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# The natural context of mother-toddler play interactions in a rural Nepali community.

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# THE NATURAL CONTEXT OF MOTHER-TODDLER PLAY INTERACTIONS IN A

# RURAL NEPALI COMMUNITY

A Dissertation Presented

by

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School of Education

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# IN A RURAL NEPALI COMMUNITY
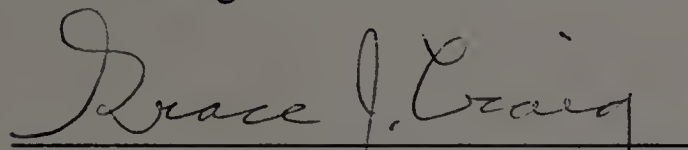
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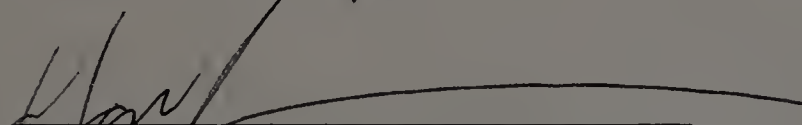
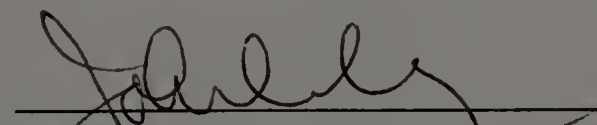Approved as to style and content by:

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# DEDICATION

To my parents – Dr. Vishnu Prasad Rajouria and Rama Rajouria

&

To the loving memory of Hajurama, Ba, Ama, and Sanu

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

THE NATURAL CONTEXT OF MOTHER-TODDLER PLAY INTERACTIONS

IN A RURAL NEPALI COMMUNITY

MAY 2002

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Research indicates that mothers structure or scaffold children's early play. However, it is unclear whether these findings can be generalized to mothers and children of different cultures. Culture-specific and ecological factors may affect a mother's inclination and motivation to play with her child, her scaffolding behaviors, her involvement in play, and the type and kind of play she engages in. This study explores and provides preliminary descriptions of how play is defined, perceived, and valued by a sample of fifteen rural Nepali mothers. The study also describes the kind of play interactions Nepali mothers have with their young children who range in age from twelve to thirty-six months.

The qualitative method of research was used to address the research questions. Data were collected through participant observation, videotapes of mother-child play in the course of everyday activity in the home, and interviews and discussion with the mothers based on the videotaped activities between them and their children.

The results of the study reveal that play appears to be an integral aspect of mother-child interaction in daily care routines and is seen as a valuable means for keeping the child engaged, for managing child behavior, and for encouraging children's co-operation. The mothers in this study have a positive attitude towards play and are aware of the developmental impact it has on children, even though they underestimate their own roles in play interaction with their children.

Findings contribute to the field of child development and education by building on existing cross-cultural literature on play. Early childhood educators and practitioners will be able to utilize the results of this study to inform their work in designing and implementing culturally relevant child development and education programs that are meaningful for the target population.

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# CHAPTER I

# CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

## Introduction

Numerous studies have been conducted on parent-child relationships with the guiding belief that the child's parents are a fundamental source of genetic, social, and psychological influence upon the child. Of course, we must take into account that there is an equally large body of research, focusing on the influence that the child has on the parent-child relationships. For example, the child's health, responsiveness, and overall temperament shape adult expectations, perception, and affect (Brazelton, 1979).

Parent-child relationships are universal, but there is variation in these relationships that accordingly affects the development of the child. What causes these variations? Anthropologists have shown with increasingly convincing evidence that the environments of infancy and early childhood are shaped by cultural values (Harkness 1992; Bornstein, 1991; Valsiner 1995; Super & Harkness 1991; Bronfenbrenner 1979; LeVine 1994; Levine 1988). Literature to date also suggests that cultural, social, and educational factors influence the parent-child relationship. Accordingly, the different child-rearing practices noted across cultures are multi-faceted, including caretaking, stimulation patterns, hygiene, choice of toys and other stimulating objects, and so forth. There is further literature regarding factors within the culture that directly influence the behavior of the parents by shaping their attitudes, perceptions, and values regarding child rearing and parenting. The ecological (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and transactional (Sameroff and Chandler, 1975) approaches have established that parents

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organize the social and physical environment of the child according to cultural values and beliefs that are reflected in their child-rearing practices. Therefore, mother-infant interaction is dependent on the mother's culturally prescribed perception of the infant and her expectations for the child's performance and development. Assuming that parents' beliefs and perceptions could be rooted in their own childhood experiences, it is worth noting their values, attitudes, and ideas regarding play with their children.

The importance and significance of play in a child's life can hardly be understated as it enables the "all around" development of the child. Research about children's play reveals that its contributions to child development can be explored from diverse vantage points. While many agree that play is beneficial to children, the meanings people give to the word "play" are different. MacDonald (1993) argues that play is an essential adaptation for human evolution. He speaks of play as an "environment-engagement device" that is intimately connected to the developmental plasticity of the young. In play, children seek and generate a large variety of environmental stimulation and develop neural structures that are maximally responsive to the salient features of the environment. The result is that play stimulates neurological growth and facilitates cognitive, communicative, and motor development (Greenough, Black, and Wallace, 1987).

Given that play behavior is seen as significant in the healthy growth of children, conditions conducive to the development of play deserve some attention. In general, theories regarding the ontogenesis of play can be divided into those that posit some innate tendency in the child to play, and those that rely on social mediation, specifically the caretaker relationship, for the development of play behavior. In the former theories, play

spontaneously develops out of an immature cognitive structure as part of a self-regulatory mechanism set in motion when the child starts accommodating reality (Piaget, 1962).

Other theorists, notably Vygotsky (1976), Lewis and Feiring (1981), Dunn (1985), believe that infants learn to play as a result of interactions with their mothers. Maternal behavior is not merely one of many influencing factors in the development of play, but constitutes the origin of play behavior itself (Sutton-Smith, 1979). Play develops out of the expressive interaction between a mother and her infant; the amount of playfulness in subsequent years is a direct function of the mother-infant involvement and elaborateness (Sutton-Smith, 1979). Even solitary play is viewed as the transmutation of prior mother-child play interactions, wherein the developing child has learned to portray all the necessary roles him or herself (Lewis and Feiring, 1981). Several authors believe that parental play participation may not only influence play behavior itself, but may also affect the parent-child relationship and thereby affect the child's subsequent emotional, cognitive, and social development (LeVine, 1988).

These findings are based on studies done with mostly European-American samples with the exception of a few studies (Haight, Wang, Fung, Williams, and Mintz, 1999; Haight and Miller, 1993; Farver and Howes, 1993; Rogoff, Mistry, et al. 1993). Other studies involving mother-child play have been conducted in controlled settings and not in the natural everyday setting of mothers and their children. This raises a serious question about the validity and generalizability of such studies: is play in controlled research settings really representative of spontaneous play in everyday settings? Bronfenbrenner (1979) maintained that social or relational processes (i.e., play) are best studied by observing the naturally occurring daily interactions of relational partners.

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In this study, the researcher is exploring the spontaneous play and interaction patterns between mothers and children of a non-Western community. The researcher is studying mother-child pairs in their natural setting by taking into account the mothers' perceptions of play. The reason for taking this approach is because cultural norms, beliefs and values shed light on the phenomenon of play as each of these socio-cultural systems shape the mothers' perceptions and values which in turn, it is assumed, shape the interactions of the mother with her child. The researcher believes this approach will also help to understand play further in a cross-cultural context, and to help see the existing variations within that particular cultural context.

## Statement of the Problem

Most research on mother-child interaction and play patterns is based on European-American middle class samples. As a result, cultural differences in children's play have been interpreted as a sign of deficiency rather than variation. In Western studies of early play behavior, it is proposed that mothers facilitate young children's beginning attempts at play. As mothers provide suggestions and communicate the rules of playing, children incorporate the maternal guidance into play sequences and gradually begin to construct play scripts and enact roles. During play, mothers and children co-ordinate their actions, and with maternal assistance, children can perform beyond their existing level of competence (Haight and Miller, 1993). Although research indicates that mothers structure or scaffold children's early play, it is unclear whether these findings are generalizable to mothers and children of different cultures. In other societies, children may have few opportunities to play with their mothers. Mothers may not have time to spend in specific

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child-centered activities involving play. Children's play may not be considered to be a valuable, productive activity, or entering and managing children's play may be a culturally inappropriate adult behavior. Cultural variations in mother-child communication styles may also influence their collaboration in play. Such culture-specific factors may affect a mother's inclination to play with her child, her scaffolding behavior, and her involvement in play with her child (Farver & Howes 1993).

Little evidence exists concerning the diverse social functions served by caregiver-child pretend play in non-Western communities. Although children's and caregivers' initiations of play may be primarily playful, variation in caregivers' initiations may relate to diverse socialization goals (Haight et al., 1999).

Vygotsky (1978) theorizes that children's development cannot be understood apart from the wider social milieu. Ecological factors, as well as the economic and social organization of a community, influence families' daily routines, individuals with whom the children interact, activities in which they engage, and the scripts that guide their behavior (Whiting & Edwards, 1988). As mothers' perceptions and values regarding child rearing, interaction, and play patterns are the result of the above-mentioned factors, these factors deserve some attention to make studies as culturally meaningful as possible.

No studies have been conducted on mother-child interaction, and play patterns in Nepal. Aside from a handful of studies on child rearing (Arnold, Bartlett, Hill, Khatiwada, and Sapkota 2000; Poudel, and Niraula, 1998; National Planning Commission HMG/Nepal, and UNICEF/Nepal 1996; Thapaliya 1990; Pradhan, Shrestha, and Shrestha 1980), whatever studies exist focus on the health and survival of children, since this is still the primary need of children there. LeVine (1994) mentions that, in

populations with high mortality rates, parents have the physical survival and health of the child as their overriding conscious concern, particularly in the early years. Child rearing customs reflect this priority. And in populations with relatively scarce or precarious resources for subsistence, the overriding conscious concern of the parents is the child's capacity for future economic self-maintenance, particularly after the child's survival seems to be assured. Child-rearing customs also reflect this priority. Therefore, in the context of Nepal, energy has been spent in attempting to reduce the rate of infant mortality, which is still very high. Nevertheless, there is a need for studies on the topics of play and how it is perceived and valued since it is a vital part of the child's process of learning about himself and his environment. Since the mother is the primary caretaker of the child in the early years, exploring the ways in which mothers interpret and define play, their interaction and play patterns, their attitudes and ideas regarding play, and how these influence their play with their children in naturalistic settings would serve to inform the early childhood practitioners in designing home-based child care education programs.

<div align="center">Purpose of the Study</div>

The purpose of this study is to explore the ways in which the mothers interact and play with their children and to examine the mothers' perceptions and ideas regarding play. The study attempts to understand mother-child play in the context of everyday activities and the culturally-valued goals of play. Further, this study explores how the experiences of the mothers may have shaped their perspectives and ideas regarding play and how these are reflected in their play interactions with their children. Assuming that parents' perceptions and attitudes are rooted in their own childhood experiences, it is important to investigate whether they affect the mother-child play interactions.

<div align="center">6</div>

The existing lack of information on the natural contexts of mother-child play patterns and interactions presents challenges to early childhood educators who are working with families to implement home-based childcare and education programs. These programs have borrowed various concepts from the West and tried to adapt them to meet the needs of the local people. This study helps in providing a basis for formulating culturally relevant programs rather than borrowing ideas from elsewhere to meet the needs of the families. By focusing on a rural community in Nepal, on mothers with one to three year old children, by observing the patterns of play and interaction between them, and from interviews and conversations with them, the attitudes and values of the mothers are identified and described. Attempts were made to examine the influence of culture in shaping the mother-child play interaction patterns and to take into account the contexts in which play occurred.

The following questions guided the study through interviews, observations, field notes and participation in the community:

1. What are the mothers' perceptions, attitudes, and values regarding play? What does play mean to them and how do they define play?

2. What are the patterns of interaction and play between mothers and their young children?

## Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the field of child development by building on existing cross-cultural literature and providing information on attitudes and perspectives on play of rural Nepali mothers as well as shedding some light on the patterns of play and interaction between the mothers and children. This study also supports current theories of

cross-cultural research on child development and child rearing in underdeveloped rural communities by allowing general inferences to be made about the role of Nepali culture in child development. It informs fields of research and practice and serves to demonstrate the ways in which culture influences the formations of play attitudes and patterns of play interactions.

Early childhood educators in Nepal will be able to utilize the findings to inform their work with parents and communities. This study is unique in Nepal, where, there have been no studies on mother-child play patterns of interaction and what influences these patterns. This study could serve as an example for the need of similar studies in Nepal in order to implement more culturally relevant early childhood education programs. Results could therefore challenge the existing models of programs for the degree of cultural contextuality and relevancy and hopefully lead to their revision and reformulation so as to be more meaningful to the participants of those communities. Educators, it is hoped, will become more sensitive to the opinions and ideas of parents and will use their input in devising culturally sensitive programs for the target population. In order for the early childhood programs to truly meet the individual needs of the child, educators need to be sensitive and respectful to the differences within families so that the programs are more "family centered" rather than merely "child centered." Therefore, educators will need to consider the goals and values and expectations articulated by the parents as important as their own.

# CHAPTER II

## THE REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### Introduction

This review will attempt to define the complex phenomenon of play from the perspective of various scholars and also briefly examine the theories of play. Developmental literature does not completely ignore cross-cultural research. There have been a number of significant contributions in the area of cross-cultural and comparative child development, some of which will be considered in the course of this review. Literature on how different cultures are reflected in the types of play their children engage in is also presented, exemplifying how play is a medium for cultural expression. Attention has also been given to parental involvement in play. Finally an overview of child-care in Nepal has been provided to establish the context in which this study takes place.

Play literature has documented studies on the play of young children phenomenally and developmentally. Play as a behavioral phenomenon has posed intriguing questions to researchers regarding why it occurs or what causes it (Fromberg, 1987; Rubin, Fein, and Vandenberg, 1983; Sutton-Smith and Kelly-Byrne, 1984). Developmentally, play has been observed, characterized, investigated, and explored for its relationships to children's development (Johnson, Christie and Yawkey, 1999; Bergen, 1988; Athey, 1986).

The United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1948) declared play to be a basic child right that takes its place along with such other rights as nutrition, housing, health care, and education. Play is a highly valued social and cultural activity in

Western societies. Attitudes about children dating from the early nineteenth century contribute to the widespread notion that children have a special right to be happy and that happiness involves the freedom, opportunity, and ability to play (Tizard, 1977).

MacDonald (1993) argues that play is an essential adaptation in human evolution. He speaks of play as an "environment-engagement device" that is intimately connected to the developmental plasticity of the young. In play, children seek and generate a large variety of environmental stimulation and develop neural structures, which are maximally responsive to the salient features of the environment. The result is that play stimulates neurological growth and facilitates cognitive, communicative, and motor development (Greenough, Black and Wallace, 1987).

Interest in play has been generated from diverse academic backgrounds and disciplines including anthropologists, ethnologists, linguists, educators, ecologists, and child developmentalists; their interest has contributed to the study of play.

Studies of play can be grouped into four categories according to the elements that influence the nature of play: (a) definitional studies, (b) co-relational studies, (c) individual difference studies, and (d) ecological studies (Sutton-Smith, 1983). Definitional studies attempt to characterize and distinguish play from other behaviors (Rubin et al., 1983; Krasnor and Pepler, 1980; Johnson, 1983; Smith and Vollstedt, 1985; Schwartzman, 1978). Correlational studies investigate the effects of play on children's development (Johnson, 1976; Vandenberg, 1982). Individual difference studies examine the contributions of individual differences such as age, sex, or cultural background on play development and behavior (Fagot and Leinbach, 1983; Pellegrini, 1985; Saracho, 1987). Ecological studies explore the influence of environmental factors including

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people, settings or materials on play behavior (Vandenberg, 1981; Giddings and Halverson, 1981; Barnett and Kleiber, 1984).

Studies of play and its correlates show that play is associated with intelligence (Johnson, Ershler, & Lawton, 1982), problem solving (Sutton-Smith, 1979), creativity (Dansky, 1980), prelinguistic social-communicative development (Bruner & Sherwood, 1976), the development of representational skills including language (Hill & McCune-Nicholic, 1981), and emergent literacy skills (Pellegrini & Galda, 1982, 1993).

## Attempting a Definition of Play

Although it is clear what play is not, it is much less clear what exactly defines play as a distinct behavior. For example, if household chores are approached with a playful attitude, is the expressed behavior play or work? Accordingly, the study of play behavior systematically requires scholars and researchers to define play from the unique perspectives of their own specialties, values, and purposes. As a result, the definition of play remains a notoriously controversial issue and it is unresolved (Smith, Thakvar, Gore and Villstedt, 1985). Play has been variously defined, and its significance variously interpreted: as a biological, psychological, and cultural phenomenon. It may properly be regarded as all of these things.

According to Johnson, Christie, and Yawkey (1999), play is an extremely difficult concept to define since, "In addition to the many denotations of play, the connotations of the term are often vague and slippery, and even personal and idiosyncratic" (p. 3).

As Hovey (1989) puts it, "Play is a wonderful human activity." The term play is easy to recognize but very difficult to explain, define, understand, and observe accurately because play manifests itself in so many different forms (Athey, 1986). Scholsberg

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(1947) argued that play is easily recognized, but defining play is a very difficult. The term is undefinable and must remain undefined because the definition of play is tied to educational purpose, and each historical setting has had a different purpose and therefore a different definition.

In Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary about 80 explanations of play are listed both as a noun and a verb, and 116 distinct definitions are listed in the Oxford English Dictionary. For example, play in the noun form, is defined as varying from a particular act of a game or sport to a recreational activity of children. Play as a verb is characterized as an action to engage in a game, sport, or recreation, to perform music, or to act in a dramatic production. A different viewpoint reflects play as an adjective. According to Millar (1968), nothing is play but anything can be playful. It is worthwhile recognizing a broad variety of definitions as they stem from different approaches and conceptual backgrounds reflecting the scientific judgement about play with respect to the theoretical differences and biases of such investigators (Vandenberg, 1982).

Researchers have approached the study of play from various perspectives depending on how they perceive the concept "play." In such cases, they tend to focus on one or two aspects of play and thereby reduce the concept "play" to a limited "sphere." In order to gain a full understanding of play, it is essential to thoroughly examine the subjective meanings relevant to the context in which it occurs. Thus, there are numerous definitions of play, with a variety of ways to characterize it. And though there is no one specific definition, it should be determined by several simultaneous characteristics of an activity or a class of behaviors rather than merely a single attribute and it is necessary to include observed behaviors and the contexts in which the behaviors are elicited.

Characteristics or Factors of Play

Researchers have suggested a number of interrelated dispositional factors or a combination of many behavioral characteristics that may better serve to distinguish and characterize play, instead of using a single attribute (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Rubin et al., 1983; Smith and Vollstedt, 1985). Rubin et al. (1983) synthesized such criteria and came up with the following characteristics or factors of play:

(a) Intrinsic motivation: Play is intrinsically motivated and sustained. It is not governed by appetite drives, social demands, or inducements external to the behavior itself. Instead it is pursued for it's own sake.

(b) Process (over product) orientation: Play is dominated by the players and is characterized by attention to means rather than ends. Play behavior may be goal-oriented, but the goals are self-imposed and can vary in importance or salience according to the wishes of the player.

(c) Non-literality: Play is often a non-literal behavior that is characterized by an "as if" quality. This is particularly true of play where the usual uses of objects and meanings of social situations are modified in the service of pretense. (For example, a chair becomes a car or a doll is "hungry" and needs to be fed.)

(d) Positive affect: Play provides the child pleasure and enjoyment, even if sometimes it is mingled with feelings of nervousness and anxiety ( such as when beginning a new activity).

(e) Free choice: Play is relatively free from externally imposed rules and so is different from games. When young children have the choice to play whatever they want, they are actively involved in it, rather than when an adult assigns them some kind of play.

These factors have been cited in various play research studies and reviews for a definition of play characteristics (Thakvar, 1988). Other researchers such as Bronfenbrenner (1979), Krasnor and Pepler (1980), and Smith and Vollstedt (1985) present similar definitions. Bronfenbrenner (1979) describes play as an intrinsic activity for one's self and it is essentially spontaneous, voluntary, free, and enjoyable. Fromberg (1987) broadly identified play to be meaningful, symbolic, active, pleasurable, voluntary, intrinsically motivated, rule-governed, and episodic. Krasnor and Pepler (1980) characterize play activity by four criteria: flexibility, intrinsic motivation, nonliterality, and positive affect. These criteria have been questioned by Sutton-Smith and Kelly-Byrne (1984) who argue that some forms of play are not voluntary or flexible and may be characterized by negative affect.

Lieberman (1977) suggests a set of criteria for what she considered the term "playfulness" as a part of all activities. According to her, the quality of playfulness includes the following five criteria: physical, social and cognitive spontaneity, manifest joy, and a sense of humor. Lieberman identifies these factors as they relate to divergent thinking and creativity. However, it has been critiqued as lacking the ability to discriminate play from non-play (Spodek, 1985).

Causal connections between play and specific domains of child development may not be completely understood (Rubin et al., 1983). Nevertheless play is a primary means in which children initiate and sustain active engagement with the physical and social environment. Through this process of engagement, play serves as a context for the acquisition and generalization of cognitive, communicative, emotional and social skills (Rubin, Fein & Vandernberg, 1983).

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## Play and Work

One of the widely acknowledged approaches to defining play has been to contrast play with non-play or work (Thakvar, 1988). Work is perceived as a serious, beneficial, productive activity and play as a non-serious and pleasurable behavior. It seems efforts to define play have ranged from structural definitions (play regarded as typical gestures or movements) to functional or causal definitions (play viewed as enjoyable activities without being goal-directed) (Smith and Vollstedt, 1985).

Csikszentmihalyi (1975) has questioned the categorical distinction between work and play on the basis of similarities between enjoyable work and play. However, recent research has considered play on a continuum in the opposite direction from work by exploring children's interpretations of play and adults' perceptions of play. Chaille (1977) reports that children perceive tasks or activities assigned by teachers as work and those they enjoyed most as play. Adult distinctions between work and play are evident as parents tend to show less favorable attitudes towards play-related activities than towards schoolwork activities during preschool (Bloch and Wichaidit, 1986). Neumann (1971) who suggests there are no clear-cut lines to separate work from play except on a continuum characterized by control, reality, and motivation, argues the work-play distinction. Schwartzman (1978) asserts that any activities may be defined as being either work or play simultaneously depending on one's attitude toward it.

## Play and Exploration

Research by Hutt (1976) revealed that play and exploration are similar as they are both intrinsically motivated behaviors and not directed by externally imposed goals. More recent research (Hutt, Hutt, and Christopherson, 1989) however, reveals some

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important differences between play and exploration. Exploration is viewed as a "stimulus-dominated" or "stimulus-referent" behavior that is concerned with active investigation for acquiring information about an object or event. It is controlled by the external characteristics of the object being explored. Play, conversely, is "organism - dominated" or "response-referent" behavior, which occurs according to the needs and wishes of the child to manipulate the object or event as the child desires. In play, the emphasis changes from the question of 'what does this object do?' to 'what can I do with this object?' (Hutt, 1976, pg. 211). Thus, while exploration is concerned with gaining information about objects, play is concerned with generating stimulation. This approach has been empirically examined in several studies that investigated exploratory behavior in children (McLoyd and Ratner, 1983; Wohlwill, 1984; Adams and Bradbard, 1985).

Along with the motive for play, the concepts of "voluntary behavior," "interest," and "expression of pleasure" are the prevalent elements in defining play. In reviewing definitions of play, Sapora and Michell (1961) illustrate that play is considered to be intrinsically motivated and therefore, is a voluntary behavior. These conceptions are based on the following assumptions: (1) there is a behavior; (2) there must be a motive that drives the behavior.

Theories of Play

Johnson et al. (1999), categorize theories of play in two general ways: the classical and modern or dynamic.

(a) Classical Theories: the first category consists of those theories developed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These were primarily concerned with the precursors of play and with inferences about the purposes of play, as these

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conceptualizations appeared to focus on the cause of play or the motive for play. By so doing, these theories attempted to recognize the existence of play in humans. The theories within this category are the following:

(i) Surplus Energy Theory,

(ii) Recreation Theory,

(iii) Recapitulation Theory, and

(iv) Practice Theory.

The classical theories are based on outdated, discredited beliefs about energy, instincts, and evolution and are thus limited in scope as they do not fully explain play behavior. Nevertheless, we cannot wholly ignore classical theories as they provide a historical perspective for contemporary adult attitudes and the modern or dynamic theories of play which have their roots in these early theories. And while the classical conceptualizations have been dismissed by professionals, they still influence the conceptualizations of play among lay people.

(b) Modern or Dynamic Theories: The second category of play theories, are those developed after 1920. These theories already accept the existence of play. Rather their focus is on the dynamics of play, the specific form play assumes and its role in child development. The modern or dynamic theories are the following:

(i) Cognitive Theories: These theories of Piaget, Vygotsky, Bruner, Sutton-Smith, and Singer are related primarily to children's intellectual or cognitive development. These theorists argue that the role of play in child development is for practicing and consolidating previously learned skills (Piaget, 1962); for promoting abstract thought, as well as learning within the zone of proximal development, and self-regulation

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(Vygotsky, 1967); for generating flexibility in behavior and thinking (Bruner, 1986); for imagination and narration (Sutton-Smith, 1979); and for modulating the rate of internal and external stimulation (Singer, 1973).

(ii) Psychoanalytic/Psychodynamic Theories: Freud and Erikson are the proponents of psychoanalytic or psychodynamic theories. In such theories, play has an important role in children's emotional and psychosocial development. The study of children's play has attracted developmental psychologists since psychoanalytic theory became popular in the 1920s.

While play has been considered educationally trivial (Scholsberg, 1947) it has also been viewed as an important force in several types of development: problem-solving (Piaget, 1962; Bruner, 1972), language and thinking (Vygotsky, 1967), and personal adjustment (Erikson, 1950).

There is a long history in both cognitive developmental psychology and psychoanalytic theory of linking child play to emotional development. Piaget (1962) notes that, " We can be sure that all happenings, pleasant or unpleasant, in the child's life, will have repercussions on her dolls" (p.22). Vygotsky (1978) has proposed that play originates when a child's desires cannot be realized (e.g. wanting to be a firefighter). The child plays or creates imaginary forms of desires in order to obtain immediate gratification. Freud (1961) and psychoanalysts after him have viewed play as a manifestation of the pleasure principle as well as a way for children to act out conflicts and assimilate those events. The capacity to symbolize in play helps toddlers negotiate issues of separation and autonomy. Toddlers find games of appearance and disappearance to be appealing, and they enjoy sorting games that symbolize differentiating what or who

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belongs to what or whom. From the psychoanalytic perspectives, play is not only

cathartic and therapeutic; it is integral to emotional health and development.

## The Developmental Phenomenon of Play

Through a variety of observational methods and analytical models, researchers

and theorists have asserted play as a developmental phenomenon and provided its

taxonomies (Piaget, 1962; Rubin et al., 1976). Early theorists defined the qualitative

categorizations of play and described the hierarchical levels of play ranging from

sensorimotor activities to fantasy endeavors and games with rules. These ideas have been

the basis for later theories about play development, specifically, that play develops in

orderly stages (Rubin, et al., 1983). Investigations of the development of the play of

young children have sought to identify developmental sequences and correlates of play.

These studies provide description of structural and functional features of play at various

stages of development (Rubin et al., 1983). Play manifests itself in a predictable

developmental sequence throughout infancy and toddlerhood. Acquisition of increasingly

complex play behavior corresponds to cognitive communicative and social-emotional

maturation (McCune-Nicolich and Fenson, 1984).

The foundations for preschool play are established during the first three years of

life. By the time the child is three years old, her play is complex and play routines and

partnerships are firmly established. There is a burgeoning of play development from nine

to thirty months corresponding to a period of rapid language development and a transition

from the sensorimotor to the preoperational stage of cognitive development.

Until nine months of age, play takes the form of visual tactile object exploration

and manipulation  (for example, banging or mouthing objects, and examining them). At

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one year old, children begin to manipulate objects in functional and relational ways. From one to one-and-half years of age, the child's manipulation of toys becomes increasingly object-specific and functional. That is, children use toys in conventional ways. Between eighteen months and three years, the symbolic use of objects emerges and becomes increasingly elaborate. The first symbolic play acts are those inspired by the perceptual properties of the play object and are self-related (for example, pretending to eat from an empty bowl). After the second year, toddlers engage in de-contextualized symbolic or pretend play where the child is able to transform one object into another in the service of pretense, for example, pretending a block is a vehicle (Belsky & Most, 1981; Piaget, 1962).

Development of Play

Age: Six  months
Reach for toys and grab them
Bang toys and mouth them
Try to transfer a toy from one hand to another

Age: Nine months
Manipulate and explore objects within reach
Imitate movements like shaking a rattle
Bang toys against each other
Roll balls around
Engage in motor activities

Age: Twelve Months
Examine toys with hands and eyes rather than mouth
Imitate animal sounds
Use one object to act on another (hit one toy with another)
Put objects in and out of containers
Respond to music
Involve their own bodies when doing activities like putting items on head
Limit activities to fewer objects
Change activities quickly

Age: Eighteen months
Pull, push, and drag toys from one place to another
Imitate simple actions like washing dishes or sweeping
Enjoy sand play, pouring it in and out of containers
Scribble with crayon or pencil
Dance to music
Know names of body parts
Block play by carrying them and gathering them, but not building with anything particular in mind
Show affection towards toys
Relate pictures to familiar objects

Age: Twenty-four months
Know functions of objects and use them appropriately
Imitate everyday household activities like cooking, or hanging clothes, etc. that are observed everyday
Play with blocks, lining them up or using them to fill trucks and with other toys
Play with clay
Investigate and play with small objects like pebbles, sand, and water
Play with large objects in which they can put other smaller objects and push around
Symbolic play emerges (for example, pretending to drink from a cup
Squat to pick up objects
Walk up and down stairs with assistance
Walk backward

Age: Thirty-six months
Able to initiate own play activities when toys or objects are provided
Make simple objects from clay like a "snake" or ball
Attempt to draw simple figures
Imitate real life activities of others
Pretend to go to the store or do other familiar errands
Symbolic substitutions made for absent objects or people
Push objects and toys around in pretend play activities
Playthings become more active. (doll is fed, washed, put to bed, scolded, etc.)
Make "houses" under tables and corners
Respond to rhythm of music by clapping, marching, or swaying

(Adapted from Martin, 1988; Silberg, 1993)


Parental Involvement in Play

Play was traditionally studied as an individual behavior reflecting the child's

developmental level and affective concerns. To a large extent, it wasn't examined until

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recently. As a dialogue between parent and child that may serve important emotional, social, and cognitive functions. Developmental psychologists now share the view that play first emerges and develops within social relationships from infancy (Haight & Miller 1993; Dunn 1986).

In many cultures, parents are often key facilitators of infant and toddler play. MacDonald (1993) suggests that parent-child play is an elaboration of play as an "environment-engagement device." Parents are powerful sources of stimulation and they enhance the play process by increasing levels of complexity and intensity (Sutton-Smith, 1993). Through play, parents direct the child's attention to interesting things in the environment, engage in object and pretend play, and provide high levels of physical stimulation. The parent attracts and maintains the child's attention by controlling the structure and complexity of stimulation. In these ways, parents excite engagement and support children's natural tendency to seek information from the environment regarding its features and contingencies.

Lewis and Feiring (1981) offer the notion that play emerges from precursors found in early social relationships. They argue that the child's ability to form a relationship with the caregiver is the underpinning of play behavior and that the quality of early social relationships may determine the quality of the child's early play behavior. This belief is further supported by El'Konin (1971) and Dunn (1986) who believe that infants learn to play as a result of playful interactions with their mothers. Maternal behavior is not merely one of many influencing factors in the development of play, but constitutes the origin of play behavior itself. Play develops out of the expressive interaction between a mother and her infant, such that the amount of playfulness in

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subsequent years is a direct function of the mother-infant involvement and elaborativeness (Sutton-Smith, 1993). Even solitary play is viewed as the transmutation of prior mother-child play interactions, wherein the developing child has learned to portray all the necessary roles him or her self (Lewis and Feiring, 1981).

As we can see, evidence supporting the importance of parental roles in the various aspects of play with their children is well documented (Damast, Tamis-LeMonda, and Bornstein (1996); Sutton-Smith, 1993; Fernald & O'Neill (1993); Fiese 1990; Levine, 1988). These studies amply reveal that parents enhance the development of play in young children from infancy by encouraging engagement in play and supporting increasingly elaborate and complex play behavior. Maternal participation in young children's play has been found to increase the amount and duration of child exploration and play and the diversity of activity within play episodes (O'Connell & Bretherton. 1984). Mothers have been observed to provide "scaffolding" or support for the child in play that leads the child to act on a more competent level (Slade 1987). In addition. by scaffolding. mothers introduce higher levels of play to young children. In a study of spontaneous pretend play of mothers and young children in the home. Haight & Miller (1993) found that mothers initiated pretend play and elaborated on their children's rudimentary pretend play behavior from infancy.

While children show increases in sophistication of play over time. at any one age. children exhibit different levels of play in different social contexts (e.g., solitary play, play with parent. play with a peer or sibling). When interacting with a more experienced partner. children often display play behaviors which are more sophisticated than those exhibited when playing alone; this phenomenon has been explained by the theories of

Vygotsky (1978), Rogoff (1990), and Wertsch (1985), among others. These theorists propose that children learn first in a social environment with an experienced partner, later incorporating the knowledge into their own personal repertoires. In an often-quoted passage, Vygotsky (1978) states that "every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: First, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first between people (inter-psychological), and then inside the child (intra-psychological)" (p. 57). Vygotsky suggests that children have at least two levels of development: the actual developmental level and the potential developmental level. The actual developmental level is the level at which children function when solving a problem alone (intra-psychological). This level describes developmental cycles that have already matured. Children's potential level of development is that level at which they can function when in collaboration with a more experienced partner (inter-psychological).

The distance between these two levels, the zone of proximal development, represents "functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Vygotsky and others (Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978; Zuckow, 1986) suggest that children show the greatest advances in learning new skills when they are engaged with others in activities that are within their zone of proximal development. By structuring interactions so that they exceed the child's actual level and approach the child's potential level, partners provide stimulation that may help advance the child's actual level of development.

Supporting the role of mothers' active participation in dyadic play, studies have shown that specific behaviors of the mother have differential effects on the child's play depending on the age of the child (Fiese, 1990; Tamis-LeMonda and Bornstein, 1991).

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According to Fein and Fryer (1995):

> Mothers who are distant or indirective have little influence on their children; mothers who are intrusive and tutorial have a negative influence. Mothers who offer direct suggestions, solicit pretend behaviors from their children and participate in pretend exchanges have a positive influence in their children. (p.378)

In sum, it is not simply the overall participation of mothers in dyadic play interactions that facilitates greater play sophistication in children. Rather, specific behaviors on the part of mothers are related to specific levels of play sophistication in children. These relationships differ as a function of the age of children. Moreover, there is an overall match in both the type (e.g., attention-focusing, questions, play suggestions) and level (e.g., non-symbolic, symbolic) of maternal behaviors during dyadic interaction and the level of functioning of the children; this match is both concurrent and predictive during the second year (Tamis Le-Monda & Bornstein, 1991).

Parental modeling of imaginative play, especially by mothers, is seen as crucial to the development of pretend play in young children (Haight, et al., 1999; Farver & Howes 1993; Beizer and Howes, 1992). However, there is no clear evidence that children who are brought up in families where parents frequently participate in pretend play develop different fantasy patterns than children whose parents seldom participate in pretend play (Dunn, 1986; Dunn and Wooding, 1977). Perhaps other factors such as social class or experiences may contribute to the child's level of pretend play (Barnett and Kleiber, 1984; Schmukler, 1981; Fein, Stork and Wasserman, 1975). While previous studies have attempted to examine the contributions of parental roles and attitudes in children's play, recent studies have increasingly focused on the nature of parental involvement or participation in the play of their children, especially during the preschool years. Early

play investigations of parent-infant play have reported research findings in the differential pattern of parental play styles with their children's play. They found that fathers are more likely to engage in physically stimulating and robust types of play while mothers are more likely to involve verbal stimulation and toy play (Power and Parke, 1982; Clarke-Stewart, 1978).

Besides studies of parent-play patterns, a growing number of empirical studies are attempting to investigate differences in interactive behaviors of mothers and fathers in their children's play. How mothers and fathers involve themselves with their preschool children's play at home need more extensive qualitative investigations. Parents are children's primary caretakers and play major roles in all areas of children's development including play skills. It is important to consider both mothers' and fathers' roles and their involvement in the play of their children at home, especially during the preschool years. As play is easily observed in children three to five years of age, it is interesting to observe the types of play these preschoolers prefer with their families at home.

Knowing that play assumes an important role in children's cognitive development, it is worthwhile to explore the influences on children's play behavior. Johnson (1986) has developed a model to illustrate the relations among cultural and environmental factors and play behavior and development in young children. His model suggests that the system relates to the child's characteristics and behaviors, which serve, in turn, as stimulus factors influencing child rearing, play attitudes, and parent-child interaction. These adult ideations directly or indirectly shape the proximal environmental factors affecting children's play.

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Parental contribution to children's play is influenced by their play attitudes and childrearing practices (Sigel, McGillicuddy-DeLisi, & Goodnow 1992; Johnson, 1986; Barnett and Kleiber, 1984). It appears that parents who promote play are more willing to participate in their children's play activities and provide a variety of play materials and equipment. Bishop and Chace (1971) have examined parents' attitudes and the conditions of their three and four year olds' home play environment. Two sets of parental questionnaires were administered. One questionnaire explored parents' attitudes regarding various play situations, types of toys, rights of children in play, and parent-child relations in play. The second questionnaire asked only the mothers for factual descriptions of the child's home play. The results showed significant differences among mothers' attitudes towards play related to increases in children's potential creativity. Mothers who were more flexible and had more positive attitudes towards play enhanced playfulness by providing more play opportunities in the home. This attitude was associated with higher creativity in children.

Cross-cultural and Comparative Child Development Research

Liederman, Tulkin and Rosenfeld (1977) state that cross-cultural studies examine the interrelationship of various systems on a cultural level. Although child-rearing practices and child development may be included in a cross-cultural study, they are not the primary focus. In comparative child development, comparisons are made across cultural groups and focus on those aspects of culture that appear to be relevant to child development. Franz Boas, an anthropologist, became the father of cross cultural studies in 1911 by conducting fieldwork in cultures outside of Europe and North America (Cole, 1992). On the other hand, the field of comparative child development emerged in the

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1960s and distinguished itself from existing cross-cultural studies because the main focus of these studies was to look at child development across cultures. Whiting's six-culture study (1963) and Caudills' comparison of childrearing in Japan and the U.S. (Caudill, 1966) marked this shift.

Despite the definitional distinction between cross-cultural studies and comparative child development studies, the number of studies on cultural influences in child development has remained surprisingly low.

In the 1970s, studies in the early years of development were directed at the differences in patterns of parent-child interaction, specifically in the areas of language and social and emotional development, without a consideration of the cultural context. During this time, few studies considered the cultural context or looked for universals that might underlie the differences in these domains. However, in the late 1970s, interest in cross-cultural research studies grew with the emergence of broader developmental models. During this time, the ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and transactional (Sameroff and Chandler, 1975) views of development were proposed, emphasizing the study of development in context. This was combined with a resurgence of interest in Vygotsky's contextual approach. As a result, there was an increase in cross-cultural studies, and psychology began to draw on anthropological methods of investigation.

Within the last decade, there has been increasing criticism within the field of developmental psychology regarding studies that fail to explore cultural underpinnings of behavior, the focus on stages and phases of development, and the use of white, middle class samples (Bornstein, 1991; Valsiner, 1989; Roopnarine and Carter, 1992). The

assumption of a mono-cultural perspective (Harkness, 1992) fails to recognize differences between groups and seriously limits the applicability of results to other groups. As a result, attention to cultural contexts received greater recognition in mainstream psychology and education during the 1990s.

While methodologies, samples, and paradigms utilized by cross-cultural researchers may be undergoing scrutiny, the importance of cross-cultural research has been justified by Bornstein (1991). First, it tests the generalizability or universality of psychological constructs. Such research informs interpretations of infant behavior as long as external factors (parent-child interaction, timing, ecological context) are also considered. Second, cross-cultural research can extend or amend theories to cover cultural variations, such as studying the influence of contextual or ecological factors and resulting influences. While universals in development may be identified, they may be regulated by the caretaker and environment, and shaped into patterns of particular cultural significance (Super, 1981). As such, they may serve to organize the environment of the child in culturally specific ways. Thirdly, cross-cultural studies can test for the effects of large-scale social change on child development. Fourthly, cross-cultural research provides an opportunity to learn about another culture and help to define what is "normative" in each society. Understandably, ethnographic inquiry would need to be the first step before cross-cultural comparisons could be made or an application of universal theory to comparative groups could be assumed. In this way, cross-cultural research can provide a check against an ethnocentric worldview (Bornstein, 1991) and provides a basis for reconsidering developmental theories that assume a middle-class Western lifestyle (Harkness, 1992).

Cross-cultural studies also have limitations. Brazelton and Lester (1982) cite methodological problems related to investigator-bias, limited access to sources within the cultural group, and the necessity of previous knowledge of the culture one is studying. They also identify the lack of theoretical focus in the field of cross-cultural research, which can lead to biased interpretations of data by the investigator. In this case, use of an exploratory approach such as ethnography can serve as a preliminary methodology to identify aspects of the culture that are meaningful to its members. Ethnographic methods can also uncover information about the group that is "outside" the assumptions of the investigator and subsequently raise new questions.

Harkness (1992) argues that the current use of categorizing data based on U.S. values may blur locally constituted systems of meanings for each group being studied. Thus, if different meanings are attached to global categories, results cannot be generalized. Once again, the need for exploratory studies that initially serve to identify meanings of events unique to each group are vital before findings can be interpreted to be universally applicable.

Therefore, the need for research that incorporates an anthropological perspective will serve to identify the integrative and systematic aspects of the physical, social, and cultural environment that are often difficult to see from a mono-cultural perspective (Super and Harkness, 1980).

## Ecological Studies

With the exception of a few studies (e.g., Haight & Miller, 1993; Rogoff, et al. 1990; Dunn & Wooding, 1977) all studies of mother-child play have been conducted in artificial or controlled research settings. This raises a serious question about the validity

and generalizability of such studies: is play in controlled research settings really representative of spontaneous play in everyday settings?

Bronfenbrenner (1979) maintains that social or relational processes (i.e., play) are best studied by observing the naturally occurring daily interactions of relational partners. Studies of the play of children outside of controlled research settings are rare. Power & Parke (1982) have compared observations of spontaneous parent-infant interaction in play in a laboratory setting with observations of parent-infant play in the home. They found that a significant proportion of parent-child play interactions occurred outside of a "play" context, that is, in the context of care-giving or household routines. Four types of interactions that were rare or nonexistent in the laboratory were common in the home:

1. Parents assisting infants in engaging in some gross motor behavior for purposes of exploration;

2. Parents prompting the infant to search for a plaything not in view;

3. Parents trying to get their infant to imitate them and;

4. Parents trying to get the infant to vocalize during play. In addition, parent use of play to manage the infant's behavior was common in the home and didn't occur in the laboratory. The effort parents expended in the laboratory to attract and maintain their infant's attention to a toy were not seen in the home. The researchers concluded that while there was some correspondence between parent-infant play in the laboratory and in the home, there were important differences in play that could be accounted for by the differences in the two contexts. For example, when parents are told

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that researchers wish to observe parent-infant play and are asked to use a set of toys to get their infant to play, they are likely to expend energy trying to prompt and maintain infant engagement with toys. In the home, parents are more likely to respond to infant exploration and play. Furthermore, the interpersonal context was found to influence parent behavior. Researchers noted that parents would often give the infant something to explore or play with before engaging in household tasks. This served to keep the infant occupied and minimized the infant's need for parental attention. Parents have motives for encouraging play and participating in children's play. These motives are an inseparable part of the play context, that need to be explored to fully understand the phenomenon itself.

Since the 1970s the context of child development has increasingly become the focus of cross-cultural research. The ecological (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and transactional (Sameroff and Chandler, 1975) models were proposed, based on the influence of cross-cultural traditions. Such approaches have established that parents organize the social and physical environment of the child according to cultural values and beliefs that are reflected in child-rearing practices. Theories proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979, Super & Harkness (1986), Valsiner (1989), and LeVine (1974, 1988) demonstrate the different approaches that psychologists and anthropologists uilize in the study of the cultural context of infancy and childhood.

In his description of the ecological model, Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposes a view of development that envisions individuals as being embedded within a number of

important systems. The direct and indirect interactions between the child and these systems contribute to the child's developmental outcome.

This model stresses the relationship between the child and the environment as dynamic and interactive. Developmental change occurs as a result of the reciprocal exchanges between the child and the environment, which is divided into four systems. These systems include interactions within immediate settings, such as the family (micro-system), within major settings, such as the home, or school (meso-system), within larger structures, such as neighborhoods (exo-system), and finally, the system that represents the ideologies of the culture (macro-system) enveloping all of these layers. The idea of the macro-system suggests that cultural values and practices have an effect on child-rearing practices and on the development of the child, and that the child "should" also have an effect on cultural practices. Therefore, by suggesting such a system, Bronfenbrenner created a culturally inclusive model of development.

Since this theory's inception, a growing number of research studies have examined the infant in the context of the family, rather than focusing on specific variables. In addition, the systems approach to viewing early development is also reflected in the following models that focus on the "micro-system" and define it as the "niche" in which culture is transmitted to the child.

Super and Harkness (1986) acknowledge the contribution of the anthropological view of infancy. This perspective states that early development does not exist in isolation, but rather that it is enmeshed with other aspects of a culture. They introduce the concept of the "developmental niche" as a framework for examining the cultural regulation of the micro-environment of the child. Thus, in researching infant development, the

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"developmental niche" becomes the unit of analysis and combines the theoretical concerns of psychology (the child alone) with the concerns of anthropology (the context). Through their research in Kenya, Super and Harkness (1991) describe the "developmental niche" as having three components. They are: the physical and social setting in which the child lives (i.e., sleeping arrangements); the culturally-regulated customs of child care (i.e., infant-carrying and promotion of motor skills); and the psychology of the caretakers (parental theories about independence and responsibility). Each of these components is seen as a mutually interactive system and shares a common function in organizing the child's developmental experience. It is within these niches that the child can abstract the social, affective, and cognitive rules of the culture. Therefore, studying the "developmental niche" can provide a description of the environment from the point of view of the child and the ways in which it reflects the salient features of the culture.

Valsiner (1989) focuses on the socialization process in early development and also identifies the "niche" as a construct for studying infancy. He proposes a model that describes the interdependence of the developing child with his/her culturally meaningful environments. In this case, the "family" constitutes the niche within which the collective culture becomes intertwined with the individual development of the child. It is within the context of the family that the individual child develops his/ her own personal culture and subsequently his/her own developmental course. Development then, is the result of a dynamic process of co-construction by the parent and the child. It proceeds through an active re-structuring of the culture of the parents to a level that becomes adaptive and is internalized by the child. Development at this time is organized by (1) the provision of

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culturally appropriate environmental structures for the child, and (2) placement of the birth and development of the child into the cultural system shared by the family, clan, community, and society (via customs, traditions, rituals). Within this familial niche then, the child adapts or restructures components of the culture and creates his/her own culture that may go "beyond" that of the parents. Valsiner proposes that due to the complexities of the parent-child relationship, the idiosyncrasies of each niche and the child's individual contribution to developmental outcome is difficult. This model supports the need to consider the unique "niche" in each culture through qualitative methods that can capture the dynamic, bi-directional exchanges between the parent and child.

Finally, Robert LeVine (1974, 1988) proposes a model of development that includes parents' perceptions on child-rearing and parenting as a form of cultural adaptation. He relates these beliefs to the ultimate survival of the group. LeVine suggests that parental goals for children are universal, such as the survival and health of the child, the acquisition of economic capabilities, and the attainment of local cultural values. However, factors other than cultural values also shape the early care-taking environment. These factors include environmental hazards, demands, and opportunities that act as another set of constraints on of child rearing. These environmental conditions result in the creation of a "cultural code" that is adaptive and serves to guide parental behavior. Parents then modify their care-taking strategies based on the risks or benefits present in their environment. For example, in agrarian societies where perhaps there is a high infant mortality rate, parental strategies would be focused on sustaining the health of the children as future laborers. On the other hand, in an urban setting, the number of children per family is reduced and the acquisition of specific skills (i.e., academic performance)

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becomes the focus of parental goals. Survival of the child appears to be assured and the parents' concern is for the child's future economic self-maintenance.

<u>Play and Culture</u>

Studies have been conducted on parent-child relationships with increasingly convincing evidence that the environments of infancy and early childhood are shaped by culturally prescribed parenting patterns of behavior.

Play has always had a place in the world since it is a fundamental behavior present in all human cultures; play is a universal human behavior. However, its types or forms are "learned cultural acts" (Norbeck, 1977). More and more researchers have come to realize that the subjects of play and culture stand to gain and benefit from the integrated investigations that assume that play and culture mutually influence one another (Schwartzman, 1978).

In recent years, researchers have explored the cultural dimensions of children's play in a wide variety of cultural groups (Farver, 1999; Goncu, Tuermer, Jain & Johnson, 1999; Farver & Shin 1997; Haight et al., 1999; Gaskins, 1996). This research both reflects and contributes to the attempts of cultural psychologists, theorists, and practitioners to articulate culturally sensitive theory of development. Although play is often assumed to be universal in its characteristics, these perspectives challenge us to understand play as a culturally mediated activity that may take different forms in different groups (Miller, Gaskins, Goncu, & Haight, 1999).

Studies concerning the relationship between the types of play and cultural variables have been conducted in both less technologically advanced cultures and the more technologically advanced ones. The expansion and influence of technology is

bringing these different worlds together. How much this will affect the transformation of the culture-specific play into culture-universal play is yet to be investigated.

Approaches to Studying Play and Culture

The role of play in culture has been of particular interest to anthropologists. According to them, culture is a powerful element in shaping how people think and perceive. Each culture lays out general boundaries in the realm of thinking for people. Thus, the meaning of the concept of "play" varies depending on culture. Mead (1928) and Lancy (1980) argue that forms of play reflect the values of culture. Huizinga (1955) even theorizes that culture arises in the form of play and society expresses its life in the world through forms of play. In "primitive" agricultural societies, for example, Mead (1928) and Lancy (1980) observed children engaged in imitating behavior of their elders in occupations such as hunting and wood-crafting. Play was interpreted as functioning for the preparation of children for adulthood.

Language expresses the reality of everyday life, which is shared by the practical concerns of the culture. Being rooted in the culture, language is a useful source for studying culturally oriented concepts. Cultural meanings, both subjective and objective, are delivered through language. Since play is the activity in which all human beings participate, language about play is assumed to exist in all human cultures and implies how the people in a particular culture conceptualize play.

Research on children's play appears in two forms in the anthropological literature. The fact that young humans play in one way or another in all societies is illustrated by the numerous descriptions of this activity appearing in ethnographies. The second type of literature available on this subject consists of attempts on the part of investigators to

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formulate specific definitions and/or theoretical statements about the play behaviors of

children. Two approaches stand out in investigating the relationship between play and

culture. One approach is to relates culture to the overall form of play; the other approach

views culture-specific forms of play as a reflection of cultural values.

(1) Play Forms and Culture: The first approach is well elaborated in the works of

Huizinga (1955) and Caillois (1961). Huizinga concludes, with what seems a grand

statement, that play leads to the emergence and growth of civilization. Despite

disagreement over its definition, a few traits have been selected as characterizing play:

-   freeness or voluntaries of participation;

-   separation of play from other behavior in both time and place;

-   quality of make-believe;

-   totally absorbing;

-   ordered by rules;  and

-   unproductive, characterized by group relationships which surround themselves

    by secrecy and disguise  (Huizinga, 1955, p. 13).

According to Huizinga, all human activities including art, law, religion,

philosophy and literature contain these play elements. Huizinga's main inquiry concerns

the extent to which culture is a product of play. Yet he points out that play does not create

a new culture.

Even though Huizinga's work is appreciated as a major work to open play as a

serious scientific topic, his conceptualization of play has been criticized for its

narrowness. In other words, Huizinga dealt with only the competitive character of play

(Schwartzman, 1978) and does not distinguish play from a game. In addition his

elaboration excludes how specific forms of play affect the elements of culture. On the other hand, Caillois (1961) tried to expand the spheres of play by identifying four types: Competition, Chance, Mimicry, and Vertigo. In the conceptualizations of play, Caillois stresses the types of play in the culture, whereas Huizinga emphasizes play elements of the culture. However, neither of them deals with children's play.

(2) Play Types as Expression of Cultural Values: The second approach is concerned with how specific types of play exist in a particular culture and reflect the cultural values. This approach is based on the premise that different types or forms of play are systematically related to cultural values such as child training, and economic and political factors (Schwartzman, 1978).

All human cultures and societies whether they are technologically advanced or not, have a fundamental unity with respect to human play. Through analysis of play types, cultural anthropologists have attempted to infer the nature of a culture and the values of that culture. Thus, it is assumed that an individual culture has unique types or forms of play that reflect cultural values. For example in a less technologically advanced society, play and all other human behavior tends to be much more closely linked with religion than in a technologically advanced society. The differences in types of play from society to society serve as indices or descriptions of the culture of those societies. Research has shown that many inferences about social structure, social relations, ideals, values, and other cultural patterns may indeed be inferred from examination of types or forms of play (Norbeck, 1977; Miracle, 1977; Whiting, 1963). Therefore, in this approach, when the conception of play is examined, the types or forms of play in the particular culture are the essence of investigation to infer the cultural values. Thus,

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assuming that individual cultures contain their own uniqueness, the context in which play

occurs is assumed to influence the uniqueness of play.

Available cross-cultural research suggests that children enact culturally-specific

themes reflecting activities and values important within specific communities. For

example, children in the Marquesas Islands pretend to paddle canoes, hunt, and fish

(Martini, 1994). Children in India enact traditional celebrations and folk tales

(Roopnarine, Hossain, et al., 1994). Korean-American children focus on family role

themes, while European-American children focus on fantasy themes such as superhero

adventures (Farver & Shin, 1997).

Through studying the Aymaran culture, Miracle (1977) notes that play forms

reflect the nature of the agricultural culture of the Aymara, which depends on cooperative

labor. Children are involved with labor early on in the Aymaran culture. Almost all of the

children's games stress skills and cooperation without much dependence on luck or

chance. These games do not require group strategy. According to Miracle's speculation,

this reflects the Aymaran reticence to manipulate others within the community. Ager

(1977) finds the same pattern with Eskimo children whose games cluster around physical

skills, and require dexterity, strength, and endurance. These qualities are considered

necessary and functional for hunting in the Eskimo culture. In addition, the Eskimos' lack

of emphasis on material possessions is reflected in minimal emphasis on the prize in

competitions. This non-competitive nature of play also appears in the games of Motu

children (Rosensteil, 1977). The Motu de-emphasize competition in their traditional

games. No prizes are awarded for winning. And there is a tendency to have no restriction

on the number of times a child can try. This indicates that their societal values focus on

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the development of skills more than on a competitive spirit. Thus, a mastery of certain skills needed for cultural living is obtained by engaging in the games. In reviewing the relationship between games and cultural values, Schwartzman (1978) concludes that games of physical skills are prevalent in cultures where physical abilities are essential to survival; games of strategy are practiced in cultures where class stratification and warfare are institutionalized. In cultures where both types of games appear, there tends to be more emphasis on achievement.

Rich (1978) also explores the relationship between types of play and cultural values in the children of Iceland who prefer to engage in games of physical skill and in competitive activities in which the exercise of individual skill is the major contributing factor to the outcome of games. Rich speculates that this is based on two emphases in Iceland regarding child-rearing: achievement and independence.

The play themes of caregiver-child may also reflect variation in socialization values and goals. For example, Chinese caregivers generally emphasize harmonious social interaction obtained through obeying, respecting, cooperation, adherence to rules, and submission to elders, while European-American caregivers generally emphasize individuality, independence, and self expression (Fung, 1994; Chow1994; Greenfield, 1994). In accordance with these socialization goals, narratives within Chinese families focus on moral and social standards (Miller, Wiley, Fung, & Liang, 1997; Miller et al., 1996), and narratives within European-American families often highlight children's positive and unique characteristics.

The literature review of play and culture indicates that the word "fundamental" is one of the key concepts to explain the concept of play. Play is conceptualized as a

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fundamental activity, taking place in the context of culture. Cultural context appears to determine the kinds of play in which people engage as every culture carries its own meaning of the concept "play," and treats play in different ways. Even though one is able to see the place of play in the cultural context, the mechanism of human play with emphasis on individual human beings does not seem to be discussed sufficiently. How and why does a member of culture engage in a particular kind of play? What does play mean to individual members of a culture in relation to their own culture? The researcher was interested in exploring what conceptualizations mothers have of play in relation to their own experiences and play interactions with their young children. The researcher saw herself in a position where she needed to inform herself of the existing interaction play patterns between mother and children in the context of their natural and cultural environments. This was achieved by taking into account various factors and elements that might be shaping the forms of play that occurred between the mother and child since this would provide a holistic picture for studying and clarifying the phenomenon of play. Only by studying the phenomenon in the context in which it occurs can one gain a valid, accurate, and integrated understanding of the action. Information derived from this kind of inquiry provides educators the opportunity to create and implement culturally relevant, meaningful, and effective programs for its participants by matching and accommodating styles of learning within the classroom to children's cultural learning styles. Moreover, this information will also enhance further understanding and knowledge about how young children learn, develop, and change or adjust themselves when they are in different settings besides the home.

## Childrearing Process in Nepal

Childrearing, or the process of bringing up children, can be described in terms of practices and activities that reflect a society's response to the survival and developmental needs of both children and the society. Individual practices are influenced by cultural norms or patterns that have evolved over time and which, in turn, are grounded in cultural beliefs and values. They are influenced by the physical, social, and economic contexts as well as by the types of technology available to and associated with childrearing. The choice among possible childrearing practices, the manner in which they are carried out, and the results seen in children will also depend on the character and knowledge of the individual(s) who are responsible for childrearing. To understand the process of childrearing, then, it is necessary to understand the basic needs of children and the general practices required to meet them; who is responsible for childrearing; differences among, and changes in physical, social, economic, and technological characteristics of the environments in which childrearing occur; and the cultural beliefs, values, and norms that continually evolve to guide and ground choices among the available options in the form and content of child-rearing, It is necessary also to identify how these various dimensions of childrearing are interwoven and how changes in any one dimension can produce changes in others, sometimes to the benefit and sometimes to the detriment of the child, the family, or the culture.

LeVine (1974) argues that there are universal and cultural variations in parental goals. Universal parental goals are:

(1) The physical survival and health of the child;

(2) The development of the child's behavioral capacity for economic self-maintenance and security; and

(3) The development of the child's behavioral capacities for maximizing other cultural values, i.e., moralities, prestige, wealth, religious piety, intellectual achievement, personal satisfaction, and self-realization as formulated and elaborated in culturally distinct beliefs, norms and ideologies (p. 20).

On the other hand, cultural variations of parental goals can be found, for instance, in populations with high mortality rates where childrearing customs reflect the priority of physical health and survival of the child. For example, in rural Nepal children are not usually weaned until they are two years old and sometimes older than that because the post weaning diet is low in protein and prolonged breast-feeding provides better protection for the child against all kinds of diseases.

In this section the researcher attempts to provide the reader with a better understanding of the ecology of child-care in rural Nepal, which is so far removed from that of the West. This will enable the reader to frame the context of childcare in which this study took place.

Around half of Nepal's 21 million people are children under the age of sixteen. They are growing up in a country extraordinarily rich in cultural and spiritual traditions but struggling economically (Arnold, et. al., 2000).

There is very sparse literature on child development and childcare in Nepal. Any studies are very far and few in number (Arnold, Bartlett, Hill, Khatiwada, and Sapkota 2000; Poudel, and Niraula, 1998; National Planning Commission HMG/Nepal, and UNICEF/Nepal 1996; Thapaliya 1990; Pradhan, Shrestha, and Shrestha 1980). Most

studies have been conducted by international organizations and look primarily at the health factor or the physical development of the Nepali child. However, more and more interest is being directed towards studying the overall development of the Nepali child. One of the most recent studies that was conducted, "Bringing up Children in a Nepali World," (Arnold, et al., 2000), explores the accumulated wisdom and knowledge of parents and caregivers regarding child rearing.

Housing

The housing conditions in rural Nepal are often cramped and poorly ventilated. Houses are clustered together and sharea common yard. Some have cow or pig sheds or chicken cages either on the first floor of the house or as an extension to the house. Most houses are mud-plastered and made of stones or bamboo with thatched roofs. Richer people have more spacious brick houses with tin roofs. There is either a covered front porch or one that surrounds the house and most children play either in the yard or on the porch, where a hammock is usually hung for the child to sleep in during the day.

Livelihood

People in the rural areas are primarily farmers, relying for subsistence on what is locally grown. Rice, millet, and corn are cultivated and vegetables and fruits are grown in the kitchen gardens. Those who don't own much land work in other's farms as laborers and sharecroppers or leave their family in the village and work in towns and city as seasonal laborers. With improvements in the transportation system, the rural population has easier access to markets and is able to make income selling some of their cash crops like ginger, turmeric, jute, and baskets. They are also able to buy necessities like kerosene and fertilizer, which are hard to come by in their communities.

<u>Household structure</u>

Over the years, there has been a significant move in rural villages as well as in urban areas away from joint and extended families towards more nuclear families. Nuclear families may exist, but they are not so pervasive as to have changed the nature and actions of people to shun all extended-family ties. The significance of this shift for child rearing needs to be investigated. Nevertheless, the extended and joint families still largely remain the type of family structure in which a rural Nepali child grows up. The joint or extended family is characterized by the sharing of residence, income, etc. All Nepali families also have a hierarchical household structure where the majority of the women perform all domestic work and whenever needed, field work as well. Men usually attend to duties outside the house. The eldest male member, usually the grandfather, is the head of the family. He has control over the rest of the family and makes all the major decisions, even for his grandchildren. The children are the lowest order of this hierarchy. They begin learning their place at a very young age and are expected to be obedient, respectful, and co-operative. Thus, most families in Nepal are patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal. Although it is less striking in some ethnic communities (Tharu and Magar), in other ethnic groups, women and girls have a lower status than men and boys. By the time a child is one year old, there are some clear patterns of treatment between boys and girls. Male children have preferential access to food, leisure time, and clothing. When faced with precarious economic situations, decisions are nearly always made in favor of educating boys. However, in the past decade a gradual change has been noted in the treatment of boys and girls. Women and girls have primary responsibility for child-care and household work, including fodder and firewood collection and men and boys, for

outdoor work and income generating activities (Pradhan, et al., 1980). These generalizations overlook the fact that women are usually heavily involved in animal care and work in the field. According to comparative time allocation studies, a Nepali rural woman spends almost eleven hours a day to maintaining the family's subsistence level. Men, by comparison, are involved in the family farm enterprise for approximately six hours daily. It is unknown, although important, to what extent women share in decision-making with their husbands about children's needs. The direct role of the fathers in the physical care, education, and values development of their children has yet to be determined, and most likely varies from one ethnic community to another. Nevertheless, fathers have a profound indirect role in children's wellbeing. The capacity of mothers and other caregivers to ensure the best care is determined by fathers' decisions and decision-making power, their control of women family members' access to information and services, and their control over family resources.

Child Rearing Beliefs

If one were to reflect on the rural Nepali childrearing strategies and see where they might fit in LeVine et al's (1994) continuum between the *pediatric model* and *pedagogic model*, one could say with no hesitation whatsoever that the rural Nepali childrearing strategies of parents and caregivers tend to be driven by a pediatric model. Survival, health, and safety are important goals for childrearing for Nepali parents. Once survival, health, and safety are more assured, caregiver attention is then directed toward other developmental goals.

In the Hindu tradition which most of the Nepalese follow, children are highly valued as a gift from God. The most prominent child rearing style is that of a nurturant

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mother who is responsive to her child. This quality can become highly indulgent, especially to sons who hold a more treasured place than girls, who are in their parental home only until marriage and are not expected to contribute to their parents financially.

The early years, generally up to about five or six, are seen as a special time, deserving particular care, indulgence and relative freedom from responsibility. By the time they are six or seven, children in these villages, as in many societies, are considered to have developed new capacities, and expectations change (Rogoff, et al., 1993). So it is in rural Nepal, that by the time children reach five or six years of age, they are given responsibilities and are expected to contribute in dependable ways. The age could slightly vary between communities, but even then they are not seen fully as adults or as "children," particularly if there are younger siblings.

According to Arnold et al. (2000), parents recognize that encouragement and support can stimulate learning and growth. They see both nature and nurture as having a role in their children's development, even though they believe that children will inevitably become what they were destined to become (karma). When talking about important developmental markers parents not only mentioned children's growth and capacities, verbal progress, and their interactions with others, but also put an emphasis on the development of work-related skills. They have high hopes for their children but are primarily concerned with their survival, emphasizing LeVine's theory of parents' goals being hierarchical when survival is the issue.

Child Care

The first few months of a child's life are spent with the mother and often the grandparents. These months are normally a time of close physical contact, breastfeeding,

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and care. The practice of oil massage is of great importance regardless of ethnic background. Usually the child is massaged outside in the sun and by the kitchen fire when it is cold. The massage is conducted twice a day during mid-morning and evening but becomes less frequent as the child grows older. The frequency depends on how much free time the mother has. Sometimes the mother takes the child with her to the field. If there is somebody to take care of the child at home like grandparents or older siblings, the child is left at home and the mother returns at intervals to feed the child. A child is introduced to semi-solid food at five or six months of age and remains breastfed until beyond twelve months, even until four years of age, or when the mother is pregnant again. The child's diet usually consists of rice and lentils ("daal-bhaat") or corn and millet with vegetables and lacks in fruit, eggs, and meat. The child's development is not specifically monitored and developmental milestones are taken as they come. The child who learns to walk later than her peers or who is mildly malnourished is not necessarily singled out for special attention by the family (National Planning Commission/HMG & Unicef 1996). The environment is often heavily contaminated, giving rise to frequent episodes of illness. Toilet training is very casual and by the time a child can walk, he or she is expected to be able to go outside to the kitchen garden and relieve himself.

Caregivers

Among the various ethnic groups, in both rural and urban Nepal, childcare is greatly influenced by traditional and contemporary models of social and moral order. As previouslyy mentioned, the household is organized around an extended family system, which shapes the physical and interpersonal ecology of childcare. Caring for a child is primarily, though not entirely, the role of the mother. While the mother is a significant

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individual in the life of the child, other female caregivers such as grandmothers and aunts have an equally important role followed by older siblings, father, uncles, older cousins, and other peripheral caregivers. In most cases, maternal attention sharply declines as children get past the second year, and most certainly during the third year when children start spending large amounts of time with other caregivers (Figure 1: Caregivers of the Child). This prepares the child to live with a collective body of people rather than just the direct family. Children are held, talked to, supervised by, and remain in physical and emotional contact with several significant adults.

The composition of caregivers varies greatly with multi-ethnic Nepal and varies from home to home. However, to a greater or lesser extent, multiple caregiving is a form of extended family care, where certain family members actively partake in taking care of their young mostly, but not exclusively, within their household. The different caregivers are involved to different extents and at different periods in providing stimulation, inculcating values, providing food and making sure the child is safe. However, mothers make the majority of day-to-day decisions regarding children's welfare. Mothers are also primarily responsible for maintenance of the home environment as it affects children's wellbeing, such as storage of water, the cleanliness of food, and surroundings.

When mothers are absent or working, an older female sibling is left in charge of feeding and washing the child and guarding the child from any potential sources of danger like getting burnt by the kitchen fire or playing with a knife or scythe and getting cut. The older siblings are also considerably involved in the learning and stimulation of their younger siblings, especially through play. Due to their extensive caregiving roles,

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older children may play a vital part in the language acquisition of younger children and certainly model behaviors and communicate values, which form children's behavior vis-à-vis the adult world.

**Figure 1:**

**Caregivers of the Child**

| Nuclear Family | Parents and siblings |
|---|---|
| Joint Family or Extended Family | Grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins |
| Community members | Peers, neighbors and other people |

In-laws are another known element in home childcare. In households with two or more brothers and their families in residence, a woman may take a primary role in the care of her sister-in-law's children as well as her own.

Similar to the findings of Minturn (1993) and Mistry (1993) whose studies were based in India with toddlers and families, at the level of the household in Nepal, the life of the family group is an inextricable part of children's early development. Nepali children are participants in the ongoing flow of adult relationships by being constantly responded to by multiple caregivers from infancy onward.

When compared to the patterns of child care in the West, the social and environmental conditions of early child development in a rural Nepali community demonstrate a lack of separation between the children's world and the world of adult

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family and community. In Nepal, these are not separate worlds as they have been in Euro-American societies (Aries, 1963; Archad, 1993; Cunningham, 1995).

Upon reviewing literature on children's worlds in different societies, it becomes apparent that the influence of groups on the lives of children is pervasive (LeVine, et al., 1994; Sheifflin, 1990; Tronick et al., 1984; Hareven, 1989; Geertz,, 1973). Thus, much of what is considered "normative" in developmental psychology carries a modernist bias (Burman, 1994), promoting individualistic parent-child practices that tend to occur in dyadic settings but may not be reflective of the real world interactions even of Western children.

# CHAPTER III

## DESIGN OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH METHODS

<u>Overall Approach and Rationale</u>

When a child is born, it experiences widely varying conditions in growing up. Children's immediate social networks vary from one culture to another, thereby dramatically influencing socialization and enculturation patterns. Presumably, cultural variations in the various domains of child rearing exert significant and differential influences over the mental, social, and emotional development of children (Bornstein, 1991). Whiting and Child's (1953) finding, which is now widely accepted, is that parents in different cultures adopt some similar, as well as some different, approaches to child rearing, and that parenting is a principal reason why individuals in different cultures are who they are, and are often so different from one another.

In the context of Nepal, there is a dearth of information regarding parent-child interactions. This study aims to address this lack of literature by exploring the play interaction patterns between mothers and children, taking into account their attitudes, perceptions, meaning-making, goals, and value of play within the natural context. This study may also serve as a model for exploring other socio-cultural influences that affect the development of a child in the rural Nepali context. The study uses qualitative methodology for the purpose. It does not attempt to test any hypothesis but rather to provide a descriptive explanation for the phenomenon of play as it occurs in the everyday setting of the mother and child.

Pilot Study

In January 1998, a pilot study was conducted in a rural village in Nepal to explore the feasibility of the study. Before conducting the pilot study, the researcher met with practitioners of home-based child care and education programs to pilot general research questions for the study. With their experience in the field they were able to contribute invaluable insight into the implementation of the study.

A pool of sample questions was developed in relation to the research questions. Those questions were based on a review of the literature on play and the researcher's questions developed through reading. The questions were unstructured and only used as guidelines for open-ended interviewing and discussing play with the mothers. Some questions that did not generate sufficient data were screened out through pilot testing.

The sample for the pilot study consisted of two mother-toddler dyads with one female toddler and one male toddler. On the basis of pilot testing, the researcher was able to determine the approximate length of observation time, feasibility of videotaping, times of the day appropriate for conducting observations and videotaping, and types of questions to ask during the interview, as well as necessary length of the interviews to be conducted. The researcher was especially eager to see the reaction of the mothers when they saw themselves with their children on video and to find out if viewing the video would facilitate discussion and interviews with the mothers for understanding their conceptions and attitudes regarding play.

After data was collected and analysis made, changes were made in the format of the open-ended interview questions and some questions were removed. For example, the following question, "Based on what you said, how do these play activities contribute to

development?" was one of the questions asked. Earlier in the interview, mothers had been asked, " What do you think some of the functions of play are?" The intention of the first question was to identify subjects' views on how the process of play contributes to development. The mothers appeared to understand the question, but did not find appropriate ways to respond to it. Another question, "What is the value of play in relation to child development?" had the same effect on the mothers. The mothers felt they had already answered this question when they responded to the question on functions of play and seemed confused about giving the same answer. A third question, "What are the useful aspects of child's play experiences?" did not produce sufficient response for analysis. So the three questions were removed from the main study. The researcher also made modifications to the other questions in the open-ended interview, in order to clarify them.

Lastly, the researcher decided to engage the assistance of a video camera operator for the study, since it was challenging for the researcher to simultaneously keep track of filming the child's interactions and taking observation notes during the pilot study.

Qualitative Methodology

Using qualitative methods of data collection, participant observation, video-taping of mother-child play interactions, mothers' self- reflections and interviews, and note-taking, this study explores ways in which culture influences the play interaction patterns of mothers with their one to three year olds. By exploring mothers' perceptions and values regarding play, attempts were made to determine how the mothers defined "play," how it was valued, and how their perceptions and own experiences influenced their play with their children. The qualitative method of research is best suited for addressing the

questions of this study since it deals with the perception and meaning-making of people and how it influences their actions. The study can become meaningful only if we take into account the interpretation of the meaning of the people in the cultural context in which the actions, phenomenon, and meaning are occurring (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). This methodology was also chosen because it best serves the purpose of exploring and interpreting a phenomenon and process that had not yet been studied and identified in that population. The goal of this study was, therefore, not to test any hypothesis that may have been generated by studies in other areas, but to explore the existing patterns of play and to discover and interpret mothers' attitudes and perceptions that might influence their play interactions with their children. Through close descriptions of the observations made of mother-child play interactions in everyday natural settings, the researcher hoped to understand the meaning of what was observed in small moments of day-to-day cultural activities and relate those observations to the cultural practices and traditions of that particular community.

This qualitative method of inquiry was essential for understanding both the substance and process of mother-child play behavior and the elements that influenced it in the natural setting. For better understanding of the complexity of the phenomenon under study, the researcher had to take into account the interplay of all the relevant factors that might underlie the play interaction patterns. For example, play interactions had more depth and meaning when the maternal concepts and goals of child learning and the norms that guided the mothers' actions were explored. Therefore, the qualitative method of research was invaluable in exploring parental concepts and attitudes to determine the play interactions of the mothers and their children.

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The theoretical bases of qualitative methodology are tied to the phenomenological perspective. The way people see and interpret the world will determine their action (Bogdan & Taylor, 1984). Thus, it is meaning that determines action. According to phenomenologists, people attach meanings to other people, objects, and situations through subjective interpretation. The locus of reality thus is in the minds of the people. The main goal of qualitative research, therefore, is to understand a phenomenon from the subjective and personal level and try to see such phenomenon as a whole. That is, the goal of qualitative research is to obtain a holistic view of the phenomenon of the study. Qualitative methodology is defined as "research that produces descriptive data: people's own written or spoken words and observable behaviour" (Bogdan et.al. 1984). The main methods for collecting qualitative data are participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and case study. Since this method is suitable for providing detailed description of particular activities, relationships, and contexts, the researcher utilized it to look at the quality of mother-toddler play and the dynamic and reciprocal influences operating and the physical and social contexts in which the toddler is embedded (Fraenkel and Wallen, 1993). The researcher used open-ended interviews to obtain a broad understanding of the concept of play without unduly imposing pre-determined perspectives. To study the actual play interactions that occurred between mother-child dyads, the researcher conducted participant observations of mother-child interactions.

## Open–ended Interviews

Patton (1990) identifies three types of open-ended interview approaches to qualitative data collection: the informal conversational interview, the general interview guide approach, and the standardized open-ended interview.

The informal conversational interview consists of informal conversation, which generates spontaneous questions as a result of the interaction between the interviewee and interviewer. It usually takes place as part of participant observation field-work. Since the interview is conducted in a form of informal conversation, the interviewee may not even realize that an interview is taking place.

The general interview guide approach starts with a set of issues decided in advance. In this format, the interview guide is written to ascertain all relevant topics to be covered during the interview. The purpose of using an interview guide is to obtain common information from all interviewees. At the same time, this approach allows flexibility in wording and sequence in order to adjust to situations as well as to individual subjects. Within the topics, the interviewer is free to explore or ask questions that help to illuminate the particular topic. Yet, the general interview guide keeps the interaction focused.

The standardized open-ended interview consists of a number of questions worded and arranged in advance. In this format, each subject is asked the same questions with the same words in the same sequence. The purpose of this interview format is to minimize the effects of the interviewer by using the same questions with all the subjects. Whereas the interview questions do not allow flexibility, the responses are still open-ended to obtain the subjects' insights, feelings, and thoughts in their own words. These formats are the three basic approaches to qualitative interviewing. However, depending on the nature of the research questions, various combinations of these formats have been developed by researchers.

## Construction of the Interview Instrument

The structure of the interview instrument was developed on the principles of Patton's guidelines for qualitative interviews (Patton, 1990). Patton's guidelines were adapted for constructing the questions for the interview (Appendix A), because finding out what is in the mother's mind concerning her conception and perception of play involved her disclosure of experiences, thoughts, and knowledge of play. Patton's guidelines served these purposes. According to Patton, any of the following six types of questions can be asked on any topic:

(1) Experience/Behavior questions, (2) Opinion/ Values questions, (3) Feeling questions, (4) Knowledge questions, (5) Background/Demographic questions, (6) Sensory questions

(1) Experience/Behavior questions concern what the subjects did or had done. For example, a question like, " What are your child's favorite play activities?" is designed to elicit the mother's description of her child's favorite activities drawn from her observation.

(2) Opinion/Value questions aim at understanding what the subject's thoughts and interpretations are about their behavior or experience. For example, the question, "What do you think about your child's favorite play?" attempts to find out the mother's opinion and value of her child's favorite play.

(3) Feeling questions are concerned with the emotional reactions about experiences and opinions. For example, " How do you feel about your play with your child?" attempts to obtain the mother's perception of her play with her child.

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(4) Knowledge questions aim at finding out what the subject knows about some topic or phenomenon. For example, the question " Why does your child engage in play?" attempts to find out the mother's personal knowledge about the reasons for child play.

(5) Background/Demographic questions provide characteristics of the subjects, which will help in identifying them in relation to other people. For example, questions concerning sex, age, ethnicity, occupation, education, etc. are standard questions of this type.

(6) Sensory questions concern with what the subject sees, hears, tastes, smells, touches, etc. regarding the phenomenon under study.

In this study sensory questions were excluded because the study is about mothers conceptions and perceptions about play and not about the sensory phenomenon of play. The background/demographic questions were obtained only to draw general demographic information about the subjects (Appendix G): age, education, occupation, number of children, type of household, etc.

Thus, this study uses informal conversational interview combined with the general interview guide approach so that following the subjects' responses, the researcher was allowed the flexibility to probe their responses. Twenty-six specific questions were used as guidelines for the interview (Appendix A) based on Patton's (1990) guidelines for interview questions.

In addition, when questions or responses were not clear to subjects or to the researcher, clarifications were made. Especially when some subjects didn't understand some interview questions, the questions were re-framed. If the subjects talked about play beyond what the question specifically asked, but the answers provided further insight into

the reasons behind their conceptions of play, the researcher accommodated their answers. In sum, the open-ended nature of the interview and adaptation of Patton's guidelines for interviewing allowed flexibility in both questioning and responding, serving to elaborate or expand and clarify on the part of both the subject and researcher.

<center>Translation of the Interview Instrument</center>

Since the study and data collection methods were conceptualized in English, it was necessary for translating the questions into Nepali layman terms for the open-ended interview. A translation process called "back–translation" (Lonner & Berry 1986) was used for the study. Back-translation employs a principle called "de-centering," which means that one language is not centered over the other. Assistance in translating the questions was given by two other Nepali people working in the area of early childhood care and education as trainers and educators in the rural areas. The researcher first translated the English questionnaire into Nepali. The trainer and educator then translated the Nepali version into English. This process was repeated, until the translated version very closely approximated (or as much as we could closely approximate) the original version of the questions. As expected, however, some questions contained words or concepts that were not directly translatable or were nonexistent in one or of the two languages. For example, the meanings of the English phrase "value of play" and " function of play" would be different, but in Nepali, they convey the same meaning. In English there are different words used to convey the different forms of play, for example, games, sports, etc. In Nepali there is one word, "khel," to cover all forms of play. Whether it is a game or sport, in Nepali they are all referred to with the word "khel." By adding the name of the sport or game or play to the front of the word "khel" one is able to

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determine the type or kind of "khel" that is being referred to in that particular context. When informing the mothers about my study when I said "khel" of young children, they knew I wasn't referring to sports or games but rather "child play."

## Participant Observation

As the word implies, observation is simply seeing and recording in some fashion what is spontaneously happening in a particular situation. There are many methods for gathering observational data, one of them being participant observation. In participant observation, the researcher shares as intimately as possible in the life and activities of the setting under study. The purpose of such participation is to develop an insider's view of what is happening. This means that the researcher not only sees what is happening but also feels what it is like to be a part of the setting. Researchers who live in the community that is being studied, for months or even years on end, so that they may be able to observe behaviour, practices, values, and conditions that could not be observed in a short visit typically use this approach.

In a discussion of research methods with families, Wachs (1992) notes that the degree of correlation between the attitudes of parents and their actual behavior may be quite modest. Parents' accounts of their interactions with their children tend to be based more on what they feel they ought to be doing, than on what is actually occurring. They may have the best intentions, but assessments of their own behavior is not quite accurate. Bearing this in mind, it was a good reason for supplementing interviews with participant observation, since the latter would provide a broader perspective on the phenomenon.

According to Patton (1990), there are several advantages for gathering data using the participant observation method:

(i)     Firstly, by directly observing the activities the researcher has a better understanding of the context within which the phenomenon takes place. Understanding the context in which the phenomenon occurs is essential to a holistic perspective.

(ii)    Secondly, first-hand observation with the phenomenon allows the researcher to be open, discovery-oriented, and inductive in approach. This is due to the fact that by being present on-site, the observer needs to rely less on prior conceptualizations of the event.

(iii)   The third value of participant observation is that the researcher has the opportunity to see things that may escape conscious awareness among participants because it is part of their routine and is taken for granted. The participant observer, therefore can discover things that the participants have paid little attention to.

(iv)    The fourth strength of participant observation approach is that the researcher can learn about things that participants may be unwilling to talk about or overlook, in an interview. Information that was not available through other means can be gained through participant observation.

(v)     The fifth value is that participant observation permits the researcher to move beyond the selective perception of the participants or other people. Interviews present selective perceptions of the participants. Combining those perceptions

with those of the participant observer's presents a more comprehensive view of the phenomenon being studied.

(vi)    Finally, getting close to the phenomenon through participant observation permits the researcher to access personal knowledge and direct experience as resources to aid in understanding and interpreting the phenomenon being investigated.

Thus, experiencing the phenomenon as an insider necessitates being a participant while being aware of the "observer" side to the process. The challenge lies in combining participation and observation to be able to understand the phenomenon as an insider while describing the phenomenon for outsiders

One of the weaknesses of observation is that people may act differently, even artificially, when being observed (Kerlinger, 1986). This study didn't exclude the possibility of observer effects. No assumption was made that the presence of another person in the home did not influence the parent-child interaction. Furthermore, no assumption was made that the degree of impact was constant from one home to the next (Caldwell and Bradley, 1984). The researcher assumed that it would be more difficult for the subjects to inhibit their ordinary reaction tendencies with the increasing amount of time that the participants spent together with the researcher and the video camera assistant. Wachs (1992) points out that while the presence of an observer may cause distortions in parental behavior, with repeated observations, these behaviors have a tendency to return to their normal patterns. He also suggests that behavior may vary depending on which family members are present and what activities are underway. It is important, he claims, to do repeated observations at different times of day.

Sometimes researchers use checklists as a guideline to help stay focused while conducting the observations; this was done in the present study (Appendix B). The observations were not limited to observing only the characteristics that were listed on the checklist, but all the different types of interactions and behaviors that were exhibited by the mother and the child. The checklist designed to assist the researcher in observing a range of data: the "where," "when," "with whom" and "how" of the interaction, the disposition of the mothers and children and the disposition of children with other caregivers. Thus, the observation report provided the following:

- A literal description of the child's play or mother-child play;

- The type of play the child engaged in, with or without mother or with other caregiver;

- The physical context of play, including playthings that were used;

- The social context in which the play interaction took place;

- The behavior of child and mother with regards to taking initiative, participation, response, degree of interest, mood, and expression.

The videotaping of mother-child interactions occurred simultaneously with the observations and had the same goals as observation of capturing the play interactions as they emerged in the context of everyday activity. Portions of interactions that had been videotaped (for example, eating breakfast, dressing the child, mother engaging in housework, conversing with the child) were used to initiate the interviews with the mothers. The videorecordings also worked as a back-up to the data that had been derived from observation. They were used to check the accuracy of – to verify or refute – the researcher's impressions and were used for triangulating the study.

## Selection of Sample

The sample of the study was arrived at through a mixture of (a) snowball or chain sampling and (b) criterion sampling.

(a) Snowball or chain sampling is an approach that identifies cases of interest from people who know people and who know which cases would be able to provide suitable and rich information for the study. In the case of this study, the Community Development Workers (CDW) in the village discussed the study with some families, who, in turn, passed on the information to others.

(b) Criterion sampling studies cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance. One criteria for the purpose of this study was toddlers between the age of twelve to thirty-six months.

Originally twelve toddlers between the ages of one year to three years and their mothers were to be selected as subjects for the study. When the researcher went to the site she decided to study fifteen mother-toddler dyads. Information about the study had spread all the mothers in the village who had toddlers were eager to be participants of the study. After having an initial meeting with all fifteen mother-toddler dyads, the researcher could find no valid reason for not taking the excluding extra three dyads since more participants would always be valuable for the study.

The decision to study one to three year olds is based on the more observable and frequent interactions with adults than would occur were the focus on older children. The early years of life involve more intense care-giving and provide an opportunity for richer observations of socialization behaviors and interaction than later years. It was the

assumption of the researcher that mothers would be accessible due to their role as primary caregivers of the children.

There were a total of seven male toddlers and eight female toddlers ranging in age from the thirteen months to thirty-seven months. Six of the toddlers were the first born in their families; nine of them had older siblings. The mothers' ages ranged from twenty-two to thirty years. Except for one mother, none had finished high school, although some could do basic reading and writing. None of them held outside jobs besides the one mother who had finished high school. She was employed at the local bank. All the other mothers spent their time either working at home or in the fields. None of them had participated in any home-based child-care and education programs and whatever knowledge they had about child rearing was culture-bound.

The researcher did not envision including the fathers or any other family or community members as primary participants of the study since the focus of the study was on mothers and toddlers. However, they (along with any extended family that resided with the mother and child and were caregivers of the child) were also observed when they interacted with the child since they formed part of the child's environment.

<u>Setting</u>

To provide a framework for the understanding of child rearing and play interactions within a rural Nepali family, a brief description on the population, environment, and culture is discussed in this section.

Nepal is slightly larger than the state of Arkansas. It is landlocked and sits on the shoulder of the southern Himalayas, wedged between Tibet and China to the north and India to the south. It has a land area of 140, 800 square kilometres. Forty percent of this is

forests and woodland, 17 percent is arable land, and 15 percent is comprised of permanent pastures. Nepal has some of the world's tallest mountains in the north as well as high altitude deserts. It has plains in the south and hills and fertile valleys in the midlands. Nepal is made up of fourteen zones and seventy-five districts. The climate varies from cool summers and severe winters in the north to subtropical summers with the monsoons and mild winters in the south. The almost total dependence on wood for fuel and the practice of cutting down trees to expand agricultural land without replanting has resulted in widespread deforestation, soil erosion, and water contamination.

Nepal has a population of just over 23 million. In 1999, population growth rate was 2.52%, with a birth rate of 35.66 births/1000 population. Infant mortality rate is one of the highest in the world at 75.98 deaths/1000 live births.

The population is made of various ethnic groups, including: Newars, Khas, Indians, Gurungs, Tamangs, Rais, Limbus, Sherpas, Magars, Tharus, Tibetans, and Rais. 93% of the population predominantly follows Hindu/Buddhist religion, with 4% Muslim, and 3% practicing Christianity and other beliefs. The official language is Nepali and there are twenty other languages divided into numerous dialects.

<center>Location of Research Site</center>

This study was conducted in a village in the middle, rural hills of Nuwakote District of Nepal. This is the native country of the researcher. The choice of this particular village was based on several considerations. Firstly, the researcher had received a small grant from the Save the Children Fund (SCF) for the data collection phase of the study. It was recommended that the researcher chose a site where SCF was involved so the results of the study could be used by SCF for future reference. Secondly,

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since the researcher does not speak any other ethnic Nepali dialects, the site had to be a village where the population spoke and understood Nepali besides their own ethnic dialect. This was essential, as the researcher's primary methods of data collection were participant observation, videotaping mother-child play interactions, and interviews and chats with the mothers involving direct communication. Mothers and caregivers spoke to their children in their own dialects or Nepali, whichever they felt comfortable in, during the observations. Thirdly, this particular village was selected because it had access to electricity for four hours in the evenings. Electricity had been installed in the village just a month before this study was conducted. Most rural villages do not have this facility. Electricity was required for each mother to be able to observe her child's play interactions that had been previously recorded by videotape. The researcher facilitated conversation and discussion for the interviews with the mothers after they had observed some portions of play interactions in the videotapes.

Early in May, just before the monsoons began, when it is dry and hot, the researcher set out to conduct an initial survey of the site. The purpose of the visit was to determine for herself and get acquainted with the people, their residential area, and environment where she would be spending nearly two months collecting data. The site of the study located northeast of Kathmandu, took a whole day's trip from the city, beginning with a four-hour bumpy car/bus ride through the northern mountains surrounding Kathmandu Valley. To some extent the breathtaking view of the mountains made up for the uncomfortable ride. This ride was followed by a hike of nearly five hours through valleys with meandering rivers and villages and hills in order to reach the destination. The village was located between two gushing rivers, Chandramati River in

the north and the Suryamati River in the south, and was accessible by walking across two suspension bridges located at two ends of the village. Kathmandu is perhaps one of the least modern capitals of the world, yet in relation to this village, it seemed highly sophisticated.

The researcher was greeted with smiles and greetings of "namaste" by the villagers who had already been informed by the field staff of SCF about her visit. She was hot, tired, and hungry after the day's trip, but she returned the villager's smiles and "namaste." She kept walking towards the house where the SCF field staff lived and where she would stay during the period of data collection.

The village population consisted of forty-four families with a total of one hundred and ninety seven individuals who were of seven different ethnic groups: Newar, Khas, Sherpa, Gurung, Magar, Tamang and Indian.

The village's physical structure was defined by four main paths, two that ran along the outer edges of the village and two that went through the heart of the village. Most of the houses were crowded together, sharing one or more walls with other houses. Open sanitation drains hemmed in the relatively narrow streets of the village. The houses were constructed from a combination of mud, thatch, wood, bricks, cement, and stones and were double-storied. The bedrooms were on the second floor. The kitchen, storage areas and sometimes cattle sheds were on the first floor. Children did not have private rooms or play areas in the house. Many of the children's activities were open to caregivers' supervision, taking place most often in the courtyard, kitchen and other common areas. Thus, children's beddings and cribs were generally found in parents' bedrooms where they often slept at night with their parents, especially if they were the

youngest or the only child, or in the courtyard, where children slept during the daytime. As they grew older or with the birth of another child, children had to give up the parents' bed and begin sharing a bed either with their siblings, grandparents, cousins, or uncles and aunts.

There was a Health Post and a small pharmacy where one could make telephone calls in the evenings to the city. No one else in the village had access to a telephone. There was an Agricultural Development Bank, a Commercial Bank, a Veterinarian Center, four small restaurants, a small hotel with an attached restaurant for weary travellers, a wholesale dealer, a hardware store, two stores selling groceries and cloth, and two water mills. The head office of SCF for that region was located towards the southern end of the village. Besides having a foster parent program, the organization provided agricultural development and health awareness programs for the neighbouring villages in the area as well. The village did not have any schools; children who attended school had to walk for a mile to reach their school. Parents were proud to be able to send their children to school and the children seemed excited to be going to school. Even if they were not very clean most of the day, they were particular about being clean and tidy before they headed off to school.

While most of the community used firewood for cooking, some used kerosene. They did not have any plumbing facilities inside their houses and had to fetch water from one of the five local water faucets that were installed in different parts of the village. Some of the households had pit latrines, but the rest used the open fields or the kitchen gardens.

The villagers' main source of income was farming or labouring on other people's farms. Some also went to the city for work, returning home twice a month or as often as they could. Having land was no indication that one only worked on the land. Both landowners and landless labourers had secondary jobs elsewhere such as trading, working at the bank, teaching, tailoring, running restaurants, and as porters and with SCF. Thus, the village had a mixed economic base with families having dual means of income. The women not only took care of the house but also worked in the fields and took care of any cattle, they owned.

The busiest months were May (just before the rains –monsoon- started, when the land was prepared for paddy plantation) and October (when they harvested their crop). The researcher was informed that during the monsoon season (June to September) the two rivers that flanked the village swelled, and on some occasions people had lost their cattle due to the flooding waters.

The village men often convened in the restaurants, chatting, smoking, and playing cards and the women usually met at the water faucets when they went to fetch water, do laundry or dirty dishes, or bathe their children.

Families in the village ranged in size and composition. While a majority of the families were either joint or extended, there were a handful of nuclear families as well. Altogether, there were twenty-seven households in the village. All of the families were patriarchal, headed by the oldest male in the household. In his authority rested the power, rights, and responsibilities of the household. Families were also influenced by community pressures to maintain just and equitable treatment for all family members. Community members intervened in family disputes to settle altercations between husband and wife or

father and sons. Although children principally belonged to their family, adult villagers were permitted to discipline children unrelated to them by virtue of their adult status.

During the afternoons, the village was half-empty as the older children who were not looking after their younger siblings went to school about a mile away from the village, fathers went to the fields, and so did most of the mothers. The mornings, too, were quiet as the villagers had gone to the fields, but in the evenings, the village would come alive when everyone returned home for the day.

During the next seven days, the researcher met the families and explored the village, getting to know the place while letting the families get to know her and feel comfortable with her.

Given that the researcher is a native of Nepal, her entry to the village was straightforward. She presented herself as a student-researcher who was interested in studying children and families in the village. The villagers were more than happy to be participants but seemed very curious about her interest in children and play. It seemed extraordinary to them that someone would come all the way to their village just to study child play.

The researcher spent a week inside the homes, particularly in the courtyards and kitchens where she could freely interact with members of the families, particularly the mothers and children. Growing up in a village in Nepal herself greatly benefited her interactions with them. Even though the villagers were of different ethnic groups, being a Nepali enabled the researcher to understand their mannerisms, habits, jokes, likes, dislikes, etc. In other words, the adjustment period for habituating to the village was eased by the fact that the researcher had experienced living in a village in her early years.

Early on the eighth day of her initial visit to the site, she went back to Kathmandu to make the necessary arrangements to return in a week's time with her video-camera assistant to conduct the study.

## Process

The SCF Community Development Workers (CDW) who lived in the villages were contacted to help in formulating the snowball or chain sample and to introduce the researcher to the families. The CDWs specialized in different areas ranging from health, agriculture, income generation activities, adult literacy, infrastructure development, and the recruitment of families who wished to sponsor their child through SCF. They maintained a good relationship with and had gained respect from the communities they had assisted in developing self-sustaining programs and strategies for their livelihood.

Once the mother-child pairs were selected with the help of the CDWs, the researcher explained to families on an individual basis what the study was about and what were her expectations from the families were. It was made clear to them that the study was not being conducted because of any situation that was being perceived as a problem that needed to be explored and analysed. The families were informed that the researcher was interested in the phenomenon of play and that the goal was to learn anything and everything about the play interactions of their toddlers. Confidentiality of all data was assured, as the researcher was the only person who would know the source of information. Numbers were assigned to identify the participants. All audiotapes and videotapes and any other data was identified on the basis of these numbers to guarantee the privacy and anonymity of the participants. They were encouraged to ask any questions they had at any point during the study. They were also told that their wishes

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would be respected and accommodated if they alerted the researcher of any situations that arose in which they wanted to back out of the study or reschedule any of the observation visits and interviews.

The children and mothers were expected to do whatever they usually did or wanted to do. Their families too were expected to continue with their normal activities, not interrupting their housework or any kind of work for the sake of being available during observations. While the main focus was mother-toddler interaction, spontaneous interactions of the toddler with other children and adults during the observation periods were also recorded. With the permission of the mothers and the heads of their individual household, the researcher had frequent access to the subjects in their natural setting to observe the interplay of different socio-cultural and environmental factors that influenced the phenomenon under exploration.

Before starting the actual data collection, the researcher and the video camera assistant spent two to three hours with each family, especially the mother and child participating in the study, to establish rapport. As much flexibility as possible was given to the families to gradually develop rapport and trust with the researcher and the video camera assistant. Rapport is defined as "having people open about their feelings about the setting and others" (Bogdan et al., 1992). Since communication between the researcher and participants was a critical factor for conducting the study, establishing rapport with mothers, toddlers and their families was of paramount importance for this field work. The second reason for spending this time together was also to provide them time and opportunity to get used to and adjust to the presence of the video camera that would be recording their interactions. For this purpose, at the initial visit, the video

camera assistant pretended to film them. For the first fifteen, to twenty minutes the mothers were very self-conscious of the video camera and kept glancing at the camera, getting distracted from their activities. The children were very curious and walked towards the assistant, poking their fingers at the camera. Gradually their curiosity subsided as they got used to the presence of the camera. With time, the camera was not as intrusive and all went back to their respective activities.

There was a porch right outside the room where the researcher lived on the first floor of the SCF building for female staff. From this porch, the researcher could observe a large part of the village and its hustle and bustle that went on there. Usually in the afternoons, after finishing their morning chores, some mothers would sit on the porch and talk with each other, catching up on the latest community gossip, while grooming their children or while their children played with each other. For most mothers, this was the only time that they had for themselves during the whole day; it didn't occur everyday.

Observation and Videotaping

The observation and videotaping occurred simultaneously. While the researcher conducted the observation, the video camera assistant filmed. A day was devoted to the observation and filming of each mother-child dyad. The day before the observation, the researcher and video camera assistant spent a couple of hours with them as already described earlier. The mother was reminded that the following day the researcher and the assistant would be paying them three visits. The period of the visits were attuned to the daily routines of the household. The visits were scheduled for a total of roughly six hours, with the following times and duration:

The first visit was around 8:00-a.m. when the mother returned from the field. Some visits took place in the field if that was where the mother and child were. This visit lasted for two hours.

The second visit was in the afternoon around 1:00-p.m. when the mother was either at home doing her various household chores or in the field. In this case, the child was either with her in the field or in the care of some other family member. The second visit also lasted for two hours.

The third visit, lasting another two hours, was in the evening around 6:00-p.m. when the mother was preparing the evening meal.

On many occasions the researcher had to lengthen or shorten the duration of the visit depending on the availability of the child since sometimes the child was asleep or the mother and child were not in the house. In this case, the researcher and video camera assistant went wherever the mother and child were as long as it was within thirty minutes walking distance of the village. Thus, a total of three observations were made for each mother-toddler dyad, consisting of a total of six hours per child. A grand total of ninety hours of observation were compiled.

Daily Household Routine

Morning:

(5:00-a.m.) Adults in the household wake up. The mother or some female of the household sweeps the house and either she or one of the adults (father, grandmother, uncle, or aunt) feeds the cattle.

(6:00-a.m.) In some households, the mother fetches fodder for the cattle or takes care of some work in the fields. In other households, the father or aunt or uncle carry out the tasks.

(8:00-a.m. - 10:00-a.m.) If the mother has gone to the field, she returns and prepares the meal and gets the older children ready for school. While preparing the meal, she spends time with the toddler child. If the grandmother or aunt prepares the meal, the mother comes from the field around 9:00am. Often, the toddler is taken to its mother in the field.

(10:00-a.m. - 12:00-p.m.) The family has their meal between this time period. The kitchen is cleaned and the dishes are done.

Afternoon:

(1:00-p.m. - 4:00-p.m.) Some mothers leave to do field work for the afternoon and take the toddler along with them. Some stay back and bathe or give their children a massage. Others take care of the laundry and perform other chores and errands that need to be accomplished. Most children are encouraged to take a nap. At this time, the mothers take the time to socialize with others.

Evening:

(4:00-p.m. - 5:00-p.m.) The mothers who had gone to the fields return. They catch up with a few household chores and have tea with family. The fathers return too and spend time with family or neighbors while having tea.

(5:00-p.m. - 8:00-p.m.) The mothers prepare and serve dinner to the family. After cleaning and doing the dishes, they are usually the last ones to go to bed.

(9:00-p.m. - 10:00-p.m.) Family retires for the day.

The researcher did not attempt to have participants' interactions be videorecorded until the participants felt comfortable and were not self-conscious about being filmed. Procedures for filming were individualized in each case to meet the needs and preferences of the child and mother. For example, toddlers were naturally social and curious about the researcher and the video camera assistant being in their home and filming with the camera. It was important for the validity of the study, however, that the researcher and assistant minimize their interaction with the child so that their presence did not overwhelm typical everyday activities or mother-child interactions. When children initiated contact with the researcher or the assistant, the mothers used tactics to distract them. When the child talked or showed something to the researcher or assistant, the mother responded, drawing the child's attention to her. The researcher and assistant responded minimally to the child's attempts at interaction. In most cases, a simple nonverbal response (such as a slight wave) was enough to satisfy the child's social impulse and was boring enough for the child to go back to interacting with the mother. As a general rule, the researcher and assistant avoided interacting with mother and child during videotaping.

Before filming the sessions, mothers were asked to carry on as they normally would. The video camera assistant followed the child with the camera during the sessions. Mothers were filmed when they came into the child's field or when the child came into their field. Children adapted to the presence of the researcher and assistant quickly. Though they showed awareness of the camera, their interest in it was intermittent and fleeting.

The researcher carried out the observations using lined notebook paper, a pencil, and a watch to record what interactions occurred at what times. During the observation, which occurred at the same time as the videorecording, the researcher and video camera assistant tried to remain as unobtrusive as possible, as mentioned earlier, talking to the participants and members of the household minimally and only when spoken to.

A rough checklist on the kinds of behaviour to observe was used to facilitate the researcher's observation. The observations were in no way limited to observing only the characteristics on the checklist (Appendix B). The researcher did not use a pre-determined set of behaviors to be coded because that would have limited the goals of the study. The goal of the study was to determine what the natural context revealed about the phenomenon of play. Detailed field notes were taken for recording ongoing observations and reflections of the researcher. The purpose of taking detailed notes was to provide a holistic sense of the interactions by describing the circumstances surrounding the interactions.

At the end of a day of observation and filming, the family was thanked for their co-operation and the toddlers were given some candy which was highly appreciated.

Through shadowing the mothers with their children, taking detailed field notes, and filming their play interactions, the researcher was able to capture in-depth a sample of the interactions that occurred within a day in the life of the mother-toddler dyad in their natural setting.

At the end of each day, the researcher viewed the filmed interactions and compared them with her observation notes. Filmed segments of different play interaction scenarios were selected for the mothers' viewing to generate conversations for the

interviews. On reviewing the raw data, the researcher noticed that there were five main types of interaction behaviors that the mothers demonstrated. The segments that were selected showed mothers facilitating child play, participating in child play, restricting child play, neutral behavior towards child play, and non-involvement in play. It was hoped that these five types of behavior (which have been described in detail in Chapter IV), would enable the mother to reflect and focus on the interactions she had with her child. The interviews were conducted the following day in the evening after the mothers had finished their household work for the day.

Interview

The interview took place in the evening between the hours of eight and nine when it was convenient for the mother and lasted approximately two hours. Some interviews were longer depending on the length of mothe's responses. A room with electric outlets that was formerly used by an SCF staff member was used for showing the mothers the filmed segments of their play interactions with their child before conducting the interview. The researcher made "small talk" with the mothers about their day to relax them for the interview. On numerous occasions small talk made the mothers comfortable enough to confide in the researcher about their relationships with different members of their family or the villagers and to "vent out" frustrations about their lives in general. The researcher sympathetically listened for approximately ten minutes and then proceeded to gradually direct the conversation to the video recording. The researcher's impression was that the mothers didn't encounter a sympathetic ear very often and were extremely eager to talk when they found someone willing to listen.

The researcher explained that they would be viewing play interactions with their toddlers after which they would have interviewed by the researcher for about an hour. They were informed that their opinions and ideas would be audiotaped for securing "tangible" data. They were encouraged to talk freely and voice their opinions and perspectives about what was occurring on the videotape. They were also reassured that they would not be judged for whatever their perspectives and opinions were and that there were no right or wrong answers. To develop an atmosphere for free expression, the researcher used both verbal and non-verbal cues, such as confirming remarks, a nod of the head, eye contact, and smiles.

The twenty minutes of play interaction scenarios that were selected for mothers' viewing consisted of a sample of daily routines and activities from the three videotaping sessions. In these scenarios, the mothers were facilitating, participating, restricting, remaining neutral, or not involved in child play. These scenarios were utilized for stimulating a dialogue with the mothers about their perspectives on play. Initially, the mothers' reactions to seeing themselves on the TV screen were amusement and disbelief. The researcher sometimes replayed segments so that the novelty of seeing themselves on screen wore off and they could focus and make comments about their interplay with their children. The mother of each toddler, watching the videotape of her own toddler and herself, told her story of what was happening, what was going through her mind, and why she did what she did in relation to her child's activity. Mothers were also asked to speculate on why their child did what he or she did. A mother's conceptions of child play and her role in relation to her child's play were also probed by asking them questions such as:

What is your child doing here?

What do you call this behavior?

Why is your child behaving in this way?

Who initiated this interaction, you or your child?

Why are you doing what you are doing here?

What is your child's motive for doing this?

How do you think this action of yours makes your child feel?

The researcher audiotaped as well as took notes of relevant comments that mothers made while watching the video segments.

Mothers were also asked to describe how the videotape compared to typical everyday activity and to talk about any instances of atypical behaviour. All mothers reported that the videotaped observations were highly representative of everyday behaviour. Some mothers reported that they might have been reluctant to do certain things while being filmed that they sometimes did like singing to their child, but they did not deem these to be significant. Mothers noted occasional child behaviours that seemed to be inspired by the presence of the camera. These behaviours consisted of waving and smiling. The child soon returned to typical activity after these behaviors.

The open-ended interview checklist used was a combination of an informal conversational open-ended interview approach and the general interview guide approach. It contained a list of questions for guiding and facilitating the interview as the mothers' reflected on their perspectives on play interactions (Appendix A). These questions ensured that similar information was elicited from each informant, while allowing for the spontaneous expression of ideas and the teasing out of beliefs and concepts about the

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phenomenon of "play." The questions were asked of each mother. However, the format and the sequence were not the same with every mother since the questions were asked in a manner so that the flow of conversation would not be disrupted.

The reactions and reflections of the mothers during the interviews were successfully audiotaped for accuracy and coding purposes. In addition, the researcher took notes during each interview to record her impressions, observations, and themes of the interview. These impressions were clarified with the mothers for verification and then used to interpret the data and provide meaning to the mothers' actions and words.

<div align="center">Confirmation of Data</div>

For confirmation of data, the researcher listened very carefully to the audiotapes after the interviews. If some phrases or words seemed to have an obscure meaning, that particular mother was sought for clarification. Sometimes, even though some phrases consisted of identical words, the meanings were different depending on what the mothers had in mind. In such cases, the mothers were consulted to clarify the meaning of these phrases. In some cases, the mothers could not remember what meaning they had intended. When that happened, they were given some time to think about it and subsequent contacts were made.

This process was important for confirmation of interviews because it provided mothers the opportunity to reflect on the interview as a whole and to put the interview in their own frame of reference. Miles and Huberman (1984) and Merriam (1989) refer to this process as "member check." Besides checking with the mothers, the researcher also consulted the SCF community development workers if some of the phrases and expressions that the mothers used during the interview were confusing.

## Data Management

A master calendar (Appendix H) was used for recording all the dates and places of observation, video recording and interviewing, and any other appointments or visits.

A significant amount of data was generated through the different methods of data collection. The data consisted of detailed field notes of observations, transcripts of interviews and self- reflections, and transcripts of the videotapes of interactions. This large volume of data had to be managed and organized in a systematic fashion so it could be used in a productive and efficient way.

Each mother and child participating in the study was assigned a number and had a folder that was created for them, and labelled with their number. They were given the number according to the sequence in which they were studied. The audiotapes containing the interviews and the videotapes were labelled with these assigned numbers and the date, place, and time when they occurred. The folder contained the information sheet (Appendix G) with their names, ages, gender, address, family size, number of siblings, type of household, educational status of parents and caregivers of the child, and any other information they had voluntarily shared that could be useful for the study. At the end of the day, field notes on the observations and any other notes that were taken during the day were sorted and put into the respective folders. The transcripts of the audiotapes and videotapes as well as all the paperwork generated while conducting the analysis were filed in the folders. Large index cards were used for keeping track of the different themes by listing on them the page numbers on which the themes occurred. Thus, each folder contained index cards for different emerging themes for example, "purpose of play," "play materials," " most frequent play child engaged in," "type of play." Each index card

had one theme and the page numbers on which the theme occurred in the observation field notes. There was also a miscellaneous folder that contained information and material that had been derived from other sources that were helpful for the study.

## Data Translation and Transcription

The bulk of translation and transcription of the raw data was carried out by the researcher. The videotapes were transcribed in narrative form. The transcription included a description of child and mother and their activities in the order in which they occurred during the taping session. The audiotapes of the interviews were transcribed verbatim in Nepali and then translated from Nepali into English. The researcher transcribed and translated all fifteen interviews. If and when conflicts arose in the translation, the researcher consulted two early childhood educators who worked as consultants in Nepal. Fortunately, most of the confusion that occurred with some phrases was resolved by consulting the mothers while in the field.

## Data Analysis

The emergent character of qualitative research demands that data analysis is initiated as the data are collected. Ongoing analysis of data through simultaneous review of observations, reflections, and interviews, identification of significant themes, and subsequent coding is the hallmark of qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The data was compiled and analysed using the grounded theory method developed by sociologists Glaser and Strauss (1967), an inductive approach that consists of jointly collecting, categorizing, coding, and analysing the data to allow theories to emerge. In this way, theory was "grounded" and came from the data (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984),

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985), (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This inductive approach also allowed for adjustments or additions to be made to the subsequent data collection as well.

Data was analysed for emerging themes, as well as for information related to the questions used to guide the interview and observations. Through this method, the emerging theories were systematically tested, provisionally verified, discarded, or reformulated simultaneously as data collection proceeded. The strength of this approach is that it allowed the researcher to uncover patterns in participant behaviour as it occurred in context. Thus, to the best of her ability, the researcher entered the setting with as few preconceived notions as possible in order to include important variables that were encountered in the setting.

Formal data analysis typically began with reading transcripts, field notes, and related materials to identify patterns or themes that were similar among participants and across data sources. For example, identification of recurring themes in transcripts and field notes were coded by marginal remarks. By making comparisons across informant's narratives, from observations, interviews, and other data sources, thematic differences and similarities became clear. Huberman and Miles (1994) suggest that once themes and patterns are identified, data can be reduced into categories or codes. Once coded, the constant comparative method (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) was applied. Categories were defined and evidence across data sources was gathered to contribute to internal validity. Next, the categories were analysed using Domain and Taxonomic Analysis (Spradley, 1980).

The format for data analysis was as follows:

Phase One - This phase of data analysis occurred in the field. The data collected from observations, videotapes, interviews, self-reflections, and field notes were analysed for themes. The research questions were re-read. Emerging themes that were different from the initial research questions in the guided interview questions were added to the initial research questions and explored in the subsequent observations and interviews. Also, memos were written after every observation and interview. After the last interview and before the researcher left the village, the emerging and identified themes were shared with the mothers individually as a form of "member check."

Phase Two - All the audiotaped interviews were fully transcribed and translated. The videotapes were transcribed in narrative form and the researcher's descriptive accounts and observation notes typed up. The mothers' accounts while watching the videotape and their interviews were combined. The researcher's descriptions of toddler play in the context of daily activity from observations provided one level of narrative report and the mothers' accounts and interviews contributed an "insider's" perspective to the text. The researcher's and the mothers' voices were brought together to create a narrative that offers a rich description of child play in the home. Next, the guided research questions were re-read. When examining the narrative of transcripts with the research questions in mind, the researcher was able to focus on categories and "to chunk" the data effectively.

A category is an array of different objects that are treated as if they are equivalent and are classified together. Categorization is the process of dividing data into categories that share similarities.

Phase Three - A full analysis was conducted of each category. Categories derived from

observation, videorecording, and interview responses were analyzed using Domain and

Taxonomic Analysis, the principles of which were based on the work of Spradley (1980).

Domain Analysis

Domain Analysis is the first type of ethnographic analysis. The goal of domain

analysis is twofold. The first goal is to identify categories and the second goal is to gain

an overview of the phenomenon being studied. A domain is a category of meaning that

includes other smaller categories. A domain is established on the basis of common

features of shared meaning among members and it is the basic unit of analysis. Thus,

each category consists of at least one domain. For example, the question, "What is the

purpose of child play?" establishes a domain called "purpose of play." If the reasons for

children's purpose of play appeared in contexts other than responses to the question,

those responses were also included as an element in the domain "purpose of play."

Domains as categories are made up of three basic elements or mechanical parts

(Appendix D).

(i)     Cover Terms are the names of the domains.

(ii)    Included Terms are the smaller categories inside the domain.

(iii)   A Semantic Relationship is the linking together of categories and is extremely

        important for discovering domains. The semantic relationship operates on the

        single principle of "inclusion." Its function is to define included terms by placing

        them "inside" the domain.

In the study, cover terms, while representing the shared meaning of included

terms and indicate the nature of a domain, were abstracted from individual interview

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questions. Then included terms were identified in the responses and the appropriate

semantic relationship between included terms and the cover term was considered. For

example, the domain, "why children play," is also a cover term for that domain. There are

also "included terms" which make up the domain. The included terms for the domain of

"why children play" (cover term) included the following: "because play is fun," "because

children are bored," "because they can imitate other people," and so forth. Thus, the

included terms share a feature explaining the reason for children's play. The nature of the

relationship between a cover term and included terms is called "semantic relationship." In

this example, included terms explain the "reasons" for children's playing. The semantic

relationship for "reason" was thus established.

Taxonomic Analysis

For particular domains, taxonomic analysis followed domain analysis. Like a domain,

a taxonomy is a set of categories organized on the basis of a single semantic relationship.

The major difference between the two is that a taxonomy shows more of the relationships

among the things inside the cultural domain by showing the relationships among "all" the

included terms in a domain. A taxonomy reveals subjects and the way they are related to

the whole. It also reveals an important feature of all taxonomies, which is that they have

different levels (Spradley, 1980). Accordingly, in this study when the need arose, a

search for possible subsets was made among included terms. Then, taxonomy among

included terms was established. For example, with the question concerning the mothers

childhood play experiences compared to their own child's play experiences, mother's

discussed their play experiences in various ways. Initial analysis of the data required

sorting out words, phrases, or sentences (included terms), which dealt with comparison of

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play (domain analysis). Then, the included terms were categorized into "play with who," "play with what," "play where" (Figure 9). These categorizations are called "taxonomic analysis." A diagram of taxonomic analysis is presented in Appendix C. The worksheet, suggested by Spradley (1980), represents the mechanical part of analysis. All analyses were conducted to determine themes for each category. These analyses were conducted for all subjects. After the analysis for all subjects had been conducted, all the data that had been left out was examined to see if further patterns and themes could be derived. The analyses of the results are discussed in the next chapter.

## Role of the Researcher

The collection of data through qualitative methods depends on the social relationship of the researcher with the subjects. Therefore, the role and status of the researcher in the group and setting was identified. The researcher aimed for a neutral role yet was always aware of the lens through which she saw and gathered her data. An ongoing, conscious effort to monitor this role and subjectivity was critical to preserving the internal validity of the data (Goetz & LeCompte, 1982). The researcher was aware of bringing personal and professional biases from working with families in home-based child care and education programs, as well as her own cultural beliefs and values which have roots in her Nepali heritage. Acknowledgement of these biases was the first step in striving to present the data as clearly and objectively as possible. Utilizing methods of triangulation of the data also served to keep these in check.

It was important for the researcher to establish her role first and foremost as a researcher, while her background in early childhood education and development had brought her to this study and could serve to inform this work. Conducting cross-cultural

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research presented inherent challenges for the researcher. For even though the researcher is Nepali, she is not totally familiar with rural Nepali customs and norms. For this study the researcher had to become aware of differences in social expectations. This knowledge was critical to prevent initial misinterpretations and threats to rapport-building with the participants. Assistance on these issues was sought from the community development workers.

Lastly, it was critical to clarify the purpose of this research, of describing a process and situation without being judgmental about it. The researcher's role could be perceived as one coming to study a situation because it is problematic. Providing clear information about the objectives of the study, and demonstrating a sincere respect for the voices of the participants hopefully reassured the participants of the integrity of the research.

Ethical Considerations

The sensitive nature of qualitative research could raise ethical dilemmas during data collection and dissemination. For the purpose of the study, the families were provided verbal explanation so that even those who couldn't read or write would understand the purpose of the study and the use of the findings. In this way the families were aware of what they were committing themselves to. Confidentiality of data was assured. For all interviews, the researcher was the only one who knew the source. When audiotapes and videotapes were transcribed, the name of each mother and child was changed and coded. This coding ensured the privacy of the informants when the research findings were presented.

Before each interview and observation, the mothers were reminded and assured of confidentiality and were asked if they had any questions about the study. In addition, they

were assured that if any situation arose when they felt awkward or wished to reschedule or review the interview and observation, the researcher would accommodate and respect their wishes. As participants, mothers had a right to know as much as possible about the study. Throughout the study the researcher was "honest but not too specific or lengthy in explanations" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992. p.123). The participants were informed that the goal of the study was to explore the play interactions of toddlers. The mothers seemed surprised that somebody would want to study "play." They were curious about what was so special about their children, since there were children everywhere and the researcher could have chosen other children for her study. One of the mothers mentioned that children everywhere played, and why did the researcher want to come all the way to their community to study their children playing. The researcher acknowledged the validity of their questions and informed the mothers that she was specifically interested in studying rural Nepali children because of her former experience working with rural communities and also because SCF had allocated funds for conducting the study in an area where they had ongoing programs. The researcher did not explain why she was studying "play" as that would have meant talking about her perception of "play," and she did not want to influence in any way the mothers' thoughts on the phenomenon.

Trustworthiness

In the design of a qualitative study, it is of utmost importance that the researcher guards against interference of researcher assumptions and biases in analyzing the data to ensure the transferability and consistency of the results. Lincoln and Guba (1985) have suggested several procedures that were implemented in this study to strengthen the internal validity of the data.

One way the researcher tried to establish trustworthiness was through triangulation of the data. Triangulation is a means whereby the researcher uses multiple sources to collect data on the same study, which enhances the possibility of using the findings in other settings (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). The researcher checked her field notes taken during observation with what was videotaped and the information generated from the interviews to triangulate the data. Member check (Merriam, 1988; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was also conducted when the researcher conducted the interviews with the mothers after showing them the videotapes. The researcher also kept a journal for the research process and the progression of the researcher's thoughts and analysis helped in checking and rechecking the data (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 147), which enhanced the dependability of the study. The researcher also used the Community Development Workers (CDW) in the field as peer de-briefers to clarify any confused ideas from the interview or observation and videorecording. When any confusion in interpretation of data appeared, the researcher checked with the mothers and then with the CDWs for inter-coder reliability.

<u>Limitations of the Study</u>

Although every consideration was made to ensure its quality and generalizability, there are limitations to this study that must be acknowledged:

1. The sample size is small (fifteen), in order to allow for more in-depth exploration of the phenomenon. In addition the limited geographical area and lack of "control" over social variables (such as income, age of mother, birth order of child, ethnic group, etc.) limit the generalizability of results. Therefore, the findings cannot be applied to families living in other areas with other children or in other situations.

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2. The design and methodology used in this study are limited to exploring the identified questions, and therefore may have prevented the researcher from identifying other factors or making other interpretations of/on this experience.

3. The short amount of time the researcher spent in the setting (two and half months) hindered her ability to explore and identify additional themes.

4. The researcher is of the same nationality as the informants but not of the same background and has not explored or interpreted the data in the same way that somebody from the same background (an "insider") would. The researcher shares ethnic similarity with only some of the participants and even then has differences as she is from a more privileged socio-economic and educational status than that of the participants. She has not known the hardships that the participants endure on a daily basis for maintaining their livelihoods. Spending two months in the community does not enable her to fully understand their actions. Despite efforts to monitor the validity of data collection and interpretation, these background differences may limit the study.

# CHAPTER IV

## ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

### Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study. Its purpose is to categorize and summarize the analysis of results from the data derived from observation field notes, videotapes, and interviews. To present the results more clearly, this chapter has been divided into two sections, corresponding to the two main questions this study addresses:

1. What are mothers' conceptions and attitudes regarding play?

2. What is the nature of play interaction activities between mother-toddler dyads in their natural setting?

The first section examines mothers' conceptions and attitudes regarding play through the data derived from the interviews of mothers after they watched selected portions of videotaped segments of play with their children. Mother's definitions of play, their perspectives regarding the functions of play, and the types of play that contribute to their perspectives of play have been explored. The responses generated from the mothers have been divided into various categories. The categories are: (1) Types of play, (2) Most frequent play, (3) Play materials, (4) Functions of play, (5) Definitions of play, (6) Most desirable and least desirable play, (7) Mother's childhood play, (8) Opportunity to play with child.

Each category was analysed and patterns and themes that emerged were identified through Spradley's (1980) Domain and Taxonomic analysis, presented in different figures.

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The second section examines the types and nature of play interaction activities that the mother-toddler dyads were involved in, in their everyday settings. This section has been divided into categories generated from observation and videorecording. The categories were adapted and modified from the Social/Cognitive Scale condensed from Christie and Johnsen's (1987) modification of Rubin et al.'s (1978) scale.

The following are the three categories of play and a combination of any of the subcategories of play that occurred. These categories emerged from the observation field notes and videorecording of the mother child interactions.

1) Social play categories : (a) Interactive play, (b) Parallel play, (c) Solitary play

2) Cognitive play categories: (a) Functional/relational play, (b) Constructive play, (c) Pretend/symbolic play

3) Nonplay category for behaviours that did not have the characteristics of either social play or cognitive play

Mother-involvement and sensitivity to child's play was also examined to provide deeper meaning to the play interactions of the mothers and toddlers.

The categories have been defined in detail in the second section of this chapter.

Research Question 1: What are mothers' conceptions and attitudes regarding play?
The first research question was analyzed on the basis of the previously mentioned categories.

Types of play that children engaged in

This category dealt with the types of play mothers believed children normally engaged in on a daily basis. The interview questions about types of play elicited descriptive responses of their children's play. From the interview responses, attempts

were made to generate a description of activities in which children engaged during play.

Four major taxonomic categories were identified from the responses of mothers. They

are: physical/motor activities, cognitive functioning activities, social interactive activities,

and sensory activities. These activities occurred indoors or outdoors.

**Figure 2**

**Taxonomic Analysis -Types of play children engaged in as reported by mothers**

| TAXONOMY | TYPES OF PLAY |
|---|---|
| PHYSICAL (Gross & Fine Motor) | • Running, jumping<br>• Chasing each other<br>• Rough and tumble play<br>• Attempting to climb trees<br>• Swinging on swings<br>• Rolling and kicking balls<br>• Play with pebbles, sticks, and straw |
| COGNITIVE | • Naming body parts<br>• Counting toes and fingers<br>• Names and sounds of animals and birds<br>• Imitating adults and the toy vendor<br>• Imitating events like weddings and ceremonial worship |
| SOCIAL | • Sharing play materials with each other<br>• Hide and seek<br>• Dragging each other on a sack |
| SENSORY | • Play with water, soil, and sand<br>• Play with grains, spices, and vegetables |

(a) Physical activities that children engaged in consisted of gross motor and fine motor activities. They engaged in gross motor activities such as running, playing with balls, attempting to climb trees, swinging sticks and ropes, playing with mud and rocks, and splashing each other with water. Fine motor activities they engaged in included playing with grains, pebbles, straw, twigs and soil.

(b) Cognitive activities were: learning to count fingers and toes, learning colors, learning the names and sounds animals and birds make, and naming body parts and facial features with the help of a mother or other caretaker. One mother related:

> When I go to pick vegetables in the garden, she usually accompanies me
> and helps pick them. I tell her to pick only the ripe or big ones and she
> now understands what they mean as well as the names of some vegetables.

Other cognitive activities included trying to learn songs from their older siblings, other village children, mothers or grandmothers. While they were playing with older children, the children were made to pretend to be some adults (playing house or weddings, etc.)

Imitation: Every mother related how her child imitated someone. One mother talked with amusement about how her son would put on his grandfather's hat, look at himself in the mirror and imitate his grandfather coughing. Those children with older siblings would often imitate them singing, reading or writing. One child loved imitating a toy vendor who announced his wares as he passed through the village. Other children imitated the sounds of dogs, cats, cows, and roosters in their village. One mother talked about how her daughter and her cousin would imitate performing "puja" (ceremonial worship), which they had seen their grandmother and their respective mothers perform.

(a) Social interactive activities: Mothers talked about how their children enjoyed playing

with other children until a fight would break out over play materials. Mothers encouraged their children to share their toys. And the older children dragged younger children in a sack or played hide and seek with them.

Usually when feeding a fussy child, mothers would relate stories to their children about the terrible consequences that befell a certain child who was troublesome and wouldn't eat. If a child disobeyed, mothers would threaten the child by relating some story about what happened to disobedient children. These stories were, in most cases, handed down from one generation to the next. Since it is a common practice for people to drop by for a visit, children would be introduced to different members of the community through some kinship term and would be asked to perform the traditional greeting of "namaste" or "dhog." From a very young age, children were taught to respect older family members and members of the community and were provided many opportunities for receiving social messages about their culture.

(d) Sensory activities: In general, Nepali people are very physical with their children. They usually carry their children around, hold them in their laps, hold hands, throw them up in the air, give them massages, and in most, cases breast-feed for two years or longer. Children receive exposure to numerous tactile and sensory experiences. When they are in the kitchen with their mothers, they are able to smell different spices and herbs, play with different textures of grains, vegetables, and food. As one mother said of her twenty-nine month old daughter:

> She loves wondering around the village and exploring things, picking leaves, and smelling flowers. I let her go about and even if she's in trouble, as long as it's not life threatening, she will learn from it. The more she sees and experiences, the faster she will learn.

Since it was summer, children often played in the stream or one of the local water faucets in the village. Mothers didn't like this, but the children would be engaged in playing with soil and mud, squeezing it between their fingers and splattering it all over. Outdoor play: Mothers mentioned outdoor play as well as indoor play and their responses also reveal occurrences of solitary and social play. The outdoor play mothers mentioned consisted of different types of physical, cognitive, social, and sensory activities. They included: running, playing in the water (either in the stream or by the local faucets), with a ball, with mud and soil, with sticks, ropes, and rocks, rough and tumble play with neighbourhood children, attempting to climb trees, etc. (Figure 2). Most mothers agreed that their children preferred playing outdoors rather than indoors. One mother described of her nineteen months old son:

> Even before he started walking, he would try crawling outside. His grandfather would carry him outside in his arms and he would spend time with older members of the village. Once he started walking, he was all over the place! We couldn't keep track of him. He would be either following other older children around the village, or play outside our neighbour's tea-shop with whatever objects he can find and lay his hands on. He's become quite a loafer!

Another mother gave an example of how her daughter loved to clean dirty plates:

> ...If she finds any dirty plates by the stream... (A small stream ran through their garden)...where we leave them after having our meals to be later cleaned up by myself or one of the girls, she will start cleaning them herself imitating either myself or one of her older sisters. Sometimes, she will take off her dress and start washing it. Whatever takes up her fancy she does...many times I have seen her talking to herself pretending that she is preparing meals to feed her imaginary children or some guests!

Several other mothers reported how much their children enjoyed playing in the water whether it was by the faucets, stream or the river. One mother further stated of her daughter:

> In the summer when it's hot, just before the rains begin, she loves playing in the stream. She either goes there, or if somebody is filling water containers at the local faucet, she'll go right under the dripping faucet with her clothes and all and beg the person to leave it open, as she cannot reach the faucet. If the faucet is closed, she climbs on the rock walls surrounding the faucet and triumphantly turns open the faucet herself!

Clearly the children enjoyed playing outside. The village was bordered on two sides by rivers that would be gushing during the monsoon season. One had easy access to the neighbouring hills by merely crossing the two bridges. When asked if she was concerned about her child's safety during outdoor play, one of the mothers, echoed all the other mothers' thoughts:

> Oh, there are always people walking around and everybody knows everybody else here. So, if anybody sees my child getting even close to danger they'll either take care of the child her/himself or make us aware of what is going on. Of course, sometimes there have been accidents. But, they hardly happen and I have warned my child about where she can go. On occasions when she has disobeyed, I have scolded her and punished her by not letting her play outside for some time.

Neighbours were often found taking care of or playing with the children if both parents were away. Younger children could be heard and seen in and around their houses, either playing with older children or just observing some activity or event. The boundaries of the spaces the toddlers occupied, whether indoors or outdoors, were permeable and often, there was an adult monitoring the children.

Another mother pointed out that she was more concerned about her child's health

safety when she was playing with soil or mud. The mother elaborated:

> She can play outside for hours, if she's playing with mud or soil. I hate
> when she gets herself and her clothes all dirty and soiled. It's extra work
> for me on top of everything else. But what really bothers me is when she
> sometimes licks the soil from her fingers. One never knows what kinds of
> worms have laid their eggs in it and then she ends up getting diarrhea. I
> know pregnant women have strange cravings, because I had some myself,
> but she is a child and why would she want to eat soil of all things?

We can see from the related statements that mothers had different types of

concerns regarding their children playing outdoors. Overall they preferred their children

playing outside. When a child was indoors, she would follow her mother around or nag

for attention when mother was busy doing housework. This could explain why children

would usually be found playing outdoors instead of indoors.

Indoor play: Indoors, children played in the kitchen (while the mother prepared meals)

with different kinds of kitchen objects like pots, pans, spoons, ladles, bottles, and other

containers. They also played with vegetables and grains depending on the season and dish

the mother was preparing. On one occasion, when the mother was busy kneading the

dough for bread, her child came over and wanted to put her hands in the mixture of flour

and water. The mother gave the child some kneaded dough to keep her busy; and the

child was totally preoccupied with making different shapes with the dough. Mothers

stated that their children enjoyed "helping" in the kitchen. One mother declared she

would try to keep her eighteen -month old boy out of trouble in the kitchen by giving him

different tasks:

> ....He wants to do whatever I'm doing so, before I start working on what I
> have to, I give a bit of all the things to him. He can keep himself busy
> trying to peel garlic or potatoes, squish tomatoes, and get his hands all

sticky mixing flour and water. Sometimes I give him different kinds of roasted grains like wheat, popcorn or soy-beans which he can play with and eat as well.

**Figure 3**

**Domain Analysis – Kinds of play children engaged in as reported by mothers**

| INCLUDED TERMS | SEMANTIC RELATIONSHIP | COVER TERM |
|---|---|---|
| • Indoor Play<br><br>• Outdoor Play<br><br>• Solitary Play<br><br>• Parallel Play<br><br>• Interactive Play | I<br>N<br>C<br>L<br>U<br>S<br>I<br>O<br>N | Kinds of Play |

Children often played with objects lying around the house: toothbrushes, hairbrushes or hair-combs, mirrors, newspapers, baskets, etc. Since they usually didn't have commercial toys, they played with household objects and things that were naturally available in their environment.

Solitary and social play: Mothers were asked to provide information on their child's solitary and social play. If their child engaged in solitary play, what did the play involve? If their child engaged in social play, who were their play partners and what did their play involve?

Both boys and girls engaged in the different forms of play occurring within the four taxonomic categories: physical/motoric activities, cognitive functioning, social and

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sensory activities. Among these categories, small or fine motor activities were salient features of solitary, manipulative play. In general, mothers indicated that toddlers engaged in many kinds of play without partners as well as in imaginative play. As a mother mentioned about her thirty-one month old daughter:

> Sometimes when other children aren't around and she is fussing with me, I collect objects she could play housekeeping with and give them to her. She gets totally involved, from sweeping the house to cooking and taking care of her babies, all the time talking to herself...

Another mother talked about her twenty-eight month old son:

> I'm always afraid that he might accidentally poke somebody with this stick that he loves to play with. One minute the stick becomes a flag and he holds it up and starts marching to an imaginary rhythm. Next minute the stick becomes a weapon, which he uses against his enemies. Then after a while the stick becomes his horse and he is galloping all over the courtyard urging his horse to go faster and faster.

When the toddlers were engaged in social play, their partners could be anyone. The mothers expressed how the toddlers would play, not only with their siblings and their parents, but also with other members of the household, neighbours, children of the village, and members of the community. Some mothers said that, while the older toddlers were eager to play with almost everyone who was willing to play with them, younger toddlers were more "picky" about who they played with. They preferred their older siblings and the older children of the village as their play partners. One of the mothers mentioned of her one and a half year old:

> She is always eager to play with her older sisters. Sometimes if they don't, she will start picking fights with them and start screaming. She knows that if she screams, I will tell my older one to play with her, just so that we could have some peace. She follows them around and imitates what they are doing, even if it's doing some chores. My older ones complain that she

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is getting in their way and so I try to distract her with other things. Sometimes it works, but often, it doesn't.

The mother of a twenty-five month old talked about her son:

My boy is always running after older children, mostly boys, to play with them. They would get irritated and would run even faster and he wouldn't be able to keep up with them so would come back home. He likes playing with our neighbour's boy, you know, the Sherpa child. But, he is older than Raju and sometimes they play cooperatively, but often he ends bullying the younger child and making him cry. So, when they are playing we have to constantly watch out that he doesn't hit him or bite him. I encourage him to be nice to his "brother."

From the responses of the mothers, when toddlers played with older children, they would listen and obey the older childrens' directions. One mother related how her boy who totally ignored her would comply with the wishes of an older child when they were playing.

Although the interview question does not generate an exhaustive list of kinds of play, the types of play mentioned by the mothers are assumed to be salient types of play. Based on their statements, the following patterns of "kinds of play" were identified:

- Play usually tended to occur outdoors. Mothers encouraged children to play outdoors instead of indoors.

- The boundaries of the spaces the toddlers occupied, whether indoors or outdoors, were permeable.

- Children were engaged in physical/motor activities, cognitive functioning, symbolic, and sensory activities.

-Toddlers engaged in various types of solitary play with an emphasis on fine motor forms of play and imaginative play.

<u>Most frequent kinds of play that children engaged in</u>

When mothers were asked to talk about the play they found their children frequently engaged in, only two mothers mentioned that boys preferred playing with sticks, rocks, and balls and girls preferred "housekeeping" play. The most noticeable feature about children's most frequent play was the difference between the girls' and boys' play. The mothers' of boys mentioned how their sons enjoyed playing with balls or ball-like objects. One mother elaborated:

> He can never get enough of playing with a football (soccer), especially with his father. When his father is at work he plays with other children. He is so crazy about football that when his old ball got ripped, he cried and cried for days and asked us to get a new one for him. But, with the market being so far away, it took a while until his father was able to purchase him one. He was so sad. He would take the ripped, air-less ball and kick it around, frustrated but trying to make the most of the situation. He cannot be separated from his ball.

Another mother mentioned her son's love for playing ball as well. She said:

> He doesn't have a real ball, so his father made him one from tattered pieces of sack, cloth and twine. He loves kicking it around everywhere!

On the other hand, quite a few mothers mentioned how their girls liked playing "cooking and housekeeping" with empty boxes and containers, twigs, grains, leaves, stones, and soil.

Mothers of both boys and girls talked about their children often imitating them, making different sounds and pretending to do things with objects, which implied "pretend play." Pretend play occurred both indoors and outdoors. Regardless of their gender, the children were often involved in different physical activities like chasing each other and jumping around according to their mothers. (Figure 4: Most frequent kinds of play). One fourth of the mothers mentioned their children frequently playing in the water, in the

stream or under the community faucets during the summer. The toddlers were allowed to

play in the rivers as long as there was some kind of adult supervision. Mothers

complained about how often their children would get wet.

**Figure 4**

**Domain Analysis – Most frequent kinds of play children engaged in as reported by mothers**

| INCLUDED TERMS | | | SEMANTIC RELATIONSHIP | COVER TERM |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| GIRLS | BOYS | BOTH | I | |
| Housekeeping | • Ball or<br><br>• Ball like Substitutes<br><br>• Sticks & rocks | • Running<br>• Jumping<br>• Chasing<br>• Pretend play<br>• Play in the river or the water faucet<br>• Play with kitchen objects | N<br><br>C<br><br>L<br><br>U<br><br>S<br><br>I<br><br>O<br><br>N | MOST<br><br>FREQUENT<br><br>KIND OF<br><br>PLAY |

In summary, the analysis of most frequent kinds of play that children engaged in,

established the following patterns of play:

- Children indulged frequently in physical play like chasing each other, jumping, rolling

around, and hide and seek.

- They also enjoyed water play (in the summer).

- Outdoor play occurred more often than indoor play.

- Boys were more prone to playing with balls than girls.

- Girls were often involved in cooking and housekeeping play.

- Whether indoors or outdoors, both genders were often involved in pretend play and imitation.

## Play objects and materials that children used in play

Mothers were asked to talk about the play objects and materials their children used for play. The researcher specifically made clear to the mothers that the play objects or materials did not have to consist of commercial toys and to mention any play objects they had for their children. Domain analysis of play objects/materials established three main domains: natural play objects, commercial play objects and play objects, made by the parents.

The mother's responses revealed that children seldom played with commercial toys because the parents could not afford them. They all said that if they had more money, they would love to buy more toys for their children. One mother said of her toddler:

> When the toy vendor visits the village, I have to divert her attention away or she keeps pleading with me to buy her a toy. Sometimes I get her something cheap, but usually I just try to get her attention away.

A mother related how one day she decided she was going to make a doll for her daughter. She couldn't bear to see her daughter getting upset every time the vendor came because she wasn't able to buy her daughter a doll. She said:

Once, she was so inconsolable I told her I would make her a doll. I had never made one before, but I wanted to give her something. So, I took some old cloth and cut it up in the shape of a doll and stuffed it with cotton and rags. I painted the features of her face and used black pieces of wool for her hair. She wasn't very pretty, but my daughter was so happy with it. She would not part with it at all. Actually, it wasn't very hard making it. I should have tried making it before…

Some of the other mothers had made stick figure dolls, tying together a couple of sticks with a piece of string and sticking a small potato on one end of a stick for a head.

Mothers reflected on how the toddlers played with utensils like spoons, pots, and pans as well as food items in the kitchen or with toothbrushes, hairbrushes and things they found around in the village like strings, bottles, boxes, sticks, and stones. A mother related that her daughter would use leaves, grass, and sand to represent food and vegetables when playing "house." Some mothers mentioned how the children would play with old batteries they found lying around in the village despite the number of times they had been told to stay away from the batteries. Mothers also talked about having to be careful where they kept their make-up and grooming items so that the children wouldn't be able to play with them. According to one mother, about her two year old son:

Even though I had left him in the care of his grandmother, he managed to get access to my hair oil. I had hid it under the bed, but I guess he must have managed to crawl under it while his grandmother wasn't watching. He tried to imitate me oiling my hair and in the process had oil all over himself, his clothes, the floor…it was a mess. It took me some time to clean up the mess. On occasions he has also made attempts at applying my lipstick and has bit off the top of it! I thought it was only my daughter who was interested in it, but now I have to watch out for both of them.

The toys that some mothers had bought for their children consisted of soccer ball, a plastic ball, some plastic birds, and a paper wind toy.

**Figure 5**

**Domain Analysis - Play objects and materials children used in their play**

| INCLUDED TERMS | | | SEMANTIC RELATIONSHIP | COVER TERM |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Natural Objects | Commercial Toys | Made by Parents | I | |
| • Discarded objects, e.g. boxes, candy wrappers, bottles, old batteries<br>• Objects around the house, e.g. toothbrushes hairbrushes, strings, ropes, pots, pans, other utensils, spice bottles, mothers' beads, make-up<br>• Natural objects e.g. stones, leaves, grass, sticks, soil/mud, water | • Balls<br><br>• Plastic animals and birds<br><br>• Paper wind toy | • Cloth and stick dolls<br><br>• Rag balls | N<br><br>C<br><br>L<br><br>U<br><br>S<br><br>I<br><br>O<br><br>N | Play Materials<br><br>and Objects |

The following patterns were established for the category of play objects/materials:

- Children were eager to play with commercial toys and parents wanted to give it to them but couldn't afford to do so.

- Play materials mostly consisted of household objects and natural objects.

- Some mothers had attempted to make dolls for their children and a father had made a ball for his son.

## Mothers' perceptions of the function of play

This category deals with the functional aspects of play in relation to child development. Functions of play are concerned with "why children play," " how play affects child development", or "what play does to child development." Domain analysis of the functions of play established two main domains: (a) the value of play on child development and, (b) reasons for why children play.

(a) Value of play in child development: In this domain, the value of play was approached in relation to specific areas of child development - cognitive, physical, social, and emotional. Mothers opinions regarding the different ways in which play was beneficial to their children ranged from physical and cognitive benefits to emotional and social benefits (Figure 6: Domain Analysis – Mothers' perceptions of the function of play).

Cognitive: One of the mothers thought that if a child didn't receive opportunities to play he wouldn't be able to develop "fully." Another mother mentioned her child "wouldn't become smart." There was another mother who said children "practice" through play.

Physical: Another mother stated her child would be "physically weak, as he wouldn't feel hungry, because through play he is able to develop a good appetite." Mothers said that with walking and running around, their legs would get strong.

Social: They also believed that through play with other children, a child would learn to speak and behave appropriately. One mother emphasized, "through play, a child becomes less inhibited with people and is able to develop confidence in her/him self to be able to speak out her/his thoughts." A mother related of her daughter:

...It is important that she is with children of her age or children younger than she is. She's the youngest of our children and we tend to spoil her. She's used to getting her way with

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us. But when she is with the neighborhood children she has to co-operate with their rules or she will be left out. She tries to get along with them even though occasionally she has her moments..."

Emotional: Quite a few mothers mentioned that when children were involved in play, they were less fussy and cranky and the mothers would be able to get on with their household chores.

Thus, mothers perceived play to be a foundation for developing a desirable personality, learning, and functioning in a group.

(b) Reasons for why children play: The responses of mothers trying to explain why child play is diverse. Some of the themes and patterns that emerged were the following: Three-fourths of the mothers mentioned that children played because "they were small and felt like playing." One mother responded that it was "in the nature of a child to play." Such answers prove these mothers believed in the intrinsic need for children to play. Some mothers who said that if children didn't play, they would get bored and fussy. And one mother, when talking about her child, said, "he plays because he knows it makes him happy. For him playing is fun!" This response implied the inherent nature of play is a pleasurable effect. Another mother said that when children imitated older people's behaviour, they did so in order to learn faster. Two mothers mentioned how "children expressed their emotions through play." There was one mother who even said, "children played because they didn't know any better." Another stated "when children saw other children playing they felt the urge to play themselves too."

Mothers' responses manifest differences in mothers' beliefs regarding why children play even though a majority of their responses appeared to focus on the intrinsic nature of play.

**Figure 6**

**Domain Analysis – Mothers' perceptions of the function of play**

| INCLUDED TERMS | | SEMANTIC RELATION-SHIP | COVER TERM |
|---|---|---|---|
| Value | Reason | | |
| • Physical development<br><br>• Social development<br><br>• Cognitive development<br><br>• Emotional development | • Intrinsic need<br><br>• Pleasurable effect<br><br>• Express emotion<br><br>• Express thoughts<br><br>• Curiosity<br><br>• To relieve boredom<br><br>• Learn through imitation<br><br>• Play is fun and it is a child's life | I N C L U S I O N | FUNCTION<br><br>OF<br><br>PLAY |

Upon further questioning (regarding the functions of play with an emphasis on what play does to the child's life), mothers made interesting observations. Basically their responses can be summarized in two categories: providing descriptions of what children do at play and, interpreting how play activities contribute to child development. Cathartic, imitative, and socializing functions were employed most frequently in describing what children do at play. The cathartic function of play, expressed in the form of "letting out negative emotions," was noticeable. They also stated the function of "understanding" through play. "Helping children to understand" suggests the perception

of furthering cognitive abilities. So, at least some of the mothers appear to view play as having a cognitive function with regard to social learning although not towards academics.

In summary, it appears that when taking into account mothers' responses as a whole rather than individual responses, mothers' perceptions of the function of play, especially in relation to developmental areas, covers all areas of child development. This finding might indicate that play is a total activity that contributes to child development in a holistic manner.

Mothers' definitions of child play

In the Nepali language, the word "play" is used interchangeably in referring to sports and games as well. There is one word that serves for play, sports, and games in Nepali, which is "khel." Depending on the context in which the word is used, people can differentiate the kind of "khel" that is being referred to. Each mother was provided the explanation that, for the purpose of this study, "khel" referred to the everyday play that her child was engaged in.

In their definition of play, some of the terms that mothers came up with were "enjoyment " "having fun," and "relaxation," Several said that it is what children are engaged in when they are not studying or working. They didn't hesitate to state that once children were big enough to go to school, they should spend time studying, because that would be more useful to them than playing. Their responses can be categorized as being synonyms or antonyms of play. The synonyms were "enjoyment," "fun," and "relaxation," and the antonyms were "studying" and "working."

It wasn't easy for mothers to define "play" in everyday language. To assist them in their definitions, talking about what happened or what could they observe and see when children were engaged in play helped in deriving some elements of the concept of play. The elements that were included in the concept were: "being involved," "being interested," "being preoccupied," "enjoyed," "liked doing," "enjoyed doing,"and "wanted to do." These elements indicate that play is intrinsically motivated. Mothers also mentioned some physical characteristics of play, for example, "doing fun things with toys and objects," " talking to oneself," and "making different sounds and noises." They touched on some affective elements of play by stating children "were excited, " became "attached" to certain toys, and "were enthusiastic." Some other elements of play that were also mentioned were " energetic," "imitative," "age dependent" and "repetitive."

Thus, after having listed some elements of play, it became easier for mothers to define play. Some of the definitions provided by mothers regarding play are as follows:

- "It is a big thing! When children are young they love playing because they learn things from other children while they are playing. Sometimes they pick up bad things, but usually it's all good."

- " Children have to play because it preoccupies them and they have fun, otherwise they would get bored."

- " Children cannot do the same things as grown-ups do. But, when they are playing they try to imitate adult actions and in the process practice doing things."

- "Playing makes my child happy."

- "Children have much energy, so they should play."

- "Play is always interesting for the child."

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- " A child's work is to play, as the child cannot do anything else."

- " When my child plays, she is relaxed and enjoying herself, and stays out of trouble."

**Figure 7**

**Domain Analysis - Mothers' definitions of child play**

| INCLUDED TERMS | SEMANTIC RELATIONSHIP | COVER TERM |
|---|---|---|
| <ul><li>Enjoyment, having fun, relaxation</li><li>Joyful, pleasurable activity</li><li>Activity involving energy, interest and enthusiasm</li><li>An important activity as children learn from imitating and playing with other children</li><li>Activity to keep children preoccupied and happy</li></ul> | I N C L U S I O N | PLAY |

An analysis of the definitions was made in terms of the nature of the elements of the statement in order to "tease out" the key elements that comprised each mother's definitions of play. The definitions included elements of positive affect as well interest related elements. Elements of positive affect were "fun," "joyful," and "pleasurable," and "happy." Components of interest-related included "interest" and "pre-occupied," which again indicate that play is intrinsically motivated (Figure 7: Domain Analysis - Mothers' definitions of play). Some mothers also defined play as being related to "energy," "learning," and "imitation," linking to the cognitive element of play.

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Following are the patterns generated from mothers' definitions of play:

- Positive affect and intrinsic motivation were the primary elements constituting definitions of play.

- Mothers also mentioned characteristics within cognitive element of play like imitation and learning from other children.

Most desirable and least desirable play

Mothers opinions were sought regarding which kinds of play they liked their children involved in and which ones (if any) they wished their children wouldn't engage in. Their responses revealed that mothers valued play in general due to the different areas of development that they stressed in relation to the concept of play.

Mothers enjoyed when their children played in a co-operative manner with other children without hitting or fighting with each other. As a mother mentioned of her thirteen-month old son:

> I really like how social my child is. I don't have to be with him all the time. He will climb the stairs and go up to visit the neighbors and play with their children. However, he gets into fights and screaming battles with them because he wants whatever they're playing with. He is my one and only child and I guess we have spoilt him. If he sees something he likes, he has to have it or he'll scream his head off and I wish he would be more co-operative and learn to share things with other children.

Most mothers expressed their preference for children playing outdoors rather than indoors unless the weather was bad. When further probed for their reasons, they said inside the house, it's usually crowded and there's little space for the child to move around freely. Indoors, the child constantly comes across objects mothers wouldn't want the child playing with so they have to be like watchdogs. Outdoors, the child had all the space to roam about freely to meet and see people and things. They believed that children learnt

by playing with other children and people. Those mothers who had shy and clingy children expressed their wish to see their children be more comfortable with other people, overcoming their shyness and distrust of people.

**Figure 8**

**Taxonomic Analysis – Kinds of play that mothers considered most desirable and least desirable**

| MOST DESIRABLE PLAY | LEAST DESIRABLE PLAY |
|---|---|
| • Social/co-operative play<br><br>• Imaginative play<br><br>• Outdoor play<br><br>• Running, jumping, climbing<br><br>• Play with commercial ("real") toys | • Play with mud/soil<br><br>• Play in the stream<br><br>• Play with children from whom they pick up inappropriate language and behavior |

Mothers also talked about wanting more commercial toys for their children. Overall, they didn't mind having their children play with natural objects, but they all mentioned about "wanting to" have their children play with "real" toys.

The popularity of "housekeeping" and other imaginative play like being a police or doctor was impressive to the mothers. They felt if children imitated the role of a policeman or doctor, hopefully they would later choose such a profession. They also specified those physical activities like running and chasing were good for children because they would help develop strong limbs as well as a good appetite. As long as children stayed out of physical danger and stopped pestering for attention, mothers were happy seeing their children engage in different play activities.

Some play activities that mothers did not hesitate to express their dislike for, were: playing with mud or soil because children would not only get themselves dirty, but would sometimes lick their fingers and get tummy-aches from ingesting mud and playing in the stream that ran through the village since it was dirty and the water was used mainly for gardening. Mothers were also very disapproving of toddlers picking up inappropriate words and behaviours from older children and later imitating them.

In sum, mothers liked their children indulging in different kinds of outdoor, imaginative, and social play. Some kinds of play they would rather not have their children engage in were primarily playing with soil, playing in dirty water and picking up bad behaviour and language from other children.

<u>Mothers' own childhood play</u>

Mothers were asked to reflect on their own childhood play, as far back as they could remember, as well as to talk about whether they believed children's play had changed over time. When mothers were asked to name the types and kinds of play they engaged in when they were children, analysis revealed that the mothers' generation didn't receive as many opportunities to play as their children do. Mothers reflected that there were two main reasons for why they didn't play as much as their children do. They would have many time-consuming chores to help their parents with and their parents didn't approve of them playing. Nearly all the mothers said their parents referred to play as "a waste of time."

When they were asked questions about their childhood play, most of the mothers initially said they couldn't remember much about their childhood. Then the researcher asked them to talk about whatever they could remember about growing up. They talked

about how life was hard for them since they had to take care of younger siblings, perform household chores, or get fodder for the cattle and goats leaving no time for playing and having fun. The researcher then asked questions like "When you would go to cut and fetch grass and water for the cattle with other children, would you play along the way or take a break in the fields?" or "When you were baby-sitting your younger siblings, what did you do with them?" These types of questions were "leading questions," but they helped mothers reflect on their childhood. When they started to remember some aspect of their childhood, their eyes would light up and they would smile broadly and relate their play stories.

On the basis of their responses, two broad taxonomic categories were established regarding the salient features of play. The categories were, "physical," and "imaginative." Among these categories, some physical forms of gross motor play were prevalent in mothers' childhood play were: chasing, hopscotch, hide-and-seek, jumping rope and climbing trees. Physical forms of small motor play consisted of playing a game with pebbles (jackstones?), making objects from mud, and making garlands with flowers. Symbolic/imaginative play consisted of "housekeeping,""weddings," and "harvest time."

**Figure 9**

**Taxonomic Analysis - Mother's own childhood play**

| TAXONOMY | | PLAY |
|---|---|---|
| PHYSICAL | Fine Motor | • Making objects from mud or soil<br>• Play with pebbles and flowers (making garlands) |
| | Gross Motor | • Throwing stones in the river<br>• Chasing<br>• Hopscotch<br>• Hide and seek<br>• Jumping rope<br>• Climbing trees |
| SYMBOLIC / IMAGINATIVE | Housekeeping, weddings, harvesting, imitating adults | |

Analysis established that the types of physical play that the mothers engaged in required play partners - usually their siblings, cousins, neighbors, or other village children with whom they went to collect fodder for the cattle and goats.

One can see some similarities, despite the age difference, between some categories of physical and imaginative play that mothers indulged in as children and those of their children like "hide-and-seek" and "housekeeping." It is also interesting to see that both mothers and children had natural objects as their playthings, not commercial toys.

Mothers were also asked to make an overall comparison between their own childhood play and their children's play. Based on their responses, the following

categories were established: (a) mothers' opportunities to play, (b) mothers' attitudes towards children's play, and (c) places where mothers played. Differences between the three categories are apparent.

(a) Mothers' opportunities to play: mothers related how even as children, they had different types of chores to accomplish during the day, leaving very little time for themselves. When they did have free time, they would be ready to crawl into bed. The following statement illustrates a typical response from a mother:

> ...By the time I was seven, I was managing my mother's kitchen. I would cook the meals and feed my family who would come from working in the fields. Then I would do the dishes and clean up the kitchen. I would also milk the cows and take care of my younger brother because my mother would be busy in the fields. I would always have the meals ready when they got back from the fields, as they would be hungry. When I was older, I would fetch water for the family as well as for the seven or so cattle that we had. I had to also collect three-four baskets of fodder for the cattle on days that my parents weren't able to do so. Sometimes, if a friend dropped by, we would play with "gatta," (play like jackstones, but with pebbles instead) or when I went to collect fodder with my friends, we'd take a break and have fun singing songs and teasing each other...

Another mother stated:

> ...There weren't any other households anywhere close to where we lived when I was a child. So, all I had was my brothers and sisters to play with. But they were all younger than I was and I used to be busy taking care of them, feeding them, washing their clothes. When my mother would be home, I would have to do other chores like fetching fodder. I would be busy working the whole day and in the evening after eating and doing the dishes, I would hand everyone a glass of warmed milk and I would fall asleep in a blink after drinking the milk. Everyday is a long day for me, waking up around five in the morning and just being on my feet the whole day.

(b) Mothers' attitudes towards their children's play: in this category mothers reported how their attitudes towards their child(ren) playing was different from their parents'

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attitudes towards them playing when they were young. Mothers said they had a positive attitude towards play because they realize that play is necessary and beneficial for their child. Some of them mentioned that although they do not know exactly how and to what extent it is beneficial for the child, the fact that they've heard it is makes them encourage their children to play. Mothers' parents, on the other hand, didn't have a very positive opinion about play. As one mother stated:

> I don't remember my parents ever encouraging me to play. In fact, if and when they would see me playing, they would tell me to do something useful and not waste my time playing. They always talked about how if I gave in to playing, I would develop bad habits like irresponsibility and carelessness, which I wouldn't be able to get rid of for the rest of my life.

There were some mothers who reported that their parents believed play was not good for them. However, they let them play only so that they would stay out of trouble and allow the parents to go about their chores. Two mothers mentioned that despite being discouraged from playing, they remembered being told stories based on religious legends by their parents and other older relatives. They said they remember the stories to this day and relate them to their children, because as children, they loved hearing those stories over and over again.

Mothers said that because of the generational difference in their view of play from their parents', their children were more fortunate than they were. Their children were allowed to play, whereas the mothers spent their childhood working, and doing chores and were discouraged from playing. Some of them talked about how they tried to make more time to be with their children than their parents did when they were growing up. One mother mentioned that her children were closer to her parents (their grandparents) than she had been as a child, because the grandparents were more affectionate and patient

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towards their grandchildren. She speculated that this could be because they were mellower in their old age and had fewer responsibilities.

(c) Places where mothers played: in this category, mothers reported that they would hardly ever, if at all, play at home for because they got shouted at. Instead they would play in the fields or on their way to the fields. They would also play by the river, brooks, or any places where their parents wouldn't be able to easily see them since their parents disapproved of them. A mother talked about what would happen when they would go to fetch water from the river:

> ...Sometimes if a friend or friends were also by the river collecting water
> or doing their laundry, we would throw stones into the water competing
> who could throw the farthest or throw sticks in the water and see whose
> stick would float faster. We would often end up splashing or dunking each
> other in the water...when my parent (s) would notice my wet clothes I
> would explain that the water from the container spilled all over me. I don't
> think they believed me.

In comparison to the limited number of places where mothers played as children, their children were found playing everywhere. They would play indoors, either in the kitchen or in the porch. Outdoors, they would be found playing in the stream, the local water faucet, at their neighbors', in the fields, and pretty much everywhere. Mothers let them wander around the village by themselves. As long as the children were physically safe, mothers didn't mind where their children played. In sum, the following patterns were established:

- Mothers received fewer opportunities to play in comparison to their children.

-Mothers' parents did not have positive attitudes towards play in comparison to the mothers.

- Mothers hardly ever played with their parents while mothers tried to make time to be

with their children.

- Both generations had natural objects as their playthings and shared some common types

of play.

**Figure 10**

**Taxonomic Analysis - Characteristics of mother's own childhood play and her child's play**

| TAXONOMY | MOTHERS' CHILDHOOD PLAY | THER CHILDREN'S PLAY |
|---|---|---|
| Play "Where" | * Brook     * Fields<br>* River     * Outdoors<br>* Stream     * Away from Home | * Indoors (kitchen & porch)<br>* Outdoors (water faucet, stream, brook, fields)<br>* Neighbors' houses<br>* Anywhere in the village as long as they were safe |
| Play with "Whom" | * Friends<br>* Siblings<br>* Cousins | * Alone     * Extended Family<br>* Friends     * Siblings<br>* Mother<br>* Members of the community |
| Play with "What" | * Natural Objects like stones, grass, leaves, water, sticks<br>* Other objects like string, discarded match and cigarette boxes, bottles, plastic wrappers<br>* No commercial toys | * Natural objects like those that mothers played with as well as vegetables, fruits, and grains<br>* Other objects like those that mothers played with and toothbrushes, hairbrushes, some household and kitchen items<br>* Some toys made by parents like stick dolls and cloth balls<br>* Few plastic commercial toys and balls |

- Mothers would usually play away from the parents, unlike their children, who could play anywhere as long as they were safe.

Opportunity for mothers to play with the child

Mothers said that despite their awareness about the importance of play, and wanting to play with their children, it was difficult for them to find time to play with their children. Nevertheless, observational and video recording analysis revealed that some mothers had some time and opportunity during the day to play with their children. But, instead of playing, they would watch the children from a distance or tell them to go and play with their friends. When questioned during the interview about why they weren't playing with their children, mothers responded that they were playing with their children. The researcher learnt that mothers' understanding of "playing with their children" referred to those moments when they had the time to be with the child, not whether they were in play action or not with the child.

Some mothers mentioned feeling awkward and shy playing with their children when other people were around. They mentioned that when they were bathing, massaging, and feeding the children, they would have time alone with them. One mother related how, when feeding her child twenty-five month old child, they had a kind of game:

> I mix the rice with the lentils and divide the mixture into mouth-size
> portions and place them on the plate. I tell my child each portion is an
> animal and I name the animals and ask her which animal she would like to
> eat. That way she doesn't realize she's eating as she's focused on eating
> up all the animals and learning names of animals. Sometimes I substitute
> animal names with village children that she plays with.

**Figure 11**

**Taxonomic Analysis – Mothers' reasons for not having opportunity to play with child**

| TAXONOMY | REASONS |
|---|---|
| Household Chores | <ul><li>Fetching water</li><li>Cooking</li><li>Cleaning</li><li>Laundry</li></ul> |
| Fieldwork | <ul><li>Planting</li><li>Harvesting</li><li>Fetching fodder for cattle</li></ul> |
| Social | <ul><li>Visiting friends and neighbors</li></ul> |
| Other | <ul><li>Running errands</li><li>Too tired to play</li><li>Find child play boring</li></ul> |

All mothers complained that if they had more time, they would spend it teaching their children different things. A mother mentioned:

> I would love to teach my daughter to dance and sing. Sometimes when she and I are by our selves in the house, I sing and tell her stories. But, with my work and living in a house with other eight-nine people I don't find the time to be alone with my daughter...I haven't tried but I would love to make paper or cloth dolls for her.

Each mother said she had taken her child along when she went to the fields so that the child could spend time with her. The children also accompanied them to the cattle shed when the cows or buffaloes would be milked or the chickens and goats fed. Some

mothers said that when their husbands had time, they would play with the children or take the children around the village. This made them feel good since at least one parent was spending time with the child. Nevertheless, all the mothers said that in comparison with their own mothers, they definitely made time for their children. Their childhood experiences had taught them to spend more time with their own children. They didn't want their children to grow up thinking they were ignored or neglected. Their children received opportunities to play with their parents as well as with their siblings, peers, and other children of the village. The mothers played only with their siblings, cousins, or friends with whom they went to collect fodder or graze cattle. Therefore, when making a comparison with their own childhood where their parents hardly, if ever, played with them, mothers said they were making a conscious effort to spend time playing with their children.

## Summary

One of the goals of the study was to explore the conceptions and attitudes of mothers regarding play. For this purpose, interviews were conducted with the mothers after they were shown portions of videotapes of their children playing with them or other members of the family and community. Mothers and the researcher generally agreed on which mother-child activities were playful and which were not. However, there were also various sources of disagreement. For example, mothers sometimes stretched the conception of play to include any activity their children found enjoyable. For instance some mothers referred to children listening to music on the radio or watching and listening to their older siblings reading as play. On numerous occasions when the researcher referred to mothers' behaviours as being playful, mothers reported that the

behaviour wasn't play but, rather a strategy for enlisting the child's cooperation. Another source of disagreement occurred when the researcher asked them why, instead of playing with their children when they had time, they would just watch their children play. The overwhelming response was that they were playing with the children. Therefore what the researcher saw as the mother watching her child play, the mother saw as being involved in play with her child.

Mothers viewed play as an intrinsically motivated and pleasurable activity. They firmly believed that young children needed to play because they had the energy and also because it was a fun activity for them. Mothers, for the most part, were aware that play was important for a child's development. They believed it was especially significant for the physical and social development of the children. Several of them felt play facilitated cognitive development only when a child was young, interfering with a child's academic learning once the child was older. But, overall they had a positive outlook towards play for young children.

There was evidence from mothers' responses that they believed play served a vital role in keeping a child engaged while mothers performed their household responsibilities. However they did not perceive themselves as playing with their child when they used playful strategies to keep them preoccupied. According to them, the (playful) interactions they engaged in with a child to alleviate boredom and whining were merely strategies to achieve the desired behaviour. They perceived themselves to be playing with their children when they made time in their busy schedules to be with the children – either in watching play or participating in it.

Mothers were very frank in expressing the idea that often they didn't want to play even when their children tried initiating play, either because they were too tired or bored with the repetitive activities the child was engaged in. They expressed a preference for getting involved in imaginative/pretend play and some forms of physical play like hide and seek.

Overall, they were aware of the kinds of play their children engaged in and often encouraged them to play independently or with other children. They highly valued qualities of respect, co-operation, and sharing when a child was engaged in play with others. Mothers were hesitant to let their children play with another child from whom they could pick up inappropriate behaviour or language. They disapproved if their children engaged in "dirty" play with soil or in dirty water. Because houses were usually cramped and smoky, mothers preferred that children play outdoors. However, mothers did not often participate in outdoor play because the only time they had to interact was during cooking or taking care of a child's needs, which was indoors.

Mothers confessed to feeling inadequate because they did not have the means to buy their children commercial toys. They believed children enjoyed playing with commercial toys more than with objects and materials lying around the house or with discarded items picked around in the village. They all felt their children had more opportunities to indulge in play than they had as children. Mothers believed that the main reason for this was the fact that they had a better understanding and a more positive attitude regarding play than their parents had.

The second section examines the types and nature of play interaction activities that the mother-toddler dyads were involved in, in their everyday settings. The researcher found that a significant proportion of mother-child play interactions occurred in the context of care-giving and household routines, rather than through mother's creation of a "play context." Play occurred spontaneously within the course of these activities or the mothers used play to elicit the cooperation of their children during these daily routines Parent's use of play to manage their toddlers' behaviour was very common. For example, when children protested or fussed while eating, mothers would often resort to playing with the food and telling stories to provide their children some pleasure. Despite differences in the proportion of types of play observed in each of the mother-child dyad's daily contexts, play was observed in a range of daily contexts in all fifteen dyads. Play appeared to be central in the lives of each toddler, whether it was by her or himself, with mother and any other family or community member.

Types of play activities observed

This section has been divided into categories of types of play generated from observations and videorecording. However, it must be pointed out that even though the different types of play were derived from what was observed in the field, they were broadly categorized based on descriptions and knowledge rooted in western academic traditions. The Social/Cognitive Scale [condensed from Christie and Johnsen's (1987) modification of the Rubin et al. (1978) scale] was modified to accommodate the types of

play that were found during this study. The three categories and the sub categories of play emerging from the observation and videorecording of mother child play were:

1. Social play categories

(a) Interactive play,

(b) Parallel play,

(c) Solitary play

2. Cognitive play categories

(a) Functional/relational play,

(b) Constructive play,

(c) Pretend/symbolic play

3. Non-play category for behaviours that did not have the characteristics of either social play or cognitive play.

4. Maternal sensitivity to child's play was also examined to provide deeper meaning to the play interactions of the mothers and toddlers.

The operational definitions for subcategories of toddler play behaviours are as follows:

a) Interactive-functional/relational play occurred when two or more players engaged in complementary, repetitive undifferentiated muscle movements or activities either with or without objects. Some examples include: two or more players engaging in rough-and-tumble play with each other, running, jumping up and down, gathering and dumping, manipulating objects or materials, playing with dough without any intention of making anything or when they pushed objects back and forth. Functional relational play

constituted of activities that were done "simply for the enjoyment of the physical sensation they create" (Rubin, et al.,1983).

b) Interactive-constructive play occurred when two or more players used playthings in conventional ways and created, constructed, or combined playthings to make something. Some examples were: when two or more players stacked objects to make a tower, helped each other to make different kinds of objects from dough, or drew a picture together as one project.

c) Interactive-pretend/symbolic play occurred when two or more players engaged in complementary fantasy actions or vocalizations through reciprocal behaviours or role playing, for example, one player pretending to be a shop-keeper while another player assumed a shopper's role, or taking reciprocal roles in a driver-passenger play.

d) Parallel-functional/relational play occurred when two or more players engaged in the same, similar, or different sequence of repetitive actions consisting of visually guided manipulation and gross motor activities while there was no complementary action or vocalization. For example, one player gathered objects while the other pushed objects around; one kneaded the dough and the other threw it in the air; one jumped up and down and the other slid down the stairs.

e) Parallel-constructive play occurred when two or more players engaged in the same, similar, or different activities using playthings in conventional ways, creating, constructing, or combining playthings without any complementary actions or vocalizations. For example, one player stacked objects for building a house, the other put the objects from a container into a truck; one made different kinds of objects from dough, the other drew a picture.

f) Parallel-pretend/symbolic play occurred when two or more players engaged in the same, similar, or different pretend/fantasy activities but there was no indication of complementary action or vocalization and their roles were not reciprocal. For example, one player pretended to be a policeman and the other player pretended to be a driver; one player pushed an object around and made sounds as if it were a bus and the other made animal sounds.

g) Solitary-functional relational play occurred when the player was engaged by himself in repetitive, undifferentiated activity or a sequence of actions consisting of visually guided manipulation and gross motor play or active physical movement. Some examples are: when the child was all by himself manipulating objects, jumping up and down, rolling around the floor, moving objects back and forth, or rolling dough repeatedly without making any objects.

h) Solitary-constructive play occurred when the player engaged in creating, combining, or constructing something all by her/himself, such as if the player made a ball out of dough, stacked stones or blocks to make a tower, or drew a picture.

i) Solitary-pretend/symbolic play occurred when the player alone performed fantasy actions/vocalizations through role playing or object substitution, for example, when the player pretended to drive his imaginative box as if it were some vehicle, assigned different functions to a stick as if it were a flag, or pretended to drink milk from an empty bowl.

j) Non-play included behaviours or activities that lacked the characteristics of the nine social-cognitive play categories identified above. This included: when the child watched or listened to what others were doing or saying or when s/he talked or laughed.

k) Maternal sensitivity to child's play - A mother was considered "maternally sensitive" when her behaviour reflected an awareness of the activity the child was engaged in, as well as the developmental capabilities and emotional state of the child. When she was aware of the child's cues or signals and responded appropriately, paced the activity and made sure the child had enough time to respond and didn't intrude, she showed maternal sensitivity. A mother was considered insensitive when her initiations were intrusive or out-of-sync with what her child was doing. She did not follow the child's lead, by either rejecting it or being oblivious to it. Her pacing of her child's play was too fast and her response was developmentally inappropriate.

Analysis of observation

There was a great deal of similarity in the types of play observed between all mother-toddler dyads. For example, when they were engaged in functional/ relational play, it was usually with objects found around the house that mothers provided them or they found themselves. They rolled, banged, dragged, put in and removed these items from containers. The older toddlers (eighteen to thirty-seven months) enjoyed making objects out of dough (constructive play), "helped" mothers in their chores, or engaged in pretend play as though they were preparing a meal while mothers prepared the family's meal. Despite the similarity, each child had preferences for particular kinds of play. For example, Ganesh (a twenty-two month old boy), preferred making different kinds of sounds and incorporating words. The play between the younger toddler dyads (twelve to eighteen months) and the older toddler dyads (eighteen to thirty-six months) differed in content, frequency and amount of time they spent in each of these kinds of play. The older toddlers engaged in a greater variety of play episodes than the younger toddlers did.

This is not an indication that the older toddlers engaged in more play; rather, it is an indication that they changed play activities at a higher frequency than the younger toddlers. The younger toddlers often played for about fifteen minutes or more at one activity when playing with their mothers or when any other adult worked to sustain that play. There was also more flexibility in the older toddlers' play. Flexibility in play can be conceived of as a kind of cognitive fluidity in action. Following is an example of flexibility in play exhibited by an older toddler (thirty-three months) in the study:

> Raju is pretending to play drums using an overturned pot and two sticks. He turns the pot over, pretends to stir it, and says "cooking." Then he turns the pot and goes back to drumming. After a while he stops, turns the pot over, stirs, and pretends to use one of the sticks as a spoon to taste.

Another difference between the younger and older toddlers' play was that there was more routine and repetitive sequences of action in the younger toddlers' play. Repetition is an essential means for discovering patterns and making predictions about the world and for practicing and consolidating newly acquired skills. One example of this was when a toddler put objects in a basket or pot, remove them, put them back in again, repeating the activity over and over. These repetitive play instances would usually last for ten minutes or so.

Analyzing the types of play observed across all mother-toddler dyads, the researcher found that the younger toddlers were more frequently involved in functional/relational play than in constructive or dramatic/symbolic play whether it was solitary or interactive. The older toddlers were usually involved in all three types of play.

Observation revealed that overall, all fifteen children were active players in and outside the home. They were engaged in all categories of play, whether by themselves or

with a play partner. This partner could be one's mother, father, siblings, grandmother, other relatives, neighbors, or other members of the community.

<u>Functional/relational play</u>: When the children were involved in functional/relational play, they manipulated playthings and household objects. A mother encouraged this type of play by providing them different safe objects to keep the child pre-occupied so the child wouldn't seek her mother's attention when she was busy with her household chores. On occasion, when a mother was waiting for the food to cooked, she played with the child, rolling potatoes towards the child, helping the child put objects in a basket, or giving the child dough and helping to make shapes. Often mothers spoke to their children, requesting objects, warning them not to go to certain places or do certain things, or teaching them the names of grains, cereals, utensils, and vegetables. Besides exploring the provided objects, the toddlers searched and examined spaces like cupboards, items in bags or baskets, and under the bed. Even though a mother was busy with her chores, she was aware of the child's whereabouts, making certain the child didn't "discover" spaces or things that were unsafe or could be damaged (the fireplace, a knife, fire-wood, a breakable item). IN all cases, children engaged in functional/relational play by handling objects, manipulating parts of a household item, playing with food, throwing, pushing, retrieving, kicking, or banging objects. All of the children engaged in large motor play like jumping, bouncing, rolling, kicking, dancing, running, and twirling around. The toddlers more often engaged in solitary functional/relational play rather than interactive or parallel functional/relational play. When the latter occurred, it was usually with peers and siblings rather than with a mother or an older member of the family or community.

Constructive play: Another type of play observed was constructive play where a child used playthings in conventional ways and created and constructed objects from stones, boxes and whatever he could lay his hands on. This type of play reflected the child's ability to generate specific associations. In many cases, a child would play with dough in the kitchen when mothers would be kneading dough to make bread. They would try to make balls or snakes and would ask their mothers to make things that they had difficulty making (like a bird or a mouse). One mother did not give her child dough to play with. She said it was a waste to let her child play with it when they didn't have enough to eat. She gave the child some onions to roll around instead. Mothers also asked their children to sort potatoes from tomatoes to keep them busy. A twenty-nine month old girl was observed "helping" her mother shell green peas.

A house was being constructed in the village so there were rocks and wood lying around. Despite their parents' warnings, children loved going to the site of construction to play with the smaller rocks, sand, and wood, to construct their own houses.

Some mothers often brought their toddlers when they went to pick vegetables or flowers for worship. Mothers directed them to picking the ripe vegetables and flowers, while questioning and telling the names of vegetables and flowers. One example of mother-toddler engaged in an episode of play was:

> Shanti, a three-year old girl, was helping her mother prepare raw mangoes for pickling. The mother peeled the mangoes and cut them in four pieces, and the child would remove the split seeds. The mother explained her how she was going to make the pickle. The toddler kept asking if she could bite the mango and the mother kept warning her that it wasn't ripe and she would suffer a tummy-ache if she did so. After seeding a few mangoes, Shanti couldn't hold herself back anymore, and despite her mothers warnings, she bit into a piece of mango. The sour juice of the mango made her screw up her face and her mother started laughing,

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looking at her and telling her, "Look what happens when you don't listen to me!" The mother teased Shanti saying, "May be you would like to have some more raw mangoes, huh?" and tried to mockingly feed her, but Shanti quickly learned her lesson and lost interest in helping her mother seed the mangoes. Then her mother pretended to be very disappointed, saying, "Here, I was thinking you and I were going to seed the mangoes together and now you're deserting me to do all the work myself. What kind of a daughter are you?" Shanti knew her mother was teasing her and with a sly smile, went back to helping her mother.

Mothers and other members of the household engaged in chasing and hiding games with the toddlers. Toddlers would venture to the barn either by themselves or with one of their siblings to play and feed the animals. They would also grab green, edible leaves and feed the chickens or the goats. They would take the broom and sweep the yard or the porch. One of them had a flute and would be found blowing on his flute.

Children frequently engaged in water play, by the stream or one of the water faucets. Mothers would reprimand and discourage them from playing in the stream, which was far from clean. They would throw leaves, flowers, sticks, or matchboxes in the stream and followed, running up and down the banks as the objects floated along. If there was an adult supervising the play by the water faucet, mothers would allow their toddlers to play splashing their friends and being splashed in return. On numerous occasions, children were observed throwing sticks and stones into ditches and streams competing to see who could throw the farthest.

Mothers were also observed during feeding times, relating stories about the consequences for a character who did not eat and gave trouble to the mother. Mothers would also divide the food on the plate into mouth-size portions, naming each for a different person or animal and ask which portion should be eaten next. A child would be so caught up in the play that s/he didn't realize eating.

When a mother would bathe or give her child a massage, she would encourage the child to name different body parts, tickling and having fun with the child.

It was very common for people to drop by at different times of the day. Mothers would point out familial relationships even if the visitor weren't a family member. In Nepal, it is common to address people within one's community as uncle, aunt, sister, brother, etc. A mother would use these visits or any meeting with others to convey social messages to the child.

Pretend/Symbolic play: The third type of play toddlers engaged in was pretend/symbolic play. Pretending is indicative of the child's growing development of abstract or representational cognitive ability and becomes a primary form of play during the preschool years (Belsky & Most, 1980; Piaget, 1962). There was a high level of engagement in pretend play among the toddlers. The younger toddlers imitated activities like drinking from a bowl, eating with a spoon, brushing teeth, or making sounds of different animals, or coughing like an old person. The pretend play of older toddlers ranged from pretending to be a vendor, policeman, or bus driver to pretending to be one's own mother or other members of the family. When older toddlers were involved in pretend/symbolic play, they did so with other children. An example of solitary pretend/symbolic play is:

> After eating lunch, Gita's (thirty-two months) older sister carried the dirty dishes outside to the stream to wash them. Gita took her plate and imitated her sister and washed her plate. She then gathered some sand from the bottom of the stream and spread it on the plate. Next, she picked some grass and added that to the sand in the plate. She mixed them up, all the while muttering to herself. Her sister told her to give her the plate so she could clean it, but Gita refused to do so. After a while she dumped the sand and grass mixture from the plate and washed it clean before taking it to the house. Having put away the plate, she came back to the stream. She

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picked some more grass and placed the grass on a flat stone. Then she got another stone and proceeded to grind the grass, saying she was going to make a paste to eat with bread. She ground the grass for a minute or so and then added a few drops of water from the stream, muttering to herself that the paste wasn't coming out the way she wanted. After a couple more minutes of grinding the grass, she said she needed to add some salt and scooped some sand from the stream and added to the grass paste. She ground them together. She then put a finger in the mixture and pretended to lick her finger saying the paste was yummy. Next, she proceeded to smear the paste on her face, pretending she was applying make-up. She got some on her lips and realized it tasted bitter, so she made a face and spat it out. She rinsed her mouth and then washed her face. While doing so, her dress got wet, so she removed it and rinsed it with the water from the stream. She squeezed out the excess water from the dress and flung it on the thatch roof of their house to dry, like she had seen her mother and sister do. She then went back and jumped into the stream and lay down on the floor, pretending to be swimming like a fish...

Another child was given a mirror by his mother and he was delighted to watch his reflection. After a while, he started making faces and sounds while looking at himself in the mirror. His mother asked him, "Who are you?" He beamed and responded, "A bull!" His mother then said to him, "Oh, I would like to see a cow." He quickly stopped snorting like a bull and started mooing like a cow while looking at himself in the mirror.

Mukti, a boy of twenty-nine months played with sticks with children older than him using their sticks as flags. They imagined themselves to be soldiers marching along. The older children were too fast for Mukti, so he was left behind. He then straddled his stick as though it was a horse and galloped away, pretending to whip the horse to go faster.

Children were also observed pretending various activities they saw adults engaged in. Some of these activities were digging, plastering the floor with mud, applying "puja tika" (a red dot on the forehead put on after worship as a sign of blessing) making sounds for rounding up cattle, and chasing chickens into their baskets.

Non-play: The environment in which the toddlers were growing up provided them with numerous natural occasions and opportunities to get physically and mentally stimulated at different levels. They were encouraged to socialize with other members of the community, young and old besides their immediate and/or extended family. There were always different types of activities happening all around them. The researcher observed them totally engrossed in listening to conversations and seeing what was happening around them. Sometimes their observations were interrupted when a family member picked them up or told them to come into the house. They would ignore these directions and linger until they were physically picked up and taken away when they would protest, screaming and kicking. Despite their stimulating environment and having (in most cases) more than one caregiver, toddlers were observed staring listlessly into space, walking around aimlessly, or getting bored and repeating goal-less activities like tearing grass from the ground, biting objects, shredding leaves, scratching the dusty ground, or wandering off. In two cases, the toddlers depended on their older siblings to provide them with playful activities rather than initiating play themselves. They whined endlessly if their siblings engaged in another activity. When this happened, if there were older adults around, they often coaxed the older sibling into playing even if s/he temporarily didn't want to. When there was an adult supervising the child, most of the interactions consisted of the adult telling the child what to do without physically getting involved in the activity herself. The child soon got bored playing alone without any input from the adult. The child wondered off or started whining or just listlessly scratched the ground. This was observed frequently in all fifteen children.

Mother-involvement and sensitivity: Some characteristics of mother involvement in child's play that were observed were: (a) participation, (b) facilitation (c) neutral, (d) restriction, (e) non-involvement, and (f) sensitivity

Participation: Mother-participation occurred when the mother contributed by actively joining or engaging in an activity, developing reciprocal behaviours through co-ordinated actions such as turn-taking; exchanging ideas; vocalizations; or play materials; or taking integrative and complementary roles relevant to the activity. For example, a mother engaged in a pretend tea party as a guest and drank from an imaginary cup or constructed a house from leaves and stones with her toddler.

Facilitation: Mother-facilitation played a significant role in mother-involvement in play. Facilitation occurred when the mother displayed positive, indirect involvements in play activity by encouraging such ongoing play activity by through supplying comments or materials relevant to the play events. This occurred when a mother praised her child saying her construction looked creative, offered an object appropriate for whatever the child was making, or modelled how to be an animal by making different sounds.

Neutral: A mother was considered to be neutral in her play when she showed interest or attention to a play activity by observing without making any comments or actions relevant to that activity. For example, a mother listened to the child's ideas or watched the child build something.

Restriction: A mother was considered to be restrictive of her child's play when she displayed negative feelings, attitudes, or actions toward a play activity by verbally or physically distracting the ongoing play activity. For example, a mother disapproved of

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her child adopting a different role, commented that the child was not playing the way she expected to and stopped him, or refused to help set up play materials as the child requested.

Non-involvement: A mother was not involved in her child's play when she was involved in something besides the play activity or displayed behaviors that lacked the characteristics of the four parental-involvement categories identified above. Examples of mother-non-involvement include: talking to other people, sewing or knitting, taking care of another baby, or washing clothes or dishes.

Sensitivity: A mother was considered maternally sensitive when her behavior reflected an awareness of the child's current activity, cues, or signals and responded appropriately. She paced the activity and made sure the child had enough time to respond. A mother was considered insensitive when her initiations were intrusive or out-of-sync with what her child was doing. She rejected or was oblivious to the child's leads or her pacing of her child's play was too fast and her response was developmentally inappropriate.

The most frequent characteristics of behavior the mothers in this study demonstrated were either facilitating or being neutral towards the child's play. However, this observation is from the researcher's point of view and not from the mother's point of view. Taking into consideration the mothers' point of view, one would label the mothers' behaviors as participating in the play. As previously mentioned, when the researcher asked the mothers why they watched without getting involved in play, mothers responded overwhelmingly that they were playing with their children. The researcher's observation of "neutral" behavior (mother watching her child play) was considered by mothers as active participation in play.

When children were playing happily, mothers were not involved in their play. They used the opportunity to get some of their chores done. All mothers wanted children to play by themselves without needing mothers' involvement. Mothers were also observed restricting behaviors if their children were involved playing in an unsafe area (for example, near the construction site or the fireplace) or with an unsafe object like a sharp object. They also restrained their children from playing in the stream or with mud and soil.

When mothers engaged in playful interactions with their children, they demonstrated affection, letting children climb on their backs, playing with their hair, teasing and tickling them. Sometimes a mother was observed showing sensitivity to a child's play by being patient with the level at which the child was playing. At other times, a mother was impatient and bored with the child's play.

For the mothers in this study, the process of child development did not seem hurried, but something that unfolded naturally. Each was concerned with the health of her child and believed that if a child was healthy, it would develop naturally with little training from her. That is why mothers let their children play without much direction and let the children have proximity to several caregivers, sometimes even strangers, without much discrimination. The maternal style seemed distal. Yet mothers were responsive when needed, monitoring children visually and verbally even though there wasn't constant physical contact because they were so busy. For the most part, they would juggle their housework with meeting the needs of their child.

## Play in the Context of Everyday Activity

From the interviews of the mothers, it is clear that, to a large extent, they are well aware of the importance of play in a child's development. However, during observations their actions didn't reflect this perception and awareness. According to them, one of the main reasons for this was the fact that they had very little free time. Each of the fifteen mothers said she would love to play and spend more time with her child if only she had fewer responsibilities. The observations revealed that nine of the fifteen mothers in the study were extremely busy between their house-chores and field responsibilities, leaving them little time with their children. They were with their children during mealtimes, while preparing the food, when grooming and taking care of children's hygienic needs, and in the evenings when all the chores were done for the day. The other six mothers who were observed to have more time did spend some of it with their children. However, they were not very much engaged in play interaction. When mothers were with their children, their main forms of interaction were teaching, correcting, and setting limits on children's behaviour. They also expressed affection by kissing, hugging, and cuddling. Mothers held their children if they touched or sat on their mothers' laps. Some mothers expressed annoyance when a child sat too long on their laps and refused to get up and play. There were few episodes where they interacted with each other for the primary purpose of playing. When play occurred, it was spontaneous in the course of whatever child care activity the mother was involved in. In the majority of instances, the children initiated play. However, in the few instances that mothers' initiated play, they had several motives for doing so. They initiated play in order to teach certain skills or strengthen certain behaviors. The two most common motives were to "find the child something to do," that

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is, to keep the child engaged, and as a means for managing child behavior and encourage cooperation in daily care routines. In one instance:

> Mother suggested to Sri (twenty-two month old boy) that they should put on his shorts. Sri said "no" and tried to run away. Mother caught him and took him to the bed where his shorts were lying. Sri protested and resisted. Mother introduced a game to distract him and elicit his cooperation. She helds his shorts in front of him and told him, " Come on let's get these shorts on and see what are in the pockets." Sri put his legs in the shorts and his mother said, " Have you checked the pockets?" Sri was excited and put his hands in his pockets and came up with nothing. Mother then said, let's see if I can find something, and put her hand in his other pocket and said, "How come there's nothing in the other pocket? I found something really nice (enlarging her eyes to emphasize) in this one!" (Actually she had put a candy in the pocket when pretending to check his pocket). Sri quickly removed his mother's hands from his pocket and jubilantly pulled out the candy. He laughed and didn't realize that he had his shorts on.

Each of the mothers was observed to initiate play for redirecting her child's attention when the child was pursuing an activity the mother disapproved of. This occurred,

> When a mother saw her daughter, Mingma (nineteen month-old girl), head towards the kitchen all by herself unsupervised, she followed her. She got down on her hands and knees pretending to be an animal, growling and saying to no one in particular that she was going to get whoever is in the kitchen. She pretended not to have spotted Mingma and went around in circles, letting the suspense and excitement build. When Mingma tried to get away through the door, her mother crawled menacingly towards her saying, "If you don't get out of the kitchen, I'm going to get you!" Mingma started squealing and half-ran-half-walked-out of the kitchen. After a minute, the mother stopped pretending and walked out. When she saw Mingma, she said, "Oh there you are! I heard an animal in the kitchen and came to look for you. Don't ever go to the kitchen by yourself or the animal might get you."

Mothers were firm about not letting their children in the kitchen unsupervised. One reason was that once children entered the kitchen, they would have easy access to the open-earth stove that was constructed on the floor of the kitchen. Ash coals were left

from the morning to save time in re-building fire in the evening. Another concern was that there were knives and scythes lying around.

The observations revealed that children explored and played in their homes and outside with persistence. It was remarkable to see how frequently they were engaged in play even when mothers were not their play partners. All the children sought social contact with their mothers and play was often a medium for that contact. In those few moments when mothers interacted with their children, children enthusiastically and spontaneously initiated and contributed to the play. They appeared to initiate play primarily to generate stimulation, pleasure, or physical and emotional release through engagement. They would try to attract their mothers' attention and involvement in their play, and when mothers neglected to follow their leads, they protested, persisted, and insisted that their mothers respond to their initiations and requests. If mothers did not have something urgent to take care of, they would respond either by participating neutrally in the play, or in most cases, by distracting the children's attention from themselves by giving some objects to divert them. For example,

> After lunch, Mohan's (twenty month old boy) mother finished washing the dishes and they went to the yard to play. Mohan's mother squatted on the floor and told Mohan, "Go grab that nice stick (pointing at the stick) and play with it. You'll have a lot of fun. I'll watch you from here." Mohan got excited, went, and brought the stick to his mother. He asked her to play with him, trying to pull her up from her sitting position. She kept telling him, "Go on, I'll watch you play." Mohan wouldn't give up, so finally she stood, took the stick from him and drew a circle on the dusty ground. Mohan got excited began jumping, and took the stick from his mother, trying to draw himself. His mother got bored and after a while squatted down again, watching his activities, but not initiating any herself. She was neutrally involved in her child's play.

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There was another toddler who loved playing with the traditional bead necklace his mother wore around her neck. When she tried to get his hands off her beads, complaining that he would break the necklace, the tighter his grip became, until she tickled him to loosen his grasp and used physical force to pry open his fingers. Once the necklace was freed, she walked away leaving the child to play by himself. Two mothers were observed giving their children their old bead necklaces to play with. One of the girls hid the necklace under her dress when she finished playing with it so that her mother wouldn't ask for it back.

Eight of the fifteen toddlers observed were still breastfed by their mothers. In Nepal, mothers usually breastfeed their children for approximately two years or more years unless if another child is born. When children weren't successful in getting their mothers' attention, in nearly all cases, they would whine to be breast fed, not out of hunger, but because they wanted to interact and be close to their mothers. Mothers were aware of this ploy and would give in for short periods. When the child was satisfied, s/he would try to interact playfully, trying to get another breast or play with her hair and "tika" (red dot on the forehead). Mothers would use breast-feeding time to clean the children's ears or cut their toenails, activities children wouldn't permit at other times.

Although in most cases, the toddlers initiated play, both mothers and toddlers terminated play with equal frequency. Children terminated play by moving on to a new kind of play or another activity. Mothers terminated play for several reasons. Two of the most common reasons were to take care of child-care routines or other chores or if they thought the play was unacceptable (for example, playing close to the fireplace or in the stream). Mothers also terminated play when they were tired or bored with repetitive play

(for example, when a mother said, "OK, one more time and then we'll do something else"). In some instances, mothers terminated play to redirect the play or introduce a new kind of play. Mothers were quite artful at doing this in ways that would be satisfying and acceptable to children. For example:

> Kanchi (twenty-eight month old girl) was pretending to be a dog and licking her mother's face. Her mother tired of the licking, so she said, "Now you're a good cat. Here, let me pet you and you can lick your hands like a cat licks it's paws." Kanchi's attention was re-focused on herself, rather than on her mother.

Mothers not only initiated and terminated play episodes for specific reasons, but in some cases, they also had clear motives and intentions in participating in their children's play. In these cases, a mother intentionally followed her child's lead in play and supported that play by offering ideas and explanations. To elaborate or organize on the child's play or themes, she made suggestions, gave verbal prompts and hints, and helped the child do things s/he was unable to do on her own. Vygotsy (1976) used the term "scaffolding" to refer to ways adults give support to children to help them act in a more complete manner. Without even realizing, provided "scaffolding" by providing appropriate levels of structure and by demonstrating play behavior that their children could model. A strategy that four mothers employed was to become inactive or passive themselves to prompt children's actions. For example:

> Ganga (twenty-eight month old girl) and her mother sat on a cot, facing each other, on the front porch of their house. Ganga played with some small plastic birds and animals that her father had brought her when he had last visited town. She put a plastic bird in one hand and another plastic toy in the other and "attacked" one bird with the other. Her mother gathered all the remaining plastic birds and animals. When she did that, Ganga stopped her game, dropped the toys she had, and asked her mother for other toys. Her mother showed her one toy and asked her to identify it. Ganga then either identified it or made the sounds of the animal or bird

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that her mother was showing. If she got it right, her mother praised her and gave her the toy. If she wasn't able to identify it or made a wrong identification, her mother corrected her, made her repeat the name, and then gave Ganga the toy. This way, Ganga got all the toys. When one round of play was over, Ganga pushed all the plastic animals and birds towards her mother, asking her to play all over again.

Mothers often used play as a context for teaching. They tried teaching about size, shapes, colors, the name of things, and how simple things worked. Typically this teaching occurred incidentally, that is, in the background of daily activity. Mothers provided information but didn't necessarily expect children to respond in any particular way. Play was also used for teaching children about social conventions and appropriate behavior.

Mothers were observed consistently "working" on building certain social play behaviors when playing with their children. For example, they encouraged children to respect, co-operate, share, and be friendly. Behaviors like rudeness, selfishness, and violence were "extremely" discouraged. Mothers were seen abruptly leaving the children if they were un-cooperative or disruptive in play. They even encouraged the children's playmates to stop playing with them if the child misbehaved. If another child modelled good behavior, mothers encouraged following that child's behaviour of respect, co-operation, sharing and friendliness. Children who were behaving inappropriately were rebuked and mocked to deter them from behaving in that manner.

Children were constantly asked to be polite, to greet others, and be to kind to them. The rules of respect and deference were taught early, sometimes with explicit direction and sometimes through suggestions. Children were praised and shown affection when they behaved in the appropriate manner, and parents' took pride in their children's behavior.

Observations revealed that mothers seemed least inclined to participate in manipulative play and most inclined to participate in pretend play or to introduce pretence to play. Mothers found pretend play more interesting and fun than functional/relational play. Thus, without realizing it, they were scaffolding their children's play behavior especially, in the case of older toddlers.

Some mothers who had made toys (for example, a ball from rags or a doll with sticks) would often provide these for play. They would throw or roll the ball and encourage children to throw it back. They would chide the children who threw the balls in the wrong direction and would praise them saying, "Good job!" "You are so strong!", "You have excellent aim!" when children demonstrated skill.

Mothers used both positive and negative reinforcement strategies, emphasized further by their tones of voice. They used praise and smiles as strategies of positive reinforcement to sustain activities that they approved of. For example, if the children were trying on some adult's clothes or shoes, mothers would smile at them and comment on how they looked or pretend that a child was the person whose clothes/shoes she was wearing. If children were playing with leaves and twigs, or pretending to be an animal, mothers encouraged them by asking questions like, "What are you making with leaves and twigs? Are you trying to make a plate like Mommy does with them?" or "So do I have a cow in my kitchen? I wonder if it'll give me lots of milk, so my baby can drink." Usually mothers praised their children when children exhibited socially approved behaviors. They made comments like, "My daughter/son is so smart," "My child is so friendly and polite," etc. Mothers also made good use of negative reinforcement strategies by prohibiting, criticizing, rebuking, or threatening if children were involved in

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and wouldn't stop an activity they disapproved of. Mothers criticized when they were dissatisfied with the children's behavior. For example:

> The fourteen-month old toddler's sister, who was two years older than him, was looking in the mirror and combing her hair. He tried to get the comb, lunging at it while she was combing. She told him to leave her alone. When he wouldn't, she complained to her mother. She gave him another comb so he would leave his sister alone. However, the child wanted the comb his sister was using and started whimpering when he couldn't get it. His mother looked at him impatiently and told her daughter, "You're my good girl. Here take this comb, and give the one you're using to that idiot boy." When she did so, her mother praised her and told the boy, "Go take the comb. I'm only going to do my daughter's hair because she is a good girl, unlike you who wants everything. Go...be on your own."

Another negative reinforcement strategy mothers used to discourage their children from doing activities they didn't approve of was teasing or threatening their child:

> A mother was folding laundry when her child (twenty-one month old) started playing and unfolding the clothes. At first, the mother told her to stop playing with the clothes and put the pile of clothes out of reach of the child. But the child wouldn't stop. So she said, " If you don't stop, I think when the Baba (old man begging for alms) comes today to ask for grains, I will give you to him instead of the grains and he can do whatever he wants with you." The child's hand was suspended in mid-activity and she looked outside the window to check if Baba had come and moved towards her mother's lap for safety. Her mother laughed and said, "Baba takes away children who disobey their mother. If you're a good child, there's no way that I will let Baba take you away from us."

In all cases when mothers had time to be with their children but were not actively participating in their children's play, they took pleasure in just watching them play while they talked to their neighbors and friends. If the children's play began subsiding, they would give verbal encouragement and suggestions to sustain the play. Sometimes, they would also clap their hands and sing to encourage the children in dancing and singing.

It was also observed that in the third year, children started receiving training to assume responsibility. They were seen helping their fathers and uncles in gathering farming tools or getting items from the grocery store or helping their mothers and aunts by putting the dishes in their correct place or drying smaller pieces of laundry in the courtyard. Children enjoyed these instances and were full of purpose in the responsibilities they were assigned. If they got distracted, the adult supervising them would try to divert their attention in a playful manner or even make a game out of the chore, by saying, " OK, let's see who can do it faster," " Let's see if you can tell me to whom this item of clothing belongs," or " If you bring me sugar from the store, I'll make you some sweet bread." Since much of everyday adult activity occurred in the presence of children, they gravitated towards the center of the activity, observing intently, asking questions, or imitating the adults. Thus, parents often included children in what they were doing, thereby training them for greater responsibilty.

Parents assumed that their children learned primarily through imitation and observation. They compared the development of their children to that of a sapling that grew stronger everyday with nourishment and good care. Some mothers also compared childhood with the foundation of a house. Once the solid foundation was created in childhood, by instilling good values, behavior, and habits, a strong house could be built upon that foundation.

## Vignette of a portion of one child's day

This particular fourteen months old boy's mother held a job at the bank. She was able to spend time with her child either before 10:00am or after 5:00pm. In the morning before she left for work, she would prepare the meal and the child would be with her in the kitchen. Her son was a very active fourteen-month old who had just started taking wobbly steps and was "all over the place." Before the mother started her cooking preparations, she placed the child on a mat and gave him some bowls, little bottles with herbs and spoons to play with. For about ten minutes or so, the child excitedly played with the objects. Then he started crawling or walking towards his mother who was by the earth stove where she was trying to get the fire going. She took him back to the mat, sat down herself and rolled the bottles around for him, telling him to do the same. He crawled and fetched the bottles from wherever they had rolled on the floor and started rolling the bottles around as well. Seeing that he was preoccupied rolling the bottles, his mother went back to the stove. She talked to the child while preparing food, and once in a while, threw him a corn-cob or potato to keep him away from where she was. At some point in his play, the child reached the corner of the kitchen where water for cooking and drinking was stored in big pots and buckets. His mother told him to get away and play with the bottles. He ignored her since he had found a mug containing water. He dumped the water on the floor. With his hand, he splashed the water and spread it around the floor, getting himself muddy. His mother was in the midst of stirring the food cooking on the stove and told him to leave the mess. He was totally oblivious to her voice and continued with the water-mud play. Since the damage had already been done, his mother let him play and get dirt, but she threatened that she would tie him up for not listening to her. She continued with her kitchen chores. After ten minutes of solitary water-mud play, while his mother occasionally told him to leave the mess and play with other objects, the boy tried to walk towards one of the objects he had been playing with earlier. In the process, he slipped on the mud and fell, leaving him a little disoriented. His mother looked frustrated. She removed the pot from the fire, got a plastic wash-basin, and came to the child. She removed his filthy clothes and washed his hands and face, saying, "Look at the mess you've made. Now I will have to tie you up so I can prepare food." After cleaning him, she took him to the bedroom, dressed him in clean clothes, and brought him back to the kitchen. There was a cloth rope that I had noticed earlier around a pillar at one end of the kitchen. The mother unravelled the rope and the boy started crawling away from the kitchen when he realized he was going to be tied up. She shouted at him, "Oh, I'm going to get you!" She got the boy and tied the rope around his waist while he protested and kicked. She left about four feet of rope between him and the pillar so he could wander around without getting into areas she didn't want him to. She went back to her cooking but kept talking to the child, telling him, "Mommy has to tie you up because you don't let her cook without getting into trouble and she will be late for work."

Once the meal was prepared, her husband and his sister who lived with them, came to the kitchen, and the mother served them their meal of rice, vegetables, and lentils. She got the child's food, untied him, and fed him. The child took turns being fed by his father and mother. If he was fussy, both mother and father would talk, cajole, and tell him stories so he would eat. The child enjoyed having both his parents' attention.

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*When the meal was over, the father took the child with him and the mother had her meal, washed the dishes, and got ready to go to work at the bank. The toddler was in the yard with his father, socializing with his father's friends, when his mother came to say she was leaving. Seeing his mother dressed up, the child knew she was leaving for work. He started squirming in his father's arms, trying to get to his mother. His mother said, " Be a good boy and come to see me later OK?" His father tried to distract him, saying, "Hey, we're going to visit the buffaloes and you're going to feed them grass. Would you like that?" They left for the buffalo shed. The father gave the child some grass he had cut earlier that morning. Holding the child's arm, he extended it towards the buffalo so the buffalo could eat. The child had a look of fascination on his face. His father took more grass from the basket and gave it to the child and they went to the next buffalo.*

*After returning form the buffalo shed, the father left his child in the care of his sister. The boy's aunt planted him on her hip and they went to the tea-shop on the first floor of their house. When the tea-shop owner saw him, she teased and said, "Oh, here comes the little prince!" He was shy and clung to his aunt. She pulled out one of the chairs and sat with the boy on her lap. The owner came towards them and asked the child, "So, what did you have for lunch today?" She pretended to feel the child's belly saying, "Let's see what's in this little belly of yours," and started tickling the child. After a few minutes, the child started getting restless and his aunt, lowered the child to the floor where he played with the tassels of the straw mat. Other people came to the tea-shop. Since they obviously knew him, they would say something to him. Sometimes he smiled at them; otherwise kept playing with the tassels. A man came over to him and said, "Hey, has your father left for the fields already?" He then picked the child up and threw him in the air. The child squealed with delight. The aunt and the child spent about forty minutes in the tea shop. She then took him to the bank where his mother was working. He was thrilled when his mother held him. She told him, " You can't just sit on my lap and be rude to my colleagues. Come on you have to say 'namaste' to these two uncles." She helped him do "namaste" ( the Nepali greeting, performed by folding the hands as in prayer towards the person being greeted) by helping him fold his hands. The boy shyly extended the greeting to his mother's two colleagues. They both returned his greeting and said, "Good job, you're a fine boy!" His mother asked her colleagues if it would be okay for her to step out of the office for a half-hour to be with her child. She carried the child and went with him to the next floor where there was a balcony. She sat down on one of the benches and breast-fed him while caressing his legs and talking to his aunt. Once he fell asleep, she gave the boy back to the aunt and told her to let the boy sleep in the "kokro" (a swing basket). The aunt carried the sleeping child home, placed him in his kokro," collected the dirty laundry, and went to the local faucet to do some washing while he was asleep.*

## Summary

In summary, all fifteen toddlers in this study were involved in all types of social play categories (interactive, parallel, and solitary) and cognitive play categories (functional/relational, constructive, and pretend/symbolic). The older toddlers (eighteen to thirty seven months) were more frequently engaged in pretend/symbolic play and there was more flexibility in their play than the younger toddlers (thirteen to eighteen months). The younger toddlers were engaged at the same frequency in all three types of play categories and in more repetitive play activities than older toddlers. Toddlers played either by themselves or with any play partner ranging (mother, fathers, siblings, or any other member of the family or community.)

Play with one's mother occurred in the midst of daily household activities rather than through the mother creating a "play context." Most mothers reported that they did not have as many opportunities to be with their children as they desired. When playing with children, mothers were more inclined to be involved in pretend/symbolic play than in functional/relational play. Indoors, children usually played in the kitchen while mothers cooked. Outdoors, an adult generally supervised them.

Children initiated play with mothers more often than mothers did. When a mother did initiate play, it was to keep the child involved while she worked or to redirect the child's attention when the child was pursuing an activity the mother did not want the child to be engaged in. Mothers would try sustaining child play by providing different objects for children to play with and verbal affirmations. Both positive and negative reinforcement strategies were used during play to impart social messages on what was

appropriate and inappropriate behavior. Play was used to teach certain skills and to provide a context for learning about shapes, sizes, colors, names, etc.

Both child and mother were equally involved in terminating play. Mothers often had very specific reasons for terminating play (redirecting children's attention, introducing another kind of play in order to take care of other chores, or if she was tired or bored by the play.) Children usually terminated one type of play to begin another play activity.

Mothers "unintentionally scaffolded" children's play by offering ideas to elaborate on their play. This happened when mothers were bored by lower levels of play like functional /relational play that consisted of repetitive movements and was not stimulating for parents. They involved their children in play they considered to be more fun, such as pretend or constructive play. They also provided suggestions, demonstrated play behavior, and helped children to do things they weren't able to do on their own.

Despite the fact that children had play partners of all ages, often they were engaged in non-play solitary activities like staring listlessly into space, walking around aimlessly, getting bored, and wandering off. Some children were dependent on their older siblings to provide them with play activities rather than initiating anything themselves. Children were very creative in using objects as play materials. These included natural objects (leaves, twigs, and stones); household objects (spoons, bowls, pots, and pans); and discarded items (candy wrappers, old tires, discarded cigarette boxes, and match-boxes.) In their minimal free time, some mothers made stick dolls and balls out of rags. Mothers had a very positive attitude towards play and encouraged children's play

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although they seldom had time for it themselves or engaged in play for the sole purpose of playing.

Different family members often treated toddlers with total indulgence even if mothers did not have much time to focus on children's needs. There wasn't much pressure regarding walking, talking, or weaning. Children were not "rushed" in their development. Parents' primary concern was to keep children healthy and safe. Once that was guaranteed by the survival of the first three-four years of life, parental indulgence was gradually withdrawn and children were expected to start taking responsibilities and support their parents in their daily lives.

Reference to Figure 12 – Elements involved in the natural context of mother-toddler play in a rural Neplali community

The preceding figure is a diagrammatic representation of the findings of this study. It reveals the elements that "come into play" in the natural context of mother-toddler play in a rural Neplali context. The elements could broadly be represented by the categories of "Who With?" "When & Why?" "Where?" " What With?" and "So What?" regarding the phenomenon of "Play."

# Figure 12
## Elements involved in the natural context of mother-toddler play

NATURAL CONTEXT OF
MOTHER TODDLER PLAY

Mother

Independently

Other Partners

- Caregiving & Household Routines

- To keep child engaged

- To manage child behaviour

- To encourage child co-operation

- For the purpose of play

Indoor and
Outdoor Play

- Natural & Discarded
  Objects & Materials
- Household Objects
- Toys made by Parents
- Commercial Toys

Physical
Development

Cognitive
Development

Socio-Emotional
Development
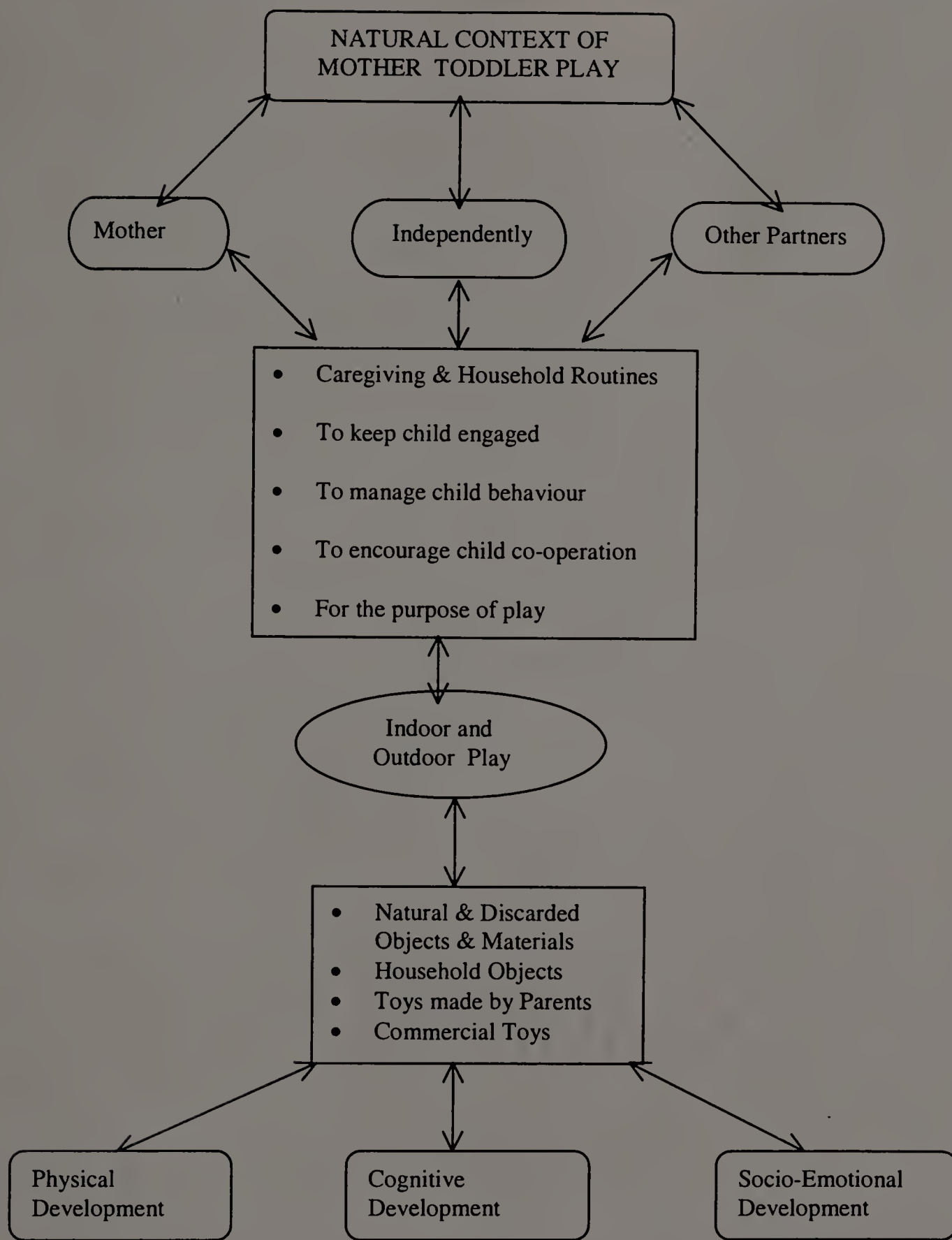
# CHAPTER V

## DISCUSSION

### Introduction

Play is one of the activities in which all humans participate throughout the world. It is a pervasive, infusing human activity throughout the life span (Fromberg, D. P. & Bergen, D. 1998). As reviewed here, there is no single conceptualization, that covers the concept of "play" in a holistic manner, suggesting the complexity of the concept of "play." Notwithstanding the "scientific approaches" to play attempted by biologists, psychologists, and anthropologists, a systematic conceptualization satisfactory to all has never been established.

This study attempts to determine conceptions and attitudes of play held by mothers in a rural Nepali community. To do so involved exploration of the conceptions of the nature of play, focusing on the categories derived from the analysis of the interviews conducted with the mothers. As reported by the mothers, the categories consist of: types of play, kinds of play, definitions of play, functions of play, most frequent play, play materials, most desirable and least desirable play and, opportunity to play. In addition, based on observation and videorecordings, the study also explores the nature and types of play interactions activities between mother-toddler dyads in their natural setting.

In this chapter, I will discuss how the analysis of results offers additional information about mother-child play and the mothers' conceptions and attitudes about play. This will contribute to our understanding of the occurrence of play in the natural context of a rural Nepali community. The methods and findings of this study are

exploratory and tentative because of the lack of holistic studies and the complexity and diversity of the phenomenon. This study attempts to probe the broad range of the conceptions of "play" held by mothers and the play interactions they engage in with their toddlers in an everyday context. Therefore the findings establish a baseline for further research and investigation. The focus of the study is on the mothers' subjective and personal perspectives of play in an attempt to understand mothers' thoughts about the phenomenon and their engagement in play with their toddlers.

The first section of this chapter explores some of the outstanding themes that emerged from making inferences about the results of the study. The second section describes the significant characteristics of this study.

<u>Eight Themes</u>

The following are the eight overriding themes that emerge from the results of the study:

**1) Mothers for the most part were aware that play is somehow important for their children's development.**

Mothers said that although their main motive in encouraging their children's play was to keep them preoccupied so that mothers could do their chores, they believed play was a beneficial activity for the development of their children. They were especially vocal about the significance of a child's physical and social development through play. Their focus on these two areas can be concluded from their responses for the categories of "functions of play" and "definitions of play." They mentioned play being valuable because it benefits children in all areas of development. Physically, it helps children to develop and strengthen their limbs and for gaining healthy appetites. Cognitively, it

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enables children's learning through the imitation of others and practicing behaviors. Socially, it helps childre learn to share and play co-operatively with others as to develop self-confidence. Overall, their perspective was that the children learned through play by imitating and playing with others. Their opinion was that when children were young, they benefited from playing since it facilitates learning about how to behave (including through their mistakes.) They believed that without opportunities for play, children would not "fully" develop. This implies that mothers' overall perception of play for young children is positive. However, the same rule did not apply to older children. Mothers were not convinced that play would help children with their academics and formal learning. They believed that as children grow older, they should play less frequently because play interferes with academic learning. They firmly believed that play distracts school age children from learning. If an older child played too much, s/he was considered to be of little use in the future as an adult. They valued education and if older siblings or cousins read the alphabet to toddlers they approved of this and encouraged the toddlers to repeat after the older children.

Therefore, these mothers were aware of the significance of play in the overall development of children, although they disapproved of older children being engaged in play.

## 2) Mothers viewed play as an intrinsically motivated and pleasurable activity.

In an attempt to have the mothers define "play," the different elements of play were discussed. Mothers tended to focus on the element of intrinsic motivation. This pattern emerged strongly in the categories of "definitions of play," and "functions of play." In addition to the element of intrinsic motivation, a quality of pleasurable effect

was also generated in their reflections. They saw their children as "having the need to play since they didn't have anything else to do." Frequent mention was made of children being "happy" and "in a good mood" when playing. From the analysis of the definitions, the element of intrinsic motivation and the element of pleasure effect appear to be inherently related to each other, confirming that positive emotional experiences are a prerequisite to intrinsic motivation.

Besides these two elements of play, learning through imitation (practicing what other people around them said and did) and surplus energy (they were active and could not sit quietly) were salient characteristics of the definitions of play generated by the mothers. They also mentioned children "letting out negative emotions" while playing, explaining the cathartic function of play.

Thus, the mothers in this study believed in the intrinsic need for children to play and the pleasure effect they received from it. This viewpoint supports one of the claims in play literature about play being intrinsically driven and having a (positive) pleasurable effect on the player.

**3) Play materials primarily consisted of natural objects and things.**

Mothers mentioned providing their children natural and household objects to play with. These objects included leaves, vegetables, spice bottles, grains, different types of kitchen utensils, toothbrushes, mirrors, and objects used for "puja" (ceremonial worship). If mothers didn't provide toys, toddlers played with whatever was available around the house or outside. These items consisted of empty boxes (included match and cigarette boxes), candy paper, sticks, straw, ropes, old batteries, water, soil, sand, rocks, and pebbles. Some of the mothers and one father had attempted to make toys such as dolls

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and a ball for their toddlers. Children were very creative in the ways they manipulated and played with the limited objects they had access to. As long as the objects children played with were not harmful or dangerous, parents were happy to see them engaged. The few children who had commercial plastic toys treated them as their prized possessions. Parents felt pressured to provide commercial toys and inadequate for not being able to do so. They believed children would have more fun playing with these commercial toys than with household or discarded objects. They also believed these unaffordable commercial would provide more stimulation than the objects that were in the child's environment.

As evidenced by play literature (Roopnarine, Hossain, et al., 1994), when children do not have toys, they construct playthings from materials found in their environments. This fact is supported by the current study in numerous instances of children using ordinary things for toy substitutes.

**4) The play spaces and play partners of toddlers.**

The categories of "kinds of play," "most frequent play," "most desirable and least desirable play" and "characteristics of mother's childhood play and her child's play" reflect where and with whom the children played. All the children in the sample played outdoors, anywhere in the village. Virtually the entire village was their playground and their play partners could be anyone living in the village because almost everyone knew each other. Mothers did not restrict children's choice of play partners, as long as their children were safe and didn't pick up inappropriate behaviour and language. Children only played indoors when the weather was bad or when their mothers were cooking or performing other chores indoors. Outdoor play consisted of exploratory, physical, and pretend play. Indoor play primarily consisted of fine motor, exploratory, and pretend

play. Since the different types of outdoor play elicited more social interaction with peers than indoor play did, children needed a greater number of playthings when they were indoors. Indoor play elicited more adult involvement and control over children's play (by mothers or other adults). As some mothers mentioned, one of the reasons for encouraging outdoor play was the lack of space indoors. Even though it is not clear, it is assumed by the research that other ecological factors like poor ventilation could have contributed to the higher occurrence of outdoor play.

**5) Certain types of play were more prevalent than others due to cultural values.**

The types of play children engaged in reflected activities important to the culture. It seemed that certain types of skills and behaviors were emphasized and encouraged while playing. The emphasis on motor skills might indicate an orientation related to physical independence and the ability to perform manual chores for the family. Stress was placed on mastering physical skills like walking, running, carrying objects, because they made children more independent. When mothers went to the fields, it was easier to take children who were bale to could walk and did not need to be carried. These children also helped round up goats or cattle. Being imaginative and imitating adults' activities and roles like washing dishes, picking vegetables, and feeding the chickens, were also encouraged, because they were perceived as enabling the children to learn, understand, and practice social roles that they were expected to take on later as adults. By three years of age, they were expected to be more responsible and help by running errands or performing chores around the house.

Children were also encouraged to associate with different members of the community and were made aware of their extended relationships. They were encouraged

to spend time playing with people of different ages. The community approved of a child who did not cling to his parents and was confident and comfortable playing with others. Individual achievement in play was encouraged but not at the cost of social relationships. An unwillingness to co-operate, violent language or behaviour, and rudeness were discouraged. If children engaged in such behaviour they were often chided and ridiculed. Social messages about appropriate behaviour and conforming to the values of the culture were apparent in all types of play interactions. Parents were proud of children who were obedient, respectful, and co-operative in their play. Rules of deference and respect were expected. Older children were expected to show respect verbally and through their gestures and greetings. At a very young age, children were taught to greet elders in the appropriate manner. Elderly members of the family and the community elicited greater displays of respect.

Mothers encouraged children to learn the alphabet and songs from the older children who went to school. They believed their children would do well in school if they had a positive academic influence even as toddlers. While parents clearly wanted their children to be educated and economically viable, their primary aim was to raise children to be socially adaptive to the family and community. Training children for educational achievement was not seen as a substitute for social adaptability, although they wanted their children to have a materially improved lifestyle.

**6) Play was seen as a valuable means for keeping children occupied.**

There was evidence from mothers' responses that they believed play served a vital role in the everyday learning, development, and social life of children. Mothers also saw play as a valuable means for keeping children engaged while they performed their

household chores. However, they did not always see the strategies they used to keep children occupied as "play." They perceived the interaction in care-giving routines (bathing, cleaning, dressing, feeding, or massaging) and those interactions for alleviating boredom or whining as strategies for achieving desired behaviours in children. Mothers only saw themselves as playing when they made time to play. During these times, they were often observed being not directly involved in play activities but watching children or giving verbal prompts. One could say that mothers' definition of themselves in play interaction with their children depended upon the goal of their (playful) interaction. When the goal of the interaction was to achieve a desired behavior, even if mothers didn't consider these to be play. From the mothers' viewpoint it was simply fulfilling another responsibility of care-giving even if these occurrences were fun for the children. For the mothers to consider themselves to be engaged in playful interactions, the interactions had to have a playful effect on them as well. So, when the goal of their interactions was to achieve a care-giving need, even if their interactions were playful, mothers did not see them as such because they were merely fulfilling another maternal responsibility.

Thus, we can conclude that mothers' perception of play with their children was goal-driven rather activity-driven. This is why mothers perceived themselves to be engaged in play when they watched children playing independently or with other play partners and did not perceive those playful interactions they used for enlisting their children's co-operation for care-giving routines so they could continue their chores as play. This is worth noting because it also provides a clue about mothers' motives for initiating play, which in turn may assist in understanding the complex behaviour of mother-child play.

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**7) Mothers' realization of the significance of their role in their interactions with their children.**

Mothers saw their roles as providers and care-givers for their children. They took their responsibility for feeding, caring, and keeping children safe from harm and sickness very seriously. Younger children were treated with much indulgence and affection and mothers would try to meet children's wishes and commands. However, they did not realize the full significance of their daily play and non-play interactions in the overall development of children. They also saw themselves as role models for imparting social messages, but did not comprehend that the time spent interacting with their children would provide a solid basis for venturing out into the world with confidence and skills. They were ambitious for their children, wanting the best for them and hoping they become important and smart people in the future. Some believed children are like saplings; with nurturance and care, they would flourish into big healthy trees that bear good fruit. Others believed children are like clay and could be molded any way. It is the responsibility of parents to make sure children receive appropriate care and exposure to be molded in the right direction. They tried to have children molded and influenced by smart and respected individuals of the community, like the teacher and doctor. Mothers believed that these people could shape the personalities and characters of their children; their influence and role modelling would inspire their children to become smart and important as adults. Mothers did not think of themselves as having as significant an influence in the process of children's development as the educated and influential people of the community. They underestimated their capacity as parents because they were not very educated. They believed that since they hadn't seen the rest of the world and had not

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achieved much, they couldn't inspire their children. In addition, some of them had a

fatalistic attitude, believing each child was born with a certain fate to undergo despite the

help and support given to the child. They said each child was born with his fate written

on his forehead and that would determine the direction of the child's life. However, they

also believed that through religious rituals, bad influences and bad "karma" could be put

to rest.

## 8) Children have multiple caregivers.

While mothers were the key figure in the children's lives, childcare activities

were often distributed among extended family members. It seemed that participation of

the extended family was essential in the smooth functioning of the household. Children

were encouraged to value and respect surrogate caregivers and were often instructed to be

near them physically. Caregivers used instructional as well as affect-laden talk most

frequently. While instructional talk provided explicit directions, affective talk included

teasing, positive affection, and scolding. Physical contact was a frequently used modality

of care.

The goal of social adaptation, and group identity or acceptance was partly

structured and transmitted through the naturally occurring practice of multiple caregiving.

Children were engaged in social interactions with several significant family and

community members besides their mothers. They sought proximity to several of these

caregivers during distress and used them as a secure base from which to explore the

environment.

Thus, the group of maternal caregivers was a principal socializing agent in the

lives of these children. While the rules of respect and obedience were based on

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hierarchical relations, preference and feelings of comfort determined the rules of affection and reciprocity that children displayed. Therefore, while children were socialized to respect everyone, they tended to prefer caregivers that spent time with them.

It is the researcher's assumption that in Nepal in general, being exposed to different caregivers leads to a kind of multiple social referencing in children. Children follow social cues of several caregivers and are attuned to several interpersonal and contextual levels in their caregiving environment simultaneously. The evidence in children's early social capacities attests to children's innate precocity for attunement to changes and fluctuations in the caregiver and the environment (Feinman, 1992). Supported by mothers' or other caregivers' attempts to regulate joint attention, Nepali children may adapt to increasingly complex situations by attending to, interpreting, and following adult cues. Over time, this may have implications for socio-emotional development of young children. Bruner (1990), Demos (1992), and Tronick, et al. (1984), believe that social referencing and affect attunement are deeply complementary processes, wherein the mother and in the Nepali case, extended caregivers, may determine and alter to some extent what the child actually experiences. Children's social development as individuals may be directly linked to the extended family group, where children may internalize not only parental representations but also those of several other caregivers. The extended or joint organization of the household, which fosters a kind of multiple caregiving environment, may have a long term developmental impact on children.

The outstanding themes inferred from the results of the study can be further understood in the context in which they occurred, which the next section explores.

## Play – Where, When, and Why?

The openness of the toddlers and their families was reflected in their everyday interactions with the researcher and the video camera assistant. As the researcher and video camera assistant became part of the community, by regularly visiting different families, children grew increasingly fond of them. The conditions in which toddlers grew up with multiple caregivers, encouraged fluid interpersonal boundaries, giving them a sense of connection with others.

Videorecording of mothers and toddlers in their natural settings for extended periods of time proved to be an effective methodology for collecting data about the everyday activity of children with their mothers. All mothers reported that the activity captured on videotape was predominantly representative of typical, everyday activity. Mothers were eager participants and they, with their families as a whole, were eager to plan videotaping procedures that would allow for the taping of "naturalistic" behavior. In fact, almost all of the mothers stated that for a complete view of everyday activity, I would need to include not only videotaping of the family at home but also taping of running errands, going to the fields, etc. Mothers offered insightful comments about how child behaviour and the dynamics between mother and child changed with context. Mothers and the researcher decided that videotaping in the home and in the other contexts in which the mother and child interacted on a regular basis were essential.

There were high levels of agreement between the mothers and researcher regarding which child behaviors constituted play. Nevertheless, there was a major difference in the ways they identified play when it occurred between the mother and child. While observing the mothers and toddlers, the researcher used more conventional

"textbook" definitions of play, taking into account the major characteristics of play like positive affect, freedom of choice, process orientation rather than product orientation, intrinsic motivation, and nonliterality in identifying play occurrences and interactions. According to these characteristics, the researcher observed numerous play scenarios between mothers and toddlers especially when mothers were meeting the everyday needs of children and when mothers prepared meals in the kitchen or did the dishes and laundry. Mothers would often be juggling everyday chores alongside (playful) interactions with children. However unlike the researcher, mothers did not consider these interactions as play when they were engaged in (what seemed to the researcher) playful interactions initiated for eliciting the desired co-operative behavior from children.

When talking about their play with their children, mothers would say, "I never really thought of myself playing with my child when I tried to engage her in this activity. All I wanted to do was get her engrossed so I could then do my chores." Sometimes mothers would say, "I never thought of this really, is that play?" These statements imply that although the mothers believed and mentioned some of the "textbook" characteristics of play like positive affect, intrinsic motivation, and free choice during the interview, when they were interacting with their children, the interaction was termed as "play" only when they made the time specifically to play. In those cases where the goal of the (playful) interaction was to achieve co-operate, mothers perceived this as a strategy for attaining the desired behavior and not play. Mothers considered themselves to be playing with their children when they made the time to be with their children and derived enjoyment and pleasure from either interacting playfully or watching the children play alone or with other play partners.

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The researcher thinks this is a very important finding of this study for two reasons. First, it reveals the differences between the perception of play from the mothers' point of view and theoretical textbook definitions. Second, mothers have one set of rules for perceiving play when their children are engaged in solitary play or play with others and another set of perception of play when their children are playing with the mothers themselves.

Therefore, it seems important for researchers and practitioners as a first step, to devote time in finding out what perception of play mothers have in order to support and encourage this behavior between children and mothers. This initial step is necessary prior to designating and implementing goals and objectives for early childhood care and education programs. When the concept of "play" is included in the curriculum of higher education, it tends to be examined in terms of theories, values, and functions of play. The major concern is how the concept as it is generally accepted theoretically should be translated into early childhood education. Educators of young children need the opportunity to explore what "play" means to them personally in relation to the meanings that are universally conveyed in curriculum practice. They also need to understand how meanings are derived from the social interaction processes that make up individual definitions of the phenomenon. By so doing, they will consider the phenomenon of "play" from the viewpoint of the individuals in a particular culture. Incorporating their multidimensional meanings into the programs will promote educational experiences that are meaningful to the participants of the program.

The mothers and the researcher also agreed on most occasions about who initiated and terminated play interactions and what mothers' motives were for initiating play. On

those occasions when the investigator attributed motives to mothers that didn't exist, she accordingly rectified her assumptions. Mothers also spoke about why they participated in their children's play the way they did. The consensus regarding the identification of motives is encouraging, because it suggests that identifying motives for mother behavior in relation to very young children is an important pursuit for researchers. Maternal motives were considered very important in understanding the complex behavior of mother-child play interactions and needs to be considered in current practices and future research. Maternal motives may also account for the differences in mother-child play in studies that are conducted in laboratory settings and this study. In laboratory studies, mothers may sense that researchers want to "see something happen," and so they may try to make something happen. They may then initiate and control play with their children, which would be different from how they played with their children in a natural context and setting. The effect of motives for play varies according to the context in which play occurs, because motive is an inseparable part of the social context for play that may influence many aspects of play behavior. The investigation of motives can tell us why mothers participate in different ways in their children's play, thereby, illuminating and providing deeper meaning to the play interaction. Laboratory studies neglect to consider the motives of players and how these motives may influence player participation.

Most research on the play of children has been conducted in controlled research settings. In those studies, usually the researchers have provided children with specific toys rather than allowing children to play with their own familiar playthings. The present research is unique in that it provides a preliminary understanding of child play as it emerges spontaneously in the natural setting with objects that the child is familiar with

and that are found in the child's environment. The study of play in the midst of everyday activity in the home is ecologically valid. It may be that children function at their highest levels of play competence when they are in the comfort of their own environment with their familiar and favourite playthings and play partners.

In this study, play was observed to occur during daily routines in the home and community, indicating that play is central in the everyday lives of children. Play also appeared to be an integral aspect of mother-child interaction while meeting the daily needs of the child. Play may be most important in the mother-child relationship, because it provides a socially meaningful context for interaction. Children were competent players. Play was a medium for the mother to involve the child in, so she could carry out her other household responsibilities. Children were enthusiastic when mothers joined them in their play.

In the context of everyday activity in the home, these mothers sometimes did and sometimes did not respond to their children's initiations of play. When mothers initiated play, they did so for very practical reasons, such as to manage behavior, to elicit cooperation, or to make daily activities more pleasurable. Mothers believed that it was important for children to play independently, since they were not always available. Mothers wanted their children to be involved in independent play, because it kept them occupied and relieved some of the demand on themselves for providing constant social contact. The mothers were unanimous about how important it was for them that their children became independent. Most mothers mentioned that one of the reasons they participated in play was to give children ideas that could be used in independent play. For some children who required high levels of mother-involvement and support, the

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acquisition of independent activity was a major issue. Mothers of such children could be disenchanted in child-caregiving because of the intensive child-rearing demands.

Two patterns were observed among all fifteen cases. Play was a means for mediating mother-child interaction during social and caregiving routines and it was a primary means for children to occupy themselves while their mothers were engaged in household or leisure activities. Most mother-child play observed occurred during child-care routines like mealtimes, bathing, and grooming. Play appeared to be particularly important in facilitating child-care. This function in daily life may be extremely important for parents who face intensive daily demands. Play appeared to serve many functions for children in everyday life and this finding is consistent with observations of Haight and Miller (1993), who studied the play of children in the home.

The ways that mothers participated in their children's play in all cases were remarkably similar. Mothers' behavioral repertoires consisted of a variety of neutral and facilitative techniques. Mothers primarily facilitated their children's play by following their leads, helping when necessary, demonstrating new behaviors, introducing new objects and enriching the play with information. They sometimes prompted their children's initiative when they occasionally became passive in play and introduced novelty and flexibility into play when it became repetitious. Toddlers were most responsive to maternal moves that were facilitative of ongoing activities and least responsive to moves that attempted to direct activities. The behavioral styles of both mothers and children varied along a continuum. Mothers differed in the directiveness of their behaviors, ranging from a highly directive style to a less directive style, to facilitative style. The rest of the mothers exhibited an eclectic style consisting of a range

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of different behaviors. Close inspection of the data revealed that the effectiveness of a directive approach depended upon the child's style. Children differed in the extent to which they involved their mothers in their activities, with some being earnest in their efforts to involve their mothers. If the child was active and engaging, a directive maternal style was as effective as a less directive one.

It is assumed that mother-participation in play in everyday contexts may be influenced by the beliefs mothers hold about play and ways they want their children to be occupied and experience the world. When mothers construct knowledge about how to interact and play with their children, they are influenced by the ideas, assumptions, and norms of the cultures in which they are socialized (Richman, Miller, & Levine, 1992). In the case of this study, since the culture of the community did not tolerate disobedient, uncooperative, and disrespectful children, mothers and other caregivers encouraged children to play in appropriate and acceptable manner. Caregivers were heard threatening the children that if they did not co-operate or share, they would be "eaten by a dragon" or "taken away by the Jogi-Baba" (an unkempt hermit who visited the village begging for alms). They used different methods like rebuking or ridiculing a child, leaving a child to play by himself, and ignoring his pleas to coerceg the children to behave in the culturally-valued forms of behavior like sharing, being respectful, and playing cooperatively.

Mothers also disapproved of their children playing in the stream or with soil. They believed children would get sick from eating dirt and from playing in the dirty water of the stream. Because education was highly valued, they encouraged their toddlers to play with older children who went to school and who could be role models for the children. Mothers approved of older school-going siblings teaching their younger siblings

the alphabet and words; they believed that youngsters would have a head-start in receiving education by associating with children who attended school.

There were numerous occasions when mothers did not want to and did not play with their children when children tried to initiate them into play. They just sat and watched the children or ignored the child's advances and went about doing their chores. They expressed clear preferences for different kinds of play. They preferred getting involved in pretend play and physical play as long as it wasn't too rough. They were straightforward about what aspects of child play bored, such as repetition and following whatever children wanted them to do.

Observations of the everyday play of these toddlers with their mothers show many similarities and a few differences in play behavior across all fifteen cases. Differences in the levels and types of play among the toddlers were associated with the development status of the individual children. Toddlers varied in development and progress from sensorimotor to the preoperational stage of development at different ages. They displayed similar types of solitary, parallel, and interactive play associated with their developmental age within functional/relational play, constructive play, and pretend/symbolic play. The older toddlers (30-37 months) were observed to play at higher levels (with occurrences of constructive and symbolic play than the younger toddlers (12-18months) who were often engaged in functional/relational play. The toddlers who played at higher levels appeared to have transitioned into the preoperational stage of cognitive development. Those playing at the lower levels appeared to be in the beginning phase of transitioning from the sensorimotor to the preoperational stage of development. The children displayed enthusiastic involvement in play and actively explored their environments, engaging in

developmentally appropriate play activities independently and with mothers or other caregivers. When they played with their mothers or other caregivers, the play was longer in duration and often more complex than if they were engaged in solitary play. It was interesting to note that the toddlers were frequently engaged in playful interactions with other caregivers, especially siblings, cousins, fathers, aunts, and uncles.

Researchers point out that when caregivers do not provide children with abundant toys, children will construct props for play from the materials at hand (Roopnarine, Hossain, et al., 1994; Gaskins, 1990; Schwartzman, 1986). In this study where space was limited inside the house and children had relatively few personal possessions, children typically constructed props for themselves from whatever materials were available, like discarded boxes and strings.

The present research clearly suggests that it is challenging for mothers to make mother-child play central in their lives with the numerous responsibilities they have to carry out on a daily basis. The evidence presented here builds a strong case for assuming a socio-cultural perspective in regard to the determinants of mother-child play behavior. Particularly, the results indicate that there are extraneous factors that play a role in mother-child play interactions that are not dependent solely on the individual characteristics of the mother and child. Such factors include the culture at large and their daily lifestyle. Since mothers attended to several activities at the same time, it was a luxury for them to make time for the sole purpose of spending it taking care of children.

They were burdened with responsibilities. When children were with them in the midst of their work, they would give the verbal cues to encourage or discourage whatever activity children were engaged in. They were aware of the children's whereabouts while

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managing their chores. They cherished moments of caregiving like massages, bathing and feeding. It was during such child-care rituals that their children received undivided attention or as much of it that mothers could afford to spare on them. When the children were not in the care of the mothers, some other member of the extended or joint family took care of them. In their early years, children learned to spend large amounts of time with other caregivers. This lifestyle prepared the children to live with a collective body of people. Children were held, talked to, monitored by, and played with several significant adults and family members. Mothers were the significant caregivers, although the child spent much of his time with other family members. Tronick (1984) has argued that multiple caregiving among the Efe' may lead to firmer boundaries, precocious social capacities, and less insistence and demanding behaviors towards the mother, personality dispositions highly adaptive for functioning as an individual. To what extent this is applicable to the participants of this study cannot be stated since this aspect was not explored. Nevertheless from the observations, it did seem that the children clung to their mothers when their mothers returned from the fields or from finishing their chores.

This study demonstrates that the pattern of mother-toddler play interaction in the context of this particular rural Nepali community is distinct from the pattern of mother toddler play interaction among middle-class American and Western European families. From the study, it is evident that what is considered *optimal* in a rural Nepali mother-toddler play interaction is dissimilar to those described as optimal mother-toddler play interaction by researchers American and European families. One of the fundamental differences that drive the type of care a child receives is the number of children a mother bears. In the rural Nepali context, mothers bear more children and so have fewer

resources at their disposal compared to their American counterparts. The mothers in this study were raised in patrilineal extended families, receive little education and are assigned to domestic workloads. American women are raised in nuclear families, often isolated from kin on both sides, receive education, and are able to pursue occupational careers. These are some of the factors that make up the environment and some of the reasons why the interactions and development of children are bound to be different in the two contexts.

In the context of this study, multiple caregivers in extended households brought up children and so their identities were shaped by the ability to live with the inherently social and collective nature everyday interactions. This was a blessing for the mothers. Knowing that their children were well taken care of in their absence allowed the mothers to go about their responsibilities without worrying too much about the welfare of their children. This scenario is different from America where children have a limited number of caregivers, which shaping their identities in a different way.

The maternal style of the mothers in this study differs from that of the mothers in the West because the Nepali mothers juggled their housework and responsibilities while also keeping children engaged. They tended to monitor the children visually and verbally without constant physical contact because they were so busy. Mothers in America make special time for children and give them their undivided attention for play or teaching. While the American pattern could be described as pedagogical, the rural Nepali pattern has a relational basis because it emphasizes social adaptation. Even though parents want their children to be well educated and economically sound, their primary aim is to raise children who are healthy and socially well adjusted and adapted. Thus, in order to

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account for the varied patterns of mother-toddler play interaction and divergent pathways for child development in diverse settings, it is necessary to consider the complexities of ecological and cultural contexts in which children are reared.

The information mothers provided regarding their perspectives and attitudes on play enriched this study. Researchers and professionals need to recognize mothers' expressions regarding their thoughts and feelings towards their children's play. If they fail to do so and treat play as a behaviour devoid of an everyday social context without regard for child and family play preferences, and without knowing how children play, or how they are supported in their play in their daily lives, such research endeavours for providing services are of questionable value.

A comprehensive research and program agenda, therefore, needs to consider play in the many contexts that comprise everyday activity for young children. Research on child play in the range of everyday contexts and parents' perceptions and motives for play are especially important when the purpose of the research is to inform existing practices in early childhood care and education. These types of studies will establish strong collaborating links between families and practitioners which are essential for discovering how to provide relevant and useful services for young children and their families.

### Summary of the Study

In summary, mother-child play was observed to occur during all daily contexts in the home and community. Play was an integral aspect of mother-child interaction while meeting the daily needs of the child. The toddlers were competent players. Play was a medium for the mother to involve the child, so that she could carry out her other

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household responsibilities. All mothers in the study believed that it was important for children to play, and encouraged their children to play independently or play with other children.

In summarizing the findings, I will apply the original research questions to the results, which will contribute to understanding the occurrence of play in the natural context. The following questions guided this study:

1. <u>What are rural Nepali mothers' conceptions and attitudes regarding play?</u>

Mothers view play as an intrinsically motivated and pleasurable activity. They firmly believe young children have the need to play because they have the energy and it is a fun activity for them to engage in. Mothers, for the most part, are aware that play is important for their children's development. They believe it is especially significant for physical and social development. Several of them feel play facilitates cognitive development only when the children are young and that it interferes with academic learning when children are older. Nevertheless, overall they have a positive outlook towards play for young children.

The mothers and the researcher generally agreed on which mother-child activities were regarded as play and which were not. However, sometimes mothers stretched the conception of play to include any activity the child found enjoyable, like listening to the radio or watching and listening to other people.

There is evidence from mothers' responses that they believe play serves a vital role in keeping children engaged while they performed their household responsibilities. However, they do not perceive themselves as playing when they use playful strategies to keep children preoccupied. According to them, the (playful) interactions they engaged in

to alleviate boredom and "whining" were merely strategies to achieve the desired behavior from the child and were not "play." They perceive themselves as playing with their children only when they "make the time" out of their busy schedules to be with their children, whether it is when they are actually playing, or just watching their children play independently or with other play partners.

Mothers were very frank in expressing that often they didn't want to play even when their children tried initiating them into play, either because they were too tired or bored with the repetitive activities. They expressed a preference for getting involved in symbolic/pretend play and some forms of physical play like hide and seek and chasing.

For the most part, mothers are aware of the kinds of play their children engage in and often encourage them to play independently or with other children. They highly value the qualities of respect, co-operation, and sharing when children engaged in play with others. Mothers chided and threatened if children were disobedient, rude, and uncooperative while playing. They are also hesitant to allow their children to play with another child from whom they could pick up bad behaviour or language. All mothers wished their children played more often outdoors, but they disapproved of "dirty" play with soil or in dirty water. The houses are usually cramped and smoky so mothers prefer playing with their children outdoors. However, this did not happen very often, because the only time they were able to interact with their children was when cooking or taking care of their needs, which would be indoors.

Mothers confessed to feeling inadequate for not having the means to buy their children commercial toys, because they believed children enjoyed playing more with commercial toys than with objects and materials lying around the house or discarded

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items picked around in the village. They all feel their children have more opportunities to indulge in play than they had as children. Mothers believe that the main reason for this occurrence is due to the fact that they have a better understanding and a more positive attitude towards play than their parents had.

2. <u>What are the types of play interaction activities between mother-toddler dyads?</u>

A significant proportion of mother-toddler play interaction occurs in the context of caregiving and household routines rather than through the mother creating a "play context." Play occurs spontaneously within the course of these activities or mothers use play to elicit cooperation of their children during the daily routines. Play appears to be central in the lives of the toddlers, whether it is solitary or with mothers or any other family or community member. Despite differences in the proportion of different types and levels of play that occurred in each of the mother-toddler dyad, play occurs in a whole range of daily contexts in all the dyads. Toddlers play activities vary from sensorimotor to preoperational stage of development. They display similar types of solitary, parallel, and interactive play associated with their developmental age.

Mothers' behavioral repertoires consist of a variety of directive and facilitative techniques. They were observed either participating, facilitating, staying neutral, restricting, or having no involvement in their children's play. Usually children initiated play. However, when mothers initiated play, it was often for practical reasons like achieving co-operation, managing a behavioral problem, or keeping children distracted and preoccupied. Mothers unintentionally "scaffolded" their children's play by offering ideas to elaborate on the play. They also provided suggestions, demonstrated play behavior, and helped children to do things they weren't able to do on their own.

Some of the toddlers were often found spending more time with other caregivers than with their mothers. A physically and mentally stimulating environment surrounded them with different types of activities. Despite the numerous caregivers and stimulating environment, toddlers were often observed staring listlessly into space, wandering around aimlessly, getting bored and repeating goal-less activities, or just whining. It seemed they were seeking to be stimulated, but didn't find fulfilment in engaging in solitary play or the play with their caregivers was not interesting enough. It is also possible they just missed their mothers and wished to be with them.

Mothers see their roles as providers and caregivers for their children rather than as play partners. They take their child-care responsibilities seriously. However, they either do not seem to understand the significance of the extent to which their daily play and non-play interactions with their young children affect the overall development of their children or they chose to overlook this fact because they are not able to spend as much time as they would have liked with their children. They are very ambitious for their children's future, desiring for them to become important, educated adults. They believe that smart and educated people are able to impact and influence their children more than they can. They underestimate their capacity as parents because they are uneducated or have little formal education. They do not comprehend that the time they spend interacting with their children will provide a solid basis for venturing out into the world, equipped with confidence and skills.

Play reflects the nature of childhood and development. Children learn to explore and discover themselves, their environment, and the world around them through playing and interacting with other members of the community. In the case of this rural Nepali

community, mothers definitely play an important role in enhancing play skills and development in the early childhood years. Nevertheless, since several of the toddlers in this study had other caregivers besides their mothers, (like grandparents, aunts and siblings) these caregivers undoubtedly also play an important role in the overall development of the children.

The present study pioneers research on mothers' conceptions and attitudes about play and the play interactions they engage in with their toddlers in the natural, everyday context. The findings support that the context and environment influence and affect the play patterns of mothers and toddlers. This offers new directions for further investigation of the occurrence of play in the day-to-day context.

# CHAPTER VI

## CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, & RECOMMENDATIONS

### Introduction

The home is the original inclusive environment for children. In the present study, toddlers were observed to play in a wide variety of contexts in the home and outside of it. Findings indicate that play is central in the lives of children, and it serves similar functions for children and their mothers. That is, play is a primary means for child engagement with the environment and one of the mediums for mother-child interaction. The study also reveals that there is a connection between the natural context and the mother's conceptions regarding child-rearing and play in relation to the types of play and non-play interactions that the mother and child engage in. Mothers expressed that they valued their children's play and believe it to be an appropriate and necessary child activity that they actively support in the home and outside with the hope that children will learn to play independently and with peers. Play is usually incorporated in mother-child interactions as a means for eliciting the child's cooperation while the mother is carrying out her household responsibilities. In the present study, children are observed to be competent players who initiate a majority of their own play, whether it is by themselves or with their mothers. They all have a variety of well-established play behaviours that they have learned and expanded upon as they play by themselves, with their mothers or other play partners. Individual children vary in their acquisition of play skills but play at a level commensurate with developmental age. They engage in many of the same types and kinds of play activities. Older toddlers are also seen increasingly using play as an important medium for peer interaction and socialization.

Implications

This study has contributed to the field of child development by building on existing cross-cultural literature, providing information on attitudes and perspectives on play of rural Nepali mothers, and shedding some light on the patterns of play and interaction between the mothers and children. The study supports current theories of cross-cultural research on child development and child-rearing in underdeveloped rural communities by allowing general inferences to be made about the role of rural Nepali culture in child development. Parents have motives for encouraging play and participating in children's play; these motives are an inseparable part of the play context. The study informs fields of research and practice and serves to demonstrate the ways that context influences the formation of play attitudes and patterns of play interactions for understanding the phenomenon itself.

The present study is unique in Nepal where, to date, there haven't been any studies focussing specifically on mother-child play patterns of interaction and what influences these patterns. Nepal has a long way to go in the field of early childhood education and this study could serve as an example of the need of similar studies. Results could challenge the existing models of programs for the degree of cultural relevancy and hopefully lead to their revision and reformulation so they would be more meaningful to the participants in those communities. The findings imply that practitioners need to be more sensitive to the opinions and ideas of parents and use their input in devising programs for their children. It is hoped that early childhood educators in Nepal will utilize the findings to inform their work with parents and communities for implementing more culturally relevant early childhood education programs. When the programs are

culturally sensitive for the target population they become sustainable; otherwise they disappear in approximately one year. In order for the early childhood programs to truly meet the individual needs of children, they have to be designed so they are respectful to the differences between the families, with programs being more "family centred" rather than merely "child centred". Therefore, for the successful implementation and sustainability of a program, it is imperative for the practitioners to consider the goals, values, motives, and expectations articulated by parents as paramount to their own.

It is a fact that play is a powerful socializing force. Since it is a medium of socialization, it incorporates social and cultural messages and expectations that adults have and would like to foster in their children. The ways that children are encouraged to play communicates something about adult expectations for children. Goals for child play that emphasize following the lead of others or complying with instructions and the demands of the task contribute to the socializing of young children. In developing early childhood care and education programs, educators need to realize that consistently high levels of structure and direction are not needed in play to make progress. In the present study, the direct teaching of play skills does not appear to be necessary for children who generally are actively exploring and engaging in play. One consequence of approaching play with assumptions about providing high levels of structure and direction may result in inadvertently training children to play in ritualized, routine ways. These are characterized by repetition and lack of novelty and flexibility and stunt children's creativity and imagination in the process. Another concern is that when programs are developing their goals and objectives, they need to include and reflect what mothers consider important in their children's development. Caution should be taken in supporting programs that build

on children's initiative and both conventional and unconventional methods of play. This way, play could include but would not be limited to exploration and discovery of how playthings go together, frequent theme switching, and the introduction of novelty into play.

The findings of this study could also be considered for policy development for early childhood educators and services to families. Emphasis could be laid on developing play-based curriculum for children by including and encouraging input on the community level.

Finally, there needs to be an ongoing open dialogue about the role of play in the daily lives of children, between parents, childcare providers, and researchers and practitioners of early childhood care and education. These dialogues will enable the design and implementation of programs that are relevant and effective in supporting early childhood care and education that is meaningful for the mothers and children.

Future Research

The evidence presented in this investigation builds a strong case for assuming socio-cultural variations in children's environments can offer valuable insights and perspectives about the role of social groups in regard to the determinants of mother-child play behavior. Particularly, the results indicate that there are factors that play a role in mother-child interactions that are not dependent solely on individual characteristics. Refocusing attention on these extra behavioral factors will broaden the analysis of play behavior between mothers and children as will an in-depth examination of mothers' conceptions and attitudes towards play and how that influences their play behaviors. This would generate a more comprehensive view of play practices and interactions between

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mothers and their children and could also possibly provide some information on the ensuing developmental outcome in children.

More research is also needed to understand what mothers need in relation to their children's play and what their motives may in playing with their children. It is likely that mothers are not inclined to play with their children in ways that they don't enjoy and this is something that practitioners will need to understand. Mothers in the present study expressed preferences for and against different kinds of play (for example, they responded positively to physical and pretend play and negatively to play with mud and water, etc.) Mothers were straightforward on what bored them (repetition) or what made participation less enjoyable (when they were tired).

These findings suggest that more focused, in-depth investigations of play behavior and conceptions held by mothers are possible. For example, further study of the process of enculturation through play would be helpful in order to gain insights into culturally related conceptions of play.

As noted in the study, the ecological condition of the research site affected the context as well as text of play. The interrelationship of the context and text of play emerged as a theme in all samples. This interrelationship of the context and text of play suggests a need for further investigation to substantiate the ways in which the interrelationship arises. For example, it is important to know whether particular types of play provide useful experiences in developing social skills appropriate for a particular cultural context. In terms of the relationship of conceptualizations of play to the cultural context, the study suggests that culturally related conceptions of play are likely to be influenced by the difficulty of trying to make a living, for the members of this rural

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community. Thus, in order to obtain a deeper conception of play, based on play experiences, the ecological conditions of the research site need to be taken into consideration. Indeed, it seems that the location may be a critical factor in determining the types of play that children engage in. Along these lines, a recommendation is made for an expansion of similar research by further probing the different contextual variables that influence play behavior, with a larger sample size and a more diverse family background.

Future studies might focus on analyzing how the link between play patterns and gender contributes to the differences in the types of play engaged in by girls and boys and to the transmission of stereotypical gender socialization. That is, future studies might explore if the perpetuation of traditional gender roles is evident in mothers' conceptions of play and manifested in their play interactions with their children. This kind of study would further lead to exploring the kinds of toys that children are provided for both enjoyment, in mastery of their use and in understanding the properties of things and the expression of ideas and feelings. Therefore could selection of play materials play an important role in the process of socialization?

A comprehensive investigation could also be conducted to observe father-toddler play and the interrelationships among mother-father-toddler play interactions in the natural context across several time periods, in order to compare the parental involvement of mothers and fathers with their toddlers. The value of this study would be further enhanced if future naturalistic studies assessed the play between children and other caregivers. Such studies may help clarify child-rearing ideas and practices in guiding child development in Nepal.

In conclusion, the present study provides a preliminary description of the naturally occurring play interaction of toddlers with their mothers and of mothers' perspectives regarding play. Due to the complex nature of the concept "play" and the dearth of relevant qualitative studies, this study was exploratory in nature and attempted to gain only a general picture of play interactions and the conceptions and attitudes regarding play held by Nepali mothers of a rural community. This study has contributed to establishing data on play, a phenomenon that, until now, had not been explored in this particular part of the world.

# APPENDIX A

## GUIDED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Prior to their interviews, mothers were shown video portions of the activities that had been taped during the day they were visited for observation. They were assured that they would not be judged for their responses and that there were no right or wrong responses to the questions. They were also informed that the interview would be audiotaped for future reference.

1. What kinds of play does your child engage in? Could you relate your child's typical play to me?

2. What are your child's favorite play activities?

3. What do you think or how do you feel about your child's favorite play?

4. Could you list for me the types of play your child engaged in alone and with someone else?

5. Who does your child play with most often?

6. Could you tell me where your child usually plays? Indoors or outdoors? Around the house or away from the house?

7. Does your child have any play materials? What are they?

8. How often do you get to play with your child? When? Where?

9. Describe for me the types of play you are involved in with your child.

10. How do you feel about your play with your child? Do you enjoy playing with your child? Why or why not?

11. Do you make or give your child things to play with? If yes, what are those things?

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12. What kinds of play activities would you like to see your child engaged in the least?

13. What kinds of play activities would you like to see your child engaged in the most?

14. How or when can you tell your child is playing?

15. What are the things your child does at play?

16. Why does your child engage in play?

17. What makes play different from other activities?

18. How would you define play?

19. Does play have any effect on your child?

20. Could you explain why and what the effects are or why not?

21. Does play affect child development?

22. If yes, could you explain to me some kinds of play that have been useful in your child's development?

23. Does your child play the same way as when s/he was younger or do you see any differences in the way s/he plays? If yes, what are the differences you see and why did they occur?

24. Looking back on your own childhood, what kinds of play did you engage in? What other activities were you engaged in as a preschool age child?

25. Based on your own childhood play experiences, how would you compare your to your child's play experiences?

26. Could you explain to me what would happen to young children if they were not allowed to play?
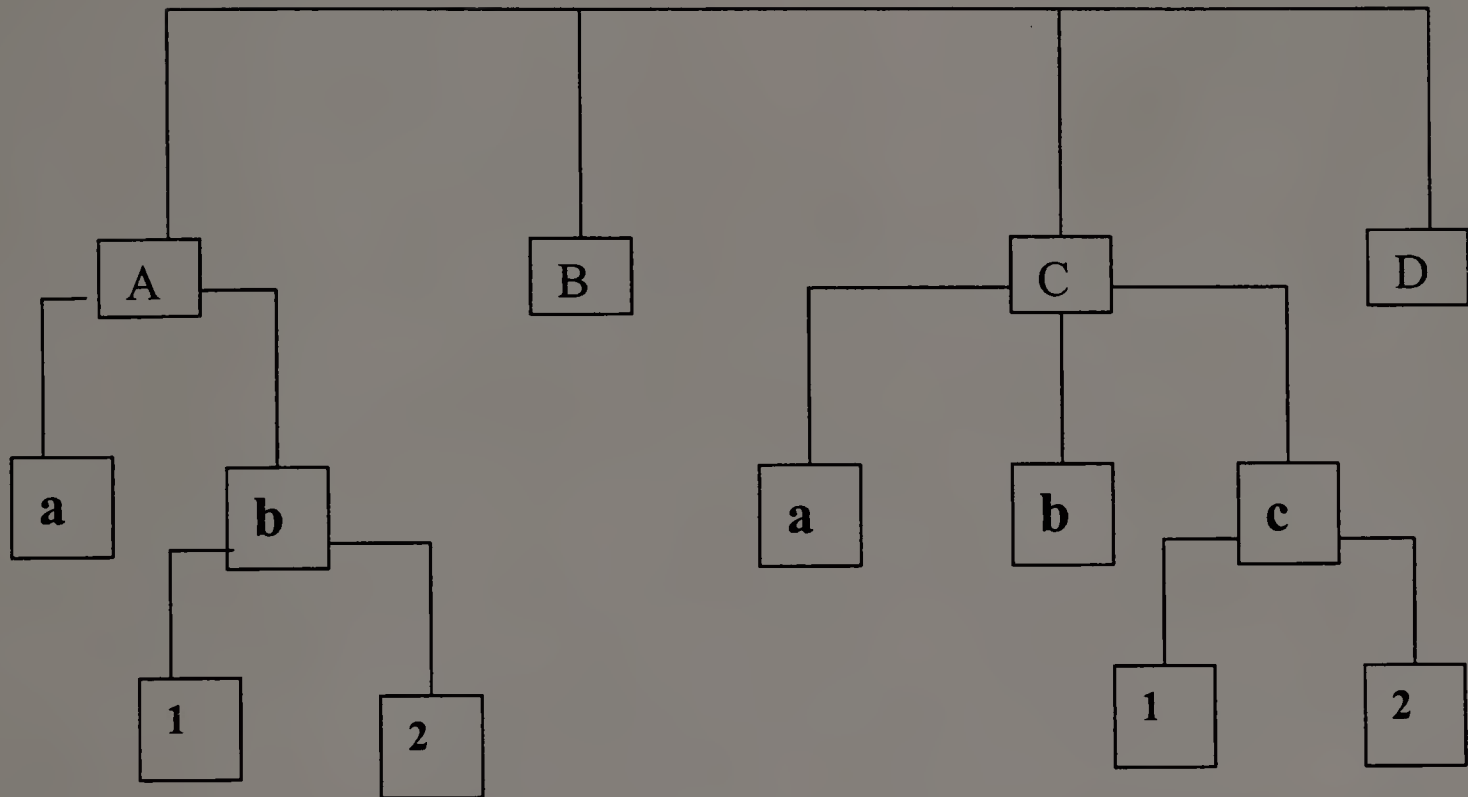
# APPENDIX B

## GUIDED OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

- Places of play

- Play partners of the child

- Kinds and types of play

- Context in which play occurred

- Types of play materials and objects

- Maternal involvement and sensitivity

- Child involvement and expression

- Initiative taking by mother and child

- Degree of interest of mother and of child

- Mood of mother and of child

# APPENDIX C

## TAXONOMIC ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

# APPENDIX D

## DOMAIN ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

1. Semantic Relationship: Rationale for Inclusion

2. Form: X (is a kind of / is a reason for) Y

3. Example: Kicking a ball around (is a kind of) physical play

| INCLUDED TERMS | SEMANTIC RELATIONSHIP (INCLUSION) | COVER TERM |
|---|---|---|
| • Physical development  • Cognitive development  • Emotional development  • Social development | is a kind of  ⟶  is a reason for | Function of Play |

Structural Questions: Why does your child play?
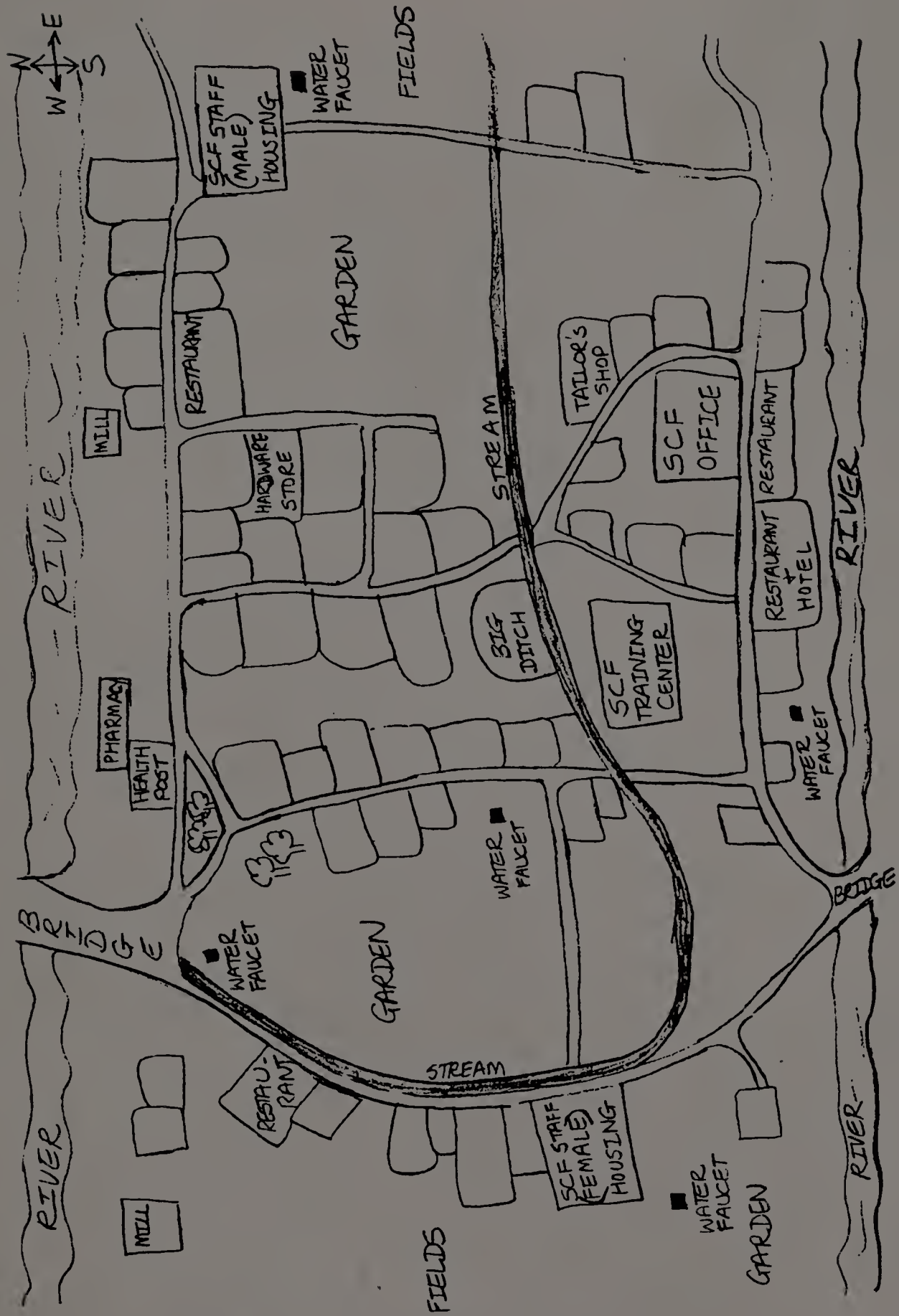
What is the purpose of play?

# APPENDIX E

# MAP OF NEPAL



A  Mountains
B  Hills
C  Tarai
—·— International
      Boundary
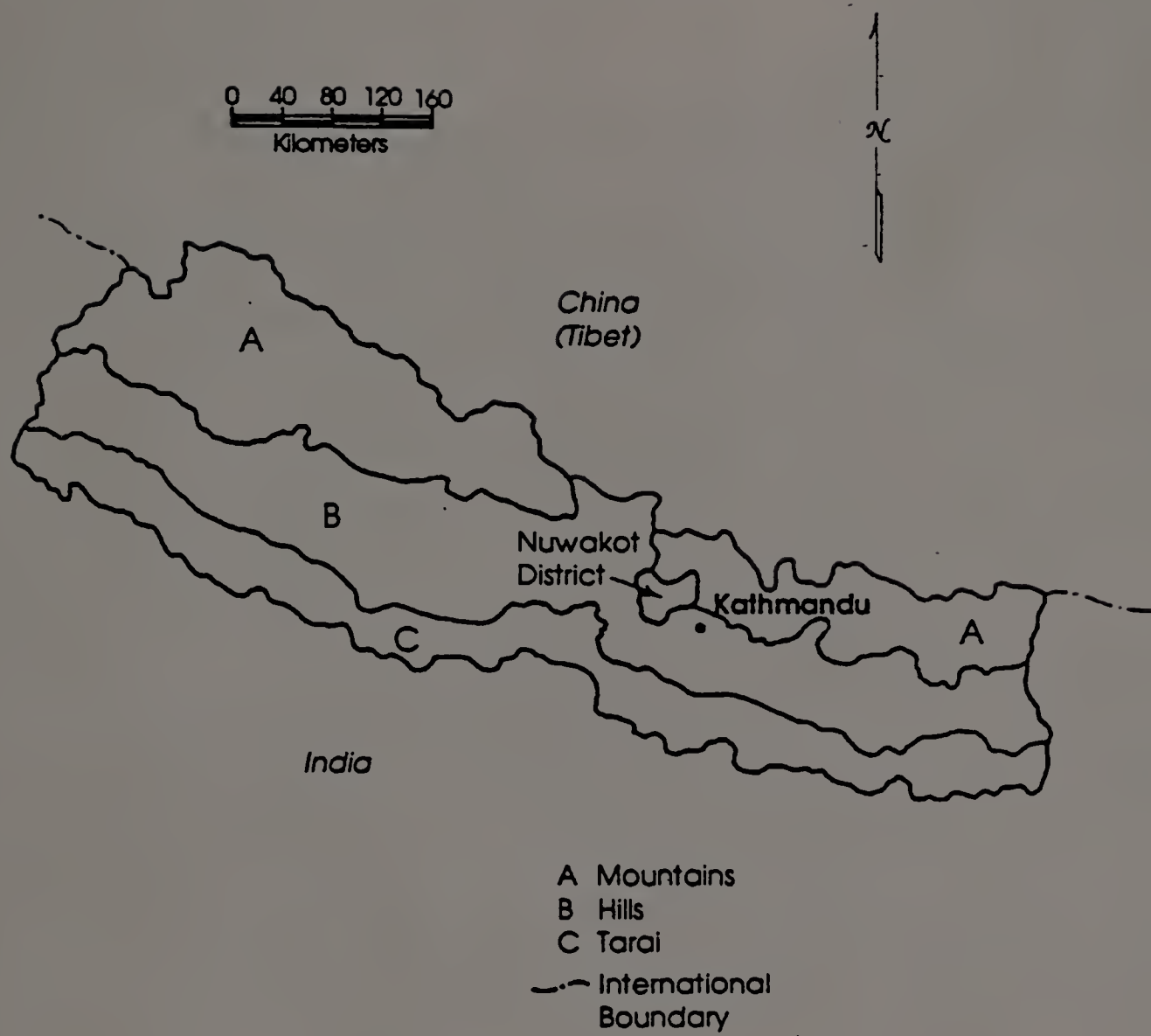
--Map of Nepal Showing Three Geographic Regions

# APPENDIX G

## PARENT, CHILD & HOUSEHOLD INFORMATION SHEET

Mother's name: _____

Mother's age: _____

Mother's education level: _____

Mother's occupation: _____

Father's name: _____

Father's education level: _____

Father's occupation: _____

Child's name: _____

Child's age: _____

Other children:     (i) Age_____ (ii) Sex _____

Household type:   (i) Nuclear _____ (ii) Joint _____(iii) Extended _____

Number of household members: _____

Caregivers of the Child besides Mother: (i) _____

                                                          (ii) _____

                                                           (iii) _____

# APPENDIX H

## MASTER CALENDAR FOR DATA COLLECTION

<u>Preliminary Visit</u>

May 2$^{nd}$ - May 10$^{th}$: Initial visit to the research site.

May 11$^{th}$: Returned to Kathmandu to make arrangements for research.

May 19$^{th}$: Left for research site with video-camera assistant.

May 20$^{th}$ and 22nd$^{st}$: Revisited families and last minute preparations for data collection.

<u>Data Collection</u>

May 23$^{rd}$- June 16$^{th}$: Two and half days devoted to each mother toddler dyad. One day for observation and the other day for interview. Half day was for familiarising with family.

Maintained flexibility to the needs of the family whenever required.

Sample of calendar for each mother toddler dyad:

Day, Date & Time of visit for familiarizing with each other and camera:

Day and Date of Observation:

Mother & Child name:

8:00am-10:00am - Place of observation:

1:00pm- 3:00pm - Place of observation:

6:00pm-8:00pm- Place of observation:

Day, Date & Time of Interview:

<u>Unforseen break in data collection</u>

June 17$^{th}$- June 25$^{th}$ : Researcher was ill and had to return to Kathmandu. Informed the remaining families about returning for data collection as soon as possible.

June 26$^{th}$: Returned to the research site.

Resume Data Collection

June 27th: Contacted and visited the six mothers-toddler dyads that had not been observed and interviewed.

June 28th- July 14h: Resumed data collection.

Exit from Research Site

July 15th - July 17th: Went through data and visited mothers to ask for clarification where confusion had arisen. Thanked each and every family for their participation and hospitality. Took pictures of the families, which were later framed and sent to them as a small token for their invaluable contribution to the study.

July 18th: Headed back to Kathmandu.

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