fact that 83% of the low-income children were from single-parent families, while 83% of the middle-income children were from two-parent families. Low-income children, then, were essentially requested to enact interdependent behavior to which they had probably received less real-life exposure.

Efforts to synthesize and reconcile findings are further hampered by failure to perform or report statistical tests of significance (Golomb, 1979; Smilansky, 1968; Stern et al., Note 2; Tizard et al., 1976, Study 2) and delineate research methods (Golomb, 1979). It is, of course, unnecessary to belabor the interpretational ambiguity posed by studies which confound social class and culture (Smilansky, 1968, Study 1; Stern et al., Note 2).

Lack of systematic efforts to control classroom and school variables. One of the most troublesome aspects of the majority of studies is the confounding of social class and classroom factors such as curriculum, materials, space, and affective environment. With one exception (White, 1978), children in all of the reviewed studies were observed in school or day-care settings, typically, though not always, during the free play period. In a majority of studies, children from different social classes were drawn from different and socially homogeneous classrooms (Eifermann, 1971; Griffing, 1980; Rosen, 1974; Smilansky, 1968, Studies 1 and 2; Smith & Dodsworth, 1978; Tizard et al., 1976, Study 1; Stern et al., Note 2). Therefore differences between the children may reflect classroom effects rather than social class differences in symbolic competence. For example, in the Smith and Dodsworth (1978) study, one of the two working-class classrooms was situated in a high-rise estate and the other was staffed by nurses rather than trained teachers. Neither condition existed in the middle-class classrooms and both may have operated to depress the frequency of pretend play among the working-class children.

In some studies, children from the same socioeconomic background also came from different and socially homogeneous classrooms (Eifermann, 1971; Griffing, 1980; Rosen, 1974; Smith & Dodsworth, 1978; Tizard et al., 1976, Study 1; Stern et al., Note 2). This sampling procedure, however, does not necessarily neutralize or randomize classroom effects if the low- versus middle-income sample was drawn from an unequal number of classrooms (Griffing, 1980; Rosen, 1974) or if low- and middle-income classrooms differed systematically on variables affecting pretend play.

Indeed, recent research indicating systematic variation in children's pretend play as a function of school and situational factors makes reevaluation of those studies which ignore these variables obligatory. Greater teacher directness (Huston-Stein, Friedrich-Cofer, & Susman, 1977), decreased emphasis on classroom language instruction (Tizard et al., 1976, Study 1), a discovery-based versus structured curriculum (Johnson, Ershler, & Bell, 1980), and certain types of teacher training (Tizard et al., 1976, Study 1) have all been associated with lower levels of symbolic play among preschool children. Inhibitory factors may actually be more prominent in homogeneous low-income classrooms. Gouldner (1978), for example, found that teachers of low-income, inner-city, Afro-American kindergarteners, compared to teachers of white, middle-income suburban kindergarteners, were more demanding of silence, order, and obedience, and more likely to be judged by their colleagues on the basis of their effectiveness as disciplinarians. Stern et al. (Note 2) reported that the length of the free play period at low-income kindergartens was substantially shorter than that at the middle-income kindergartens. The indoor

classroom itself, in contrast to outdoor settings, appears to inhibit symbolic play among working-class preschoolers, while facilitating it among middle-class preschoolers (Tizard et al., 1976, Study 1). There is also limited evidence that children's symbolic play across different settings may not be significantly correlated, raising questions about the generalizability of individual differences found in one physical context (Singer, 1973).

A few researchers have eliminated the confounding of social class and classroom factors by observing low- and middle-income children within socially heterogeneous classrooms (Fein & Stork, 1981; Rubin et al., 1976; Tizard et al., 1976, Study 2). Their findings indicate higher frequencies of sociodramatic play (Fein & Stork, 1981; Rubin et al., 1976) and pretend play (Tizard et al., 1976, Study 2) among middle-income children. However, as noted previously, these differences were tempered by non-significant social class effects on other types (Rubin et al., 1976) and components (e.g., object transformations) of pretend play (Fein & Stork, 1981), only marginally significant (Rubin et al., 1976) or untested for their statistical significance (Tizard et al., 1976, Study 2).

Observation of low- and middle-income children in socially heterogeneous classrooms does not necessarily ensure elimination of possible confounding factors such as unfamiliarity with play materials and feelings of apprehension (Rubin et al., in press; Schwartzman, 1978), both of which are known inhibitors of pretend play (Fein, 1981; Hutt, 1970). It has been suggested that low-income children may indeed be more unfamiliar with play materials in the preschool setting because they are less likely to have in their homes the variety of play materials found in middle-income homes or preschool classrooms (Fein & Stork, 1981; Rubin et al., 1976). Further, they may be more apprehensive toward the teacher as an authority figure because they may have received more threats and negative directives from their parents (Fein & Stork, 1981; Wootton, 1974). In keeping with these hypotheses, it has been recommended that social class differences in pretend play be assessed only after systematic attempts have been made by the researcher to familiarize low-income children with play materials, their teachers, and the school environment in general (Fein & Stork, 1981). Ideally, the success of these attempts should be empirically verified. If we assume that familiarity increases and apprehension decreases automatically as a function of time, another possibility is to simply chart pretend play of low- and middle-income children over the school year so that changes in each group relative to the other can be examined. This strategy, however, does not decisively eliminate the possibility that failure of the two groups to converge over time is due to factors other than deficiencies in symbolic competence.

More specifically, whether low-income children are generally less

comfortable in the classroom setting may have less to do with how much time they have spent there and more to do with stable home versus school discontinuities in acceptable verbal and social behaviors (Riessman, 1964), and valued cognitive styles (Boykins, 1978; Cohen, 1971). Stable classroom dynamics such as hierarchical social relations and cleavages, and differential student–teacher interaction (Gouldner, 1978; Rist, 1970), may also be important determinants. For a multiplicity of reasons, then, the classroom or school may be a less appropriate context to assess social class differences in symbolic competence.

On the other hand, school may provide the broader context for creation of a “special” play setting designed to eliminate motivational and affective inhibitors of pretend play. A playroom might be set up at the school but away from the classroom. (A two-room mobile laboratory is ideal.) Low- and middle-income children could be familiarized with the setting and encouraged to think of it as a “safe and fun place” where, ostensibly alone with their peers, they can do whatever they wish without adult observation and supervision. Subsequent to familiarization, dyads or triads could be brought to the playroom for covertly observed play sessions. Under these conditions, preschool children display richer socio-dramatic play and more “risqué” pretend behavior and language in their adult role enactments (e.g., simulating intimacy, profanity) than preschool children observed in the presence of a familiar adult (McLoyd, Morrison, & Toler, Note 3).

One other strategy merits serious consideration. Rather than attempting to control motivational and affective differences within one setting, a different setting might be chosen for each respective group precisely because of its facilitory effect on pretend (Fein & Stork, 1981). For one, the highest level of symbolic competence may be expressed in a home or neighborhood setting, and for the other, a school setting. Alternatively, both groups of children might be observed in the same two settings, one chosen to be optimal for each group. This research strategy, of course, requires more knowledge than is currently available about the ecological determinants of pretend play within low- and middle-income children. Along these lines, it has been suggested that observations of low- and middle-income children be conducted in an array of settings. This information would not only inform researchers about where pretend is most likely to occur for each group and thereby allow designation of optimal settings, but would also permit distinction between “typical” and “best” display of pretend within the two groups (Fein & Stork, 1981).

Verbal behavior as an indicator of symbolic processes. Verbalizations and to a lesser extent, vocalizations (e.g., onomatopoeia) elucidate the symbolic content of play. Though some research on pretend play has been based entirely on spontaneous nonverbal behavior (e.g., Lowe, 1975),

Huttenlocher and Higgins (1978) have argued quite strongly that without verbal evidence that play behavior (e.g., imitation of adult behavior, play with representative and nonrepresentative toys) is meant to designate an absent model or object (e.g., "Pretend I am the mother"), symbolic processes need not be involved. The child's behavior may reflect nothing more than exemplification or practice of social skills, the toys' limited potential or functional substitutability, or what the child has learned about the appropriate use of toys. The importance of their argument is that they point out the need for a more rigorous and unifying definition of symbolic behavior, and moreover, raise the issue of potential discrepancy between the child's observed performance and his underlying symbolic competence.

Though Huttenlocher and Higgins (1978) were concerned with overestimation of symbolic competence as a result of inadequate operational definitions, there is also reason to be concerned about the converse, that is, underestimation of symbolic competence. There is evidence, for example, that older preschoolers display lower levels of understanding of social roles in solitary free play than in a modeling procedure which elicits role-related behavior (Watson & Fischer, 1980). Of course, a certain amount of verbal communication is necessary in sociodramatic play to create, plan, and negotiate the episode, but the possibility remains that some designations may not be verbally referenced (e.g., object or action substitutions). In a number of previous studies of social class differences in sociodramatic and pretend play, low-income and working-class children made fewer verbalizations than middle-income children (Smilansky, 1968, Study 1; Smith & Dodsworth, 1978; Stern et al., Note 2). It is also noteworthy that in the Griffing (1980) study, the largest difference between the two groups was the extent to which verbal behavior was used as a substitute for situations (e.g., "Let's pretend that this is a supermarket and we're shopping"), while in the Fein and Stork (1981) research, frequency of pretend verbalizations was the only sociodramatic component for which a significant social class difference was found.

Low-income children's verbal behavior varies substantially as a function of the situation (Cazden, 1970) and may be mediated by sociolinguistic factors including suspicion that their behavior will have adverse consequences (Labov, 1972). Because they are more likely to speak nonstandard English and less likely to code switch from the latter to standard English (Gouldner, 1978), they are more likely to be admonished about their speech patterns in the classroom. The potential inhibition of spontaneous verbal behavior (Labov, 1972; Riessman, 1964) which supports and externalizes pretend, then, constitutes another reason why the classroom setting may be a less optimal setting for low-income and working-class children.

Addressing this issue in a practical sense requires identification of procedures which encourage or provoke verbal expression, or which reduce the observer's reliance on verbal expression. In addition to observing children in settings which facilitate uninhibited, spontaneous behavior, as suggested earlier, children can simply be probed about the meaning of ambiguous free play behaviors (e.g., Fein & Stork, 1981; Pulaski, 1973). This procedure may yield information beyond that already available to the observer, and as such provide a better estimate of the child's symbolic competence, but it may also inhibit display of pretend because of the necessary disruption and adult presence. Verification of these outcomes seems worthwhile.

Experimental research, which surprisingly has not accompanied observational research on social class differences, may be especially instrumental in reducing, though not eliminating, the observer's reliance on verbal behavior as an indicator of pretend. At the very least, certain components of sociodramatic play, such as make-believe with objects, can be studied in experimental settings. Children might be elicited to model pretend with signifiers which vary in their prototypicality (e.g., Elder & Pederson, 1978; Fein, 1975). Very early role-playing competence can be assessed by modeling role-playing behavior of varying complexity and examining how the modeled demonstration is integrated into the child's subsequent free play (e.g., Watson & Fischer, 1977). These procedures can be grounded in a game to discourage defensive behavior. To satisfy Huttenlocher and Higgins' (1978) criterion, it may be possible to generate questions which provoke explanations from children about why an object or their behavior can be used to designate another object or person (e.g., "Is this really, really a horse?" "Then why did you or how can you treat it like a horse?" "What other things could you use for the horse?").

These kind of experimental procedures can be used with very young children (i.e., under 3 years) who have limited verbal skills and have not entered nursery or preschool. The onset and very early development of pretend unaffected by school or curriculum factors can then be examined.

There appears to be considerable lack of conceptual clarity about the extent to which symbolic processes are implicated in play which is "make-believe," "imaginative," "representational," or "imitative." The claim that disadvantaged children's play is imitative (e.g., child imitatively feeds and bathes doll, puts doll to bed), but not imaginative (e.g., "Let's pretend that I already fed and bathed the baby and now I'm putting her to bed," when only the last activity is actually imitated) seems to imply that their play is primarily nonsymbolic (Smilansky, 1968; Sutton-Smith, 1972b). This need not be the case if we assume, as did Piaget (1962), that even deferred imitation involves the "symbolic evocation of

absent realities'' (p. 67) based on storage and retrieval of mental or memory images. Furthermore, the term ''imitative'' most often belies the information processing and generative capacities inherent in the observed action schema. As Garvey and Berndt (Note 4) argued, ''... performance of an action format of the schema... is not imitative but involves processes of active reconstruction of a unit of adult daily activity... It seems unlikely that the event sequences... were directly copied from any single adult model. Rather, bits and pieces of experience may have been grasped and conjoined in the process of the child's construction of the schema. Once the schema is formed, it is productive, i.e., it generates specific variants of the schema which control the performance...'' (pp. 11-13). Even Huttenlocher and Higgins (1978) exclude as imitation production of one's own previous behavior. They note that ''if a child observes an act and then performs the act, the child's behavior is imitative... However, if the child later performs the act again, the second performance of the act cannot be called imitative because it may be based on a memory of his own initial performance rather than on a memory of the model's behavior'' (p. 116). Again, the most convincing evidence of symbolic processes is prior verbal announcement that the ''imitative'' behavior is designative (e.g., ''I'm the mother'').

Assessment of the components of sociodramatic play is necessary in future comparative research if social class differences are to be linked to specific symbolic processes (Fein & Stork, 1981), a task which few researchers have undertaken (e.g., Fein & Stork, 1981; Griffing, 1980; Stern et al., Note 2). Such information enhances our understanding of the nature of sociodramatic play in children from different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds and is particularly instructive to intervention efforts where strategies are presumably based on some understanding of those components most lacking.

In addition to measuring the quantity of sociodramatic play, three dimensions, each having its own components, might be identified within each bout of sociodramatic play. The first dimension might relate to the role itself and have as its components specificity of role [e.g., is child pretending to be a human being, an adult, a parent, or a mother (Stern et al., Note 2); a nonhuman creature, or a nonhuman creature with a name who descended from space], and type of role [e.g., remote versus within the realm of the child's personal experiences and concrete reality, the basis of Saltz et al.'s (1977) distinction between thematic fantasy and sociodramatic play].

A second, more complex dimension might be involvement or depth of role play, constituted by components such as change of voice to represent signified expressions of feelings, emotions, or psychological states as opposed to concrete behavior, distinctive and meaningful role-related ges-

tures (e.g., patting or rocking doll, jumping from chair to simulate superhero), and diversity of role characteristics (e.g., mother is nurturant, metes out punishment, teaches, performs instrumental acts; superhero is noble, daring). This dimension may capture some of the communication patterns of low-income children ignored in previous research. In some of these studies, some or all of the low-income children were Afro-American (Griffing, 1980; Rosen, 1974; Stern et al., Note 2) or members of an ethnic minority (Smilansky, 1968). Among Afro-Americans, especially low-income groups, verbal communication is laced with distinctive nonverbal expressions and frequent displays of affect (Hannerz, 1969; Kochman, 1972; Akbar, Note 5). Though it is not clear how early this style of communication emerges, first- and second-grade Afro-American girls have been found to make prominent use of nonverbal behavior (e.g., hands on hips, pointing and shaking fingers at "naughty" child) in their pretend enactments of the maternal role (Brady, 1975).

A third dimension might focus specifically on language and object use. Components might include language used to plan play, substitute for action, invoke, clarify, or negotiate rules, or perform other functions (e.g., Smilansky, 1968; Stern et al., Note 2). Object use might be differentiated on the basis of whether a concrete signifier was similar, or dissimilar to the signified, or nonexistent (e.g., Elder & Pederson, 1978; Stern et al., Note 2).

TRAINING STUDIES WITH LOW-INCOME CHILDREN

Intervention studies have been conducted with low-income preschool children to increase pretend play and other behaviors, resting on the assumption that these children, in contrast to middle-income children, suffer deficits. The duration of training has been as brief as 165 min segmented into eight sessions (Freyberg, 1973) and as protracted as 125 hr, 5 hr per week for 25 weeks (Lovinger, 1974), all with positive results. Play training has resulted in increased sociodramatic and thematic-fantasy play (Rosen, 1974; Saltz & Johnson, 1974), imagination (Freyberg, 1973), social and affective role taking (Rosen, 1974; Saltz & Johnson, 1974), positive affect, concentration (Freyberg, 1973), perceptual role taking, cooperation, group productivity (Rosen, 1974), recall of a story sequence, verbalization and integration of events in story recounts (Saltz & Johnson, 1974), intellectual performance, ability to distinguish reality from fantasy, ability to delay impulsive behavior (Saltz et al., 1977), and language usage (Lovinger, 1974).

Studies similar in design, procedure, and findings have actually been conducted with middle-income preschool samples, but notably absent are any tacit or explicit assumptions of deficiency. Their sole expressed purpose is clarification of how specific types of play training affect other

cognitive and social behaviors (e.g., Fink, 1976; Golomb, 1979; Golomb & Cornelius, 1977; Guthrie & Hudson, 1979).

The deficit-based underpinnings of training studies with low-income children are superfluous, if not unfounded, for two reasons. First, the studies themselves provide virtually no empirical evidence that the target children are comparatively deficient in pretend play. Only Rosen (1974) and Smilansky (1968) compared children from different economic and cultural backgrounds prior to intervention. Because their Caucasian, lower-middle-income sample showed "surprisingly low levels" of solitary fantasy play prior to intervention, Feitelson and Ross (1973) concluded that "paucity of thematic play is not confined to exotic societies nor to the economically destitute" (p. 218). While piquant, their former comments have limited meaning in the absence of comparative data and evoke the inevitable question, "compared to what?" Notwithstanding the lack of comparative data in most of these studies, the mere existence of training studies with low-income children has been interpreted as evidence of their deficiency in play (e.g., Smith, 1977).

The deficiency label appears superfluous for a second reason. Interpretation of positive results, in the absence of comparative data, is at best problematic. The fact that intervention often resulted in increases in various behaviors does not *ipso facto* mean that the children were initially "deficient." Indeed, there is evidence that children's ability to benefit from play training, at least with respect to its effects on perspective taking, is unrelated to their pretraining levels of perspective-taking performance (Burns & Brainerd, 1979). Further, the ease with which positive results have been obtained may suggest that situational and ephemeral factors, not low symbolic abilities, were primarily responsible for pretraining levels of pretend play (Fein, 1981). Freyberg (1973) acknowledged that the positive effects produced by her brief intervention probably reflected a significant discrepancy between pretraining performance and play competence. Other factors such as lack of information about the durability of training effects (Fein, 1981) and failure to control for experimenter involvement (Smith & Syddal, 1978) make interpretation of these findings difficult.

Parenthetically, Freyberg's (1973) study has been misinterpreted by some researchers as providing comparative data on middle- and low-income children. Summarizing Freyberg's study, Huston-Stein et al. (1977) wrote, "In one study, children from disadvantaged backgrounds showed lower levels of imaginative play than middle-class children, though training procedures increased such play" (p. 915). Freyberg compared her findings with those from another study of upper-middle-income children (Pulaski, 1973), but in fact, her study was not comparative and included only low-income children.

In summary these training studies provide little understanding of the nature of spontaneous pretend play in low-income children and are designed such that competing explanations of the findings cannot be decisively eliminated. It is both inappropriate and hazardous to regard their mere existence as evidence of play deficits among low-income children.

USE OF ETHNOGRAPHIC DATA AS EVIDENCE OF PRETEND PLAY DEFICITS AMONG LOW-INCOME CHILDREN

It is beyond the scope of this paper to critique ethnographies which include information about the play of children from non-Western, less economically prosperous backgrounds. This task has been executed superbly by Schwartzman (1978) in her book, *Transformations: The Anthropology of Children's Play*. However, a few considerations which go beyond Schwartzman's treatment should be noted briefly. Ethnographic studies have reported a dearth of play among children in rural Egypt, Kenya, and Israel (Kurdish Jews) (Ammar, 1954; Feitelson 1959; LeVine & LeVine, 1966). However as Schwartzman pointed out, none of these studies had as its primary focus children's play, let alone specific types of play. Ammar (1954) devoted an entire chapter in his book on childhood in Egypt to children's play and games and while indicating that, "On very few occasions children engage in constructive or imaginative play," he also pointed out that he "made no detailed observations of play situations" and described his observations as "limited." To Ammar's credit, his statements appear as meant to encourage circumspection and discourage facile integration of these conclusions into the play literature as unqualified "fact." Mead (1975) actually commented on the neglect of and disdainful attitude toward play by early anthropologists and further cautioned that "students should be warned that one can never rely on a negative statement that any toy, and game, any song is absent just because it is neither witnessed nor recalled by adults" (p. 161).

These considerations notwithstanding, Feitelson (1977) recently advanced the thesis that representational play occurs predominantly or coincides with "technologically creative civilizations." Even if a dearth of pretend play in some non-Western societies is confirmed, this thesis must reckon with other studies of non-Western, low-technological societies which report considerable pretend play among the children (e.g., Fortes, 1976; Leacock, 1976; Maretzki & Maretzki, 1963; Read, 1968). Perhaps the former studies indicate that pretend play is not universal, but in any case, do not constitute evidence that low-income children generally engage in less and poorer-quality pretend play than middle-income children.

It has been suggested recently that perhaps the critical overarching determinant of play is whether children are an economic asset and are thus subjected to early, normalized survival training (Sutton-Smith, 1977),

a thesis which should, of course, be tested before accepted as fact. Even in societies in which children are major economic assets, it seems unlikely that children would be expected to assume major work responsibilities, or that work would be a serious competitor of pretend play prior to the fifth or sixth year of life, well after some of the major developmental milestones of pretend play typically occur. Previous failures to confirm macrolevel theses which claim to be applicable across cultures make it difficult to be sanguine about their robustness and veracity. For example, Sutton-Smith (1972b) suggested earlier that children who belong to an ascriptive, rather than achievement, game culture, engage in play which is imitative but not transformational, and relies on the use of realistic toy representations rather than improvised ones or none at all. In addition to some of the evidence presented earlier (e.g., Fein & Stork, 1981), recent evidence from controlled laboratory studies with low-income Afro-American children, identified by Sutton-Smith (1972b) as belonging to the ascriptive game culture, runs counter to this thesis. McLoyd (Note 6), in a study of low-income primarily Afro-American preschoolers, found that girl, but not boy, triads engaged in significantly more triadic sociodramatic play, onomatopoeia, and substitutions with low-structure play materials (e.g., pipe cleaners, blocks, boxes) than with replica toys (e.g., dolls, tea sets, trucks). Older girls spent about 80% of their time during the low-structure sessions engaging in triadic sociodramatic play, compared to 40% during the replica toy sessions.

In another study of this issue, McGhee, Ethridge, and Benz (Note 7) found that Afro-American low-income preschool boys used unstructured toys in a solitary pretend manner significantly more often than moderate-structure or high-structure toys. Most recently, Sutton-Smith (1980) has elucidated some of the sociopolitical factors which led to or antedated the current middle-class value for individualistic and symbolic play (in contrast to team games and playgrounds), and extant standards by which the "goodness" of play in children from various sociocultural backgrounds is judged.

In light of insufficient data, findings which are equivocal or run counter to prediction, and the sheer complexity of the issues, it appears imprudent to postulate broad-sweeping generalizations about the relationship between culture and play. Time and time again, starkly drawn dichotomies such as the abundance or dearth of pretend play in Western versus non-Western societies, technological versus agrarian societies, ascriptive versus achievement game cultures, similar to those drawn between the broken versus intact home (Herzog & Sudia, 1973), an employed versus unemployed mother (Hoffman, 1979), or a present versus absent father (Hetherington & Deur, 1975), simply do not hold up under empirical scrutiny as unqualified determinants of behavior. As Herzog (1970) succinctly put it, such dichotomies often prove to be at best, "a way-station

on the road to recognizing a continuum or trichotomy or an intermeshing of complex variables'' (p. 113), and at worst, creators of stereotypes, misconceptions, and pejorative notions which persist long after qualifying, if not outright contradictory, evidence has been proffered.

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RECEIVED: June 30, 1981; REVISED: January 8, 1982