PEER CULTURES

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Word Count 7557 Including References (1714)

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

Much early work on peer culture focused on adolescents with the main concern being on outcomes (positive and negative) of experience with peers on individual development. New theoretical approaches to childhood studies see children and their peer cultures as worthy of documentation and study in their own right. From this new perspective peer culture is defined as a stable set of activities or routines, artifacts, values, and concerns that children produce and share in interaction with peers (Corsaro, 2005; Corsaro and Eder, 1990).

From this definition it is clear that the concept of peer culture differs from that of peer group. Children are *members* of peer groups (i.e., groups of children of relatively the same age although the age range can vary), while children collectively *produce* their peer cultures. In fact, children produce and participate in a series of peer cultures that are affected by arrangements of children in various settings (neighborhoods, schools, city streets, village compounds and so on) that result from age grading and other mechanisms of placing cohorts or groups of children together for extended periods of time.

To argue that children produce their own peer cultures does not mean that such cultures are separate from adult culture. Children's peer cultures are not a sort of tribal childhood (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998) making up some part of their lives separate from the adult world. Children are always participating in and are part of two cultures---children's and adults'---and these cultures are intricately interwoven in different ways

across space and over time (Corsaro, 2005). This position is in line with Qvortrup's structural approach to childhood in which: childhood constitutes a particular structural form, childhood is exposed to the same societal forces as adulthood, and children are themselves coconstructors of childhood and society (1991). However, the production of peer culture is a matter neither of simple imitation nor of direct appropriation of the adult world. Children creatively appropriate information from the adult culture to produce their own peer cultures. Such appropriation is creative in that it both extends or elaborates peer culture and simultaneously contributes to the reproduction and extension of the adult world.

This process of creative appropriation is seen as *interpretive reproduction* (Corsaro, 1992; 2005) in line with Giddens's notion of the duality of social structure in which he argues that 'structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize' (1984, p. 25). It is in this sense that interpretive reproduction differs from other theories of social reproduction in that it sees social structure as both constraining and enabling. The process is interpretive because children do not simply individually internalize the external adult culture. Rather peer culture is at the core of reproduction and change. Children become a part of adult culture and contribute to its reproduction and extension through their collective negotiations and interactions with adults and their production of a series of peer cultures with other children (Corsaro, 2005).

CENTRAL THEMES IN PEER CULTURES

Given this is a handbook of child studies, this chapter will concentrate on empirical studies of children's peer cultures and not the rich literature on youth culture or

subcultures. Although a wide range of features of children's peer cultures have been identified, two central themes consistently appear: Children make persistent attempts to *gain control* of their lives and to *share* that control with each other. In early childhood years (two to six years old), children have an overriding concern with social participation and develop strategies for challenging adult authority. In preadolescence (seven to 12 years old), the challenging of adult authority persists and is accompanied by increased desire for autonomy, but there is also often a gradual movement toward social differentiation within the peer culture.

Most of the empirical work on children's cultures has taken place in Western societies (primarily the US, Canada and Europe). Studies in other cultures have focused on children's activities and primarily examined the types and frequencies of children's play and work in their households and communities. Recently, their have been more detailed ethnographic studies in a number of non-Western societies which have gone beyond the documentation of children's activities to look closer at their daily lives and their interactions with peers.

CHILDREN'S PEER CULTURES IN WESTERN SOCIETIES

In this section I discuss generally what we know about sharing, participation and friendships as well as autonomy, control and differentiation in children's peer cultures in Western societies. The review is by no means exhaustive, instead it focuses on what I see as key aspects in some detail in line with our earlier definition of peer culture. I concentrate on primarily younger children as other chapters in this volume (Evaldsson and Frønes) consider the activities of preadolescent children

Sharing, Participation and Friendships

How early given our definition do children produce and participate in an initial peer culture? With the dramatic increase in dual career and single parent families in the US and Europe, children as young as two years old are spending considerable time with peers in child care centers. Several studies in France, Italy, and Norway document how toddlers engage in routines that demonstrate shared emotional satisfaction and in some cases creatively use objects in areas of child care centers for other than their intended adult designed purposes (Corsaro and Molinari, 1990; Løkken, 2000a, 2000b; Mussati and Panni, 1981; Stamback and Verba, 1986).

One example the 'little chairs routine' captures complex elements of toddler play (Corsaro and Molinari, 1990). This routine developed spontaneously among toddlers in an Italian preschool for two- and three-year-olds, and was extended and embellished over the course of the school year. It began as children played with the small chairs, first pushing them around the room like small cars and bumping them together. One day some children pushed the chairs to make a long line from one wall to a small platform sitting against the opposite wall. Once the line was finished, the children made sure that the chairs were together with no gaps and that the line was straight. Then the children walked across the room from chair to chair---sometimes swaying a bit and saying 'I'm falling! I'm falling,' but always keeping their balance---until they reached the platform and jumped down. The teachers noticed this play and told the children to be careful, but did not intervene. Over time the line of chairs was constructed in different ways, children sometimes hopped instead of walked, and always reminded each other that they must be careful.

In this example we see not only the creation and embellishment of a routine of peer culture among very young children, but also an implicit challenge of the teachers' authority. The chairs were to sit on and not walk on. However, the teachers were impressed with the children's invention and allowed it to occur as long as the children played carefully. Thus, the children felt a sense of control and took it upon themselves to monitor the correct and careful way to walk on the chairs.

Numerous studies document the complexity of young children's fantasy play in preschools and in homes in the US and Europe. Children's fantasy play is emotional-laden and helps them deal with various concerns like being lost, facing a variety of dangers, and death (Corsaro, 1985, 2003; Löfdahl, 2005). Sawyer (1997) relying on work in metpragmatics, impressively identifies the poetic nature of American children's fantasy play. These poetic performances in children's fantasy play are part of shared peer culture in that they are created in an improvised fashion that Sawyer calls 'collaborative emergence' (Sawyer, 2002). By collaborative emergence Sawyer means that children's improvised play is unpredictable and contingent upon the ongoing turn by turn production of the fantasy play narrative. Thus, one child 'proposes a new development for the play, and other children respond by modifying or embellishing the proposal' (Sawyer, 2002: 340). Sawyer argues, however, that the researcher can interpret the particular episode of fantasy play by assuming that the play narrative ceases with the end of a particular play episode.

Johannesen (2004; also see Corsaro and Johannesen, 2007) in her study of children's fantasy play with Lego extends Sawyer's work by entering the practice of fantasy play in terms of the practice itself. She does this by considering the in-frame

reality as voiced by the Lego play characters as a real world, and the voices as expressing real experiences. Given her work is longitudinal with the study of play with Lego by the same children over a long period of time, Johannesen demonstrates that the Lego characters remain intact even when they, as embodied in play artifacts, are stacked away from one day or week to the next. Over time the play-reality persists and becomes increasingly complex as the characters plan and experience recurring episodes of danger-rescue and other themes. These recurrent experiences materialize in the enduring relational identities, artifacts, and of the participants in the play. Thus we see many of the aspects of peer culture (play routines, values and concerns, and artifacts) in the shared production of fantasy play over time (Corsaro and Johannesen, 2007).

In her work in "doing reality with play," based on observations of Finnish preschool children Strandell (1997) makes a similar point, maintaining that play in the peer culture should not be seen only as a means of reaching adult competence. Rather she argues that play is a resource child use in their everyday life activities in the peer culture. Interestingly these and other studies of fantasy play demonstrate language and improvisational skills among the young children that some have argued surpass those of most older children and adults.

Young children's dramatic role play differs from fantasy play in that children take on real roles that exist in society like mothers, police, construction workers and so on. Role play goes beyond mere reproduction of various real life scripts, as children appropriate and embellish adult models to fit their concerns and values. In role play children have a sense of status as power and authority over others, which is displayed in the children's action and language in role play in the home, neighborhood, and preschool

(Corsaro, 2003; Elbers, 1996; Garvey, 1977; Goodwin, 1990; Kalliala, 2006; Paley, 1984). Also children tend to embellish role play themes to make them more interesting and dramatic in the peer culture. For example, in a role play scenario in an Italian preschool a girl created an ice cream store making ice cream from materials present in the outside yard (sand for vanilla, dirt for chocolate, leaves for pistachio). She then asked other kids if they wanted ice cream from her store, but she very specifically listed the only flavors available. Instead of first choosing one of these flavors the others always asked for one not on the list, such as lemon or in one case a very rare flavor *zuppa inglise* derived from the English dessert trifle. The girl who made the store was not upset with these orders, but instead enjoyed denying they were not available saying '*Non c'é limone, non c'é zuppa inglise*!' with a great deal of relish. In this example, children go beyond enacting a role play theme to 'ply the frame' (Goffman, 1974) of the play and the whole role play becomes about 'playing with the play.'

Finally, in studies of role play across social class and racial groups in American preschools, Corsaro found interesting differences. Middle class white children often mixed fantasy and reality in role play, while poor African-American children stayed very close to the reality of the real life models, often including challenging aspects of their lives and the lives of their families living in poverty (Corsaro, Molinari, and Rosier, 2002).

It is in these routines and activities of the peer culture that children begin to talk about and form friendships. Shared play is verbally marked with the oft heard phrase 'We're friends, right?' Young children (three to six year olds) often play regularly with a large number of other children in preschools (normally seven or eight children).

However, gaining access to ongoing play is particularly difficult regardless of past shared experiences because play activities are fragile and children tend to protect their interactive space by resisting the entry of other children (Corsaro, 2003, 2005). Resistance of access attempts seems uncooperative or selfish to adults, but it is not that that children are resisting the idea of sharing. In fact, from the children's point of view they want to keep sharing what they are already sharing, and they know from past experience that entry of others often disrupts shared play. Over time in particular preschool groups most children meet the challenge of resistance and develop a complex set of access strategies. These strategies are successful because they are composed of indirect techniques which communicate that the child attempting to gain entry has knowledge of the play theme and knows how to play without being disruptive (Corsaro, 2005).

Children's early friendships in preschools can become close with a good deal of shared understanding and intimacy (Corsaro, 2003; Dunn, 2004). They often become increasingly gender segregated in line with play preferences, but the degree of gender segregation is much less than in early elementary school and can vary across subcultural and cultural groups (Corsaro, 2003).

Autonomy, Control, Conflict, and Differentiation

Earlier I noted that a major theme of peer culture revolves around children's gaining a sense of control over their lives. In fact, we know from numerous studies in the home and in schools that children and youth have a strong desire to achieve autonomy from the rules and authority of adult caretakers and gain control of their lives (Adler and Adler, 1998; Corsaro, 2003, 2005; Dunn, 1988). This issue of autonomy is apparent not only in

children's active challenges of adult control, but also in a variety of play routines in which children confront confusions and fears from the adult world. These routines can be part of the peer culture in particular schools and also related to various festivals or rituals for children that are created by adults and celebrated in homes and communities.

Some researchers maintain that challenging and mocking adult authority may be a universal feature of peer cultures (Corsaro, 2005; Schwartzman, 1978). Such mocking of adults begins very early. In a study in a Finnish preschool when a group of three year olds were asked to show older children, who have just arrived back to the school from an outing, how nicely they can eat their snack, both the younger and older children instead begin calling out each others names and then the names of animals (Strandell, 1997). The teachers are not happy and tell the children to settle down. However, the mischief only escalates. When some children finish eating and run into the hall, a teacher calls them back saying, 'How about saying thank you!' One girl, Pia, stands by the dining room door and shouts, 'Thank you so much ladies!' All the other children now laugh and shout, 'Thanks ladies!' A teacher tries to control the situation by saying, 'That's enough now' in a calm voice, only to have one of the children shout 'Enough!' to more laughter (Strandell, 1997, pp. 459-460). The teachers are put in a difficult situation here because of the children's cleaver us of language. They do what they are told, but in a way that clearly puts them in control of the situation.

Corsaro (1985, 1990, 2003, 2005) has documented children's strategies for getting around adult conventional (as opposed to moral) rules in preschool in the US and Italy. In line with Goffman's (1961) work on adults in total institutions Corsaro refers to the children's strategies as *secondary adjustments* and the children's creation and sharing

of these secondary adjustments as composing the *underlife* of preschools. For example, rules in most preschools limit or prohibit children from bringing personal items from home to school. The rule is conventional or organizational because teachers know that children often fight over such objects and these disputes can result in the items being damaged. But children get around the rule primarily by smuggling small objects to school which they hide in their pockets. Matchbox race cars, tiny dolls, and small action figures are particular favorites. The smugglers almost never played with the toy alone, but show it to another child and then the two or sometimes more played with it surreptitiously or so they thought. In fact, teachers usually saw what was going on, but ignored it as long as children did not fight over the toy.

The children were very careful in their play, returning smuggled objects to their pockets when a teacher passed and sharing a sly smile with their playmates. In fact, after awhile 'getting around the rule' was just as important as playing with the forbidden object. Here we clearly see collective cultural production by the preschoolers. The children did not get the idea from parents, as it is extremely unlikely that a parent would advise, 'So the teacher says no bringing toys, well you can fool her by taking something small like your race car and hiding it in your pocket.' No, the kids come up with the idea themselves and then it can be passed on to other kids.

Corsaro identified many other types of secondary adjustments in preschools related to rules about indoor and outdoor play and especially the much dreaded 'clean up time' that occurs at different points (before snack, lunch, outside time, and nap time) in a normal preschool day. Many kids did not see the logic of clean up time. Corsaro (1985)

overheard one boy say to another, 'Clean up time is dumb, dumb, dumb. We could just leave our trucks here and play with them after snack time!'

The children Corsaro studied came up with many ways of avoiding or delaying their involvement in clean up including relocating as soon as the announcement is made; pretending not to hear the announcement; and using personal-problem delays (having some other pressing business that is more important). The last of these strategies is very inventive and involves things like feigning a personal injury, pretending to be dead as part of fantasy play, among others including one boy's strategy of going around and giving all the other kids and teachers a 'big hug' during clean up (Corsaro, 2003).

Children also address shared fears, concerns, and values in the types of fantasy and role play we discussed earlier. For example children in the pre-Civil War South in the US often engaged in auction role play which helped them deal with the very real fears of being separated from their plantation communities (Alston, 1992; Wiggins, 1985). Corsaro (2005) documented American and Italian children's approach-avoidance play in which a child is spontaneously forced into the role of a monster or wild animal who the other children then approach and avoid by running to a home base. This spontaneous play is related to a number of types of children's games (see Evaldsson, this volume).

Controlling fears and gaining a sense of autonomy can also be seen in children's participation in various rituals in Western society. For example, children are fascinated with the tooth fairy who brings them money for the painful experience of loosing their baby teeth (Clark, 1995). Also figures like Santa Claus in many cultures and *La Befana* in Italy are primarily seen as benevolent, but will not bring toys or candy when children are bad. They also supposedly have magical powers and can see and remember children's

bad behavior and could bring lumps of coal instead of gifts (Clark, 1995; Corsaro, 2005). Clark (2005) in one of many interesting accounts of Halloween in the US shows how this holiday for children and its various aspects from trick-or-treating, to the building of horrifying yard displays of tombs and skeletons, to even adults dressed as ghosts or vampires answering the door both give children a sense of control and instill real fears especially among younger children. Clark found that children love the idea of dressing up and being able to threaten adults with a trick for the reward of candy. On the other hand, many children were especially fearful of haunted houses and other frightening displays. As one child said, "if you're really, really, really scared it's not fun' (Clark, 2005, p. 193).

Surprisingly a good deal of work on children's peer relations and friendships documents the importance of discussion, debate, and conflict (Corsaro, 1994, 2005; Rizzo, 1989). Corsaro found that Italian and African American preschool children often develop friendship ties through debates and teasing. Neither these children nor their teachers were overly sensitive to conflict. On the contrary, disagreements, debates, and teasing were valued in peer relations. In contrast, white middle-class American preschool childen were highly sensitive to conflict and became upset when it occurred, often quickly going to teachers for aid in settling their disputes. On the other hand, the middle-class American children were much more likely to use the denial of friendship ('I won't be your friend' or 'You can't come to my birthday party') to try to control the behavior of their peers (Corsaro, 1994). Corsaro discusses how these patterns are related to social relations and beliefs in the children's families and communities, reminding us again how peer and adult cultures are interrelated. These findings are similar to research on older

preadolescent children (Fine, 1987; Goodwin, 1990, 1998; Poveda and Marcos, 2005; Rizzo 1989; also see Evaldsson, this volume) that documents the role of conflict and peer relations among children of different social class, ethnic, and cultural groups.

As noted earlier the first sign of differentiation in young children's peer cultures is increasing gender separation, with children as young as age three preferring to play with children of the same sex. Differentiation by status in peer cultures is rare among preschool children and develops more in elementary school and reaches a peak in middle and high school (Adler and Adler, 1998; Eder and Nenga, 2003). Gender separation increases toward the end of the preschool period and in the early grades of elementary school (Berentzen, 1984; Davies, 1989; Thorne, 1993) leading Thorne to note that 'it is meaningful to speak of separate girls' and boys' worlds' (1986, p. 167).

However, as Thorne (1993) herself argued later, much of the work has a tendency to exaggerate gender differences and ignore similarities. Boys and girls do play and work together in educational settings, especially on group projects. Also features of composition, setting, culture and ethnicity are important. Goodwin (1990, 2003) found that African American boys and girls often engaged in playful, cross-sex debates and teasing. Corsaro and Molinari (2005, also see Aydt and Corsaro, 2003) found that Italian children who stay together in the same group with the same teachers throughout elementary school display much less gender segregation than white middle class American children. Evaldsson (1993, 2003, this volume) reports similar findings to the for Swedish elementary school children.

These findings reflect new theories regarding gender identity which focus on children's collective practices in their peer cultures (Davies, 1989; Fine, 1987; Thorne,

1993, see Corsaro, 2006 for a review). Following and interpretive and cultural perspective, Thorne (1993) and Goodwin (2003) advocate taking a nongendered, contextual approach. They believe that when researchers enter the field expecting gender differences, they will limit their ability to see similarities among girls and boys. This approach also argues for comparative research in a wide variety of social and cultural contexts. This need for comparative research is important for understanding children's peer cultures more generally. We now turn to a discussion of what we know about children's peer cultures in non-Western cultures.

CHILDREN'S PEER CULTURES IN NON-WESTERN SOCIETIES

We know much less about the nature and complexity of children's peer cultures in non-Western societies for a variety of reasons. First, most of the research focuses on children's psychological development rather than the nature of their childhoods and peer cultures. Second, children in non-Western societies often live challenging lives due to poverty and political instability and often enter the adult world of work at an early age. Research on children in these circumstances is more applied and focuses on documenting the poor conditions of children's lives and developing programs and policies to provide them education and opportunities to have some degree of a childhood. Still some of these studies directly or indirectly document aspects of peer cultures among the children they study and for whom they advocate better lives. Third, the dominance of the English language in the world (especially the Western academic world) means that many studies and reports of children's lives in non-Western cultures are not known beyond a particular society or group of societies which share the particular or a similar language. International conferences and journals have helped to better disseminate some of this

work in English, but this process is still one way. We will know much more about children's cultures and childhood in general when more of us are literate in more languages and less dependent on English as the dominate language of the Western academic world.

Sharing, Participation and Friendships

A rich set of data on children's activities in several non-Western societies was collected as part of the six cultures studies (Whiting and Whiting, 1975). The main aim of this work was to document differences in individual child development across several cultures. With this focus on individual development the idea that children might have their own peer cultures was not considered. The original data were collected through observations of children aged three to ten years old between the years of 1954 and 1956 in Kenya, Mexico, Philippines, Okinawa, India, and the US. Edwards (2000) has recently done a re-analysis of the data which focuses specifically on play. Here we will examine her findings omitting information from the US. Kenya was the country were children played the least as they were involved in work activities from a young age. However, girls who cared for younger siblings and boys who tended animals integrated play into their work. The boys made small plows out of sticks and they imitated agriculture work. Similar types of role play during work occurred in India with children using sticks and branches to fashion play materials. Role play was even more frequent in Mexico where children had more free time from work. Girls made houses and pretended to sew and to make tortillas while boys made roads and vehicles out of mud. In the Philippines children engaged in a wide variety of types of role play and also fantasy play including playing ghost and pretending to be horses. In Okinawa children younger then five were seldom

given chores and they and older children participated in a rich variety of role and fantasy play (again often making needed props using available materials like mud, sand, pieces of tile and bamboo sticks).

We see in these materials that role play appeared to a large degree in all the cultures and it has also been documented in more recent studies in India (Roopnarine, 1994) and the Sudan (Katz, 2004, this volume). Katz's longitudinal ethnography is especially fascinating in its detailed observations of Sudanese children's everyday life in Howa, a village in central eastern Arabic-speaking Sudan.

On a typical day in the village children in mixed age, primarily same gender groups spend time involved in a variety of types of work and play. Boys engaged in 'elaborate enactments in miniature of the behaviors and tasks associated with' *dukan* (store), *hawashaat* (tenancy), and *bildat* (subsistence fields) (Katz, 2004, p. 11). Central to tenancy play was a toy tractor one of the boys made from a variety of discarded objects with the help of an older brother. The boys made a plow for the tractor and cooperatively and painstakingly reproduced all the various elements of agricultural work from plowing the fields, planting and watering the crops, to irrigating and weeding, and finally harvesting the crops and taking them to a pretend storehouse. They also reproduced the process of selling their harvest using artificial currency. Finally, they used their pretend profits to play store in which they bought a range of goods represented by objects like bits of metal and glass and battery tops. (Katz, 2004, p. 12-13). Girls' role play was also elaborate. They made dolls from straw, gave a name to each doll who represented males and females of all ages, and played with the dolls in houses 'they established with dividers made of shoes, mortars, bricks, and pieces of tins' (Katz, 2004, p. 17). The girls

used these props to enact a wide range of domestic activities like cooking, eating, going to the well to fetch water, and visiting.

While Katz focuses on the elaborate nature of the role play and how it relates to processes of reproduction in this Sudan village, it is clear that the children in line with the notion of interpretive reproduction have also produced a rich peer culture. One in which they not only work and play, but also develop shared values and build close peer relations and friendships.

The nature of these friendships are quite different than the age-graded and extra kin friends of children in Western societies. The need for a wider view of friendship that captures the mixed age groups of siblings, kin, and neighbors that are typical of many non-Western societies is evident. Gaskins in her research on Yucatan Mayan children's interactions in Mexico argues for a broader notion of friendship which is more reflective of family and kin networks and also more communal and collectivist. Gaskins argues that friendships 'can be reconceptualized as a culturally specific form of providing children with close daily social interaction with other children rather than a unique, and presumed universal, social construct' (2006, p, 301). The peer cultures within which friendships emerge and are cultivated must also take cultural variation into account (also see Carvalho, 2004).

Autonomy, Control, Conflict, and Differentiation

The issue of autonomy and control from adult rules is less for children in many non-Western societies because even though they have work obligations from a very early age, they also have a great deal of freedom from direct adult supervision (Nsamenang, 1992; Martini, 1994; Schildkrout, 2002). Martini in a study of a group of three to five year olds

on the Marquesas Islands in Polynesia found that these young children 'organized activities, settled disputes, avoided danger, dealt with injuries, distributed goods and negotiated contact with passing others---without adult intervention' (1994, p. 74).

Studies of street children (children who work or both work and live on the streets) in urban areas of countries in Africa, Brazil and Turkey also display a great deal of autonomy from adults (Aptekar and Heinonen, 2003; Ataöv and Haider, 2006; Ennew and Swart-Kruger, 2003; Rizzini and Butler, 2003). Children live and work on the streets for many reasons. Almost all are poor, some are orphans, some are escaping maltreatment in the family or other settings, and others are working to support themselves but also to contribute to the family. However, independence and freedom are important motivations for choosing street life (Rizzini and Butler, 2003). Yet, street children are often threatened by violence from police, other adults, and in some cases other street children. Still street children report they often look out for one another and build strong group solidarity (Ataöv and Haider, 2006; Rizzini and Butler, 2003)

Many children in non-Western societies do spend much of their time under the direct supervision of adults in their families, schools, and the work place. We know little about how children may challenge adult authority and how it is a product of peer cultures in non-Western societies. However, Hadley (2003) found that Taiwanese kindergarten children used complex word play to both resist and accommodate the Confucian values that their teachers introduced to them. By manipulating and playing with adults' names and class names, the children collectively resisted the teachers' rules to act respectively towards adults. As Hadley notes using 'word play to resist the value of being a good student could not be accomplished, however, without a parallel enactment of the very

skills that characterize a good student. Understanding word structure, vocabulary and word placement were "good student" skills that facilitated the delivery of a disrespectful word play' (2003, p. 204).

Finally, regarding conflict, gender and status differentiation in peer cultures there are some patterns in the studies we have reviewed in this section. Gender differentiation begins at an early age and is often related to different types of work assigned to girls and boys. Girls and boys also show different patterns of play preferences even in the same general type of play (for example role play, Katz, 2004). Nonetheless many children do spend more time in age and gender mixed groups in non-Western societies compared to at least most white middle class children in Western societies.

The issue of conflict is also important. None of the studies of non-Western societies we reviewed reported intense personal conflicts among children or that adults were quick to enter into and settle such conflicts. In fact, the studies indicated that children are expected to be able to settle their own conflicts and disputes as part of learning to be members of their culture. For example, Martini in her study of young Marquesan children found that children are required to be compliant when dealing with adults, but peer relations are based on reciprocity. Martini discovered a complex hierarchy in the group with older children in the roles of noisy and quite leaders, younger children in the role of initiate members, and the youngest toddlers as peripheral members of the group. Noisy leaders introduce activities, direct group play, and keep players on track. Quiet leaders invent new play, monitor the bossiness of noisy leaders, and care for the toddlers. Initiate members follow the leaders and support each other. The toddlers are

interested observers. Their incompetence brings out the skills of the older children who gain status by helping and teaching dependent toddlers (Martini, 1994, p. 98).

Overall, Martini's research and other studies we have reviewed in this section remind us of the Western bias that is evident in much research on children's peer cultures. In the mixed-age-and-gender groups of children in many non-Western societies, attempts to control other children are most often prosocial rather than egoistic. That is, the goal is to maintain group cohesiveness rather than to attain individual desires (see Whiting and Edwards, 1988, p. 182). Martini contrasts this preference for prosocial versus egoistic control to peer interaction among white middle-class American children who learn to value goal-directness and individual achievement early in life.

THE FUTURE OF PEER CULTURES

We see in this review that our knowledge of children's peer cultures has benefited greatly by more comparative studies both within and across cultural groups. It has also benefited from increasing cross-disciplinary work from anthropology, education, folklore, geography, history, psychology, and sociology. The work of geographers have brought special insights to the role of space and place to understanding children's peer cultures (Rasmussen, 2004; Valentine, this volume).

As children's lives, especially in Western societies, become more institutionalized and children are increasingly affected by media and new technologies, it is clear that future work on peer cultures must pay careful attention to these trends (Buckingham, this volume; Cook, this volume; Drotner, this volume). Finally, we must be open to new research methods that more directly involve the participation of children in the research process and in their social and political worlds including participatory action research

(Ataöv and Haider, 2006; Christensen, 2004; Christensen and James, 2007; James, 1996; Kjørholt, 2004).

One thing is clear. Our understanding of children's peer cultures in the future depends on our appreciation of the diversity and complexity of their lives in the present.

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