DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 028 464 24 CG 003 719

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Socialization and Games: An Exploratory Study of Race Differences.

Johns Hopkins Univ., Baltimore, Md. Center for the Study of Social Organization of Schools.
Spons Agency-Office of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C. Bureau of Research.
Bureau No-BR-6-1610
Pub Date Dec 68
Grant-OEG-2-7-061610-0207
Note-25p.
EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$1.35
Descriptors-Achievement, *Games, Grade 6, *Racial Differences, *Research, School Orientation, Self Concept, Simulation, *Socialization

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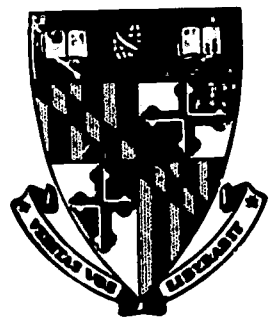

THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

REPORT NO. 31

THE CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF SCHOOLS

SOCIALIZATION AND GAMES:
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF RACE DIFFERENCES

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DECEMBER 1968

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OEG-2-7-06160-0207

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The research reported herein was performed pursuant to an OEG-2-7-06160-0207 grant with the Office of Education, U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare. Contractors undertaking such projects under Government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their professional judgment in the conduct of the project. Points of view or opinions stated do not, therefore, necessarily represent official Office of Education position or policy.

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ABSTRACT

Play and games are widely held to meet a vital role in the socialization process. This study explores the differences in their socialization impact by race. Children in the sixth grade at a rural school were surveyed with regard to their participation in four types of games: individual, sports, board-card and party. Game experience was found to be related to a range of attitudes, including (1) sense of efficacy, (2) self-image, (3) belief in success, (4) orientation toward school. All four game types have possible socializing effects regardless of the race of the player. In addition, each game type has a differential impact by race. For example, sports participation is related to the expression of achievement values for blacks but not for whites. The strength of the findings highlights the need for further research on the role of games as alternates to the family in socialization.

SOCIALIZATION AND GAMES: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF RACE DIFFERENCES

The compensatory educational programs which have developed in recent years are based upon a sequential, interlocking model of socialization. The family, the school, and other community agents are seen as providing various inputs to the socialization process. Should any agent perform its functions inadequately, then the child is at a disadvantage. These early deficiencies or disadvantages too often have an increasingly-deleterious and wider-spreading effect as the child matures. Identification of agents not providing the necessary resources is thus a fundamental step for an effective policy of compensation. As a result there has been considerable research to document, first, the strains and limited resources which cramp the socialization efforts of black or poor parents; secondly, the shocking failure of the urban school, as it presently exists, to provide education even marginally-equal to the middle class in our society.

A third agent in socialization has been relatively ignored, namely, the peer group. Empirically, there is strong evidence that peers are second to the family in importance for socialization. In substance, the family and the peer groups either share or compete for the major role in the development of a capable, competent social being. (Coleman, 1961)

The mechanism through which peer socialization occurs in childhood is generally held to be play and games. According to Mead (1963: 228-33), games fulfill several functions. First, the child learns to develop a sense of the roles of others. He also grasps the fact that there are organized sets of rules applicable to all participants. Eventually the child generalizes the activity of the others and the rules into a unity, the famous "generalized

other."

Along similar lines, Piaget's (1955) observations of marble-playing have led him to infer that games give children practice with rules. He has noted that the rules are first conceived as having an existence of their own. Later, players learn that rules are conventions which can be changed upon agreement with others. In this later stage children develop a more sophisticated view of the social order: it is something that can be manipulated as well as followed.

Games are believed to teach not only about the nature of social order, but also its substance. Moore and Anderson (1962: 234) propose that games teach the folk models of the culture. These are models of the proper and legitimate behavior for various situations. Another set of hypotheses state that play, and in particular, games, provide skills for interacting effectively with people and with various aspects of the social environment. (Boocock and Coleman, 1966; Schelling, 1961).

Games are also held to develop basic personality traits. Thus Roberts and Sutton-Smith (1962) propose on the basis of their cross-cultural research that physical games lead to the development of need-achievement and independence. In a similar manner it has been suggested that games develop creativity, span of attention, emotional disposition and stability, the ability to cooperate, and so forth. (For a comprehensive review of the functions of games and play, see Inbar and Stoll, 1968; Inbar, 1968.)

In short, then, it is held that games are of great importance. Because most games are social in nature they mediate and shape the mutual socialization which is taking place in peer groups. Hence the type, frequency, and social context in which games are played are likely to be important for dif-

ferential socialization outcomes. One question for learning about the adequacy of peers for socialization is, simply, are black and white children playing the same games? And do the games being played have positive or negative effects with regard to socialization outputs?

Method

The research was conducted in a Southern racially-integrated, rural school. We can presume that social life outside of school in the community is racially-segregated. All sixth-graders (N = 108) answered a battery of questions, part of which dealt with the frequency and social conduct of game activities.

In order to measure game experience, the following question was asked with regards to (1) sports, (2) board or card games, (3) individual games and hobbies, and (4) party or group games.[1]

On the average, how often do you take part in (type of game)?

a. once a month

b. between once a month and once a week

c. about once a week

d. about twice a week

e. more than twice a week

Given the small sample size it was necessary to dichotomize the resulting frequency distributions for purposes of analysis. The cutpoints for game activities are as follows: sports, more than twice a week; individual games, twice a week; board games, once a week; party games; once a month.

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[1]Extensive definitions were provided for each game type. E.g., "Party games--these games are played with other people, do not require any great physical skill nor any prepared materials. They include pantomimes, guessing games, and "ice breakers."

Because the data were collected in conjunction with another study, it was necessary to limit the type of "effects" variables. Given that the larger study focused upon student role and classroom climate, it was decided to choose variables related to school, achievement, and self-image. Not only were these variables quite relevant to the theme of the larger study, but other variables of interest to autotelic theorists (e.g., creativity, personality integration, role-taking skill, and so forth) would require more sophisticated measures and time for administration. (These latter variables are included in a large-scale cross-cultural survey the authors are presently conducting.)

Two attitude items dealt with the child's belief in efficacy over the environment (e.g., agreement that hard work is more important than luck for success; agreement that people like himself have a chance to succeed). Another item related to self-image, namely, the child's desire to be different if he could. These items are identical to those used in the Coleman et al (1966 survey which related both sense of efficacy and self-image to academic achievement. If games are one source for nurturing these attitudes, then they would have an important socializing function on this basis alone.

Several measures relate directly to school role and performance. First, the results of a scholastic achievement test (S.C.A.T.) was administered to respondents as part of the research. Secondly, the student was asked whether he agreed with statements such as "Sometimes I just can't learn" or "My teacher thinks of me as a good student."

Three attitude items about the general interaction preferences were included in accord with Mead and Piaget, both of whom suggest that games develop special attitudes toward social situations in general. The respondent stated his preference for cooperative or competitive situations, his perception of

rules as manipulable, and his ability to remain involved in situations without becoming bored.

The data were analyzed by means of cross-tabulation techniques. All findings discussed here are significant at least at the .05 level of significance, using a test of proportions. In cases where there was reason to suspect the reliability or direction of a finding, it was not included for discussion.[2]

As might be expected, the pattern of game play within racial groups are quite dissimilar. Table 1 presents measures of association (gamma) of game playing for each of the four game types. For black children, there is a very strong relationship (.72) between participation in sports and individual games. Also, participation in party games is highly-correlated with frequent playing of both individual and card-board games. Thus, black children who play frequently one type of game are likely to play another type often as well. For white children, participation in one game type is generally independent of playing another. Only one high positive correlation exists, between play of individual games with board or card games (.50). And participation in sports is inversely related with frequent play of party games. Thus white children exhibit a segmental playfulness, in contrast to the more generalized playfulness of the black child.

Results

Each of the game types varies with regard to the structure and context of the

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[2]In analyzing the data respondents were also categorized by sex. The subsample sizes were too small to be confident of the strength of relationships uncovered. Yet, it was possible from race-sex identifications. The race differences discussed here appear to be valid whether the respondent is male or female.

TABLE 1

Correlations (Gammas) for Degree of

Participation Among Game Types

Code:

1 = Sports

2 = Individual Games

3 = Card-Board

4 = Party Games

BLACKS

	1	2	3	4
1.	-	.72	.28	.29
2.		-	.07	.70
3.			-	.56
4.				-

WHITES

	1	2	3	4
1.	-	.28	-.04	-.41
2.		-	.50	.16
3.			-	-.03
4.				-

setting in which the games typically take place. Individual games are by definition solitary activities. Sports are generally highly structured, physically active, large group activities. Board and card games are highly structured, mentally-active, though usually of small group size. Party games such as guessing games or charades, are loosely structured, may have either physical or mental activity, and can have wide variations in group size. It should not be surprising, then, that each type of game has certain possible effects regardless of the race of the participant.

1. General effects of games: As the data in Table 2 show, all four types of games have what could be called positive effects for both racial groups. For both individual games and card or board games, the frequent players are more likely to believe that the teacher perceives them as good students. Those who play more frequently party games are more likely to believe that they have a chance to be successful in life. And those who play sports often are less likely to be bored easily by things. Not surprisingly, sports players are also less likely to prefer cooperative situations, although the differences are not great.

What is remarkable is the strength of these relationships. For example, 47 percent of the white students who play party games frequently perceive a chance for success in life, as against only 26 percent of those who play infrequently. Or, only 17 percent of the black students who play sports infrequently are not bored easily by situations, in contrast to 50 percent of those who play often. The particular reasons why party games induce a sense of efficacy, while sports develop a sense of concentration cannot be answered with data from a limited, unsystematic sample of the type used here.

2. Effects for black students: Table 3 presents correlates of game experience

TABLE 2

General Effects of Game Playing

Sex:	Blacks		Whites	
Game Frequency:	Low	High	Low	High
A. INDIVIDUAL GAMES				
% believe teacher perceives them as good students	31 (19)	54 (24)	29 (24)	45 (22)
B. SPORTS				
% not bored easily	17 (18)	50 (20)	47 (17)	75 (28)
% prefer cooperative situations	65 (17)	55 (22)	39 (18)	26 (27)
C. BOARD-CARD GAMES				
% believe teacher perceives them as good students	31 (16)	55 (29)	29 (21)	44 (25)
D. PARTY GAMES				
% see chance of success	56 (18)	75 (24)	26 (31)	47 (15)

TABLE 3

Effects of Games for Blacks

Play Frequency	Low	High
A. INDIVIDUAL		
% not bored easily	22 (18)	53 (19)
% like to create new rules	41 (17)	67 (21)
% feel can learn	53 (19)	79 (24)
% see chance for success	58 (19)	71 (24)
% interest in school	90 (19)	54 (24)
B. SPORTS		
% believe teacher perceives as a good student	39 (18)	50 (26)
% feel can learn	50 (18)	81 (26)
% chance to succeed	56 (18)	73 (26)
% interest in school	89 (18)	62 (26)
C. BOARD - CARDS		
% would change self	69 (16)	90 (29)
% feel can learn	81 (16)	68 (29)

TABLE 3 (Continued)

Play Frenquency	Low	High
D. PARTY		
% prefer cooperative situations	81 (16)	33 (21)
% believe teacher perceives them as good students	33 (18)	58 (24)
% would change selves	78 (18)	88 (24)
% feel can learn	78 (18)	62 (24)
% luck is more important than hard work for success	61 (18)	71 (24)

that hold only for black respondents. Because individual game participations and sports playing are very highly interrelated, it is not surprising that the same attitudes correlate in each case. Notably, frequent participation in sports or individual games is related to a feeling that one can learn, that one can succeed, yet that school is not interesting. Also, those who play individual games are less likely to be bored easily, and like to create rules. In general, those black children who play sports or individual games exhibit a sense of efficacy and related attitudes conducive to achievement.

Board-card or party game participation may be inducing less positive attitudes. For both of these game types, frequent players compared to infrequent ones, are less satisfied with themselves and less likely to feel they can learn. Frequent party game players in addition are highly competitive, favor luck, and believe that their teacher perceives them favorably. We shall consider possible reasons for the differences in game effects below.

3. Effects for white students: Table 4 presents those attitudes which correlate with game play for whites only. The results are a striking contrast to the trends for black children.

Frequent individual game play does not have the positive impact for whites it has for blacks. Whites who play individual games often are less likely to want to create rules, and less sure of their chance for success in life.

Those who play sports often, compared to less frequently playing children are most interested in school and value luck less. Sports is the only game type which provides consistently positive effects (and then on only these two items.)

Board or card games are related to a low sense of efficacy. Frequent players see their chances for success as less likely and see luck as more important than hard work. They also are not so interested in school as infrequent

TABLE 4

Effects of Games for Whites

Game Frequency	Low	High
A. INDIVIDUAL GAMES		
% like to create rules	83 (24)	62 (21)
% see chance for success	37 (24)	27 (22)
B. SPORTS		
% see luck is more important than hard work for success	22 (18)	11 (28)
% interested in school	50 (18)	86 (28)
C. BOARD-CARDS		
% like to create rules	65 (20)	80 (25)
% see chance for success	38 (21)	28 (25)
% see luck as more important than hard work for success	10 (21)	20 (25)
% interested in school	81 (21)	64 (25)
D. PARTY		
% not bored easily	74 (31)	33 (15)
% like to create rules	80 (30)	60 (15)

players. On the other hand, participation in board-card games is the only game type for whites that is related to a preference for creation of, not mere acceptance of, rules.

Party games, which had many effects on blacks, distinguish on only two items for whites. White students who play party games frequently are much more likely to be bored easily and more often view rules as fixed, not manipulable.

4. Differences by Race: Most clearly, game play has a greater impact on blacks with regard to the variables studied than on whites. Sports are played by black students who hold attitudes conducive to achievement, yet are uninterested in school. White students who play sports are very interested in school. Board-card game participation is related to negativistic attitudes for both races, although more so for whites. Individual game playing is related to a sense of efficacy for blacks, but not for whites. Finally, party games have a less varied impact on white players than on black ones.

What could account for these differences? One answer may be that there is a differential selection process into the same game by race. If this were true, then there should be variation in achievement scores by game participation. One would hypothesize, for example, that blacks who frequently play sports or individual games have higher achievement scores than infrequent players. Also, we should expect that blacks who play party games frequently will have lower achievement score. With regard to white respondents, predictions are less certain, but we might expect that frequent individual game players or board-card players have lower achievement scores.

Table 5 presents degree of game participation by S.C.A.T. scores of respondents within each racial category. There is some support for a selection effect. Notably, participation in party games is inversely related to achieve-

TABLE 5

Scholastic Achievement and Participation in Games

Race:	Percent of respondents who scored above the median S.C.A.T. score: Blacks		Whites	
Game Frequency:	Low	High	Low	High
Individual	16 (19)	21 (24)	67 (24)	75 (22)
Sports	11 (18)	23* (26)	67 (18)	75 (28)
Board-Card	19 (16)	17 (29)	71 (21)	72 (25)
Party	28 (18)	13* (24)	81 (31)	53* (15)

*Differences (within racial group) significant at .05 level with the test of proportions.

ment scores for both racial groups. The moot question then, unanswerable here, is whether party game participation is a summary measure for a type of peer group, or whether such games develop or reinforce the attitudes of those who participate in them.

Selection may explain part of the relationship for achievement values among black sports participants, but not white ones. Black students who play sports are more likely to have high achievement scores, while there is not much difference in achievement for white sports' players versus non-players.

There are yet other reasons for the differences in game "effects" and race membership. It could be that the actual games played within each game type vary in content or structure by race. Perhaps whites are playing more adult-supervised sports than blacks. Also, in the board-card game category, there is evidence from some of our other exploratory research that blacks are playing predominately cards, while whites are playing board games. (We plan to refine this category in future investigations.)

Another possibility for differential effects by game is that the social context varies by race. Some data collected on this sample is available to address this explanation. Respondents were asked to name with whom they they typically played each game type. The answers were categorized into: adults, siblings, or peers. Table 6 shows that there is very little difference in the social context of party games or sports by race. The distributions of game partners are quite similar. In regard to card or board games, blacks are more likely to play with peers than whites. Also, a large minority of whites play these games with adults, though few blacks do so. Yet for both races, siblings are the modal partner. Thus social context, as defined in the manner here, does not appear to explain the differential impact of games by race.

TABLE 6

Social Context of Games Within Racial Groups

	Adults	Siblings	Peers	(N)
Blacks				
Sports	11	19	70	(43)
Card-Board	8	42	50	(48)
Party	9	30	61	(47)
Whites				
Sports	5	34	61	(45)
Card-Board	28	48	23	(46)
Party	8	29	63	(48)

Finally, it is also possible that games have a greater impact on blacks because more of their peer activities are in game settings. In other words, whites in this sample may have more adult-supervised or quasi-organized activities (clubs, recreational groups). In support of this argument, Table 7 has data on participation rates for each game by race. Except for sports, blacks are likely to have more frequent participation in games than whites. Clearly what is needed is a survey of youngsters' activities outside of formal and home settings.

Whatever the answer, our data can only indicate that games may be an important source of differential socialization by racial membership. Whether games themselves structure and shape social developments, or whether they are the medium through which peers group together and communicate with each other is a problem for further inquiry. Such investigation should consider such factors as the peer relationships of respondents, social characteristics of game partners, the frequency of peer activities--game and non-game.

Implications

This study attempted to explore the potential value of the autotelic hypothesis. In light of the gross category scheme used and of the crude analysis necessitated by the small sample size, one might have expected small differences, if any. Thus the results are all the more impressive.

Although peers have been held to be second to the family in socialization, research on peer groups seldom considers the daily variety of activities through which socialization takes place. Rather, there has been what one could call a "carbon copy" theory of peer influence: peer attitudes and values impress upon the individual member. One implication of our data is that a particular peer

TABLE 7

Game Participation by Race

	Percent who play frequently:		
	Black	White	Epsilon
Individual	58 (43)	48 (46)	.10
Sports	59 (44)	60 (44)	-.01
Board-Card	64 (45)	54 (46)	.10
Party	57 (42)	32 (46)	.25

group activity, (e.g., sports) may contribute socialization outcomes independent of the peer group values. In other words, to the extent that game effects are not the spurious result of selection factors, the game forces may reinforce or accelerate peer preferences. (As a hypothetical case, competitiveness may be engendered among individual members of a highly cooperative friendship group, if that group frequently plays sports.)

In addition, the findings suggest that some socialization outcomes usually attributed to family background may also be developed in game settings. Notable here is the group of black students who participated frequently in sports and individual games, who exhibited achievement values possibly as a result of game participation. A major theoretical problem to be faced is: in regard to what socialization outcomes do games provide alternatives to the family?

The answer to this question may also help us to understand why some children from disadvantaged settings, of minority group membership, or poor family background manage to be successful. To put the issue in a specific context, prediction of delinquency usually errs in the direction of overprediction (for example, Reiss, 1951). The problem for criminologists has been not, why delinquents, but rather, why so few. The structure and context of extra-familial or school activities, such as games, have been overlooked.

Games can also militate against the values of family and peers. White players in our sample tended to display non-preferred attitudes. The intrinsic appeal in games may be drawing such respondents away from activities with other socialization agents. Or, the games themselves could be inducing attitudes contrary to the achievement orientation of middle-class white society.

Thus games may have a differential effect partly due to the cultural orientation of players. For blacks, games are one of a limited set of leisure time

activities. If games are removed from the behavior repertoire of youth and there is little left.[3] For white students, games may be viewed negatively, as an outgrowth of the Puritan ethos which values work over pleasure-seeking. This interpretation is conjectural with regard to our data, though worth further investigation.

In conclusion, the differences in socialization of black and white youths in our society go beyond peer and family group structure. The activities through which peers and family influence one another, such as game settings, may reinforce, accelerate, or reverse the intentions of the socializing agents. Games may provide an important source of alternate socialization for some children, and they may confound the effects of traditional agents for other youth. Thus games may have a broader relevance for socialization than the already lengthy statement of theories imply.

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[3]Data from another study of inner-city black youth suggest that games are a major context in which the entire family, including extended kin, participate. It is questionable that middle-class white families participate as units in games very frequently.

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