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**The social transformation of children's play and organized
activities, 1880–1990: A sociohistorical study**

Spano, Rina Gangemi, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1991

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THE SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION OF CHILDREN'S PLAY
AND ORGANIZED ACTIVITIES, 1880-1990:
A SOCIO-HISTORICAL STUDY

by

RINA GANGEMI SPANO

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate
Faculty in Sociology in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
The City University of New York

1991

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This manuscript has been read and accepted by the Graduate Faculty
in Sociology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

12/18/90
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12/19/90
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Abstract

THE SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION OF CHILDREN'S PLAY
AND ORGANIZED ACTIVITIES, 1880-1990:
A SOCIO-HISTORICAL STUDY

by

Rina Gangemi Spano

Adviser: Professor Gerald Handel

This work traces changes and continuities in the play and organized activities of American children between 1880-1990. It analyzes those changes as a result of the convergence of shifting and popularized psychological theories of play with significant sociocultural and historical changes. The thesis argues that throughout the study period there has been a shift in the adult focus of attention from the play of lower class children for whom play was seen as a means of social control, to the play of middle class children, for whom play is an activity of personal development.

The study period is divided into three parts: 1880-1920; 1920-1945 and 1945-1990. The 1880-1920 period focuses on the free and organized play of poor and immigrant urban children. Street play is contrasted with the Playground

Movement, a Progressive era effort at child-saving. The theories of G. Stanley Hall and Joseph Lee shape playground programs and organization.

The 1920 to 1945 period begins to mark the shift to adult concern with the play of middle class children. John B. Watson and Arnold Gesell provide the theoretical ideas that influence play practices. The growth of the middle class, changing family patterns, the Depression, and World War II provide the socio-historical backdrop for the period.

The last period, 1945-1990, is marked by extensive suburbanization, bureaucratization, technological advances, the rise and fall of child-centeredness, and changing gender roles and family structures. Theoretically, the ideas of Freud, Piaget and Erikson on the value of play dominate. The dominant play patterns are shaped by the growth of municipal recreation programs, the rise of organized sports programs for preadolescents, toys and television.

The study ends with a summary of changes and continuities in play, conclusions and recommendations for further research.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When my older daughter, Elisabeth, now in the seventh grade was a first grader she and I were playing hopscotch on the driveway of our suburban home. As we played, I remembered thinking about the hopscotch games of my own childhood. Though the game had remained the same, I had played it on the streets and sidewalks of the city I lived in. My mother would not have dreamed of playing hopscotch with me. But then again she didn't have to; neighborhood children were always available as playmates.

At the time I still had several semesters of graduate course work to complete. But that day I settled on my dissertation topic. Ironically, once I decided to study changes and continuities in the play lives of children over the course of a century, I played much less with my own children. The dissertation consumed an inordinate amount of my time and energy. Given all that I learned about the value of play to child development, it was a regrettable and worrisome omission on my part. No doubt, it will continue to nag me.

The road from idea to completed dissertation was a long and difficult one. To be sure, it was fraught with the typical frustrations and demands of research and writing.

But a number of personal crises, the greatest of which was the critical illness and death of my beloved father Joseph on January 25, 1990, came very close to breaking my spirit and strength to complete the dissertation. That I did complete it is due largely to the support and encouragement that I constantly received from my dissertation adviser, Gerald Handel. I expected to benefit, as indeed I did, from his expertise as a distinguished sociologist. The dissertation has been greatly improved by his close reading of it and his many helpful suggestions. But in 1986 I had no way of knowing just how much I would benefit, over a period of four years, from his wisdom and insights on life and on the human condition. I shall always be grateful to him for all that he said and did to see me through this project.

I wish also to acknowledge the support and encouragement I received from the other members of my supervisory committee, the late Patricia L. Kendall, Lindsey Churchill, who rekindled by faith and interest in sociology, and Catherine Silver, who graciously agreed to join my committee in the spring of 1990. Each offered me many helpful suggestions for improving the dissertation.

Many of my colleagues at Caldwell College took a special interest in my progress. I wish to thank them. I am especially indebted to Sister Patrice Werner, O.P., Academic Dean, for her support, both moral and financial. Three annual grants from the Faculty Development Fund helped to defray tuition costs. The Library directors and staff could

not have been more helpful. They cheerfully processed countless requests for interlibrary loans. Sister Judith Foloky, O.P. and Sister Brigid Brady, O.P. graciously gave of their time to train me on the computer. Were it not for their insistence that I do the dissertation with a word processing program I would still be frantically re-typing. I wish to thank the staff of College Services for their assistance with photocopying drafts of the dissertation. My colleagues and friends Marie Marmo Mullaney and Rosann Rovento Bar gave generously of their time, discussing the dissertation, sharing ideas, forwarding relevant books and articles to me. I am most appreciative of their support and their friendship.

My mother Rose so willingly gave of her time and energy so that I might research or write. I can only hope to possess her goodness and strength. My brother Joey was always available for technical assistance on the computer. I thank them both.

I wish to thank my husband Mimmo and our daughters Elisabeth and Cristina for their patience. I wasn't very easy to live with as the pressure mounted. As more and more of my time and attention went into the dissertation, less, of course, went to them. My husband, in particular, assumed more than his share of household responsibilities (admittedly not always with humor and grace), so that I could make progress on the dissertation. I didn't thank him as much as I should have and as much as he deserved.

The exhilaration that I feel at finally completing this dissertation and earning the Ph.D. is not complete, however. Every day I think of how proud my father would have been of me. Though he never doubted that I would be the first "doctor" in the family, he did not live to share in my accomplishment. A man of great talent, wit, intelligence and courage, my father, throughout my life, was an inspiration to me. It is to his loving memory that this dissertation is dedicated.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vi
Chapter	
I INTRODUCTION	1
II PLAY THEORIES AND THEIR POPULARIZATION	29
III FROM STREETS TO PLAYGROUNDS: DOMINANT TRENDS 1880-1920	108
IV FROM PLAYGROUNDS TO BACKYARDS: DOMINANT TRENDS 1920-1945	176
V SPORTS, LESSONS, TOYS, AND MOST OF ALL, TELEVISION: DOMINANT TRENDS 1945-1990	237
VI SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	366
BIBLIOGRAPHY	414

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the June 22, 1989 edition of the Bergenite, a local New Jersey newspaper, columnist Ed Flynn, after recollecting some of his own childhood play, asks his readers:

When's the last time you saw girls--or boys together, for that matter--jumping rope in the street?
I suppose in this age of TV and electronic games things like jumping rope are too corny . . .
Do all the young kids in the neighborhood still get together and play hide and seek? And what about games like ring-o-lieve . . . How about King of the Mountain, Red Light, Green Light, Simon Says? . . .
And how about all those games played in the street . . . stickball and one-o-peg, for example? Have you seen anyone skating in the street lately? Does anybody still play jacks? Or marbles? ¹

Flynn stands in the company of better known social observers and scholars who have also remarked that they no longer notice children playing traditional street games. Educator Neil Postman laments the disappearance of childhood play,² social critic Marie Winn chronicles the end of play,³ psychologist David Elkind declares that play has been transformed into work and that what was once recreational is now professionalized and competitive,⁴ academician Edward Devereaux maintains that traditional games don't stand a

chance against that giant of organized children's sports, Little League.⁵ Folklorist Carl Withers concludes that the play of middle class children has become as organized as their study.⁶

But about a generation before these contemporary critics declared the death of children's spontaneous free play, writer Robert Paul Smith captured the transition from unorganized child controlled play to over-organized, adult controlled play in his autobiographical book, "Where Did You Go?" "Out." "What Did You Do?" "Nothing.",⁷ published in 1957. Reminiscing about his own childhood in the late 1920s, he described games of mumbly-peg and immies, stoop ball, tree house building and chestnut collecting. Smith compared his childhood with that of his own and other children growing up in the 1950s, contrasting two worlds of childhood play: the freedom and inventiveness of kids in the 1920s, who, he said, had a lot of fun doing nothing, with the adult controlled and materially over-indulged play of children in the 1950s, who despite a variety of toys, elaborate play equipment and endlessly planned activities, almost always managed to be bored.

Smith's children and their friends, to his dismay, had never heard of mumbly-peg, didn't play marbles or stoop ball, red rover or kick the can, nor did they build tree houses, dig holes or collect chestnuts, but they did play Little League Baseball.

All the kids I see playing baseball these days are in something called the Little League and have a covey

of overseeing grownups hanging around and bothering them and putting catcher's masks on them . . . They tell me these kids cry when they lose a game.*

Smith, like Flynn, waxed nostalgic for the bygone days of informal childhood play. But, has the play of American children really changed in its organization and its content? Has it changed for all children or only some? And if, in fact, play has changed, how can those changes be explained?

Casual observation would readily suggest that Little League and the various other youth sports organizations it has spawned, and the technology of television and videos, have either "professionalized" play or eliminated it altogether. But the transformation of childhood play requires a far more complex analysis than casual observation would suggest. A socio-historical study of the trends in children's play provides far more than a description of change and stability in play behavior. For it is important to trace not only if and how play has changed, but to explain why it has changed.

Thus, the purpose of this study is twofold. The first purpose is to describe dominant trends in both child-structured and adult-structured play, showing both changes and continuities throughout the study period. The second purpose is to analyze the play trends as a consequence of shifting theories of play as a vehicle of childhood socialization as those theories converged with significant social, cultural and historical changes.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study, then, will examine children's play in America over the century beginning in 1880. It will discuss the conceptualization of play as a socially significant domain and activity and the simultaneous rise of and shifts in adult concern with play. For with the acceptance of play as a legitimate childhood activity and an important socializing mechanism, rather than as an idle and even sinful pursuit, adults became increasingly involved in the management and organization of children's play, an activity imbued with significant powers.

In the period covered by this study there has been a shift in the adult focus of attention from the organization of the play of lower class children to the organization of the play of middle class children. Guided largely by the play theory of child psychologist G. Stanley Hall and his followers, and responding to the social disorder wrought by industrialization, urbanization and immigration, upper middle class reformers, in the period between 1880-1920, attempted to organize the play of poor, urban children through the Playground Movement. The emphasis was on play as a socially useful activity, a means of moral and political socialization. From the 1920s to the 1960s, the highly popularized play theories of noted psychologists John B. Watson, Arnold Gesell, Sigmund Freud and Jean Piaget, each provided a new understanding of the value of play. Emphasizing the importance of play in the physical, social,

psychological and cognitive development of the child, their ideas reached a wide audience of middle class parents through popular child rearing manuals and magazines. Combined with salient and facilitating socio-economic and cultural factors, such as the growth of the middle class, the rise of large scale organizations, the explosive growth of the toy industry, and changing gender roles and family patterns, these theories contributed to the increasing adult organization and management of the play of middle class children, an arrangement that continued through the 1980s. The emphasis came to be on play as a personally, rather than socially, useful activity and as a means of anticipatory socialization.

So organized had their play become by the 1950s that it seemed that middle class children's spontaneous play and games had all but disappeared, taken over by adult-controlled sports programs and other organized activities. But, rumors as to free play's untimely death are exaggerated. Both middle class and lower class children, in the period covered by this study, have moved within two worlds of play--adult-controlled and child-controlled. The difference is one of degree, not kind. Though traditional childhood games have decreased, middle class children do, indeed, engage in child-controlled play and lower class children, largely abandoned as targets of organized play programs with the demise of the Playground Movement in the 1920s until the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, do participate in adult organized activities.

DEFINITIONS

According to child development experts Piers and Landau, "No one has yet formulated a definition of play, especially of child's play, which includes everything it is and leaves out everything it isn't."⁹ So exasperated have scholars become with this "definitional problem" that some have suggested abandoning the task of arriving at the definition of play altogether.¹⁰ Loizos maintains that just about everyone, with the exception of researchers on the topic of play "know it when they see it,"¹¹ anyway, and that the more difficult problem is determining what the outcomes, benefits and functions of play are. Despite the difficulty of arriving at an objective definition of play, scholars, no doubt, will continue to seek it.

The Dutch historian Johan Huizinga has provided the classic definition of play.

Summing up the formal characteristics of play we might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside "ordinary" life as being "not serious," but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means.¹²

Caillois, the French sociologist, criticizes Huizinga's definition which he feels is "at the same time too broad and too narrow."¹³ Concentrating on only one form of game, the

contest, Huizinga "deliberately omits, as obvious, the description and classification of games themselves, since they all respond to the same needs and reflect, without qualification, the same psychological attitude."¹⁴

Caillouis proposes a four-fold classification of games into competition or *agon*, games of chance or *alea*, games of simulation or *mimicry* and games of vertigo or *ilinx*. Each type of game has a distinct social function. Within each category games can be placed on a continuum from extreme spontaneity to extreme formality and difficulty, either of a physical nature or embodied in rules. Caillouis uses the Greek term *paidia* to denote spontaneous play and the Latin word *ludus* to denote controlled and regulated play.¹⁵ Having expanded on Huizinga's definition of play, Caillouis restates the characteristics of play as an activity that is free, separate, uncertain, unproductive, governed by rules and make believe.¹⁶

According to psychologist Catherine Garvey, play is characterized by the following attributes:

1. Play is pleasurable, enjoyable. Even when not actually accompanied by signs of mirth, it is still positively valued by the player.
2. Play has no extrinsic goals. Its motivations are intrinsic and serve no other objectives. In fact, it is more an enjoyment of means than an effort devoted to some particular end. In utilitarian terms, it is inherently unproductive.
3. Play is spontaneous and voluntary. It is not obligatory but is freely chosen by the player.
4. Play involves some active engagement on the part of the player.

5. Play has certain systematic relations to what is not play.¹⁷

Anthropologist Philip Stevens, Jr. argues that Huizinga's definition of play, which "started it all," defined play by summing up its formal characteristics. This resulted in efforts to categorize behaviors which fall under the headings of "play" and "playforms" and are conceptually distinguishable from "work," the behavior that became dichotomous to play. Such efforts, Stevens bemoans, have led into a "rut" and definitional waters "that are now pretty muddy."¹⁸

Stevens maintains that too much attention has focused on Huizinga's key words and phrases "not serious," "no material interest," "no profit," and "according to fixed rules." Stevens argues that by focusing instead on the forgotten attribute in Huizinga's definition of play, namely, "absorbing the player intensely and utterly," play and work then become a false dichotomy. This persistent failure to deal with the experiential aspect of play has contributed to that rut, "whose bottom threatens to wear deeper and deeper," into which those who seek to categorize play from non-play find themselves.¹⁹

Play theoretician and researcher Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has dealt with this experiential component of play. He writes:

There is a common experiential state which is present in various forms of play, and also under certain conditions in other activities which are not normally thought of as play . . . I will refer to this experience as "flow." Flow denotes the

wholistic sensation present when we act with total involvement . . . This experience seems to occur only when a person is actively engaged in some form of clearly specified interaction with the environment. The interaction may be primarily physical, emotional or intellectual, but in each case the person is able to use some skills in acting on a limited area of his or her environment. The flow experience is therefore dependent on *flow activities* . . . The most typical kind of flow experience is play, and games are the most common forms of play activities.²⁰

But, Csikszentmihalyi maintains that the flow experience is not limited to play, nor is it always found in play. He found, for instance, that mountain climbers, neurosurgeons and orchestra conductors had experienced flow as well as people who worked on the production line or in a machine shop. "So much for the dichotomy of play and work."²¹

Sport sociologist Harry Edwards constructed a continuum of forms beginning with play at one extreme through recreation, contest or match, games, and then sports at the other extreme. While some forms have attributes that absolutely distinguish them from other forms, some aspects of the activities are different in gradation only. Play is defined by Edwards as "a voluntary and distinct activity carried out within arbitrary boundaries in space and time, separate from daily roles, concerns and influences and having no seriousness, purpose, meaning or goals for the actor beyond those emerging within the boundaries and contexts of the play act itself."²² Recreation is "an activity which is for the most part voluntarily engaged in by the actor, different in character from those activities exerting mental and physical pressures upon him in his daily life, and having the effect

of refreshing him in mind or body." ²³ A contest or match is "an individually focused activity emphasizing self-discovery through competitive struggle within the context of informal or formal rules and having no consequences beyond those affecting the individual and emerging within the contest activity."²⁴ The participants are opposing individuals, not teams. A game is "an activity manifest in physical and/or mental effort, governed by formal or informal rules and having as participants opposing actors who are part of or who represent collectivities that want to achieve a specific goal that has value beyond the context of the game situation, that is, prestige, recognition, influence."²⁵ The chief characteristic of any game is rivalry or competition. Unlike play and recreation where the actor may begin and end when he pleases, the commencement and termination of participation in the game is determined by rules, the nature of the game's goals and the seriousness of the activity. Sport is defined by Edwards as "involving activities having formally recorded histories and traditions, stressing physical exertion through competition within limits set in explicit and formal rules governing role and position relationships, and carried out by actors who represent or who are part of formally organized associations having the goal of achieving valued tangibles or intangibles through defeating opposing groups."²⁶

Based on a list of determining attributes Edwards concludes that play and recreation are very similar as are game and sport, while contest/match is a genuinely

intermediate case. Play and sport, however, are fully independent concepts, with no overlap whatsoever in characteristics. "Far from being play, recreation, 'fun and games,' or mere diversion, sports assume the character of occupational endeavors for participants, and of business for coaches, administrators and owners."²⁷

Sports sociologist Stephen Figler carries Edwards' continuum one point further, distinguishing sports from athletics, concepts that Edwards used synonymously.

In simple terms we may conceive of athletics as sports in spades. Athletics out-sports sport. If sports are highly structured, the category of athletics is virtually rigid . . . Athletics is absolutely restrictive . . . Regarding goals and motivations, athletics out-distances sport. Sports require some investment, while athletics is big business. Sports are competitive, while in athletics, "Winning is the only thing." It would be nice but totally irrelevant in athletics if the athletes were having fun.²⁸

Figler relates the four categories of play, games, sports and athletics, which he defines as forms of physical leisure activity, and analyzes them as points on a continuum rather than mutually exclusive categories, according to Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow. If, as Csikszentmihalyi maintains, "flow (playfulness) is the result of pure involvement without any consideration about results," and "games are obvious flow activities, and play is the flow activity par excellence,"²⁹ then Figler, by separating sports from athletics, argues that flow may be present in sports, though progressively less so than in games and play, but is irrelevant in athletics. But, if, in fact, flow can be found

in work, then why not in athletics? According to Figler, "The highly developed structures and systems of authority that control athletics hinder its being a flow-type activity."³⁰

If the preceding scholars of play have offered very specific definitions of play (or, at least, of play's formal characteristics), other scholars have constructed broad definitions. Anthropologist Helen Schwartzman writes, after presenting a general overview, systemization and assessment of over seven hundred cross discipline studies of play, "I am critical of the way definitions . . . of children's play have been formulated and used in the past. Definitions are often speculative attempts by investigators to arbitrarily define the nature of play, with little attempt made to collect information or data on the subject."³¹ She offers that play is a mode of activity, as opposed to a category of activity, which can occur at any time and place. Play is "an orientation or framing and defining context that players adopt toward something (an object, a person a role, and activity, an event, etc.), which produces a text characterized by allusion (not distortion or illusion), transformation (not preservation), and '*purported* imitation' of the object, person, role, etc."³² Play historian Bernard Mergen notes that play has been loosely defined to include activities in which children engage for the sake of amusement, passing time, being part of a group, or learning and practicing skills."³³ According to psychologist Bruno

Bettleheim, play is "the child's activities characterized by freedom from all but personally imposed rules (which are changed at will), by free wheeling fantasy involvement, and by the absence of any goals outside of the activity itself."³⁴

While theorists do not agree conclusively on the defining characteristics of play, Huizinga, Caillois, Garvey, Edwards and Bettleheim concur that play is voluntary, intrinsically motivated, set apart from ordinary life, and governed by rules imposed by the players themselves. Caillois and Bettleheim stress the make-believe quality of play while Huizinga, Garvey and Czikszentmihalyi maintain that play involves active engagement on the part of the player. Czikszentmihalyi captures the intensity of this absorption of the player with the activity in his concept of "flow," a characteristic that makes "play" and "not-play" a false dichotomy. Schwartzman, in offering new metaphors for play, maintains that play is productive rather than unproductive, giving shape to individual affective and cognitive systems. Play, then, is a pleasurable, absorbing and productive activity.

~~Games~~ are defined by Roberts, Arth and Bush as "recreational activities characterized by organized play, competition, two or more sides, criteria for determining the winner and agreed-upon rules."³⁵ According to anthropologist John M. Roberts and psychologist Brian Sutton-Smith, games can be grouped into three classes according to outcome

attributes: (1) games of physical skill, such as weight lifting and bowling, in which the outcome is determined by the players' motor activities; (2) games of strategy, such as chess and checkers, in which the outcome is determined by rational choices among possible courses of action; and (3) games of chance, such as bingo and roulette, in which the outcome is determined by guesses or by some uncontrolled artifact such as a die or a wheel. Roberts and Sutton-Smith allow for a further distinction of games based on the presence or absence of strategy or chance. Games of physical skill and strategy, such as football and baseball, have outcomes influenced by rational decisions. In games of physical skill and chance, such as musical chairs, chance is a factor as well as physical skills. In games of physical skill, strategy and chance, such as Queenie or steal the bacon, all three defining attributes are present. In games of strategy, chance may also be present, such as bridge or cribbage. The category of games of chance is not subdivided, since by definition they lack the attributes of physical skill and strategy.³⁶

Sport is defined by Loy as "any institutionalized game demanding demonstration of physical prowess."³⁷

Organized activities are uses of time that are purposive, ongoing, structured and more or less voluntarily chosen although parental and peer pressure may influence the process of making choices. They are supervised by adults and administered by some agency or formal organization.

Activities include institutionalized clubs, such as scouting organizations, groups, teams, lessons and extracurricular school programs.³⁸

Child structured play is "the play of children which they create 'on their own' and often 'out of sight' of adults."

Child structured play is characterized by child-child interaction usually without the presence of an adult.³⁹

Adult structured play is "team games, sports, board games and other highly structured games which adults have introduced to children which may or may not require adult supervision."

Adult structured play is characterized by child(ren)-adult interaction with adults filling a variety of roles such as supervisor, coach, teacher, parent.⁴⁰

On the premise that indeed play is productive, it is so precisely as an activity of childhood socialization.

Socialization, broadly defined, is "the process by which we learn the ways of a given society or social group so that we can function within it."⁴¹ An interactional process, socialization is considered the essential link between the individual and society, transforming original nature into human nature. Through socialization, "individuals acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that enable them to participate as more or less effective members of groups and the society."⁴² An important outcome of socialization is the development of the personality, at the core of which lies the self, a conscious feeling of a distinct personal identity.

The personality is made up of three main elements: the

cognitive component of thought, belief, perception, memory and other intellectual capacities; the emotional component of feelings; and the behavioral component of skills, aptitudes, competence and other abilities such as incipient adult roles.⁴³ Play, it has been theorized, facilitates the development of all of these components. Play and games provide children with interactional experiences through which they learn "to take and act on the attitudes or lines of action of others."⁴⁴ According to social philosopher George Herbert Mead, play and games are the vehicles by which children learn how to take the perspective of others. In the play stage, children take on the role of significant others, such as mother or father. But with increasing social experience, they learn to simultaneously take the role of many others and can participate in organized games. At this point the self is becoming more complex and can initiate different actions in response to different others. In this game stage, children learn to view themselves from the perspective of the group. A final step in the development of the self is the ability of children to act and to see themselves from the point of view of the generalized other, that is, in reference to widespread cultural norms and values.⁴⁵

Anticipatory socialization is learning the outlook of a social role, including the rights, obligations and expectations of that role, preparatory to assuming it. It is intended to ease a person's adjustment to a change in status

and facilitate acceptance into the new status.⁴⁶

Middle class will be broadly defined as that stratum or category in which income and life chances are primarily a product of steady employment in white collar (nonmanual) work. This distinguishes them from an **upper class** whose wealth is primarily derived from inheritance and property ownership and a **lower class** that is marginally and intermittently employed. **Working class** poses a definitional problem. Around the turn of the century, the working class were the unskilled factory and street laborers drawn from the ranks of immigrants and rural transplants to the cities who were financially impoverished and would by recent descriptions of the American class system be lower class. With the growth of the middle class, particularly in the post World War II period, that class was further rank ordered into the upper middle class and the lower middle class, based on location within the occupational structure. The **working class** is now below the middle class in the stratification hierarchy but above the lower class and includes those people who work at occupations characterized as blue collar (manual) labor marked by a lower level of skill and complexity, and requiring less education than the occupations of the middle class. Working class jobs are for the most part lower paying, less secure, and more physically demanding and dangerous than middle class occupations.⁴⁷

LIMITATIONS

This study will be limited to:

- (1) the play of children in the United States. No attempt will be made to differentiate ethnicity among American children.
 - (2) the period between 1880-1990;
 - (3) physically and mentally healthy children. The role of play therapy for the mentally and physically impaired will be excluded.
 - (4) children between the ages of 5-12, approximately the ages of grade school children and the period generally referred to as middle childhood. It is during this period of childhood that children engage in more group than solitary play.
 - (5) middle class and lower class children;
 - (6) children who live with families, however they are structured, and in the community. Children in institutions such as boarding schools and hospitals are excluded.
 - (7) the ludic activities of play, games and sports.
- No attempt will be made to systematically trace the role of toys in play behavior over the period covered in this study, though to the extent that toys have become a characteristic feature of play, they will be covered.
- (8) ludic activities, free or organized, occurring outside of the school classroom;
 - (9) children in urban and suburban areas. The play of

rural children is excluded.

(10) the largest youth serving organizations, Boys Scouts of America (BSA), Girl Scouts of the U.S.A., Camp Fire (originally Camp Fire Girls), and Boys Club. The 4-H Club, with over two millions members, is excluded because membership is largely, though not exclusively, drawn from rural children.

METHODOLOGY

According to the sociologist C. Wright Mills, "All sociology worthy of its name is historical sociology."⁴⁸ This study will utilize the historical method. According to historical sociologist Theda Skocpol, historical studies have some or all of the following characteristics. They ask questions about social structures or processes understood to be concretely situated in time and space. They address processes over time, and take temporal sequences seriously in accounting for outcomes. Most historical analyses attend to the interplay of meaningful actions and structural contexts, in order to make sense of the unfolding or unintended as well as intended outcomes in individual lives and social transformations. Finally, historical sociological studies highlight the particular and varying features of specific kinds of social structures and patterns of change. ⁴⁹ Varied in its methodology, historical sociology has "no mechanical recipes for proper methods."⁵⁰

This study will employ both primary and secondary

data. According to Skocpol, "Some people believe that [secondary sources] are automatically inferior to primary sources . . . From the point of view of historical sociology, however, a dogmatic insistence on redoing primary research for every investigation would be disastrous . . . If secondary studies by specialists are already available . . . secondary sources are appropriate as the basic source of evidence for a given study." ⁵¹

Primary data include books, such as child development and child rearing manuals, the original writings of playground organizers and play theorists, and general works from varied disciplines that describe and analyze the socio-cultural and historical changes that have occurred during the period covered in this study. In addition to books, primary periodicals in the fields of sociology, psychology, anthropology, the humanities and recreation have been used. General periodicals, such as popular women's and news magazines, are also sources of primary data, as are newspaper articles. Secondary sources include books, pamphlets and unpublished dissertations.

Data have been derived from a systematic search of the literature for the period 1880-1990. Articles and books have been obtained by referencing the following sources from their earliest date of publication, but not prior to 1880: Book Review Digest, Dissertation Abstracts, Essays and General Literature Index, Humanities Index, Readers' Guide to Periodic Literature, Sociological Abstracts, and Social

Science Index. This was undertaken as a manual search. In addition, a computer search by Dialog Information Retrieval Service (Social Scisearch) for the period 1972 (earliest available date) through 1988 was also conducted.

The manual search of the above cited sources included references under the topics of PLAY, PLAYGROUNDS, RECREATION, GAMES, CHILDREN'S SPORTS, CHILDREN'S AMUSEMENTS, CHILDREN'S OUT-OF-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES, CHILDHOOD, AND TOYS. The computer search by Dialog was limited to the topic CHILDREN'S PLAY. Evidence of the popularization of play theories was limited to a search for references to play in child rearing manuals and play-related articles found in the Readers' Guide to Periodic Literature. This limitation is justifiable since the intention is to show that theoretical ideas on play, developed by leading psychologists of the period, found their way to the general public, particularly to mothers. The Readers' Guide to Periodic Literature, which is the only reference source that indexes popular literature, is then the appropriate source for play-related articles of general interest. Since mothers have been assigned the role of primary caregivers to their children, it is reasonable to assume that child care manuals are read mainly by mothers, and that it is mothers who either manage their children's play or delegate management of it to other adults.

Employing research strategies common to historical sociological studies, such as the uses of theory, concepts and comparisons, the study will seek to describe changes in

play behaviors and to analyze those changes as a result of the convergence of broad societal changes occurring between 1880-1990, and popular psychological theories of play.

ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

Following a review of selected theories of play and their popularization in widely read child rearing manuals and magazines, a study of trends in dominant play patterns, both adult-controlled and child-controlled is undertaken. These will cover three periods: 1880-1920; 1920-1945; and 1945-1990. A socio-historical background to each period precedes the description of play trends. Socio-historically, the 1880-1920 period is most profoundly shaped by Progressive reform efforts to restore social order to a society perceived to be in a state of chaos. The growth of the middle class, changing family patterns, the Depression and World War II provide the socio-historical backdrop for the 1920-1945 period. The last period, 1945-1990, is marked by extensive suburbanization, bureaucratization, technological advances, the rise and decline of child-centeredness, changing gender roles and, once again, changing family structures. It is in this period that poverty is "re-discovered" and the play of poor urban children once again becomes a socio-political issue.

The dominant play patterns of the 1880-1920 period focus on the play, both free and organized, of poor and immigrant city children, the intended benefactors of Progressives'

reform efforts. Responding to conditions of perceived social disorganization, the result of rapid change to an industrialized and urbanized society, upper middle class reformers organized to remove children from the streets, considered both physically and morally dangerous, onto playgrounds. Ostensibly motivated by humanitarian concerns emphasizing children's need for fresh air and physical activity, and guided by Hall's popular instinct theory of play, reformers, the research suggests, had more complex motives that included attempts at control and moral indoctrination of the young through play and games, organized and supervised by trained play leaders who would also serve as respectable role models. During this same period, the play of middle class, pre-adolescent children was largely home-based. These children were supervised by their own parents, but particularly by their mother, who was morally and didactically motivated. The character building organizations of Boy Scouts of America, Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. and Camp Fire were all founded between 1910-1912 for middle class youth twelve years old and over. These organizations begin the involvement of adolescents in adult-supervised, organized activities on a large scale.

The 1920-1945 period traces the decline of the Playground Movement and the shift from a concern with the play of poor urban children to a concern with the play of middle class and increasingly suburban children. Guided by the popularization of play theories in behavioral and

developmental psychology, middle class parents follow the trend in home and yard play promoted by the National Recreation Association (formerly the Playground Association of America). As growth in the number of urban playgrounds stalls, backyard playgrounds dot the suburban landscape. Yards, fully equipped with playground apparatus, offer children safe, healthy, developmentally stimulating play opportunities under the watchful eyes of their parents. In addition to its physical benefits, play is credited with an emotional and psychological adjustment value. For children of the middle class, play has moved beyond a didactic activity to one that is central to the child's developing personality.

This period also sees the rise of organized sports programs for preadolescent children as schools withdraw their sponsorship of intermural team sports. Thus coaches join parents as the managers of children's play. Despite the growth of organized sports for children, particularly Little League Baseball, founded in 1939, and the growth of the scouting organizations, child-controlled street play continues to thrive, particularly among urban children.

The play of children in the 1945-1990 period is influenced by more than adults. The rise of television as the most pervasive and influential of the mass media begins and peaks, never relinquishing its hold on its young audience. In a period of economic prosperity and "child-centeredness," television begins to cater to the entertainment tastes of the

young while transforming them into avid consumers of that most popular sponsor, toys. The impact of Freudian and Piagetian theories of play alters the adult concept of play's value. The role of play in physical growth and self mastery through emotional, social and cognitive development is emphasized while its role in psychological adjustment through good habit formation recedes in importance. Organized sports and clubs are valued for their cultivation of social skills germane to a corporate economy, such as leadership, loyalty, discipline, competition, and cooperation or learning how to be a "team player." For middle class children free play fits in around a schedule of organized activities such as scouting, sports and lessons. For urban lower class children the streets and sidewalks remain popular play spaces, though by the late 1960s the character building organizations, traditionally reserved for white, middle class children, reach out and begin to successfully recruit a significant number of poor minority youngsters.

The final chapter will provide a review of the impact of play theories that have influenced this childhood activity throughout the period 1880-1990 and a summary of the changes and continuities in the play lives of American children. Recommendations for further research will be made.

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CHAPTER II

PLAY THEORIES AND THEIR POPULARIZATION

From Play as Evil to Play as Essential

In 1988 educators Isenberg and Quisenberry wrote, "Play is a dynamic, active and constructive behavior, a necessary and integral part of childhood, infancy through adolescence. . . . Adequate and appropriate play experiences provide children with opportunities for developing mastery and competence in cognitive, social and physical skills."¹ This centrality of play to children's lives and development is a belief that evolved gradually, rooted in important theoretical ideas, developed over the course of the last century.

Strict Puritans, early settlers in the American colonies, frowned upon play as selfish and irresponsible behavior.² They believed that infants were innately depraved, entering the world with original sin and tendencies toward wickedness. These tendencies, Puritans held, would progressively become more pronounced unless suppressed through rigid discipline. According to social historian John Brewer:

Brought up as (usually Calvinist) Protestants, their fierce religiosity required them to curb their children.

Since the human (and therefore children's) proclivity for wickedness, sloth and indolence was known to be extraordinarily strong . . . the caring, attentive and loving parent was obliged--almost compelled--to impose a harsh, punitive regime of the strictest discipline to keep children on the straight and narrow. . . .

The play of . . . children in the seventeenth century American colonies was almost never regarded as being instructive, purposeful or educationally useful. Rather it was condemned by puritans and zealots as a sinful and idle pursuit.³

While some more moderate Protestants did, in fact, tolerate play which emphasized work and group solidarity and which developed self-control, self-denial, faith in God, and obedience to rules, this play occurred out of doors and usually with adult members of the family and community. Children's play was undifferentiated from the non work activities of adults.⁴

But between the late seventeenth and the early nineteenth centuries, new ideas on human nature and the processes of human learning altered, at least for some, attitudes and practices related to children's play. In Some Thoughts Concerning Education, published in 1693 and in its 26th edition before 1800, the English philosopher John Locke presented a new view of the child.⁵ Locke maintained that children were innocent at birth, highly malleable and manipulative creatures. Their mind was a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate upon which knowledge and learning were imprinted by appropriate sense impressions. For Locke, play was an important part of childhood, the key to successful learning. The most popular book on child rearing in its day, it was particularly influential among America's moderate Protestants

and wealthy aristocrats, who had adopted a "genteel mode of childrearing,"⁶ one already receptive to children's play. Brewer notes, "Locke's Thoughts were read chiefly by the affluent and middling classes of America and England who had the time, the leisure, the money and the social disposition to lavish attention on their children . . . They were eager to 'improve' their children."⁷

But, as Brewer also notes, while Locke's ideas were well received among the moderate and wealthy Protestants, they existed side by side with the negative views of children and play still embraced by strict Puritans. An eighteenth century church publication captures that attitude:

. . . we prohibit play in the strongest terms. The students should rise at five o'clock summer and winter . . . Their recreation should be gardening, walking, riding and bathing without doors . . . The students shall be indulged with nothing which the world calls play. Let this rule be observed with the strictest nicety, for those who play when they are young will play when they are old. ⁸

Yet, Locke's ideas continued to gain in popularity and acceptance. As childhood historian John Sommerville suggests, "Books achieve this kind of popularity not because of their originality but because the public is predisposed to agree with their ideas . . . Locke did not have to wait to be discovered; the public was ready for his ideas."⁹ Though his views on play differed from those of strict Puritans, like them he emphasized the importance of obedience, self-control, regularity of habits and self-denial in children. Believing that children could be molded to one's desires, Locke stressed that it was important for parents to be ever

watchful of bad influences and habits. Thus, he insisted that children should play and learn at home, a controlled environment. This ideal condition contributed to the cult of domesticity which through the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries kept a genteel and leisured class of women in their homes, overseeing the moral development of their children.¹⁰

"Children's play became restricted to the domestic environment in which parental (especially maternal) control could be most successfully exercised."¹¹

This growing acceptance of play, especially as a didactic activity, resulted in the growth of a wide market for educational toys and games manufactured in Nuremberg, Germany and in England beginning in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. According to Sommerville, "The educational impulse soon became strong within the [toy] industry. The first jigsaw puzzle (which appeared in 1762) was a map to teach geography. There were educational card games and board games to teach vocabulary, music, history, and astronomy."¹² In addition to teaching skills and imparting knowledge, early toys also were marketing morality. Board games with titles such as *The Cottage of Content*; or *Right Roads and Wrong Ways* appeared. Another morality game, designed in France, sent players to the stocks or prison for landing on certain vices.¹³

Throughout the nineteenth century different attitudes regarding the nature of children and child rearing were still evolving. In the early decades of the century, strict

Puritan overtones were still heard in the advice given to parents who were warned to "vigilantly guard" their children against their own "depraved impulses." By the 1860s, however, children were viewed as innocent and good by nature, yet open to contamination by the evils of society.¹⁴ The influence of Jean Jacques Rousseau's Emile informed this view. In the opening sentence of Emile, the story of a tutor and his youthful charge, Rousseau proclaimed, "The Author of Nature makes all things good; man meddles with them and they become evil." Evil lurked in the external environment, but no longer resided innately in children. Romantic and Victorian writers of the century such as William Blake, William Wordsworth, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, depicted children as symbols of innocence, love and goodness, and guardians of virtue.¹⁵ Thus, over the course of the century concepts of child nature changed from the child as "depraved," to the child as neither good nor bad, to the child as "tender creature."¹⁶ By the last decades of the nineteenth century children had come to be seen as nothing less than "redeemers" of adult failures.¹⁷

But, the nineteenth century is peculiar not only for its shifting and competing images of children, but as Sommerville says, "One of the puzzles of our history is the fact that the greatest exploitation of children coincided with the greatest glorification of childhood." While some children "formed the backbone of industrialization," others lived "pampered lives [that] rested on that labor."¹⁸ According to sociologist

Anthony Synnott, "Victorians had three views of children--little workers, little angels, and little animals, especially little monkeys, depending on whether they were high capitalists, Romantics, or scientists."¹⁹ For indeed, the Romantic sentimentality of childhood was offset by Charles Darwin's On the Origin of Man published in 1859 and The Descent of Man, published in 1871.

Thus, just as there was no single view of children, there was no one experience of childhood. Childhood, and play as a recognized childhood activity, were influenced by social class. For middle class children the period between 1800-1880 provided "a greater opportunity to play without interruption or interference than they had ever had."²⁰ For children of the poor, however, childhood was not yet to be a period of carefree play, but a stage largely undifferentiated from that of adulthood, one very much constrained, in its pursuit of fun, by dire economic conditions which required child labor.

Yet, as the nineteenth century drew to a close increased attention was focused on all children as the rapid changes brought by industrialization, urbanization and immigration threatened the well-being of the young, for it was they who were seen as "tomorrow's hope." Everything about children--their growth, their education, their work and their play--became more important than it had ever been before.²¹

Threatened by this changing order, the middle class, seeking to maintain traditional standards, returned to a

close supervision of their children's play. But the play of poor children, too, came under the watchful eyes of educators, psychologists, philanthropists and playground supervisors.²² Play, which had gained acceptance as a powerful shaper of malleable minds, bodies, and characters, was an activity that was too important to be left to the whim of children.

The year 1883 has been designated as the year of "the discovery of children's play."²³ In 1883, three documents appeared which legitimized the theoretical and empirical study of children's play from that year forward. Folklorist William Wells Newell's Games and Songs of American Children,²⁴ a collection of over two hundred games and their variants, was published. Newell believed that children's games were dying off. He took it as his duty to "pick and preserve" these play traditions, which he held were "almost entirely of old English origin."²⁵ As editor of the Journal of American Folklore for twelve years (1888-1900), Newell urged folklorists to gather "accurate and responsible" folklore reports through field research and historical documents rather than to weave "elaborate fabrics of pseudo theory" with few threads of facts.²⁶ That same year anthropologist Matilda Cox Stevenson, the first anthropologist to take a special interest in children's activities, published "Religious Life of the Zuni Child."²⁷ Her study of the "habits, customs, games and experiences" of Zuni children began with a trip to the American Southwest in

1879. Her interest in the moral and physical changes in Zuni youth and adolescents was lifelong.²⁸ Finally, psychologist G. Stanley Hall, a founder of the Child Study Movement, published his study on the contents of children's minds,²⁹ the results of which led him to his famous recapitulation theory, which influenced the founders of the Playground Movement and the organization of early playgrounds.

Selected Theories of Play

Following a review of classical play theories, we turn to Hall's recapitulation theory and the subsequent theories of Sigmund Freud, Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson, all of which treat play as an essential activity of childhood socialization.

One of the earliest theories concerning play is attributed to the German poet Schiller³⁰ and espoused by the English philosopher and sociologist Herbert Spencer.³¹ Essentially, they maintained that play was a way for organisms to expend **surplus energy** or surplus vitality. Lazarus,³² a professor at the University of Berlin, in a theory that contradicts surplus energy, argued instead that play results from an energy deficiency and is the consequence of the need for **recreation** to overcome this deficiency. T.W. Patrick,³³ an American philosopher, extended Lazarus' recreation theory to one of **relaxation**. Play, he said, stems from the need for relaxation from mental fatigue and the strain placed on small muscles, consequences of changing occupational patterns.

Play is the body's response to the need for gross motor activities which physically relax the body. Thus, he advocated participation in football, swimming, gymnastics, and running. These theories are generally grouped under biological theories of play.

Karl Groos, a professor of philosophy, added a social-psychological dimension to play theories of the period in his work, The Play of Man.³⁴ Strongly influenced by Darwin's instinct theory, Groos, in his ~~practice-preparation~~ theory of play, maintained that children have a natural or inherited impulse to play in order to practice incomplete hereditary instincts. Through play, these instinctive behaviors are perfected in preparation for future adult tasks. Essentially, then, the play of the child prepared him for his role as an adult. According to Groos, children need an extended period of childhood in order to practice and perfect their instincts during periods of "playful experimentation." Nothing less than survival was at stake.

It was Groos who first noted the role of play in socialization. Through play, instinctive behaviors are refined to eventually become the adult's repertoire of skills, thoughts and emotions, which could be used for occupational, personal and social achievement. That play socializes the young raised the activity to one of serious importance and "in time it [socialization] became the central thesis about play in the twentieth century."³⁵

Play as a Socializing Activity

Hall's recapitulation theory of play is similar to Groos' in that he too saw play as an expression of innate instincts. While Groos, however, considered play to be a natural and important activity for the development of future skills, Hall believed that through play past skills which had become inappropriate and disruptive to the present stage of development were weakened or modified. Play provided the opportunity to rid human beings of primitive, instinctual traits carried over from past generations.³⁶ Hall's recapitulation theory argued that children pass through series of play stages corresponding to and recapitulating the cultural epochs of the race: animal, savage, nomad, farmer, and tribal member. As children lose these primitive behaviors through their play activities they can acquire the adult behaviors of their present civilization, essentially having purged themselves of atavistic tendencies that would obstruct advancement to higher levels if left unreleased.

Hall wrote:

I regard play as the motor habits and spirit of the past of the race, persisting in the present, as rudimentary functions sometimes of and always akin to rudimentary organs. The best index and guide to the stated activities of adults in past ages is found in the instinctive, untaught and non-imitative plays of children which are the most spontaneous and exact expressions of their motor needs. . . In play every mood and movement is instinct with heredity. Thus we rehearse the activities of our ancestors, back we know not how far, and repeat their life work in summative and adumbrated ways.³⁷

Accepting the Greek ideal of developing body and mind, Hall believed that there was a link between muscular

conditioning and mental and moral efficiency. According to Hall, "All good conduct might be defined as good muscle habits."³⁸ Morality and character could be developed by rigorous physical drill and conditioning.³⁹

Sigmund Freud

According to the father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, who visited Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts on the invitation of G. Stanley Hall during his tenure as that university's president, play served a major function in the child's social-emotional development. Freud maintained that play is motivated chiefly by two needs of the child. The first is the need to act out and repeat difficult situations in order to master them. Mastery is achieved by projecting hostilities and anxieties onto play objects or play partners. The second need is to fulfill the wish to be "grown up." According to Freud:

It is clear that in their play children repeat everything that has made a great impression on them in real life, and that in doing so they abreact the strength of the impression and . . . make themselves master of the situation. But on the other hand, it is obvious that all their play is influenced by a wish that dominates them the whole time--the wish to be grown up and to be able to do what grown up people do. It can also be observed that the unpleasurable nature of an experience does not always unsuit it for play . . . In the case of children's play we seemed to see that children repeat unpleasurable experiences for the additional reason that they can master a powerful impression far more thoroughly by being active than they could by merely experiencing it passively. Each fresh repetition seems to strengthen the mastery they are in search of. ⁴⁰

Thus, play is pleasurable for children since it provides

an opportunity for them to master both themselves and their environment. Play situations give children the opportunity to discharge or express emotions through behaviors that would be socially unacceptable outside of the play context. In play, children can act out and repeat problematic or painful experiences in order to master them. Therefore, even though children may be motivated to attain pleasure through play, they repeat painful experiences to gain the understanding and power that come with mastery of the self.⁴¹ Further, through play imitative of adult behavior, children can deal with the biological push and the psychological pull to grow up.

Jean Piaget

Jean Piaget, the Swiss developmental psychologist, developed a stage-like, cognitive-developmental model of childhood play.⁴² Piaget conceptualized four major stages in the development of the child: sensorimotor (birth to two years), preoperational (two to seven years), concrete operational (seven to eleven years) and formal operation. Cognitive abilities increase as the child advances through these four stages.

In his consideration of play, Piaget found parallels in the stages of this activity and the cognitive aspects of development. Each cognitive stage exhibits a characteristic type of play activity.⁴³ The practice game, which consists of repeating newly mastered motor skills, coincides with the

period of sensorimotor intelligence. Symbolic play which includes fantasy and make believe play, emerges at the time the child is beginning to develop language and corresponds with the preoperational stage of cognitive development. In their make-believe or sociodramatic play, children act out their feelings, anxieties, fears and confusions through symbolic figures and events. In addition to symbolic play, children in this stage of development benefit from play which develops their gross and fine motor skills, such as jungle gyms, skipping ropes and tricycles; in creative play, such as play with clay and finger paints; social play, which includes records, child sized cooking utensils and play groups; and cognitive play, such as jigsaw puzzles, number and letter games, running a store, and science kits.⁴⁴ Games with rules appear in the concrete operational stage of cognitive development. It is during this stage that the child has overcome his egocentrism and is able to see things from another's perspective. Games with rules can be fully understood and played only when the child has an understanding of the moral necessity of rules, about the age of nine. These games help the child's reasoning to become more logical. As the child becomes capable of logical thought on concrete matters and more capable of coping socially and emotionally, the symbolic play of the earlier period declines and group play, characteristic of children between 7 or 8 and 12, predominates. Included here are games with complex rules, such as Monopoly, organized sports, clubs and team

competitions. Children also are interested in play that manipulates mathematical concepts the younger child cannot understand, such as weight and number. Toy scales, magnet sets, and card collections are toys and activities that correspond to the developing mental operations of which the child is capable. Fine motor skills develop through play with marbles, jacks, skates and bicycles. Since the play activities of this period correspond more closely to "reality," they help the child prepare for the last stage of cognitive development, formal operations. In this final stage, the child's activities, or constructional games, reproduce reality in a faithful and objective manner, and thus mark a transition to nonludic, adaptive behavior, or practical intelligence.⁴⁵

Piaget maintained that all behavior serves the ends of biological adaptation. As individuals interact with the environment they are continuously striving for adaptation, or an equilibrium, between the self and the environment. In order to attain this equilibrium two complementary processes must occur in balance. These are assimilation and accommodation. These processes underlie the child's intellectual development. During assimilative thought the child imposes his own reality on the physical world; during accommodative thought children bend their own cognitive structures to fit reality. The important factors for cognitive development are the quantitative and qualitative nature of these assimilation-accommodation

interactions. Both processes are thought to be a part of all actions; however, at certain times, one may predominate over the other, while at other times they may be in balance.

According to Piaget, assimilation is dominant during play. "In play the primary object is to mold reality to the whim of the cognizer, in other words to assimilate reality to various schemas with little concern for precise accommodation to that reality." ⁴⁵ In play there is "primacy of assimilation over accommodation." But when accommodation is dominant, the child adapts himself to reality, adjusting his existing schemata. Intellectual development results from the active interplay between assimilating and accommodating. Intelligent adaptation occurs when there is equilibrium between these two processes. Play then is an integral part of the child's developing intelligence.

Through play, the child can test out new social, physical, cognitive and emotional patterns without serious consequences in the real world. Thus, play provides a buffered form of learning. Patterns tested out through play become stored as meaningful information to be drawn from in future accommodative experiences. From a cognitive perspective, then, play facilitates the development of intelligence. Emotionally, play allows for the release of stress, the assuaging of interpersonal and intrapersonal conflicts. Physically, it permits the testing of new physical roles and situations. In addition, children's moral development is facilitated through play. In his early study

on how children learn the rules for the game of marbles, Piaget distinguished between the practice or application of rules and the consciousness of rules.⁴⁷ As with his ideas regarding cognitive development, which would come later in his career, Piaget concluded that rule conceptualization for children also advanced through stages. In the first stage (ages one through three) rules are "purely motor" and not coercive in character. During the second stage, heteronomy (ages four through eight), children believe that game rules are sacred, absolutely binding and immutable. During the third stage (from age nine), children view rules as deriving from social consensus. Conformity to them is necessary for everyone to enjoy the game. Rules, however, are no longer inflexible, but subject to modification by mutual agreement. Competitive games exemplify progression from a view of morality characterized by heteronomy and moral realism based on respect for persons in authority to a mature "autonomous" moral sense, rooted in mutual respect among equals and capacity for cooperation. ⁴⁸

Erik Erikson

In his work Childhood and Society,⁴⁹ Neo-Freudian psychoanalyst Erik Erikson developed a theory of psychosocial development and a series of play stages that coincided with childhood development. According to Erikson:

To grow means to be divided into different parts which move at different rates. A growing boy has trouble in mastering his growing body as well as his divided mind . . . I would look at the play act, as

vaguely speaking, a function of the ego, an attempt to bring into synchronization the bodily and the social processes of which one is a part even while one is self . . . The emphasis, I think, should be on the ego's need to master the various areas of life, and especially those in which the individual finds his self, his body, and his social role wanting and trailing . . . The playing child advances forward to new stages of mastery. I propose the theory that the child's play is the infantile form of the human ability to deal with experience by creating model situations and to master reality by experiment and planning.⁵⁰

Thus, play has two functions--ego synthesis and identity builder. In an effort to establish his ego the child moves through three play spheres. Autocosmic play characterizes the play of the infant. All play is focused on the body and is exploratory and reflexive in nature. Microspheric play follows autocosmic play. This play is often solitary and involves play with manageable toys. Microspheric play will generally lead to pleasure in the mastery of toys and mastery of trauma projected onto them. Macrospheric play occurs in a world shared with others. The child can appreciate the consequences of his or her actions and begins to accommodate to the rules of the social and environmental system. According to Erikson, "Each sphere is endowed with its own sense of reality and mastery."⁵¹ For Erikson, personality development is fraught with crises which leave the individual open to conflicts, anxieties and guilt. For school age children from about the ages of six through twelve, the major developmental crisis is industry versus inferiority. During this time children learn the values of the culture, how to form relationships and how to

perform tasks. The development of self confidence is especially important. Play has a major role in the mastery of the psycho-social crises children face. As children competently perform tasks through their play, they acquire a sense of identity and confidence.

Unlike Freud, who stressed the anxiety-reducing qualities of play, Erikson, stresses its growth-enhancing function.⁵² According to Erikson, the child uses play "to make up for defeats, sufferings and frustrations." Through dramatic play children work out difficulties so they can meet the challenge of the world with confidence. Thus, "to play it out is the most natural auto-therapeutic measure childhood affords."⁵³

The preceding theories of play are but a limited selection, chosen precisely because they moved beyond the erudite circle of scholars who developed them and into popular child rearing manuals and publications where they were presumably read by social actors who converted them from abstract ideas to actual play practices.

Popularization of Play Theories 1890-1920

Despite the importance of play as theorized by G. Stanley Hall, as well as the popularity of his child study movement, his ideas did not reach the general public, but were confined to a circle of his own followers. His view of play provided the organizing principle for playground activities as they were developed by leaders of that

movement, particularly Luther Gulick, Joseph Lee, and Henry Curtis whose work will be discussed in the following chapter. Through muscular conditioning, repetitive physical drill, organized games and team sports, the adult supervised playgrounds, rather than schools, were deemed the most likely place to transform the destructive instincts characteristic of peer gangs into socially valued behaviors, precisely because of the physicalistic quality of play.⁵⁴

In 1898, Luther Gulick, a close friend of Hall's who, in 1906 would become the first president of the Playground Association of America, wrote on the role of muscular exercise through organized play. Following Hall, Gulick related sound muscular conditioning with mental and moral efficiency.

Muscular contraction appears to be closely related to the genesis of all forms of psychic activity. Not only do the vaso-motor and muscular system express the thinking, feeling and willing of the individual, but the muscular apparatus itself appears to be a fundamental part of the apparatus for these psychical states. Without the muscular system, material for psychic activity can not be secured. All three of these processes--thinking, feeling, willing--are more or less remotely connected with a rehearsal in the body, both neural and muscular, of the acts by which the original material for the mental processes came in.⁵⁵

Between 1890-1899, only twelve articles on play appeared in the popular literature,⁵⁶ the majority of those dealing with the role of play in the school, particularly the kindergarten curriculum, as that was influenced by the theories of the American educator and philosopher, John Dewey, and the German educator Frederich Froebel. Before the turn of the century, though, developments in organized play

programs outside of schools, which had begun in 1885, had no theoretical underpinnings. Indeed, according to historian Dominick Cavallo, "Gulick was convinced that the play movement lacked a systematic theory to describe the role of play in the child's moral and physical development." ⁵⁷ Gulick had such a theory in mind-- that of his friend G. Stanley Hall. In words almost identical to Hall's, Gulick also wrote, "The plays of children are rehearsals of the activities of the race during forgotten ages . . . Putting it exactly, play is the ontogenetic rehearsal of the phylogenetic series."⁵⁸

Between 1900-1904, the emphasis on the educational value of play in the popular literature remained constant, though during these years, the value of play was broadened to include its power to reform the socially unfit. The movement for philanthropically and municipally funded small playgrounds, begun at the end of the nineteenth century, had resulted in the opening of playgrounds in congested areas of thirteen cities prior to 1899. These were Boston, 1885; New York and Brooklyn, 1889; Philadelphia, 1893; Providence, 1894; Pittsburgh, 1896; Baltimore and Milwaukee, 1897; San Francisco, Cleveland, Minneapolis and Denver, 1898; and Chicago, 1894.⁵⁹ Between 1899 and 1906, an additional twenty eight cities provided for play. Overwhelmingly, articles on playgrounds credited them with such socially valuable results as preventing tuberculosis, reducing juvenile delinquency, and building character in the young who lived in

seedy, overcrowded tenements. The growth of play facilities in Chicago was hailed as the "ten million dollar experiment in social redemption."⁶⁰ The playground was described as "a reformatory agency" and "a school of the citizen."⁶¹ Between 1906, the year the Playground Association of America was formed, and 1910 fifty-five cities had play facilities.⁶² Play continued to gain ever greater power to influence and reform the young, and in so doing to improve society. Between 1910 to 1920, organized play was hailed as "medicine," as "the promoter of racial physique and morals," "the shaper of character and ethics," as "the engine of social progress," and nothing less than "the means of realizing the universal brotherhood of man."⁶³

Though loftier ends can hardly be imagined, the power of play to accomplish them was an idea that traveled in rather limited circles. While the number of articles on play and playgrounds increased in the popular literature of the period, the majority of them were found in The Playground, published by the Playground Association of America, and targeted to those working in the newly established field of recreation, in American City, a magazine whose articles discussed the practical operating problems of local city governments, including parks and recreation, and in journals such as National Education Association Conference, Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences and Charities and the Commons.⁶⁴ Thus, the ideas about the benefits of play, as they had been so defined in this period,

still reached largely, though not exclusively, an audience of professional educators and social scientists, playground supervisors, urban planners and charity or social workers, who as we shall see, were reform-oriented. Playground organizers Joseph Lee, Henry Curtis and Luther Gulick, who were all guided by Hallian play theory, were regular contributors to these publications.⁶⁵

During a period in which mothers were considered almost exclusively responsible for child rearing, the importance of play in the lives of children outside of school and off of the playgrounds, was not a popular topic in either women's magazines or in child rearing manuals. Between 1890-1920, only three articles on play appeared in women's magazines, the first not until 1914.⁶⁶ In her review of three popular women's magazines, The Ladies Home Journal, Woman's Home Companion and Good Housekeeping, published between 1890-1949, Stendler⁶⁷ found that in the 1890-1920 period, the articles overwhelmingly dealt with the child's physical growth and with the development of a good moral character, a personal trait that was of primary concern to mothers of that period. Child rearing practices were designed to produce children who would exemplify the Victorian ideals of courtesy, honesty, orderliness, industriousness and generosity. It was mother, in a good Christian home environment, who was crucial to the formation of good character through imitation.⁶⁸ The role of play in character formation was not mentioned.

The most popular child rearing manual of the period was

Luther Emmett Holt's, The Care and Feeding of Children,⁶⁹ the "infant Bible of the nation," reprinted twelve times between 1894-1926.⁷⁰ This book marks a shift in the focus of child care manuals from an emphasis on the raising of the morally "correct child" of the Victorian era to the "mechanical baby" of the 1900-1920 period, raised according to a rigid schedule.⁷¹ According to child care historian Daniel Beekman:

At the beginning of this century, the morality of the middle class was still tied to Victorian ideals, but technology was carrying the parents and children into another world . . . Little was known about children in a scientific sense, but a good deal was known about production. Production demanded regularity, repetition and scheduling. All that seemed to be required of the family was that the parents submit to the same kind of systemization and discipline in the handling of their children as was routinely demanded of factory workers on a production line. Books of the time reflect the unanimity with which middle class parents supported the new doctrines. It was schedule the child or spoil the child . . . The new methodology appears in book after book largely without argument.⁷²

Highly readable in its question and answer format, Holt's book covered topics of feeding and physical growth, infant care, such as bathing, and miscellaneous problems, "bad habits" such as thumbsucking and masturbation. On the topic of playing, however, Holt devotes only three questions.

At what age may playing with babies be begun?
Never until four months, and better not
until six months. The less of it at any time the
better for the infant.

What harm is done by playing with very young babies?
They are made nervous and irritable, sleep badly
and suffer in other respects.

When should children be played with?
If at all, in the morning, or after midday naps.
Never just before bedtime.⁷³

In a later manual Holt conceded that toys were important in helping children to develop imagination and concentration and to train them in habits of order, neatness and regularity, an important theme of the time. He did, however, hold to a differentiation of toys suitable for boys and girls. Boys should be given engines, cars, blocks, balls and toy soldiers, while girls should play with dolls and housekeeping sets, this in preparation for their future gender roles.⁷⁴ Jacob Abbott in his 1871 best seller, Gentle Measures in the Management and Training of the Young,⁷⁵ a treatise on moral guidance of the young, argued instead that play for the older child was important to proper development. In imagery that predated Freud, Abbott urged that the natural energy of the child not be repressed. "We must favor and promote, by every means in our power, the activity of children, not censure and repress it."⁷⁶ Abbott, influenced by Elizabeth Peabody, a follower of Froebel's and a leader of the kindergarten movement in the United States, also recognized the educational value of play and toys.⁷⁷ Middle class families of the 1880-1920 period continued to value play, particularly with educational toys, for their older children at home.⁷⁸ Yet, in her review of Infant Care Bulletins published by the United States Department of Labor Children's Bureau, Martha Wolfenstein documents a view of play in the 1914 edition as "suspect," "dangerous," even "wicked," because it might lead to erotic excitement.⁷⁹ Play for babies, was discouraged because it "produced unwholesome

pleasure and ruined the baby's nerves."⁸⁰ Just as there was not one view on the nature of the child, there was not one view on the role of play. Attitudes toward play still depended on the social status and even degree of piety of the family.

With the rapid and disruptive social changes of the 1880-1920 period, which we shall examine in the following chapter, the middle class family became increasingly private,⁸¹ and attention focused not on the play of these children, who played at home, often with family members, particularly their mothers,⁸² but rather on the play of the poor and immigrant children who crowded into American cities, and whose street play constituted a social problem.

G. Stanley Hall and his followers, who put his theory to work on urban playgrounds, believed that play was a means of working out atavistic tendencies that aided the child in adaptation to modern urban life. In the process it induced conformity to American norms and values, prevented delinquency, and promoted brotherhood and physical health. It was precisely because playground organizers lacked confidence in the mothers of the poor immigrant children they hoped would use their playgrounds to serve as models of good character, that they assigned this role to playground supervisors. Middle class mothers, on the other hand, were assumed to be competent role models. Through imitation of their mother, rather than through play, these children would learn socially acceptable behavior and develop socially

valued personality traits.

Popularization of Play Theories 1920-1945

If child rearing literature of the 1890-1920 period concentrated on the morality and physical care of children and aimed at producing "the mechanical baby" whose bodily functions accommodated a rigid schedule, the manuals of the 1920-1945 period had a decidedly different focus. Behavioral psychologist John B. Watson shifted the focus of child care from morality and physiology to psychology with an emphasis on behaviorism, though like Holt, he too believed in rigid scheduling. In the introduction to his popular child care manual, Psychological Care of Infant and Child,⁸³ Watson in 1928 wrote:

Ever since my first glimpse of Dr. Holt's "The Care and Feeding of Children," I hoped some day to be able to write a book on the psychological care of the infant. I believed then that psychological care was just as necessary as physiological care. Today I believe it is in some ways more important. Healthy babies do grow up under the most varied form of feeding and bodily care . . . But once a child's character has been spoiled by bad handling which can be done in a few days, who can say that the damage is ever repaired?⁸⁴

Stating that "no one today knows enough to raise a child,"⁸⁵ Watson offered advice to hapless mothers on the assumption that they "want their children to be happy, efficient, well adjusted to life."⁸⁶

According to Watson, "Children are made, not born, failure to bring up a happy child, a well adjusted child falls upon the parents shoulders . . . The rearing of children

is the most difficult of all professions."⁸⁷ Anxiety would be the hallmark of parenting for close to two decades, until Dr. Benjamin Spock, in direct refutation of Watson, would tell parents to relax.

Rejecting the then popular belief in instincts as the basis for behavior, Watson maintained that all forms of behavior, such as cleanliness, curiosity and play were built in by the parents through conditioning and by the environment that the parents provided for their children.⁸⁸ Using his conditioning techniques as a guide, mothers stood a chance of instilling good habits into their children, thereby producing "a happy child." For Watson, play was part of the child's routine care, "a half hour of quiet play" before bedtime. "This is a good time to give the father his half hour. It keeps the children used to male society. Then, too, they have their chance to ply him with questions."⁸⁹ Early morning activities included a play period "until the mother or nurse has done her household duties." Weather permitting, children should play outdoors and "exercise up and down the sidewalk in front of the house or in the backyard " on an age appropriate riding toy, such as a scooter or tricycle.⁹⁰ Morning play should be alone or with a nurse or mother. Following an afternoon nap, the child should go out again, but "social contacts should have their place as part of the afternoon schedule . . . Games with other children, on the street, in the park or in the home . . . Every home that has a right to house a child should have a back

yard or be situated near a park, where at least an hour of the day can be spent in play with companions."⁹¹

Watson advocated toys as children's playthings for the habit formation they facilitated.

Neatness and order must be instilled early if it is ever to be instilled . . . Children with toys all over the floor do not have time at the end of the day to clear them all up carefully . . . There are several very definite things we can do about it.

(1) Don't let the children have too many toys at a time . . . (2) Choose the toy for the age . . . (3) Choose only well made toys."⁹²

Failure to meet the first and third pieces of advice would result in the formation of destructive toy habits; failure to meet the second, in dependence, since children, in order to use the toy, would have to count on someone's help. Watson encouraged parents to teach their children to make their own toys. "Every behaviorist loves to see the child begin to construct objects from raw material . . . What I am heading for is the building of the habits of ingenuity, of skill and of craftsmanship."⁹³ In the psychology of the 1920s habit was more than a technique for training, it was also used to explain other behavior. Neurotic behavior, for instance, was a bad habit."⁹⁴

The child's psychological care was addressed in two other books of the 1920s, Douglas Thom's Everyday Problems of the Everyday Child and Erwin Wexberg's Your Nervous Child.⁹⁵ This focus on psychological care resulted in the establishment of mental hygiene clinics where experts could reassure anxious parents that their child was indeed normal. Douglas Thom was

the director of the Boston Habit Clinic set up to deal with children who were developing undesirable methods of solving life's daily problems. Bad habits and "unhealthy methods of reaction" were analyzed in habit clinics where through proper training and play therapy the clinics could further "the formation of habits that will tend toward the proper development of the child and its best interests."⁹⁶ Play was an activity that had the potential to instill correct habits and to eliminate bad ones.

Watson's contention that "no well trained man or woman has ever watched the complete and daily development of a single child from its birth to its third year"⁹⁷ was blatantly incorrect. In 1911 Dr Arnold Gesell founded the Yale Clinic of Child Development (originally the Yale Psycho-Clinic) and began systematic studies of child development with normal children from infants to five years of age. At the end of his first major work on child development, The Mental Growth of the Preschool Child,⁹⁸ Gesell included normative summaries of developmental schedules. A difficult book to read, it had a limited audience. In 1928, he followed with Infancy and Human Growth,⁹⁹ which dealt with both physical and mental development. With the popular child rearing manual of 1930, The Guidance of Mental Growth in Infant and Child,¹⁰⁰ the "mechanical baby" gave way to the "standardized child,"¹⁰¹ as parents used Gesell's charts to determine if their offspring were up to snuff both physically and mentally by the

attainment of significant developmental milestones at statistically average ages. In 1943 Gesell and his colleague Frances Ilg published their most accessible and most popular child rearing book, Infant and Child in the Culture of Today, followed by companion volumes that followed the child to the age of sixteen.¹⁰² Still organized around normative developmental profiles, these books also dealt with children's social behaviors and interests, such as interpersonal relationships, schooling, play and pastimes, all described with growth gradients.

"Children reveal themselves most transparently in their play life,"¹⁰³ begins the chapter on play in The Child From Five to Ten. Unlike Watson, who rejected play as instinctive behavior, Gesell and Ilg maintained that play "arises spontaneously out of instinctive promptings which represent developmental needs . . . No one needs to teach a child to play."¹⁰⁴ Play is the major business of childhood and from it the child acquires emotional satisfaction unattainable from other forms of activity. "Deeply absorbing play seems to be essential for full mental growth. Children who are capable of such intense play are most likely to give a good account of themselves when they are grown up."¹⁰⁵ The authors conclude the chapter on play with typical age related play behaviors and activities from the nursery games of the one year old to the interest in organized clubs such as Cubs and Brownies of the nine year old. Play, parents are told, has a "developmental logic which does not necessarily fit into our

preconceptions."¹⁰⁶ Thus, the authors stress the importance, as did Watson, but for different reasons, of age appropriate toys and activities. The importance of play in child development is clear:

Play is an outlet for obstructed and overflowing energy . . . Play is imitative, repetitive or rhythmical . . . Play is psycho-motor exercise. . . Play harks back to the past . . . Play penetrates into the future . . . In all children play has a creative function. It serves to organize the abilities with which the child is endowed. In its supreme moments it reveals his individuality and his potentialities.¹⁰⁷

Gesell and Ilg sounded an early warning on the hazards of television, then a fairly new invention, though one enthusiastically accepted into American homes. They cautioned that as the culture became more technological the psychological health and growth of children would need increased protection, particularly for children between the ages of five to ten who are the ones to be prematurely drawn into adult culture.

We should have more faith in the simple, unsophisticated forms of play life, which keep the child closer to nature. Technology tends to use more and more technology in order to catch up with the pace which technology itself sets. Hence, radio, comics, movies and television for children . . . They are a poor substitute for the most basic types of play which come from inner urges and express the initiative and resourcefulness of the growing mind.¹⁰⁸

Gesell and Ilg, whose particular emphasis was on the physical and mental growth of the child, would remain popular sources of advice on child rearing throughout most of the following period, 1945-1990. Indeed, their book Infant and Child in the Culture of Today was published in a revised

addition in 1974 with Louise Bates Ames as another collaborator. The Child From Five to Ten and Youth: The Child From Ten to Sixteen were also published in later editions. Infant and Child in the Culture of Today was also heartily endorsed by Benjamin Spock in all of the editions of Baby and Child Care and by Fitzhugh Dodson in How to Parent, their very popular subsequent child rearing manuals, which we shall examine.

Another important child rearing manual of the period, Babies Are Human Beings,¹⁰⁹ written by Dr. C. Anderson Aldrich and his wife, Mary M. Aldrich was the first to advocate parents having fun with their babies. Enjoying the baby and coddling it, Watsonian taboos, became not only acceptable, but essential. "The fundamental need of every human being for caressing is nowhere as demonstrable as it is in young babies. Loving care . . . is tremendously important to their successful progress."¹¹⁰

Intended to popularize some of Gesell's earlier, largely inaccessible works, the manual viewed the baby as human from birth, not a creature whose humanity followed a period of training and manipulation. The specific task of the parents was to ease the child's adjustment into society as the inevitable conflicts with the environment developed. Taking their clues from the known facts of development based on the research of Gesell and Ilg, parents were advised not to urge ideal standards on their youngsters before they could physiologically deal with them, but rather to respond to the

babies built in developmental plan. So much for the standardized child. The revolution in child rearing, commonly attributed to Benjamin Spock, had its roots in the Aldrich text.

One of the important social changes of the period is that popular magazines began to publish articles on play based on popular themes of the child rearing manuals. Magazines of the period reflected the emphasis on play as an activity which develops good habits and good health. The age gradient application of play activities and play artifacts developed by Gesell and Ilg and related to the child's physical and mental growth is also recurrent in the popular literature. Two other themes emerged, however, which were more the "grassroots" concerns of reform minded citizens and parents than the theoretical ideas of psychologists. These were the inseparable issues of child safety and home play.

Home Play: Safe, Secure and Supervised

With the growth of American cities and their increasingly congested vehicular traffic, young children at play in the streets were regularly killed and maimed. As early as 1904 a New York Times editorial noted that "with disquieting frequency children are ground up under street cars."¹¹¹ For children five to fourteen in the United States the average yearly accidental street fatalities rose from 1600 in the years 1913-1917 to 3100 between 1918-1922.¹¹² In New York state alone, the death toll of the automobile for

1922 was 1808; for 1923, 1966--a total of 3774, thirty two less than the combined number of deaths from typhoid fever, diphtheria and scarlet fever. Thirty percent of these fatalities were children under fifteen years of age. Approximately 14,500 children under fifteen were injured in automobile related accidents in New York state in 1923.¹¹³

In an effort to halt the carnage wrought by the automobile, safety campaigns were begun to educate children and adults to the hazards of street play.¹¹⁴ Urban playgrounds were a potential haven for the propertyless, but the safety campaigns also sent many children into their own backyards as homeowners converted backyard space into home made playgrounds.

"Where shall the children play?" begins an article in Parents' Magazine by a concerned mother who tired of sounding the perpetual warning, "Don't go near the street, dear." Determined to provide her children with a safe and fun filled play space, she "transformed an unattractive, about-as-big-as-a-handkerchief backyard" into a "delightful playground" which became a haven for all of the neighborhood children.¹¹⁵

The Mitchell Manufacturing Company advertised its playground apparatus in Parents' Magazine under the headline "Healthy Fun for Children."

Mitchell Backyard Playground apparatus encourages happy, healthy play for children. It keeps them off the streets, away from trucks and autos, and helps them grow with strong bodies and keen minds.¹¹⁶

Built for safety as well as fun, the slides and swings were reasonably priced, sturdily constructed and sure to give

"many happy hours of healthy exercise."

So popular had home playgrounds become by the mid-1930s that in 1935 the Readers' Guide to Periodic Literature began a separate entry under PLAYGROUNDS, HOME. From the backyard beach¹¹⁷ to the backyard vacation,¹¹⁸ magazines advised readers on the "how to" of outdoor home play. "Just because the house you live in has never had a playground is no excuse for your children's not having one,"¹¹⁹ concluded a practical mother. Offered another, "With proper planning and the right equipment, backyard play can get children to think of home as something more than a place to eat and sleep."¹²⁰

Child safety was only one goal of backyard play. As women's changing roles, the Depression and World War II disrupted traditional family patterns, parents were urged, in the articles of popular magazines of the period, to learn how to play with their children as a means of enhancing family solidarity.¹²¹ In addition, as we shall see in Chapter IV, during this same period, local playground and recreation departments, in cooperation with the schools, were conducting home play campaigns, intended to promote family solidarity along with child development through play.

The campaign for home play, though not begun by psychologists, cannot be seen apart from the then current insights psychological theories provided on the value of play in child development, particularly those of Watson and Gesell. If, indeed, it was possible to leave "little to chance" in the development of the child, as psychologists

suggested, and with play recognized as an important activity in child development, it was then the responsibility of parents to see to it that their children did, indeed, learn the important lessons that play provided. "The value of play to a child will largely depend on the responsibility taken by the adults in charge of him,"¹²² parents were told. They were to provide their children not only with play space which gives the child "psychological as well as physical security," but proper play materials as well. "It is necessary to choose toys wisely."¹²³ Following Gesell, parents were advised that, "Choosing a child's play material is not a trivial matter. In order to select them wisely an adult needs a good working knowledge of what children can do at different ages. Physical skills and muscle coordination develop in orderly fashion. If you give your child play equipment which he is not ready to use, the chances are he becomes discouraged or destructive."¹²⁴ Proper play experiences should develop in children a willingness to share, cooperation, taking turns and the ability to follow orders.¹²⁵

Play was seen, too, as a means of correcting behavior problems and instilling good habits in children. "Every parent cherishes a mental picture of an ideal child. Such a child should conform with the physical, mental and social standards set for his age."¹²⁶ Unfortunately, not all children live up to this ideal. Some children are dependent, awkward, bossy, sissies or tomboys. If these deviations are not

corrected early, Snyder and Snyder warn parents, they "may develop into habits leading to later maladjustments." Fortunately, "correction can often be effected most readily and most naturally through careful direction of a child's play life."¹²⁷ Good habits can be taught through play but "rightly selected toys" are essential. For instance, if toys are ill adapted to a child's stage of development, dependency will be increased since the child will need help to use them. A sense of failure or a bad habit, such as destructiveness, following frustration in using the toy, may result. On the other hand, skill appropriate toys will build confidence. Children should be provided with ample space to keep toys, so that the "habit of orderliness can be developed." Play groups where team or cooperative play is required will help to overcome bossiness and to break a child of "the habit of domineering."¹²⁸ Just as play could correct behavioral problems, its value in correcting emotional problems was similarly recognized. The nervous, irritable, and bashful child could be helped through play and proper equipment to overcome his difficulties, developing social poise, confidence, and the "habit of success" through his play.¹²⁹ The influence of John B. Watson on these play ideas is obvious.

By 1939, the value of play in child development had been so well accepted that a report of the White House Conference on Children in a Democracy included in its first paragraph, "When we speak of play as a need of children we

speak about that which to them is most important and most necessary, if they are to develop as normal, healthy individuals." The report further indicated the shifting view of play from an activity that builds character to an activity that shapes personality.

To emphasize recreation as a means of reducing or preventing juvenile delinquency, or achieving some other worthy end, is to slur over its essential character, its developmental role as play, fun, relaxation, release, joy. Play and recreation are part of the soil in which personality grows . . . Play is as vital to the child's developing personality as food is to his growing body. Children are children but once. Their time is play time.¹³⁰

The report further recommended that the public in general, and parents in particular be given education in the importance of play to mental hygiene and child development through journals, newspapers and the radio and through parent education classes and literature.¹³¹ Thus, to the young mother taking a course in child guidance who asked, "But why should I take children's play seriously?" the answer was a serious one indeed.

What happens in the hours of freedom and play . . . determines the fundamental patterns of the growing personality as surely as more formal education. Play gives the child what education, work, recreation, art and exploration provide adults. And it is at home that the largest part of the child's play life is lived. In learning to guide wisely the play life of the child, parents are touching the springs of growth at a most vital point.¹³²

Parents were told that "every child should have, if possible, a play yard outside and a play room inside."¹³³ The yard should be equipped with swings and climbing bars, a mud bank, a sand box and a little pool. The play room, filled

with toys and arts and crafts materials, and "planned for the child rather than with adult esthetic standards in mind. . ." should, ideally, "have an immediate entrance to the play yard."¹³⁴ Parents were cautioned, however, not to rush their children into play activities that they might be developmentally unprepared for. "Parents should watch for signs of readiness, provide the kinds of materials or opportunities for which the child seems ready, and then wait to see what the child can do. And if it turns out that the child is not yet ready, there should be no urging. Just wait. The child will achieve whatever it is in his own good time."¹³⁵

The research of Gesell and his colleagues on the role of play in child development went beyond age gradient interests and activities to include sex differences in play preferences.¹³⁶ Arguing on the side of innate differences in play patterns, Dr. Helen Thompson, a colleague of Gesell's at the Yale Clinic of Child Development, wrote, "It is not unreasonable to suppose that society's ideas of what differences should exist between the sexes are based in part, at least, on differences which inherently exist."¹³⁷ Thompson maintained that boys' greater ease of delivery and accuracy of directing the throw of a ball "are due to inherent and biologically determined factors, and not to training."¹³⁸

She held this position as well for girls' tendency to play with dolls and boys' preference for mechanical objects. Thompson argued that not only did play preferences vary by

sex, but so too did play patterns.

Boys show more inclination than girls for games involving teamwork and formation. Whether conditioned by physical or by social and psychological factors, this pattern of operating as a group, which will be characteristic of males in later years to a far greater degree than females, is thus laid down early in play.¹³⁹

Thompson's ideas would remain unchallenged for almost three decades when, in the spirit of the Women's Movement of the 1960s, they came under study and attack. Until then, there would be boys' play and girls' play--different activities that served as rehearsals for the different gender defined roles that youngsters would presumably adopt as adults.

Popularization of Play Theories 1945-1980s

Popular child rearing manuals of the 1920-1945 period created anxiety and confusion for mothers. According to historian Hardyment:

If things did not go according to . . . plan, the Watson plan, or the Gesell developmental schedule, mothers felt that they had done something wrong, or that their child was abnormal. It was hardly surprising that they should consider themselves at fault. Most of the manuals made it clear that they were likely to be so.¹⁴⁰

Thus, in May 1946 when Dr. Benjamin Spock published his Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care,¹⁴¹ which opened with the reassuring message, "Trust yourself. You know more than you think you do.", the book became an instant success. In the first ten months after publication 547,938 copies were sold. By 1972, sales had reached over 24,000,000 copies of

the paperback version, making it the world's all time best seller after Shakespeare and the Bible.¹⁴²

Spock told parents not only what they needed to hear to allay the anxieties of parenting, but what they wanted to hear following years of economic depression and war. Spock's biographer, Lynn Z. Bloom, comments:

After an era of anxiety, the postwar generation wanted to love. Dr. Spock urged, "Don't be afraid to love [your baby] . . . Every baby needs to be smiled at, talked to, played with, fondled--gently and lovingly." After the grimness and constraint of the Depression and the war years, when children were raised in a rigidly scheduled fashion reflecting the times, the new generations . . . wanted to have fun. Dr. Spock encouraged, "Be natural, and comfortable and enjoy your baby." He was saying exactly what they wanted to hear.¹⁴³

Playing with and enjoying one's baby was an idea that preceded Spock, however. The Aldriches, whose manual influenced Spock, had already spoken out in favor of coddling babies. Further, in the 1942 and 1945 editions of the Infant Care Bulletins of the Children's Bureau, enjoyment, fun and play permeate all parental activities with the child. Not only may parents enjoy their babies, enjoying them had become a new imperative. For once play had been associated with muscular development, necessary exercise, strength and control, instead of unhealthy excitement and nervous debilitation, play assumed a new obligatory quality.¹⁴⁴ This "fun morality" remained prominent in the 1951 edition of the Infant Care Bulletin. Fun morality was acceptable not only for its contrasts with the austerity, military discipline and death associated with war, but was facilitated by the

economic prosperity of the 1950s and the 1960s, which enabled parents to give time and money to their children in quantities before unknown.¹⁴⁵

Despite this similar position on playfulness, Spock's manual differed from all those that had preceded it. Though Spock himself was in accord with Arnold Gesell that child development proceeds in an inevitable pattern, his book contained no charts with age specific skills as the Gesell books did. This removed a norm against which children could be compared. Yet, Spock did advise his readers to consult Infant and Child in the Culture of Today "to appreciate your child's development"¹⁴⁶ with the cautionary note, however, to read it in light of Spock's own assessment that "every baby's pattern of development is different."¹⁴⁷

Beyond this break with strict developmental schedules, Spock's book had a distinct psychological orientation that set him apart from both his predecessors and his contemporaries. Spock's views on ideal parent-child relationships were strongly influenced by the pragmatism of the American educator and philosopher, John Dewey, and the psychoanalytic perspective of Sigmund Freud.¹⁴⁸ Like Dewey, Spock "encouraged parents to relax their discipline, to understand their child's nature, to trust his drive to become mature and responsible and to regard his needs as equally legitimate and important as those of grown ups."¹⁴⁹ From a Freudian perspective Spock stressed that the experiences of the child within the family in the early years of life would

largely determine the child's social and psychological adjustment as an adult. Parent-child relationships were to be characterized by warmth, love, security, stability, and responsiveness. Emphasizing principles of preventive psychiatry, Spock urged parents "to consider the child's welfare as paramount even if it means placing the child's psychological needs before those of the parents."¹⁵⁰

Thus, Spock himself believes that his most significant contribution to the advice on child rearing was the Freudian psychoanalytic perspective he brought to understanding child development.¹⁵¹ Though Spock was not the first author of a child care manual to ground his advice in Freudian theory, he was the most popular. His interpretation of Freud, unlike that of other child care authors, was not expressly worded to cause anxiety in its dire predictions for future emotional health should parents mismanage the early years, although he clearly put the weight of responsibility for the child's healthy psychological development on parents.

Dr. Margaret A. Ribble's The Rights of Infants: Early Psychological Needs and Their Satisfaction¹⁵² was a psychoanalytically oriented predecessor to Spock's Baby and Child Care. Ribble asserted that babies should be given large measures of tenderness and love, that in "the feeling life of the baby, the emotional reactions get their initial momentum and reactions."¹⁵³ Ribble warned that:

Parents have to remind themselves constantly that human personality is a continuous development, and healthy emotions as well as free creative intelligence are rooted in early infant

experience . . . It becomes increasingly evident that most of the emotional problems of children and adolescents begin with traumatic relational situations in early life . . . Modern parents need to acquaint themselves with the facts of mental as well as physical development.¹⁵⁴

According to Spock, Ribble's book "made the conscientious, intellectual kind of mother who bought it worry about whether she had the qualities and understanding to meet her baby's needs."¹⁵⁵ Thus, Spock took it upon himself to interpret Freudian theory for the lay reader. Like Freud, Spock recognized the value of play in helping children deal with the problems and anxieties of growing up. "Play is serious business . . . A child loves his play, not because it is easy but because it is hard."¹⁵⁶ Spock noted the role of play in muscular development, the control of aggression, particularly through athletics, the mastery of fears, as practice for future roles, as an emotional catharsis and in learning how to get along with one's peers.

Encouraging doll and household play as "the principal way in which children learn to be parents," Spock continues:

It isn't just positive feelings that children exercise in doll play. Fears, sorrows, resentments, jealousies and hatreds get expressed and gradually understood and digested in valuable ways. A boy who has been frightened and felt ashamed during an inoculation has an urge to repeat the scene until he has mastered his fear, which he does by pretending again and again to inoculate a doll . . . A girl who has resented her mother's punishment may similarly punish her doll, explaining carefully the reason for it, overcoming her sense of outrage by playing out her mother's role and learning in the process, how she will deal with similar situations with her future children . . . I don't want to give the impression that the principal value in play is psychotherapy. But I do mean that the main drive in children's play is to express feelings of many kinds.¹⁵⁷

Selma Fraiberg's The Magic Years,¹⁵⁸ though not as popular as Spock's book was "highly esteemed by parents and professionals, including Spock himself."¹⁵⁹ Though she employs with "sane and witty articulateness the psychoanalytic knowledge of ego development,"¹⁶⁰ Fraiberg introduces her book with none of the assurances of Spock who tells parents they can rely largely on their own good common sense as they confront the problems of child rearing. Fraiberg, a psychotherapist, takes a heavily psychoanalytic approach to child rearing. She tells parents, on the very first page of the preface, that the magic world of childhood is:

An unstable world, at times a spooky world, and as the child gropes his way toward reason and an objective world he must wrestle with the dangerous creatures of his imagination and the real and imagined dangers of the outer world, and periodically we are confronted with his inexplicable fears or baffling behavior.¹⁶¹

An important way to master the normal fears of childhood is through play. Recounting the story of her own niece's fear of tigers, Fraiberg explains:

The child who tries to overcome his fear of tigers by becoming a tiger in his play is employing a perfectly healthy approach to the tiger problem. A child who stalks his parlor tigers with homemade weapons is conducting an honorable fight against his imaginary fears . . . The imaginative play of children serves mental health by keeping the boundaries between fantasy and reality. If the rules of the game are adhered to, if the imaginary beasts are kept in their place and brought under control in the parlor, there is less likelihood that they will invade the real world. . . . Play is one of the means by which the child attempts to overcome his fears.¹⁶²

While Fraiberg's book aims to "promote the mental health of

children" by applying "the important discoveries in child development and child psychology,"¹⁶³ that goal seems a mighty one to achieve. "Our problem is to find out how a child who is to be reared in our culture today can achieve the necessary harmony between his drives and his conscience and between his ego and his society, serving the best interest of his society without succumbing to illness."¹⁶⁴

Despite the many insights offered throughout the book, particularly the emphasis on emotionally strong parental ties which cause the child to feel both loved and attached, Fraiberg concludes the book with an ambiguous answer to the question, "Can we assure against neurosis?" She says, "The best of our knowledge in contemporary psychology cannot tell us with scientific exactness how we shall prevent neurosis in childhood."¹⁶⁵

The fear of inflicting psychological harm on one's children by mismanaging developmental crises or by not forging strong enough bonds with parents, particularly mother, were found not only in Fraiberg's book, but in other Freudian inspired manuals of the period, including Edith Buxbaum's Your Child Makes Sense, A Guidebook for Parents¹⁶⁶ and psychologist John Bowlby's Child Care and the Growth of Love.¹⁶⁷ Bowlby, who stressed the importance of maternal attachment, wrote, "Mother love in infancy is as important for mental health as are proteins and vitamins for physical health."¹⁶⁸

Noting that the Freudian era peaked in America from 1940

to 1960, psychologists Jerome Kagan, Richard Kearsley and Philip Zelazo summarized the Freudian influence on child care:

Rearing a child was a serious and difficult mission with many shoals to avoid. Each child was a potential phobic, obsessive, depressive, or in the extreme, schizophrenic, and parents were warned against the potential dangers of practices they had regarded as innocuous. The prevention of psychological pathology had replaced earlier worry over physical disease.¹⁶⁹

Central to the prevention of pathology was the child's relationship with his or her mother. According to Kagan and co-authors, "The duties of the modern mother had become physical affection, sacrifice of the self's interest for that of the child, consistency of care and enjoyment of interaction with the child."¹⁷⁰ The advice and warnings in the child care manuals contributed to the creation of the "child-centered" society that, as we shall see, defined postwar America. Middle class mothers, to whom the manuals were directed, were urged to stay home, "for the sake of the kids," and to provide play experiences that promoted emotional and mental health, ego development, and mastery over one's fears and unresolved conflicts. To do less would be to jeopardize the child's future psychiatric health.

In the 1960s, however, Freudian influence on child rearing waned and, as Kagan and his associates noted, there was "receptivity to a new paradigm, which was being written by Piaget."¹⁷¹ If the 1945-1960 period was characterized by concerns with attachment to mother and good mental health and emotional depth, the 1960s through the 1980s emphasized

cognitive development. The nurturance of intelligence became the new touchstone in modern child rearing.

Jean Piaget began studying cognitive development of infants in the 1920s, though his work was not adopted in America until the 1950s and early 1960s.¹⁷² Piaget's theory of development claims a hierarchically ordered sequence of cognitive abilities developed through interaction with the social setting from birth onward. Cognitive abilities--thinking, knowing, perceiving, judging and reasoning--advance through the sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational and formal operational stages.¹⁷³

To some extent Piaget's ideas on child development were long overshadowed by the developmental school of Arnold Gesell, though Gesell's colleagues did proclaim that "contrary to rumor there is no basic disagreement between the Piaget and Gesell points of view. Both emphasized that behavior develops in a highly patterned, predictable way, influenced, but not determined by environmental factors."¹⁷⁴ Piaget's ideas first found acceptance among educators who used them as the basis for curriculum reform. Two social crises in the United States led to the inevitable adoption of Piagetian theory in educational and intellectual circles. In 1957 the launching of Sputnik, the Russian satellite, threw the nation into a state of preoccupation with its diminished role as the world's leader in science and engineering. Ten years later, the nation began to grapple with compensatory education to meet the needs of poor and minority children, including

Project Head Start, for disadvantaged preschoolers. New curriculum projects, planned "to educate a new generation of scientifically literate and productive citizens," were based on Piaget's notion of structure and the sequential development of intellectual skills.¹⁷⁵

By the late 1960s several popular child rearing manuals used a Piaget inspired format, including T. Berry Brazelton's Infants and Mothers: Differences in Development¹⁷⁶ and Toddlers and Parents,¹⁷⁷ Penelope Leach's Baby and Child,¹⁷⁸ Mary Ann Pulaski's Your Baby's Mind and How It Grows: Piaget for Parents,¹⁷⁹ and the very popular, How to Parent¹⁸⁰ by Dr. Fitzhugh Dodson who combines Piaget's theories on intellectual development with Erikson's psychosocial stages in the development of the self. Dodson in particular stresses cognitive or intellectual development of the child, noting that during the preschool stage of development children are particularly responsive to intellectual stimulation and urges parents to make their home a "school for learning."¹⁸¹ Dodson cites research by Dr. Benjamin Bloom of the University of Chicago that demonstrates that a child develops 50% of his intelligence by the age of four, another 30% by the age of eight, and the remaining 20% by the age of seventeen.¹⁸² Play, Dodson writes, is "the major means by which a child educates himself about his world. To rob a child of play, or to provide him with inadequate play materials, is to rob him of his major source of learning about life at this stage of development."¹⁸³ Dodson stresses

that play is an important activity for acquiring basic learning skills. The larger the child's repertoire of these skills, the higher his IQ, the more likely he is to succeed in school and in life.¹⁸⁴ Dodson tells parents that school begins at home and that they can teach their preschoolers math, reading and highly developed language skills. Educational toys, books, and records are the "textbooks of the preschool years." Dodson writes:

Since your child is learning all of the time, what he will learn in his home play will depend on what kind of play equipment you provide, how much you know how to play with him, and how much you know how to teach him to play by himself. . . . The intellectual stimulation you give him is of crucial importance for the optimal development of his intelligence.¹⁸⁵

Dodson concludes with an appendix of toys and play equipment for preschoolers. Though indeed there are toys to stimulate role playing and creative fantasy, fine and gross motor development and creative arts and crafts, Dodson also lists toys and equipment for cognitive stimulation, mathematics and numbers, science, foreign language, music and dance, and field trips to local places of interest.¹⁸⁶ All this for children between the ages of three to five.

All of the Piaget inspired manuals note the importance of appropriate play and toys in stimulating the process of cognitive development. With the intellectual development of young children as an important goal in parenting, it can safely be assumed that middle class parents continued to prioritize intellectual growth even as their children grew up. And play, though very broadly defined, was indisputably

an important vehicle for cognitive development.

Jerome Kagan, in assessing the emphasis on Piaget-influenced manuals, commented, "Advice to mothers emphasizes rituals and purchase of toys that are supposed to promote the precocious growth of cognitive skills rather than interventions that might affect cooperativeness, honesty, vitality or empathy."¹⁸⁷ According to Kagan, Kearsley and Zelazo, modern American parents "worry more about their children's intellect than about their physical appearance, vigor, health or even happiness."¹⁸⁸

Child developmental theories such as those proposed by Piaget and Gesell inevitably raised the question of the possibility of speeding up development. Piaget went so far as to call the question "Can we speed up behavior by early intervention?", the American question.¹⁸⁹ Piaget, as Gesell, answered in the negative. One cannot speed up behavior or significantly influence the orderly development of behavior by self conscious efforts.¹⁹⁰ Such denials, offset by those who argued otherwise, did not stop parents, as we shall see, from rushing their children through activities at increasingly early ages, from the play activities advised by Dodson, to the programs offered by baby guru, Glenn Doman's Better Baby Institute to Little League Baseball and scouting programs for six and five year olds.

Hardyment concludes:

The intensity with which children's play time was approached by all postwar writers on baby care derived from its dual importance, its implications for both emotional and intellectual

development. The psychoanalyst, long accustomed to play therapy, which allowed the child to reveal hidden problems by "playing them out" saw its function as emotional expression. . . . The developmental psychologist, on the other hand, was interested in play as an aid to cognition. Toys were crutches through which to grasp new facts about the nature of the outside world.¹⁹¹

The popularization of play theories in magazines of the period reflects the emphasis found in child rearing manuals.

By the time the children of the 1920s and 30s became the parents of the late 40s and 50s, any lingering attitudes toward play as idleness and potentially troublesome behavior, had all but disappeared. Play was unequivocally the child's right and a necessary activity for sound physical and mental growth. Yet, childhood training is not easily undone and as James Hymes, Jr. wrote:

Almost every one of us carries within us the seeds of some antiplay feelings . . . Some of these anti-play feelings stem from our history . . . Then play was evil . . . Then play was bad because play was not work.¹⁹²

Hymes, then a Professor of Education at State Teachers' College in New Paltz, New York, and later the author of The Child Under Six goes on to persuade his readers that play is, indeed, the solution to their children's present and future problems. Thus, though old practices and ideas may die hard for some, die, indeed, they must.

Every one of us wants children to face problems, to think them through, and to learn to solve them . . . Play gives children the chance for this learning. It continually confronts children with real tasks and children work them out . . . But even more important . . . it is play that teaches prime lessons in life, play that gives children the practice in social skills

they and our world so desperately need.¹⁹³

Because children by virtue of their size, strength, skill level and dependency are often frustrated and powerless in the pursuit of their desires, play offers them the chance for control and mastery. In the world of make believe play children can be mean and angry, can hate and be tough, without severe penalties. Through play, children engage in "trial runs," practice sessions that prepare them for future life activities. Thus, Hymes concluded:

Good play can lessen the feelings of fear and anger and inadequacy. It can provide power. . . It can provide control . . . It can provide a safe world for the feelings so that children do not have to carry confusion inside of them . . . Through good play children can learn to live with themselves and learn to live with others and learn to live in this world as this world operates.¹⁹⁴

If play could do all this for children, the fallout of good play behavior had positive consequences for the family in general. "When we parents use our children's play for the creation of happier and richer living, we are going to be surprised at the deep rich veins of new family understanding we will strike,"¹⁹⁵ one father tells his readers.

Indeed, for parents who carefully observe their children at play, there is much that they will learn about them for "play is not only one of the most important activities in a child's play life, but also one of the most revealing."¹⁹⁶ Psychiatric social workers Montgomery and Gilbert wrote:

Through play the young child expresses his emotions; he reveals his desires; he acts out his likes and hates; he exposes his hopes and fears. Hidden

things that are bothering him often come out in subtle and indirect ways in play. Through this same medium he shows his skills and personality development.¹⁹⁷

In Freudian terms, play had moved "beyond the pleasure principle."

Play provides children with an outlet for expressing unacceptable emotions, and provides a means of relieving tensions. Through play children learn how to get along with others acquiring "the art of give and take, the social awareness which must come as he grows up."¹⁹⁸ But in order to play creatively and constructively children need two things: equipment, often cited by writers throughout this period, and experiences. It is beholden on parents to provide both. "A child uses his experiences to make his play richer. At the same time that he plays he assimilates these real life experiences and absorbs and understands better what is going on around him."¹⁹⁹ For children, then, play is the important business of life, not just activities children engage in while they wait to grow up.

So central to child development had play become in the postwar period that Roda Bacmeister, author of Caring for the Runabout Child, could proclaim in the opening paragraph of her article "Why Play is Important to Your Child":

The primary job of children is to grow--strong and straight, skillful, friendly and competent. And the three basic ways they go at it are by eating, by sleeping and by playing. I don't know which is the most important.²⁰⁰

Noting, as authors before her had, the cathartic value of play, Bacmeister wrote:

In play, one is allowed complete freedom of expression. You can say and do all the things you dared not in reality . . . Often children feel deeply hidden fear and guilt about their rages and hates of parents and teachers. Such feelings seem to threaten the basic relationships of love and protection that children know they need. In dramatic play, however, they can safely let it all out in clowning.²⁰¹

Roma Gans, Professor of Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, reported on "Eight Important Things Children Learn From Play."²⁰² Several of the lessons to be learned from play had been previously articulated, such as testing out ideas and preparation for living. Gans added some social consequences of play. Through play children learn to be part of a group and to participate in teamwork. In organized games with standard rules children learn that "rules make sense" and that a fundamental need of life is "to accept and obey regulations and laws that groups and communities must establish to make life safe and comfortable." Play also teaches "respect for others from different backgrounds and with different customs." Finally, while children are learning a valuable set of social and technical skills through play, they also increase their energy to grow in their ability to persevere, to stick at games tenaciously. Gans concludes that play develops good sports as children learn not only to appreciate the glory of victory but to manage the agony of defeat.²⁰³

As the 1950s drew to a close, the importance of play as "a safety valve for feelings" and as a mirror of what was going on in the child's "mind and heart" was still dominant.

According to psychologist Ruth Hartley, then of City College, New York, "Through play children can 'explode' harmlessly, and work off hostile and aggressive feelings without hurting another person or bringing penalty upon themselves."²⁰⁴ In dramatic play children reveal their needs and fears.

Boys in their incessant cowboys and Indian play, in cops and robbers, in their impersonations of Roy Rogers and Zorro, pilots and bus drivers, tell us how terribly important it is for them to be strong and manly . . . Perhaps the greatest service we can offer our young sons, besides the basic one of loving, is to understand the needs they reveal in their play, accept them and furnish the necessary props to fill out the brave facade.²⁰⁵

Hartley and a colleague, Robert M. Goldenson, stressed the importance of toys in deriving maximum benefits from play. According to Hartley and Goldenson:

No harassed housewife is busier than a playing child and no statesman pondering his country's policies makes more momentous decisions. For play is not only the child's response to life; it is his life, if he is to be a vital, growing, creative individual. . . . The most helpful way a parent can contribute to his child's play life, it seems to us, is to provide the materials, space and opportunities for the kinds of play activities, the child needs . . . When we buy toys we are investing our money as surely as when we buy stocks.²⁰⁶

In less hyperbolic terms, the authors conclude that to be a good plaything, a toy must be sturdy, appropriate to the child's level of skill and compatible with the child's interest.

In a later article, Goldenson, identified as the coauthor of Understanding Children's Play (with Ruth E. Hartley and Lawrence K. Frank) takes readers through several different kinds of play with age specific activities and

appropriate playthings. Goldenson categorizes play into make-believe play, indoor games, outdoor play, making and building, nature play, arts and crafts, musical activities, science activities, hobbies, and readings activities. Here he parallels Gesell's descriptions of play activities within each category, but also notes specific playthings for each type of play and for age groups 1-3, 3-6, 6-9 and 9-12. Goldenson does not attempt to define play, thus he broadly includes as play not only traditional play and games such as boys playing pirates and girls playing jumprope and hopscotch, but activities that more accurately might be called pastimes, such as "watching the growth of onion and narcissus bulbs, radishes and lima beans," arts and crafts, such as beadstringing and clay work, and hobbies such as raising hamsters and collecting coins.²⁰⁷ Piaget and Gesell also blurred over the distinctions among various types of play and games, pastimes, and hobbies, broadening play to include gross motor and fine motor play, creative play, imitative play, social play and cognitive play, categories of play that include activities such as finger painting, playing letter and number games, collecting and swapping cards and bottle tops, reading comics, climbing trees, making model boats, cutting out paper dolls and shooting paper planes, and organized activities such as scouting, though both stressed the importance of make-believe play for the very young child.²⁰⁸

Given the value of play and what it might accomplish for

children, middle class parents understandably "took charge" of their children's free time. Both Gesell and Piaget, as well as writers of articles on play in popular magazines, many of whom were academicians, had described or defined play so broadly that it included pastimes, hobbies and organized activities. Parents, thus, could choose from a wide range of playthings and play experiences that they believed would best serve their children at specific ages or stages of development. As a result, children's traditional play and games were reduced to only one form of ludic activities that had socio-psychological and developmental benefits.

On the other hand, psychologist Bruno Bettelheim, though adopting a Piagetian perspective on play, emphasized the value of traditional and spontaneous play and child-controlled games over organized activities and adult managed play. Discussing the value of children's spontaneous games "of ancient nature and universal persistence" such as stepping on all the cracks in the sidewalk or on none of them, Bettelheim maintains that these games with their self-imposed rules are

experiments in self-mastery to prove to the child that he is capable of commanding his own activity . . . What's more the feeling of power derived from the game may mean to a child that he has mastered not only his own fate, but even that of his seeming masters. Hence, the rhyme, "step on a crack, break my mother's back."²⁰⁹

But games with prescribed rules, such as tag and ball games, which have remained popular as well, serve an equally important function, according to Bettelheim. For these two

types of games, that is, those with self-imposed rules and those with prescribed rules, reflect the two step process in personality development. The self-imposed rule leads to the development of self respect and self-mastery while the games with rules lead to the development of social skills.

According to Bettelheim, "Talent--or individual self--can be developed only in comparative isolation, but character--or social personality--can be achieved only through rich interaction with others."²¹⁰ Bettelheim cites Piaget who stressed the importance of learning rules in the process of socialization. Only when a child can control his tendencies for aggression to reach his goals can he enjoy the continuous interaction with others that is involved in game playing with partners who are also opponents. Through games the child learns to obey rules and control selfish tendencies.²¹¹ Games such as hide and seek and blind man's bluff expose children to the dangers of an insecure world and provide the opportunity for the child to overcome the dangers and master that world. Through imaginative play, the child can become master of himself, submitting his unrealistic daydreams, such as being a King or a general in wartime, to his conscious control. In terms reminiscent of Piaget, Bettelheim writes that children engage in fantasy play "to separate more clearly the inner life of imagination from the outer life of reality, and to gain mastery over both." Through play, then, children develop the inner strengths to enable them "to grow into socially confident and mature adults who can easily

accept the rules of the group while maintaining their individuality."²¹²

As children play they develop a sophisticated repertoire for responding to unfamiliar environments. Thus, they can accommodate novel situations by drawing from the memory bank of experiences gained through play (assimilation). The assimilation-accommodation process leads to higher levels of human functioning. And play is assimilative behavior *par excellence*. Thus, play is vital to adaptation, and by consequence to the growth of intelligence.

This Piagetian view of play, but play very loosely defined to include pastimes, hobbies and organized activities, found its way into popular literature, interpreted for the average reader unfamiliar with the rather difficult language of the theory. Roda Bacmeister tells parents that when the child plays he is "learning about himself and the world around him." Through imitative play, children learn and grow. This growth and learning occurs in interaction with the environment. Thus, the "child learning about the world and himself has for his laboratory all living things."²¹³ There are seeds to plant, trees to climb, pets to raise. Puzzles and games that involve planning and strategy test a child's mental ingenuity. Making things, such as model airplanes and clay figures, or sewing doll clothes is something children do because "they like to--in other words, as play."²¹⁴ As children advance to higher cognitive levels, play activities progress as well,

providing wider opportunities for mastery of the self and the environment.

So associated with cognitive development had play become by the end of the 1960s that Benjamin Spock, who himself did not deal with the growth of intelligence in his child care manual, spoke out against too many play opportunities motivated by a conscious effort to foster intellectual development.

I am afraid of further encouraging those parents who already have become too preoccupied with the importance of advancing their child's intellectual powers . . . I agree that intelligence is vital . . . still, if parents become obsessed with any one aspect of development, they tend to lose sight of the others and the child is apt to turn out lopsided. . . . Play is spontaneous and joyful.²¹⁵

Spock notwithstanding, the role of play in cognitive development continued to receive attention. Bruner described play as "a precursor of adult competence,"²¹⁶ pediatrician T. Berry Brazelton, as "a method of learning, an intellectual exercise."²¹⁷ Psychologists Maria W. Piers and Lorraine Wallach stressed the significance of creative play, seemingly inconsequential activities, to the child's "understanding of the relationships of objects and himself in space, and of his comprehension of such abstract concepts as volume, weight and number."²¹⁸ Citing Piaget, they noted that play leads to more advanced mental operations. In addition, "Not only does play afford the child the chance to look at things in a different way, stretch his imagination, allow him to discover their properties and relationships, the satisfaction derived from such activities lays the groundwork for creative,

constructive achievement in later life."²¹⁹ Play is "the single most important factor in developing future intellectual growth."²²⁰ Bettelheim, however, advises parents not to intervene in the play of their children, in attempts to manage it, for while play does indeed function in the development of cognitive and motor abilities and teaches the child habits most needed for intellectual growth, it does so only through enjoyable play activities chosen by the child.²²¹ Children need an inner life of fantasies and daydreams, which according to Bettelheim, is particularly inaccessible to most middle class kids whose days are filled with scheduled activities--Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts, music and dance lessons, organized sports, often planned by parents, precisely to use time constructively toward the full development of their children.²²² Bettelheim believes that parents organize their children's play because they expect to reap tangible outcomes from these activities--namely, physically and mentally healthy, intelligent, socially competent, talented children. But, according to Bettelheim the value of play resides not in the outcome, but in the act. Only by negotiating the terms of their play among themselves will children develop

their abilities to reason, to judge what is appropriate and what is not, to weigh arguments, to learn how consensus can be reached and how important such consensus is to the launching of an enterprise. Learning all of this is infinitely more significant for the child's development as a social human being than is mastering whatever skills are involved in playing the game itself.²²³

Bettelheim brings us back to traditional play and

child-controlled games. He takes a dim view of skilled pastimes and highly organized and competitive team sports, the "play" of many middle class children because they "distract the child from the task of self-discovery." His lament is not only a recent one, however.

The over-organization of children's lives, including their play, was criticized as early as the mid-1950s. C. Anderson Aldrich and Mary Aldrich, authors of the popular child care manual, Babies Are Human Beings, wrote in 1954:

Many of the modern ways with children are particularly adept in obstructing the progress of dynamic growth. Our present day stressing of organization, for instance, tends to regiment a child's life so that every detail of his program is supervised. One glance at his routine is sufficient to demonstrate how rigidly his world is ordered for him. Early to bed, early to rise, hours at school at standardized tasks, organized play in organized clubs, music lessons, dancing lessons, the superathletic ideal, table and parlor manners, all leave him little time for spontaneity in play or work or for development of his own initiative. ²²⁴

Despite this widely read evaluation, adult organization of children's activities continued to escalate. In light of what parents were reading about what play, however it was defined, could accomplish in their children, it became far too important an activity to be left to the children themselves to manage, or as parents no doubt feared, to mismanage, thereby failing to reap its many benefits. Therefore, it came increasingly under the control of adults for younger and younger children.

As we shall see, over the course of three decades, from the 1950s through the 1970s, children were increasingly

participating in "organizational" life and scheduled activities. Among the most popular, particularly for boys, were highly competitive sports programs, which soared in numbers of organizations and in participants.²²⁵ These programs had both defenders and detractors, as the issue of "kidsports" was covered in popular magazines.²²⁶ So involved had children apparently become in a variety of organized activities that it seemed that traditional, spontaneous, child-controlled play had all but disappeared.

Summary:

Once forbidden as an idle and sinful pursuit, by the middle of the eighteenth century play had grown in acceptance especially as an educational activity, due largely to the popularity of John Locke's Some Thoughts Concerning Education. In the century beginning in 1880 the new science of psychology, particularly the specialization of child development, offered theories of play that contributed to play's transition from a didactic activity to one that builds character, shapes and adjusts the personality, and nurtures intelligence.

G. Stanley Hall's recapitulation theory provided the theoretical underpinning for the Playground Movement, a movement directed largely at urban poor children. Through their play children worked out atavistic tendencies and adjusted to modern urban life. Though Hallian play theory, which fell out of vogue by 1920, was well known to middle

class reformers, it was of no particular influence among middle class parents, still concerned with raising the morally correct child largely through mother's wisdom and example.

The ideas of behavioral psychologist John B. Watson and developmental psychologist Arnold Gesell, unlike those of Hall, reached middle class parents through their widely read child rearing manuals which promoted play as an essential activity in habit formation and in physical and mental growth. Between 1920-1945 their ideas found further dissemination in popular magazines. Prompted by these developmental theories, the physical hazards of unsupervised street play and the disorganization of an economic recession and a world war, middle class parents became actively involved in the play lives of their children. At home play with age-appropriate games and toys and backyard equipment became typical of middle class children.

After 1945 the theories of Freud, Erikson and Piaget, popularized through child care manuals, gave a new emphasis to play. According to Freudian theory, in their play children developed self-mastery while dealing with their fears, emotions and inadequacies. Neo-Freudian Erik Erikson highlighted the ego-enhancing and identity-building features of play. By playing, children developed competence, self confidence, social skills and a defined sense of self. Jean Piaget emphasized the centrality of play in the growth of intelligence and morality.

So crucial had play become to sound physical, emotional and mental growth and development that it became an essential childhood activity and one that middle class parents increasingly organized and managed for their children, given its impressive powers.

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CHAPTER III
FROM STREET PLAY TO PLAYGROUNDS
DOMINANT TRENDS 1880-1920

Socio-Historical Background

According to historian Robert Wiebe, the period 1877-1920 was one characterized by a search for order. Small town life was America's norm in the mid-seventies. Towns and farms were tied to larger urban centers through transportation lines but "these communities moved by the rhythms of agriculture."¹ Self-contained and homogeneous, these small communities constituted "a nation of loosely connected islands."² But, as Wiebe maintains, the years 1877 to 1920 witnessed a fundamental shift in American values from those of the small town in the 1880s to those of a new, bureaucratic-minded middle class by 1920. Rapid urbanization and industrialization on the heels of Reconstruction had caused the breakdown of old patterns of organization. The poverty of the masses combined with the vice and degeneracy of the cities--saloons, brothels, gambling dens, and obscene theatres--raised concerns about the viability and spiritual well being not only of the poor,

but of the growing middle class as well.

From 1870 to 1910 the population of the United States increased two and one third times. The old middle class--business entrepreneurs and independent professionals--grew somewhat more than two times to 3,261,000; the working class a little more than three times, but the new middle class--salaried managerial, professional, technical and clerical workers--grew almost eight times rising from 756,000 to 5,609,000.³ Despite the growth of the middle class its members were considerably outnumbered by foreign born persons, most of whom were working class. Almost one seventh of the total population or 13,345,000 people living in the United States were foreigners by 1910.⁴ Outnumbered and overwhelmed by foreigners in many great cities "the Yankee felt himself pushed into his own ghetto."⁵ The immediate reaction to so broad a shift in the social order within the brief span of forty years was a growing uneasiness among the middle class.⁶

The effort on the part of middle class reformers "to realize familiar and traditional ideals under novel circumstances"⁷ gave rise to the era of Progressivism. Essentially middle class moralists, Progressives saw themselves as "the architects of a stable social order."⁸ One of the general themes of Progressivism was the restoration of a kind of morality and civic purity that was believed to have existed earlier in America and to have been lost to the vice and corruption of the period. To this end,

urban reformers launched a massive moral purification drive in order to restore a cohesive urban moral order which would, as they saw it, benefit the masses, but would strengthen and increase the internal cohesion of the middle class as well.⁹ Seeing moral reform as an even larger issue and greater challenge than political reform Progressives used two distinct strategies to bring about a moral renaissance. One was the coercive approach. Viewing the city as a menace to be subdued, reformers, as self-proclaimed moral wardens, set out to eradicate urban decay primarily by attacking the strongholds of commercialized vice through repressive measures and campaigns. The second approach, not incompatible with the first, was positive environmentalism. This was the attempt to elevate the moral character of city dwellers, particularly the poor, by improving the physical conditions of their lives.¹⁰

Heredity vs. Environment--The Debate Begins

That environment and not heredity alone influenced character and that character could be altered was an idea that had come of age by the end of the nineteenth century. The principles of Darwinian and Spencerian evolutionary theory had been examined and challenged. Man could and ought to "take charge" of the development of society rather than to endure a constant struggle to survive within it.¹¹ Supervision by social physicians of those "less fit" due to a poor environment could bring about individual and societal

amelioration, environmentalists argued.¹² Both hereditarians and environmentalists, however, accepted the proposition that the poor and their offspring were "depraved."

Environmentalists, though, took the position that poverty, crime and degeneracy were acquired rather than genetic characteristics, and therefore neither inevitable nor permanent.¹³ Indeed, this belief was at the very heart of the Progressive reform efforts. Reformers were quite optimistic that the social disorganization of urban centers could be managed, if not reversed, if the "socially weak" could be reached. "Society's right to take an active role in the guidance of the conduct of its members became axiomatic, particularly where children were concerned."¹⁴ Indeed, the central theme of humanitarian progressivism was, in fact, the child. Viewed as "the carrier of tomorrow's hope," the child was considered singularly receptive to education in rational, humane behavior. It was the child, seen as both the victim and the savior of American society, who united campaigns for health, education, labor legislation and an improved urban environment.¹⁵ According to social historian David Rothman, "From child labor legislation to compulsory schooling laws, from kindergartens to playgrounds, from widows' pensions to municipal bureaus of child health and hygiene, Progressives sought to insure the proper physical, mental and moral development of the child."¹⁶ For only with the successful socialization of the American child, could reformers envision an American society largely untroubled by poverty, vice and

crime.¹⁷ Reformers looked to the child for the nation's salvation. Susan Tiffin, a social historian, writes, "The problems of youth were thus not merely humanitarian concerns; they were also important problems of social order."¹⁸

It was the American sociologist Lester Ward who was largely responsible for transforming the popular but harsh Spencerian doctrine of social Darwinism into a full fledged philosophy of ameliorism. Herbert Spencer, the British intellectual, was the great proponent of evolution to the American people. Spencer's basic principle was that society was an organism subject to evolutionary laws. Any attempt to remove human society from the laws that operate upon nature was foredoomed. "Coercion in all its forms. . . is essentially vicious."¹⁹ Social improvement was, indeed, exasperatingly slow but no measure of human tampering could hasten it. The very impatience of reformers in supposing there were artificial means to progress would only bring disaster. According to Spencer men are infinitely more the creatures of history than its creators.

Ward, an environmentalist, repudiated the Spencerian notion of "survival of the fittest." He argued that Spencer's theory was essentially planless in character, ignoring as it did, the capacity of the human mind to plan. With the mind at work, evolution was no longer static, but dynamic, no longer blind, but purposeful, no longer genetically determined, but consciously directed toward worthy social ends. Ward's one great idea stood in precise opposition to

Spencer's. Man, he argued, is not the subject, but the master of nature; all human progress is achieved by the conscious exercise of that mastery over the impersonal and chaotic forces of nature. Man and man alone through the psychic forces of mind and spirit can control and direct the laws of nature.²⁰ Ward believed that:

The office of mind is to direct society into unobstructed channels, to enable these forces to continue in free play, to prevent them from being neutralized by collision with obstacles in their path. In a word, mind has for its function in civilization to preserve the dynamic and prevent the statical condition of the social forces, to prevent the restoration of equilibrium between the social forces and the natural forces operating outside of them.²¹

More clearly than any of his contemporaries Ward saw that although environment transforms man, man transforms environment, and he insisted that the transformation be not haphazard, but planned.²²

By the 1890s new notions regarding man and society had come to the fore. Progressives found themselves with a growing body of theory on which to base their reforms. In the ongoing debate between the effects of nature and environment, the scales had tipped in favor of the environmentalist viewpoint. Just what was the urban environment, which was of such concern, like at the turn of the century?

Immigrants and Urban Blight--Forces to be Reckoned With

Wherever urban reformers looked in the closing years of the nineteenth century they saw disorganization,

fragmentation and urban blight. Million dollar mansions were set apart by boulevards from teeming ghettos with their dilapidated tenements and filthy streets. Urban industrial expansion increased the need for labor which in turn stimulated immigration. Between 1881 and 1920 over twenty million foreigners entered the United States²³ with industry absorbing an ever increasing number of them. In 1870 one industrial worker in three was foreign born; but early in the new century 57.9% of the labor force was foreign born.²⁴ Those arriving from 1880 onwards were overwhelmingly "new" immigrants who came from eastern and southern Europe. These "new" immigrants were mostly poor, uneducated, clannish and considered unassimilable by native born Americans who grew increasingly to fear and to distrust them, and to blame them for the growing number of urban problems. "The native was horrified by the conditions under which the new Americans lived--their slums, their unsanitary misery, their alien tongue and religion," according to historian Henry Steele Commager.²⁵ A radical academic, Edward A. Ross, wrote:

Immigrants reduced living standards to their "pigsty mode of life" just as they brought social standards down to their "brawls and animal pleasures." They were unhygienic and alcoholic, they raised the rate of illiteracy and insanity, they fostered crime and bad morals . . . They bred in such numbers they were increasingly dominant over the native stock, and thus threatened to overwhelm American blood and bastardize American civilization.²⁶

Four out of five of these new arrivals settled in industrial centers where jobs could be found. By 1890 seventy five percent of the populations of New York,

Chicago, Cleveland and Boston were immigrants or children of immigrants.²⁷ With such a rapidly growing population the pace of urban growth far exceeded the capacity for management. Garbage piled up in the streets and streets crumbled beneath the pounding of heavy traffic. Living quarters were overcrowded, a condition from which developed "the evils of cellar dwellings, unsanitary privies, lack of drainage, inadequate water supply, filthy out-house premises, defective plumbing, dark rooms and halls . . . the sweating evil and those other manifestations of modern life too often seen in large cities."²⁸ By 1900 New York had the worst tenement problem in America. One investigating committee found three hundred and sixty people, including forty children, living in a single tenement building. Two thirds of New York's 3,400,000 people lived in 82,600 tenements.²⁹

Overcrowded and substandard living conditions contributed to disease. So unhealthy was tenement life that one corner of New York became known as the "lung block" because of the prevalence of tuberculosis among its inhabitants.³⁰ Nor was this condition peculiar to New York. Jane Addams, a crusader for social justice and founder of Hull House wrote, "One of the Hull House residents, under the direction of a Chicago physician who stands high as an authority on tuberculosis . . . made an investigation into housing conditions as related to tuberculosis with a result as startling as that of the 'lung block' in New York."³¹

The disintegration of family life, mental anguish,

crime and juvenile delinquency were also aggravated by slum conditions. Police often disrupted harmless street play and children drifted into gangs of delinquents.³² Each day children fell prey to the moral and physical hazards of the streets. Commercial amusements such as movie theatres, vaudeville halls and penny arcades beckoned. Automobile and railroad accidents took a daily toll. By 1910 accidents had become the leading cause of death for children ages five to fourteen.³³

Hoping to attack both problems, that is those related to the physical and moral development of city children, groups of progressive urban reformers set about their task of "child saving." From 1890 to about 1915 the dominant theme in child saving was reform or the manipulation of child life through public policy.³⁴ Reformers even prevailed upon President Theodore Roosevelt to hold a national conference to discuss and marshal support for governmental planning and protection of the nation's children. In 1909 the White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children was organized by Jane Adams and Lillian Wald, leaders of the Settlement House Movement.³⁵

Convinced of the significance of upbringing and of a positive environment, particularly on the young, but equally convinced that poor and immigrant families were themselves morally, socially and intellectually inept, providing homes where bad habits and wrong values were learned, early reformers viewed immigrants as unfit to rear their children

alone. The intervention of outside forces in child development became justified, lest faulty socialization of the young create deviant adults, an outcome which now, it was believed, could be prevented and controlled.

One form that child saving took was the effort of charity workers and social reformers to "transplant [children's play] from city streets where it was, they thought, unorganized and uncontrolled, onto supervised playgrounds."³⁶ Earliest efforts at organizing play were part of a charity organization movement that swept through American cities between 1880-1920. In 1906 the Playground Association of America, a professional organization designed to promote municipally supported playgrounds, was founded.

The Power of Play Recognized

That the very idea of organizing the play of children occurred in the latter half of the nineteenth century was the result of the convergence of new ideas and theories in several disciplines. Not only had evolutionary theory been challenged by environmentalists, but educators and psychologists had begun to trumpet the value of childhood play in the social, intellectual and psychological development of the young.

By the end of the nineteenth century the German educator, Friedrich Froebel, had claimed that play activities were "the germinal leaves of all later life,"³⁷ natural childhood activities which facilitated the growth of the

child as well as the integration of the child into his physical environment. Froebel's ideas were widely accepted in the United States and found expression in Froebelian kindergartens.

According to John Dewey, the American educator and philosopher, writing in 1899, play was the child's natural living and learning experience. As such, it acted as a mediator between the child and society. Espousing an educational philosophy of "learning by doing," Dewey saw play and games as the most effective method for the child to act out ideas and social roles, thereby arriving at "genuine" knowledge. For Dewey:

Play is not to be identified with anything which the child externally does. It rather designates his mental attitude in its entirety and its unity . . . Positively, it means that the supreme end of the child is fulness of growth--fulness of realization of his budding powers, a realization which continually carries him on from one plane to another . . . Wherever this result isn't reached, play results in mere amusement and not in educative growth. ³⁸

Dewey's ideas on play became a mainstay of the school curriculum in the era of Progressive education.

At the turn of the century another well known educator, T.R. Croswell, had placed responsibility for teaching appropriate play habits squarely on the shoulders of public schools. "One of the aims of the school is to prepare for proper employment of leisure moments . . . Hence must the school take into consideration the effect of its work in the formation of the conditions that will affect the play of the children today, and determine to a large extent their habits

of amusement when men and women grown."³⁹ According to Croswell, the schools were to engage students in age appropriate play and pique their interest in crafts, hobbies, music and games, all to be pursued by the children, on their own, out of school. But Croswell did not wish to see adults intrude on the free play of children.

We wish to lay stress on the greatest "school of infancy," free play. From no other source does the child learn so much that is of permanent value in after life as in those hours spent in play apart from the direct influence of adults.⁴⁰

As concentrated attention focused on children as critical actors in the perpetuation of the race and as designers of future societies, and as play became accepted as an important childhood activity, children and their play became the objects of scientific studies intended to arrive at an understanding of their nature and development. Walter Wood, a prominent educator wrote, "Children are not little men and women. The difference between ourselves and these strange folks is not merely a question of degree, or even of mental content."⁴¹

It was the psychologist G. Stanley Hall who was in the vanguard of the scientific view of the child and who, in an effort to understand "these strange folks," launched the child study movement in 1883, which culminated in 1909 with the founding of the Children's Institute.

The movement insisted that children were malleable beings whose development could be controlled and whose negative tendencies could be eradicated with proper training

at each stage of the developmental process.⁴² Following the publication of Hall's "The Content of Children's Minds" in 1883, local child-study clubs sprang up in several American cities. Committed to understanding the development of their children, the upper middle class mothers who joined these clubs and associations "wanted their information directly from experts trained in child study."⁴³ The emphasis of these mothers, however, was on raising the morally correct child. Thus, the experts who lectured at meetings were asked to answer questions related to children's anger, honesty, spiritual discipline, autonomy, and fears. Though the range of topics was very broad, there is no indication that the mothers or the experts addressed the role of play in child development.⁴⁴ Contributions made by the child study movement did help to illuminate for those both in the academy and for the general public children's emotional and psychic make-up. But investigations into behavioral aspects of child development and education centered on the role of the school and as such reached professional educators influencing curriculum. Outside of the school, studies on child development and behavior, particularly those by G. Stanley Hall, provided the theoretical impetus for the growth of the playground movement. Aimed especially at poor urban children, the movement began to blossom in the 1890s.⁴⁵ For Hall and his close follower Luther Gulick did, indeed, recognize the value of play in inculcating moral lessons and socially acceptable forms of conduct as it moved children

through ontogenetic stages of development.⁴⁶ Their ideas on play, however, did not find widespread expression either through the popular literature of the period or through child study clubs. Instead, they reached a professional, not a lay, audience. Their theories influenced playground organizers--reformers, psychologists, recreationists--but not the average parent.

Hall believed that modern life was a "disease"⁴⁷ which urban man, lacking the right morals, could not restore to health. Hope rested with the young who, through the development of a healthy musculature, strong character and sound morality, all formed through play activities, would resist succumbing to the moral decay around them. For Hall, the child's moral development could be organized and controlled only through play.⁴⁸ Hall's recapitulation theory specified that through play man recapitulated the behavioral traits that made survival possible for his ancestors, that is climbing, swinging, throwing, catching, running, yelling and so forth.⁴⁹ Hall's basic thesis, what he called the "general psychonomic law" was that ontogeny, the development of the individual organism, recapitulates phylogeny, the evolution of the race.⁵⁰ For example, the child's insistence on climbing trees and swinging from branches is a vestige of the activities of his monkey-like ancestors. Hall's theory brought a new understanding to the behavior of children, who, he argued, represented the earlier form of primitive man, acting, as primitives did, on impulse, instincts and muscles.

Hall insisted that children be allowed to express their primitive promptings on playgrounds for it was through play that what was morally valuable in our primitive heritage was preserved and what was inappropriate, unnecessary or disruptive was weakened or modified.⁵¹ Luther Gulick, Hall's friend and Henry Curtis, his former student, early playground organizers, took up his call, organizing playgrounds according to Hallian theory. Playground programs were organized so that by the time children advanced to the tribal stage of development, the instincts that would cause them to form socially sanctioned gangs, would be directed into the formation of socially approved athletic teams.

The playground movement of the late nineteenth century then was an outgrowth of ideas primarily of Hall, Ward and the Progressives, regarding the nature of children and the effects of a positive environment on children. In keeping with this new emphasis on environmentalism, a charity organization movement grew throughout American cities starting in the late 1870s. The movement's workers, mostly propertied, upper class women, believed that children could be spared "moral contagion" by training in proper behavior. Immigrant parents, they believed, were a negative influence on their children. Unable to remove the children from their homes, they sought instead to counterbalance home influences with positive outside forces.⁵² Recreation was one of those forces. Charity workers not only supported playgrounds, beginning in 1885 in Boston, but were responsible for the

founding of the first "Boys Club" in New Haven, Connecticut in 1873, another "method of taking boys off the street and improving their behavior."⁵³ By the 1890s contributions from the social sciences on the role of play on child development gave further impetus and rationale to the growing, mostly privately funded, playground movement. All of these ideas and practices came of age simultaneously with the rise of industrialization which, for some, bred "a form of barbarism infinitely more degrading than any primitive form of savagery"⁵⁴ and from which children, who had acquired an increased social value, needed to be protected. Forced to grow up in the city under "unnatural conditions" with no place for play, the majority of children were victims of "the evils which civilization has itself produced."⁵⁵ Playground advocates maintained that "the municipal children's playground, under expert supervision, can restore a great deal of the city child's lost inheritance of play, and. . . act as the required antidote to the child's unnatural environment."⁵⁶ So great an agenda required the unification of diverse efforts, guaranteed funding through municipal budgets, and trained personnel. These goals would coalesce in a new organization, the Playground Association of America.

The Organization of Play: How It Began

The development of the playground movement is well documented.⁵⁷ In the summer of 1885 a pile of sand was placed in the yard of the Parmenter Street Chapel in Boston,

Massachusetts under the direction of Mrs. Kate Gannett Wells, a member of the Bostonian elites and founder of the Massachusetts Emergency and Hygiene Association (MEHA), an association committed to the promotion of healthful living through cleanliness and preventative practice.⁵⁸ This sand garden was the beginning of the playground movement.⁵⁹ Sand gardens were provided exclusively for the use of young children during the summers. Activities were simple, providing the opportunity for "free play," supervised, but undirected by matrons employed "to keep watch and ward."⁶⁰ By 1887 MEHA had established eleven sand gardens all of which were discontinued when the Boston School Committee granted the MEHA permission to open playgrounds on several school yards for the summer of 1888. By the summer of 1890 MEHA had seventeen playgrounds and one winter playroom. A decade later, four organizations, the MEHA, the Boston School Committee, the Boston Department of Parks and a new organization, founded by philanthropist Joseph Lee, the Massachusetts Civic League (MCL), were sponsoring a total of thirty five playgrounds.⁶¹ But it was the model playground established by Joseph Lee which would become the standard against which all playgrounds would be measured. Lee himself would come to dominate the field of organized play and recreation for the next three decades.

The idea for playgrounds had spread from Boston to other cities. By 1895 private groups had founded similar playgrounds in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia and

Providence.⁶² New York expanded on the playground idea with rooftop playgrounds, wharves and docks converted to recreation piers, and vacation schools. In 1898 a new organization, the Outdoor Recreation League (ORL) had established itself as a promoter of playgrounds and outdoor gymnasiums in New York City.⁶³ By 1905 New York had taken a leading position among American cities with public recreation programs.⁶⁴ Between the years 1900-1910 New York spent \$16,000,000 in establishing children's playgrounds.⁶⁵

Credited with reducing juvenile delinquency, promoting conformity and Americanization, improving the morals and behaviors of the poor and providing exercise and fresh air for the promotion of physical health, playgrounds began to spring up across the country. By 1906, forty one cities had playground programs, up from fourteen just six years earlier.⁶⁶

Joseph Lee, in the meantime, had gained a national reputation as a leader in recreation, having published numerous articles and speeches on play and playgrounds in periodicals and newspapers, as well as his book Philanthropy. In 1904 Lee took over the Department of Recreation of the American Civic Association. In this capacity he established a national information service and an advisory committee of experts on recreation.⁶⁷ Included on this committee was New York educator, Dr. Luther H. Gulick, director of the city's public school physical education program. It was Gulick who in 1905 suggested a national organization for the discussion

of play and playgrounds to the ORL, as well as a standard training program for playground leaders. Gulick and Henry S. Curtis, the director of New York City's playground system and a Ph.D. in child psychology from Clark University where he had studied under G. Stanley Hall, wrote to Joseph Lee, suggesting the organization of a national playground association and asking Lee to accept the presidency. Lee declined the offer and countered that Gulick and Curtis pursue their interests by forming a committee of the American Civic Association.⁶⁸

Gulick, however, proceeded with his plans to form the Playground Association of America. A select group of recreation leaders gathered by invitation in Washington, D.C. and on April 12, 1906, the Playground Association of America (PAA) was established. Luther Gulick was elected its first president. Jane Addams and Joseph Lee (both absent), vice presidents, and Henry Curtis, secretary.⁶⁹ Chicago delegates declared that the purpose of the PAA was to secure for urban children "their natural birthright--play" under the auspices of "elevating leadership."⁷⁰

The PAA was committed to the recruitment and training of play directors. A normal school training course for play directors was created by Clark Hetherington, professor of education at the University of Wisconsin. The course, used in sixty cities, emphasized the biological, social and psychological sciences rather than physical education, for now great emphasis was placed on understanding childhood and

play. Curtis, who designed a written civil service test for play directors, believed that the appointment of playground positions should be made on the basis of three qualifications: passing a written examination on the theory of the various activities involved; second, the acceptable practice of these activities with children; third, the personality of the applicant. Curtis recommended that "No person who has not the play spirit and the ability to secure the cooperation of children, along with a considerable degree of personal refinement, should ever be placed on a playground."⁷¹

Curtis insisted that it was the responsibility of the playground supervisor to ascertain that "activities carried on therein are giving the right sort of physical, social and moral training."⁷² He also argued that supervision or direction was necessary to prevent "street rowdies and corner loafers [from making] the playgrounds their headquarters, determining its spirit and the sort of activities that go on there."⁷³ In addition to maintaining discipline and teaching games and activities, the ideal play director should become a hero or heroine of the children. Curtis believed that:

The reason that the street play of the children is apt to be demoralizing is that they take as their models the street loafers and leaders of gangs whose language and conduct are far from being good examples . . . The right type of play director . . . tends naturally to become their ideal.⁷⁴

The question of the supervision of children's playgrounds was a stumbling block in the early stages of the

development of the movement. When the Playground Association of America was first formed, President Roosevelt, while applauding the efforts of the playground organizers, criticized the extent of supervision. In an address to the PAA Roosevelt said, "It is a splendid thing to provide in congested districts of American cities spaces where children may play; but let them play freely. Do not interfere with their play, leave them alone. Do not meddle."⁷⁵

This same position was taken in an editorial appearing in The Washington Post:

While the leaders of the [playground] movement are busily advocating playgrounds for the children, they are at the same time determined to dictate what they shall play and how they shall play it. . . . Our opinion is that playgrounds so governed and conducted by a lot of theorists and doctrinaires will arouse in the breasts of the children a trifle less of genuine interest than would a present of cuneiform inscriptions from Mesopotamia . . . What healthy child . . . would give three straws for a so-called playground if there has to be someone there with authority to forbid this or limit that? Who wants to be watched, and lectured, and restrained, and pulled and hauled about, and slapped and straightened, and washed behind the ears, and tagged and registered, and kept account of and generally browbeaten from the time he or she enters the alleged playgrounds until an escape shall have been achieved? . . . Playgrounds of the character indicated . . . will be avoided by robust youngsters as though they were reservations set apart for the free distribution of rhubarb and castor oil. Let the children alone!⁷⁶

According to playground advocates unsupervised playgrounds were tried in many cities in the United States with the result that they either remained unused or else were closed within a few months by public protest.⁷⁷ As a result, within a few years President Roosevelt changed his views on

supervision of playgrounds and public opinion changed as well. Contrary to the Post's prediction, Wood asserts that attendance at playgrounds was "something like a thousand children for every acre of supervised playgrounds" while unsupervised playgrounds were "ignored by children."⁷⁸ He further maintained that the role of the supervisor was neither indoctrination nor control,

but to enforce the rules of fair play, and to see that the apparatus is used legitimately; otherwise their work is suggesting games and participating in them . . . "No" and "don't" are least used words in their vocabulary . . . All the current arguments against supervising children's play arise from ignorance as to the nature of the work of the supervisor.⁷⁹

Henry Curtis also stressed the importance of supervision on the playgrounds. "Supervision not only trebles the attendance at the playground, but makes it a school of character and of all the social virtues, whilst the unsupervised playground is apt to get into the hands of older boys, who should be working, and train children in all of the things they ought not to be trained in."⁸⁰

Problems of playground supervision were limited to the children of the working class. Middle class children engaged in their play activities with adult family members, and often far from the city, on their country estates or in parks removed from the industrial centers of cities to which the poor rarely, if ever, ventured. According to educator Jerry Dickason, "Parks were areas created and frequented by the middle and upper classes; playgrounds were created much later by the middle and upper

classes for use by the poor."⁸¹

There was no shortage of activities for the children of the middle class to engage in. During the same period in which play reformers attempted to make play public, peer group oriented and adult supervised (by a non-parental figure), middle class children were playing at home with a variety of manufactured toys and games available through catalogs and "toyshops that bulged not only with strictly didactic playthings, but with mechanical devices . . . and with the inevitable dolls and dollhouses."⁸² Prior to the 1840s, there were virtually no toy manufacturers in the United States. But as ideas regarding the educational value of play were accepted by middle class parents, the toy industry was born in America and responded to this middle class interest in children's playthings by producing a variety of educational, mechanical and cast iron toys.⁸³ According to social historian John Brewer, "These new toys and games, which left so little to the imagination, epitomised the bourgeois attributes necessary for commercial, industrial and social success in adult life."⁸⁴

Cast iron banks and working steam engines were popular toys of the 1870s, reflections of the importance of banking and railroads in America of that period. In 1886 the game **The Monopolist** was first advertised. In 1889, **The Game of Moneta: or Money Makes Money**, and in 1895, the **Game of Business**, tributes to the capitalist world of finance and business, were introduced on the market. Games such as

chess, checkers, lotto, Parcheesi, dice, and cribbage, and sporting goods, including thirteen varieties of baseballs, and tennis rackets, were offered in the Peck and Snyder's Sporting Goods Company catalog in 1886. Shortly after the turn of the century, the first electric trains, complete with railroad station, tunnels, and surrounding villages, graced the playrooms of middle class children. Construction toys such as Meccano, Tinkertoys and Lincoln Logs were created as well in the first two decades of the twentieth century. ⁸⁵

John Champlin and Arthur E. Bostwick's The Young Folks Compendium of Games and Sports, was a 784 page "compendium of recreations of all kinds including indoor and outdoor games and plays, athletic and rural sports and pastimes, chemical and mechanical experiments and amusements, and every similar thing that can interest a wide awake boy or girl."⁸⁶ The volume, published in 1899, was intended "primarily for the family, for the use of children and youth of all ages."⁸⁷ Each entry provided an historical sketch of the activities indicating a longstanding play tradition. Entries provided precise rules of play, necessitating command of the English language, and requisite play equipment, affordable only to those with discretionary incomes.

But, middle class youth were not without their own adult supervised, socializing organizations. Between 1910-1912, Boy Scouts of America (BSA), Camp Fire Girls and Girls Scouts of the U.S.A. were all founded. Though not specifically for middle class children, it was from this class that both the

adult leaders and the youthful members predominantly came."⁸⁸ According to historian David Macleod, character building organizations "soaked up middle class anxieties and norms like blotting paper and were colored by commonplace values of the Progressive Era."⁸⁹

Boy Scouts of America was founded in 1910 by Ernest Thompson Seton and Daniel Carter Beard. Originally open to boys twelve through seventeen, its expressed purpose as stated in its federal charter of June 15, 1916 was "to promote, through organization and cooperation with other agencies, the ability of boys to do things for themselves and others, to train them in Scoutcraft, and to teach them patriotism, courage, self-reliance and kindred virtues."⁹⁰ Research suggests a hidden agenda.⁹¹ A motivating factor in the founding of Boy Scout of America was to get boys from "good" families away from the bad influence of street boys. According to Macleod, "An easy assumption of middle class moral and religious superiority reinforced distinctions between middle class boys and all others considered beneath them. . . . To middle class parents and youth workers, unguarded contacts [with lower class boys] threatened the results of careful nurture."⁹² In fact, it was recognized that even middle class boys were not without their imperfections. They too engaged in "minor vices," smoking cigarettes, loafing, missing Sunday school, and hopping freight trains. Left unsupervised, they would be subjected to the "degenerate" drift of modern urban life, to contamination

by lower class boys, and to "feminization" by overexposure to women at home and in school. They would become either soft and undisciplined or weak and effeminate. The BSA program was one means of bringing middle class boys under adult supervision and control. Through earnest advice, set forth in the Boy Scout Law, steady training through badge work, and management of instincts in a group setting to harness the gang instinct, Boy Scout leaders could claim "all around development" of their members. In developing the BSA program, Seton turned to the rural life of ideal boyhood and the strenuous adventures of Daniel Boone and Theodore Roosevelt. The emphasis was twofold. One was on character building. Though "character" was never actually defined, it was understood as the intrinsic qualities of mental and physical strength and social and moral virtue. The other emphasis was on the development of masculinity through masculine leadership, outdoor ramblings, "woodsy savagery" and sports. Boy Scouts' rugged outdoor adventures and strenuous physical activities aimed at making "big men out of little boys."³³ In the introduction to his book Boys Scouts of America, Seton wrote, "Realizing that manhood, not scholarship, is the first aim of education, we have sought out those pursuits which develop the finest character, the finest physique, and which may be followed out of doors, which, in a word, make for manhood."³⁴ In founding the Boys Scouts, Seton and Beard were responding to what they perceived as a crisis of masculinity, created by the closing

of the frontier and increasing forces of feminization in the lives of boys. As mothers had assumed almost total responsibility for the moral education of their children,⁹⁵ and school teachers were increasingly females, proper masculine socialization seemed threatened. Scouting's program and structure were intended to counterbalance the forces of feminization by offering adolescent boys the opportunities to display and validate their masculinity.⁹⁶ The Boy Scouts of America "celebrated a masculinity tested and proven against other men, removed from the cultural constraints of home, hearth, school and church."⁹⁷

As the Boy Scout Promise stressed, a Boy Scout should be "morally straight," but, lest he be considered a sissy, he should also be self-assertive, energetic, and strong-willed, and should the need arise, ready to fight. Strongly supported by the middle class, membership in Boy Scouts had reached 245,183, by the end of 1916 and 478,528 by the end of 1920.⁹⁸

Those who worked with children during the Progressive era were far less concerned with the behavior, and for that matter, the play, of girls than of boys. "On the whole, girls aroused less adult alarm than boys . . . Girls, it seemed, had more continuous socialization and adapted more smoothly to adult expectations . . . After classes each day they mostly went straight home, whereas boys hung about on the streets."⁹⁹ But, if middle class boys needed to be trained as "real" men and prepared for their future occupational roles as "managers and professionals in

adulthood,"¹⁰⁰ middle class girls, too, had their feminine qualities reinforced as they developed the skills and personality traits suitable to their taken for granted futures as homemakers.

Camp Fire Girls was founded, also in 1910, by William Langdon and Dr. Luther Gulick, who at the time had just stepped down from his position as the first president of the Playground Association of America and was serving as head of the Department of Child Hygiene (health, education and recreation) at the Russell Sage Foundation. In establishing Camp Fire Girls, Gulick said, "What we are trying to do in the Camp Fire Girls is to brush away from the everyday activities of the world the dull grey with which the oil and smoke of this machine age have covered them; to reveal the beauty, romance, and adventure of the common things in life; to awaken an appreciation of the wonders that are going on all about us, but that so many of us fail to see."¹⁰¹ Evidently, these wonders could not be seen on the urban playgrounds that the Playground Association of America was sponsoring for children of the poor. Gulick set forth eight "laws" which have continued to guide the organization he helped to create. They were: worship God; seek beauty; give service; pursue knowledge; be trustworthy; hold on to health; glorify work; and be happy.¹⁰² Though no definite age limits were stated or required, activities were adapted to girls in their teens.

Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. was founded in 1912 by

Juliette Gordon Low for girls twelve to seventeen. Based on the ethical code expressed in the Promise and the Laws of Girl Scouting, the movement was designed to inspire girls with "the highest ideals of character, conduct, patriotism and service, that they may become happy and resourceful citizens."¹⁰³

Girl Scouts and Camp Fire Girls professed to be preparing young girls for their future roles in the home and in service to their communities. Luther Gulick was quite adamant in his vision of the organization's goal. Speaking to a group of Camp Fire Girls organizers, including his friend Ernest Thompson Seton, Gulick said, "I believe the keynote is here--that we wish to develop girls to be womanly. . . The bearing and rearing of children has always been the first duty of most women, and that must always continue to be. This involves service, constant service, self-forgetfulness and always service."¹⁰⁴ Seton concurred, "The aims should be clear: the work should be undertaken to encourage womanhood."¹⁰⁵ Gulick also urged the organizers to teach the Camp Fire Girls "the possibility of leading other girls . . . the factory girls, the city girls, the mill girls, the country girls."¹⁰⁶ Presumably these girls not only needed leadership, but were unlikely to assume it themselves as members of the Camp Fire Girls organization.

While all three of these organizations developed programs around outdoor oriented recreation, they differed from the playground movement in several ways. Unlike the

playground movement, the scouting and camping organizations emphasized health, community service, educational activities individual achievement through badge work and the cultivation of hobbies. While play and games were a part of these programs, they were not expressly developed around these activities, nor around the then popular play theories, although Seton, and, of course, Gulick, were well aware of Hall's ideas on adolescence. They too believed that these organizations of adolescent peers would "harness the tribal instinct," thus preventing the formation of socially disapproved gangs.

The social distance between members and leaders of the character building organizations was far less than was generally true for the children using urban playgrounds. Thus, the middle class scouting and camping organizations were enthusiastically supported by middle class adults who recognized them as affirming middle class values. Each of the organizations saw continued growth in membership from its founding until the 1970s, when membership in each began to decline. The parents of the urban poor, however, remained suspicious of the playgrounds and their supervisors.¹⁰⁷

While these three organizations, Boys Scouts, Girls Scouts and Camp Fire Girls sought to clearly differentiate what constituted masculinity and femininity so that they might produce real men and women, playground organizers emphasized the development in boys of a "feminine" style of moral consciousness in the transformation from gangs to

teams. Masculine aggressiveness was to be offset by the feminine traits of cooperation, loyalty, conformity, and peer-oriented morality. "What makes the playground movement so interesting . . . is that play organizers designed social training methods that were supposed to harmonize and integrate traditionally bipolar masculine and feminine traits."¹⁰⁸

Finally, these organizations were originally intended for children twelve and over. Before that age, it was mothers who were the character builders of their children. Women leaders in Girl Scouts and Camp Fire extended this aspect of their motherly role to adolescent girl members. But, for boys twelve and older it was men, and not women, who developed both character and masculinity in their charges. On the playgrounds, on the other hand, it was assumed by adult supervisors that poor and foreign mothers were incapable of instilling strength and virtue in their children; thus, the playgrounds targeted young children as well as adolescents. Indeed, the playground movement began with sand gardens for the young child and only later developed programs for adolescents. Camp Fire Girls, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, on the other hand, began for adolescents and only gradually dropped the age of membership eligibility to five.

Despite their differences all of these organizations have one thing in common: whether overtly or covertly, their goal was moral and political socialization of their youthful

members, a socialization aimed at reproducing the social order according to the vision of their founders.

The Play Movement: How It Grew

Unlike the children of the middle class, poor children, it was believed, did not know how to play, having been deprived of a play tradition due to their cultural and economic circumstances. Since children played quite openly in the city streets, empirical evidence was obviously contrary to reformers' beliefs. Play was in the eyes of the beholders; street play was not recognized as play, nor accepted as a legitimate form of play. Reformers also believed that poor children did not have the guidance of adults to assist them in creating constructive play activities.

Wise mothers and nurses have taught the well-to-do child how to play, and by taking part in games with their children parents hand on the tradition . . . Working class children have none of these advantages. They have, as a rule, no one to teach them games . . . The working class mother has no time to play with her children. If she is of city origin, she herself knows very few games to pass on . . . We have a large class of mothers with no games, no songs, no stories, to pass on to their children.¹⁰⁹

If parents could not teach their children how to play, then supervisors would have to for "the wrong done to children by denying them the proper opportunity for play and games is not the denial of pleasure, but in arresting their normal development."¹¹⁰ Sociologist Richard Henry Edwards concurred:

It is not enough to provide places [parks, playgrounds

and recreation centers] and leave young people to frequent them without guidance in the pleasures that develop there. The supervisor of activities is, after all, the essential element, without which the facilities provided are often worse than wasted. Only as counsellors and play leaders of tact and wisdom, men and women of rich personality, are brought into touch with young people will recreation be sure to bring youth out into a richer maturity.¹¹¹

Though there was disagreement over the issue of supervision of playgrounds, there was widespread consensus that playgrounds were beneficial to children instilling desirable social values through constructive activities and offsetting the antisocial temptations and criminal examples that street life exposed children to. A Philadelphia judge, William H. Stake, commented:

The public playground is the greatest deterrent of juvenile delinquency and lawlessness among children. It stands for body and character building, and produces better children, homes, morals and citizens. On the score of public economy alone, the playground is a necessity.¹¹²

An article in Playground, the monthly publication of the Playground and Recreation Association of America, proclaimed:

"The dust is gathering fast on the gavel of the Superintendent of the Juvenile Court of Binghamton," writes William I. Engle in The American City for December, 1919. Five years ago . . . juvenile crime was increasing yearly as the population grew. Boys . . . were pillaging, burglarizing, committing a dozen kinds of youthful depredation that kept police and Human Society officers anxious day and night . . . Someone suggested playgrounds . . . It [the supervised recreation program] has turned guttersnipes into boys whose fathers are proud of them, and it has cleaned the streets of girls of bad repute. It has also established a new code of morals among both boys and girls. ¹¹³

The writer indicated a sixty percent decrease in crime in

Binghamton, New York within one year of the inception of supervised recreation.

Thus, in spirit, the Playground Association of America was widely supported. Financially, however, it was floundering until the Russell Sage Foundation in 1907 appropriated \$20,000 for playground promotion and \$5,000 to hire a financial secretary to build memberships. The imagination and resourcefulness of Gulick and Curtis along with the support of the Russell Sage Foundation led to growth and a certain degree of stability of the PAA. By 1908 there were twenty nine local affiliated playground associations. That year the Board of Directors authorized Gulick to seek out Howard S. Braucher, secretary of the Associated Charities of Portland, Maine, to serve as executive secretary of the PAA, a position he did accept. Meanwhile, Joseph Lee became actively involved with the PAA. In 1910 when Gulick resigned from the PAA to accept a position with the Russell Sage Foundation, Lee became president of the Association.¹¹⁴

There were considerable differences in the ideas of Luther Gulick and Joseph Lee regarding playground goals and organization. Gulick was an "organizational" progressive, and as such a proponent of scientific management and bureaucratic planning, distinctly twentieth century ideas born of the industrial revolution and its emphasis on precision, efficiency and productivity.¹¹⁵ For Gulick, playground agendas were situated activities designed to facilitate adaptation to the new social order that he foresaw and

embraced. According to Dominick Cavallo, historian of the play movement, "Using the psychological theories developed by his friend G. Stanley Hall, Gulick explicitly linked the moral lessons and the 'technical' skills learned by the 'team player,' to the attitudes and aptitudes necessary for the citizen's adaptation to modern society."¹¹⁶ Gulick, himself, wrote:

Democracy must provide not only a seat and instruction for every child in school, but also play and good play traditions for every child in a playground. Without the development of these social instincts, without the growing of the social consciousness--which has its roots in the early activities of the playground--we cannot expect adults to possess those higher feelings which rest upon the earlier social virtues developed during childhood . . . The sand pile for the small child, the playground for the middle-sized child . . . [provide] wholesome means of social relationships . . . without which democracy cannot continue . . . Upon them rest the development of self-control . . . related to an appreciation of the needs of the group and of the corporate conscience.¹¹⁷

Lee, on the other hand, the Harvard educated philanthropist, was nostalgic for the harmonious village life he saw disappearing and with it, longstanding play traditions. In 1913 Lee wrote, "We are at present in imminent danger of losing a large part of the precious tradition. The danger, like so many others that threaten our social life, arises largely from the crowding of our cities . . . Immigration is the other cause."¹¹⁸ For Lee, the role of the playground was to reverse the cultural fragmentation and moral anonymity typical of cities. Playgrounds should be the hub of neighborhood solidarity and civic pride, the sites where the fragmentation of ethnic diversity and individualism

might be counteracted by emphasizing social unity, social order and ethnic assimilation.¹¹⁹ Searching for a play tradition on which to model the early playgrounds Lee turned to the play activities of Elizabethan England. Lee believed that the revival of an Elizabethan-American play tradition would preserve for Anglo-Americans their almost lost heritage of play and would assert American identity and values amid the multiplicity of recent immigrant groups.¹²⁰ For Lee, "Our first playgrounds are an inheritance from the England of the Elizabethan age."¹²¹ English folk dances, an "American" custom, were taught to all of the children as were Maypole and Flagpole dances. On the fourth of July one playground program guide suggested that the children perform a Flagpole dance with red, white and blue streamers.¹²² It was, however, through the playing of team games that an Anglo-American form of the play spirit was expressed most adamantly.

Team games, Lee believed, not only helped immigrant children pull away from their particular ethnic loyalties, but served all children in the development of sound citizenship.

The great team games are the best school of the citizen . . . In playing them the boy is not going through the forms of citizenship--learning parliamentary law, raising points of order, moving the previous question--he is being initiated into its essence, participating in the thing itself. He is actually and habitually losing his own individuality in a larger whole; experiencing citizenship, not learning about it.¹²³

Lee was especially fond of baseball as a socializing

activity. He wrote in the Boston Herald:

Apart from lessons on the life and character of Abraham Lincoln, the effective instrument of Americanization, hitherto, has been baseball . . . Knowledge of English and of the constitution is at best a means of induction into American life and consciousness; baseball is the thing itself . . . Language and constitution may predispose, but a touch of baseball makes the whole world kin . . . Therefore, long live baseball . . . And may the experience in increasing measure be personal, on park and playground and spare lot and in the street; for citizenship cannot be vicariously enjoyed. ¹²⁴

In developing playground activities Lee was guided by his own theory of child development. In a period emphasizing evolutionary and recapitulation theories as applied to children, it is not surprising that Lee's own ideas of child development mirrored and further developed those of G. Stanley Hall. Lee proposed four major ontogenetic stages. The first was "babyhood" from birth to age three; the second stage was the "dramatic stage," from ages three to six; the third stage, "Big Injun," was the stage of self-assertion which lasted until age eleven; finally was "adolescence" or the "age of loyalty," which extended to the mid-twenties. ¹²⁵

Lee believed that one form of play dominated in each stage and that its expression was critical in proper development.

Each [play] instinct has its time of stress, its special vogue, during which it lays siege to the mind and makes its principal impression on the resulting growth. There is . . . a gradual unfolding and a special time when each power has its preferred opportunity to assert itself . . . The sequence is as fixed in mental as in bodily growth. The whole tree is already present in the seed, but there is a budding off time for each of the great branches of which its final form is to consist. ¹²⁶

The play style peculiar to each stage was intended to promote the expression of instinct rooted in specific historical epochs and through which all children would proceed. With guidance, supervision, and stage-specific play activities, such as making mud pies, playing on swings and seesaws, playing ring around the rosy, and engaging in team sports, children's play impulses could be directed to outcomes that would serve specific social and moral ends. For instance, youngsters, it was believed, inherited the instinct for throwing and running. If concerted efforts to direct these instincts into desirable channels were not made, city youth would surely end up in trouble with the law. A Philadelphia educator writing on "Recreation versus Delinquency" noted in 1920:

Play is the natural expression of all the inborn instincts of a child . . . Any inborn quality will, if forbidden legitimate expression, manifest itself in some other way . . .

An overwhelming percentage of cases brought before the Juvenile Court show, as a predominant cause for arrest, the play motive. In a study of 193 delinquents made in the Hell's Kitchen neighborhood of New York, it was discovered that 184 cases showed the play motive as the cause of arrest.

The problem of juvenile delinquency is largely a problem of play, or opportunity for play. . . . Children cannot inhibit the play impulse, and there is no other place for them to work it off, in the absence of recreation centers and playgrounds.¹²⁷

Participation in supervised team sports, however, would provide the physical expression of the instincts and the development of morally uplifting values, such as loyalty, cooperation and respect for rules.¹²⁸ Supervised play and games would weed out maladaptive aspects of an instinct while

developing its socially useful aspects. In so doing, play was a powerful tool of social reform for it served as a means of guiding the social and moral development of the children who attended the playgrounds. Their personal amelioration would ultimately improve the environment in which they lived and the society they would inherit. Left to their own devices on the streets or on unsupervised playgrounds, the working class child would form unacceptable behavior patterns. According to one school administrator:

The small yards, the congested and unattractive tenements, and the alluring attractions of the theatres and streets cause the children, especially the boys, at an early age to spend the greater part of their waking hours in play or work or mere idling away from home . . . cigarette smoking, the theatre going habit, petty stealing from fruit stands and stores, lawlessness and truancy, are some of the outward manifestations of the street developed character.¹²⁹

Thus, for Lee and for Gulick before him, supervision by play directors was a *sine qua non* of playgrounds.

Unsupervised playgrounds were unattended playgrounds and thus were failures in whatever it was they were intended to do, to simply provide for free play, to indoctrinate, to keep children off the streets whether that be for their own safety or to guide their instincts to socially and morally uplifting ends. According to Lee, "The unsupervised playground in a crowded district has not shown itself to be a successful institution."¹³⁰ Even supervised playgrounds were not used with any regularity or in great numbers by foreign born children, a targeted group. About 10 to 20% of the children in ethnic enclaves used the playgrounds regularly or

participated in team games.¹³¹ Studies done in Boston showed that playground use was practically confined to the radius of a six minute walk--less than half a mile. In the case of little children, the radius would be nearer to a quarter of a mile.¹³² Studies done in Milwaukee, Cleveland, and New York City confirmed that only 4% to 5% of all the children who lived within walking distance of playgrounds regularly used them.¹³³

But even if all children wished to use the playgrounds they would not have been able to. There were neither a sufficient number of playgrounds to accommodate them nor the funds to build and equip as many as were needed.¹³⁴ Yet, the growth of the play movement and the facilities it provided cannot be ignored.

When Joseph Lee became president of the Playground Association of America in 1910 he sought to broaden the definition of play and recreation to include varied opportunities for the use of leisure by all people, not only playgrounds for urban slum children.¹³⁵ Thus, in 1911, the Playground Association of America changed its name to the Playground and Recreation Association of America (PRAA). Lee's interests ranged from rural recreation to industrial recreation to recreation for the elderly, the handicapped and racial minorities. The Association stressed the need for recreation by all ages, classes, beliefs and races. Lacking facilities for so great an agenda, the Association, under Lee's leadership, fostered the concept of the recreation or

social center in school buildings which provided space, encouraged neighborhood spirit and aided the assimilation of immigrants.¹³⁶ Lee also wanted to promote the idea that local municipalities were responsible for providing basic recreational facilities under trained leadership.¹³⁷ Between 1910-1916 Lee made great strides in reaching the goals of a broadened definition of play and municipal responsibility for recreation. In 1910, 184 cities had a total of 1,244 playgrounds; playgrounds in 62 of these cities operated with municipal funds, with 59 receiving both municipal and private funding. By 1916, some 414 cities had 3,270 playgrounds and neighborhood centers; municipal funds supported these facilities in 171 cities and in combination with private resources in 95 cities. Overall, these figures for total municipal management of recreation programs had risen to 63.8% of the 414 cities reporting supervised recreation in 1916. In 1910, 31 cities had schools used as recreation centers; 27 of the 31 cities reported 201 such schools. By 1916, 127 cities utilized 663 schools as social centers.¹³⁸ According to historian Richard Knapp, "The Association had clearly helped to guide American cities from informal 'play' to public 'recreation.'"¹³⁹ But, in so doing, its original purpose, to provide playgrounds for disadvantaged urban poor children, was relegated to an ever smaller goal.

In 1917, Curtis observed that despite the increased number of playgrounds, the play movement was not reaching its ideals. Although Lee, who staunchly believed in

municipal support of play and recreational facilities, was not in agreement, he was unable to stop the shift of organized play from city playgrounds to the public schools where the activities of the playgrounds were incorporated into the school curriculum through extra-curricular sports and physical education courses. Between 1915-1921, twenty five states had enacted laws requiring or permitting the introduction of physical education into their schools.¹⁴⁰ Compulsory attendance laws would solve the attendance problems that plagued the playgrounds.¹⁴¹

That same year America's involvement in World War I brought a further shift in focus as the leaders of the PRAA decided that the wartime mission of the Association would be to help towns near military training camps organize to provide visiting soldiers with wholesome community activities.¹⁴² The War Camp Community Service (WCCS) was established, generously funded and widely used by the military. It was not until 1923, in the aftermath of W.W.I, that Lee again turned his energies back to expanding the pre-war efforts of the PRAA.¹⁴³

Though the success of the play movement in establishing thousands of playgrounds in major cities is undeniable, that success should not be exaggerated. For as the record shows, far more children did not than did use the playgrounds. For children of the poor and working class their preferred play sites remained city streets.

Street Play--Playgrounds' Nemesis

According to nineteenth century charity workers and twentieth century social reformers alike the street play of children was unsupervised, vicious and destructive of human character. Organized play offered a substitute for the disorderly street play that "perverted the play instinct and led to the demolition of human character, from which sickness, nervousness, melancholy, stupidity, uncontrolled passions, lack of balance, mental and moral, resulted."¹⁴⁴

Henry Curtis wrote:

It is not the play but the idleness of the street which is morally dangerous. It is then that the children watch the drunken people, listen to the leader of the gang, hear the shady story, smoke cigarettes, and acquire those vicious habits, knowledge, and vocabulary which are characteristic. When they are thus driven from the street to play upon the sidewalk or the doorstep, the only common games which they can pursue are tops, marbles, jackstones, war, craps, and pitching pennies . . . The politeness and ethics of a game played on the street are on a lower plane than those of the same game played elsewhere . . . play has probably reached the lowest ebb in the history of the world.¹⁴⁵

But was street play really such a negative and destructive feature of urban life? To be sure, it put children in physical jeopardy, competing as they did with motor vehicles for space. But in declaring that street play destroyed character and perverted the play instinct, urban reformers blurred the distinction among commercial amusements, idleness and actual street play and games.

Popular commercial amusements such as burlesque and vaudeville were judged to "have as little morals of any sort as the law allows and frequently less."¹⁴⁶ In a report

censoring such live shows in Cleveland, the author noted:

When one sees the hundreds of young men and boys at these performances, and sees the frenzied manner in which they indicate their approval of the vulgar, he cannot but concede that many must here receive the suggestion and impetus that leads them into lives wasted in dissipation and profligacy. Recently, in visiting one of the larger burlesque theaters of this city, eighteen boys were seen, twelve of whom were known to be under fourteen years of age. These young boys witnessed a performance which overflowed from beginning to end with insidious suggestions clothed to make immorality appear the normal indulgence of the ordinary life . . . The flashy light of sensual pleasures was turned full in their faces, blinding their eyes. ¹⁴⁷

Dance halls and "men only" hangouts such as pool halls, bowling alleys and gambling and drinking clubs were attacked by reformers for the "serious immorality" which characterized them and threatened the moral integrity of their youthful clients. Dance halls were particularly demoralizing for the young girl who danced the "spiel" sensuously, was prey to white slavers and who under the influence of alcohol lost that which "she can never regain though she live a hundred years."¹⁴⁸ According to one social worker in Cleveland, "Under such conditions it is not strange that one who deals often with the problem of the illegitimate child frequently gets the statement from the girl-mother, 'I met him at a public dance.'¹⁴⁹

Pool rooms and similar hangouts for men were deemed dangerous for the gang spirit which characterized them. "They may start as a loitering place for idle boys who gradually form into a gang and not infrequently become centers of the most immoral and criminal influences."¹⁵⁰

Though young children were exposed to these popular amusements because of their high visibility in urban areas, with the exception of motion pictures they did not, as a rule, patronize them. Most of these establishments were frequented by working class adults and youths over fourteen. Young children were spending their free time, for the most part, "doing nothing" or "playing" in the streets, yards, alleys or vacant lots.¹⁵¹ Candy stores were ubiquitous. Children loitered and spent their hard earned coins in them.¹⁵² Idleness expressed itself in less than socially redeeming ways. In Cleveland, children were observed "breaking windows, destroying houses, chalking suggestive words on buildings, throwing mud at street cars . . . stealing, gambling and drinking." The Cleveland play census taken on June 23, 1913, found that the majority of children who said they were playing described that as "just fooling around."¹⁵³ Indeed, Henry Curtis had stated that the dominant motive and a primary concern of the leaders of the Play Movement was that there was "little for the children to do in the cities, and that in this time of idleness, the devil has found much for idle hands to do. . . Crime is increasing everywhere."¹⁵⁴ Thus, play historian Bernard Mergen raises the question, "Was idleness or inappropriate play the most pressing problem?"¹⁵⁵

Children in Cleveland who were not "mostly just fooling around" but were actually "playing" were engaged in imaginative play and/or organized games. Baseball, kites,

shinney, tag, potsie, and dolls filled their free time. The street games of the children in Cleveland were some of the same games played by children in Brooklyn,¹⁵⁶ New York City,^{157, 158} Worcester, Massachusetts,¹⁵⁹ and in South Carolina¹⁶⁰. Wherever children were surveyed or observed at free play, ball games, particularly baseball, one-o-cat, and football, chase games, such as tag, hide and seek, and leap frog; dolls, and games of skill and chance, such as jump rope, marbles, potsie, and jacks were their games of choice. For most of these children, the city block or tenement stoop served as the basic unit of social organization. It was on the streets, equipped with play objects such as lamp posts, curbs, and man-hole covers, routinely incorporated into their play activities, that urban kids created a world of play that was spontaneous, innovative and free from overbearing adult supervision.¹⁶¹

Autobiographical and qualitative studies of children at play between 1880-1920 belie the description of street play as disorganized and character-destroying. Cary Goodman, in his study of Jewish immigrants on New York's Lower East Side at the turn of the century, argues that far from being destructive, unorganized and divisive, street play, may, in fact, have been a social glue. Street play, he says, united the community and served to counter the anomie of the slums.

Street games, which brought thousand of people into close contact with one another, in a context of fun and relaxation, contributed to the creation of a community. A pattern of daily recurrence developed which facilitated talking and sharing . . . This familiarity of shared experience softened feelings of

anomie and rootlessness generated by immigration and constant moving.¹⁶²

David Nasaw, writing about the street play of New York City children between 1900 and 1920, describes the street as "a separate world with its own standards of right and wrong, its own code of ethics . . . The children took care of one another. They managed their own space and their own games- according to their own rules . . . The children's play community of the street was founded on a bedrock of rules."¹⁶³ Nasaw notes that each play community had small subgroups defined by age and gender. It was the task of the older more experienced street kids to teach the little ones and newcomers how to run the bases, shoot dice, swing a bat and jump rope in rhyme. According to Nasaw, subgroups developed an acute sense of territory. Each had its space on the block. Girls had responsibility for their younger siblings earning themselves the title Little Mothers, while the bigger boys guarded the block from youthful outsiders.

Nasaw, as well as Goodman, notes that adults, though not supervising, organizing or controlling the street games of children, were frequent observers of children at play since so much of their time was spent outdoors escaping the wretched tenement conditions or conducting business.

The life on the streets was the life of the city. While the children played, the policemen walked their beat, prostitutes solicited "johns," peddlers shouted their wares, delivery wagons squeezed down the block to neighborhood shops, and men and women clustered in small groups on the corners, in front of the shops, at the threshold of the saloons, and on their front stoop.¹⁶⁴

Local playgrounds were available to these children. In the year 1910 alone, New York spent \$121,606 for playground maintenance employing over 1000 workers on 250 playgrounds.¹⁶⁵ But most of the children who had access to the playgrounds did not use them. Having savored the sweetness of unsupervised play, city children were reluctant to give that up to the watchful eye of adults. "The children at play inhabited a world that was encased in but separate from the ordinary adult world that surrounded them . . . There was something liberating in this temporary separation from supervising adults. On the streets they could play as they pleased and say what they wanted."¹⁶⁶

Catherine Brody reminiscing about "A New York Childhood" wrote, "There was no such thing as gathering or playing in the house . . . The streets were the true homes of the small Italians, Irish and Jews. Though there were inseparable obstacles of caste and religion to home visits between the three classes, in the street they all met on fairly equal terms."¹⁶⁷ The satisfactory negotiation of disputes is a common theme in street play. Brody's version follows:

The evening often ended with a mad. Tenement house children have sensitive tempers . . . If a girl called for one day, one had to call for her the next. Otherwise, there was a mad. Getting glad again called for a vast outlay of tact, since, while both parties might be anxious to become glad, neither would make the first overtures . . . But we had found a . . . way. The mad parties lost their names and became A and B, thus protecting their pride by a supposed anonymity in case of a rebuff. An intermediary would approach A and ask: "If B speaks to A, will A speak to B?" Then she would approach B

and ask, "If A speaks to B, will B speak to A?"
B would.¹⁶⁸

By so negotiating their disputes the girls not only resolved their mad, but managed to "save face" as well.

Though commercial amusement, idleness and "mostly just fooling around," may have had their moral or social shortcomings, these activities are not the same as street play and games whose major shortcoming was unequivocally the physical danger they represented to children. The descriptions by Progressive era reformers of street play as vicious, wild and disorderly have been challenged by research that shows that on the streets children created a world of play that was spontaneous and innovative, but not necessarily chaotic and unorganized, nor totally removed from the watchful eyes of neighborhood adults.

Given the contradictions in the descriptions of children's use of free time, just what was it that playground organizers were up to and what was their motivation?

The Organization of Play--Why It Began

Play historians are unified in their belief that the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century group of reformers led a nation wide crusade to provide playgrounds and supervised activities for children and adolescents in American cities. They disagree, however, on the reformers' intentions. Three viewpoints have emerged.¹⁶⁹

The earliest arguments advanced in the early decades of the century, held that the play advocates were

attempting to improve urban life in such a way as to liberate the downtrodden from their impoverished social and economic conditions. Everett Mero and Clarence Rainwater, both of whom provided a history of the play movement, held this position. Rainwater wrote, "The play movement is a positive movement rather than a negative one. It seeks to bring about adjustments [to other social situations, i.e., conditions produced by urbanization, immigration, and specialization in industry] through the organization of social activities." ¹⁷⁰

By the 1960s, however, some historians were beginning to argue that progressive reformers were consciously doing just the opposite; that is, they were intervening to control their subordinates. Anthony Platt, in analyzing the creation of the modern juvenile justice system as one form of child saving, maintains:

The child saving movement tried to . . . achieve order, stability and control while preserving the existing class system and distribution of wealth . . . The child saving movement was not simply a humanistic enterprise on behalf of the lower classes against the established order. On the contrary, its impetus came primarily from the middle and upper classes who were instrumental in devising new forms of social control to protect their privileged positions in American society." ¹⁷¹

Reformers worked in favor of the interests of capitalism by manipulating the lower classes while preserving social relationships conducive to their own dominance. ¹⁷² The inner city immigrant child was the main target of these reformers. New laws were enacted to make it a crime to play in the streets. At the same time new "velvet" cages, the playgrounds, beckoned the immigrant child to find freedom

through play. "Once captured [on the playground], the child was subjected to daily lessons in punctuality, obedience, discipline, self-sacrifice and the American way."¹⁷³

Cary Goodman in Choosing Sides: Playgrounds and Street Life on the Lower East Side takes this position.

The rise of organized play and the destruction of immigrant street culture was the result of the combined efforts of many of America's leading reformers operating with and on behalf of the upper class. . . . Many tactics were used to attain their goals, including the passage of "street laws" which prohibited playing in the street, flying kites, and the like . . . All of the leading public and private recreation groups took as an article of faith the need to eliminate street play and games. They saw in the "alternative attractions" of gyms, leagues, vacation schools, etc. not only lures away from the street but opportunities for socializing the newcomers to a particular value and behavior system . . . Street play and playgrounds were the two sides of the coin during this period and children were forced to "choose sides" between them. ¹⁷⁴

The enactment of laws, as early as 1902 forbidding street play was one of the major reasons for the high rates of juvenile delinquency associated with this period. Doeblin noted that "children are arrested for playing baseball or football in the streets, for playing 'jacks' or marbles on the sidewalk, or for collecting in a group on the steps of a house and singing." ¹⁷⁵ Child savers were intent on rescuing youth from delinquency even as they were instrumental in creating the laws which defined and labelled them as delinquents.

Lawrence Finfer, an advocate of the social control school of play organization, maintains that the early playground advocate who saw play as "promoting the

development of the trait of 'resentment against injustice,'

. . . hoped to 'submerge this impulse.'"¹⁷⁶ He writes:

Thus it was that a movement ostensibly desiring to release the city's young from the harsher aspects of urban life became one which served to prepare them to accept their fate uncomplainingly. Liberation, in this sense, was ironically a freedom for the sake of control.¹⁷⁷

In a similar vein Dickason argues that:

In their collective capacity, philanthropists, organizers and staff members succeeded through playgrounds and playrooms in inducting potential deviants to conformity to the existing social order . . . By imitating a playground supervisor children learned the "correct" mode of behavior. They learned humility; they learned cleanliness, cooperation and compromise . . . All of these virtues were held up for each individual child to admire and imitate on the playground. None of this was orchestrated on playgrounds for the children of the upper classes.¹⁷⁸

A third group of studies on child saving in general or on the playground movement in particular, published in the late 1970s and the 1980s, falls in between the Progressive and social control schools of thought. Dominick Cavallo, Susan Tiffin and Roy Rosenzweig are representative. Like the social control camp, these historians view the playgrounds as tools by which the middle and upper classes could shape a new moral order defined by the standards of their own class positions. The school maintains that reformers acted more out of self interest than out of altruism. As F.H. Briggs, author of a book with a title that makes no secret of its intention, Boys as They Are Made and How to Remake Them, maintained, the wild or immigrant boy must be reached for "his vote will weigh just as heavily as your son's vote . . .

and he will be able to pull votes by means that your son cannot use."¹⁷⁹ The masses, mostly poor immigrants, would pose a threat to the political and economic environment of the rising middle class if they could not be made to share in their goals and aspirations. Americanizing the immigrant through education, civic instruction and supervised play was a cause taken on by both moderate conservatives and liberal minded Progressives. Playgrounds were necessary extension of the prototypical melting pot, the public schools.

While this group of play historians agree that reformers desired to shape social relationships in their own interests, they do not maintain that organized play was part of a conspiracy to close off the life chances of the urban poor. Indeed, the emphasis on team sports on the playgrounds is interpreted as an aid used to teach children how to play the game of capitalism. For as values shifted from nineteenth century individualism to twentieth century collective interdependence and organizational discipline, participation in team sports was viewed as a certain means of producing the cooperative spirit required for modern industry. According to historian Cavallo, play organizers believed that a connection existed between the social training techniques employed on the playgrounds, especially during team games, and the creation of a distinct personality type. "Playground training," Cavallo argues, "wove conformity and autonomy into a multidimensional personality . . . perfectly suited to meet the stresses and

challenges of twentieth-century urban-industrial society."¹⁸⁰ The ideal team player was "a thing, a process, and . . . he had to be efficiently organized in the interests of social order and harmony."¹⁸¹ Cavallo concludes that the playgrounds and the social training through play and sport undertaken on them, were, indeed, vehicles of political socialization. He allows, however, that this structuring of the ideal team player's personality was the hidden agenda of the playground organizers. "Certainly," he concedes, "we cannot overlook their most obvious child saving interests: the moral and physical well-being of youngsters who lived in damp, dirty, congested tenements."¹⁸²

Social historian Susan Tiffin also falls within this last school of thought. She writes:

The men and women who agitated for child welfare reform were mainly middle class, native-born, urban based professionals. The stable society they wished to ensure was one that was conducive to their own social and career aspirations. They did not wish a radical redistribution of wealth nor a basic restructuring of social relationships. Their intervention into the lives of children would theoretically guarantee that American society would suffer no such upheaval. At the same time they were genuinely concerned about the plight of an unfortunate group of children . . . The interaction between self interest and idealism is too complex to permit dismissal of the humanitarianism of the late nineteenth century as a hypocritical front for the self interest of privileged classes . . . The urban middle class professionals who concerned themselves with child welfare tried to achieve both social order and social justice. ¹⁸³

Historian Roy Rosenweig agrees that while social control was certainly an important motivation for many reformers, he argues that this analysis distorts history in

two ways. First, it tends to reduce social reformers and playground advocates to rationally calculating social engineers, when their motivations were much more complex. Early reformers were also sparked by naturalistic visions of society, fears about urban disease, and infatuation with European public gardens as well as by the desire to uplift and quiet the masses. Second, and more importantly, the social control formula suggests that the object of social reform, the urban masses, were both inert and totally pliable.¹⁸⁴ His own research on the working class of Worcester, Massachusetts and biographical and ethnographic studies of children at play show these groups to be actors as well as acted upon. Despite the efforts of parks and playground reformers to organize the leisure of the poor and working class, they, both adults and children, succeeded in creating and pursuing their own conception of leisure activity.

Whatever the motivation of the reformers, be it freedom or control or both, they did not act alone, but in concert with the children for whom playgrounds were intended and designed. The children's subjective understanding of their interactional play experiences had to have played some part in influencing whether they were liberated or indoctrinated or neither. Given the complexities involved, it is doubtful that either liberation or indoctrination of urban youngsters could have been achieved by design solely on America's playgrounds.

Summary:

Between 1880-1920 the social disorganization wrought by industrialization, urbanization and immigration brought a heightened concern for the welfare of children who were seen as both victims and saviors of society. Through the Playground Movement which began in 1885 Progressive reformers sought to improve the environmental conditions of urban poor children while at the same time socializing them to the dominant culture. Not until 1910 were there similar efforts to organize middle class children through the character building scouting organizations. Even then, efforts were directed toward adolescents only. While social control was a guiding, though not exclusive, principle of both movements, the Playground Movement assumed inferiority of both the children it hoped to serve and their parents. If successful, organized play would be an adaptive aide and play leaders, rather than parents, would be positive role models. The scouting organizations, on the other hand, reinforced the taken-for-granted character building virtues of the middle class family in adolescents who were struggling with neither accommodation nor assimilation, but were being trained for their gender-specific adult leadership roles.

Though impressive in its growth throughout the period, the Playground Movement was not enthusiastically received by poor children who preferred their own child-controlled, peer organized play on the busy streets and sidewalks of the

cities. Middle class children had their own play spaces as well. These were largely in their own homes with manufactured toys and games, or in the homes and yards of neighbors, under the watchful eyes of their parents.

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CHAPTER IV
FROM PLAYGROUNDS TO BACKYARDS
DOMINANT TRENDS 1920-1945

Socio-Historical Background

America in the 1920s, was a relatively affluent society, but one filled with political and social tensions in the aftermath of World War I. The economic prosperity of the 1920's, with the exception of the brief but severe recession of 1921-1922, allowed for the upward social mobility of a large segment of the population. Between 1921 and 1929 disposable income increased from \$60 billion to \$83 billion. The GNP in that same period rose from about \$72 billion to about \$104 billion.¹ The rapid growth of the middle class, which began a decade earlier, continued as manufacturing expanded the need for all levels of white collar employees--from salespeople to clerks to upper levels of management. In 1920, 25% of the civilian labor force was white-collar, compared to 18% in 1900.² The rise of this large middle class was a significant factor in the decline of Progressivism in the 1920s. Historian Arthur S. Link comments:

Vastly important . . . in the decline of Progressivism was the widespread, almost wholesale defection from its ranks of the middle classes--the middling businessmen, bankers and manufacturers, and the professional people closely associated with them in ideals and habits in American cities large and small . . . These groups found a new economic and social status as a consequence of the flowering of American enterprise under the impact of the technological and other revolutions of the 1920s . . . Their temper was dynamic, expansive and extremely confident . . . The whole complex of groups constituting the urban middle classes . . . had little interest in rebellion or even in mild reform proposals . . . The professionalization of business and the full blown emergence of a large managerial class had profound impact upon social and political ideals . . . The beginning disintegration of the great cities with the spread of middle and upper class suburbs . . . diffused the remaining reform energies among urban leaders.³

The Changing American City

As Link notes, the economic forces that expanded the middle class affected residential patterns as cities grew. The late nineteenth century city was a city of concentration and centralization accentuated by industrialization. Built in the era of steam power the great American cities of the east and midwest developed their manufacturing processes around a core area, uniting factory and power supply. Manufacturing sites flourished around the central business district of the city and along rail and water transportation lines. Thus, early cities were quite compact, fashioned by centripetal rather than centrifugal forces. Production, management and wholesale distribution were all concentrated in or near the factories with the majority of workers living nearby in densely packed tenements. The distant separation

of residence and place of work was a luxury reserved for the wealthy.⁴ This residential pattern was new, however, to the industrial city and evolved with the transformation of cities from a preindustrial form to a fully industrial form by the end of the nineteenth century. In the preindustrial city the well-off, the powerful and the elite tended to live at the center of the city, an area which had preeminence over the periphery.⁵ Distance from the center was inversely related to social status. By 1920, however, a reversal of that pattern had been completed: distance from the center had become directly associated with position in the status hierarchy.⁶ The farther one lived from the center of the city, the higher the social status.

Technological breakthroughs in the area of transportation and communication had transformed the city based on steam power into one dependent on petroleum and electricity. By 1920 trucks freed factories from locating on rail lines and over 15 million telephones allowed for long distance communication. The result of these major technological innovations was decentralization. Within the metropolitan areas growth was from the center to the periphery.⁷ In 1925, urban sociologists Robert Park and Ernest Burgess had delineated the growth of cities in concentric rings around the central business district. The tendency, they noted, was for any town or city to expand radially from its central business district. Encircling the downtown area was an area in transition which was eventually

invaded by business and light manufacturing plants. This zone was characterized by "slums," a deteriorating area of rooming house districts inhabited by Negroes, newly arrived immigrants and those earlier settlers who did not move up and out. It was believed that the children of these groups were subjected to the conflict between American and ethnic cultures, a prime factor in their tendency toward juvenile delinquency. Highly disorganized and freed of the constraints of primary controls, this area was characterized by promiscuity, vice, gangs, crime, poverty, desertion and abandoned children. These were the children first targeted for child saving by early playground organizers. A third area, the zone of workingmen's homes was inhabited by the factory and shop workers who had escaped from the area in transition but who desired to live within easy access of their work. The inhabitants of this area were generally second generation ethnic Americans who tended to remain ethnically homogeneous as they moved outward of central cities. Ethnicity came to characterize neighborhoods, providing a network of organizations and social relationships bounded by common origin and territorial unity.⁸ Beyond this zone was the residential area of high class apartment buildings or of exclusive "restricted" districts of single family dwellings. Still further out beyond the city limits was the commuters' zone, suburban areas, or satellite cities, with a thirty to sixty minute ride to the central business district. Salaried white collar employees, professionals and

businessmen lived in these outlying rings.⁹ The residential patterns were facilitated by the automobile which allowed workers to commute to work from their residences located in peripheral areas of the city and in areas not served by existing trolley, elevated railroads and subway lines.¹⁰ According to Park and Burgess, the expansion of the city resulted in a process of distribution which sifted, sorted and relocated individuals and groups by residence and occupation. Interrelated with this economic division of labor was a corresponding division into social classes and into distinct cultural and recreational groups.¹¹ The effect of the growth process was to support the association of physical distance from the center with status in the social hierarchy.

The Changing American Family

Prosperity and industrial growth not only rearranged the familiar social geography of the city, but it also affected the structure and functions of the family. Middle class families grew increasingly smaller, private and more intimate as the number of children decreased and nonkin such as boarders, apprentices, servants and dependent members of the community were withdrawn.¹² As external institutions took over many of the economic, protective, religious, and educational functions of the family in the urban industrial environment, the family took on the particular functions of companionship, consumption and child rearing, with an

emphasis on emotional and personality development of the young. Sociologist William Ogburn, argued that these remaining functions were strengthened, making the family a realm of emotional specialization. According to Ogburn:

The sloughing of various functions of the family except the personality functions has meant a focusing of attention upon the happiness and companionship of mates and on the rearing of little children.¹³

Young, single woman who worked in clerical and communication jobs which offered "an important employment outlet for middle and upper class girls who previously had been unable to find positions consistent with their social status," ¹⁴ withdrew from the labor force when they married or had their first child. Indeed, the wage earning wife and mother faced public opinion that regarded her as "socially disturbing" or, even worse, an "ethical problem,"¹⁵ for her job at home was far more socially valued than the work she pursued at the office. Despite her commitment to the family, the middle class woman of the early decades of the twentieth century was a "New Woman." Unlike the upper-middle class "True Woman" of the mid-nineteenth century, characterized by piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity,¹⁶ this middle class woman was seeking self expression, sexual fulfillment, and equality with men, new ideas that were brought to fruition in a novel type of family concept, the "companionate family," in which husbands and wives would be "friends and lovers" and parents and their children would be "friends."¹⁷ With parent education classes and magazines such as Parents

as her tools the middle class mother, who by the 1920s had become "the central and dominant figure within the home,"¹⁸ had embraced parenthood as a profession, a status to which parenthood, indeed, had been elevated.¹⁹ Though fathers were more actively involved in parenting than the patriarchal husbands of "True Women," it was mothers who had primary responsibility for the guidance and discipline of children.²⁰

Informed on the latest trends in child rearing and child psychology, and guided by the manual of John B. Watson and the findings of Arnold Gesell, middle class mothers emphasized and provided creative play for their children's physical, intellectual and emotional growth and development. They were aided by the Home Play Movement promoted by the Playground and Recreation Association of America (PRAA). Between 1920-1930, the movement which began in the West, spread from Los Angeles to New York.²¹

As the companionate family took shape, the PRAA adopted as a catchy slogan, "The family that plays together, stays together." The slogan, which explicitly fosters family togetherness, was adopted by hundreds of cities for their campaigns to promote home play.²² Among the objectives of the movement as listed by the Playground and Recreation Association of America in its booklet Home Play, distributed through schools, parent education classes and local recreation departments, were: (1) to encourage provision of adequate space and facilities for the play of children at home; (2) to strengthen home ties by focusing attention on

the importance of parents' playing with their children; and (3) to promote knowledge in the community at large of the educational value of children's play activities and to encourage critical and intelligent selection of such activities for the child in the home.²³ Home play was heartily endorsed by the participants of the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection in 1930. The report on child welfare commented:

Through wholesale participation in home play activities, parents and children come to know each other and to lay the foundation for the greatest protection against future stress . . . Though the old fashioned home and much that it stood for is passing, the home of today is preparing through scientific knowledge and sympathetic thought for a future when recreation will be planned for, as are meals, and when a balanced ration of play will be a part of the home's everyday program.²⁴

Many of the home play campaigns concentrated on the education of parents for home recreation. Municipal recreation committees and Parent-Teacher Associations offered courses which discussed and demonstrated subjects such as active games, games for quiet times and rainy days, books, handcraft projects, play rooms and play corners, backyard playgrounds, understanding the child during his first twelve years, understanding teen-age boys and girls, helping children enjoy music, exploring the world of Nature, using public recreation opportunities, organized programs for boys and girls, things mothers and daughters can do together in the home and things fathers and sons can do together in the home.²⁵ Parents were encouraged to join the "Parents' Home Play Club." The enrollment card read: "Recognizing the

necessity of constructive and safe play in the life of our child, our family will endeavor to devote at least three hours each week to play activity together."²⁶ According to the Conference, "Making a date for family play, that is setting aside a certain night each week for the family to play together is proving very successful in many homes."²⁷ Among the games played at home were checkers, dominoes, jackstones, mumblety-peg, jackstraws, authors, lotto, parchesi, flinch, card games, ping-pong, billiards, table golf, paper and pencil games and salvo.²⁸

Though parent education in the United States goes back to 1800, it was not until 1925-1935 that organized parent education experienced its greatest growth. Between 1921 and 1930, 75 major organizations were conducting parent education programs.²⁹ The expansion of parent education programs continued through the mid-1930s, then declined in 1938.³⁰ Funds from the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial and other foundations helped to launch the publication of Parents' Magazine in 1926. The magazine was an outlet for the research carried on in child study centers. The purpose of the magazine was to transmit to parents the research findings on child development.³¹ It regularly carried feature articles on the benefits of play and playthings on the child's physical and psychological development.³² Indeed, the growth of organized parent education was a response to the new body of scientific knowledge on child development.³³ By 1920 the focus on children had shifted from the

Progressives' concern with the disadvantaged or delinquent child to the child study scientists' preoccupation with the normal child. No one advanced the concept of the normal child more than Dr. Arnold L. Gesell, a student of G. Stanley Hall's. It was Gesell whose maturational perspective redefined child psychology as the study of the normal child.³⁴ This was the child who under expert supervision could develop to the utmost his or her physical, physiological, mental and moral abilities.³⁵ This emphasis on the study to the normal child allowed for a new focus on child saving from the Progressive reforms based on public policy such as compulsory school attendance laws and public playgrounds to child saving through the intellectual and institutional development of new applied professional subcultures of parent education and child guidance.³⁶ And both parent education and child guidance, after 1920, stressed the seriousness of play and its essential role in mental and physical health as well as in personal and social development.³⁷

Parent education classes were intended for all social classes, though it was thought that the lower class parents would benefit most from participation. This group, however, was the least likely to participate in these programs. Between 1920 and 1934 studies pertaining to the socioeconomic characteristics of parents reached by parent education programs all clearly demonstrated that the percentage of parents involved in parent education programs varied by

socioeconomic status with proportionately more middle and upper status mothers informed and involved than lower class mothers.³⁸ As educational and occupational status increased, so did the number of participants in parent discussion groups and the percentage of parents exposed to extensive sources of information such as books, pamphlets, articles read and talk shows listened to on the topic of child care.³⁹ So effective was parent education considered to be that educators and educated might be considered as "coworkers together with God in the fashioning of immortal souls."⁴⁰ Indeed, teachers and educational institutions were vital links between the movements for parent education and for home play. In many cities the cooperation of teachers was secured to further the movement through school children.

While the home play movement was intended to reach all citizens, its appeal, just as that of parent education, was to the middle classes. Middle class children, when not playing at home tended to play in neighbors' homes and yards.⁴¹ In addition to home and yard play, family recreation became a standard of middle class play as fathers in companionate families were encouraged, unlike the patriarchal husbands of True Women, to spend their leisure time in active parenting, particularly in family recreation.⁴² Trips to national parks, campsites, vacation spots and Sunday afternoon spins became typical of the middle class, for whom the automobile had become a necessity by 1920.⁴³

Though the decade of the 1920s was noted for its economic prosperity, that prosperity was not evenly distributed. Full time motherhood was a luxury that working class women could not afford, thus the home play movement held little appeal to financially struggling families. Lower class children were more likely than their middle class counterparts to play in streets or vacant lots. Without discretionary income, these families lacked the facilitating conditions for home play, namely, time, space, money for toys, games and backyard play equipment, and unoccupied adult partners. As late as 1930, over 57% of all employed women were either Negroes or foreign born whites.⁴⁴ The vast majority were in semiskilled or unskilled positions. Of employed women, 33% were in domestic and personal services, 18% were in manufacturing and mechanical industries, 19% were in clerical positions, and 12% were in trade and transportation.⁴⁵ Ninety percent of employed women went to work out of economic need.⁴⁶ Despite President Hoover's claim in his inaugural address that "We in America today are nearer to the final triumph over poverty than ever before in the history of any land,"⁴⁷ 60% of all families had incomes below \$2,000, which according to the Brookings Institute was sufficient in 1929 prices to supply a family of four with only basic necessities.⁴⁸ Installment payments and rampant credit purchases were indications of a prosperity that lacked sound financial backing. America's imminent "triumph over poverty" was not to be.

The decade which began with economic prosperity ended with the stock market crash of October 24, 1929 which plunged the country into the longest and worst economic depression it had ever known. As late as 1937, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, in his second inaugural address, could still say, "I see one-third of a nation ill housed, ill clad, ill nourished."⁴⁹ The 1930's opened with economic chaos and closed with the outbreak of World War II, which the United States would enter by 1941.

Both the unemployment crisis of the 1930s and the war experience of 1941-1945 affected family life. In 1933, the depth of the Depression, the birthrate was 18.4 per 1000 population, down from 27.7 per 1000 population in 1920 and from 21.3 in 1930.⁵⁰ Economic necessity propelled middle class married women into the labor force. In 1910, only 10.7% of married women worked, by 1940 that figure had increased to 15.2%. with the greatest increase occurring during the Depression.⁵¹ In addition, more than 6 million women went to work for the first time during the Second World War; in 1945 women were 36% of the labor force.⁵² The end of the Depression and the prospects of separation at the beginning of World War II brought an increase in the birthrate between 1940-1942, which fell again during the war years. It soared, however, immediately after the war reaching a high of 26.6 per 1000 persons in 1947.⁵³ As we shall see, each of these factors--prosperity, depression, and war--in its own way impacted on the play of American

children. But so did America's growing fear of foreigners.

The Effects of Xenophobia

The period immediately following World War I was characterized by extreme xenophobia. The visibility of radical labor organizers, terrorists, anarchists and communists, along with the economic recession of 1921-22, caused many Americans to fear that their way of life was in imminent danger. Though the majority of immigrants were neither communists nor radicals, many extremists of the period, in fact, were not American citizens. According to historian John Garraty, "Wartime fear of alien saboteurs easily transformed itself into peacetime terror of foreign radicals. In place of Germany, the enemy became the lowly immigrant, usually an Italian, a Jew, or a Slav and usually an industrial worker."⁵⁴

Even while fear and distrust of immigrants increased, the postwar economic conditions of Europe led hundreds of thousands to seek a better life in the United States. Immigration increased from 110,000 in 1919 to 430,000 in 1920 to 805,000 in 1921 and showed no signs of abating.⁵⁵ The climate of the early twenties was not conducive to this increasing tide of immigrants and to the reform efforts Progressives had undertaken on their behalf in large cities. Historian Link writes:

The 1920's were a period made almost unique by an extraordinary reaction against idealism and reform . . . The surging tides of nationalism and mass hatred generated by W.W. I continued to engulf the land and

were manifested, among other things, in fear of communism, suppression of civil liberties, revival of nativism and anti-Semitism most crudely exemplified by the Ku Klux Klan, and in the triumph of racism and prejudice in immigration legislation. The 1920's were an era when great traditions and ideals were repudiated or forgotten, when the American people, propelled by a crass materialism in their scramble for wealth, uttered a curse on twenty five years of reform endeavor.⁵⁶

The bigotry against Catholics and Jews by white Protestants of northern and western European ancestry was strengthened by popular racial theories that characterized the "dirty little dark people" of southern and eastern Europe as genetically inferior.⁵⁷ Genetic psychologists such as Henry Herbert Goddard, Robert Yerkes and Lewis M. Terman, major scholars with national influence, argued that not only were physical appearance and intelligence genetically transferable but social behavior was inextricably linked to mental inheritance.⁵⁸ Yerkes and his colleagues, based on mental testing of Army recruits, suggested a hierarchy of races or nativity groups according to presumed innate endowment.⁵⁹ The new immigrants were found, according to their interpretation of the tests, to be genetically inferior to Anglo-Saxons who along with Germans, Scandinavians and other "old" immigrants from northern and western Europe formed the superior "American race."⁶⁰

Though deemed genetically superior to immigrants, native born old-stock whites were failing to reproduce themselves at the same rate as the "inferior" immigrants, a situation which was viewed with great alarm. As early as the turn of the century it was feared that the fall in the

American birthrate, concentrated among native born women, would result in "the ignorant, the low-lived and alien," taking over the country by outproducing "our own population."⁶¹ Sociologist Albion Small commented, "In some of the best middle class social strata in the United States a young wife becomes a subject of surprised comment among her acquaintances if she accepts the burdens of maternity. This is a commonplace."⁶² In fact, the rate of childbearing among immigrant women was nearly twice that of native born women.⁶³

The fears engendered by the reproductive facts of the "better" and poor classes, the perceived political radicalism and genetic inferiority of immigrants, and the waning of Progressive idealism led to a revival of nativism which culminated in an immigration restriction movement which "grew to such force that it could not be denied."⁶⁴

In 1921 Congress, responding to public pressure and itself reflecting the widespread prejudice against eastern and southern Europeans, passed the Emergency Quota Act, signed by President Harding. The new law provided that the number of foreigners of any nationality to be admitted to the United States in any given year could not exceed three percent of the number of foreign born of that nationality counted by the census of 1910. Soon considered inadequate in restricting the "undesirables" from Italy and eastern Europe, the Emergency Quota Act was replaced by the National Origins Act of 1924. An administrative nightmare, the legislation initially restricted each nation to an

immigration quota equal to 2% of the foreign born of that nation residing in the United States in 1890. Since most immigration from southern and eastern Europe had been after 1890 the legislation drastically reduced the numbers of undesirable immigrants. By 1929 a new system went into effect, still based on national origins, which set a top limit of 150,000 per year.⁶⁵ The system heavily favored northern and western Europeans. About 85% of the quota went to northwest Europe and half of the total quota went to three countries: England, Germany and Ireland. Eastern and southern Europeans were given minimal quotas. Thus, while the former group were given quotas they were unable to fill, southern and eastern Europeans waited for admission to the United States.⁶⁶ Though the numbers of undesirable immigrants would dwindle to a mere trickle by the 1930s, thus eliminating them as a supposed major source of social problems, throughout the 1920s immigrants in urban centers continued to be blamed for the social ills of crime, delinquency, and vice, particularly second generation youngsters, believed to be caught in the disorganization and confusion of culture conflict.⁶⁷ This large population of second generation immigrant children remained a target group for the advocates of the waning playground movement.

But just as the larger "immigration problems" had been dealt with by restrictive legislation, the larger "children's problems," the issues of health, education, neglect and delinquency that had united Progressive campaigns, were being

handled by enacted legislative and institutional reforms. Between 1890-1918 compulsory primary education laws were enacted in all the states ⁶⁸ and by 1921 physical education classes, which incorporated many of the activities of the playgrounds, were either required or permitted by law in the schools in twenty five states.⁶⁹ By 1914, almost all the states had laws covering hours and conditions of child labor in factories, mills and workshops, though they were weak and inadequate. By 1930, however, less than 5% of children between 10 and 15 years of age were employed, compared to 18% in 1900.⁷⁰ In 1912, under President William Howard Taft the U.S. Children's Bureau was created to conduct and disseminate research on infant mortality and other welfare problems related to children. Promoting middle class child rearing practices through educative literature, the Bureau advocated "a scientific view of mothering and spelled out the then current dogma on feeding, play, discipline, and parent-child interaction."⁷¹ With passage of the Sheppard Towner Act in 1921, health care facilities were created to provide those services deemed necessary to children's well being based on the research of the Children's Bureau. In the area of social welfare, the professionalization of social work from the voluntary and philanthropic "charities and corrections" of the turn of the century to state and city organized "public welfare" institutions and agencies in the 1920s was another heritage of the Progressive era. The social worker had been transformed from "the embodiment of sentiment into the symbol

of technique."⁷² As scientific casework rooted in Freudian psychology characterized the new concept of social work, "the psychiatric social worker in the child guidance clinic became a model for the profession."⁷³ Yet, individual clinical casework was only one model. As social reform activity diminished, "social group work," a methodological approach to helping through recreational and educational activities, was the standard program in settlement houses or "community centers," YMCAs, YWCAs, Boys Clubs, and later in the period, in Police Athletic Leagues.⁷⁴ Early efforts to establish a juvenile justice system, begun in Chicago in 1899, met with continued success. By 1920, every state but three provided a juvenile court for youthful offenders.⁷⁵ By the 1920s, then, significant social reforms had been firmly established and were dealing with dependent and delinquent children. Thus, as the Americanization of immigrant children and the improvement of their physical health and moral character, goals of play organizers, were assumed by institutions such as the schools and social welfare agencies, the very *raison d'être* of the playground movement was weakened.

Thus, by 1923 when Joseph Lee, still President of the Playground and Recreation Association of America, turned his attention back to the pre-World War I efforts of the association, the decrease in the flow of immigrants, the general disinterest of the middle class in further reforms, the Americanization of immigrant children in the schools, and the legislative and institutional provisions for child

welfare, freed the PRAA to continue the broadening of its programs into the areas of industrial recreation, rural recreation, the training of recreation leaders, athletics and recreation for women and girls, music, home play and play in institutions.⁷⁶ Yet, the PRAA did not abandon its earlier commitment to the provision of play spaces and programs for urban poor children. By 1920, however, the urban poor were not only ethnics but Negroes who had migrated to the cities during World War I in search of employment opportunities. In 1900 fewer than a quarter of the 8.8 million blacks lived in urban places. By 1920, 34% of the black population was urban; in 1930, the figure was 43.7%⁷⁷ Urban blacks concentrated in large metropolitan areas and within these metropolitan areas, in central cities.⁷⁸ Lee and the Playground and Recreation Association of America made several efforts to provide recreation for Negro children, yet these were neither successful nor substantial.⁷⁹ In 1919, the PRAA established a Bureau of Colored Work which provided consultation services aimed at assisting racially segregated community recreation programs until World War II.⁸⁰ In 1921, The Playground, the monthly magazine of the PRAA, reported:

The keen desire on the part of colored people for proper recreation facilities in towns and cities is in evidence in every locality, but as yet comparatively small provision has been made for his need in this respect. Playgrounds and recreation parks are entirely lacking in many neighborhoods in the North where colored people reside, and in many sections of the South play facilities have not been developed for any group . . . About three percent of all the playgrounds now operated in America beckon colored inhabitants to participate in the activities incident to their use . . . One type of playground being utilized by communities for colored

people is the vacant lot.⁸¹

In 1930, the White House Conference on Children, examining the state of Negro recreation, concluded that, "Progress has been made by cities during the last ten years in providing more adequately for the wholesome recreation of colored children." Though facilities were segregated and inferior to those for white children, they had grown in numbers over the decade. By 1930, 361 outdoor playgrounds exclusively for the use of Negro children and young people were reported in 125 cities. In forty-eight cities, 103 indoor recreation centers were being maintained for colored people. Public recreation departments were promoting music and pageantry among Negro groups who were "able to make a unique contribution to community life through their rendering of negro spirituals and their natural gifts for drama."⁸² But, public recreation for racial minority groups would never be comparable in quality and quantity to those provided for white citizens.

By the 1920s the PRAA found itself in an ambivalent situation. The leadership was still interested in promoting child welfare through supervised play activities, but it was more committed to offering recreational activities beyond the scope of playgrounds and community centers, and was particularly concerned with drawing adults, of all social classes, into the recreation movement. The decrease in the number of hours worked per week provided leisure for the masses. In 1900, the average weekly hours of work in

unionized manufacturing industries were 53 and for nonunionized manufacturing, 62. By 1920, unionized manufacturing hours had declined to 46 per week while nonunionized manufacturing hours fell to 54.⁸³ How leisure time would be spent was a matter of concern. An article in The Playground asked:

How shall the leisure time of life be spent? Shall it be spent destructively, in dissoluteness, debauchery, gambling, immorality, extravagance and in all the vicious activities that make a nation worse? Or shall the increasing amount of leisure time in people's lives be spent profitably for the making of better citizens, for the development of a more rounded and finer life?"⁸⁴

The "profitable" use of leisure time was not limited to study and educational classes, but also to the pursuit of "amusements, recreational games and sports." The writer asked, "Is it not time, in the year 1920, that we finally recognize that the determination to be amused and to have fun cannot under any conditions be eradicated from the human heart?" Play was no longer an activity that belonged only to children, but "for us adults, play, diversions, recreation, amusements can be profitably admitted to most people's lives in much greater quantities than they are now."⁸⁵ Responding to the advent of leisure for the masses, public recreation "came of age. . .and took its place, full fledged and unassailed as a major and indispensable institution in American society" in the 1920s.⁸⁶ This focus on adults would increase in the 1930s as recreation filled the gap left by widespread unemployment during the Great Depression. Indeed, in 1930 the Playground and Recreation Association of America

changed its name to the National Recreation Association (NRA) confirming its shift away from the play of children, particularly economically and socially disadvantaged ones on urban playgrounds, to recreation for all age groups and social classes. As recreation became securely entrenched in the folkways of America,⁸⁷ play for deprived urban youngsters became an increasingly smaller and less important item on the agenda of the National Recreation Association.

Having established the major socio-cultural and historical changes of the 1920-1945 period, the thesis continues with a closer look at children at play. It also traces the continued growth and transformation of the organized play movement as well as the effects of radio and movies on play.

Children at Play

Ethnographic, autobiographical and empirical studies of working class children at play during this period vividly describe street play. The memories of stickball are particularly notable. Folklorist Arthur Silverstein describes four variations of stickball games to which he and his boyhood friends "devoted some of the best years of our lives": Lengthwise, Against the Wall, Pitching in Swift and Catch a Fly, You're Up. Silverstein writes:

Stickball is not a single game at all, but a family of games adopted from our national pastime, and played on city streets in and between the flow of traffic. All one needs

is a rubber ball and a broom stick--no uniforms, no gloves, no special equipment at all. The ball of choice is, or was, a Spalding (pronounced Spal-DEEN), a hard pink sphere with remarkable bounce. The stick was generally "borrowed" from the basement of a nearby apartment house. . . .

Choosing sides was generally no problem. Most games could be and were played by only two boys. . . . When a larger group of boys wanted to start a game, the oldest ones or the best players took charge and selected their teammates in alternation, down to the youngest or the least skilled, who, if there were an odd number, might be designated as scorekeeper, umpire, coach, or catcher for both sides.⁸⁸

Sociologist Gerald Handel, in interviews with working class men who grew up in Yorkville, a section of New York City, in the two decades or so before W.W.II, captures their play spirit in the streets of the city. One man recounts his childhood in the thirties:

You never invited the kids up . . . Everybody used to meet in the middle of the street . . . And in the summer time . . . you sat on the stoop and played games . . . four corners maybe . . . or hot beans.⁸⁹

Handel's interviewees recollected, as did Silverstein and Nasaw in describing street play of children in the 1900-1920 period, the imaginative incorporation of street fixtures into their games. Manhole covers, called sewers, served as the rings for games of marbles; as goals for hockey played on roller skates; and as bases for stickball. Invented in the streets of New York, stickball was illegal and players had to try to outwit the cop on the beat who, if not outwitted, almost always confiscated their sticks.⁹⁰

Most of the men recall being financially impoverished

in childhood. Yet, as Handel notes, fun is consistently interwoven with deprivation in their memories. Though "money was short and toys and play equipment were scarce," the men recollect having a lot to do and having fun doing it.⁹¹

According to John Clark, for working class kids in New York City during the 1930s and 1940s, the tenement stoop was a dominant factor and organizing principle in their lives, just as it had been for city children since the turn of the century. The stoop was "a subculture and the location of the child's first experience in social living."⁹² Clark describes a city block at play:

The sidewalk itself is an endless gaming table. There might be seven or eight potsee games going on--one in front of each stoop. The boys have chalked up the sidewalk for numerous skully games, played with bottlecaps filled with melted crayons purloined from school. Sets of four engage in furious boxball matches or, using the brick fronts of buildings, a game of King with the loser "asses-up." At either end of the block where the billboards hang, boys stand fifteen to twenty feet away and aim a Spauldeen at the low pointed end of the sign . . . The stoops were used for stoopball, the curbs for curbball, the walls for off-the-wall; the streets were used for stickball, association, or roller skate hockey. ⁹³

Stickball was by far the most popular game, "a demanding, competitive sport." Each stoop had its own stickball team, but only the best players, those few three manhole hitters, made it to the block team. Clark, too, recounts the appropriation of the streets by the boys at play. "The ball, if hit in fair territory, must be played off car fenders, windows, walls, hydrants, occupied baby buggies and Mrs. Gustavo."⁹⁴

Edward Devereaux recounts the play of his childhood in the 1920s:

I can recall literally dozens of games which we played regularly and with enthusiasm--puss in the corner, red rover, capture the flag, one-o-cat, statues, stealing sticks, blind man's bluff, croquet, leap frog, duck on the rock, prisoner's base, and many, many more. ⁹⁵

Devereaux describes in detail the game of one-o-cat, a version of back yard baseball. An informal game, it had no teams, no set number of players, no fixed rules. He writes:

The rules of the game, as we vaguely understood or invented them, were fairly simple. Pitched balls not swung at didn't count either as balls or strikes. Three swings without a hit and you were out . . . A caught fly put you out. A good hit could get you to the tree and back for a home run . . . There were no teams and nobody bothered to keep score, since the personnel of the game usually changed during the session anyway, as some kids had to go do their chores and others joined in. The object seemed to be to stay at bat as long as you could, but during the afternoon every kid would have plenty of opportunities to play in every position, and no one was ever on the bench. ⁹⁶

It should not be thought that middle class children did not play outdoors. In a research study of students born between 1923 and 1937 and growing up in middle class areas of Boston, Lukashok and Lynch note that the respondents remember the lawns, pavements and floors on which they played, concluding that, "Of all the various types of floor coverings mentioned, grass is the best liked, then dirt that can be dug or molded, and after that any smooth surface that allows roller skating or bicycling."⁹⁷ Students recalled engaging in both active games and in imaginative play, such as house, either alone or in small groups. Open spaces, streets

without much traffic, alleys and garages were the favorite play spaces of these students as children.

Writer Robert Paul Smith, recollecting his middle class childhood in upstate New York during the late 1920s, described games of mumbly-peg, immies, stoopball, and chestnut collecting. Smith, like Devereaux, noted the informal nature of the ballgames of his childhood.

There must have been some time in my life when I played ball with nine men on a team, but surely it was not on our block. We played with as many kids as were around, and I don't think there were eighteen kids on the block.⁹⁸

Based on a survey of three thousand American families, the report of the Committee on the Young Child in the Home for the 1930 White House Conference on Child Health and Protection, found that when playing away from home children of the lower classes were more likely to play in the street or vacant lots than in playgrounds while those in the higher classes were more likely to play in parks. More boys than girls played in the streets and vacant lots while equal proportions of both sexes played in parks and playgrounds.⁹⁹ The frequency of play yards increased from either end of the socioeconomic scale toward the middle since upper class families were more likely to live in apartments and lower class families in tenements.¹⁰⁰

Though research supports distinct preferences in play spaces, studies on preferences in play activities indicate that these varied more by sex than by social class. Research by Boynton and Wang on 1800 children in the fourth, fifth,

and sixth grades in schools within a 150 mile radius of Nashville, Tennessee, on the relation of their play interests to their economic status, found that while boys and girls of high, middle and low economic status expressed an interest in similar play activities, more children of the low status indicated an interest in more of those activities that involved little or no monetary outlay, though they also did express an interest in costly activities such as horseback riding. Low income girls favored traditional singing and ring games, dodge ball, skating, jacks, jumping rope, and riding bikes. Girls in the middle socioeconomic status group showed less interest in traditional games and more interest in bike riding, hiking, swimming, horseback riding, playing a musical instrument and going to the movies. Playing with dolls was of equal popularity with low and middle status girls, and middle class girls liked skating almost as much as lower class girls. Interest in traditional games further lessened for girls in the high status group, as did interest in bike riding, jumping rope and going to the movies. Their interest in games such as badminton, croquet, tennis and hunting as well as in activities such as hiking, swimming, horseback riding and playing a musical interest, was greater though a large percentage of high status girls rode bikes and went to the movies. Thus, the preferred games of the upper class girls required a great deal of space, time and monetary outlay. Those of the lowest class required little in terms of these resources and those of the middle class fell

somewhere in between.¹⁰¹

Riding their bikes, horseback riding, baseball, marbles, and traditional chase games such as tag and hide and seek were the play activities that most interested the low status boys. The high status boys showed a preference for fishing, hunting, swimming, tennis, horseback riding, baseball and football, while the middle status boys had no one activity that was preferred overwhelmingly by that class alone. Instead, they, like the lower class boys, liked the traditional tag games, bike riding, skating and flying kites, though the percentages expressing interest were lower for the middle than the lower class of boys. Like their upper class counterparts, the middle class boys liked playing with toy airplanes, fishing, football and going to the movies, though here too the percentages expressing interest were lower than the upper status group.¹⁰² Of a total of 108 activities, the researchers found only five which for both boys and girls showed a progressive increase in preference from the lowest to the highest socioeconomic group. These five were badminton, swimming, tennis, football and watching ball games.¹⁰³ These researchers concluded that economic status has only a very minor or weak relationship to play preferences and even less of a relationship between the children's economic background and their play dislikes.¹⁰⁴ The authors note that "in the main, children of all economic strata, express a considerable interest in costly activities, even though they may not be able to afford them."¹⁰⁵ The

study further demonstrated that "children from low socioeconomic strata are likely to have about as much breadth or diversification of interests in play activities as children from any other economic level."¹⁰⁶

Foster, in a study of 1423 children in grades one to six in various Minneapolis schools, found differences in play preferences to be a function of age and sex. Among boys play preferences were clearly in catching and throwing games such as baseball, basketball, and in chasing-fleeing games such as blindman's bluff, king of the hill, fire on the mountain and drop the handkerchief. Between the ages of ten to thirteen there was little difference in the popularity of the chasing-fleeing games for boys and girls.¹⁰⁷ Singing games were more popular with girls than with boys though they decreased in popularity for both groups from age six on. Girls showed a definitely greater interest in jumping-hopping games such as hopscotch, leap frog, and jump rope than did the boys. Both boys and girls were consistent in listing fewer games for indoor than for outdoor play. Table games such as checkers, old maid, snap, Uncle Wiggly, and parchesi dominated indoor games. In terms of favorite games, baseball attained a popularity with the boys that was equalled only by the popularity of jacks among the girls. Hide and seek and tag were two of the most popular games for each sex. Both sexes showed a steadily increasing interest in baseball, run sheep run, sixty and tennis. Boys showed an increasing interest with age in canny can, five hundred,

football, golf, nigger baby and volley ball. Girls showed an increasing interest with age in jump rope, croquet and long ball. Playing house and school appeared frequently on the lists of the girls but were not present on any lists of the boys. On the other hand, basketball and volley ball were popular with the boys, but did not appear on the girls lists.¹⁰⁸

In studying the leisure time uses of 530 school children in a small town suburban community, in which three distinct classes resided, Fox found that children from Old Hatterstown, the poor and largely Italian section of town, had ten to thirty percent less leisure time than did the children of Linden Bluff, the middle class area and Mountain Grove, the "ritzy" section. Children in Old Hatterstown spent more time on home duties and work outside the home than the wealthier children. In all classes, girls had less time than boys since they did two to three times as much work around the house as the boys.¹⁰⁹ Results of the research showed that the most popular sports of all groups were baseball, tennis, basketball, swimming, football, soccer, golf, volleyball, horseshoes, bowling and skating. Fourteen of the first twenty sports listed were individual activities while only six were team games. The most popular sports were not necessarily those taught in school or on the playgrounds.

More boys (33.9%) than girls (23.1%) engaged in spontaneous outdoor play, that is, imaginative outdoor play

having no rules. Children from poorer homes were more prone to play outdoors in this manner than the wealthier children though the differences "were not overwhelming."¹¹⁰ More girls (9.6%) than boys (4.4%) engaged in spontaneous indoor play, such as playing with dolls and dressing up. Tendencies were not consistent among the community groups. Far more boys (16.1%) than girls (1.3%) spent time in highly organized outdoor play, that is, outdoor active team games with standardized rules and equipment, such as football and baseball. Fox found that as the communities got wealthier, there was a tendency for the sixth grade children to play fewer highly organized games. Similarly, more boys (8.9%) than girls (.6%) played more indoor active organized games, that is games requiring physical activity and formal equipment such as ping pong and bowling. Community differences were not significant. There was a slight tendency for girls (20.5%) to lead the boys (18.3%) in indoor quiet organized play, games with set rules and equipment such as checkers, parchesi, bagatelle and card games. Community comparisons showed that children on the average from better class homes participated more in games of this type.¹¹¹

Research by Robinson on the leisure time activities of 1100 children on New York's lower west side, the majority of whom were second generation Italian immigrants with low socioeconomic status, confirmed the preference for indoor activities by the girls due to "the lack of facilities for

outdoor play for girls, the home responsibilities which keep the Italian girls closer to the home and the tradition of the Italian immigrant group which requires careful home supervision over the girls."¹¹² Outdoor play was more popular with the boys who reported a great variety of games and types of play, most of them adapted to the city street, though much of their time outdoors was spent "just hanging around."¹¹³ Only one half of the children reported belonging to some recreational agency, the highest participation in any supervised recreation was sixteen percent of the boys on a Friday. Thus, agencies in the community had on their rolls only one half of the children and attracted less than one sixth of them to supervised activities in any one day. Robinson contended that play streets, playgrounds and parks staffed with trained workers were essential to the area. "The significant point, however, is that such programs are most difficult to organize and administer in just the areas where they are most needed."¹¹⁴

It is significant that many of the play preferences of children involved participation in team or individual sports which had become available to the masses as participant or spectator sports by 1920. Before the turn of the century, sports such as tennis, golf and even baseball were activities of the wealthy for it was only they who had the time and money for such nonproductive pastimes.¹¹⁵ Indeed, economist Thorsten Veblen speculated in 1899 that the leisure activities of the affluent were engaged in as a form of

conspicuous consumption, to impress observers that they could afford to devote so much time away from work.¹¹⁶ But with the growth of cities, the rising standard of living and the increase in leisure time due to shorter working hours and higher wages, middle and working class people were able to spend more money on sports whether as participants or spectators. Advances in transportation and communication facilitated the explosion of modern sports, particularly during the decade of the twenties. Indeed, the era of the 1920s was the "Golden Age of Sports" with some of America's most famous athletes rising to prominence during those years: Babe Ruth, Knut Rockne, Jack Dempsey, Bill Tilden and Bobby Jones.¹¹⁷ A pervasive and intense athletic spirit had swept over the country as sports became an important part of American national life for both adults and children. But while the affluent could pursue their sports in private clubs and facilities or on their country estates, the masses were most likely to pursue theirs in community facilities. Thus, it is not to be presumed that even if children's play interests were similar, as empirical studies showed they were, that their ability to actually engage in their preferred activities were equal or that class lines were crossed for participation. The rigid residential patterns, largely a consequence of socioeconomic status and social distancing among the classes, resulted in a de facto segregation of the classes residentially and recreationally. For instance, while all children expressed an interest in swimming, the children

of the affluent and the poor did not swim in the same facilities. Children of economic means spent their summers in private camps or clubs, while children of the poor and working classes swam in municipal pools or the camps provided by the "fresh air" associations and newspaper "benefits".¹¹⁸

The Effects of the Radio and Movies on Play

The effects of the radio and movies on the play lives of children cannot be ignored. These two technological innovations affected the play lives of children during this period if for no other reason than the sheer amount of time they took away from active play. Various studies on the radio listening activities of children confirmed that children spent approximately one to three hours daily in voluntary listening to the radio. Children between the ages of nine to twelve reported eleven hours and twenty-four minutes of radio listening in one week on average.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, children did not make a distinction between children's programs and adult programs. Whether a program had a child audience was largely a matter of the hour at which it was broadcast. Typically, children preferred programs of humor and variety, drama and dance music. While boys and girls did not differ in the amount of listening, boys liked mysteries, detection of criminals, comedy and news better than did the girls. Girls preferred programs of sentiment and emotion. Time spent listening to the radio did not vary by intelligence level of children although program

preferences did. Clark's study is in agreement with Eisenberg's on this variable.¹²⁰ Overall, Clark's respondents were in agreement that they would rather listen to the radio than read the "funnies", read a book, read an adventure story or go to the movies. Despite objections and admonitions by parents, children continued to listen to the radio and to programs of their choice. According to Sidonie Gruenberg, then director of the Child Study Association of America:

Children preponderantly show enthusiasm for a kind of program which parents as a whole view unfavorably with about the same unanimity. The thriller, the mystery, comedy, the melodramatic adventure series, all these are seized on by the children with an avidity that leaves the parents aghast.¹²¹

Fox, in his study of leisure time uses in a suburban community found that 17.8% of the total leisure time of boys and girls was spent listening to the radio, the biggest time consuming activity. There was no significant difference by age, sex or economic status.¹²² Robinson too notes that listening to the radio was a high ranking activity for the children in his study. Boys spent 35% of their weekday leisure time on this activity, girls, 45%. Over a period of four days children reported listening to 150 different programs. Four types of programs were outstanding in popularity. These were adventure serials, comedies, family serial stories, and variety musical shows. These four classifications included 79% of the girls listening and 86% of the boys listening. Children listened to the radio

largely for entertainment in the form of music, comedy and excitement. ¹²³

While parents, teachers and ministers raised questions as to the merits of the programs to which the children were exposed and the probable effects upon their minds and characters, Gruenberg notes that the most common complaint against the radio itself as part of the home equipment,

Is its frequent interference with other interests and activities. Family conversation is the greatest sufferer, with reading and music practices close seconds. The other losses mentioned are group games, creative play, crafts, singing, and so on. ¹²⁴

When the stock market crashed in 1929 about 12 million radios were in use in the United States. A decade later, that figure had increased to forty million, including 26 million private homes and five million cars as well as in clubs, hospitals, schools and other institutions. ¹²⁵ Every study of how Americans spent their leisure time, both adults and children, placed listening to the radio highest on the list of popular amusements. ¹²⁶ America's fascination with the radio would not see a decline until the 1950s, when another technological wonder, the television, became widespread.

Movies gained in popularity as a leisurely pastime throughout this period as well. While early play reformers generally perceived that movies were negative influences, in 1910 John Collier, then on the National Board of Censorship of Motion Pictures, stressed its positive potential. ¹²⁷ "The only form of deliberate and conscious art in which the

American wage earning public participates",¹²⁸ movies, Collier believed, could be used to inculcate middle class values into its audience of immigrants, wage earners and children. There were those reformers who enthusiastically agreed with him. By 1933, when the Payne Fund for the Motion Picture Research Council published its report on the influence of motion pictures on American youth, reformers were far less sanguine. Where children were concerned it was recognized that "the motion picture is an extraordinarily potent factor in informal education."¹²⁹ The problem was that much of what was learned from the movies was believed to be morally objectionable.

Children spent a lot of time at the movies. Robinson's study found that 25% of the children went to the movies on Saturdays, a full 50% on Sundays.¹³⁰ As with radio listening, children did not use discrimination to any great extent in choice of films. Attendance was distributed evenly over the films offered in the community. According to two publications, Educational Screen and Parents' Magazine, recognized as authorities in the field, 84% of the films presented in the neighborhood Robinson studied were considered unsuitable for children by at least one of these authorities.¹³¹ Boynton and Wang found interest in attending movies to be similar for boys regardless of socioeconomic status while for girls, those of middle status had the highest interest in movies while those of low status, the least.¹³² Fox found that boys attended movies slightly more

than girls. Children from the more exclusive areas went to the movies more on weekdays, with those of lower status going to the movies more on Sundays.¹³³ Children in the highest SES groups tended to go to the movies more with their parents than with other children, while those of lower status went more frequently with other children or alone than with their parents.¹³⁴ Surveys showed that young people whose home life was stimulating and whose recreational life was full and varied were infrequent visitors at movie houses. At least one-third of regular youthful attendants at movies went for lack of anything else to do.¹³⁵ Parental accompaniment did not necessarily obviate against children viewing age-inappropriate films. According to Stephans, 80% of box office revenues were derived from family audiences. Comedies were put on the same bill with features suitable only for adults, and those features, it was felt, were contributing to the changing moral standards of the young.¹³⁶

Thus, not only did movies take away from spontaneous play time of children, but they also exposed children to adult behaviors considered inappropriate to their moral conduct. Radio listening and attending movies were judged to be passive pursuits that did little for the intellect and morals of their audiences and even less for their physical fitness. In addition, these pastimes, unlike hobbies or creative arts and craftsmanship, were believed to have no carry over value to adult life as a form of wholesome and constructive use of leisure.

The Rise of Organized Sports in Schools

The introduction of sports into the public schools saw rapid growth from 1903 through the 1930s. However, until 1920 sports were after school activities, and not part of the physical education programs which were almost exclusively based on gymnastics. Following W.W.I compulsory physical education programs began a gradual change from gymnastics to sports.¹³⁷ The value of team sports promoted by playground advocates was not lost on educators. In fact, as schools increasingly took on the sponsorship of sports, playground leaders were free to shift their focus from play and sports to music, drama and crafts. But, by 1932 the effects of the depression had hit the schools. Physical education classes, grouped with other "frill" courses, such as art and music, were drastically curtailed. In 1935, a major study undertaken by the government-created American Youth Commission emphatically stressed the close relationship between education and recreation, citing the schools' responsibility to offer every school boy and girl "the opportunity to cultivate physical fitness through games, sports and outdoor activities."¹³⁸ As a result, a considerable share of Works Progress Administration (WPA) and Public Works Administration (PWA) funds were used for the building of school sports facilities--gymnasiums, swimming pools, tennis courts and athletic fields. By 1937, it was estimated that \$75,000,000 had been spent for such

projects.¹³⁹

Just about this time, however, educators were becoming alarmed at the overemphasis that had been placed on winning intermural events and on the associated physical and emotional strain of championship play. In the 1940s physicians joined educators in denouncing highly organized competition of a varsity pattern for children of elementary and junior high school age. They too were concerned about the safety and value of adult organized children's sports. Both the American Association of Health, Physical Education and Recreation and the Society of State Directors of Physical and Health Educators had issued policy statements directed to school boards suggesting that interscholastic athletics had no place in elementary schools.¹⁴⁰ In the late 1940s these organizations joined the Department of Elementary School Principals of the National Education Association and the National Council of State Consultants to Elementary School Principals to form the Joint Committee on Athletic Competition for Children of Elementary and Junior High School Age. It maintained its policy of no highly organized competitive programs, believing that elementary schools should provide informal games, sportsdays and playdays instead.¹⁴¹ As more and more elementary and junior high schools eliminated or curtailed interschool sports programs, nonschool agencies such as YMCAs, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, Boys' Clubs, local service clubs, religious organizations and local parks and recreation programs quickly picked up the

slack, developing larger and more diverse sports programs.¹⁴² In an age when interest in sports pervaded American society, sports programs for children were highly supported by the public. From the 1930s through the 1960s, when educators and medical doctors were sharply critical of children's sports programs, all of the major nonschool children sports organizations were founded.¹⁴³ As a result, professionally trained leaders in sports and recreation relinquished their hold on organized competition for young children. Schools continued to sponsor interscholastic athletics for youth twelve and over, but sport competition for preadolescent boys became the responsibility of organizations outside of the educational framework.¹⁴⁴ According to Berryman:

Their main objective was to provide wholesome character building activities to occupy the time of children in order to better enable them to make the transition from childhood to adulthood. Sport was the one activity that was capable of providing all of the necessary conditions for this successful growth and development. Thus, it was during the 1930s . . . outside of the educational context that highly organized sport competition for preadolescent boys began its ascendance to present day heights.¹⁴⁵

No organization was more successful in promoting competitive adolescent team sports than Little League Baseball, begun by Carl Stotz in 1939 in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. The organization began with a few local teams. A decade later it had grown to more than 300 leagues in eleven states.¹⁴⁶ Its continued growth and similar developments in other sports on the national level, which provided sporting opportunities and facilities for the young,

altered the play lives of American children and passed the organization and supervision of children's play from the dominant adult figures of playground leaders, educators and parents to a new adult figure--the coach.

The Continued Growth of Organized Recreation: The 1920s

As President of the PRAA Joseph Lee insisted that public recreation belonged primarily on a local level, funded by municipalities.¹⁴⁷ Beginning in 1917 and continuing throughout the 1920s the PRAA influenced legislation in twenty one states permitting localities home rule charters which would permit them to establish playgrounds and other recreational facilities through local legislation. Localities were further given the freedom to set up recreation programs under park boards, school boards, or separate recreation commissions in accordance with local conditions and supported by local taxes.¹⁴⁸ Between 1916 to 1924 several national organizations on recreation came together, jointly establishing a solid base for the provision of organized park and recreation services.¹⁴⁹ Park administrators and planners began to convert areas once reserved strictly for leisurely strolls and aesthetic appeal to recreational areas with playing fields for sports and playgrounds. Parks, however, were generally located on the outer limits of the city, the areas inhabited by the middle and upper classes, and it was they who frequented these parks.

The prosperous 1920s saw a great increase in recreational facilities. In addition to playgrounds, golf courses, swimming pools, bathing beaches, picnic areas, winter sports facilities and game fields were constructed in greater numbers than in the previous two decades. The data on municipal recreation show the expansion of the decade 1920-1929 as follows: employed leaders, 10,218 to 22,920; expenditures, \$7,199,000 to \$33,539,000.¹⁵⁰

In 1930, a total of 13,354 separate public play areas under leadership were reported by 980 communities with the total expenditure for public recreation at \$38,518,194, the largest figure ever reported. In 1920, 465 cities had directed play areas and facilities; in 1925, 748 cities; in 1930, 980. Among the directed recreation areas which cities reported were 7,677 outdoor playgrounds, 2,066 indoor recreation centers, 4,322 baseball diamonds, 312 golf courses, and 1,042 swimming pools. In addition, there were 1,806 ice-skating areas, fifty nine ski jumps, and 221 toboggan slides.¹⁵¹

Throughout the 1920s municipal governments directed funds to more diverse recreational programs intended for a clientele wider than children. Indeed, as programs and facilities shifted from meeting the play needs of children to meeting the recreational needs of adults, poor children in particular were left out of that expansion, since they were least likely to use many of the new facilities. While the number of playgrounds did, in fact, grow through the decade,

most were located on school grounds. By 1930, despite growth, playgrounds served only 20% of urban children.¹⁵² And, despite the fact that 2,310 children died in traffic accidents in 1930, pleas for land to keep city children, still largely first and second generation immigrants or Negroes, safely and constructively engaged in play on freestanding playgrounds, fell on deaf ears.¹⁵³ Indeed, concern for child safety was a motivational factor in the Home Play Movement undertaken by the PRAA. As an alternative to playgrounds, the promotion of home play allowed the PRAA to meet its still lingering commitment to serving children, but required little in terms of financial resources and trained play supervisors, a role to be undertaken by parents, particularly mothers. The home play movement, however, did not attract the families of the poorer classes.

During the 1920s, with the decline of Progressivism, the rise of a large middle class guided by new psychological insights on child development and parent education, a decrease in immigration, and the upward mobility of earlier generations of immigrants, supervised playgrounds became less relevant in the play lives of urban children. These children were still more likely, as in the period 1880-1920, to engage in street play. As an alternative to playgrounds, many cities, by 1930, had blocked off streets for play under supervised leadership during the summer months.¹⁵⁴ Particularly in the foreign sections of large cities, streets were used by children at play. Play zones were established at

certain times of the day by roping off sections of the street to vehicular traffic, though frequently the streets in congested districts were so poorly paved they were not serviceable as play areas. In many cities numerous vacant lots were temporarily turned into playgrounds by the boys of the neighborhood extending playground room "beyond the meager facilities directly under municipal and philanthropic control".¹⁵⁵ Though these play streets were used, undirected street play remained a more popular pastime.

The 1930s and World War II

The Great Depression brought an involuntary increase in the amount of leisure time. In 1933, sociologist Martin Neumeyer wrote: "Never has there been a period in history during which so many people had so little to do as at the present time. It is estimated that 12,000,000 persons are now unemployed . . . They not only face the problem of livelihood but also of how to spend their leisure."¹⁵⁶ The Depression increased the demand for and participation in public recreation at the same time that it reduced the supply of programs and staff due to reduced municipal recreation budgets. These budgetary constraints hampered the NRA in its efforts to expand recreational services at the local level. It was the federal government that stepped in to meet this challenge and was so successful that "as a result of federal relief funds, the recreation and park facilities of the country were, by and large, developed a full decade ahead of

what otherwise would have been possible."¹⁵⁷ Between 1935-1939, the WPA was to spend over one billion dollars on local recreation, leadership, and facilities for use by both adults and children, the latter group no longer a prime focus of the NRA. And while the WPA did, in fact, build 2078 new playgrounds, "neighborhood playgrounds, especially in the older sections of cities, lagged behind other expansion."¹⁵⁸

Recreation under WPA auspices was enormously popular at the local level, though the leaders were not qualified, being drawn from the ranks of the unemployed, a point of contention with the NRA. Throughout the 1930s, many groups, public and private, were sponsoring recreation and competing with the NRA as the prime spokesman for public recreation. By 1945, the NRA, committed from the start to local control and initiative in recreation was a weak organization "doomed to failure in its hopes to be the primary representative and guide of public recreation in the United States."¹⁵⁹

With America's involvement in W.W.II, the NRA, philanthropic groups and municipalities continued to move their focus away from young children to two targeted groups: the military and teenagers. As it had during W.W.I, organizations sponsoring recreational activities again turned their attention to serving the military and those involved in the war effort.¹⁶⁰

It was also during W.W.II that over 3,000 "canteens" or recreational centers were established for that enigmatic subcultural group known as "teenagers."¹⁶¹ A

"neglected age" in terms of recreational services, teenagers' behaviors became of increased concern during the war years as teenage pregnancies and juvenile delinquency increased. In assessing the adverse effects of war on children, Boll commented:

Homes were upset. In one, Father wanted to enlist or feared being drafted. In another, Big Brother went off to war. Father's job vanished overnight, or Mother rushed into a war job and was always tired and irritable . . . Parents acted strangely and home life was different . . . Every subject touched upon to this point, holds in it some factor which leads to the increase in juvenile delinquency that is alarming society: the conditions in schools; wartime nerves; attitudes of hate, violence and opportunism; the exploitation of working children, the thrill of the paycheck; the employment of mothers; and the lack of adequate substitute care. War has always increased the number of these unfortunates [children born out of wedlock] and there are many indications that this war is no exception . . . In some parts of the country, requests for services for unmarried mothers have more than doubled during the war.¹⁶²

Recreational centers were intended to offset these war conditions by providing wholesome and supervised use of leisure time by this particular age group. But teenagers were not the only group affected by the disorganization the war brought. The widescale entrance of women into the labor force during W.W.II left many young children unsupervised-- "latchkey children"--or in the care of relatives, neighbors or day care centers. Long term separations of GIs with their families contributed to the then unprecedented divorce rate immediately following the war's end. But, with victory, peace and prosperity the American family would move, by the 1950s, into the "Golden Age."¹⁶³ According to Mintz and Kellogg:

To a generation economically trapped in the depression and sacrificing for the war effort in World War II, the

opportunity to have a family and buy a suburban house, with a backyard barbecue and a living room teeming with children, filled a deep emotional need. For two decades American families had experienced unprecedented strain, and now they turned away from public concerns and sought in private life satisfactions available nowhere else.¹⁰⁴

Children were considered essential to the satisfied personal life. Every aspect of child life was important--how children grew, learned, behaved and how they played. It is to this era that we now turn.

Summary:

Middle class children in this period, as in the previous one, played mostly at home under the supervision of their parents. In this period, however, the parents were guided not by the educational value of play but by the power of play to facilitate personality development and physical growth. These ideas were developed by psychologists John B. Watson and Arnold Gesell and promoted through parent education classes, child rearing manuals and popular literature. By the end of this period, Little League Baseball was founded, beginning elementary school aged children's participation in adult-organized, competitive sports programs.

With the decline of Progressivism and the decrease in immigration, the Playground and Recreation Association of America diffused its interest in providing play opportunities for disadvantaged children to include adults, military personnel, and children of all social classes. As many of the early playground programs were incorporated into school curricula, particularly through physical education classes,

the play of poor children became less of a social issue. At the same time, the children themselves became less visible to a suburbanizing, managerial class lacking the political fervor of Progressive idealists. The Depression and the Second World War reinforced the emphasis on constructive use of leisure for constituencies other than disadvantaged children as the number of recreational facilities increased.

Working class children continued to play in the streets, organizing their informal play around the tenement stoop and the city block. These low income children played more traditional games than children of higher socioeconomic status who preferred individual pastimes and skilled activities, such as swimming and tennis. But for all children the radio and movies made a significant claim on their time, to the dismay of concerned adults. It is in this period that the electronic media began to intrude on children's spontaneous play and to introduce children to adult behaviors considered inappropriate to their age and moral development.

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CHAPTER V

SPORTS, LESSONS, TOYS, AND MOST OF ALL, TELEVISION

DOMINANT TRENDS 1945-1990

Socio-Historical Background--1945-1963

The years following World War II brought rapid and dramatic changes to American society. The American economy experienced astonishing growth as the gross national product increased 250% between 1945 and 1960. By 1960, per capita income was 35% higher than it had been in 1945. As a result of this postwar economic boom, nearly 60% of the American people had achieved a "middle class" standard of living by the mid 1950s, in contrast to only 31% right before the the Great Depression.¹

Technological and scientific breakthroughs, prompted by the war, not only increased the productivity that widely expanded the middle class, but resulted in a "knowledge revolution" which transformed the occupational structure of the American economy from an industrial to a postindustrial state. For the first time, white collar workers, engaged in the occupations that served consumers, outnumbered blue collar

workers. A significant impact of this shift in the economy was the explosive growth of the new managerial class created in the earlier decades of the century. Between 1947 and 1957, the number of salaried middle class workers rose 61%. The growth of large corporations, rapid advances in productivity, and the importance of developing specialized personnel to market and manage the corporate product, all contributed to the increase of middle class workers.²

Out of this corporate economy staffed by middle class managers, evolved a new personality type, the "organization man." Epitomized by the corporate employee, the organization man possessed not only the requisite professional skills to successfully complete his occupational tasks, but the skills of managing interpersonal relationships as well, for the bureaucratic corporate environment constantly tested one's ability to get along with others.³

According to sociologist William H. Whyte, writing in the mid-1950s, organization men "are the ones of our middle class who have left home, spiritually as well as physically, to take the vows of organization life . . . They are the dominant members of our society."⁴ Organization men were guided by a social ethic which Whyte defined as:

That contemporary body of thought which makes morally legitimate the pressures of society against the individual. Its major propositions are three: a belief in the group as the source of creativity; a belief in "belongingness" as the ultimate need of the individual; and a belief in the application of science to achieve the belongingness.⁵

The social ethic might also be called an organization

or bureaucratic ethic. It, more than anything else, rationalized the organization's demand for fealty.⁶ This accommodation to bureaucracy was representative of the mainstream of organization life in America.⁷

As a group, organization men shared a social character, or mode of conformity that sociologist David Riesman described as "other-directed". According to Riesman:

What is common to all the other-directed people is that their contemporaries are the source of direction for the individual--either those known to him or those with whom he is indirectly acquainted, through friends and through the mass media.⁸

The other-directed character, dominant in postwar America, stood in sharp contrast to the inner-directed character of past generations. Inner-directed people were guided by an internal gyroscope for moral and personal direction, while other-directed people sought and responded to signals from peers by means of a kind of psychological radar.⁹ According to Riesman:

Approval itself, irrespective of content, becomes the only unequivocal good . . . one makes good when one is approved of. Thus all power, not merely some power, is in the hands of the actual or imaginary approving group, and the child learns from his parents' reaction to him that nothing in his character, no possession he owns, no inheritance of name or talent, no work he has done is valued for itself but only for its effect on others. Making good becomes almost equivalent to making friends.¹⁰

Relating social character types to social classes, Riesman notes:

If we wanted to cast our social character types into social class molds, we could say that inner-directed is the typical character of the "old" middle class--the banker, the tradesman, the small entrepreneur, the technically oriented engineer,

etc.--while other-direction is becoming the typical character of the new middle class--the bureaucrat, the salaried employee in business, etc.¹¹

Riesman further maintains that every society seems to get, more or less, the social character that it "needs" by employing methods that ensure some degree of conformity from the individuals that comprise the society. Organization men produce organization children who are also other-directed, seeking "belongingness," popularity, and the approval of peers, traits encouraged not only by parents, but by the educational system as well. Whyte notes the bureaucratic emphasis in the schools that "organization men" sent their children to. These schools were characterized by a noticeably permissive atmosphere, a stress on adjustment, a reduction of academic competition, and a desire by parents to have their children be "good citizens" who can get along well with others.¹² Rosabeth Moss Kanter maintains that training for organizational life through the schools begins very early, that is, in nursery school.

If American society conducts a preponderance of its activities through formal organizations, then it is not surprising that even very young children should be provided with the experiences of formal organizations.¹³

Thus, in school training, beginning with the nursery school experience:

The organization child, like the organization man, is asked to accept organizational reality as given, adjust to routine, take on a limited rather than a diffuse obligation to the organization and to guide his behavior by impersonal, universalistic principles.¹⁴

This emphasis on belonging, approval, and peer

acceptance, as well as participation in organizations, is one important element in the enormous growth of Scouting, Little League and other organized athletic events for children in the postwar period.

At Home in Suburbia

Organization men tended overwhelmingly to live in the new suburban housing developments that sprouted like mushrooms during the 1950s. Between 1950 and 1960 more than 13 million homes were built in America, 11 million of them in the suburbs.¹⁵ This phenomenal growth of suburbia was the result of need, due to an acute urban housing shortage, desire, to escape the clamor and incipient decline of cities, and political decisions to foster suburban development.¹⁶ In 1920 only 17% of all Americans were suburbanites. The percentage increased to 24 in 1950, then climbed to 33% in 1960 and 37% in 1970.¹⁷ After World War II, the exodus from the city included not only the well to do, but large numbers of junior executive middle class families as well as blue collar families.¹⁸

The marriage and baby booms that followed the war's end created 10 million new households, which cities, already experiencing an acute housing shortage, were unable to accommodate. Government guaranteed housing loans subsidized the purchase of newly built suburban homes making it more affordable, for the first time, to own than to rent. Those who flocked to the suburbs went in search, not only of space,

privacy, fresh air and backyards, but of a "new and warmer way of life" embodied in the "togetherness" of an ideal family.¹⁹

Indeed, suburban family life was decidedly home and child oriented, and female dominated. The everyday responsibilities of home and child care fell on mothers. A model of efficiency, patience and charm, the suburban wife became the counterpart of the organization man, helping the family achieve new levels of adjustment.²⁰ The suburban mother could assume this central position in the home for she was far less likely to be in the paid labor force than was her urban counterpart. Employment of suburban married women in 1953 was about 9% as compared to 27% for the United States. Only two fifths of this 9% were employed full time. The typical role of the suburban housewife was that of homemaker and deviation from that role was quite rare.²¹ While commuting time added to the work day of suburban husbands and "handyman tasks" consumed some of their free time, suburban fathers generally agreed that their current lifestyle allowed them to spend more time with the family than before moving to the suburbs.²² Family "togetherness" was facilitated by two factors. Because getting around required a car, children were "captives of their suburbs" unless a parent, usually mother, chauffeured them about. While children gained the freedom of open spaces that urban children lacked, they were dependent on an adult for their mobility.²³ Secondly, with the decentralization of

entertainment from central city clusters, "the home became the chief gathering place for the family-either in the 'family room' with its games, its TV, its informality, or outdoors around the barbecue."²⁴

Suburbanism was more than an ecological phenomenon, it was a way of life,²⁵ marked by conformity, familism, "neighboring" and participation in local groups and associations.²⁶ Indeed, as a group, suburbanites were described as status conscious joiners.²⁷ Membership in organizations was not limited to adults, however. At an early age children began participation in adult-directed organizations, which sponsored activities that defined their play and structured their free time. The immediate postwar period was "the golden age of scouting." Enrollment in Cub Scout packs doubled from 766,635 in 1949 to 1.6 million in 1956. Girl Scouts and Brownies leaped from 1.8 million in 1950 to four million a decade later. The number of Little Leagues expanded from 776 in 1950 to 5700 in 1960.²⁸

In one study of an affluent suburb, Crestwood Heights, Seeley and his colleagues found unwavering adult support for children's associations. "The Crestwood child," they wrote, "almost from the cradle, is directed through a series of age graded associations especially devised for his physical, mental and emotional needs, at each stage of growth, until he finally joins his parents in their own adult associations."²⁹ While these parents consciously planned to involve their children in groupings where skills learned might be useful in

preparing them for their lives as adults, they also saw the advantage for the future in the fact that "these children's groupings provide opportunities for their children to make congenial friends in a much more highly selected segment than that afforded by the school."³⁰ MacDonald, McGuire and Havighurst found in their study of fifth, sixth and seventh graders that children from different social class backgrounds engaged in leisure activities that were quantitatively and qualitatively different.

Middle class parents see to it that their children belong to organizations which teach middle class ways, and they control their informal play so as to keep them in the company of other children who have the 'right' manners, language and attitudes . . . Lower class parents tend to leave their children to the streets and alley play groups of the lower class neighborhoods.³¹

Based on their data, the researchers concluded that the middle class children participated mainly in Scouts and the YMCA for their organized recreational activities, while the lower class children took part mostly in the activities of two Neighborhood Centers or clubs for "underprivileged children." Differences appeared in the pursuit of individual activities also with middle class children more frequently reading books, listening to the radio and taking music lessons while lower class children spent more time "going to movies." ³² In his study of the leisure time activities of economically privileged children, M. Ward Cramer found that 85.4% of the total group studied took dancing lessons, 53% took music lessons and practiced from one to eight hours a week; other lessons included choir, dramatics, art and

ceramics. Over 40% of the children participated in organized activities such as Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Cub Scouts, church organizations and junior civic groups and all of the children were active in sports, either organized or sponsored in play groups to which they devoted two to ten hours per week.³³ Suburban baby boomers had become "an overorganized generation with every spare moment preplanned."³⁴

Thus, as the social ethic entered the home affecting socialization practices, and with other-direction as a dominant mode of conformity, the lives of middle class children became highly organized and highly pressured, with an emphasis placed on achievement, adjustment, conformity, belonging and popularity. Organized sports, scouting, and specialized lessons, all adult controlled activities and programs, increasingly filled the free time of suburban children. The growth of these adult dominated organizations made it seem as if the middle class child's world of informal, unsupervised play was disappearing, replaced by "suburban mothers chauffeuring their children from activity to activity in wood-panelled station wagons."³⁵ By 1960, suburban children were in the "junior rat race,"³⁶ living a world of structured activities and formalized recreation, with few escape routes from the conventions and customs that circumscribed suburbia.³⁷

Though pressured, these children "tended to be pampered as never before."³⁸ So dominated by their children's needs had suburban families become that traditional patriarchy had

been replaced, according to one analyst, by "filiarchy," or rule of the child.³⁹ As children came to reign supreme in suburban homes, anthropologist Margaret Mead was driven to characterize suburban life as consisting of "a living room or recreation room which often resembles a giant playpen into which the parents have somewhat reluctantly climbed."⁴⁰

Child Centered Families

A focus on children was almost unavoidable for children were everywhere. In the 1950s alone, almost 30 million babies were born. The birth rate for third children doubled between 1940 and 1960 and that for fourth children tripled.⁴¹ Couples chose to have large families and to place the needs and interests of their children at the center of family life, thus the term "child-centered" as it applied to postwar families.⁴² This emphasis on the social and emotional value of children was not new. Indeed, the sacralization of the child had begun in the previous century and was a social accomplishment by the 1930s.⁴³ In fact, the child-centered family found its widest expression among the stable middle class in the prosperous decade of the 1920s, but this was interrupted by depression and war. Parent education classes of the twenties, intended to improve the quality of family life, emphasized the new ideal of "scientific mothering" based on the study of child development. Child psychologists were proclaiming that it was the parents' responsibility to provide the experiences and environment that would encourage

the proper growth and development of the young.⁴⁴ A shift away from the development of the child's moral character to the development of his personality as a socialization goal had begun. Permissive child rearing techniques, emphasizing attention to the child's needs and the fostering of a secure and well adjusted personality began to replace the earlier, rigid theories of child rearing. Parents were advised to be less authoritarian and more responsive to their children's needs. Indeed, they were advised to have "fun" in their daily interactions with their babies.⁴⁵ By the late 1930s as evidenced in the popular Aldrich and Aldrich child care manual, Babies Are Human Beings, the child was coming to be seen as an active individual who required not only discipline, but love and respect.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, these new permissive child rearing techniques stood side by side with the rigid theories of behavioral psychologist, John B. Watson. It was not until the immediate postwar period, with the publication in 1946 of Dr. Benjamin Spock's The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care, as well as the Freudian inspired manuals of the early 1950s by Fraiberg, Buxbaum and Bowlby, all of which stressed the possible psychological harm that could befall the child should parents mismanage the early years, that permissiveness in child rearing would become the dominant technique and that "child-centeredness" would come to define the postwar American family.

American couples married after World War II created the

type of family they had gone in search of. The middle class suburban family of the 1950s was pursuing the "companionate" ideal of family life typical of the upper middle class families which evolved in the 1920s.⁴⁷ The postwar economic boom allowed for a similar polarization of gender roles, but on a much wider scale. Never before had full time motherhood, an indispensable condition of the child-centered, companionate family been so accessible to so many women.⁴⁸ This child-centered family was shaped by several forces. As noted, prosperity allowed for full time maternal child care, but it also resulted in greater privacy and freedom for the young. Children, for instance, were likely to have their own rooms. Further, as central heating allowed children to shed the layers of clothing worn for warmth, their physical movement increased.⁴⁹ As the nature of work changed from industrial to postindustrial, the family's integration into the economic structure influenced its child rearing practices. Essentially, child rearing practices took into account the shift in occupational roles. More permissive, affection oriented techniques, emphasizing social adjustment were adopted by bureaucratic or organizational parents, instead of the strict demands for independence and self-reliance of the entrepreneurial class.⁵⁰ Expectations for the child's adult roles in bureaucracies influenced his socialization. Adjustment and belonging, rather than competition were stressed by parents whose head was employed in a bureaucratic organization.⁵¹

Probably no single factor carries more weight in the shift to permissive child rearing practices than does Dr. Spock. Michael Zuckerman interprets Spock as a spokesman for a society in which fellowship was a primary virtue. For Spock, post World War II America was a bureaucratic society which had lost its hard competitive edge. Babies, he believed, were amiable at birth and perfectly suited, with proper training, to this type of society.⁵² Breaking unequivocally with the rigid, inflexible theories of the prewar period, Spock advised anxious, young mothers, physically removed from the sage advice of their own mothers, to relax and to trust themselves. He advised mothers to be permissive in the handling of their children.

As already noted in Chapter II, Spock's views on the ideal parent-child relationships were influenced by John Dewey and Sigmund Freud. Like Dewey, Spock encouraged parents to relax their discipline and to trust the child's drive toward maturity and responsibility. From a Freudian perspective Spock stressed that parents' relations with children should be governed by principles of preventive psychiatry.⁵³ According to Spock, the child's welfare was paramount, even if this necessitated placing the child's psychological needs before those of the parents--a clear reversal of the nineteenth century family hierarchy.⁵⁴

Spock endorsed the idea that each child has a certain potential that could be realized only with the right kind of parental guidance. He made parents understand that how they

acted toward their children in their early years would have significant consequences for the children's future. If the suburban family sought to be egalitarian and companionate in its adult relationships, it was further democratized by Spock's advice to have children be involved in the formulation of the rules to which they would be expected to comply.²⁵

Spock stressed the primacy of the mother in raising the children, thus he was opposed to mothers of young children holding jobs outside the home. Having himself experienced, as a child, an industrial revolution, the Depression and the chaos of two world wars, he believed that American society by 1945 had witnessed the disappearance of traditional and natural patterns of conduct between parent and child. Spock sought "to reestablish such patterns by recreating or reaffirming role relationships associated with some real or imagined prewar, preindustrial or precompetitive culture."²⁶

Intending to relieve mothers of anxiety in child rearing, Spock's advice on physical ailments and general care was, in fact, reassuring. But parents were now held responsible not only for their child's physical welfare, but for his or her social adjustment and personality as well. Interpreting Freud for the lay reader, Spock advised parents to become personally invested in their children's psychological development. And for Spock play was an important part of that development.

Spock's book was an instant success. Though he denied

foreseeing a baby boom, his book caught the first wave of baby boom mothers who eagerly raised a generation of "Spock babies." By 1952, the Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care had sold four million copies, and sold at least one million copies a year for eighteen straight years. If all of the mothers who bought a copy of Spock's book read it, then one out of every five babies was a Spock baby.⁵⁷ And, if they all assumed the weight of responsibility that Spock placed upon them for the development of physically and psychologically healthy children, then they would have had to experience some concern about their performance as a parent. Thus, in 1957, the year Spock's book came out in its second edition, historian Max Lerner, in his analysis of postwar American society, commented, "It is evident that in no other culture has there been so pervasive a cultural anxiety about the rearing of children."⁵⁸

Though inexpensive to purchase (the first edition cost 35 cents), the book of "Spockian middle class rearing rules" had little appeal to the poor and working classes. Aimed at a middle class readership, the book left out of its scan "the people whose economic struggles preclude the comforts essential to Spock's child rearing scheme."⁵⁹

Nancy Weiss argues that the poor and working class mothers were exempt from Spock's rules for the rules depended on certain assumptions which did not apply to these women.

To use permissive techniques requires households with enough bedrooms and belongings for all members. Baby and Child Care addresses the problem of whether siblings should share a room . . . without considering homes where children

must share beds. The advice assumes a catalogue of belongings and a set of relationships: telephones, refrigerators, a pest and rodent free house in adequate repair, accessible physicians, a nuclear family composed of mother, father, and baby . . . The larder is filled with food, the "feeding problem" being the recalcitrant child, not an inadequate food supply. The modality of child rearing involves endless conversations and verbal exchanges.⁶⁰

Fundamentally then the new suburban family was "child-centered" to a greater degree than elsewhere in contemporary America."⁶¹

Though Spock's book was, indeed, child-centered, it alone cannot be credited with the rise of the child-centered family. The turning from war, delayed marriages and the subsequent baby boom, prosperity, the growth of suburbia, and the Freudian psychoanalytic perspective brought to understanding child development also contributed to the sharpened focus on the child. According to Strickland and Ambrose:

It appears that the sale of the book benefitted . . . from a fortuitous convergence between book and times . . . For those mothers who did give attention to Spock's psychological advice, there seemed to have been a remarkable congruity between what the doctor was advising and what they were ready to hear.⁶²

Television-Its Birth, Growth and Maturity 1945-1990

Though television was invented before World War II, America's involvement in the war interfered with its growth.⁶³ It was in 1947 that television entered a period of rapid expansion becoming a commercial giant by 1950.⁶⁴

In 1947, only 7,000 television sets were sold in the United States. Just three years later, in 1950, seven

million sets were purchased by American consumers. In 1956, the number of television stations stood at 442, up from six in 1946.⁶⁶ By 1960, almost every American home had at least one television set.⁶⁶ In 1975, there were almost 70 million television households in the United States. In 1980, 98% of American households had a television set, 85% owned a color set and 51% had more than one set. It was predicted that by 1990 there would be 93,900,000 television homes, a figure that was only slightly over the actual 92,100,000 television homes by that year.⁶⁷

Television viewing quickly came to dominate the free time of Americans, both adults and children. In 1963, the average television household had a set on over five and one half hours each day. By the fall of 1976, that figure had increased to close to seven hours a day.⁶⁸ Since the beginning of commercial television the general average daily viewing time for children ran between two and three hours. Between 1952 to 1972, it increased by approximately one hour per day, though specific viewing patterns have been shown to vary by race, socioeconomic status, educational level and intelligence.⁶⁹ By the early 1980s, children were watching on average twenty-eight hours per week of television, spending more time in front of the television set than in school.⁷⁰ According to Kenneth Keniston, Chairman of the Carnegie Council on Children, "Television has become a flickering blue parent occupying more of the waking hours of American children than any other single influence--including both

parents and school."⁷¹

The 1970s and 1980s expanded television's capacity through cable wiring. In 1975 only 16 percent of television homes were wired for cable television. By 1987 that figure had increased to 45 percent.⁷² Just one year later, cable was reaching 50.5 percent of U.S. homes.⁷³ In addition, by the mid-1980s over 22 million video cassette recorders (VCRs) were attached to televisions.⁷⁴ In 1988, 59.8 percent of American households with children up to eleven had VCRs.⁷⁵ The children's video market alone generated sales of 12 million units with a wholesale volume of \$210 million in 1985.⁷⁶

In the 1970s the television set found yet another use--as the monitor for video games. In 1975 Atari produced the game Pong for the home market, three years after it had been successfully introduced in video game arcades. By the end of 1978, 13,000,000 units had been purchased. By the end of 1983, fourteen million home video games machines had been sold.⁷⁷ Between 1979 and 1983, the number of new game cartridge titles issued each year and produced by a growing number of American and Japanese manufacturers was roughly double that of the previous year, increasing the number from a few dozen to about 500 in four years.⁷⁸

Children's absorption with television and video games comes at the expense of other activities, such as sleeping, reading, and participation in religious and civic activities. But, its impact on play has been most significant, altering,

though not, as we shall see, destroying the play patterns of American children.

Socio-Historical Background 1963-1990

While the 1945-1963 period was characterized by familism, child-centeredness and other-direction, the 1963-1990 period has been characterized by narcissism, greed and competition. The other-directed personality gave way to egocentrism as individual self-fulfillment challenged commitment to the group. Family patterns changed as divorce rates escalated. The cult of childhood was gradually transformed into the erosion of childhood. As the practical and emotional costs of raising children increased, and as television exposed children to adult information and behavior, children appeared to be "growing up fast" with little time or interest in play as their time became tightly scheduled around organized activities. Yet, racial tensions and the re-discovery of poverty revealed not one world of childhood, but rather two worlds of childhood, one shaped by economic deprivation, the other by affluence, competition and the increasing organization of children's free time.

The Decline of Child-Centeredness

Television introduced audiences to idyllic, if unrealistic, families that mirrored the stereotypes of suburban family life. Baby boomers grew up with teenage idol Ricky Nelson, the Anderson children, "Kitten," Bud, and

"Princess," and Beaver and Wally Cleaver, all wholesome, socially well adjusted children living in close knit, traditional families. While the mothers, always neatly dressed and coifed, tended to the home and the physical and emotional needs of their children, the fathers, patient and wise, went off to their white collar jobs. They were good providers and firm, but kind, disciplinarians. All of the storylines centered on the children, by the end of each show they had learned a socially useful or moral lesson. Indeed, the parents' overriding concern was that their children, though they might be less than perfect at times, would ultimately do the right thing, from admitting that they broke a neighbor's window, or dented the family car, to cultivating their talents, and assuming leadership among their peers. The parents were unabashedly dedicated to their children.

This child centered society, fashioned with the emphasis on the family during the immediate postwar period, peaked in 1967 when the number of children under the age of eighteen reached 70 million. By the 1970s, as the youngest of the baby boomers left childhood and the oldest of them had formed their own families, smaller than those of their parents, the celebration of the "cult of the child" had waned considerably. Its demise was most evident in the declining birthrate. Indeed, the birthrate had fallen precipitously after 1960 when it had peaked at 3.8. By the mid-1980s, the birth rate was less than 2.0.⁷⁹ In 1960 children between the ages of five to thirteen constituted 18.2% of the total population,

but in 1985, that percentage had fallen to 12.6.⁸⁰ But the tumbling birth rate was but one of several factors that began a gradual chipping away at the cult of the child. The Women's Movement of the 1960s and 1970s brought about ideological changes in the roles of women (and men) both within and outside of marriage. As women began to question the traditional roles of wife and mother, divorce rates began to climb. And, as ideological factors combined with inflationary economic conditions, more and more wives and mothers entered the labor force.⁸¹

In 1950, the divorce rate stood at 10.3 per 1000 married women age 15 and over. This figure was a sharp decrease from the unprecedented high of 17.9 recorded in 1946, following the end of World War II. During the decade of the 1950s the divorce rate remained fairly stable dropping to a low of 8.9 in 1958. In 1960, the rate stood at 9.2. But by 1964 it had again reached 10.0 and continued its unrelenting climb to the peak rate of 22.8 in 1979, after which the divorce rate began to slightly decrease. In 1982, it stood at 22.6; in 1984, at 21.5.⁸² Between 1970 and 1980, the number of children living with only one parent rose by 54%. By the early 1980s about one in five American children lived with a single parent, about 90% of them with their mothers.⁸³ While the economic and psychological problems that accompany divorce are important issues, particularly as they affect children, sociologist Robert Weiss notes that on the positive side many children in single parent families "grow up a

little faster" since they are required by circumstances to contribute to family chores and to develop self reliance and autonomy. They become "surprisingly adult in their manner."⁸⁴

Most women who are single parents are forced by economic conditions, often quite severe, to work for wages. The 1960s were notable, however, for the entry of married women with preschool or school age children into the work force in unprecedented numbers. By 1980, almost two thirds of women with children between six and eighteen were employed. One half of mothers with children under the age of six were also in the labor force.⁸⁵ A new generation of "latchkey children" are taking care of themselves after school, with television as a major form of child care.⁸⁶

The pervasiveness of television in the society makes it a common cultural experience. Ninety eight percent of American homes have at least one television set which, as noted, is typically turned on for almost seven hours a day. The typical child between the ages of two and five spends about thirty hours a week watching television. Children ages six to eleven average twenty five hours a week in front of the television set.⁸⁷ The effect of television on children is at the center of a storm of controversy which has been raging since the early 1950s. Television, the all-pervasive medium, exposes children to crime, violence, sex and consumerism at increasingly tender ages and for increasing hours in the day. This gives children access to information which blurs the

distinction between adults and children previously bounded by certain types of knowledge.⁸⁸ In addition to rendering children more adultlike through exposure to adult themes, television fills a large portion of children's free time some of which might be spent in childish games and play. Thus, television does play a role in what has been perceived as a loss of a childhood culture of play, though, as we shall see, the extent of television's effect on children's play has been exaggerated and determined by an ahistorical analysis. Long before television, radio and movies filled children's free time. Much of the time spent viewing television has been taken from those media.

New Breed Parents--Baby Boomers Grow Up

Baby boomers were not quick to relinquish the privileges of the attention and indulgence bestowed upon them as children. Whereas, in the 1950s cultural norms stressed allegiance to groups, the church, workplace, and particularly the family, with children on center stage, by the 1980s those values had shifted profoundly, emphasizing individualism, with a stress on personal "growth," "self-realization" and "self-fulfillment."⁸⁹ This preoccupation with the self as "number one" branded the 1970s as the "Me Decade".⁹⁰ Social critic Christopher Lasch bemoaned "the pursuit of happiness to the dead end of narcissistic preoccupation with the self."⁹¹ David Riesman who defined the American character of the 1950s as other-directed, in 1980 raised the question "Is

the American character changing?" He warns, "The egocentricity of the present era, in terms of undersocialized and neglected children growing into adult and wilful people, will have long term consequences."²

This pursuit of personal happiness, characteristic of the 70s, clashed with the traditional norm of sacrifice for the family. Pollster Daniel Yankelovich identified a group of parents, all baby boomers, who were less child oriented and more self-oriented. Affluent and well bred, these "New Breed" parents believed it was "important for parents to have their own lives and interests--even if it means spending less time with their children."³ In the wake of the Women's Movement, many women, whose own mothers forfeited higher education and careers for full time mothering, were committed to "having it all"--family and career. In 1981, Yankelovich found that about 17% of Americans were deeply committed to a philosophy of self-fulfillment, even if it came at the expense of the needs of their children. Another 63% embraced the value of self-fulfillment in varying degrees, with only 20% adhering to traditional values, such as the primacy of the family group over the individual.⁴

To whatever extent children affect parental pursuits of self-fulfillment, the means by which they do so vary. Children are expensive and time consuming, emotionally and psychologically demanding. They may be allowed, even encouraged, to tune into television as parents put time, energy and financial resources into their own interests, no

longer sacrificing everything "for the sake of the children."

Yet, because the American family is a private enterprise, parents are held responsible for how their children develop. If viewed as reflections of the parents' ability to provide for, mold and raise the "superchild" whose accomplishments bring prestige and gratification to the parents, children may be overindulged with numerous opportunities for intellectual and psychosocial development in the form of various types of private lessons and organized activities. According to Elizabeth Douvan:

The upper middle class child, born to a couple who have chosen parenthood deliberately over alternative life patterns, is the focus of enormous attention. They have the resources and energy to insure that their children will have every advantage. Since competitive achievement through occupation is the guiding ethos in this class, advantage in the form of early cognitive stimulation, attendance at the finest schools and cultivation of talents becomes crucial to "successful parenting" and the child's success in adulthood . . . For the parents, providing the advantages that a middle class child needs becomes a major commitment of financial resources.⁹⁵

Child rearing in the 1950s focused on children's social and personality development. The sixties, in contrast, would usher in a new trend. Since 1963 there has been a trend in child rearing toward a monolithic concern with the child's cognitive development--almost to the exclusion of affective and social development.⁹⁶ According to pediatrician, T. Berry Brazelton of Harvard, "Everyone wants to raise the smartest kid in America rather than the best adjusted, happiest kid."⁹⁷ Experimental studies in developmental psychology, begun in the late 1950s supported the hypothesis that

maximizing sensory stimulations during the critical period of early childhood would lead to optimal mental development.⁹⁸ Such notions were widely popularized during the 1960s as the explanation for the inferior academic performance of poor and minority group children and provided the basis for Head Start, the compensatory preschool program for these children, established by Congress in 1964. That same year Glenn Doman, founder of the Institutes for the Achievement of Human Potential, saw his book, How to Teach Your Baby to Read,⁹⁹ make it onto the best seller lists. In 1979, he followed with Teach Your Baby Math.¹⁰⁰ Douvan argues that not only does this heavy emphasis on cognition that characterizes developmental psychology contribute to the decreased differentiation of childhood from adulthood, but it also increases parental anxiety and reinforces the individualistic myth and competitive, self-centered values that dominated America of the 1980s.¹⁰¹ In its coverage of the drive by well to do parents to push their offspring, Newsweek commented:

Today's newborn are often blessed or cursed with a singular set of parents--older, richer, more combative, and firmly convinced that there are lessons for everything . . . The baby boomers . . . are changing the course of childhood . . . Many new mothers and fathers now mean to bring up state of the art babies.¹⁰²

Whether motivated by love, self-gratification or competition, or a combination of these factors, parents often manage the organization of their children's time scheduling their offspring into numerous activities, thus leaving them with little time for carefree play just for the fun of it. Instead, children's play and leisure time, as controlled by

adults, have been scheduled to serve a "purpose," the acquisition of skills--psychosocial and cognitive--that will serve children well, both in their childhood and in preparation for their adult roles. If parents are ultimately going to be held responsible for how their children "turn out," if it is they who primarily will prepare their offspring to "make it" in a rapidly changing, uncertain and highly competitive society, then the uses of their children's free time will be perceived as too important to be left to the children to decide. Responsibility without control is an untenable situation.

Another Look at Childhood--The View from Poverty

Just as the turn of the twentieth century offered two worlds of childhood, that of poor immigrant children living in crowded and decaying urban tenements, contrasted with the protected world of middle class childhood, at the end of the twentieth century a similar dualism exists, but with striking differences. Today the faces of the urban poor are, for the most part, differentiated from those of the dominant group by racial rather than ethnic characteristics. There is still a substantial foreign born white population in the United States. As of 1970 there were 9.6 million foreign born whites in the United States, 91% of whom resided in urban areas. But while the majority of the whole ethnic population has been dispersed outward from segregated ethnic neighborhoods, black and Hispanic groups, the two largest

minority groups in the United States, remain highly concentrated in central city neighborhoods.¹⁰³

In 1985, there were 28,887,000 blacks in the United States, representing 12.1% of the population.¹⁰⁴ Between 1910 and 1960 about five million blacks left the South for big cities of the north.¹⁰⁵ Unlike the European immigrants of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, black immigration to urban areas occurred during a period of the twentieth century when stable employment opportunities for the unskilled and poorly educated were dwindling. By 1980 over one-half (55%) of all blacks lived in central cities of metropolitan areas, compared to 24% of all whites. In Atlanta, Baltimore, Detroit, Gary, Newark (NJ), New Orleans, Richmond, and Washington, D.C. blacks make up the majority of the population. In eleven other cities--Cleveland, Durham, Flint, Jackson (MS), Macon, Memphis, Oakland (CA), Portsmouth (VA), St. Louis, Savannah, and Shreveport (LA),--more than 40 percent of the population is black.¹⁰⁶ Urban segregation patterns resulted in blacks remaining in the central city ghetto neighborhoods originally settled in by earlier immigrants, unlike European immigrants who were able to move to outlying neighborhoods with the prosperity that booming industrialization offered them. While over six million blacks now live in suburban areas and about one third of the black population is middle class, most blacks live in segregated urban neighborhoods, and almost one third of all blacks live below the poverty line, including one in every

two black children.¹⁰⁷

In 1985, there were 16,940,000 people in the United States of Hispanic origin, over 80% concentrated in metropolitan areas.¹⁰⁸ The largest groups of this diverse population, Mexican Americans, who make up 10,269,000 of the total population, and Puerto Ricans, who comprise a total of 2,562,000, are disproportionately poor. Slightly over twenty eight percent of Mexican Americans were below the poverty level in 1985 and concentrated in urban barrios or ghettos. Mainland Puerto Ricans are almost totally urban with 96% living in metropolitan areas. Over 43.2% of Puerto Ricans live in poverty.¹⁰⁹

The conditions under which poor immigrant children lived and played almost one hundred years ago were highly visible to the non-poor who still either lived or worked in the cities. Lacking the private retreats of the middle class, the poor drew the attention of sympathetic journalists, upper middle class philanthropists and progressive reformers. Though their motivations may have varied, those reformers actively attempted, with their distinctly middle class orientation, to improve the welfare of the young. The playground movement was but one result of these reform efforts.

But to America of the postwar period, economically more prosperous than it had ever been and demographically more dispersed, poverty had become invisible. The increase in manufacturing and postindustrial services continued to expand the working and middle classes. Based on a variety of

sources, including the federal government, particularly the Census Bureau; community, metropolitan and national studies, and interpretative works, and defined by the criteria of wealth, prestige and power, it is estimated that the American class system has the following representation. One to three percent of the population is upper class; 10% to 15%, upper middle class; 30-35%, lower middle class; 40-45% working class; and 20-25%, lower class.¹¹⁰ While many working class families live austere or even impoverished lives, most earn incomes that permit a modest level of comfort. The lower class, however, are those who are permanently unemployed or underemployed, or only erratically employed. Financially, they are destitute.¹¹¹

The prosperity and the growth of suburbs of the postwar period also changed the metropolitan structure and demographics. The Census Bureau reconceptualized urban expansion by creating metropolitan statistical areas (MSA), a categorization that includes cities and their surrounding suburbs. Each MSA has one or more central cities with a combined population of 50,000 or more, and a suburban ring. In 1950, 35.4% of the population lived in central cities and 27.0 in suburbs. In 1980 30% lived in central cities and 44.8% in suburbs.¹¹² Those who could afford to relocated to the suburbs. Factories, offices, warehouses, and retail businesses followed them.¹¹³ Thus, an increasing concentration of minority poor were left behind in the central cities where joblessness would make them a permanent

underclass.¹¹⁴ Metropolitan growth, then, had led to a geographic separation of people by social class and race.¹¹⁵ Thus, poverty, located "off the beaten track" had, in the postwar period, become invisible. Quite literally the poor were neither seen by the non poor nor heard, having lost the attention of politicians. Michael Harrington, in The Other America, the book which awakened the public to the existence of poverty amid affluence, noted:

Because the slums are no longer centers of powerful political organizations, the politicians need not really care about their inhabitants. The slums are no longer visible to the middle class, so much of the idealistic urge to fight for those who need help is gone.¹¹⁶

Between 1880-1920, the poor, numerous and visible, lived and worked side by side with the non poor. In the period following World War II, the poor, forgotten in the prosperity of the period, became politically, economically, and physically removed from the mainstream of social life. Not until 1964 would attention be focused on what would become America's national disgrace, widespread, yet unnoticed, poverty.

John Kenneth Galbraith in The Affluent Society explained, "Poverty is self-perpetuating because the poorest communities are poorest in the services that would eliminate it."¹¹⁷ Galbraith recognized the need for community sponsored recreation, but urged an aggressive attack on the total environment of poverty--slum clearance, improved housing, quality education, strong health services. "The process promises to be expensive and also time consuming. But the

question is less one of feasibility than of will."¹¹⁸

Will came in the form of the War on Poverty launched by President Lyndon Johnson in 1964. During the years of the War on Poverty, the number of families living in poverty fell from 40 million or 22% of the population in 1959 to 25 million or 13% in 1968.¹¹⁹ Yet, history would judge the War on Poverty a failure, a "phony" war.¹²⁰ Based on the assumption that the attitudes and values of the poor are the cause of their poverty, "the poverty program was designed to change the poor rather than to change existing social arrangements that supported poverty."¹²¹

In 1986, 33 million Americans--14% of the population, lived below the poverty line. Though the poor are a highly diverse group, poverty is not randomly distributed in the total population. Rather, it is concentrated in three groups--minorities, female headed homes and children, the group with the highest poverty rate. About 20% of all Americans under the age of eighteen live in poverty, 16% of white children, 39% of Hispanic children and 46% of black children.¹²²

The childhood experiences of these children differ significantly from those of the middle class. Often lacking the bare necessities of life, theirs is not a play world which revolves around Little League, scouting, expensive toys and dancing lessons. Just like poor children throughout the earlier periods of this study, poor children in the postwar period lack the enabling or facilitating conditions to make

their play lives and leisure time uses comparable to those of the non poor--space, money, and adult supported linkages with organizational life.¹²³ Thus, the play life of urban children at the end of the twentieth century resembles that of their early twentieth century counterparts in that it is not highly controlled and organized by adults. On the other hand, it is different because adults, in the form of social reformers, have made no attempts, similar in magnitude and spirit to that of the playground movement, to organize poor children for wholesome play and games in the name of child welfare. That effort, as we shall see, has been take up by the voluntary, character-building organizations, a "privatized" alternative to the financially constrained and inadequate public recreation services of many cities.

Dominant Trends in Children's Play Patterns 1945-1990

Having examined the major socio-historical events of the period, the thesis now examines related dominant trends in play.

The Municipalization of Children's Play

With the end of World War II, the National Recreation Association and four other organizations, the American Institute of Park Executives, the National Conference on State Parks, the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums, and the American Recreation Society, all of which had gained prominence in the field of recreational services, planning and administration over the course of the twentieth century, realized that collectively they could most

effectively meet the needs of a society in which leisure had grown markedly for the masses of people. The shortened work week and the simplification of household tasks, both a result of technological advances, combined with the increasing affluence of the postwar period to create a tremendous impetus for recreational participation. In 1965, these organizations merged into the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA).¹²⁴

The new association described itself as "a public interest organization dedicated to improving the human environment through improved park, recreation and leisure opportunities."¹²⁵ The NRPA is engaged primarily in research, the dissemination of information on recreational programs, public relations campaigns to acquaint Americans with the importance of recreation to physical and mental health, and the sponsoring of education programs "for the development and upgrading of professional and citizen leadership in the park, recreation, and leisure field."¹²⁶

One of the first undertakings of the NRPA was an assessment of the recreation-park manpower situation. Given the demand for recreational programs by a more leisurely and affluent society, manpower was judged to be critically inadequate.¹²⁷ Personal consumption expenditures on recreational pursuits increased from \$3,761,000 in 1940 to over \$176 billion in 1985.¹²⁸ In addition, recreation as a municipal service and a public responsibility, financed by property taxes, also blossomed between 1945-1965 as all of

the states enacted enabling legislation giving municipalities the right to exercise of recreational services.¹²⁹ This provision of recreational services as a function of local government was largely accepted by residents who approved budgets allocating sufficient sums of money by means of taxation to carry out recreational programs.¹³⁰ With organized recreation community based and financed, inequalities in programs and services became inevitable as "economic conditions, social strata, political prestige, and group initiative provide for opportunities in one place and cause neglect in another."¹³¹ Public recreation became a middle class amenity for those who could afford to pay for expensive facilities and programs through their taxes. The class and racial homogeneity of the postwar suburbs provided a defacto segregation of the poor from the non poor, and ultimately of minorities from the dominant group. Thus, a longstanding pattern of the separation of social classes in recreational facilities was maintained. Early suburbs had been planned without much thought to recreational facilities. In order to make them affordable, early suburbs offered few municipal services, but levied low taxes on residents. Nevertheless, by 1950, there was a demand for municipally sponsored recreational programs, supported by American voters through steadily increasing municipal budgets.¹³²

While state and federal governments appropriated funds for recreation, expenditures by local governments exceeded by several times the outlay of higher levels of government. In

1929, \$33,539,000 was spent on municipal recreation in approximately 800 cities. By 1950, the NRA reported that \$269 million dollars had been spent in 2,175 municipalities on local parks and recreation.¹³³ In 1966, total local government expenditures on recreation had risen to \$905 million.¹³⁴ In 1977, \$1.5 billion of municipal budgets were allocated to recreational programs, services and facilities.¹³⁵ By the middle of the 1980s municipal recreation and park services were providing "the most significant outlet for Americans at play."¹³⁶

The vision of early playground organizers, that public recreation be financed by municipal tax dollars, administered by efficient professional leaders, with varied year round activities for all citizens, moved steadily closer to realization.¹³⁷ Yet, precisely because municipal programs are funded by tax dollars they are uneven in quality and quantity. While affluent areas can afford year round varied recreational activities for all age groups, less affluent communities will necessarily have more restricted programs, while many poor suburban and urban areas, with shrinking tax bases, will be unable, as Galbraith noted, to provide even basic services.

Indeed, even as overall municipal spending on recreational programs was increasing, older American cities such as New York, Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit and St. Louis, began their descent into an economic abyss, as the middle class population and then industry moved into surrounding

suburbs. The residual population of central cities rapidly became stereotyped as old, poor and racial minorities.¹³⁸ In those very cities that had spawned and nurtured the playground movement, public recreation saw a period of what would be irreversible retrenchment. Public recreational employees were furloughed, discharged, or allowed to retire. Many urban recreational departments were decimated.¹³⁹

As a generalized response to the slow pace of change in their economic and social status, including long established, rigid patterns of segregation, urban blacks staged widespread spontaneous ghetto uprisings between 1964 and 1968. The worst outbreaks were in Los Angeles in 1965 and Newark, NJ and Detroit in 1967. In 1967 alone 164 riots took place in all parts of the country.¹⁴⁰

It was not until this urban rioting erupted that meeting the recreational needs of the poor, particularly the non-white poor in urban slums, became a focus of attention. As part of the federally funded War on Poverty the Senate voted \$75 million dollars to be used to "provide new jobs, supervise recreation, light playgrounds, and provide swimming pools"¹⁴¹ to keep the summers "cool". Indeed, the Report of the National Advisory Commission of Civil Disorder documented the need for improved recreational facilities and programs. The report noted: "Among the twenty cities that accounted for the 24 most serious disorders, grievances relating to recreation were found in 15 cities and were ranked of first importance in three, second in one, and third in four cities."¹⁴²

Cities responded by developing expanded recreation programs in black and Spanish speaking neighborhoods. Since facilities were minimal, vacant lots were rapidly transformed into small parks. Portable pools and mobile recreation units were built or purchased and trucked into disadvantaged neighborhoods. Resident children were bused to municipal, county or even nearby state parks.¹⁴³ Nevertheless, in 1970 when the NRPA undertook a study of 25 cities with populations over 250,000 and their inner city areas for the Department of Housing and Urban Development on Open Space and Recreational Opportunities in America's Inner Cities, it found that many of the open space facilities were not equipped with so much as a basketball court. The study also found that the larger the percentage of city families below the poverty level, the fewer park and recreation acres in the cities.¹⁴⁴ Over one third of open land space were vacant lots; 29% were playgrounds, 10% parks, and 7% small play lots.¹⁴⁵ Researchers found that many of the parks and playgrounds were empty most of the time.¹⁴⁶ The reason for this underutilization of facilities seemed obvious to one study observer. "Who wants to spend time on an asphalt lot, with no water, littered with broken bottles and empty cans, far from the traditional centers of community participation and with no physical facilities or personnel to suggest more imaginative use of the space?"¹⁴⁷ Where playground equipment had been installed for younger children the study found much of it to be "sterile and unimaginative, dangerous

when play is unsupervised and, in a word, boring. Stickball in the streets is still a more welcome diversion."¹⁴⁸ As for the recreational facilities that quickly sprung up following the riots, in city after city lack of funding for upkeep reduced them to eyesores within a few years. On May 22, 1973 the Washington Post reported:

The 19 miniparks built in the city's riot-scarred areas in 1969 and 1970, at a cost of \$1 million, have been virtually abandoned and are now a shambles. No funds were approved for their maintenance and city and federal officials have bickered over who is responsible for them. For a time, the parks were the only redevelopment to take place in the riot areas.¹⁴⁹

The study observers concluded their report to the Department of Housing and Urban Development by commenting:

We saw little in the physical conditions of those streets or the neighborhoods around them to indicate that the protests or the Kerner Report had accomplished anything. To be sure, most of the rubble of the buildings the rioters burned in 1965 and '66 and '67 has been carted away by now and replaced with basketball hoops or children's swings or park benches--or more likely, with scrap iron, rotting newspapers, and empty beer cans and wine bottles.

In any case, our observations convinced us that most changes in the conditions and circumstances the Kerner Report identified as being associated with the rage that erupted in the cities in the '60s have been changes for the worse.¹⁵⁰

While environmental and site characteristics such as distance from home, maintenance levels, lighting and shade are instrumental in nonuse of neighborhood parks and playgrounds, sociologist Herbert Gans suggests that another inhibiting factor may be goal and value differences between the supplier and the user of the facilities.¹⁵¹ Gans argues that playgrounds and municipally funded recreational programs attract children who themselves are seeking one or more of

the goals which the suppliers have formulated for them. Suppliers of public recreation have expressed goals of personal growth, physical and mental health, personal safety and welfare, and citizenship and democratic values.¹⁵² According to Gans, middle class children or children of the working class oriented to the middle class bias and self-improvement goals of the Recreation Movement are far more likely to use these facilities than are children of the lower class who are seeking peer interactions, relief from roles and surroundings, variety, excitement and challenge.¹⁵³ While recreation planners give lip service to the importance of spontaneity in leisure, in fact, programs continue to emphasize organization, leadership and scheduling of activities, thus failing to meet the recreational goals of lower class children. This explanation offers insight into the reluctance of the poor and immigrant children, for whom the early playgrounds were targeted, to frequent them, preferring instead unsupervised streets, alleys and vacant lots. It is consistent too with the findings of MacDonald, McGuire and Havighurst that children of different social classes pursue different leisure activities intended to reinforce the culture of their own class. They found that "exceptional children," that is, lower class children who participated in middle class organizations, such as Scouting, were encouraged by their parents to do so precisely so that they might learn the ways of middle class children as preparation for upward social mobility. But, these children

were, indeed, exceptions, constituting only 5% of the lower class, and 10% of the upper-lower class.¹⁵⁴

In noting the flagrant inequalities in organized recreation and park services when applied to Blacks, Chicanos and Native Americans, recreationists Seesoms, Meyer and Brightbill comment:

Too often, recreation and park services have reflected the attitudes and aspirations of their staffs, who are largely middle income, majority group members, not the ethnic groups they sought. In doing so, the interests of the minority were overlooked, particularly when those interests were outside the experiences of the professional staff. It is difficult to program for those one does not know, understand, or relate to in one's everyday experiences.¹⁵⁵

Thus, in the period following World War II, as in the period before it, urban play facilities have been characterized by an underutilization by poor children who, it appears, have found the facilities, the programs and the motivations for their existence in their neighborhoods to be uninspiring, uninteresting and largely irrelevant to their lives. For the most part, the organization of these children's free time continues to center on the peer group minus an adult leader. According to sociologists Levine and Havighurst:

Beginning at age ten or thereabouts, the boys of a neighborhood cluster together in groups of six or eight or more. Often they choose a name for themselves such as the Tigers or the Nighthawks. They may organize a baseball team, or carry on athletic activities of one sort or another. More frequently they retain a kind of loose organization that brings them together afternoons and evenings at a particular street corner, just to talk and play. Girls organize into such groups less frequently than boys, though they often maintain a loose relationship to boys' gangs in the neighborhood.¹⁵⁶

Formed as a way of avoiding adult domination, these gangs may break up as the members grow older and reorganize in groups in adult led organizations such as the YMCA or the CYO. If they fail to break up by the late teens, there is the possibility that they will become delinquent gangs, hostile to adult organized authority, such as the police, teachers and church leaders.¹⁵⁷

In their research for Growing Up Poor, sociologists Terry Williams and William Kornblum met a number of adolescents who were members of crews, the contemporary descendent of the adolescent fighting gangs of the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁵⁸ Though crew members are generally in their mid-teens, Williams and Kornblum note that members may be as young as eight years old. Crews differ from peer groups in that they have an explicit identity: a name, a pledge, a code of ethics and rules of behavior. Though crews may be organized around illegal activities such as shoplifting and purse snatching, they also form around special activities such as sports or a preferred style of music or dance. While most crew members are boys, the researchers note that girls have formed a number of crews particularly around the jumprope game, double dutch, a combination of acrobatics and dance. Double dutch crews sometimes engage in scheduled competitions with other crews.¹⁵⁹ A source of fame, protection and success, "the crew is a haven for kids who are in effect marooned in the city."¹⁶⁰

The Continued Rise of Organized Children's Sports--The Public and Private Sectors

The American writer, Robert Paul Smith, in recollecting his childhood play in the 1920s and contrasting it with the play of his own children in the late 1950s, remembered:

When I was a kid, the year was divided into times. There was a time when you played immies. There was a time when you played stoop ball. There was a time when you built kites. There was a time when you made parachutes out of a handkerchief and some string and a rock. There was a time when you made spool tanks. There was time when you played football. There was a time when you played Red Rover, and statues, and one and over and Buck Billy Buck and ringoleveo . . . There was something that clicked, and the gears shifted, and we all got up in the morning and put our immies in our pockets because that was the day everybody started to play immies . . . One morning we stopped playing immies and started making kites, because overnight it had stopped being immie time and started being kite time. ¹⁶¹

This seasonal transition in the games children play remains, though the games have changed from immies and Red Rover and ringoleveo to soccer and football in the fall; twirling, wrestling and basketball in the winter; track and field, baseball and softball in the spring; swimming and tennis in the summer. "Pee Wee," "Mitey-Mite," "Midget," "Rookie," and "Crackerjack" levels of organization are open to children starting as young as six years old in both publicly and privately sponsored organized sports programs. Out of a total of 51,047,000 children between the ages of five to seventeen in 1975,¹⁶² over 30 million boys and girls, almost 60%, participated in one or more non school sports programs organized at the municipal level and/or through children's

sports organizations.¹⁶³ All of these programs are highly dependent on adult volunteers.

Edward Devereaux, a critic of competitive, adult-organized children's athletic programs, argues that children's participation in organizations such as Little League Baseball, Pop Warner Football and Pee Wee Hockey is threatening to wipe out the spontaneous culture of free play among American children.¹⁶⁴ Organized athletic programs have come under attack not only for displacing children's traditional play culture, but also for placing an overemphasis on competition and winning, essentially taking the fun out of the game, and causing physical injury and psychological harm to those who are less capable of successfully competing.¹⁶⁵ Competitive programs for school aged children moved into the public and private spheres precisely because educators, backed by pediatricians, eliminated them from school programs in the 1930s concluding that they were, indeed, harmful to youngsters. Nevertheless, the growth of organized competitive sports for children since the introduction of Little League in 1939 by Carl Stotz is testimony to the demand for and the popularity of these activities, despite the controversy that surrounds them.

It is hard to imagine the Little League motto "Character, Courage, Loyalty" and the pledge, "I trust in God, I love my country and will respect its laws, I will play fair and strive to win, But win or lose, I will always do my best,"¹⁶⁶ not having a great measure of appeal to parents of

the World War II period. As the motto suggests and as one Little League official commented, "Little League Baseball has nothing to do with baseball."¹⁶⁷ According to the Pulitzer Prize winning sportswriter, Arthur Daley, "The appeal of the Little League idea is almost irresistible."¹⁶⁸ Indeed, when Stotz began Little League in Williamsport, Pennsylvania in 1939, "it was only a community affair then, but it was so generically sound that it spread to adjoining towns and then to adjoining states, until it raced with the speed and consuming avariciousness of a prairie fire."¹⁶⁹ By 1952, the same year that the Joint Committee of the American Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation, and the Society of State Directors of Health, Physical Education and Recreation issued a policy statement disapproving of such competitive athletic programs for children below the ninth grade,¹⁷⁰ there were 500,000 boys in Little League, in obvious parental disregard of the Committee's position. By 1977 the number of Little Leaguers had swelled to 2.26 million boys and girls.¹⁷¹ In 1989, fifty years after its inception, there were 16,000 Little League baseball programs in the United States with over 2,500,000 children between the ages of eight to twelve participating, making Little League the largest children's sports organization in the world.¹⁷² In addition to Little League, Babe Ruth Baseball, a supervised baseball and softball program for children six through eighteen, has over 432,000 young members and Pony Baseball, a summertime

recreational baseball program, over 16,000.¹⁷³ Pop Warner Football, the largest nationally organized tackle football program, has approximately 4000 teams for children ages seven through sixteen with over 240,000 youngsters participating.¹⁷⁴ These represent but a few of over twenty five organized youth sports programs involving more than thirty million children annually.¹⁷⁵

The promotion of children's organized team sports must be seen as more than an offshoot of adults' interest in sports. Following World War II American cultural values became more oriented to a corporate economy, and competitive team sports, which promote values similar to those of the corporation, became a socializing agent for Americans who adopted this "social ethic."¹⁷⁶ Sports reflect the structure and values of the society in which they are found. American society is highly competitive placing a great emphasis on achievement and success. Hard work and disciplined activity are highly valued for their own sake and as a means to success. Despite an expressed belief in "rugged individualism" Americans value external conformity to normative codes of behavior. The development of the individual personality into a responsible, self-respecting adult is highly valued among Americans. And while the importance of the individual is stressed, Americans recognize and value the group as well.¹⁷⁷ Sports sociologist D. Stanley Eitzen accounts for the enormous popularity of baseball and football in the United States among both adults and children by noting that:

Baseball represents what we were--an inner-directed, rural-individualistic society. It continues to be popular because of our longing for the peaceful past. Football, on the other hand, is popular now because it symbolizes what we are now--an other-directed, urban-technical-corporate-bureaucratic society.¹⁷⁸

Whatever the game, however, American sports place a tremendous emphasis on competitive success, as does the larger society. While the ideal norm of sportsmanship is "It's not whether you win or lose but how you play the game," the real norm guiding sports is "Winning is not everything. It's the only thing." Winning athletes are reinforced with praise, honor and status while losers are ridiculed, subjected to degradation ceremonies, stigmatization and "cooling out," all of which force the redefinition of the self as an athlete.¹⁷⁹

Though the emphasis is on winning, the truth is that in sports, as in life, losing is an outcome that must be managed. The emphasis on winning and the inevitability of defeat are neatly exemplified in the "Punt, Pass and Kick" contest sponsored each year by business corporations. In 1974, 1,112,702 children between the ages of eight to thirteen entered this contest sponsored by the Ford Motor Company. There were six winners. Sports sociologists Eitzen and Sage wonder "why an organization would sponsor an event with six winners and 1,112,696 losers. Perhaps the answer lies in that this, too, is a microcosm of society."¹⁸⁰

In sport, the goal of individual achievement is accomplished through continuous hard work and sacrifice. The work ethic is synonymous with the sport ethic and is captured

in slogans commonly used by coaches such as "The will to win is the will to work" and "There is no substitute for hard work."¹⁸¹ In his study of Little League teams, sociologist Gary Alan Fine notes:

Coaches and many players expect the participants to adhere to a Puritan work ethic, preparing themselves for adult life. When they don't, moral disparagement is seen as warranted and is judiciously applied.¹⁸²

As in the larger society, conformity to external standards is highly valued in sports. Coaches demand that their athletes conform to community standards of dress and speech. They place a high value on team unity, emphasizing subordination of the self to team success. Coaches demand "acceptance of authority" (theirs) and compliance with the system's rules. "Coaches have absolute control over their team and players; if they wish to participate, they must conform to his system."¹⁸³

Coaches of children's sports teams expect this same conformity to the structure and rules of the organization. Indeed, adults who interact with children in character-building organizations, which include organized athletic programs, view their undertaking as a moral enterprise.¹⁸⁴ Coaches believe that they have an obligation to teach values and social propriety to the children with whom they come into contact, to instruct them in the moral order of sport as well as in the techniques of the game itself. In Little League baseball, "The coach is given responsibility for instructing his players in the need for hard work, cooperation,

competition, sportsmanship and good citizenship, as well as teaching them the proper techniques for playing baseball."¹⁸⁵ Specifically, adult concerns regarding the moral socialization of their charges focus on the importance of effort, sportsmanship, teamwork and coping with victory and defeat. Through their talk and practices coaches convey these moral messages.¹⁸⁶

There is indeed then a close relationship between American sports and American values, resulting in the growth of organized sports programs as a major vehicle of childhood socialization. In his study of children's soccer and ice hockey associations, Berlage concluded from interviews and surveys of the boys' fathers that the attitudes, values and skills inculcated in the training of team athletes, especially teamwork, self-discipline and tenacity, were major reasons for supporting their sons' participation in the sports. Middle class parents wanted their sons to be socialized in these values, seeing them as basic to success in corporate America. Ninety three percent of hockey fathers and 88% of soccer fathers believed that a boy has an advantage in business if he has played competitive sports.¹⁸⁷ Watson, in his study of middle class and working class parents' evaluations of Little League participation by their sons, found that for both groups the greatest value of the game was in the training in cooperation--learning to become a functioning member of a team.¹⁸⁸ As a socialization device, Watson concluded that:

Little League appears to perform quite different functions for the family according to its status . . . The Little League game is valued by middle class parents for its training in adaptive (self-directed) behavior, and by working class parents for its training in integrative (conforming) behavior.¹⁸⁹

For all parents, however, the Little League game was "far more than a mere passing attraction."¹⁹⁰

Thus, in the bureaucratically organized, postindustrial corporate society that is recent America with, its emphasis on organizations and the "social ethic," children's play too has become bureaucratized, characterized by a centrality of authority (in the figure of the coach), and an emphasis on discipline, rationality, technical knowledge and impersonal procedures. Organized sports are perceived by interested adults as rational means to a specific goal, i.e. socialization of children to corporate values and future roles within those corporations. Because organized sports programs are still predominantly male domains, to whatever extent these activities are successful socializers into adult roles, boys are gaining an early advantage over girls in training for corporate values and skills. In the words of sociologist David Riesman, "The road to the board room leads through the locker room."¹⁹¹

But girls too are learning to play that game. Beginning in the twentieth century girls began to change their play activities, participating more freely in the active running games that were typical of boys. In the nineteenth century girls most frequently played singing and ring games which were ascriptive and hierarchical in nature. The pattern of

play in these games was dominated by one person who controlled the order of play and the outcome. The subject matter was most often marriage or the pantomiming of women's chores (scrubbing floors, washing dishes). But in the twentieth century this pattern was enlarged. Girls steadily showed an increasing interest in boys' more active and competitive games.¹⁹² These games center on egalitarian contests among the players, are achievement oriented and organized in teams. By the late 1950s boys had fewer games that differentiated them from girls than did girls have games that differentiated them from boys. For while girls' play activities had expanded to include games once dominated by boys, such as baseball, basketball and soccer, boys did not show any greater preference for girls' games. Yet, despite this encroachment by girls upon boys' games, especially in fourth and fifth grades, girls continue to play and to show greater interest in their own distinctive games¹⁹³ such as hopscotch, jump rope, jacks and red rover.¹⁹⁴

The games of boys and girls have different emphases. Boys' games emphasize bodily strength and contact, the use of larger spaces and the outdoors, well defined outcomes with winners and losers clearly labeled, and success achieved through active interference with the other players. Boys tend to play their games in a continuous flow of activities, in age-heterogeneous groups and for long periods of time. Their motor activity involves their whole body and conflict, imagined or real, exists between groups or teams.

Boys play their games competitively in team sports with clearcut leadership positions and definite rules of procedure.¹⁹⁵

The characteristic games of girls, on the other hand, show more turn taking in ordered sequences, indirect competition between individuals, not groups, choral activity, songs and rhymes, a multiplicity of roles dictating every move and motor activities which involve only parts of the body. Girls play their games cooperatively, free of structure and rules, and are less concerned with a designated winner.¹⁹⁶

Although girls have been showing an increasing preference for sports, boys are playing more team sports now than ever before, both informally and in formal organized programs.¹⁹⁷ Only recently have girls gained access to membership in sports programs begun for boys. It was not until 1974 that Little League changed its all-male policy to permit girls to play on its teams, and then it did so reluctantly. By the mid-1980s about 20,000 girls were playing Little League baseball, while almost 150,000 girls were playing soccer and 250,000, softball.¹⁹⁸

Lever argues that there are serious future consequences of the sex differences in the games children play. Boys games provide them with a valuable learning environment, allowing them to cultivate social skills, such as the ability to deal with diversity in membership, to coordinate actions and maintain cohesiveness among group members, to cope with impersonal rules and to work for

collective goals. This serves them well as preparation for roles in the larger, complex institutions of society. Girls' informal games, on the other hand, may help prepare their players for the private sphere of the home and their future roles as wives and mothers.¹⁹⁹ Lever concludes:

The world of play and game activity may be a major force in the development and perpetuation of differential abilities between the sexes . . . serving to protect the traditional sex-role divisions within our society.²⁰⁰

Character Building Organizations

By the mid-1980s there were over 300 national youth serving organizations. Four major ones have consistently been Boy Scouts of America, Girls Scouts of the U.S.A., Camp Fire Girls and Boys Club of America. All four of these organizations began in the early 1900s and each has as its primary purpose the development of character and good citizenship through wholesome recreation and community service. Each organization grew steadily from its founding, with membership mushrooming after 1945 until the early 1970s when membership began to decline. In response to changing social conditions, particularly the widescale entry of married women into the labor force, and to offset declining enrollments due to demographic changes (the percentage of children between the ages of five to thirteen dropped from 18.2 in 1960 to 17.9 in 1970 to 13.7 in 1980),²⁰¹ each organization at various points lowered the age of entry to as young as five, thereby including millions of children once

considered too young to be a part of, or in need of, the services of these associations. From the 1960s forward, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and Camp Fire Girls, reflecting the wider society's heightened concern with minorities in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement and government initiative toward affirmative action, made active attempts to recruit minority populations into what had been predominantly white, middle class organizations. Boys Club, which always had as its mission the welfare of socially and economically disadvantaged urban boys, opened its doors to girls.

Boy Scouts of America

Begun for boys twelve through seventeen in 1910, Boy Scouts of America chartered its first Cub Scout troop for boys nine through eleven in 1930. Cubs, as the program was initially called, was developed by educator and psychologist Harold W. Hurt. Drawing on the new ideas on child development advanced by sociologist George Herbert Mead, behavioral psychologist John B. Watson, philosopher John Dewey and psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, Hurt convinced the executive board of the Boy Scouts of America that the years between eight to twelve were important in the formation of character and good habits.²⁰² In 1930, there were 5,102 Cub Scouts. In 1950, a year after the BSA lowered the age limit for Cub Scouts to eight through ten, there were 828,344 Cub Scouts. Climbing steadily through the 1950s and the 1960s, membership peaked at 2,438,009 in 1970. By 1980, however, the number of

Cub Scouts had dropped to 1,696,193.²⁰³ In 1982, Tiger Cubs was introduced for boys age seven. In 1985 there were 169,000 Tiger Cubs. Though Cub Scouts remained the largest of all divisions within the BSA, membership continued to decline falling from 1,569,000 in 1983 to 1,499,000 in 1985.²⁰⁴

Though the Boy Scouts had seen increasing growth in membership through the 1960s, this decade also brought sharp criticism of the organization for being out of touch with the times and for subsidizing the recreation of middle class, suburban boys. Minority and inner city youth were hardly represented in the organization.²⁰⁵ In 1965, a year characterized by racial tension in large American cities, the Boy Scouts launched its Inner City/Rural Program, to meet the challenge of bringing scouting to poor boys in the inner city and depressed rural areas. Traditional methods of organizing were waived as store front scout centers, staffed by professionals, opened up in several cities. Scouting units in public housing projects sprung up, the result of aggressive campaigns. Local councils hired professionals whose chief duty was to recruit and organize in black and Hispanic communities. Urban scouts, easy targets in their uniforms, were often taunted and even physically attacked by neighborhood youth gangs. Nevertheless, these strategies were successful in recruiting thousands of black youth into the organization, helping the Boy Scouts to shed its image as an organization primarily for middle class whites.²⁰⁶

The Handbook for Boys was revised in 1972 in what turned

out to be a misguided attempt to make it relevant to this new membership. Standards such as Morse Code, semaphore, and cloud identification were replaced with issues such as how to handle landlord violations of housing standards, and how to treat rat bites. The section on loyalty posed the question, "What if some friends take your sister's bike. They strip it and sell the parts. Where does your loyalty lie?"²⁰⁷ The sense of outdoor adventure, a defining feature of scouting, was decidedly missing.

In 1973, total membership reached a high of 6.4 million, but by 1979 it had plummeted to 4.3 million. A part of this decline can be attributed to demographics. In 1980 boys between the ages of five to thirteen stood at 14.3% of the total population, down from 18.6% of the population in 1970.²⁰⁸ But, scouting had begun to lose its appeal due to program changes. Without abandoning its commitment to urban youth, scouting executives decided to put the "outing back into scouting."²⁰⁹ In 1979 still another version of the handbook was produced. That handbook was similar to the handbook of 1945 recapturing the spirit of outdoor adventure.

Though membership in Boy Scouts is still more frequent in middle class and suburban families, and membership tends to be concentrated in the Cub Scout age group, all income levels and races are now substantially represented. By 1985, total membership, including adult leaders, had increased slightly to 4.8 million.²¹⁰ The number of boys who were members of the Boy Scouts increased from a low of 3,176,000

in 1979 to 3,755,000 in 1985.²¹¹

Girl Scouts of the U.S.A.

Following the lead of the Boy Scouts, Girls Scouts, founded in 1912 for girls between the ages of twelve through seventeen, also revised its program in the late 1930s. In 1938, three age levels were established: the Brownie program for ages seven through nine; Intermediate program for ages ten through thirteen; and the Senior program for ages fourteen through seventeen. In 1963, the program was again redesigned. Brownie Girl Scouts included girls ages six to eight; Junior Girl Scouts, ages eight to eleven; Cadette Girl Scouts, ages eleven to fourteen; and Senior Girl Scouts, ages fourteen through seventeen. In 1984 Daisy Scouts, for five year olds was added. Within one year Daisy membership reached 61,000.²¹² In 1944 membership in Girl Scouts stood at over 1,000,000 climbing steadily to an all time high of 3,900,000 in 1969. Though it is still the leading voluntary organization serving girls in the United States, Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. experienced a crisis in membership following years of continuous growth. From 1970 to 1985, the Girl Scouts lost one-fourth of its members as total membership fell from 3.9 million in 1970 to 2.8 million in 1985.²¹³ Again, this loss can be partially attributed to demographic changes as the percentage of girls between the ages of five through thirteen fell from 17.2% of the population in 1970 to 12.0% in 1985.²¹⁴ But the entry of married women into the

labor force left the organization short of adult women to volunteer as troop leaders.

As Boy Scouts had done, Girl Scouts revised its program and reached out to minority populations. In 1970, a conference on Scouting for Black Girls was held in Atlanta. In 1973, the Girl Scout program was extended to American Indian girls in eight western states. In 1981, Mundos a Explorar, the Spanish adaptation of the Brownie/Junior handbook, Worlds to Explore, was published. In addition to the recruitment of minorities, Girl Scouts began to offer programs to help young girls deal with situations once too delicate to mention in scouting programs. New programs called Safe and Sound at Home Alone, Say NO to Drugs, Staying Safe (dealing with child abuse) and Growing Up Female began to be offered. Teen pregnancies and suicides began to be discussed as well. Training in "urban survival skills" is now part of the Girl Scouts' agenda.²¹⁵ By 1985, Girl Scout members from minority groups reached 14% of the total membership²¹⁶ making Girl Scouts representative of different racial and ethnic groups, though it remains predominantly a white, middle class organization. Membership, however, continues to decline. In 1981 Girl Scout membership totaled 2,829,000 compared to 2,264,983 in 1988.²¹⁷

Camp Fire

Camp Fire Girls was founded in 1910 and unlike Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, both modeled on the English organizations of

Boy Guides and Girl Guides, Camp Fire Girls was "an American product per se."²¹⁸ The purpose of Camp Fire Girls was to educate for life, but especially for a life of service and leadership. Though no definite age limit was stated or required upon its founding, in general activities were adapted to girls in their teens.²¹⁹ In 1936, ten year olds were permitted to join Camp Fire Girls as Trail Blazers. The Blue Bird level for girls in grades one and two and Sparks level for kindergartners followed. In 1962, Junior "Hi" Camp Fire Girls was introduced for girls in junior high school. In the mid-1970s Camp Fire Girls changed its name to Camp Fire and officially involved boys in the organization. The move also reflected the "organization's commitment to diversity, regardless of sex, race, ethnicity, religion or economic background."²²⁰ Before this commitment to diversity was made, Camp Fire, just like Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, was serving almost exclusively the youths of the middle class. In recounting the story of Camp Fire Girls, Buckler, Fiedler and Allen unabashedly comment:

The accusation is frequently made against Camp Fire Girls and other youth-serving organizations that they do not serve the children who need them most . . . The administration of Camp Fire Girls, Inc. . . . makes no apologies for the fact that its membership comes largely from the middle class which constitutes the greatest segment of American society, for if this group is not trained for responsible leadership, society is in danger. Even so, the organization recognizes its obligation and responsibility to extend the opportunity of membership to the greatest possible number of girls and has sought consciously to make its membership constantly more inclusive of all religious, racial and economic groupings which constitute American society.²²¹

A study conducted by Camp Fire Girls in 1957 indicated that the membership composition was more middle class than the country as a whole, with 79% of the groups having a majority of their members in the middle income bracket.²²² Though early efforts to expand Camp Fire Girls membership to the lowest income groups proved "difficult," the organization was able to conduct "limited, but very successful programs with groups in underprivileged areas."²²³ The Metropolitan Critical Areas Project was one such program which reached out into "long neglected areas seeking to include girls whose problems of identity crisis, neglect, low educational levels, delinquency, fatherless families and poverty are deep seated."²²⁴ In the 1970s, the organization committed itself to the active recruitment of racial and ethnic minority children, particularly those between the ages of five to ten.²²⁵ Efforts to meet the needs of a diverse population included a national resolution in support of Martin Luther King Day, a resolution to develop a human rights project and the dissemination of self-reliance literature in Spanish and Cambodian. In 1987, more than 18% of the 445,000 youth members of Camp Fire were black, native American or other minority races, or of Hispanic descent. More than one-third were male.²²⁶

In essence, the Camp Fire organization of the 1980s and 1990s is publicly committed to being a modern version of turn of the century child saving. In 1985, a California council of Camp Fire, Inc. began Crimebusters Camp, a summer

program which "teaches kids how to survive, even thrive, in dangerous surroundings." In the summer of 1990, Crimebusters was brought to seven inner city housing projects. There the campers did crafts, played games, sang songs and worked through problems. All the activities centered on crime prevention. Aimed at teaching children how to be safe in an unsafe environment, Crimebusters also is intended to leave kids with a "new sense of responsibility and self-confidence. Perhaps for the first time, they have the desire to stay out of trouble and the vision to make a positive impact on their community."²²⁷ The child-saving theme of Camp Fire is apparent in the 1987-1988 Annual Report which reads:

Poverty, family dissolution, abuse and neglect, discrimination and prejudice . . . That's the environment our kids live in today. And how are they responding? Children having children, crime and victimization, drug and alcohol abuse . . . runaways, suicide. Today's children come from an increasingly diverse population of races and culture. Many do not fit the image of the traditional American family. A large and growing number of these young people are at risk of not developing into solid, productive citizens. They are at risk of slipping through childhood and adolescence without a strong foundation of skills, knowledge, values and self-esteem. *Camp Fire's six year plan commits agency resources to help as many kids as it can to "make it."*²²⁸

In their efforts to reach poor and minority populations, Camp Fire, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts are johnny-come-latelies.

The Boys Club of America

The Boys Club of America (BCA), founded in 1906, is a congressionally chartered national organization of

approximately 1100 clubs serving over 1,285,000 youth (ages six to eighteen) in all fifty states. Each club is staffed by trained and full time youth work professionals. Unlike the other three youth serving organizations which use local facilities for meeting places, Boys Club is facility based in clubhouses, the majority of which are located in slum areas of major cities. In 1988, Boys Club extended membership to girls. It is the only major nationwide youth agency with a primary mission of service to boys and girls from disadvantaged circumstances. Indeed, membership is drawn primarily from these groups. In 1988, 71% of club members lived in urban areas, 47% came from single parent families, 29% from families receiving public assistance, 51% from minority families, 49% from families with parents working in blue collar or factory jobs. Sixty six percent came from families with annual incomes under \$15,000. Seventy six percent of club members were between the ages of six through thirteen.²²⁹

Since its founding, Boys Club has been self-described as "a process, a method of taking boys off the street and improving their behavior."²³⁰ Operating as a guidance system, the organization uses a conditioning process which aims to bring "the person in need of guidance . . . under control and conditioned to accept suggestions with respect to attitude and behavior."²³¹ In 1987, Boys Clubs of America launched its Outreach '91 five year plan, one goal of which is to recruit an additional 700,000 disadvantaged boys and

girls into the Clubs. The plan was developed in response to "disturbing social, economic and demographic data . . . the rising percentage of minority and immigrant children, chronic poverty . . . and the large population of 'latchkey' children lacking daily adult supervision."²³² As part of its Outreach '91 plan, Boys Club of America has developed program curricula for youth services in the areas of substance abuse prevention and teenage pregnancy prevention with its *Smart Moves* program for boys and girls ranging in age from ten to fifteen; juvenile delinquency prevention through its *Target Outreach* program; career development through *One With One*, a program which links boys and girls with adult mentors who are successful in various fields of interest to the members; and school retention, a program coordinated with *Cities In Schools*, an organization with a tested program for keeping at-risk boys and girls from dropping out of school.²³³ Boys Club of America also conducts programs in outdoor and environmental education, personal development, cultural enrichment, citizenship and leadership development, and health and physical education. According to the BCA, "Sports have historically been the most popular Club activities with the strongest membership recruitment potential . . . Through sports activities, Club members learn about teamwork and fair play. Youngsters attracted to Clubs by sports soon discover many other exciting and enriching programs available to them."²³⁴

Though all four of these organizations have held to

their basic traditions, they have, of necessity, also transformed themselves in the last thirty years. This is particularly true for Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and Camp Fire each of which made a commitment to shed its image as an organization for white middle class children, though essentially, they have remained so.

Going through childhood in the fifties and sixties, baby boomers were introduced to organizational life through membership in these character building children's organizations. Their emphasis on cooperation, service and loyalty was congruent with the ethics of the times. Though Benjamin Spock, so influential in directing child care for postwar parents, did not expressly promote scouting in his Baby and Child Care Manual, his message to parents on the aims in raising a child might have been taken from the pledges of the Scouting organizations. Spock comments:

I think more of our children would grow up happier and more stable if they were acquiring a conviction all through childhood, that the most important and the most fulfilling thing that human beings can do is to serve humanity in some fashion and to live by their ideals.²³⁵

The stated purpose of Girl Scouts is "to help girls develop as happy, resourceful individuals willing to share their abilities as citizens in their homes, their communities, their country and the world." The organization promotes ethics through the Girl Scout Promise and Law. The laws require Girl Scouts to be trustworthy, loyal, useful, a friend to all, courteous, obedient, cheerful, thrifty and clean in thought, word and deed.²³⁶ A recent provision has

added the vow "to protect and improve the world around me."²³⁷ Boy Scouts promise to do their best to do their duty to God and their country while keeping themselves "physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight."²³⁸

In her manual on child care and development, child psychologist Louise Bates Ames, associate director of the Gesell Institute of Human Development, wrote, "These youth organizations are all to the good. A parent does more than she realizes when she sees to it that her boy or girl joins one of these excellent organizations."²³⁹ Despite this advocacy, Scouting had already begun its sharp and rapid decline in membership. Baby boomers, as parents, had smaller families, but just as important as the demographics that affected scouting figures, and the loss of female volunteer leaders as women entered the labor force in large numbers, were the skepticism and anti-institutionalism that permeated the country on the heels of the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal. As the seventies ushered in the "Me Generation," the emphasis on the group and community of the fifties gave way to emphasis on the individual. Parents have increasingly expressed a desire to inculcate in their children traits associated with autonomy, independence and self-fulfillment.²⁴⁰ With such an emphasis, service to others and living by codes of conduct may have indeed rendered Scouting "out of tune with the times" necessitating a change of program emphasis within these organizations.

A 1986 NORC survey of U.S. adults, however, found that

while autonomy is still given top priority as a desirable trait in children, parents are now also emphasizing values such as tolerance, helping others, and working hard that will balance out increased autonomy.²⁴¹ These preferences have swept across class lines. As youth serving organizations have altered their programs and membership profiles, and as Americans struggle to maintain commitment to groups in an age of individualism,²⁴² these organizations have stabilized their memberships and some even have registered small gains.²⁴³

From Superbaby to Superkid?

Mom and Dad ponder the seeming unwillingness of their child to appreciate the importance of high academic performance. Getting into the right college, they conclude, means more to them than to their daughter. The daughter, it turns out, is but three years old. The parents, as one prototype of current parenting models, represent achievement oriented, professional couples who will devote their resources and energy to provide their child with every early advantage to insure future success. The scene is from the 1989 movie Parenthood. Throughout the film the pig-tailed tyke is led through lessons, in the Doman method of flash cards, in math, science, and Spanish. In between she reads Kafka. And rarely, if ever, does she play. Hollywood fiction or art imitating life? It appears that the latter is the case.

Beginning in the 1960s books with titles such as Revolution in Learning: the Years from Birth to Six,²⁴⁴ Give Your Child a Superior Mind,²⁴⁵ How to Raise a Brighter Child,²⁴⁶ How to Teach Your Baby to Read,²⁴⁷ Fostering Intellectual Development in Young Children,²⁴⁸ and How to Teach Your Baby Math²⁴⁹ appeared, some making it to the best sellers list. The Superbaby phenomenon had begun. According to child psychologist David Elkind, the superbaby syndrome started in the 1960s simultaneously with the widescale entry of women into the labor force and the rise of early childhood education.²⁵⁰ Prompted by the well published findings of Operation Head Start,²⁵¹ the program designed to give poor children a leg up on the middle class competition, that early cognitive development facilitates later learning in structured classroom settings, parents began to see children's learning as a race, the earlier you start, the better. Nursery schools and kindergartens, typically settings for childhood socialization through group play, became more academically oriented. According to Marie Winn, author of Children Without Childhood:

Parents of the Sesame Street generation often demand a "serious," skill-centered program for their pre-schoolers, in school, afraid that the old-fashioned, play centered curriculum will bore their alphabet spouting, number chanting four and five year olds.²⁵²

Child care centers such as Houston's tony *Creme de la Creme* are sought out by parents who can afford them. *Creme de la Creme* caters to "the puppies of yuppies" and will teach math at eight months "if the baby is interested."²⁵³ Indeed,

centers such as these are not open to all children whose parents can pay the tuition. Admission is by testing. To prepare their children for the entrance exam parents might invest in a copy of Jacqueline Robinson's The Baby Boards: A Parents' Guide to Preschool and Primary School Entrance Tests.²⁵⁴ In kindergarten, too, children now face "homework, grades, testing, a great hurrying," according to Elkind.²⁵⁵

The decrease in fantasy play and the simultaneous emphasis on academics have contributed to the alteration of early childhood from a play-centered time of life to one closely resembling the style of adulthood: purposeful, success-centered and competitive.²⁵⁶ Valerie Suransky in The Erosion of Childhood argues that most institutionalized child care centers, with their emphasis on the pursuit of profits, order, competition, and socialization to the work ethic, all undertaken in settings bound temporally and spatially by adult organizational standards, are antithetical to the very being of childhood.²⁵⁷ According to Winn, "The likelihood is that these preschool "workers" will not metamorphose back into players when they move on to grade school."²⁵⁸ Winn maintains that the loss of childhood play is most evident in school age children, those from six to twelve who once were visible on sidewalks, streets and corner lots engaged in free play. Indeed, many school age children may not metamorphose back into players, not because they have forgotten how to play, but because they have little time to play.

Superbabies, if they don't burn out first, are likely to grow

up to be superkids. The superchild is often the offspring of well-intentioned though, according to psychologists, misguided, dual career or dual worker couples, who, in seeking quality structured time for their children, have organized their kids' lives around an array of classes. Each day of the week, or at least several of them, are accounted for with some lesson or activity.²⁵⁹ This type of overprogramming, often stressful to children, is the result of a combination of factors.

With almost two thirds of mothers with school aged children now working outside the home, children are getting less personal attention. To compensate, parents are scheduling "quality time" activities for their children, in a sense, not only making every minute count, a behavior competitive, goal oriented parents would tend to value, but also substituting formal or methodical and ceremonious attention in the place of personal or informal and unaffected attention. Furthermore, many of today's baby boomers, affluent and well educated, not only want to give their children the best, but, the children themselves are seen as reflections of the economic status of the parents. Yet, even children with mothers who do not work outside the home are often similarly overorganized. Because so many other children are involved in numerous organized activities and classes, parents who do less may worry that their children will not "fit in" socially or compete successfully with their peers. Some women who leave high powered careers for full

time motherhood may try to manage their children like corporations with the child becoming a symbol of the mother's worth.²⁶⁰ Elkind comments:

There's a human need to demonstrate economic surplus, and we do it through conspicuous consumption and leisure. Middle class women used to be symbols of economic surplus. They didn't work because that was evidence that their husband could support them. What's happening today is that women are no longer symbols of leisure class status and economic surplus. Our children have become those symbols.²⁶¹

Thus, excessive competitiveness and status seeking also plays a role in the organization of children's social lives.

According to the Bank Street College Guide to Raising a Confident Child, "Some middle years children are definitely overindustrialized. [Their] schedule. . .leaves little time for independent play and no time at all for doing just nothing."²⁶² The results can be early burn out, free floating anxiety, depression, and the turning to drugs in adolescence.²⁶³

Television's Effect on Play

Any consideration of the dominant trends in children's play activities after World War II must include the impact of television. Though both parents and social reformers of the past were concerned about the influence of radio and motion pictures on the young, television has traits that make it a phenomenon of a different magnitude.

Growing Up Fast: Play is Kids' Stuff

The Payne Fund's extensive study of movies, done in the

1930s, found that the majority of American children "regularly" attended motion pictures. But "regularly" meant anywhere from two movies per month for younger children to three times per week for children from nine to nineteen.²⁶⁴ These figures pale compared to the time children spend watching television--over three and one half hours per day on average.

To view a movie children have to go somewhere. Movie theatres are special places set aside and arranged to facilitate viewing. Adults either accompany children to the movies, give them permission to go to the movies, and/or serve as gatekeepers at ticket booths controlling entry through the sale of tickets. Going to the movies costs money and forces children to order their priorities as they choose how to spend allowances or money earned doing odd jobs, and which movie to spend their money on. But television alters this process. As an almost ubiquitous component of home life, television viewing requires no ticket for admission and no need to travel from home, nor is viewing restricted to a specific show. Just flip the dial, or press the remote control panel, and choices abound.²⁶⁵ In a typical year, the approximately 720 commercial stations in the United States broadcast 4.7 million hours of programming.²⁶⁶ VCRs are, of course, bringing movies into the home as well.

Radio, like television, can be experienced without leaving home, yet radio differs from television in that there are no pictures, forcing listeners to create images based on

past experiences. According to author Joshua Meyrowitz:

If a child has never seen a murder or a seduction, radio would not "fill in the picture" for the child. Children in a pre-television age who listened to radio dramas no doubt learned many adult secrets, but compared to television, radio had little power to fully "expose" the hidden aspects of adult life.²⁶⁷

It is in this exposition of the secrets once held exclusively by adults that television blurs the distinction between adulthood and childhood. Children's easy access to television and adults' apparent inability to curtail that access, leave parents without the power to control, or at least to filter, the information that their children are exposed to. While print allows for the separation of children of different ages into differential informational worlds, television changes that pattern of information flow into the home. Television exposes children to topics and behaviors that adults for centuries tried to keep hidden from them.²⁶⁸ As it thrusts children into a complex adult world, television erodes childhood innocence revealing to them the harsh secrets of adult life, such as the ravages of war, disease, suicides, crime, poverty, failure, divorce, and mental illness. According to social critic, Marie Winn, The Age of Protection has given way to the Age of Preparation. Unable to shelter children from the grisly realities of life, adults might best serve children by preparing them to deal with these realities. Yet, this preparation hastens the loss of childhood innocence. As young children become more sophisticated and adult like, traditional childhood play and games lose their appeal.

According to Winn, "Children who still have the 'play drive' and like to play may yield to the pressure of their more precocious peers and give up or hide the 'discreditable nature' of their secret play activities."²⁶⁹ She quotes a fifth grade boy who sneeringly remarked, "Some of the kids in the class are real weird. They're not interested in going out, just in trucks and stuff, or games pretending they're monsters. Some of them don't even try to be cool."²⁷⁰ Folklorists Iona and Peter Opie noted well over a decade before Winn that "today . . . children become self-conscious about the games they play, giving them up on their own more quickly than they used to."²⁷¹

Shaping Play: Toys and Violence

Television shows for children began in 1947. Three of the most popular shows were the Howdy Doody Show with Buffalo Bob Smith (NBC, 1947-1960), Kukla, Fran and Ollie (NBC, 1948-1954), and The Lone Ranger (ABC, 1949-1961). Howdy Doody was Buffalo Bob's freckled face puppet sidekick. A "peanut gallery" of shrieking children, entertained by Bozo the Clown, filled a section of the stage on each live show. Kukla, Fran and Ollie were puppets, contemporary Punch and Judy characters. The Lone Ranger, a well-known radio star, came to television as the masked cowboy, who astride his white horse, Silver, and with his ever faithful American Indian companion, Tonto, always won the struggle of good over evil before disappearing into the sunset in a cloud of

dust.

Until 1949 the operation of television was a matter largely of local station programming and regional hook-ups. Coast to coast network television began on September 4, 1951. Most children's broadcasts were confined to network evening hours and week-ends until that year when they started to move into late afternoons. During the 1950s, when most homes had only one television set, programs were targeted for children on the belief that they controlled family viewing until bedtime.²⁷²

Yet, children were not seen as a major market for products and few sponsors had economic interests in children's programming. That is, until 1955 when Walt Disney's Mickey Mouse Club made its television debut. The show aired from 5 to 6 P.M. every weekday on the ABC network. Because of Disney's popularity, network affiliates all over the country agreed to carry the show. Enormously popular, the show dominated the air waves fulfilling ABC's guarantee to its affiliates of reaching "90 percent of all the television homes in the country."²⁷³ This was no insignificant number. In 1955, 66 percent of all homes had their own television set. In 1956, the number rose to 85 percent and forty million homes were watching five hours a day of television. ²⁷⁴ Unlike earlier children's television shows which all aired on local stations, first in the evening between 7-7:30 P.M., and later on Saturday mornings, the Mickey Mouse Club reached children nationwide. But national

coverage was not the only factor that separated the Mickey Mouse Club from local programs. Before 1955, advertising directed to children did not yet exist. The Mickey Mouse Club, however, was sponsored by Mattel Toys, a small company that had the foresight to realize the opportunity television provided to build the first brand name in toys. Mattel executives believed that the child who said, "That's what I want, Daddy" would be an irresistible salesman. Every Wednesday between 5:30-5:45, Mattel played three commercials promoting their Jack-in-the-Box, Getars, and Burp Gun toys. Ninety percent of the nation's children, with a television in the home, watched these first toy commercials.²⁷⁵ In between Thanksgiving and Christmas of that year, Mattel experienced unprecedented sales. The Burp Gun was by far the most popular of the three toys advertised on television. It had "fired shots heard round the world."²⁷⁶ Television commercials, aimed at an audience of children, began to shape their play lives.

According to Cy Schneider, creator of numerous children's television shows and kids' commercials, "The play situation in which you place a toy becomes a fantasy for the child. The fantasy becomes as important as the product."²⁷⁷ According to television researchers Liebert, Neale and Davidson, "There is a conscious and deliberate move on the part of the ad makers to capitalize on all of the child's weaknesses, to bring the toy store into the living room . . . so that a purchase is almost inevitable."²⁷⁸

In 1969, Playskool began television advertising of its products. By then television advertising of toys to children had become a major commercial effort. On a single Saturday morning shortly before Christmas 1969, ABC had 62 toy commercials, CBS had 63 and NBC ran 55.²⁷⁹ In 1970, advertisers spent and the networks received \$75 million for advertising time on network children's shows alone with half of all children's advertising selling food, another 30 percent toys and 10 percent vitamins.²⁸⁰ Though empirical studies need to be done to determine the extent to which children actually play with their toys, the volume of toy sales is indication enough that the ads do result in purchases. In 1954, before the first television toy commercial, the annual sales volume of the toy industry was less than \$1 billion. By 1985, it had soared to \$12 billion.²⁸¹ Almost 80 percent of toy sales are of licensed products based on television and motion picture characters.

According to psychologist Brian Sutton-Smith, modern children spend an increasingly large part of their lives at home alone with their toys.²⁸² Though toy manufacturing began in the United States in the 1840s, the modern toy industry was born after World War II. Postwar prosperity resulted in, indeed, was fueled by an increase in consumerism. Between 1945 and 1960 "a new culture of buying took control."²⁸³ An upwardly mobile population had discretionary income to spend on toys which proliferated as the plastics industry grew. Television too helped to propel

the toy industry toward maturity.²⁸⁴ Toys now have a role in children's lives far exceeding that of earlier years. Sutton-Smith labels them "the second educational curriculum," one with which modern children spend as much time as their parents spent in childhood street play. Though manufacturers organize toys by age of players according to increasing complexity and mechanical ingenuity, "Children at younger and younger ages are given increasingly complex machine based toys to deal with."²⁸⁵ Indeed, as working parents and over-scheduled children spend less time together, "self-nurturant" toys that tell bedtime stories and ask about the child's day, have been developed to fill the gaps.²⁸⁶ The most advanced and costly toys are the newest video games. Japan's Nintendo leads the pack of video manufacturers.²⁸⁷

Television commercials directed to children tout the latest in toys. What came to be seen as the abuse of children oriented advertising prompted the formation of the Boston based watchdog group, Action for Children's Television.²⁸⁸ That organization maintains that "in the case of children's advertising, the purpose is to use the child as a surrogate salesman to pressure the parent into buying the product."²⁸⁹ But, children themselves are active consumers. Children nine to twelve spend nearly all of the \$4.73 billion they get annually in allowances, gifts, and earnings as dual career parents yield many spending decisions to their children.²⁹⁰

Though the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB)

defined children's programming time as "those hours other than prime time in which programs initially designed for children under twelve years of age are scheduled,"²⁹¹ the heaviest viewing of television by children, even those as young as two to five, is, in fact, during prime time.²⁹² The A.C. Nielson Company, which measures audience viewing, reported that for children between the ages of six to eleven, 28% of their viewing time occurs during prime time (8-11 P.M. Monday to Saturday, 7-11 P.M. Sundays); 17% during the early "fringe" period (weekdays from 4:30 to 7:30 P.M.); 22% occurs Saturday between 7 A.M. to 7:30 P.M. and Sunday 7:00 to prime time; 5% occurs during the "late fringe" from 11 P.M. to 1:00 A.M.²⁹³ According to researchers Adler and Faber, "By the time children leave elementary school, their program preferences are likely to be closer to those of adults than of their preschool siblings."²⁹⁴

Whether viewing cartoons or prime time television shows, children are exposed to considerable violence. Excluding cartoons, by the time average television viewers reach the age of sixteen, they will have witnessed over 18,000 fictionalized murders and innumerable other violent acts. Results of empirical studies on the effect of television violence on children's behavior are contradictory and controversial.²⁹⁵ Gerbner and associates, for example, conclude that the impact of television violence is not in the stimulation of violence, but in the cultivation of a pervasive fear of violence in heavy viewers.²⁹⁶ The National

Institute of Mental Health, on the other hand, after surveying over 2,500 studies on the relationship of television viewing to actual behavior, concluded that there is overwhelming evidence that violent portrayals, in fact, do encourage aggressive conduct among children and teenagers.²⁹⁷ This aggressive conduct is acted out in children's play. Research shows that children do learn and retain new aggressive behaviors from television and that they spontaneously imitate that behavior.²⁹⁸ Yet, they do not usually act out these aggressive acts alone; most children use televised aggression as a guide for their own actions when playing with friends.²⁹⁹ Exposure to only one violent cartoon can increase the aggressiveness of children's play. Children exposed to violence on television will act out violent behaviors they have viewed on the screen for months afterwards in their play activities.³⁰⁰

In their study of television's impact on children Tannis MacBeth Williams and her colleagues compared the play behavior of children in a town in British Columbia, Canada before and after the introduction of television into the community in 1973.³⁰¹ The town without television was named Notel by the researchers. It was compared to two comparable communities, Unitel, which received only one television station and Multitel which received both Canadian and United States networks. These two communities served as controls in the researchers "natural experiment" on the influence of television. Changes in children's behavior in Notel,

following the introduction of television, not occurring among the children in the other two communities could reasonably be attributed to the effects of television.

Williams and her colleagues observed children during free play and obtained ratings of aggression from teachers and peers for Notel children both before and after television was introduced as well as for the control communities. They found a significant increase in the aggressive behavior of children in Notel following the introduction of television. Two years after receiving television, Notel children were significantly more aggressive, both physically and verbally, in their play than they had been before television was introduced into their community. Children in the two control communities demonstrated only slight changes in physical and verbal aggression.

The authors concluded that:

There was a significant increase in the aggressive behavior of Notel children following the inception of television in the community. The increase occurred for both physical and verbal aggressive behavior; it occurred for both boys and girls; it occurred at more than one age level; it occurred for children who were initially low in aggressive behavior as well as those who were initially high in aggressive behavior; and it occurred for the same children studied longitudinally and same-aged children compared cross-sectionally.³⁰²

Replacing Play: "I Can't. My Favorite Show Is On."

In the decade of the 1950s, television came to dominate the non-sleep, non-school time of American children, becoming the greatest source of common experience in their lives.³⁰³

Television has been criticized as an interloper rearranging children's (and adults') lives as they fit in increasingly more viewing time. Television viewing, indeed, comes at the expense of other activities, one of which is free and organized play. Nevertheless, it cannot be assumed, as it glibly is by critics concerned about television's impact on play, that most of the time spent watching television was spent playing before television entered American homes or that the time would be spent playing were television to suddenly disappear.

Television satisfies children's fantasy needs. It is to this end that children use television.³⁰⁴ Before the invention of television, children met those needs through other activities, particularly radio listening, movies, comic books and escape magazines, such as confessions, detective and the pulp adventure type. These activities declined significantly with the advent of television. Children's total mass communication time remains an hour to an hour and one-half more than it used to be in the days of radio. A few minutes of this have been absorbed by postponing bedtime. Part of that time has been gained by reducing time spent on active play, especially play with other children. The rest of the time is absorbed by listening to the radio, while doing something else.³⁰⁵

In comparing two communities in Western Canada, Teletown, which received many television signals from both Canada and the United States, with Radiotown, which received

stray and undependable television signals and those only a few nights a year, researchers found that sixth grade children in Teletown watched 20.5 hours a week of television by taking it from radio, movies and comic books. Radio listening occupied 57 minutes a day of the sixth grade Teletown children, but 3 hours, 9 minutes of the Radiotown children. Children in Teletown saw 0.9 movies per month, Radiotown children, 4.8, and 34% of Teletown children read ten or more comic books while 87% of Radiotown children read ten or more comic books per month. For children in Teletown, however, there was a decrease in the time spent playing, both alone and with other children. First grade children in Radiotown spent 3.5 hours a day playing, while children in Teletown spent 2.92 hours a day engaged in play.³⁰⁶

The researchers conclude that children use four media--television, radio, movies and comic books/escape magazines--to meet their fantasy needs. Those needs, they maintain, are essentially the same for children in the age of television as they were for children in the age of radio. Overall, media content is not essentially different except that television gives the content a visual dimension. Changes in media content derive from changing times rather than from changing media and the changes in children's mass media habits seem to derive from television's vividness and not from changes in children.³⁰⁷

Play, too, meets children's fantasy needs and, to some extent, it has suffered as the mass media, particularly

television, meet these needs. Nevertheless, according to Schramm, Lyle and Parker, "the social attractions of play and the need to stretch muscles and get outside, will make sure that television does not completely oust play from a child's schedule. The competition between fantasy-producing mass media and other activities was present before TV."³⁰⁸

Schramm, Lyle and Parker's study of television's impact on children in Radiotown and Teletown bears similarities to the later study undertaken by Tannis MacBeth Williams and her colleagues in Notel, Unitel, and Multitel. It has already been noted that with the introduction of television into Notel, the play of children in that community became significantly more aggressive. Williams and her associates also found, however, that children in Notel, who spent three to four hours a day watching television upon its availability, did so by cutting back on other activities. Children participated less in sports and community activities. These were not measured by Schramm and his associates. The mean sports participation score for children twelve and younger dropped from 13.45 to 9.62 with the introduction of television. For Multitel children, the participation score actually increased during the same period from 5.10 to 7.57, an unexplained finding.³⁰⁹ Participation scores for total community activity dropped from 64.03 to 41.38 in Notel after television was introduced. This was twice the decline in participation scores for children in Multitel.³¹⁰ Perhaps as the novelty of television

wears off viewing time decreases.

Children's time use studies confirm that children spend more time on television than on free play and organized activities combined, yet they do engage in these latter activities as well. The Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan reports that children between the ages of nine to eleven spend 17.40 hours per week watching television, 8 hours, 29 minutes per week playing and 3 hours, 9 minutes per week in sports.³¹¹ Medrich and his associates found that seven hundred sixty four sixth grade children in Oakland, California spent on average three to four hours a day watching television, two to three hours a day "on their own" activities, engaged in either alone or with friends, but with no significant adult supervision or involvement, and four to five hours per week in organized activities supervised by adults.³¹² Over half of the children in the survey were heavy users of neighborhood facilities, particularly schoolyards and parks. Thus, free play activities can be presumed, though the survey did not explore what respondents actually did while they were at these facilities. In the Oakland sample, children from low income families were especially heavy users of local facilities, a reflection of differences in children's access to private play space at home.³¹³ Children from high income families were more involved in privately sponsored and/or fee required activities than were children from lower income families. Long and Henderson found among suburban middle class fifth

grade children that television viewing consumed half of the total leisure time and exceeds free play by a ratio of three to two. They found that in a two week period, children averaged 30.3 hours of television viewing, 20 hours of free play and 8.3 hours in organized activities.³¹⁴

That television has impacted on children's play lives is undeniable. That it has destroyed childhood play in a single generation is an exaggerated and simplistic assessment of the current state of childhood play. One of television's most vocal critics, at least as it impacts on children and childhood, is author and social critic Marie Winn. Maintaining that children would rather watch television than do anything else, Winn has compared children's use of television to an addiction³¹⁵ and blames television for the demise of childhood play. She writes:

Of all the changes that have altered the topography of childhood, the most dramatic has been the disappearance of childhood play . . . In place of traditional childhood games, that were still popular a generation ago, today's children have substituted television viewing and most recently, video games.³¹⁶

Devereaux takes a more conservative position arguing instead that there has been "a very real constriction in the game culture of American children." He attributes this to "Little Leaguism" which "is threatening to wipe out the spontaneous culture of free play and games among American children."³¹⁷ Empirical and ethnographic studies of American children's play activities both support and contradict Devereaux's observations. Children do, indeed, still play, and they still play traditional games, though, the number of

different games played by children today has diminished compared to the variety of games recorded a century ago.³¹⁸ That the impoverishment of children's games is due to the rise of Little League alone, however, is, once again, too narrow an explanation. Television and adult organized activities for children, such as municipally sponsored recreation programs and private lessons in specific skills such as dancing, gymnastics, or piano, make their claims on children's free time, edging out for some children spontaneous, child-controlled play and games. Yet, free play and traditional games live on, and many of those games are still played where nostalgia places them--in the streets of the city.

Children's Traditional Play and Games: Continuity and Change

In the late 1360s the French poet Jean Froissart listed some sixty games he played as a child in his long poem *L'espinette amoureuse* (The Sting of Love). Though many of those games are incomprehensible to modern readers of the poem, others are obvious, such as follow the leader, making mud pies, and playing with shells and pebbles. A 14th century register of a Parisian college lists *Les Jeux des Enffenz* (The Games of Children). Included are au crocet (a precursor of golf), marbles, hat throwing, and Froissart's mysterious game, *a la pince morele* or pinch the ear. In 1534, the great French writer Rabelais wrote a catalog of 217 games played by his epic hero, Gargantua. A century later in

1657 a series of copperplate engravings showing children at play was published in France. The plates illustrated many of the games of Froissart and Rabelais, including *les bouteilles de savon* (blowing bubbles), *la poste* (leapfrog), *l'assaut du chasteau* (king of the mountain) and *la bataille* (free for all).

In Flanders, the sixteenth century artist Peter Bruegel the Elder captured in his masterpiece, *Children's Games*, eighty games which required little or no equipment, training or organizing. Though many of those games are unknown to today's children, marbles, tag, hide and seek, blindman's bluff, playing with dolls and jacks are far from forgotten. In England, Shakespeare, in his plays, mentioned almost fifty games and sports, many, though not all, for children. Included among them are hide and seek, quoits, pushpin and handy dandy.³¹⁹

In the United States, folklorist and literary scholar William Wells Newell gathered the games of American children of the nineteenth century by direct observation of children at play, by interviewing children and from the childhood memories of adults he interviewed. His collection was published in 1883 in Songs and Games of American Children. It was reissued in 1903 with additional collections of children's games that had appeared in the interim.³²⁰ He noted that while a few games of the period had been lately transported from England, Ireland, France and Germany by children who brought their games with them from the

Fatherland, children's play was mainly of Old English origin. "The New World," he noted, "has preserved what the Old World has forgotten."³²¹ Newell's book conveys a quality of lament for he believed that the games that he recorded were vanishing so rapidly in a "general ruin" of popular traditions that they would soon be extinct. "This collection," he wrote, "represents an expiring custom."³²² But Newell need not have been so fatalistic for many of the games and songs printed in his book have lasted better than he predicted. According to folklorist Carl Withers:

In general, it is the most ancient and widespread of the nonsinging games that still live on, and with least change in childhood tradition. But many of the singing games are still popular, and most of them can be found somewhere among American and other English speaking children. In the United States they have lasted better as truly traditional games among less privileged children--for example, in Harlem or in the Appalachians--than among middle class children whose playtime has become almost as completely organized as their study time.³²³

Alan Milberg's Street Games,³²⁴ James Wagenvoord's Hangin' Out: City Kids, City Games,³²⁵ John and Carol Langstaff's Shimmy Shimmy Coke-Ca-Pop,³²⁶ Fred Ferretti's The Great American Book of Games,³²⁷ and Annette Rosenstiel's "Fun and Games in an Urban Setting: Black Children's Games,"³²⁸ all support Withers' position that both singing and nonsinging traditional games are still very much a part of the play lives of urban children. All of the authors went in search of (Milberg, Wagonvoord and the Langstaffs brought along a camera) city children at play. Some were not convinced that they would find any. To their surprise, they

did find them, singing and playing traditional street games.

Milberg wrote, "Though local rules, names and rituals varied across the country, I found kids today . . . are still hiding, seeking, racing, peeking; dodging, tagging, catching, snagging; blinking, staring, sometimes caring--Time out!--choosing, fleeing, losing, being; slapping, clapping, throwing, growing; eeny, meeny, miny, mo-ing."³²⁹ He found too that the spaldeen, so affectionately remembered as the only real ball to be used in stickball games, was not a cultural relic, after all, but still the ball of choice for various informal street ball games. Skelly, a variation of hopscotch with bottle caps instead of feet moving through numbered boxes, was being played in New Bedford, Boston, Atlanta, San Diego, Portland, and Tampa, though Brooklyn was "without dispute, the skelly capital of the world."³³⁰ Marbles, Simon says, red light, green light, kick the can, statues, king of the mountain, jacks, drop the handkerchief, steal the bacon and red rover continue to engage children at play.

In his photographs Wagenvoord captures city children playing ringolevio; basketball; stoopball, handball, curbball and stickball, all with the spaldeen, "the most important piece of city game equipment."³³¹ While the boys play their ball and chase games, the girls jump rope, bounce balls, and clap hands to familiar rhymes.

Langstaff and Langstaff found children in the streets, playgrounds and housing projects of Boston, Roxbury,

Cambridge, and New York playing red rover, scully (another pronunciation for skelly), hopscotch, jump rope, steal the bacon, and seven up. Traditional rhymes and chants, such as London Bridge and Little Sally Water, were heard as were rhymes and chants altered by television jingles, political events and popular culture. Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star, for example, became, in recognition of the popular drummer of the rock group, the Beatles, "Ringo, Ringo, Ringo, Starr; How I wonder what you are; Underneath that mop of hair; Ringo, are you really there? Ringo, Ringo, Ringo, Starr; How I wonder what you are."³³²

As city children always did, the children observed by the Langstaffs, as well as by Milberg and Wagenvoord, incorporated the urban environment into their play. The Langstaffs wrote, "We watched these young children using the environment as their own domain for play--the pavements, walls of buildings, iron manhole covers, stoops, doorways, a mound of rubble, water hydrants, squares in the sidewalk, street gutters, lampposts."³³³

Overwhelmingly, the photographs in these three books are of minority children.

Ferretti's The Great American Book of Sidewalk, Stoop, Dirt, Curb and Alley Games is a compilation of popular outdoor games, many, according to Ferretti, still played in the streets of American cities. According to Ferretti, "Handball is still one of the most popular urban games today."³³⁴ Noting the popularity of basketball as the

quintessential city game, Ferretti maintains that, "The streets are still basketball courts for thousands of black and Hispanic youngsters in New York."³³⁵ The ever popular stickball, "a game synonymous with streets," is "the national game of American cities, played by city children who cannot afford the caps and gloves and hard balls and mitts and bats and catchers' masks needed for full-fledged baseball."³³⁶

Rosenthal conducted her research in an urban low income housing development. She reports games of seven up, a guessing game, and hide and go git it, a version of hide and seek, usually played by children ranging from eight to twelve years of age. According to Rosenthal, "When a little girl is caught by a little boy, he has the right to have sex with the girl."³³⁷ Another popular game is spin the bottle, played until everyone has had the opportunity to spin the bottle and to be kissed. Jump rope, playing house, and jacks were very popular games with the girls. Uncle Remus, a singing circle game, was also popular as well as a variant of the game, Tutti Frutti.

Further empirical and ethnographic studies, done by sociologists and psychologists, rather than by anthropologists and freelance authors with cameras in tote, indicate that American children, in general, still engage in child-controlled play and in traditional games, as we shall see with the following review of that literature. If, however, there are works comparable to those by Milberg, Wagenvoord and Langstaff and Langstaff, that actually capture

in photographs suburban, middle class children actively engaged in traditional street play, this researcher has not found them. Evidence of their play activities is derived largely from surveys, diaries, logs, interviews and observations.

The data presented thus far supports the conventional wisdom that organized sports and activities, television and video games, toys and lessons, indeed, have intruded into the play lives of American children, for some, more so than for others, limiting and shaping their play. But that data, and that which follow also clearly indicate that contrary to the voice of the doomsayers, traditional play has not been destroyed. Regardless of social class and place of residence, American children still "just play."

In their study on "Sixty Years of Historical Change in the Game Preferences of American Children,"³³⁸ Sutton-Smith and Rosenberg compared the results of four large scale studies of children's games made by T.R. Croswell in 1896,³³⁹ Zack McGhee in 1899,³⁴⁰ Lewis Terman in 1921,³⁴¹ and B.G. Rosenberg and Brian Sutton-Smith in 1959.³⁴² Make-believe games, where two groups participate in dramatized conflict, had remained remarkably stable. Cowboys and Indians, Buffalo Bill, policeman and soldier were common themes. They did document a decline in singing games, such as Ring Around the Rosy and Farmer in the Dell. These games were always more popular with girls than with boys. Singing games were often central person games with lyrics reminiscent of rural

settings and distinctive gender roles. Dialogue games played by young girls are chasing games which involve a traditional dialogue and dramatization of conflict between an old witch or mother and her children. Several of these games were popular in 1896 among the children in Worcester, Massachusetts who participated in the Croswell study. By 1959, there was no mention of them. According to the authors, "These dialogue games, like the singing games, have fallen into desuetude largely because of their inappropriate symbolism."³⁴³ Consider, for instance, the game Old Witch. A mother, preparing to go out, addresses her children:

"I charge my daughters every one,
To keep good house while I am gone.
You and you [points] but specially Sue
Or else I'll beat you black and blue."

Despite her warnings to the children, mother finds upon her return that the old witch indeed has gotten into the house and has taken all of her children. The witch then calls the mother, inviting her to dinner, whereupon she produces each child, one at a time, for the mother to consume. Sue helps the witch force her siblings onto the table. Mother manages to trick the witch and run home with all of her children.³⁴⁴ It is hard to imagine the appropriateness of this game in a highly child-centered society and one sensitized to the social problem of child abuse.

Chasing games such as tag and hide and seek and red rover, central person games of high power which allow the person who is at the center of the action the power to choose

whom to chase, when to run, and so on, had remained consistently popular with both boys and girls. Central person games of low power, that is games in which the central person must use skill to fight off the challenge of the other players, such as dodgeball, king on the mountain and wall dodgeball also had remained consistently popular. Games of individual skill, where all players are on equal terms and compete with each other to see who can win, were far less varied than a century ago, but a few have remained remarkably constant. These are marbles, jump rope, jacks and hopscotch. Skill games with a penalty written into their laws, such as hide the switch, forfeits, quaker meeting and hat stack were of little interest to modern children.

Though not in themselves formally organized games, skilled pastimes such as bicycle riding, horseback riding, swimming, climbing and roller skating had increased in importance for both boys and girls from 1896 to 1959, taking the place of formal games.

Undifferentiated team games, formal games of skill in which two "teams" are only slightly differentiated in terms of different role behaviors, such as fox and hound, prisoner's base and capture the flag had all decreased in importance as organized team sports for children took their place. The only such game to remain popular with children was tug of war. Indoor or backyard games of physical skill, such as tiddleywinks, croquet and quoits had all but disappeared by 1959 while darts, ping pong and horseshoes

were still high ranking games.

Sutton-Smith and Rosenberg document a decrease in singing games, dialogue games, team guessing and acting games, cooperative parlor games and team games without role differentiation. However, other types of games were played as much in 1959 among Rosenberg and Sutton-Smith's sample of children from northwestern Ohio as in 1896 among children in Worcester, Massachusetts. These were imitative games, chasing games and central person games of low power. Skilled pastimes and selected organized sports were played more often in 1959 than in previous periods. As previously noted, Sutton Smith found very strong evidence that the game preferences of girls had become increasingly like those of boys without the reverse being true. Boys instead lowered their preferences for games that had anything to do with girls' play. As a result, boys' play had become more circumscribed by 1959, for boys had greatly reduced the range of games of individual and team skills and the organized sports to which they would devote their time.³⁴⁵ In later research, Sutton Smith, Rosenberg and Morgan again found a clear differentiation in the play and game preferences of boys and girls. By the age of eight to nine, or between third and fourth grades, boys showed a marked decrease in pastimes such as cobs and robbers and toy trains and an increase in sports, a result of their "dawning awareness . . . that games and sports are positively associated with the male sex role."³⁴⁶ Unlike the boys in this study, however, the girls showed an

increased interest in both feminine and masculine differentiated pastimes such as I Spy and bandits and an increased preference for masculine and feminine complex games and activities such as skating and basketball and soccer by the fourth grade. The authors find the generalized choices of the girls "something of a puzzle," and suggest that:

This responsiveness is an indication of greater role flexibility. Thus, the boys' specialization can be seen as a response to a clear-cut role prescription, the girls' diversity as a response to a lack of such prescription. The girls are free to choose in whatever way they wish, and they do so in much more idiosyncratic terms than the boys.³⁴⁷

In her ethnographic research on the recess activities of second grade boys, Sue Parrott³⁴⁸ found that while the boys played tricks, such as looking under girls' skirts and tripping someone, and spent time "just goofing around," they also played a number of games, characterized by the game-defining features of boundaries, penalties, roles, outcomes, teams and rules. The games the boys played were keepaway, hot box, relay races, races, kick the can, ditch, fire red, chase, frisby, catch and girls catch the boys. Though the names of these games are not all reminiscent of earlier traditional games, in fact, they adhere to established categories of games. Each can be designated as an undifferentiated team game, a chasing game, a central person game of low power, or a game of individual skill. Thus, while names and even rules of play may vary over time and place, types of play and game activities have endured. As Opie and Opie note, "Despite the motherly influence of

tradition. . . children's play is like every other activity, it is subject to continual change." 349

Janet Lever collected data for her study on children's play and games from observation, interviews, questionnaires and logs of 181 fifth grade pupils from white middle class backgrounds.³⁵⁰ Her research indicated that 52% of children's time outside of school is spent in play. Focusing on the sex differences in children's play and games, Lever found that in their play boys spend more time outdoors, make more noise, play in larger groups, are more competitive, stick with the same game over a longer period of time, and associate in more age-heterogeneous groups. Girls play indoors more, in smaller groups, are less involved in team sports, and more easily bored by their games which have a lower ceiling of skill than boys' games. 351

Girls' play and preferred activities consisted of doll play, particularly Barbie; board games, e.g. Monopoly and Parchesi; turn taking games such as hopscotch and jump rope; central person games such as tag, spud, hide and seek and Mother, May I? and ring games such as Doctor Knickerbocker, Number Nine. The only organized team sport Lever observed girls playing was kickball. Other preferred activities of girls, listed in their diaries, were: listening to records and the radio, drawing and painting, working with clay, skating, cheerleading practice, dancing, indoor fantasy play, e.g. school and house, and simple card games.³⁵² Many of these activities support earlier findings by Sutton-Smith

of children's increasing preference for informal group activities.³⁵³

Boys, instead, spent most of their play time in team sports, particularly baseball, football, basketball, hockey and soccer, or in individual competition such as one-on-one basketball. Sixty eight percent of the boys in Lever's sample said they belonged to some adult-supervised teams, with a full schedule of practice and league games. Most of the boys reported regular participation in neighborhood sports games.³⁵⁴ Other preferred activities of the boys were the playing of outdoor fantasy games such as Army, FBI and Batman, building things, climbing trees, flying kites, pool, racing, electric cars, kick the can, chess and checkers.

Based on number of roles, interdependence of players, size of play group, explicitness of goals, number of rules and team formation as dimensions of complexity, boys experienced three times as many games at the highest level of complexity and over twice as many activities in the top half of the complexity scale as did the girls.³⁵⁵ Lever suggests that, "Boys' greater exposure to complex games may give them an advantage in occupational milieus that share structural features with those games."³⁵⁶

While agreeing with Lever on some of the differences by sex in play patterns, Marjorie Goodwin³⁵⁷ refutes Lever's conclusion that simple turn taking games, such as jump rope, do not provide the girls who play them with the opportunity to negotiate rules of procedure and to settle disputes,

important learning outcomes of boys' more complex games. Focusing on the linguistic character of processes of dispute within play, Goodwin specified how the children she studied playing jump rope, all black girls, created and recreated their social order by making use of culturally appropriate dispute procedures. Goodwin found that the girls were quite able to handle conflict without disruption of the ongoing interaction of the game.³⁵⁸ She writes, "Though it is a widely accepted belief . . . that girls are incapable of engaging in dispute without stopping game activity, ethnographically based fieldwork such as that reported here reveals that girls demonstrate repeatedly their ability to deal with conflict expeditiously in the course of games."³⁵⁹

The role of play in creating and recreating the social order of the players is notably described in Margaret K. Brady's "This Little Lady's Gonna Boogaloo: Elements of Socialization in the Play of Black Girls".³⁶⁰ In their ring games, jump rope rhymes and hand claps, the play of the seven, eight and nine year old black girls under study reflected the sociocultural patterns of socialization found in the black communities in which they lived. Brady summarizes:

Using adult Black females as role-models, and relying on the support and advice of her peer group, the adolescent Black girl shows through her play those linguistic, paralinguistic, prosodic, sociolinguistic, proxemic and kinesic elements that provide her with culture specific means of communicating effectively. The significance of the Black community's emphasis on the rhythmic nature of both language and motion has become quite apparent in both the highly stylized and patterned performances of handclaps and ring-plays, as well as in

their everyday recess interactions with peers.³⁶¹

Specifically, through their play the girls were preparing for taking on the role of mature women, a part of which was learning how to relate to boys as sexually inviting, yet intrinsically bad persons, at a very early age.³⁶² For example, in the game of Mama, the central player must constantly battle to keep boys from intruding into her home while she goes out to get the food and otherwise maintain the integrity of her home. According to Brady, "The strong sexual awareness that these girls and boys experience causes them to relate to each other in a way that is greatly influenced by the knowledge of the roles men and women play with each other. Their actions, then, are frequently in anticipation of these future roles."³⁶³

Goodwin's and Brady's analyzes of children at play support Norman Denzin's position that "Children's worlds of play are not just given or handed down, rather they are constructed worlds, that are interpreted, negotiated, argued over, debated about, compromised."³⁶⁴ This is true, then, for the play of girls as well as the play of boys.

That children, particularly boys, engage in team sports does not preclude the possibility that within this activity they "just play." In his study of Little League Baseball, Fine places Little League in "a netherworld between pure play and pure work; it has both play like and work like components. . . Little League is inherently enjoyable for most players . . . Done for its own sake it has an autotelic

quality."³⁶⁵ Fine found that despite the official nature of Little League, "there are ways in which participants inject play into the games."³⁶⁶ Specifically, the boys were playing rather than working at Little League when they got caught up in the excitement of the game, experiencing flow, an un-self-conscious involvement in ongoing events, when they did not take the game seriously, changing the definition of Little League from a competitive and learning situation to one characterized by voluntary playful activity; and when the boys engaged in side involvements. When the game was routine and/or in the pauses between slices of action, boys threw dirt, played with water balloons, chased each other, played soccer in the dugout with a rock, tossed hats in the air on a windy day and engaged in many other playful activities.³⁶⁷

Unable to categorize Little League as either work or play, Fine rejects this as a false dichotomy arguing instead that "to the extent baseball is treated as task oriented and externally directed, it is a form of work; to the extent that it is flexible, free and involves choice, it is play. In fact, it is both."³⁶⁸ Thus, there is a subjective interpretation to Little League; not all participants define it or experience it the same way.

Though speculative, it is reasonable to assume that other adult-organized team sports and activities for children have elements of play, created by the participants in practice or in their own definition of the situation. For Fine joins other scholars who maintain that within adult organized

activities, children make their own culture which is evidenced in, among other things, their play. ³⁶⁹

As Jay Mechling notes, based on his research on Boy Scouts of America, this culture is created "sometimes in ways approved by the adults, sometimes in unofficial, but tolerated forms, and sometimes in forms that are clearly contrary to the official, overt values of the Boy Scouts of America."³⁷⁰ Mechling explores this overt/covert, sacred/profane dichotomy in the multiple meanings attached to the traditional game of Poison. In its official, overt context, the game of Poison, included in the first edition of the Boy Scouts' Handbook for Boys in 1911, written by founder Ernest Thomas Seton, was intended to both play on what Seton believed was an instinctive fear of snakes while at the same time making that fear manageable by isolating it, controlling it and making it a part of play.

In the summer of 1976 when Mechling observed and played "Poison Pit" during his fieldwork in a Sierra Nevada Boy Scout encampment, the game had long since been eliminated from the official Handbook. There were no adult leaders that made the boys play "Poison Pit." They wanted to. Mechling applies a psychoanalytic semiotic interpretation to the game concluding that "the game of poison pit may be interpreted as a collective ritual centering on the pubescent boy's anxieties about the integration of his sexual identity at this very precarious time of life."³⁷¹ The pit, Mechling maintains, may be seen as the literalization of a

metaphorical vagina. The game took place on "T.I.," officially "Treasure Island" but unofficially, "Titty Island." Seen from a distance, "T.I." takes the shape of a supine woman, a tribe of boys digging a hole in her belly.

Water and sand, elements connected with the creation of life, fill the pit. Thrown into it too are watermelon rinds, seeds and leftover melon flesh from a watermelon eating contest, during which the red flesh of the watermelon was repeatedly and enthusiastically referred to as menstrual blood. The menstrual image then has been connected with the pit. The final ingredient in the pit is male urine--"the boys urinating into the pit in an act that both mimics insemination, and is at the same time, an act of male power and disgust."³⁷² Having filled the pit, the boys link arms around it and try to push/pull each other into the "poison". Mechling maintains that menstruation "is as puzzling and fearful an event for the boys as it is for the girls: and it is possible to suggest that a good deal of the unconscious drama of Poison Pit has to do with menstruation and the new developmental stage it signals for both boys and girls." ³⁷³ He further suggests that the game may have something to do with "vagina envy," the expression of which is sometimes found in male initiation ceremonies. "It is possible, therefore, that the game of Poison Pit represents the ambivalence the pubescent boys feel about female sexuality. There are signs of fear, disgust and contempt, but these are matched by evidence of envy and mystery."³⁷⁴

The game of Poison Pit has been passed on by generations of youth, a part of childlore, serving a function Seton never imagined. The culture of childlore, notable for its continuity over time and its dispersion over geographic areas, is passed from one child to another and used by children to cope with the stresses of their lives. Childlore constitutes what folklorists Knapp and Knapp term "the secret education of children." Despite organized sports, despite television, despite sophisticated toys and intrusive adults, childlore--children's rhymes, jokes, songs, and traditional games--is alive and well and finding expression all over the United States.³⁷⁵

Summary:

Economic prosperity, the growth of large scale organizations, suburbanization, the expansion of the middle class and psychological play theories, resulted in increased adult structuring of the play lives of American middle class children. Private and group lessons, municipally sponsored recreation programs, abundant toys and organized activities such as scouting and team sports, increasingly filled children's free time. A cultural standard of "child-centeredness," facilitated by socio-economic conditions and supported by child rearing and child development theory, organized American middle class families as parents scrambled to raise popular, socially well-adjusted, psychologically healthy, intelligent children. Play is, indisputably, an

essential activity in the pursuit of this goal.

Between 1945 until the late 1960s the play of poor children was largely forgotten as both a political issue and a social concern. Those very cities that had spawned the Playground Movement, as well as other urban centers, had little to offer children recreationally, a condition not noticed until the urban rioting and the heightened civil rights efforts of the 1960s. Since then, the character building organizations once reserved almost exclusively for white middle class children began to actively and successfully recruit poor and minority children, though program modifications for this constituency resemble modern attempts at "child saving." This new membership was provided with "culturally relevant" programs, such as Crimebusters, unlike those offered to dominant group children.

Though involvement in organized activities accounts for a proportion of children's free time, children do, in fact, still "just play." Child-controlled free play has not disappeared among either lower class or middle class children, despite adult-organized play and despite the prevalence and popularity of television.

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6. Ibid., 6.
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12. Whyte, The Organization Man, 432-34.
13. Rosabeth Moss Kanter, "The Organization Child: Experience Management in a Nursery School," Sociology of Education 45 (Spring 1972): 186.
14. Ibid., 204.
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20. Mintz and Kellogg, Domestic Revolutions, Chapter IX;
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23. David Riesman, "The Suburban Sadness" in The
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24. Ibid., 385.
25. Sylvia Fava, "Suburbanism as a Way of Life," American
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26. See all of the references cited in notes 18-25.
27. All of the references cited in note 18 make references
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Chapter VI

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SUMMARY

In the course of the century beginning approximately in 1880 there were several interrelated transitions that occurred affecting children. Between the 1870s and the 1930s the economically "worthless" but emotionally "priceless" child emerged.¹ As historical sociologist Viviana Zelizer argues, the expulsion of children from the "cash nexus" at the turn of the past century was part of a process of "sacralization" of children's lives. Having lost a market value as workers, children gained a sentimental value becoming emotional and affective assets.² Childhood became a distinct and special stage of life, one marked by protection of the young from life's harsh realities, and by the sentimentalization of and affection toward children. With the creation of childhood the field of child study emerged and later developed into the study of child development, a discipline or body of knowledge dealing with patterns of growth and development; description, origins and meanings of behavior; and the linkages among these broad areas.³ Included in child study was the study of child's play. As

social scientists brought their particular perspective to the theoretical and empirical study of play, their ideas and research findings resulted in the acceptance of play as more than a didactic activity as in the tradition of Locke, Froebel and Dewey, but as an important and necessary part of normal and healthy development. Linked with the neuromuscular, intellectual, social and emotional development of the child, play was accepted as every child's right, and an essential part of the childhood experience.

But in the last decades of the twentieth century, beginning approximately in the 1970s, the mystique that had been woven around children and childhood began to unravel. As Zelizer suggests, the cultural legitimacy of the economically useless and emotionally priceless child has been questioned and challenged. Rather than precious and priceless, a desentimentalization of children has allowed for the evaluation of children as obstacles to adult self-fulfillment, and as economic and emotional burdens. Such attitudes have resulted in a sentiment against children, or in the conversion of children to commodities or in the rushing of children through childhood and into adultlike behavior and appearance.⁴ Adults who have invested in children, may be looking for a return on that investment, if not through the child's economic usefulness, in the form of the "housechild" laden with domestic chores,⁵ then through the child as a source of parental pride and status continuity. The Superchild--intelligent, talented,

well-adjusted, and popular--not only brings personal gratification to parents, but gives early indication of possessing those attributes associated with educational and occupational success helping the child to maintain or improve his or her advantaged position in the social order.

To be sure there are both defenders and detractors of the "priceless child." * But with battle lines drawn, the focus on children's use of free time has sharpened and with that increased attention has been given to their play. Throughout most of the twentieth century, with child labor laws firmly enacted, the sacralization of children's lives a cultural accomplishment, and the social sciences heralding the necessity of play in psychosocial development, play was the child's work. Through their play children grow, adjust, and evolve into intelligent and social beings. Thus, by the end of the twentieth century, when social critics and observers declared that there was a conspicuous absence of children at play, the significance of that absence, if in fact it was a correct observation, was far greater than a nostalgic longing for the traditional street games of bygone days.

Adult-Structured Play and Socialization

For twentieth century social scientists interested in the study of play, the socialization value of play has been its central theme. Through shifting and often overlapping theories, it was posited that in their play children work out

atavistic instincts, release their tensions, develop good habits, cope with their fears, accommodate themselves to their environment in the growth of their intelligence, practice democratic operations, form a self-concept and practice respective gender roles. Through play, then, children develop social identities, and learn how to adapt to social situations. Thus, play is an activity that furthers the child's human development; it also is a means of social control, an activity through which children internalize the values and norms of the society.⁷

Because of the very significant powers attributed to play, adults since 1883 have had a keen interest in how children play, organizing and guiding their play to achieve the desired outcome. Yet, once adults enter into the world of play, they transform it. For play, in its pure form, is free and spontaneous, and without extrinsic goals. It is engaged in for its own sake, essentially for fun, excitement, and sociability. Indeed, these are the child's motivation for play; socialization outcomes are latent functions of play, of which the child, in middle childhood, is usually unaware. From the adult perspective, however, play is a rational behavior, a means to an end. It has a purpose or a goal related to the child's physical, cognitive, moral and/or psychological development and adjustment. This is play's manifest function. Should fun be present also, as it very well may be, so much the better, but for adults managing children's play, the opportunity for fun is not necessarily

a primary motivating factor.

Research by Mechling⁹ and Fine⁹ clearly indicate that within the adult controlled and organized activities of Boys Scouts and Little League, children do, indeed, manage to create their own play, even subverting the intentions of the adults by creating their own idioculture, that is, "a system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and customs shared by members of an interacting group to which members can refer and employ as a basis of further interaction."¹⁰ Within this idioculture children express their own interests and attempt to meet their needs, often quite different than those adults have attributed to them. They also create and enforce their own rules through the interactional negotiation of members.¹¹ Child-controlled play can and does occur within the context of adult-controlled activities.

Thus, even in children's play activities that are adult-structured and organized, adults may not have full control over their charges. Right under the very noses of the adults, children are creating their own culture, including child-controlled play activities and the meaning that they attach to those activities. The adults may fail to see or be unable to stop this play-within-play activity. Nor can adults guarantee that the socialization outcome will be that which they, the adults, intended. For example, while organized sports for children "can be an important training ground for moral and social development . . . in some instances impressionable youngsters learn to swear, cheat,

fight, intimidate and hurt others. Sports provide opportunities to learn immoral values and behaviors as well as moral ones."¹² Exactly what children learn is the result of a complex interactional experience. In fact, the goals of the adults who organize the activities may be at odds not only with the children who participate in them, but with the adults who allow, encourage, coerce, merely tolerate, or deny (depending on circumstances) their child's participation. Parents and coaches, for instance, may not agree on the goals or the procedures of an activity, as frequently happens with organized sports programs, despite the fact that the parents may facilitate their children's participation and actively support them by attending their games. Further, character-building organizations, such as scouting and organized sports, which see their work with children as a moral enterprise, are not publicly committed to preparing the young for corporate gamesmanship, though the research has indicated this was a primary goal of middle class fathers whose sons participated in various organized sports programs.¹³ Finally, when there is a social distance between adults, such as the poor immigrant parents of children targeted for urban playgrounds and the middle class playground supervisors, or the inner city poor and middle class recreationists, there may be a sense of irrelevancy, indifference and suspicion toward the organization on the part of both the children and their parents.

On the other hand, parents may be quite in agreement

with the goals of the organization. The popularity of scouting among middle class children, from its beginning, but particularly in the 1945-1970 period when membership figures escalated significantly, and the increased participation of racial and ethnic minorities since the late 1960s, may be attributed to a general consistency between the goals of the organizations and the child-rearing goals of the parents, or at least to the parents' perception that the organization was, in fact, a vehicle for the attainment of desired goals, whether they be the child's social status among peers, character development, the acquisition of social skills, preparation for future roles or the avoidance of social pathologies.

From the very first efforts at organizing children's play to the present there has been a difference in the socialization aims of those organizations dealing with poor children and those dealing with the middle class. The former--playgrounds, Boys Club and the post-1965 scouting and camping programs developed for this new membership--have been efforts at "child saving," attempts to help children adapt and survive within their environment, to introduce order into what is perceived as an otherwise chaotic and dysfunctional setting. Intervention into the play lives and organized activities of poor children serves a collective purpose--the prevention or correction of social pathologies, such as juvenile delinquency and premarital pregnancy. Through these supervised activities poor children are socialized to

conventional behavior, as defined by the dominant culture (from which, typically, the adult supervisors come), through the offering of an alternative system of values and norms. "Such organizations as Boys and Girls Clubs hope to promote 'juvenile decency' rather than juvenile delinquency by providing facilities where children can experience a wholesome, accepting atmosphere through group activities."¹⁴ Indeed, Brian Sutton-Smith argues that a play theory such as Hall's, which resulted in the first organized play program and one with an emphasis on team sports as a vehicle of socialization, was a theory developed by the rich for the poor,¹⁵ though the character-building value of team sports eventually became a taken for granted view.

Organizations serving middle class children, including organized sports programs and the scouting and Camp Fire organizations, have focused on reinforcing strength and virtue in children who presumably come from an environment where strength and virtue are present and valued. These organizations then serve as a continuation or extension of the socialization process begun at home, rather than a substitute for it. The emphasis has been on personal development, through the cultivation of skills, personality traits and interests germane to future roles within a middle class lifestyle. Play serves an individual purpose--the increase of mastery of the self and the social environment.

Adult-Structured Play and Play Theories

The trends in adult control of children's play and organized activities cannot be seen apart from dominant play theories. Ideas about play have been prime movers in shaping adult-structured play. G. Stanley Hall's recapitulation theory, heavily influenced by Darwin's evolutionary theory, was well known to Progressive era social reformers and playground advocates such as Jacob Riis, Jane Addams, Luther Gulick and Joseph Lee. Hall's theory was the first to connect play with child development. Through their play, children, at each stage of their development, recapitulated or repeated an evolutionary stage in the historical development of mankind. Hall's ideas had a particular appeal to early charity workers and social reformers, who were concerned with the effects of an urban industrialized society on children who seemed to be caught in a maelstrom of social disorder. Reformers had very little confidence in poor and foreign parents to provide their children with a stable and wholesome environment to offset the disorder of the city, or to control their children's behavior, especially on the streets. For, in fact, crowded tenements left only the streets for play whereupon, it was believed, the play instinct, presumably unregulated and unsupervised would be perverted, and the child's atavistic tendencies improperly worked through. By adolescence the call of the "tribal" impulse would lead the child into gangs, prone to delinquency, promiscuity and aggression. But, through

supervised play where "play impulses. . .were filtered through specifically designed play forms"¹⁶ children would be guided through the stages of the evolutionary development of their ancestors; ultimately the tribal impulse would be rechanneled from adolescent gangs into athletic teams. Cooperation, loyalty, and a moral and social conscience, "instincts socially and morally adaptable to urban industrial civilization," would replace the antisocial tendencies of the gang.¹⁷ The goals of the playground organizers and supervisors, regardless of their motivations, were to offset the negative influence of the streets, of commercial amusement and of inadequate parents.

The character building organizations, Boy Scouts of America, Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. and Camp Fire Girls, were founded for middle class adolescents. Younger middle class children were under the enlightened guardianship of their mothers from whom they would develop character through imitation. These were the same mothers who also sought the advice of experts at child study clubs on raising the morally correct child. Yet, this close association with women led to fears of social feminization of middle class boys. This was handled by the male leadership of the BSA and a program specifically designed to cultivate masculinity in adolescent boys. Playgrounds, on the other hand, were for poor children of all ages. Indeed, playgrounds began for young children and only later developed programs for adolescents. The mothers of poor and foreign children were not considered

to be adequate socializers. Thus, it was through play, muscular conditioning, team sports, and exposure to, if not imitation of, positive adult role models, the playground supervisors, that these children might be managed and saved. Far from being feminized, lower class boys, through their all male street culture, were headed into adolescent and youth gangs, resistant to work and school, and drawn to the crass and erotic temptations of popular amusements. Organized play programs which offered an alternative to commercial amusements also provided for the instruction or political indoctrination of immigrant masses to American ideals including self sacrifice for the good of the group, order, and a well developed work ethic. Potential loafers and tramps might be turned into steady students and workers.¹⁸

By 1920 G. Stanley Hall's recapitulation theory fell out of favor with the knowledge that acquired characteristics are not genetically transmitted. But child study progressed, particularly through the works of developmental psychologist Arnold Gesell and his associates and behavioral psychologist John B. Watson. The importance of play on the child's social and psychological development now found its way into popular child rearing manuals and magazines, thus reaching a lay audience, unlike Hall's ideas that travelled in limited professional circles. Watson had stressed the value of play in cultivating good habits and eliminating bad ones. Indeed, his ideas on habit formation were instrumental in lowering the age of membership in the scouting and Camp Fire

organizations in the 1930s. Gesell developed age gradients with typical play behaviors, stressing the role of play in physical development, social adjustment and mental growth. Play at home, in backyards, with toys and playthings, and together with parents became a middle class concern and an adult orchestrated activity. Play was not embraced merely as an activity with educational and didactic benefits, as it had been by the middle class before psychological theory reached them, but as a vital activity for normal physical and psychosocial development. The swings and slides and rings that allowed poor children to proceed through the stages of evolutionary development on turn of the century urban playgrounds from the 1920s on were also found in the backyards of the middle class, where they were used to develop muscles and coordination through healthy exercise, removed from the dangers of vehicular traffic. If neighborhood children convened in a particularly well-equipped yard, it was not instinct that called them there, nor primitive drives that were released. It was, however, an opportunity to practice good habits and to learn important social skills such as sharing, cooperating, taking turns, and negotiating rules. Parent education classes, still almost exclusively a middle class activity, stressed the importance of play on the overall development of the child. Indeed, a major goal of these classes was to instruct parents on how to play with their children. By 1939, the role of play in personality development was a central theme

of the White House Conference on Children, reflecting the trend of the previous decade.

From the decade of the 1920s children's play became a middle class personal concern at the same time that publicly sponsored play for socially disadvantaged children began to recede in importance as a social and political issue. The decline of Progressivism, combined with successful Progressive legislative reforms, the drastic decrease in immigration, and the growing leisure of the masses, resulted in the steady movement of the Playground and Recreation Association of America, the leading advocate of urban playgrounds for economically disadvantaged children, into broader areas of recreation for other constituencies, particularly adults. The Depression and World War II reinforced the emphasis on recreation for adults and teenagers. In the post-World War II period, tax supported programs at the municipal level became a major source of play and recreational activities, though local funding resulted in programs that varied both in quality and quantity by municipality. As prosperity rendered invisible the poverty of declining cities, poor urban children, who at the turn of the century were targets of an organized play movement, were virtually forgotten about a half century later by their financially strapped municipal governments. Instead, the establishment of social work as a profession in the 1920s and recreation as a form of group social work gradually provided an alternate vehicle for attempting to meet both the

recreational needs of the disadvantaged youngsters and the socialization goals of their adult supervisors. Increasingly the recreational needs of a disadvantaged youthful population were being met by a variety of voluntary agencies such as Boys Club, the Police Athletic League (PAL), and later, the scouting organizations; by settlement houses and community centers, by organizations such as the Fresh Air Fund and by religious social agencies such as the YMCA and the CYO, most of which heavily emphasize social work leadership.¹⁹ Thus, while the Playground and Recreation Association of America was quite successful in achieving its goal of municipally sponsored, tax-supported recreation for all, the recreational needs of the urban poor continue to be met largely as they were before and in the early years of the founding of the organization, that is, by voluntary and philanthropic sources.

Though home based and family controlled between 1920 to 1940, the play of middle class children in the post-World War II period also moved out of the home and into municipal and voluntary organizations where adults, other than the children's own parents, managed their activities. Though the scouting organizations lowered the age of membership to preadolescents in the late 1930s and Little League Baseball was founded in 1939, it was not until the end of World War II that the "organizational child" was born.

If the postwar period introduced middle class children to organizational life, it introduced their parents to Dr.

Sigmund Freud, whose ideas also bore on parental interest in and control of children's play and organized activities. Though Freud's ideas had reached the educated American public in the 1920s they were not incorporated into child rearing manuals during that period.²⁰ It was not until after World War II that psychiatrically oriented child care manuals appeared and that popular parenting magazines dealt with the role of play in self-mastery and in managing childhood fears and emotions, reflecting Freud's ideas on the cathartic value of play. Freudian emphasis on parent-child relationships, particularly as that was interpreted by Benjamin Spock and Selma Fraiberg contributed to a concentrated focus on children in the postwar period. Child-centeredness was, of course, facilitated by socio-economic and demographic factors as well as by psychiatric theory on child rearing. But the importance of family experiences on the child's normal psychological development, and, as Fraiberg ominously warned in The Magic Years, the difficulty of guaranteeing against neurosis, resulted in the close supervision of children and their activities by parents who were now held responsible for their children's psychiatric as well as physical health. At the same time, the organizational nature of the postwar society, and the emphasis on belonging and conformity, fairly typical of middle class suburban life, moved children into organizations designed just for them.

Freudian theory on children's psychosexual development, included in the Freudian inspired child care manuals, raised

the issue of children's sexuality, a topic which was too shocking to be discussed when it first surfaced, especially since, at that very same time, children were being characterized by innocence. As already noted, from the turn of the century there had been serious concerns about the social feminization of boys. In fact, Boy Scouts of America emphasized the cultivation of true manhood and provided opportunities for the display and validation of masculinity. But in the postwar period, with Freudian psychosexual theory in vogue, fears of feminization escalated into fears of homosexuality. As in 1910, boys still had a greater exposure to women at home and in school than to men. But, with the rise of the companionate family, fathers and sons became physically and emotionally closer, "pals," than patriarchal fathers had been with their sons. Though emotionally closer, fathers were still not present as much as mothers, compromising their value as models of appropriately masculine manners and appearance, but also complicating their sons' psychological identification with the same sex parent, a concern that escalated with the increase in female headed single parent households. The result has been an obsessive cultural concern with homosexuality.²¹ And even as validations of masculinity became a greater cultural expectation, over the course of the twentieth century opportunities to affirm one's masculinity diminished. Where displays of physical strength once separated men from women, the declining significance of strength in a machine operated

society has neutralized strength as an indication of masculinity.²² "Development of machines has caused male strength to be less important, almost obsolete. Machines are stronger than men and the sexes are equally competent in running most machines."²³ The role of the father as the unquestioned authority figure, the *pater familias*, is no longer a cultural norm. In the egalitarian family, typical of the middle class, women have equal power with their husbands. The image of strenuous manhood, which the Boy Scouts tried to recapture through the rugged outdoor life of the pioneer, is too far removed from a postindustrial society to suffice as a cultural symbol of masculinity. Even the breadwinner role, a primary element in the definition of masculinity, has been assumed by women in dual worker/dual career homes.²⁴ Yet, despite the social changes that have diminished displays of masculinity, the cultural expectations of masculinity have remained relatively fixed since the pioneer days. Men are still expected to be strong, tough, decisive and aggressive. While the Boy Scouts continued to be one arena for boys to develop these traits, the leadership of women as den mothers for middle childhood Cub Scouts, the largest membership group, weakens the organization's credibility as a masculinizing agency even by its own admission. Not until 1988, and then only under the duress of a law suit, did the BSA allow women to serve as scoutmasters of the older Boy Scout troops. Staunchly adhering to the position that only men can teach manliness, in March 1987,

less than a year before it would announce a policy change, the Boy Scouts' public relations director, Frank E. Hebb, noted, "It is helpful for a boy going through the difficult process of maturing to adulthood to have a close relationship with an adult male outside the home."²⁵ Thus, for the younger Cubs led by women training in masculinity is not assumed though the cub pack itself provides for male bonding.

Another activity would replace scouting as the training ground for the traditional male role. That was sports.²⁶ As television brought sporting events into the home, and media coverage of sports created the athlete as a cultural hero, boys found a new model of masculinity. From a very early age American boys are introduced to the world of sports. Sports pervade and, indeed, define American boyhood. To some extent all boys are judged according to their interest and prowess, or lack of interest and prowess, in competitive sports.²⁷ The athlete, then, is the current model of an exemplary form of masculinity and organized sports is an arena for the social construction of a male gender identity.²⁸ Constructed as a sex-segregated activity, organized sports provide an all male world, representative of the absent father, with which boys can identify. At the same time, "the rule bound structure of organized sports can promise to be a safe place in which to seek nonintimate attachment with others in a context that maintains clear boundaries, distance, and separation."²⁹ As both a masculinizing experience and a masculinity validating experience, organized sports develop masculine bodies and

minds and inculcate values and personality traits that prepare boys for successful participation in the public sphere, where men traditionally have dominated. To a homophobic, organizational society that took for granted that "a winner in sports will be a winner in life," organized, competitive sports programs for boys, led by men, carried a lot of promise. They were masculinizing at the same time that they prepared boys with the values and social skills consistent with corporate capitalism.

In their research on "Raising Middle Class Sons," done in 1952, Aberle and Naegele³¹ found that middle class fathers already were expressing a concern with their sons' failure to show athletic ability. These fathers expected their sons to pursue middle class occupations, and believed that, "the ideal-typical successful adult male in the middle class occupational role should be responsible, show initiative, be competent, be aggressive, be capable of meeting competition. He should be emotionally stable and capable of self-restraint."³² The fathers were "not concerned with athletics because they want their boys to grow up to be professional athletes, but because failure along these lines seems to symbolize for the father inability to be properly aggressive and competitive, now and in the future."³³

These fathers did not have similar concerns for their daughters for whom "an occupational career is not taken seriously, marriage is the primary hope."³⁴ Since the women's movement of the 1960s, however, occupational careers for

daughters have been taken far more seriously, though the research suggests that the games girls play do not prepare them for occupational success as do the competitive organized games played by boys. Play then not only socializes children to their respective gender roles, but may act to perpetuate the traditional sexual division of labor.

The emphasis placed on children's achievements within the middle class, particularly on the achievement of sons, and the interest of boys in games of physical skill, are consistent with Roberts' and Sutton-Smith's conflict-enculturation hypothesis of play.³⁵ According to the researchers, children attempt to assuage the stress and anxiety induced by child rearing patterns by participation in forms of play that prepare and socialize them to deal with the parental expectations and the society's goals. The games played in childhood provide a buffered form of learning which has a social learning or enculturative value for the competencies required of the adult in the culture. While serving as exercises in mastery, the games also help children to deal with success and failure through experiences with winning and losing on a scale where the conflicts and the outcomes are more easily managed. Games of physical skill, considered separately as physical skill alone or as physical skill and strategy combined, such as baseball, basketball and soccer, show significant relationships with reward for achievement and frequency of achievement.³⁶ If, in fact, games of physical skill and strategy are associated with high

achievement training then it should come as no surprise that girls are now playing, and, indeed, showing a preference for these games typically seen as masculine, while boys have shown no similar interest in the games traditionally played by girls.

The participation of girls in organized, competitive sports programs has contributed to the growth both in numbers and membership figures of youth sports organizations. Whether publicly or privately sponsored, adult-organized sports programs constitute a major trend in the play lives of American children.

Concerned with their children's achievements, middle class parents were quick to embrace Piagetian inspired child rearing manuals. Probably no one has developed a more comprehensive developmental play theory than Jean Piaget, also known as "Mr. Child Psychology."³⁷ Piaget theorized that children's cognitive development and associated play behaviors pass through stages. As children progress through the four stages of cognitive development, play behaviors that are compatible with their level of cognitive functioning facilitate the growth of their intelligence. In the preschool years a child assimilates most of his experience through play. In the course of middle childhood, the child's cognitive development becomes sophisticated enough that accommodation to the real world predominates over assimilation and symbolic play drops off sharply. Children's fantasy play gives way to intelligent, rational behavior. "Rule

games . . . mark the decline of children's games and the transition to adult play." ³⁸ Piagetian theory on child development in general and on play forms in particular had its greatest dissemination through popular child rearing manuals and magazines beginning in the mid-1960s. Since then the development of the child's cognitive abilities through regulated play and organized activities has marked the child rearing patterns of the professional middle class and aspirants who imitate their lifestyle. Educated, affluent and upwardly mobile, these parents, anxious about securing a comparable status for their children in an intensely competitive and economically unpredictable global village, ³⁹ have undertaken with steadfast determination the molding of the Superchild. Lessons, organized activities and games with rules, at ages that Piaget would have found developmentally inappropriate, are scheduled, limiting the symbolic play typical of the preschooler and the child who has recently entered the concrete operational stage of development. Piaget and Arnold Gesell, both of whom had developmental play theories, recognized Americans' interest in rushing the growth of intelligence. It is indeed paradoxical that parents who accepted these psychologists' theories on the role of play in the child's growth of intelligence and self-mastery, refused to accept their judgments that the process could not, indeed, should not be rushed. Armed with an arsenal of "how to" books, parental eagerness to nurture their children's intelligence, strengthen their weaknesses, cultivate their

talents, and otherwise develop self-mastery in them has resulted in a lowering of the ages associated with specific play forms and play activities. Sophisticated toys are purchased for children younger than the ages for which the toys were designed, "PeeWee" categories of organized sports programs draw six year olds, an age at which children, according to Piaget, cannot understand "the rules of the game," character building organizations enroll five year olds, and private lessons from art to zen fill children's free time. Piaget did not find it surprising that the twelve year old no longer engaged in fantasy play. The child at the higher end of the middle childhood range is cognitively prepared for organized sports and activities. But according to Piagetian theory, the child at the lower end of the middle childhood range may never be cognitively prepared for higher levels of thinking and associated play activities, if deprived of those opportunities to develop that competence through fantasy play. The problem seems to be not that children engage in organized activities at the expense of free play, but rather how early and how often they do so.

Child-Controlled Play

Support for the organization of children's play, which began at the end of the nineteenth century, was gained by emphasizing the character-destroying nature of street play. Early social workers and reformers who advocated to get city children off the streets and onto playgrounds believed that

nothing of value could be gained from the apparently disorganized street play of the children. Yet, research confirms that street play was neither disorganized nor socially useless. Brody, Clark, Devereaux, Goodman, Handel, Nasaw and Smith⁴⁰ all attest to the lessons in social living learned from street play, typically organized on the city block, even if those lessons were realized in retrospect. Other sociological research unrelated to play, but related to lower class street culture, also conclude that order and organization are indeed present in what, to outsiders, appears to be a disorderly and disorganized social setting.⁴¹ Contemporary studies of children at play by Brady, Goodwin, the Langstaffs, Lever, Milberg, Parrott, Rosenthal and Wagenvoord⁴² show children engaged in rule-bounded activities, some of those activities being the same, or variants of, traditional street games played by children at the turn of the twentieth century. Not only is the play organized, but, as Brady, Goodwin and Rosenthal have pointed out, the play is adapted, by the young black children, to express their own cultural experiences.

If children's free play over the course of the century has not shown itself to be disorganized and devoid of socially useful outcomes, neither has it shown itself capable of extinction. For despite adult management of children's play and organized activities, child-controlled play and some traditional games still endure, more so among the urban lower class, but even among middle class children for whom adult

management of their unobligated time is, indeed, a marked characteristic. These activities have been passed down through childlore, the oral transmission from generation to generation, of children's timeworn rituals, including their rhymes, parodies and games. Childlore has shown continuity over time, place and social class⁴³ though it has also in the course of time and through diffusion been modified.

In 1883, folklorist William Wells Newell raised these seemingly paradoxical characteristics of childlore, that is, its tendency toward inventiveness and conservatism.⁴⁴ Full of ingenuity and imagination, children, Newell insisted, brought inventiveness to their lore, creating new games out of their environment and modifying existing ones. Yet, the basic content remained stable; indeed, formulas that were so old as to have no reasonable contemporary meaning were preserved. Yet, despite this tendency toward conservatism, Newell believed that the games he collected were vanishing in a "general ruin" of popular traditions. In England, Lady Gomme also revealed a concern for vanishing childlore in her collection The Traditional Games of England, Scotland and Ireland.⁴⁵ Folklorists Iona and Peter Opie were advised in the 1950s that their efforts to study English children at play were fifty years too late. Children were no longer capable of entertaining themselves.⁴⁶ But childlore, supposedly a disappearing element of the culture, is, in fact, holding its own. According to American folklorists Mary and Herbert Knapp, "The belief that children's folklore

is a thing of the past--like galoshes, mustard plasters, and the British Empire--is incorrect."⁴⁷

American children still play the traditional games of tag, hopscotch, jump rope, clapping games and ball bouncing games, poison, red rover, hide and seek, marbles, king of the mountain, Little Sally Waters, and other games played a century ago. But if children's play culture is marked by this continuity, it is also characterized by change. Opie and Opie comment:

If children played their games invariably in the way previous generations played them, the study of youthful recreation could be a matter merely of antiquarian scholarship. But they do not. Despite the motherly influence of tradition . . . children's play is like every other social activity. It is subject to change. The fact that the game is played slightly differently in different places, and may even vary in name, is itself evidence that mutation takes place. . . New sports emerge that may or may not in the course of time become traditional . . . And for reasons that are usually social or environmental, some games become impracticable (e.g. games played with caps are fast disappearing.) while others are overlaid or replaced by new versions that are found to be more satisfactory.⁴⁸

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the available data on children at play and on children's use of unobligated time, the following social transformations in children's play and organized activities have occurred between 1880-1990.

The play of children has become increasingly adult supervised and organized. Activities such as participation in character-building organizations, institutionalized sports programs, and community recreation programs have a greater

claim to children's time than in the era before World War II, with children's age of entry steadily decreasing. That the play of middle class children is adult supervised is not, however, a recent phenomenon but rather one of greater magnitude. Middle class parents have supervised their children's play throughout the entire period under study, but particularly since the 1920s. The growth of the middle class, the expansion of suburbia with its tax supported recreation programs, and the rise of large scale organizations for children, particularly sports programs for boys and girls, has resulted in more middle class children participating in more organizations with supervision moving from the children's own parents to other adult figures such as coaches and group leaders.

Between the 1920s and the late 1960s the recreational needs of poor urban children fell through the cracks of a system initially designed to serve them. Publicly sponsored play and recreation programs for this group declined as these services grew for middle class teenagers, adults and suburbanites. Not until the end of the 1960s would the voluntary associations of middle class youth reach out to include ethnic and racial minorities, the new generation of urban poor. But the successful recruitment of minorities into the traditionally middle class organizations of Boys Scouts, Girl Scouts and Camp Fire, though modified for "cultural relevancy," has drawn more lower income children, traditionally resistant to adult organized activities, into these programs. The sports

orientation of Boys Club, an organization that has always served predominantly the socially disadvantaged, resulted in continued increased membership as sports grew as an important cultural activity and a perceived route out of the ghetto. In addition, Boys Club now accepts girls and Camp Fire accepts boys, broadening children's opportunities for organizational participation.

Middle class children increasingly spend their time in pursuit of individual skilled pastimes such as gymnastics, dancing, skating, tennis, horseback riding, golf and swimming, activities once reserved for children of the wealthy. The emphasis on individual achievement in these activities is consistent with the child-centered, achievement oriented child rearing patterns typical of the middle class.⁴⁹ In these individual skilled pastimes children compete with their personal best. In their organized group activities they learn to subordinate the individual to the group, to be a "team player," an important social skill in a future occupational setting.

Informal group activities such as cheerleading practice, listening to the radio, dancing and talking on the telephone are increasingly popular pastimes among girls. In their actual play activities, girls have become far more active in games and sports once played almost exclusively by boys, while boys have shown no greater preference for girls' games

or play interests. Indeed, boys have lowered their preference for games that remotely resemble girls' play. The result has been a contraction of the play interests of boys and an expansion in the play interests of girls, since they have retained an interest in traditional girls' play.

Toys and manufactured games have had an increasingly greater role in play. In addition to their perceived value in intellectual development, toys have come to serve a companionship function, as they act as substitutes for human companionship and interaction within the home. According to sociologist Donald Ball, over the course of the twentieth century there have been decreasing opportunities for children to experience human companionship in the home and increasing opportunities to substitute toy companionship.

Lower probabilities of extended family residence within the home, greater chances that the child will have the privacy of his own room, increased absence of the father . . . and the increase in working mothers--all of these seem likely to have combined to reduce opportunities for human companionship and interaction within the home. At the same time, mass production and growing amounts of disposable income have increased the availability of toys, both in absolute numbers and at lowered unit cost. Perhaps grandmother has left the home, but she has frequently been replaced by toys, many of them human representations such as dolls. ⁵⁰

Despite the organization of toys by manufacturers into a "layer-cake curriculum of increasing complexity and mechanical ingenuity," ⁵¹ children of one age are given toys designed for children of another, older age who possess more highly developed physical and cognitive skills. Not only are children receiving age-inappropriate toys, but toys have

become more complex and sophisticated. Electronic and computerized games and toys, mechanized dolls, radio-controlled cars and airplanes, and elaborate model building kits compete with traditional toys on the shelves of retailers as manufacturers respond to every innovation, fad and fashion with a new line of toys.⁵² Traditional toys have been updated to enhance their appeal to a generation of children growing up with technological wizardry. **The Sounds Like Home Dollhouse**, manufactured by Fundimensions, includes a working doorbell, electric lights, and environmental sounds such as thunder and birds. **Erector** sets, a toy first sold seventy five years ago, can now build starships. And **Monopoly**, a board game which first sold in the 1930s, can now be played with an electronic accessory item, **Playmaster**, which keeps score.⁵³ But the sophistication of toys is not a function solely of technological advances. The traditional doll in need of love and nurturance and with whom the young owner plans tea parties has found her competition in teenage and young adult dolls, such as Mattel's Barbie and Ken, and their circle of friends. Such dolls introduce children from about the age of five to a teenage subculture and to adolescent roles. The prom gowns, pink Corvette, swimming pool and other doll-related paraphernalia construct for the youngster an image of adolescence that is not only unrealistic and unattainable for most, but centered on consumerism, youth, glamour and popularity. If television has rushed children into an awareness of adult themes,

teenage dolls propel the young child into a world of shopping, trendy fashions, dating and travel.

Not only have toys slipped down the age levels, but so have traditional games and play, an indication of a change in age grading.⁵⁴ In the 1920s Lehman and Witty found that girls between the ages of eight and one-half to twelve and one-half commonly participated in jumping rope, an activity that now peaks between the ages of eight to ten.⁵⁵ Jeremy Cherfas writes:

Nowadays children become self-conscious about playing kids' games at ever earlier ages . . . In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the favoured games of boys in secondary schools were marbles, tops, leapfrog, hoops, hopscotch and skipping. No boy of eleven would play those games today, and the experts are more likely to be aged eight or nine. Girls, who are probably even greater traditionalists than boys in the matter of games, are not immune to this downward shift in players' ages.⁵⁶

As older children spend increasing amounts of time in pastimes and organized sports, their games are left to younger children, who, neither physically nor socially mature enough to play them as their older counterparts did, transform them. Sutton-Smith notes, for example, that the game of red rover, a central person tag game now played mostly by children between the ages of six to nine who run between two bases and try to avoid being tagged by the "it" in the middle, used to be played by teenagers as a team game.⁵⁷

Children at play have become less visible, with play

often taking place in apartment house courtyards, backyards, playrooms, bedrooms and designated fields and gymnasiums rather than in streets, empty lots and alleys. Increasing vehicular traffic and crime in suburban as well as in urban areas have made streets off limits for play by many anxious children and their parents. Sociologist Sarane Boocock found in her study of children's use of space that 52% of those children living in a low income East Harlem, New York City, neighborhood were not allowed to go outside their building or yard, while this same restriction applied to 39% of the children in an upper income New York City neighborhood. Only 16% of the children living in suburban communities of New Jersey and Maryland were so restricted.⁵⁰ Yet, Elliott Medrich, director of the Childhood and Government Project at the University of California, Berkeley, and his associate Mary Berg, found that in low density, middle and upper class neighborhoods, land use impacted on children's social relationships, formalizing and privatizing them. They explain:

Children's social relations are an example of the way behavior is affected by the co-varying relationships among social class, cultural characteristics and physical aspects of the neighborhood environment. Generally middle class children have fairly formal friendship patterns. For example, going to a friend's house may not be a spontaneous activity--parent's permission may be required or, perhaps, an invitation must be extended. Land use, especially in low density, middle and high income neighborhoods suggests a privatized, not a communal environment. Furthermore, middle class children often live in neighborhoods where there are simply fewer young people around. To see a friend necessitates some planning--that is, finding a way of getting there. . . Within neighborhoods, topography, geography and land use constrain children's

mobility in a variety of ways.⁵⁹

Opie and Opie note that when adults do see children playing outdoors they are getting a distorted image of children's play. Children, they say, are most easily watched at play in those spaces created by adults for their play, playgrounds. But the Opies have noticed that playgrounds have a way of changing the quality of the games played on them.

We have noticed that when children are herded together in the playground, which is where the educationalist and the psychologists and the social scientists gather to observe them, their play is markedly more aggressive than when they are in the street. . . .

Often, when we have asked children what games they played in the playground we have been told, "We just go around aggravating people."⁶⁰

Thus, when adults do see children at play on playgrounds, they may not be seeing how and what those children would be playing were they out of sight of adults and masters of their own games.

Compulsory schooling has had both direct and subtle implications for children's play. Mandatory school attendance removed children from the streets for most of the day moving their play onto school playgrounds where it was adult supervised. The social organization of the school segregated children by age.⁶¹ Children voluntarily segregate themselves by sex on school playgrounds.⁶² These two variables, age and sex, have consistently, though not totally, defined children's play groups since the turn of the century. Organized around the grade level, groups tend, de facto, to

be age homogeneous, particularly for girls at free play, and, for both boys and girls within organized activities.

The research on the social organization and cultures of boys' and girls' play groups reveal distinct differences that support gender segregation. Thorne and Luria summarize those differences:

Boys tend to interact in larger and more publically-visible groups; they more often play outdoors, and their activities take up more space than those of girls. Boys engage in more physically aggressive play and fighting; their social relations tend to be overtly hierarchical and competitive. Organized sports are both a central activity and a major metaphor among boys; they use a language of "teams" and "captains" even when not engaged in sports.

Girls more often interact in smaller groups or friendship pairs, organized in shifting alliances. Compared with boys, they more often engage in turn-taking activities like jump rope and . . . and they less often play organized sports. While boys use a rhetoric of contests and teams, girls describe their relations using language which stresses cooperation and "being nice."⁶³

In their study of fourth and fifth graders, Thorne and Luria noted extensive spatial segregation between boys and girls. "Playgrounds have gendered spaces: boys control some areas and activities such as large playing fields and basketball courts; and girls control smaller enclaves like jungle gym areas and concrete spaces for hopscotch or jump-rope."⁶⁴ Sex-segregated boundaries are also maintained through rituals as well as through space, for example, through cross-sex chasing. Thus, even as boys and girls play together the gender-marked ritual of chasing actually heightens the boundaries between boys and girls.

Chasing has a gendered structure . . . Children set apart cross-gender chasing with special names--"girls chase the

boys," "boys chase the girls"; "the chase"; "chasers"; "chase and kiss", "kiss-chase"; "kissers and chasers"; "kiss or kill"--and with animated talk about the activity. The names . . . inevitably contain both gender and sexual meanings.

When boys and girls chase one another, they become, by definition, separate teams.⁶⁵

In addition to corralling children onto playgrounds, schools have also incorporated games into their curriculum, which may do more to deter children from playing those games on their own than it does to keep the games a part of childlore. To adults who lament the decline of traditional games, the Opies make a case for non-intervention.

Above all we feel it is no coincidence that the games whose decline is most pronounced are those which are best known to adults, and therefore the most often promoted by them . . . In the long run nothing extinguishes self-organized play more effectively than does action to promote it.⁶⁶

While some traditional games have found their way into the school curriculum, particularly in physical education classes, where they are supervised and played "by the book," other games known to children are discouraged by teachers. According to folklorist Paul Brewster writing in 1953:

In recent years there has been in this country a steadily growing tendency toward the regimentation of children's play. Such games as marbles . . . have been given a completely new sets of rules and regulations . . . Old games have been changed and "improved". . . Game books filled with such material as this find a ready reception among playground workers and directors, physical education instructors, and grade school teachers. Supervised play has taken the place of earlier spontaneous . . . playing and has made participation in games a mechanical performance. . . Teachers, armed with information gleaned from a . . . course in Education 312, "Supervision of Playground Activities in the Lower Grades," discourage the playing of games which children already know and which their parents and grandparents before them have played, and insist upon their learning new ones

from a book just compiled by someone in the School of Education.⁶⁷

If the Opies, writing after Brewster, are correct, those who worry about the impoverishment of traditional games should be thankful, indeed, that schools have not usurped all of children's traditional games lest they indeed hasten their extinction.

Though not extinct, the repertoire of children's traditional games has been reduced. In terms of survival, some games have fared better than others. There has been a decrease in the status or ascriptive games played by children at the turn of the century. These are the formal games, imitative of adult behaviors, in which players are subordinate to a central person. As Newell noted in 1883 many of those games were of an Old World heritage and representative of hierarchically ordered societies. Sutton-Smith suggests that such games, modeled after formal social interactions, now have an inappropriate symbolism and are meaningless to children who live in a permissive, egalitarian society. For instance, in describing the play of five to nine year old girls as recorded by folklorist Newell, Sutton-Smith comments:

In this folklore record, we find the play of . . . girls preoccupied with ritual dramatic games in which, with song and dance, the girls enacted the practices of marriage, death and the working life . . . They were not the games of players who were equal before the law, but of a group of players contesting against the ascribed power of the central person.⁶⁸

Among the status games that have declined are singing

games, such as Farmer in the Dell and All Around the Mulberry Bush. Other types of games that have also experienced a decline are team guessing and acting games, such as Charades and Devil and Angels; dialogue games, such as Old Witch and Mother May I Pick a Rose?; cooperative parlor games, such as Consequences and Gossip; couple parlor games, such as Spin the Bottle and Post Office; undifferentiated team games, such as Prisoner's Base and Capture the Flag. The decrease in undifferentiated team games may be attributed to the greater attention given to major sports and thus to children's greater participation in sports programs.⁶⁹ If status games, or games of ascription, have decreased, achievement games, or organized games and sports played by egalitarian peer groups, have increased. The Opies have also noted a marked decrease in the playing of games in which one player is repeatedly buffeted by the rest and an increase in games in which children deal with each other on equal terms. But they maintain that the popularity of games is more than a result of their function as expressive models of cultural activities and structural arrangements.

At any one time some games are gaining in popularity; some, presumably are at their peak; and others are in marked decline; and this variation affects not only the frequency with which each game is played but its actual composition. Thus games that are approaching their peak of popularity are easily recognizable . . . A game enjoying absolute favour fatally attracts additional rules and formalities; the sport becomes progressively more elaborate, the playing of it demands further finesse, and the length of time required for its completion markedly increases.⁷⁰

This elaboration of the games actually sets into motion

its decline in popularity. Whatever the reasons for the change from games of ascription to games of achievement, this shift in play forms has also resulted in a shift in attitudes toward play. As traditional children's play typified by central person games has given way to sports and organized team games, an emphasis on "likeability," and fairness in play has given way to an emphasis on skill, with winning a paramount concern. According to sociologist Harry Webb:

The transition from child's play to games, and then to sport, involves increasing complexity and rationalization of the activities and increasing professionalization of attitudes. By "professionalization" of course is meant the substitution of "skill" for "fairness" as the paramount factor in play activity, and the increasing importance of victory.⁷¹

Sutton-Smith also notes an increase in games of chance and strategy, particularly card and board games, as a form of sophistication related to an increasingly information based, postindustrial society. "Perhaps in an information culture where top level jobs have to do with marshalling facts and making critical decisions, experience in small group interactions and decision making has become essential."⁷²

Television is not quite the villain it is readily made out to be in the demise of children's free play, though it has influenced play, both directly and indirectly. Television has, in fact, taken some time away from free play. But for the most part time spent on television viewing has been taken from other functionally similar activities such as radio, comics and movies. Though it has not destroyed

children's play, there is evidence to suggest that the viewing of television violence has resulted in more aggressive play. Television's promotion of toys through commercials has contributed to the increase in toy-based play. And in exposing children to adult themes, thus providing them with the knowledge that once separated children from adults, television has hastened children's growing up. As they become more adult-like, children are more likely to feel self-conscious in their play, abandoning it sooner. Ten to twelve years old who, in the past, still played with dolls are now often eager to start going to dances, dating and shopping in malls.⁷³

Over the course of the century covered in this study, children's play has become more adult organized, less visible, more toy-based, and less traditional. There has been a steady lowering of the ages of children's participation in both adult-controlled and child-controlled play and organized activities, and a decrease in the variety of traditional games still played by children. The play repertoire of girls has increased due to their greater participation in organized sports, while the play interests of boys, relative to girls' has contracted.

Though television and organized sports programs have contributed to what may accurately be described as an impoverishment of rather than a destruction of children's

traditional play and games, the factors that have shaped play over the past century cannot be limited to these two alone. The rise of child psychology, particularly the developmental theories of Gesell and Piaget, each of which gave great importance to play in physical, social or cognitive development, but each of which also included within play hobbies, pastimes and organized activities, influenced parental organization of children's play as their theories were popularized, particularly among increasingly child-centered middle class families. In addition, the growth of large scale organizations in the shift from an industrial to an increasingly bureaucratic and competitive postindustrial society, innovations such as plastics and electronics applied to toys, challenges to traditional gender roles, and changing family structures and functions have all affected the play of children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has raised as many questions about play over this past century as it has answered. More ethnographic and empirical studies on children at play and on children's play, both child-structured and adult-structured, need to be done to expand the data on the individual, social and situational factors influencing play. How does adult intervention in children's play affect children's perception of the activity as play? What is the optimum balance between adult-structured play and organized activities and

child-controlled play? And how does that balance vary by the child's developmental stage? In the area of child-controlled play, ethnographic research should investigate where, why, how and with whom children play and what they play. How do children form their own play groups, choosing whom to include and whom to leave out? How do players enter and exit the group? How do children negotiate their activities, settle their disputes, resume interrupted play? What are the effects of the physical environment and demographic composition of the neighborhood on children's free play? Variations in play activities by social class, race and ethnicity, sex and geographic location need further exploration. Further, does play actually accomplish all that it is theorized to? What do the children themselves understand they are "getting out of" play? Are the skills purportedly learned through play transferrable to non-play situations? Does the attitude of the player affect the outcome of the play experience?

Perhaps whether an activity is play or not-play may after all depend more on the attitude of the person so engaged and on the player's own definition of the situation as play than either on the activity itself, or the theoretician's criteria for play, or, for that matter, the nostalgic observer's own dusty (and perhaps, rose-colored) childhood memories.

NOTES

1. Viviana Zelizer, Pricing the Priceless Child (New York: Basic, 1983), 3. For a discussion of the historical creation of childhood itself as a distinct period of life, see Philippe Ariès, Centuries of Childhood (New York: Knopf, 1962).
2. Zelizer, Pricing the Priceless Child, 11.
3. Joyce Wolfgang Williams and Marjorie Stith, Middle Childhood--Behavior and Management (New York: Macmillan, 1974), 7.
4. Zelizer, Pricing the Priceless Child, 214-218.
5. Ibid., 223.
6. Ibid., Chapter 7, "From Useful to Useless and Back to Useful? Emerging Patterns in the Valuation of Children," 208-228.
7. John W. Loy and Alan G. Ingham, "Play, Games and Sport in the Psychosocial Development of Children and Youth," in Sport, Culture and Society, 2d ed., eds. John W. Loy, Jr. Gerald Kenyon and Barry D. McPherson (Philadelphia: Lea & Febiger, 1981), 189-216.
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12. Nathan J. Smith, Ronald E. Smith and Jean L. Smoll, Kidsports (Reading, MA.: Addison Wesley, 1983), 41, 45.

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