Parent-Child Play across Cultures
Advancing Play Research

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Jaipaul L. Roopnarine

Kimberly L. Davidson

In this article, the authors argue for a greater understanding of children's play across cultures through better integration of scientific thinking about the developed and developing societies, through consideration of socialization beliefs and goals, and, finally, through the use of more complex models in research investigations. They draw on theoretical propositions in anthropology and psychology to describe and interpret the meaning of parent-child play activities in the context of everyday socialization practices in societies in various stages of economic development. **Key words:** cross-cultural studies; parent-child play; play's effect on child development

Theoretical Considerations and Cultural Perspectives

Two theoretical perspectives on psychocultural processes in childhood socialization that have been useful in studying and interpreting play phenomena in diverse cultural settings have their roots in both psychology and anthropology. The early twentieth-century Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky and the American anthropologists John and Beatrice Whiting were forerunners in stressing the primary importance of the social context and cultural processes (e.g., parent-child practices, belief systems) in interpreting the meaning of children's social activities and play behaviors (Vygotsky 1978; Whiting and Edwards 1988; Whiting and Whiting 1975).

Vygotsky's cultural-historical approach emphasizes the use of mental tools or tools of the mind (e.g., using lists to remember everyday tasks) in the development of higher-level mental functions (e.g., focused attention and use of memory strategies that are learned; Vygotsky 1997). These cultural tools assist children in the mastery of skills at the interpsychological or social level between people and then at the intrapsychological or individual level. For Vygotsky, play

was central to the development of mental functions during the preschool years (Vygotsky 1967).

Like Vygotsky, the Whitings highlighted the underlying role of social context in the processes of learning and development. By coding the social interactions of young children through detailed field observations in Khalapur, India; Okinawa, Japan; Nyansongo, Kenya; Tarong, Philippines; New England, United States; and Juxtlahuaca, Mexico, the Whitings were able to demonstrate the wide variations in interaction patterns of children and their parents as well as contextual factors that influence them within and across these cultural settings.

Their model emphasized the environment and history, maintenance systems (e.g., subsistence patterns, modes of production, etc.), learning environment of the child (e.g., settings, care givers), behavioral tendencies and beliefs of the adult, and projective-expressive systems (e.g., religion and ideology) in shaping parental involvement with children and childhood behaviors (Whiting and Whiting 1975).

Super and Harkness (1997, 2002) expanded on the original theoretical propositions of the Whitings, specifically those of the physical setting and learning environment of the child. Super and Harkness focused on parental psychology or ethno-theories, customs and practices, and setting as key features of the developmental niche within which children are socialized. Their propositions have been used to discern cultural-developmental patterns in children's play behaviors in developed and developing economies (see Bock 2002; Rogoff et al. 1993; Roopnarine and Jin 2012).

A Need for Indigenous Views and Universal Integration of Knowledge on Play

The field of play research needs to further tease out what culture brings to the parent-child equation. As cross-cultural psychologists continue to espouse the need for indigenous perspectives in studying and interpreting behavioral phenomena (Jahoda 1993), there are increasing attempts to construct conceptual frameworks for analyzing behavioral processes that originate from within the culture (see Kakar 1992 on developmental processes in East Indians) and to examine the applicability of popular frameworks developed by researchers in North America and Europe (e.g., individualism-collectivism, parenting typologies; see Omi 2011; Roopnarine et al. 2013) for assessing the development of behaviors

(e.g., autonomy, obedience) in cultural settings in the developing world.

For example, in cataloging the socialization patterns of Turkish mothers, Kağitcibaşi (2007) discovered that urban families incorporated the need for autonomy (independence) and strong interpersonal relationships (interdependence) into child rearing, an adaptive process for meeting the contemporary needs of children that is a departure from the more universal, dichotomous application of individualism and collectivism (Oyserman, Coon, and Kemmelmeier 2002).

Likewise, Roopnarine, Krishnakumar, Narine, and Logie (2014) examined the validity of using dimensions of warmth and behavioral control to describe early socialization in English-speaking Caribbean families. A primary goal of these investigations is to underscore the culture-specific beliefs and the seminal properties of parent-child activities endemic to a particular community or diverse communities within a society. Parallel strides to shape (or reshape) the more dominant discourses on play are modest at best and remain on the fringes of theory development.

Parent-Child Play

The focus on mother-child and father-child play does not discount the importance of multiple kinship and nonkinship individuals who are involved in the socialization of children in other societies, nor should it signal that we endorse a mother-father model of socialization or that the heterosexual couple model is the ideal for child rearing (see Goldberg, Kashy, and Smith 2012 for data on gender-typed play in gay, lesbian, and heterosexual families). Rather, we conveniently focus on mothers and fathers because they constitute the early nucleus of the economic and social lives of young children in most cultural communities and for whom data are most available.

At the same time, we acknowledge that marriage and mating systems vary widely around the world and that alloparenting is common in many cultural communities where siblings, aunts, grandparents, and other biological and nonbiological care givers may engage in more play and play-like activities than do fathers (see Flinn 1992 for an account of early care-giver interactions in Northern Trinidad; see Marlowe 2005 for care interactions among the Hadza of Tanzania). The investment of these other care givers may increase or decrease in a proportionate manner with those of mothers and fathers during the early-childhood

years depending on the age of the child and the nature of relationships within families (see Sharma 2003).

Definitions and norms of play established in Western industrialized economies have not always been useful or adequate for interpreting the parent-child play activities of families in different communities around the world. As several scholars have suggested (e.g., Göncü and Gaskins 2011), play is culturally situated, and mothers and fathers support play interactions in multiple ways across cultures and time.

For instance, play-like activities may include humor, shaming, status leveling, or even work-related activities, as in some hunting and gathering societies (Gray 2009). Furthermore, the meaning attached to involvement in these play-like activities is driven by cultural beliefs and practices developed and shaped within the ethos of parental socialization goals and expectations for children (Göncü and Gaskins 2011; Greenfield et al. 2003; Roopnarine 2011).

Parental Levels of Investment

In developed societies, opportunities for playful interactions with parents are valorized by psychologists, pediatricians, and early-childhood educators as essential for the development of attachment bonds (Paquette 2004), the maintenance of physical health (American Academy of Pediatrics 2006), timely development of language (Tamis-LeMonda et al. 2004), and appropriate social adjustment in children (Kelley et al. 1998). Furthermore, when playful interactions occur within the context of a democratic parenting style in which parents offer a good deal of nurturance and support to young children, they encourage the development of agency (e.g., self-reliance, independence) and communion (prosocial skills such as helping, sharing, etc.; Baumrind 1996).

By contrast, the lack of opportunities for playful interactions and sensitively attuned, stimulating activities in low social capital neighborhoods marred by crime and violence, poverty, and citizen insecurity (see, for example, the UNDP Caribbean Human Development Report 2012) can undermine developmental outcomes in children (Krishnakumar et al. 2013).

So what do levels of parental investment in play look like across cultures? Are there some universal patterns?

Despite claims about the lack of parent-child play in most cultural settings and assertions that parent-child play is a more recent phenomenon (e.g., Lancy

2007), field observations and estimates obtained through interviews and self-reports indicate that mothers and fathers invest considerable time being around children, taking children outdoors, and engaging in play activities with them.

In an examination of socio-emotional and cognitive care giving among one hundred twenty-seven thousand families in twenty-eight developing countries, Bornstein and Putnick (2012) found that, across all countries, taking children outdoors and playing were the most predominant activities. Across the twenty-eight countries, 60 percent of mothers reported playing with their young children (under five years of age); 64 percent reported taking them outdoors; 25 percent reported singing; 35 percent told stories; 25 percent spent time reading; and 47 percent spent time in academic activities such as counting, naming, and drawing with their children in the previous three days.

These estimates are below those obtained for children in the United States, where 95 percent are read to and 83 percent play outdoors (DYG 2000) and those in an Australian sample, where 75 percent of fathers read stories and played with four- to five-year-olds mostly outdoors three or more days a week (Baxter and Smart 2010).

Small-scale, cross-cultural comparisons showed that mothers in the United States acted as playmates to children 47 percent of the time compared to 7 percent of the time in Guatemala and 24 percent of the time in India (Rogoff et al. 1993). Other comparisons of children's play across cultural communities indicated that children played with one adult 17 percent and 16 percent of the time in two communities in the United States (Massachusetts and Utah), 4 percent of the time among the Efé of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and 3 percent of the time among the Mayans of Guatemala (Morelli, Rogoff, and Angelillo 2003).

Among groups in central Africa, Aka fathers' relative time investment in play with infants was 23 percent compared with emotional care giving (e.g., displaying affection), 27 percent; soothing, 18 percent; and physical care (cleaning), 15 percent. Mothers' relative time investment in play was 13 percent compared with emotional care giving (e.g., displaying affection), 4 percent; soothing, 12 percent; and physical care (cleaning), 5 percent (Hewlett, 1987). In the sympatric communities of Efé foragers and Lese farmers, Efé fathers were within proximity of infants 40 percent of the time observed, and Lese fathers 15 percent of the time. However, Lese fathers spent more time in play (18 percent) than Efé fathers (7 percent; Fouts 2013).

A series of studies have asked parents in different cultures to provide estimates of the overall time they engaged in care giving and play activities with young children. Mothers in Jamaica spent significantly more time in holding or

playing with infants than fathers (Roopnarine et al. 1995), and this was also the case for families with infants in rural Malaysia, where mothers spent significantly more time in play than fathers—possibly a result of the greater involvement of mothers in the basic care and nurturance of children during the infancy and preschool years (Hossain et al. 2005).

Similarly, mothers in Estonia, Finland, Russia, Brazil, United States (African Americans), and a setting in South Korea engaged in more play with young children than did fathers (Tudge 2008). By comparison, there were no mother-father differences in overall levels of play in Kadazan families in Malaysia (Hossain et al. 2008)—a pattern noted for families with older children in southern Brazil (Benetti and Roopnarine 2006) and the United States (Yeung et al. 2001).

In the face of patriarchal traditions and filial piety in a number of these cultural settings, there is little evidence of the differential treatment of boys and girls during play interactions. As has been stated elsewhere, the differential treatment of boys and girls in more traditional societies may become more visible as children move into early and middle childhood (Jankowiak, Joiner, and Khatib 2011; Roopnarine 2011).

Parental Concerns about Levels of Children's Involvement

The ever-changing context of childhood socialization across the world has raised concerns about opportunities for children to engage in play activities (Singer et al. 2009) and about the negative association between pretend play and watching television (Tudge 2008). It has been suggested that decreases in physical activity through play are linked to childhood obesity (Burdette and Whittaker 2005), and reduced recess play has negative implications for children's academic activities and performance (Pellegrini and Bohn 2005). Equally concerning is the time children spend playing indoors with technological instruments and the level of screen exposure from these instruments.

Parental reports seem to confirm a trend toward decreased outdoor play and increased sedentary indoor activities across cultures. In a cross-national comparison of the activities of young children in developed and developing economies, Tudge (2008) estimated that children spent between 18 and 30 percent of their day in play and 10 to 14 percent watching television. In another cross-national study of twenty-four hundred children (one to twelve years old)

in sixteen countries across five continents, 72 percent of mothers reported that watching television was a common activity among children compared with playing outside (58 percent). Only 27 percent of mothers reported that children engaged in imaginative play (Singer et al. 2009).

The difference in television viewing and outdoor play was more pronounced in developing economies (78 percent versus 49 percent) compared with newly industrialized countries (76 percent versus 60 percent) and technologically developed countries (60 percent versus 63 percent). Regardless of economic status, 80 percent of mothers in Vietnam, India, Indonesia, Thailand, Brazil, and Argentina reported that children watched television often. More than 50 percent of the children in all countries played with toys, and approximately half of the children painted, drew, and played music. As in prior work (see Maccoby 1988), parental estimates indicated that boys (63 percent) were more likely to play outdoors in playgrounds than girls (53 percent), and children were more likely to play outdoors in households with greater density than those with one to two children (Singer et al. 2009).

Although these findings suggest that the activity children in many developing societies most preferred was watching television, 85 percent of mothers reported that children were in school and were involved in schoolwork. This notwithstanding, mothers thought that of all the activities in which their children were involved, they enjoyed attending school least. Across many countries, mothers thought their children enjoyed playing outdoors most (54 percent of children) and that their children enjoyed playing with toys (42 percent). Younger children played with toys more than older ones (57 percent versus 27 percent).

Not surprisingly, then, 47 percent of mothers across many societies worried often about the lack of opportunities for outdoor play, and 87 percent expressed a desire for more time to play with their children (Singer et al. 2009). No doubt the changing roles of women, economic activities, work patterns, and the demands of school place constraints on parental involvement in play with children.

Endorsement of Play as Contributing to Childhood Development

Previous reviews of parent-child play (e.g., Roopnarine 2011) have articulated the importance of parental beliefs in the structuring of cognitive and social activities for young children and in possibly moderating and mediating the

association between parent-child investment and the quality of play with children and their cognitive and social development (Roopnarine and Jin 2012). Scholars have shown that parental beliefs about developmental phenomena represent the psychocultural schemas (e.g., of early academic training or the use of educational toys) often drive child-rearing strategies (Morelli, Rogoff, and Angelillo 2003; Sigel and McGillicuddy-De Lisi 2002).

These schemas have been shown to vary by ethnic and cultural groups regarding the care and education of young children (on obedience or hard work, see Chao 1994; Jung, forthcoming). The cultural schemas may be revised as families come into contact with other methods of child rearing or child training that are discrepant with or in opposition to their own internal working models or belief systems about parental input that might promote social and cognitive development (Cote and Bornstein 2005).

To illustrate, traditional beliefs about manhood and fatherhood (e.g., Manu's edicts in Indian culture; *adat* in Malaysia) continue to influence the investment of fathers in cognitive and socio-emotional care giving in cultural communities considered patriarchal. To be sure, recent data suggest that traditional conceptions of men's roles are slowly changing in specific segments of these societies where there is greater recognition of the contributions of fathers to the welfare and well-being of children and where women have expectations of men in the fathering role beyond being providers (Anderson 2007; Makusha et al. 2013; Roopnarine and Hossain 2013; Shwalb et al. 2004).

In a previous work, Roopnarine (2011) argued that the wide-ranging beliefs about the benefits of play fall along a continuum. At one end are parents (e.g., European Americans) who believe in the scholastic benefits of play. In the middle are parents, African Americans and Latina mothers, for example (Fogle and Mendez 2006; Holloway et al. 1995), who acknowledge that play may have particular benefits but prefer academic activities for children. At the other end are parents, like East Indian and Yucatec Mayans (Gaskins and Miller 2009), who view play as something children do naturally.

In the last group, the cognitive and social benefits of play are seemingly elusive or are viewed as perfunctory to childhood development, whereas for those in the middle group, there is an inherent paradox that may be tied to what David Lancy reasoned to be a "window to jump-start academic preparedness" (2007, 279). Cognizant of the efforts to promote play as important for school readiness and social adjustment, these parents view play as enjoyable but none the less would place their bets on academic activities or, at the very least, a mix

of academic and play activities for their children (see Fogle and Mendez 2006; Parmar, Harkness, and Super 2004).

For middle-class families in the United States, the professed benefits of early cognitive and social stimulation through play make sense. Acquiring skills through play is embraced as a ladder to obtaining the behavioral and intellectual acumen necessary for high levels of success in formal schooling. This may easily confuse and frustrate parents in cultural communities that have not been a part of this discourse or have relied on traditional modes of schooling (e.g., rote memorization, extensive drill-and-practice) to "educate" young children. It may also account for the consternation among middle-class people when others do not share their preoccupation about the benefits of play.

There is some evidence that parental endorsement of the benefits of play for childhood development may extend beyond groups in North America and Europe. Vieira and colleagues (2010) found that mothers' ideas about development in five regions of Brazil included proper presentation as the most important component of care giving, followed by stimulation, responsiveness, and bonding.

Interestingly, stimulation involved play and exposure to objects (e.g., attracting baby's attention to objects, encouraging one's child to play with others of different social classes, or having one's child play with toys for boys and girls regardless of his or her sex). It was discovered that older and better educated parents were more likely to endorse stimulating play. Parental age and education were positively related with endorsement of stimulation.

Similar findings were obtained in a study of Turkish fathers among whom there was high encouragement of play activities among children and high endorsement for play as a means for learning (Ivrendi and Isikoglu 2010). Fathers in low-income groups were less likely to view play as beneficial than fathers in middle- and high-income groups; and fathers in two-parent families encouraged the initiation of play in children more than fathers in extended households, which may be attributed to opportunities for interactions with diverse individuals who assist in raising children. Among individuals in the Lana'ian community, which engages in multiple care giving, parents and other adult care givers strongly endorsed the social benefits of play (Holmes 2011).

Data from the sixteen-nation study carried out by Singer and colleagues (2009) also provide some indication that mothers in societies with different levels of economic development recognize different aspects of the benefits of playing outdoors. Mothers (93 percent) believed that play kept children healthy and fit, and 61 percent opined that happy children are not subjected to scheduled

routines. Yet mothers in the developing societies of Asia and Africa (e.g., Vietnam and Morocco) were more reluctant to believe that dirt and germs, presumably acquired through play, were good for children's health.

As in the United States, perhaps better educated, urban families more fully contemplate the benefits of play for childhood development than those with less material resources and lower educational attainment. Nevertheless, parent-child play as a medium for upward educational mobility may be gaining appeal and traction in newly developed and developing economies.

Stylistic Differences in Parent-Child Play

Detailed home and laboratory observations of families have been instrumental in delineating the unique interaction styles of mothers and fathers with young children (see Lamb 2013; Lamb and Lewis 2010 for a review of these early studies). Designed to determine the development of attachment relationships of infants to parents in European American families, these groundbreaking in-home and laboratory observations indicated that mothers' play activities were more sedentary (e.g., putting a puzzle together, reading to a child) and that fathers' play activities were more active, involving minor and major physical play. Other observations of European-heritage families would confirm these patterns of play by mothers and fathers, which led researchers to suggest these stylistic differences may serve different functions in the development of parent-child attachment (see Paquette 2004).

Differences in frequencies of active, rough play between mothers and children and fathers and children have narrowed quite a bit over the years (Laflamme, Pomerleau, and Malcuit 2002). Observations and the reports of parents from diverse cultural communities seem to suggest that rough play itself occurs at relatively low frequencies when compared to rates observed among families of European heritage in the United States. For example, among Aka and Baka foragers, mothers and fathers rarely engaged in rough play with children (Hewlett 1987; Hirasawa 2005), and low rates were observed in other cultural communities in India, Thailand, and Taiwan (Roopnarine et al. 1990; Sun and Roopnarine 1996; Tulananda and Roopnarine 2001).

This may suggest two things: rough activities are not a valued aspect of play in several cultures because they run counter to issues of relatedness and separateness, and the convergence of participation in rough play between moth-

ers and fathers in some groups in North America could be attributed to more egalitarian child-rearing practices.

Differences in levels of mother-child and father-child play across cultures are inconsistent. For example, in observations of lower- to middle-income families in New Delhi, India, mothers and fathers did not differ in their engagement in object-mediated play with infants (Roopnarine et al. 1990), but mothers did engage in more object play with infants than fathers did in Taiwanese families (Sun and Roopnarine 1996). In both societies, levels of engagement during the game peek-a-boo were noticeably low, with mothers in India showing a greater tendency to participate in it than fathers.

Among Thai preschool-aged children, there were no significant differences in mother-child and father-child constructive play. In all of these Asian societies, parent-child activities were low compared with other modes of stimulation—hugging and kissing, holding, touching, tickling, teasing, laughing, and smiling (Rogoff et al. 1993; Roopnarine et al. 1994), suggesting an interface with socialization goals that groom children for strong in-group relationships (see Holmes 2011; Keller et al. 2010).

Comparisons of relative frequencies of mother-child and father-child fantasy play are sparse. A few studies have found that mother-child pairs in the United States engaged in more exploratory play than Japanese and Argentine mother-child pairs, and Argentine and Japanese mother-child pairs engaged in more symbolic play than mothers and children in the United States (Bornstein et al. 1999).

Comparisons of play in European Americans, Japanese, Japanese immigrants in the United States, Argentinians, and South American immigrants in the United States showed that Argentine mothers demonstrated more symbolic play to children than South American immigrants in the United States and that Japanese mothers solicited more symbolic play from children than Japanese immigrant mothers in the United States. It appears that the mother-child play of Japanese and South American immigrants was closer to that of their European American counterparts, possibly due to acculturation.

In yet another comparative study of mother-child play, there were no country differences in overall levels of symbolic play between French and European American mothers, but French mothers were less likely to solicit symbolic play from children than European American mothers (Suizzo and Bornstein 2006). Studies have found that in European American families, mothers initiated more fantasy and joint play with preschoolers in a laboratory setting than did fathers (Roopnarine and Mounts 1985). A different laboratory study (Farver and Wim-

barti 1995) noted that fantasy play occurred more frequently when the father and child played together than when the child was playing alone, underscoring the facilitative role of the father in these situations.

Two studies that have examined parent-child fantasy play outside the developed world explored differences in mother-child and sibling play and mother-child and father-child play. In the first study (Farver and Wimbarti 1995), Javanese mothers and siblings engaged in almost identical numbers of play episodes, siblings made more suggestions for fantasy play than mothers, sibling play contained more danger in the environment themes, and mother-child play contained more family themes.

In the second study, Thai fathers and mothers were observed for two hours in and around the home environment on different measures of play interactions. Not only were there low frequencies of fantasy play between parents in general, but there were remarkable similarities in the play patterns of mothers and fathers with children and, in some instances, in their care-giving behaviors as well.

Anthropologists have described Thai society as a "dynamically functional interactive system" in which roles appear more fluid (Sensenig 1975). At the time of the observations, Chaing Mai Provence represented a combination of "old" and contemporary Thailand caught up in swift economic development that is characteristic of other countries in the region. Perhaps socioeconomic changes and increased expectations connected to parental responsibilities may have led to more egalitarian social participation with children among these parents.

As we stated, over the last decade child-development researchers have shifted their focus from observing stylistic differences in play modes between mothers and children and fathers and children to examining the nature and quality of interactions during play sessions as they relate to cultural socialization patterns. On this count, Tamis-LeMonda and colleagues (2004) observed mother-child and father-child modes of social engagement (e.g., cognitive stimulation, intrusiveness, positive regard, and detachment) during in-home, semistructured free play and their associations with cognitive development in children in a racially diverse U.S. sample selected from the Early Head Start Project.

Their findings suggested that during the play situation, there were few differences between mothers and fathers in modes of social engagement when children were twenty-four and thirty-six months old. Mothers' and fathers' scores on sensitivity, positive regard for the child, cognitive stimulation, detachment, intrusiveness, and negative regard for the child were significantly related at both assessment points. Fathers' positive regard, sensitivity, and cognitive stimulation

at twenty-four months were predictive of maternal cognitive stimulation, sensitivity, and intrusiveness at thirty-six months, indicating that paternal behaviors influenced how mothers interacted with children over time.

Another advance in looking at play activities is the examination of parenting practices in the cultural space of individual societies. Typically, individualistic cultures emphasize independence, individual freedoms, self-determination, uniqueness, and self-control, and collectivistic cultures stress interpersonal harmony, group loyalty, and interdependence (Oyserman, Coon, and Kemmelmeir 2002). Recently, researchers have modified this dichotomy to accommodate the changes occurring in child rearing in cultural communities in developing economies.

The concept of the autonomous-relational self has been introduced earlier and denotes the socialization practices of educated, urban parents in some cultural communities who encourage the development of both independence (agency) and family interpersonal harmony and loyalty (relatedness and separateness; Kağitcibaşi 2007). To demonstrate, in a comparative analysis, Keller and colleagues (2010) assessed family allocentrism (e.g., family cohesion), socialization goals (autonomous, relational), and mother-infant play in New Delhi, India, and Berlin, Germany. In keeping with local cultural beliefs and practices, Indian mothers scored higher on allocentrism (e.g., family cohesion, closeness) than German mothers, and Indian mothers expressed more relational socialization goals (e.g., close social ties), whereas German mothers expressed more autonomous goals (e.g., independence striving).

Moreover, Indian mothers engaged in less distal parenting (e.g., more touching, holding) than German mothers, but the two groups did not differ on proximal parenting (e.g., face-to-face contact, play with objects). Indian mothers also involved their infants in more didactic play (mother's intentions for play involvement may be based on relational principles that maintain some hierarchy), while German mothers involved their infants in more autonomous play (child's initiative for play, respect for autonomy-supportive approach to play).

Summary

What we do know is this: mothers and fathers stay near their children and perhaps engage in outdoor and other play and play-like activities in some of the cultural communities in the developing world, but their level of investment in play appears low and less coordinated and systematic than in the developed world. Thus, it

would be foolhardy to speak about universal patterns of parent-child play given the current state of our knowledge in this area of cultural developmental science.

Unlike other areas of parent-child relationships (e.g., parenting styles), in which parental warmth appears to be a cultural invariant or universal and different forms of control (psychological, physical, and behavioral) are expressed to varying degrees by mothers and fathers across cultures (see Khaleque and Rohner 2012; Putnick et al. 2012), levels and qualities of mother-child and father-child play activities remain sketchy in many of the cultures in the developing world. This runs counter to the emphasis placed on early parent-child relationships and scholastic activities for childhood growth and development in the developed nations of the world, where play stimulation by adults is highly valued as a staple of contemporary child rearing (see Lancy 2007).

Links between Parent-Child Play and Childhood Development: Opportunities for Future Research

An obvious need in the area of parent-child play research is to shift emphasis from describing parent-child play to explaining its significance for childhood development. Here again, other areas of parent-child relationships receive far greater empirical attention in the child-development literature than parent-child play per se (see Cheng and Johnson 2010). The reasons for this are not clear, given that many early parent-child activities are embedded in or co-occur during playful interactions. Whether parent-child play helps define cultural pathways to childhood development is, as of now, largely unspecified.

With some exceptions, studies on developmental outcomes are mostly correlational in nature. Because Smith (2010) provides a platform for understanding these correlational findings, we describe the links between quality of parent-child play and socialization practices and childhood outcomes in a handful of studies that have used more sophisticated analytic techniques.

The cross-national study mentioned previously clearly demonstrated that degrees of allocentrism influenced maternal play styles with infants in New Delhi, India, and Berlin, Germany (Keller et al. 2010). The preference for didactic play by Indian mothers and autonomous play for German mothers reflects the socialization practices in each culture: the strong emphasis on teaching children through behavioral control (seen as care) in Indian society and the need for independence training, which begins in infancy in German society.

Within these culturally specific practices, the bidirectional influence of parent-child interactions has been assessed in different ethnic groups in the developed societies. Maternal and paternal quality and sensitivity (Landry et al. 2012; Lugo-Gil and Tamis-LeMonda 2008), instructional styles (Gauvain and Perez 2008), and mutually responsive orientation (Kochanska et al. 2008) are associated with cognitive and social skills in children, and childhood competence, in turn, influences parenting quality (see Meunier, Raskam, and Browne 2011; Zhang 2013).

Findings on quality of play interactions substantiate some of these associations. For example, in data gathered in a semistructured free-play situation, fathers' education and supportive parenting that included cognitive stimulation contributed uniquely to children's MDI (mental development index) scores in families in the United States (Tamis-LeMonda et al. 2004), and Japanese fathers' use of structure and limit setting, respect for the child's autonomy, and sensitivity during play influenced preschoolers' emotional regulation during conflicts with peers (Kato and Kondo 2007). Associations have also been found between father-child symbolic play and children's social skills in Thai families (Tulunanda and Roopnarine 2001).

A Way Forward: Moderators and Mediators of Parent-Child Play

Most studies on the association between play and development have been conceptualized and analyzed as simple linear relationships. However, developmental processes are influenced by other variables, and play and development is no exception. In closing, we discuss potential variables that may moderate and mediate the relationship between parent-child play and childhood development.

The Moderators of Play's Influence: Advancing the Study of Play

In the area of child development, researchers have explored the moderating role of numerous variables on the association between parent-child interactions and childhood behaviors. For instance, studies have determined the moderating role of parental warmth on the association between harsh parental treatment and childhood behaviors in preschool settings (Roopnarine et al. 2013) and the moderating role of the endorsement of physical punishment on the association between severity of physical punishment and childhood adjustment (Lansford et al. 2005). These investigations are instructive because they suggest that the emo-

tional qualities of parenting may temper the influence of parent-child activities on childhood development or, for that matter, between children's play activities and childhood development.

Roopnarine and Jin (2012) conducted a study on the moderating role of parental beliefs in the associations between the time children spent playing at home and their cognitive skills in Caribbean immigrant two-parent families with preschoolers in the New York City area. Maternal, but not parental, beliefs in the cognitive benefits of play moderated the influence of the time children spent at play and certain aspects of their intellectual functioning, as measured by the Kaufman Scales of Early Academic Performance. Note that the link between the time children engaged in play was not associated with early intellectual performance, which would have presented a false and incomplete picture had we only examined a simple, linear relationship.

It is our contention that parental warmth and sensitivity; parental belief in and interpretation of the benefits of play; the degree to which parents encourage and structure opportunities for play; parental socialization styles; and the appraisal by children themselves of the meanings of cognitive and social activities, their compliance with parental instructions, and their temperaments are some of the major variables that may moderate the association between mother-child and father-child play activities and cognitive and social development in children. Put differently, it is possible that, under certain conditions, parent-child play may have direct associations with children's intellectual and social skills.

But the influence of other variables within the family, community, and children and their everyday experiences on the parent-child play-outcomes link should be assessed before we can make firm statements about parent-child play and childhood development. Accordingly, we propose that in societies in which play is accepted and encouraged as a primary medium for childhood social and cognitive skills, parent-child play may have strong and potentially direct associations with childhood development and that, in societies that do not embrace such a perspective, such direct associations will be less visible, with other factors such as the quality of neighborhoods and the socialization patterns tempering the relationships between parent-child play and childhood development.

The Mediators of Play's Influence:
Influence on Childhood Development

It is also highly probable that certain variables mediate the links between parent-child play and children's cognitive and social skills. The child development

literature is replete with examples of the mediating role of parental and community factors (e.g., harsh treatment by parents, levels of parental control, levels of emotional support, ethnic and religious socialization, neighborhood quality, and social capital) in the associations between parenting practices and childhood outcomes.

As an example, in a national representative sample of families in Trinidad and Tobago, Roopnarine and colleagues (Roopnarine et al. 2014) found that ethnic socialization (e.g., emphasis on heritage, ethnic pride) mediated the association between parenting practices (positive parenting, harshness, rule setting, material rewards) and prosocial behaviors and behavioral difficulties (e.g., anger, aggression). Of significance is the differential role of ethnic socialization in mediating pathways of influence between different parenting practices and childhood outcomes in African, Indo, and mixed-ethnic Caribbean families. Ethnic socialization fully mediated the associations between pathways in one ethnic group and only partially mediated the same pathways for the other two ethnic groups.

A message from the aforementioned analyses is that parenting practices may work through other variables to influence childhood development or may not always be the overriding force of influence in certain ecological niches. That is, economic and neighborhood factors may play key roles in determining childhood development above and beyond parenting practices. By the same token, parent-child play may show context-specific pathways or variations between cultures in association with childhood development and may work in conjunction with other factors (e.g., opportunities and belief in play stimulation, parental warmth, and parental control) to influence outcomes.

Again, it is unlikely that parent-child play by itself would account for variations in childhood developmental outcomes. Parental warmth and responsiveness and high levels of parental support for children's interest in exploring the meaning of objects and thematic concepts through play, among other variables, may enhance the role of parent-child play in children's cognitive and social development.

Conclusion

Our goal here was to call attention to the need for scientific integration of theoretical and empirical knowledge of parent-child play across cultures. Parent-child cognitive and social care giving have a tremendous role in shaping the economic,

educational, and sociocultural needs of the broad range of families in different societies. Mother-child and father-child play occur in the context of other care-giving activities, and parental attributes such as warmth and sensitivity, respect for the child's need for autonomy, structure, and limit setting are likely to determine the quality of parent-child play.

Additionally, we discussed the play patterns of fathers, a missing figure in play research, not to mention play in same-sex families. The influences of joint or separate care givers are only now beginning to gain increasing research attention in the broader psychological literature. In this regard, prediction models should test for the moderating and mediating effects of other variables on the relationship between parent-child play and childhood outcomes in developed, newly developed, and developing economies.

Research efforts that focus on the local ecology, economic and work patterns, beliefs about the value of play, existing and changing values systems related to socialization and child rearing, parental sensitivity, and childhood characteristics can do much to advance a pan-cultural understanding of parent-child play and theory building that is more inclusive. However, such an advance will require scientific input from researchers from the developing societies.

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