

Introduction: Parents and Children Playing

This volume brings together a varied group of researchers and theoreticians with a common interest in parent-child play. Despite considerable diversity in theoretical perspectives and research interests, the contributors share a belief that parent-child play is an important arena in which to study basic developmental processes. Indeed, the basic processes underlying parent-child play appear to be biological universals. The data presented in several chapters, especially in chapter 10 by Anne Fernald and Daniela O'Neill, show that the capacity for parent-child play is apparent in a wide range of cultures from diverse parts of the world, and the data described in chapter 5 by Jaak Panksepp and in chapter 6 by Maxine Biben and Steve Suomi indicate that at least some types of parent-child play occur among a wide range of mammalian species.

Nevertheless, despite the importance of viewing the capacity for parent-child play as a developmental universal, there is persuasive evidence that the style and amount of parent-child play varies enormously—between species, between cultures, and within cultures—and that this variation is associated with important developmental outcomes. An adequate theory of parent-child play must therefore address basic issues related to the nature and function of variation in developmental processes. On the basis of the evidence provided in this volume, I would suggest that at the very least, parent-child play is a marker variable which is associated with variation in the level of parent interest and investment in children. However, taken as a whole, the book provides convincing evidence that parent-child play is causally related to positive social and cognitive outcomes for children.

The volume begins with an introductory chapter by Brian Sutton-Smith, a pioneer in the scientific study of play. Sutton-Smith draws on his extensive experience to provide a comprehensive sum-

mary of the literature on parent-child play over the last fifty years. This literature supports the general importance of parent-child play, especially during the early years. Interestingly, Sutton-Smith emphasizes the social consequences of parent-child play rather than "fairly marginal academic outcomes."

However, the most intellectually provocative aspect of the chapter is the second section in which Sutton-Smith attempts to develop a wider perspective on adult attitudes toward play (including play research). Sutton-Smith argues that as children's play has come increasingly under scientific scrutiny, it has also become more supervised and controlled by adult interests. These interests have ranged from a concern to inculcate manliness (prominent from the mid to late nineteenth century) to a concern to use children's play as a means to increase academic competence (a highly salient contemporary interest). Increased knowledge of children's play has thus led to attempts to direct and control children's play, and Sutton-Smith goes on to suggest that the present emphasis on parent-child play is partly a device to justify the socialization of the lower classes according to middle-class standards.

Sutton-Smith also suggests that the increasing control of children's play in the service of adult interests has coincided with the idealization of children's play as innocent. This idealization allows adults to ignore the rather disorderly and self-indulgent aspects of adult play, so that children's play becomes elevated to the status of an ideal conscience—a politically impotent symbol of innocence. In idealizing children's play we are ignoring earlier theorists like Groos, Hall, and Freud who emphasized the idea that children's play had other baser, more "instinctual" aspects—perhaps, for example, providing a training ground for aggression.

Although some aspects of Sutton-Smith's analysis will certainly be controversial, this last point is certainly well-taken: there is no reason whatever to suppose that the only purpose of children's play is to make ideal citizens or to become academically competent. Moreover, the fact that play has been used in an effort to shape and control children in recent history emphasizes the close connection between play and developmental plasticity. Because play can have important developmental consequences, play has often been a focal point for individuals interested in influencing development, whatever their motivation.

Following this introductory chapter, the first section of the book includes three chapters which develop different theoretical perspectives on parent-child play: the dynamic interaction perspective, the

organizational perspective, and an evolutionary perspective based on parental investment theory. Although these theories ultimately view parent-child play in quite different and (to some extent) incompatible ways, they share a common belief that play is intimately associated with the concept of developmental plasticity.

The dynamic interaction perspective presented by Alan Fogel, Evangeline Nwokah, and Jeanne Karns proposes that parent-infant play is not the result of systems which have evolved for the specific purpose of prescribing the form of playful interactions. Rather than consisting of a set of evolved schemas, developmental pathways involving parent-child play are underdetermined by the genetic material. Developmental plasticity is thus absolutely crucial to conceptualizing parent-child play. Parent-child play is one of a number of emergent processes “that partake of lower-level components, none of which contains explicit representations of play” (p. 45). Play consists of subtle variability and emergent creativity rather than stereotypic rules.

Because of their focus on variability and creativity as essential elements of play, Fogel and his colleagues concentrate the bulk of their chapter on reviewing cross-cultural variation in the dynamics of play as well as the influence of contextual factors on parent-infant play. Subtle changes in the physical context, changing the number of participants, or the status of the participant (other infants, older children, adults) has a profound effect on the dynamics of play. Moreover, they propose that laughter during games is the complex result of a large number of nonobligatory processes and cannot be analyzed as the consequence of a scheme or set of schemes possessed by the child. The result is certainly a powerful challenge to rigid evolutionary approaches which ignore the creativity, spontaneity, and variability of play.

The chapter by Marjorie Beeghly is also driven by a general theory of developmental processes—that of the organizational perspective on developmental psychopathology associated with several developmental theorists, including Dante Cichetti and Alan Sroufe. These theorists focus on developmental tasks which require the integration of social, emotional, and cognitive competencies that are crucial in achieving adaptation at a particular developmental level. Like the dynamic interaction theory presented by Fogel and colleagues, development is viewed as a complex dynamic process in which there are multiple transactions among parent, child, and ecological systems. Competent parent-child play thus depends on the successful accomplishment of previous developmental competen-

cies: the reciprocal socioemotional interchanges of the two to six month period presuppose successful regulation of physiological and behavioral state occurring during the first months of life.

Moreover, the successful attainment of developmental tasks requires environmental input which is sensitive to the characteristics of the child. For example, sensitive, responsive caretaking is typical of successful socioemotional interchanges during the two to six month period in normal infants, but highly intrusive maternal styles appear to be the most effective intervention for Down's syndrome infants. In some cases, maternal behavior can even compensate for developmental abnormalities.

For Beeghly, adult-child face-to-face play provides a window on normal and abnormal developmental processes. She reviews data indicating close associations between the child's social and cognitive abilities with the structure and style of adult-child play. She then presents parent-child play data from a group of toddlers diagnosed as characterized by Intrauterine Growth Retardation (IUGR). The results indicate that the IUGR toddlers were significantly more distractible and hyperactive in the parent-child play situations. However, these effects were moderated by contextual variables, including social support and attachment status. As predicted by the organizational perspective, performance during parent-child play at two years of age was related to earlier maternal and attachment variables.

My contribution (chapter 4) develops a perspective on parent-child play based on evolutionary biology. A basic premise is that the capacity for play is a biological adaptation and thus a panhuman universal. However, like the dynamic interaction and organizational perspectives, there is a strong emphasis on developmental plasticity. Indeed, play in general is viewed as an adaptation which presupposes developmental plasticity. Children's play is viewed as an environment-engagement device which parents take advantage of in order to shape developmental outcomes. As suggested by Sutton-Smith, therefore, parents (or other interested adults) are able to achieve significant control over developmental outcomes by manipulating the context of children's play. However, consistent with the view of Panksepp in chapter 5, play is viewed as a biological adaptation with specific neurobiological underpinnings.

The principle theoretical tool used in the evolutionary analysis of parent-child play is the idea of parental investment. Parental investment in children includes providing a wide range of resources, including the stimulation available during parent-child play. As

with any aspect of parental investment, there are clear costs and benefits of parent-child play. It is argued that societies with high levels of parent-child play are more likely to be characterized by monogamy, nuclear family social organization, low fertility (high age of first pregnancy, low number of offspring, high birth-spacing interval), and parent-rearing of children. On the other hand, evidence is provided that societies characterized by polygyny, extended family social organization, high fertility, and sibling rearing and/or fostering of children are low in parent-child play. This basic perspective implies that parents are able to take advantage of human developmental plasticity by programming individual development to respond adaptively to particular ecological contingencies.

The second section of the volume emphasizes the mechanisms underlying parent-child play. It begins with two discussions focusing on parent-child play (or its absence) among animals. Jaak Panksepp's contribution describes his research on the neurochemical basis of social play, especially rough and tumble (r & t) play, in animals. Panksepp takes issue with the views of many psychologists who have great difficulty in thinking in terms of fundamental brain mechanisms underlying specific behaviors with adaptive functions. Panksepp proposes just such a status for social play: "Roughhousing play is a robust central-state process of the mammalian brain" (p. 148). Panksepp argues that these mechanisms are phylogenetically ancient and are essentially shared by all mammals as a homology (i.e., a similarity which results because of evolution from a common ancestor).

As noted by Fogel and colleagues, one of the central problems for a biological theory of play is that of variability and creativity. Panksepp suggests that variability can occur in the presence of a single underlying mechanism because play is filtered and channeled through the higher information processing networks in the cortex. This neuropsychological underpinning is conceptualized as a dopamine-based reward system, closely linked to (but quite possibly separate from) exploratory activity. As reviewed in my contribution (see chapter 4), this conceptualization fits well with data and theory from personality research, and is compatible with the evolutionary conceptualization of play as involving mechanisms which result in intrinsically motivated interactions with the environment.

Panksepp concludes his contribution with the provocative idea that since play produces positive emotional states, it could be used as a reinforcer for good behavior in academic settings. Thus it may well be that a very good way to get hyperactive children to learn to

play appropriately and inhibit aggression would be to make r & t play contingent on appropriate behavior in the classroom or on being able to inhibit aggression and control emotions during r & t play. Unquestionably, any highly pleasurable behavior can be used as a reinforcer, so this is an important possibility, especially for hyperactive children, since they appear to greatly enjoy r & t play.

Perhaps the most salient feature emerging from the chapter by Maxine Biben and Steve Suomi (chapter 6) is that adult-infant play is far from common among nonhuman primate species. Among squirrel monkeys adult-infant play only seems to occur if other infants are unavailable. This suggests that the primary adaptation for play in this species is for play with same-age conspecifics, but it also reminds us that the mechanisms underlying play as an environment engagement device ensure that the infant will seek playful stimulation wherever he/she can find it. Moreover, it indicates that although adults are not ordinarily play partners to younger animals, they still possess the necessary machinery for play. In fact, Biben and Suomi point out that when the living situation of rhesus macaques is altered so that adult males live in close proximity to infants, the rate of adult-infant play increases some two hundred fold.

Clearly, then, adult-infant and adult-juvenile r & t play does occur among monkeys and macaques, albeit infrequently in natural situations. When it does occur, it is sufficiently well-rehearsed and stereotyped to indicate that r & t play is a biological adaptation, even if the specific adult-offspring version merely takes advantage of this machinery. Moreover, the very rich descriptions of squirrel monkey and rhesus macaque adult-infant play could very easily be descriptions of human adult-child r & t, complete with a great deal of role reversal and self-handicapping by the adults.

Also noteworthy is Biben and Suomi's argument for delayed benefits of play among infants and juveniles. This is a difficult area, but they convincingly argue that, although immediate benefits of play presumably occur (such as exercise), these benefits do not explain the sex-differentiated patterns of play observed among the juveniles and infants. Males and females are preparing for very different ecological situations as adults, and this is reflected in their play styles.

James Carson, Virginia Burks, and Ross Parke review data on parent-child physical (r & t) play among children, highlighting the very robust age and sex differences (for both parents and children) associated with this style of play. Of particular interest are

recent findings suggesting that styles of interaction across family and peer systems are “strikingly similar,” providing further support for the idea that peer interactions are influenced by parent-child interactions. Measures of directive and coercive styles of parent-child play taken prior to kindergarten predicted social competence in school.

Besides expanding the research on the parent-child correlates of social competence, the authors review evidence on the mechanisms involved, with a particular emphasis on the idea that parent-child physical play provides a training ground for affect regulation and the encoding and decoding of emotional expressions. They caution, however, that while the usual assumption is that parents influence children, the results are also compatible with the view that child characteristics, such as temperament, account for the associations found thus far.

The research on the mechanisms underlying parent-child r & t play has clearly emphasized the importance of affect in conceptualizing the nature and consequences of this activity. In their contribution in chapter 8, Phyllis Levenstein and John O’Hara provide evidence for the idea that play is an affect-driven enterprise even when the playful activities are cognitively oriented. Relying on Sheldon White’s classic paper, they note that children seek to master the environment and that they experience a positive feeling of efficacy when they do so. Moreover, this intrinsic motivation to master the environment is importantly influenced by the “affectively charged” presence of the parent. The teaching and learning which occur during parent-child play appear to be much more effective when they are embedded in a warm, affectively positive parent-child relationship.

Levenstein and O’Hara emphasize that interventions aimed at improving cognitive competence in young children must utilize sources of motivation which are intrinsic to the child, and this has been the guiding philosophy of Levenstein’s Mother-Child Home Project from its inception. The authors report on positive results for this program, both in terms of children’s cognitive competence and in terms of raising the level of the mothers’ verbal interactive behavior. There was clear support for the idea that the effectiveness of parent-child play was related to the warmth of the parent-child relationship as indicated by the association between positive affective interchange in the mother-child context and a variety of cognitive measures in the child. Mother-child play must take place “in a non-didactic dyadic climate of light spontaneity and fun” (p. 234).

Moreover, the finding that mothers' verbal interactive behavior was raised is particularly important in light of some of the data provided in Tiffany Field's contribution (chapter 13; see discussion below): inadequate mother-child interactions are open to influence. Cultural and subcultural differences, while resistant to change, can be modified by reprogramming mothers to take advantage of children's intrinsic motivation to learn about their environment. Thus, even if observational studies of parent-child play suggest only "fairly marginal academic outcomes," as suggested by Brian Sutton-Smith in chapter 1, there is the suggestion that interventions based on fairly intensive parent-child play can have ecologically important consequences on children's academic potential.

In chapter 9 Jeffrey Cohn reviews data on the detailed mechanisms involved in the regulation of affect during early parent-child play. Of particular importance are the interactions of depressed mothers during interactions with their infants. These mothers may be viewed as a paradigmatically unplayful group during interaction with their infants. Infants respond to these depressed mothers with less positive affect and more negative affect, but there are marked individual differences within groups of depressed mothers. The most playful mothers were also the most affectively positive, while disengaged mothers elicited active protest in their infants, and intrusive mothers elicited avoidance in the infant. The results underscore a central finding of this volume: parent-child play is part of an affectively positive parent-child interaction. Depressed mothers are clearly not capable of interacting in a manner where there are reciprocated positive social interactions with their infants. Infant affect matches that of the mother, and this appears to have developmental consequences: over time the infants become generally more negative.

The third section of the volume focuses on studies of play viewed in cross-cultural perspective. The data presented in these chapters can be used for two quite different purposes: (1) to show that the basic forms of parent-child play are universal; or (2) to show that cross-cultural variation in patterns of parent-child play is meaningfully associated with variation in either (a) the ecological context of the different cultures, and/or (b) cross-cultural variation in child outcomes. The chapters included in this section provide evidence related to all of these points.

The work of Anne Fernald and Daniela O'Neill on peekaboo games in chapter 10 concentrates on establishing that there are universal patterns of parent-child play. They begin by noting that

even though the words and melody used by mothers in South Africa are different from those used by Japanese mothers, “the rhythm, dynamics, and shared pleasure in the inevitable outcome are fundamentally similar” (p. 259). This research is in the best ethological tradition, often quite reminiscent of research on vocalizations among birds: detailed field observations are buttressed with sophisticated acoustic analysis of vocalizations to illustrate the essential commonalities of parent-child play around the world.

The results presented here reveal two different calls which are characteristic of mother-infant peekaboo games: the Alert call, used to get the baby’s attention, and the Release call, which results in surprise and positive affective response in the infant. As found also by research on bird vocalization, there are subtle within-species (i.e., cross-cultural) differences which can be viewed as dialects with a central species-typical core of commonality. Interestingly, an important universal feature of peekaboo games is also the most important aspect of the game: the reappearance of the mother is “an exhilarating moment, marked by exaggerated and relatively stereotyped vocal and facial gestures” (p. 267).

Thus the universal result of this game is to produce an intensely positive affective state in the baby. The authors argue that this response depends on biological predispositions in the baby. Babies appear to be biologically programmed to respond affectively to mothers’ reappearance, even though the exact routine of the mother need not be stereotyped at all. As is the case with the analysis of r & t play described in chapter 4, striking similarities seen cross-culturally in a peekaboo game presumably occur because it “exploits perceptual, attentional, and affective predispositions of the young infant, and because it both engages and accommodates the developing cognitive capabilities of the child” (p. 268).

The authors then provide a detailed account of the precise nature of these predispositions, with an emphasis on the balance between novelty and predictability as eliciting the affective response of the infant during early infancy, followed by a shift toward the infant taking pleasure also in the active orchestration of the game. Clearly, despite a variety of biological predispositions which enable babies to engage in these games, there is a pronounced lack of stereotypy. Nevertheless, the universal consequence is that the infant enjoys the games. The peekaboo game is part of a reciprocated positive affective interaction between adults and infants.

There is also considerable support for the universality of the forms of parent-child play in the work of Jaipaul Roopnarine, Frank

Hooper, Mohammed Ahmeduzzaman, and Brad Pollack in their paper on parent-child play in India (chapter 11). They begin their contribution with a summary of Indian social structure. Although nuclear families are increasing in India, the joint or extended family is still predominant. In this type of family, kinship ties are very strong, so that individuals define themselves with respect to their place in the wider kinship structure. Despite this enormous difference in social structure compared to Western norms, adult-child games are immediately comparable to games found by researchers in Western societies. These games involve visual, auditory, and tactile stimulation which is arousing and is perceived as pleasurable to the child. The authors propose that at the most general level the infant learns means-end relationships in this type of play. However, the early mother-infant games emphasize close physical contact and language in the form of songs. The physical closeness is also apparent in the practice of embedding the games in the context of massaging the infant.

Although the results reported by Roopnarine and colleagues are compatible with universal predispositions for children to enjoy certain types of stimulation, their contribution is also much concerned with variation in parent-child play along a number of dimensions. As noted also by Carson, Burks, and Parke, Roopnarine and colleagues find that the tendency for fathers to engage in rough play or highly stimulating activities is not found among several cultures from widely scattered parts of the world. Some of this variation may not be related to variation in developmental outcomes: the authors propose that similar developmental outcomes such as security of attachment can be attained by different pathways: "*Consistent social interaction patterns involving a variety of activities which are pleasurable and intrinsically arousing to the infant probably provide the essential developmental context for much subsequent cognitive and socioemotional development*" (p. 296).

Although variation in style of play may therefore not be related to variation in developmental outcomes. Roopnarine and colleagues provide evidence that variation in the amount of play is related to variation in developmental outcomes. They review the results of Indian studies which, like the comparable studies done in Western countries reviewed in chapter 1 by Brian Sutton-Smith, show an association between the amount of parent-child play and developmental status. Interestingly, while the typical social class differences in parent-child play were found, low levels of parent-child play were associated with poor developmental status in families where the

home environment “appeared to be adequately furnished with objects and materials” (p. 294). Because of these patterns, there has been an effort in India to develop interventions which focus on increasing parent-child play, an effort which has met with some success.

One of the potential problems in including cross-cultural research on human development is that the research tends to be fragmented. This tendency toward fragmentation can be minimized, however, if the cross-cultural data can be categorized as representative of contrasting types of human social organization. In the present volume it is possible to contrast societies where parents perform the great majority of child rearing with societies where sibling rearing of children is the norm. Although most of the material in this volume is derived from societies where parent rearing is the norm, there are three papers describing parent-child play in cultures or subcultures where sibling rearing of children is common. These contrasting patterns of child rearing represent theoretically meaningful types for purposes of classifying parent-child play, since sibling rearing of children is strongly associated with low levels of parent-child play. Comparisons between parent-rearing and sibling-rearing societies are thus likely to shed light on the nature and functions of parent-child play.

In chapter 12 Carolyn Edwards and Beatrice Whiting describe parent-child and older sibling-child interactions in a periurban society in Kenya characterized by polygynous, extended family structure. Mothers, although very concerned about the physical needs and survival of all their children, engage in very little sociable interaction with them, while fathers have almost no contact with their children. The role of playmate devolves to the siblings, particularly the adjacent older sibling. Fully 34 percent of these sibling interactions were affectively negative, including scolding, reprimanding, insults, and physical discipline. However, the length of the age interval between the siblings was positively associated with more nurturant and less dominant-aggressive behavior, suggesting that as the sibling gets older he/she behaves more like a parent. The authors note that sibling rearing is required because the mother has an extremely heavy work load—a point that is related to the ecology of intermediate level, clan societies in the evolutionary theory presented in chapter 4.

Although her data were gathered in the United States, Tiffany Field's study in chapter 13 shows important parallels with the work of Edwards and Whiting. She finds important differences in

mother-child play among Haitian, Cuban, and American black subcultures in Miami. These differences were found despite the fact that all groups were of lower socioeconomic class origin. Both the American black and the Haitian black groups lived in father absent, extended family environments, while the Cuban group tended to live in nuclear families and frowned on pregnancy prior to marriage.

Field documents a low investment style of parenting among American blacks in which girls become pregnant as teenagers, become disinterested in the baby, and leave the parenting to grandparents. Mother-infant face-to-face interactions in this group are "significantly inferior" to Latin groups of similar socioeconomic status. Immigrant Haitian mothers, who have a different ethnic origin than American blacks, are described as having very awkward feeding interactions, and, although their face-to-face interactions in the laboratory setting appeared superior to the American black group, their behavior in the waiting room suggested that there was little face-to-face interaction in this group. Field concludes that cultural differences are remarkably persistent among these groups—remaining even when, as in the case of the Haitians, there is a conscious effort to assimilate.

In chapter 14, Jo Ann Farver presents a direct comparison of parent-child play in a rural Mexican society (characterized by extended family social organization and little parent-child play) and lower-class American society (characterized by nuclear family social organization and normative parent-child play). Farver finds that American children experienced more complexity in pretend play with their mothers, while Mexican children experienced more complexity with their siblings. Mexican sibling-child play thus resembled American mother-child play to a considerable extent. Farver also notes that, because the mother tends to devote her attention to the most recently born sibling and ignore the older children, sibling affectional relationships are much more important in Mexican society.

These findings present a challenge to the parental investment theory presented in chapter 4, since they suggest that sibling play in societies characterized by the extended family can compensate for the lack of parent-child play. The results presented by Farver indicate that further research is necessary on the long-term outcomes of sibling rearing versus parent rearing. The important dependent variables will be measures of intellectual functioning as well as measures of the tendency to form bonded relationships later in life.

The perspective developed in chapter 4 suggests that sibling rearing is a relatively low investment style of child rearing compared to parent rearing, and will tend to result in lowered intellectual competence and less of a tendency toward pair bonding later in life. In any case, the presence of strong theoretical views in the field of parent-child play can only help to provide rigorous hypotheses regarding future research.

In the final chapter, J. Kevin Nugent, Sheila Greene, Dorit Wieczoreck-Deering, Kathleen Mazor, John Hendler, and Cynthia Bombardier compared the mother-infant play of a group of married mothers with a group of unmarried mothers in Ireland. Such comparisons again raise the issue of the role of parent-infant play in providing an optimal environment for children. The authors review literature indicating that while the mother-infant play of single mothers has been shown to be deficient, single parenthood itself may well not be the cause of the deficiency. And by comparing the play styles of single mothers in different cultures, it is possible to test the hypothesis that risk factors vary between cultures.

In the event, the authors find that indeed single parenthood does not appear to be a risk factor in the Irish sample. The mother-infant play of these Irish mothers was essentially indistinguishable from that of married mothers, and even appeared to be superior for some behaviors. The results are interpreted within what is termed a "cultural-ecological framework." The cultural-ecological perspective emphasizes two ideas: First, it emphasizes the idea that variation in cultural attitudes toward particular behaviors can affect whether the behavior is a risk factor. In the present study, the authors suggest that in Ireland the cultural disapproval of unmarried women during pregnancy is replaced by cultural acceptance of unmarried mothers and their infants. As a result, the depression characteristic of unmarried women disappears within the first three weeks of the birth of the baby, and the mother-infant play appears normal.

Secondly, the ecological-cultural perspective emphasizes the contributions of both mother and infant to early mother-infant play. While the marital status and age of the mother did not emerge as important variables in this study, mothers with higher levels of education had superior play interactions with their infants. This finding essentially replicates the findings of many investigators that parent-child play is strongly influenced by social class differences, and it reminds us that at least some maternal characteristics are important for understanding variation in mother-infant play. How-

ever, the social responsiveness of the infant was also a significant contributor to early mother-infant play, and it even appears that in the first few weeks of life the baby has a greater input into playful interactions than the mother. As emphasized also by the dynamic interaction perspective represented here by Alan Fogel and colleagues and the organizational perspective represented by Marjorie Beeghley's chapter, both the child and the mother are active agents in parent-infant play from the very beginning of life.

In concluding these introductory remarks, perhaps the most ambitious hope would be that the field of parent-child play would be able to emerge from these discussions as an identifiable field which, although obviously linked to a wide range of developmental theory and research, is distinguished by having its own set of theories and concerns. I believe that such a hope is reasonable because play is the predominant context in which children interface with the environment, whether social or nonsocial, in an affectively positive, internally driven (appetitive) manner. The present research supports the idea that parent-child play is developmentally important. The question of whether it is irreplaceable in producing optimal child functioning in a postindustrial society is a vital developmental question which can only be answered by future research.