University of Hawai'i – West O'ahu DSpace Submission

CITATION	Bloch, M. and Adler, S. M. (1994a). African children's play and the emergence of the sexual division of labor. In J. L. Roopnarine, J. E. Johnson & F. H. Hooper (Eds.) *Children's play in diverse cultures*. (pp.148-178) Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
AS PUBLISHED	
PUBLISHER	SUNY Press
VERSION	Modified from original published version to conform to ADA standards.
CITABLE LINK	http://hdl.handle.net/10790/3529
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ADDITIONAL NOTES	

African Children's Play and the Emergence of the Sexual Division of Labor

By Marianne N. Bloch and Susan M. Adler

Introduction

Research on children's play in diverse cultures around the world focuses attention on issues related to the validity of generalizing theories and results from one cultural/ethnic group, for example, Euro-American children, to others. It can also illuminate features of environments and play that children engage in worldwide that expand our concepts of how to do research, and, indeed, even our definitions of the construct or metaphors we use to examine "play" (e.g., Schwartzman 1978). Research can also help to illuminate issues related to ideological, political, or economic issues affecting children from different racial, class, cultural, or gendered groups.

In the past decade, studies of children's play that have specifically focused on and been conducted in Africa have examined play and its relation to gender and age differences in the activities children do, what they learn, and with whom (e.g., Bloch 1989; Harkness & Super 1985; Whiting & Edwards 1988; Wenger 1983). In addition, most recent authors have focused on play and nonplay activities in relation to a variety of ecological variables (e.g., Bloch 1989; Hampton 1989; Liddell 1988; Liddell & Kvalsvig 1991; Udwin & Schmukler 1981) and have made implicit or explicit comparisons of their data with those collected (by the authors or others) in American or other Western, industrialized contexts. While some studies have examined children's play in Africa in relation to play and environments in multiple other cultures (e.g., Munroe, Munroe, Michelson, Koel, Bolton, & Bolton 1983; Whiting & Edwards 1988), the majority of studies in the 1980s and early 1990s have been on children's play within a particular country/ethnic context in Africa, or have compared data from such contexts with studies done in one other group in the West. The majority of the above studies focused on children's play out of school; only recent studies by Udwin

and Schmukler (1981), Hampton (1989) and Liddell, and colleagues (e.g., Liddell 1988; Liddell & Kvalsvig 1991) in South Africa have presented some results of children's play within school contexts. Several studies deviated from these general approaches and focused on children's play in relation to economic or political oppression in different East and South African contexts (e.g., Kilbride & Kilbride 1990, sections on child abuse; Reynolds 1989, on children's play in South African townships). A few studies specifically focusing on children's play in Africa also related play to hunger or malnutrition, an extremely important topic that is often overlooked in much of the Western or United States literature on play with its dominant focus on well-nourished children in controlled preschool settings. While some attention to these issues was given by the author in a 1989 publication (Bloch 1989), and by Hampton (1989), we are certain more literature in this area exists, and readers should be conscious of this omission in this chapter.

The majority of studies in Africa during the past several decades have focused on children's play as a way to describe environments and their relation to play as a form of development and learning, what Schwartzman (1978) called a structural-functional approach to the study of play. While the focus of this chapter also assumes a relationship between play, children's learning, and male/female differences in the labor they do (a structural-functionalist perspective), it does not assume that differences are functional in an equitable way for males and females, or for any African (or other) society. This latter perspective places this study more in a critical theoretical framework, where underlying patterns of behavior or ideologies are examined, especially in terms of the ways in which race, ethnic, class, or gender biases are reproduced in different societies.

Gender, Play, Work, and Education in Africa

The current chapter focuses on young children's play based upon a series of studies done in one context in West Africa, where the first author has conducted field research since the mid-1970s. Its particular focus is on the relationship between work and play, as well as the emergence of gender differences in children's play, "play-work," and work. This focus stems from literature related to play and work (see Bloch 1989; Harkness & Super 1986), gender differences in children's activities, and in the sexual division of labor, as well as a cultural-ecological model that forces one to

examine the interrelationships between macro-level ideologies, economic, social, and political patterns and children's education (see Bloch 1989). This literature has focused our attention on the relationship between early childhood experiences in work and play in African contexts and children's opportunities for different experiences subsequent to the early childhood period, including schooling (e.g., Stromquist 1989) and different reproductive and productive activities in adulthood.

While there are many differences in the political, cultural, and socioecological contexts of African children, the majority of recent studies of African children's play have been consistent in describing the mixture of work and play that children as young as age two years engage in within, at least, rural environments— the primary setting for most children in Africa. Whiting and Edwards (1988) vividly portray the extent to which African children engage in "directed" activities (work) vs. "undirected" activities, which include play. Both Whiting & Edwards (1988) and Munroe and Munroe (1984) and Munroe, et al. (1983) quantify the extent to which children, at least from age five on, engage in more work than play in Africa than in many other societies. In addition, middle-class Euro-American groups that were studied in both of these research efforts (Whiting & Edwards 1988; Munroe et al. 1983) engaged in significantly more play than their African same-age counterparts. Harkness and Super's (1986) research in Kenya among the Kipsigis showed specifically that parents' assumptions about both boys' and girls' ability to assume greater responsibility changes during the "five-to-seven shift," but that even with such a shift, girls were expected to do, and did, more work than boys.

The cultural-ecological context in which these age and gender-related differences occur have been discussed by these authors and have been related to differences in (1) cultural and parental beliefs about the value of work vs. play (Whiting & Edwards 1988); (2) workload requirements in different seasons and in different cultural or economic contexts (e.g., agricultural, pastoral-nomadic, hunter-gatherer, or modem= technological), where Whiting and Edwards (1988), for example, describe African societies as training oriented, while American middle-class Euro- American community socialization was characterized as sociable; (3) perceptions of responsibility, expectations (e.g., Harkness & Super 1986) or goals; and (4) social residence and organizational system (e.g., polygamous vs. monogamous, sibling caretaker sociocultural patterns vs. nonsibling caretaking pattern; clustered vs. sparsely settled (e.g., Whiting & Edwards 1988).

The Emergence of the Sexual Division of Labor

Many ethnographic accounts as well as recent empirical studies document the emergence of and/or differences in boys' and girls' play and work during their preadolescent years. Negussie (1989), for example, suggests that during the first years of life Ethiopian children play in the surroundings of their houses, constructing toys with available local materials. Negussie describes one person's memory of boys' and girls' work and play as they learn the work of older peers and adults:

> *A highly educated, middle-aged man described his first informal learning period as being one, in which he followed his father in his work. Among the first tasks was the herding of goats, in the close surroundings of the house. Having a stick instead of a spear gave him a feeling of having a weapon to defend his small herd. He learned his behavior from watching the older boys when they went and returned with the cattle-herds. By and by he then got the chance to follow some older herders to the grazing areas outside the plantations. Secondly, the father constructed small tools for the son, such as a small hoe, and then instructed him to imitate the father when working. . . . Girls follow their mothers in a similar way, learning domestic chores, such as fetching water from the water-hole in a small clay-pot, carried in the same way adult women do. Girls also start to watch their smaller siblings at a very early age. . . . Dietary knowledge, traditional health customs, and traditional pharmacological competence are taught at the same time. The evidence of poisonous plants is taught to children at a very early age. (Negussie 1989, p. 12)*

Leacock (1976, p. 45) describes play as "consciously patterned ways in which children relate to, and experiment with, their social and physical environment and their own abilities." She also suggests that "In pre-industrial society, as children grew to adulthood, play merged with work, and formal instruction supplemented what children were already learning through direct observation and experimentation." As industrialization, modernization, and formal education increase in African countries as they have elsewhere, Leacock's 1976 article on children's play in Africa suggested, also, that there would be sharper distinctions between play and work than in the past, and that learning through observing, experimenting, and through supplemental instruction from adults would change as the dominant ways in which younger children learn and develop knowledge related to their life and culture in Africa.

Lancy (1975, 1977, 1980) interviewed Kpelle villagers in Sierra Leone to determine their own or emic definitions and descriptions of work and play during childhood. This process resulted in eight categories of play, the first five of which Lancy suggests Kpelle children do: (1) *Nee-pele* or make-believe: (2) *Sua- Kpe-pele,* or hunting play; (3) *Pelle-seng* or toys; (4) *Pele-Kee* or games; (5) Polo or storytelling; (6) *Mana-Pele* or dancing; or (7) musical instrument play; and (8) *Kppa-kolo-pele* or adult play. In an effort to understand the relationship between play and work, Lancy (1977, p. 87) stated:

> *I didn't find that play has no relationship to work. They are, to use a favorite anthropological term, "integrated" . . . make-believe play seems to be one step in an alternatively collapsing and expanding process. A child of three spends hours observing a blacksmith at work. A child of four brings his stick down on a rock repeatedly and says he is a blacksmith. A child of eight weaves with his friends an elaborate reconstruction of the blacksmith's craft, all in make-believe. The child of ten is a blacksmith's helper in reality; he fetches wood for the forge and no more. At twelve he begins learning the actual skills of smithing, adding a new one every few months or so. At eighteen he is a full-fledged blacksmith with his own forge. Parallel patterns can be observed for virtually every class of work. ... In hunting play, the child gradually moves from play to serious hunting but again the transition is far from direct. He has played at trapping for a number of years. But when he learns to trap, his father or older brother will assist and guide him in the slow and complex art of making dozens of different traps, in recognizing the signs of the 40 plus animal species, which are trapped and hunted, and then in combining these two skills into effective trapping.*

Over and over, no matter which document describing play or work in the African context, one finds rich descriptions of young children's play, and a subset of play that appears to be functionally related, according to the individual authors, to adolescent or adult work patterns (e.g., see Hampton 1989; Shostak 1980; Wenger 1983). Throughout the descriptions, girls' and boys' play evolves as separate types; for example, the *Luba, Sanga,* and *Yeke,* girls play with dolls, not boys, although boys may help girls gather materials needed to create them. Boys construct or replicate "modem" objects of life—cars and trucks, military personnel, weapons and vehicles.

But the definitions of work and play are also important. First, definitions of play forms and activities are debatable depending upon perspective and source. For

example, Lancy gains his definitions from his adolescent and adult sources, one of the few examples of using an emic rather than a Western researcher's definition for play. Shostak (1980) in Alisa describes, as do others, early sex play, where the majority of Western researchers examining African children's play would never cite or, perhaps, see such play. Many researchers on African children's play include verbal insults, singing, dancing, and musicmaking in their descriptions of play; these could be included in make-believe as often they involve a reconstruction of adult joking, celebrations, etc., or not. Others include certain activities as play or work in adulthood; again, dancing by women in celebrations is considered by some as productive work that is required for family ritual maintenance, and thus productive labor, while others consider this adult female leisure or play. Finally, recent research by King (1982) elicits young American children's definitions of play and work to prove that children's constructs are different from those of adults; in both of these studies, children's definitions of play included those activities that they engaged in on their own volition, regardless of whether they were defined by adults as play or work. Work was anything assigned or expected or structured into children's days by adults, even if the activity were what would normally be considered "free choice" or play.

These debates about the definition of play and work are one thorny research issue, while another issue is the extent to which researchers see play as integrated into work, or functionally leading into work. One of the better discussions of this issue is cited by Schwartzman (1978) in *Chaga Childhood* by 0. F. Raum, first published in 1940. Raum provides rich descriptions of girls' and boys' play as well as their work. For example:

> *The child's first interests centre round the processes immediately preceding eating. ...*
> *As soon as they can walk, children help in these activities. Firewood must be fetched,*
> *and carried for long distances. In the mornings the fire has often died down and a*
> *child is sent to a neighbor to ask for coals. The blowing of the embers into a bright*
> *flame must be done skillfully, and children delight in learning it. In the evenings*
> *processions of mothers with their children go to the irrigation canals to fetch water. The*
> *girls carry small calabashes, some still holding them gingerly with both hands, others*
> *balancing them gracefully on their head. The advantage of the miniature vessel used is*
> *that from an early age girls are able to perform all the necessary manipulations*
> *without help. They can fill it without fear of letting it slip. They can carry it home and*

pour the water into its receptacle (an earthenware pot) without knocking the one against the other.

After having taken part in auxiliary work for some years, a girl receives "object lessons" in cooking from her mother when she is six or seven. She is shown the essential steps in preparing a cooked dish: the quantity of water required and the amount of soda. ... If the girl gets bored, her mother rouses her attention by means of certain tricks. She tells her, "I shall give you the spoon to lick!" or "Just come back for a minute to hold this brand so that I can see into the pot"; or, again, hoping to rouse her daughter's ambition: "You are no use at this job!"

At last a day arrives when her mother is either sick or desirous of going to the market and the girl has to show what she can do by herself. . . . Then the girl is left to perform the whole task on her own. ... On coming home, the mother finds the baby playing peacefully because it has been fed. She asks her daughter if she left some over for her. Delighted with her mother's question, she replies: "Indeed I have, but I am afraid to let you eat it; it is so bad!" Her mother tastes it and reassures her: "Oh how very good!

I couldn't have cooked it better myself!" But secretly she remembers all the mistakes made and on a later occasion warns her daughter against them. . . ." (Raum 1940-1967, p. 196-197.

Raum goes on beyond this cheerful indoctrination of young girls to the cooking process, to describe in great detail other activities of young girls and boys. After describing boys' staging of a fake court sitting, with chief and all, he looks more critically at the concept of imitative play. Is all pretense directly related to functional activities in later life?

From the sociological point of view, the copying of actions among people having the same status—as in the case of the spreading of a new fashion—must be clearly distinguished from "imitation" which cuts across boundaries of status, such as is seen in the native's craze for European clothes, the child's pretense of acting the role of an adult. While in the former case, the presence of "likemindedness" may be assumed, in the latter the mentality of the imitator differs profoundly from that of the imitated, and his performance has an altogether different function from the original. For instance, in

playing at marriage, the children taking part have not seen the ceremonies performed. Much of the subject matter of "imitative" play is, in fact, relayed through the medium of speech only. Most children know but by hearsay of weddings and court meetings. If, therefore, the term "imitation" is to be retained, it should be qualified by some such term as "blind," for the children's performance resembles much more a reconstruction of certain happenings from a limited number of data. Furthermore, "imitative" play activities never achieve a complete reproduction of the example, nor are they intended to do so. They are clearly selective. Certain traits important or striking to the child, and to him alone, are chosen from the adult pattern and are remoulded in his hands. . . . The essential feature of "imitative" play is therefore that of make-believe, the tendency of the child to construct an imaginary adult society from the scraps he is allowed to know about it . . . the choice of subject and its development are a result of the child's independent and spontaneous action. . . . Imitative play is the particular response of the child to his adult social environment; in it he anticipates adult life. The term "anticipation" is the best to cover those aspects which make play appear to be imitative and preparatory, and those which show that it performs an independent function. (Raum 1940/1967, p. 255-257)

Raum, in some ways, thus describes, both the dependence and the independence of play with adult activities such as work, and at the same time provides the basis for much of our current orientation toward peer culture and play, resistance in play, and, especially, for the notion of the social construction of play and roles within play.

In order to illustrate these points better, specific examples from the first author's study of young two- to six-year-olds' play and work in Senegal are described below, with some additional perspectives on their relation to the development of gendered divisions in labor in adolescence and adulthood in African societies.

The description of the sociocultural context of the study, as well as some of the original purposes of the study will be described first in order to draw the reader into the setting. This section will be followed by illustrations of findings that relate to the questions of play and work and possible consequences of gender divisions in children's play and work. The final section will summarize remaining research questions and methodological issues raised by the study, and this specific report.

Children's Play and Work in a Lebou Village in Senegal: the Sociocultural Context

Imagine that you are beginning fieldwork in Senegal in 1973, when the first author, Marianne Bloch, began to do research on children's play in this country. Imagine that you faced issues related to research on the development of children's play, the relationship between play and other activities, and their collective relationship to the cultural-ecological context in which they are situated. Also imagine that you began to engage in some of these research questions in a country that was initially unfamiliar to you.

In envisioning decisions one makes as a researcher in the field, we hope that you will better understand some of the cultural and ecological features that were observed and coped with in cross-cultural field research. We also hope that this approach will provide more in-depth images of children's play and work in this context.

Children's Work and Play as They Were Observed[1]

From 1973-1976, and again in 1979, research was conducted on the relationship between women's work, child care and socialization, and children's development in one rural village in Senegal. This research has been published in a number of articles (see Bloch 1984, 1988, 1989: Bloch & O'Rourke 1982). In 1985, a study in another area of Senegal was focused on the relationship between women's participation in different kinds of agricultural activities, and its potential relationship to issues of child development and learning, particularly in terms of gender differences in children's participation in play, work, and the opportunity to participate successfully in formalized schooling. In 1988, and in 1990, Beth Blue Swadener and the first author investigated the introduction of early preschooling in Senegal (and the Gambia), and began to also investigate teachers' beliefs about play and work within the classroom environment. During this period, data were collected on factors related to girls' and boys' differential access to schooling during the preprimary and primary period (age three to eight years) in Senegal and the Gambia. These different types of experiences and issues will be integrated into a discussion in this chapter that focuses on young children's play and work in Senegal. The general questions posed in this essay are the following: (1) how can one describe children's play, in relation to other activities of early childhood?; (2) to what extent do different features of the cultural-ecological environment, including values, expectations, and beliefs about children and their activities, relate to the way children spend their time and with whom?; (3) what are

some of the longer-term relationships, to the extent that one can judge from cross-sectional data, on patterns of child development and learning?

The Geographical and Social Context of Research: Fieldwork in Senegal

Field research in another culture, ethnic group, or country requires extensive preparation. Ideally, one should have engaged in extensive language training, readings on the particular country, culture, and specific ethnic group, and have identified pertinent literature, at the least, that might have a direct relationship to the field research one wants to do. With few exceptions, the first author's beginning field research in Senegal violated each of these requirements. She arrived in Senegal with little prior research or reading on Senegalese culture, ethnic groups, history, economy or languages in 1973. While she was moderately fluent in French, the official language of Senegal, she had had no previous training in any of the local languages used including Wolof, the primary language of the dominant ethnic group (the Wolof) and of the Lebou (the ethnic background of the group studied in the earliest field research).

State department issued information had suggested Senegal was a small (in 1973, approximately 6,000,000 population; 1991 estimates are now nearly 8,000,000) coastal country off the coast of West Africa; that it was pretty; and that the climate was warm but moderate almost year round (in fact, the climate is wonderful, about 75 degrees Fahrenheit most of the year, except for the summer rainy season, when it is quite hot, typically over 90 degrees Fahrenheit and very humid). There were seven major different ethnic groups in the country: the Wolof, Lebou, Mandinke (see Whittemore & Beverly 1989). The majority lived in rural areas and engaged in agricultural work. With regard to childrearing, extended childcare environments were, theoretically, the norm. In short, this researcher entered the "field site" with such little information and knowledge that it is embarrassing to make an admission in print; in fact, she does admit this only to help future researchers avoid this type of "tourist" research error.[2]

Upon arriving in Senegal, particularly in the urban area of Dakar, a fairly cosmopolitan city of half a million people in 1973 (one million people in 1990 estimates), there were many new images. The city was large and laced with a mixture of beautiful, large hotels near the ocean, French and Senegalese tourist restaurants, supermarkets for the wealthy in government, etc., pockets of shacks where many of the Senegalese lived with their families, open air markets where the majority shopped, pumps where many

retrieved daily water supplies, and open gutters filled with various wastewaters (laundry, bathing, sewage).

The first overwhelming image was a vision of French colonial influence laced with images of great poverty. While Senegal achieved independence from France in 1960, it was the capital of French West Africa before independence, and, in 1973 as today (1992), the colonial influence and presence of many French advisors in government, French and other European industry, was/is very visible. In short, the illusion that colonialism died with independence is just that. For the purposes of this paper, this has implications for, in particular, the colonial type of transmission of Western theories and research knowledge concerning child development, early education, and the importance of play for child development and education. This influence affected the way research theories were constructed, questions were asked, methods were determined, and results were interpreted, particularly at first; it also affected and affects others who have been the elite "researchers" on play in Africa.

One can say a bit by simply describing the per capita income, which in Senegal is approximately $100 per annum. With an average rural family consisting of at least one wife, as the Senegalese are largely Moslem and polygynous marriages are still very typical, and approximately seven children, one can estimate family (one wife, her husband, and their children) annual income of about $1,000. While in rural Senegal, one can live on such "income," there is little money for extras, which include at times adequate nutritious food for the entire family, medication or health care that is not, essentially, free, or education beyond the primary level.

Although Senegal is not considered to be the poorest of the third world nations in Africa, or elsewhere, it is still among the poorest countries worldwide by most social or economic indicators (e.g., see World Bank reports 1990). Those living in the cities, of which Dakar was the largest, are likely to have jobs with the government; the tourist industry; low-wage, low-skill jobs in other industries; or local market industries near the cities. The vast majority still live in rural areas and engage in subsistence (vegetable, millet) and cash-crop (peanuts, corn, rice) agriculture. Schools are more prevalent and accessible, (at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels) in the cities, with fewer schools, even at the primary levels, available close to rural village settings. Preschools or daycare (crèches) are generally available as private enterprises for the

wealthier, and in urban areas, with a small (1.5% of the population of children in 1990) but important publicly financed government preschool program.

A second overwhelming image that came from the first period in Senegal was the image of health care. As a "polio pioneer," the first author had been in the first generation of United States-born children to have been immunized against polio and to have had little contact while growing up with children afflicted with polio; similarly, we take for granted that diseases such as tuberculosis, smallpox, and leprosy are controllable and typically no longer seen in the United States. The immediate experience in Senegal with those afflicted visibly with polio, measles, leprosy, smallpox, river blindness, and malaria was sadness and disbelief that some countries of the world had so little access to immunizations or health care, when most people in the United States take such health care for granted.[3] As naiveté decreased, knowledge of the privileges of power, wealth, and colonial influence increased. It became apparent that immunizations and medication that we take for granted at the time were not available to most,[4] and that the majority of children, in rural areas, had little access to formal schooling, particularly beyond the elementary level, to decent housing, especially in urban areas, to reasonable safe water, or, with too great frequency, a stable diet. The potential implications for children's play, of malnutrition, and of disease, which have been only superficially addressed in the author's research to date (see Bloch 1989) are nonetheless known.

Within this framework of poverty where many of the basic rights to health care, food, reasonable housing, and education are not provided to children, an appreciation and understanding of the beauty of Senegal, its family system, the cultural history, socialization, child development and learning grew. Indeed, after several projects in Senegal (1973-76, 1979, 1985, 1988, and 1990), the first author still has a fairly romantic vision of childhood in Senegal; however, this vision is now laced with a much more detailed understanding of the costs of poverty in terms of health care, stable and reasonably nutritious diets, and access to necessary goods and resources that stable adequate income can provide. It is to the story of young children's life, as this was observed during research in Senegal, and with particular regard to children's play and work, that we now turn.

Village Context

The majority of anthropological studies of child development begin by fairly detailed descriptions of the context of the study, the specific site, and the ethnic group. However, it is often overlooked that there are different theoretical underpinnings of those descriptions of context that result in descriptions that prioritize certain information over other information. In the present case, we have drawn from a cultural-ecological perspective expressed by Beatrice and John Whiting, their colleagues, and former students (including the first author) (see for example, Whiting 1980; Whiting & Edwards 1988, as well as the author's reports cited earlier). From this perspective, the notion of context is one that must include the history and economy of an area or group as well as the current maintenance systems including political, economic, and social organization that, it is posited, constrain, as well as provide, the opportunities for child development and learning. The notion of activity settings is similar to one expressed also by Wertsch (1985) in describing Vygotsky's sense of activity as well as the relationship between cultural and historical relationships and learning within various activity settings. From an essentially cultural-material theoretical perspective, the historical, social, political, religious, and economic (past and current) characteristics of an environment affect activities, ideologies, and outcomes for adults as well as children. While these ideas are hardly contestable, different researchers examine them in quite different ways (see Bloch & Pellegrini 1989; Schwartzman 1978).

The majority of cultural-ecological research on children's play has been called "functionalist" by Schwartzman (1978), and has included empirical-analytic research assumptions and methods associated with these (Bloch 1991). More recently, a number of studies of children's play in different cultural contexts have included greater emphasis on interpretive or symbolic interactionist perspectives where adult and child meanings and beliefs in play, work, or other activities are examined by the researcher(s) as critical elements of their understanding and interpretation of play. To date, very few have used critical or other paradigmatic frameworks for such study (e.g., one exception is King 1982). By focusing on a detailed examination of children's play and work within the context of Senegal, in this work, we hope to use a critical lens to examine, indirectly, the relationship between play and gender-based divisions in subsequent work patterns as well as learning opportunities beyond early childhood.

Play and Work: The Emergence Of Gender Divisions in Labor And Schooling

Where, how, and with whom do children have opportunities to learn at particular cultural-historical periods, and in which ways do these settings provide unique opportunities for learning and development? It was toward these questions that the study of play and work in Senegal was directed.

Dene: The Village Context

The specific research discussed in this chapter was conducted within a village called Dene, of approximately 700 people in a rural agricultural setting about sixty miles east of Dakar, the capital city, or sixty miles east of the western coast of Senegal. Initially, the first author was taken to the village site by members of an International Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) group that had initiated a youth employment project in the village. Knowing of the author's early childhood education background, they suggested that women in this particular village were interested in forming a daycare center, and wanted advice. With this opening opportunity, a Peace Corps short-course on speaking Wolof, and a tiny grant to help defray costs of an interpreter-research assistant, the author began work in this village to study early child development as well as factors related to the need for child care in a site where extended family child care was the cultural norm and practice (see Bloch 1988 for a specific report on this project).

The village had been established by a group of elders in the 1920s as these men and their families had split from a different village that had become too large. The majority of those living in the village were Lebou, a small ethnic group in Senegal, who were known generally as fishermen, and who typically resided on the coastal areas. This group had moved inland and become agriculturalists.

While there were communal work groups, in general, there were sharp distinctions between men's and women's work, with men engaging in more cash-crop agriculture with corn and peanut production, while women engaged in subsistence agricultural vegetable farming, with surplus vegetables and other food sold at the nearest roadway crossing. In the early 1970s, a European-funded agribusiness moved to within one mile of the village site, which we call Dene, and many men and women in the village had begun to engage in wage labor in the fields, or in production. The perceived need for a daycare program in the village was related to shifts in the numbers and ages of

women available to supervise and care for young children, largely because of the introduction of the agribusiness eight-hour shift days, reducing flexibility in the location and duration of women's work away from children (see Bloch 1988). Indeed, while extended family child care has remained the norm in this village, changes in caretaking patterns had occurred. The absence of older daughters, the preferred alternative caretakers of mothers, due to the youth employment program initiated by the YMCA, coupled by mothers' participation in the neighboring agribusiness, as well as maternal participation in traditional rainy season agricultural and petty trade labor had resulted in mothers of young children feeling that a daycare program focusing on care of quite young children (age eighteen months to three years) would help. Interviews done with mothers that focused on the ages of children they hoped to place in a daycare center, if one were instituted, showed clearly that the children who had just been weaned (weaning typically took place between twelve and twenty-four months, with eighteen months the norm) as well as the children who were young (through age three years) were seen as being too young to, with ease, leave the family compound and/or village under the supervision of older children and relatives. In our interviews in 1975-76, the children who were age four or five years were seen as old enough to be left without day care or supervision, as they played with older siblings, and generally, were seen as old enough to take care of themselves within the confines of the village and within the normal supervision system that existed.[5]

The social organization of the village as well as the organization for child care was an important part of the social and cultural context in which women's work at home and away from home was conducted, and in which child care took place. Indeed, one study (Bloch 1984) suggested that the availability of child care that a mother felt comfortable with was a significant predictor of women's participation in traditional as well as wage agricultural labor.[6]

In this village of 700, families lived in a clustered settlement pattern where there were multiple circular and clustered "compounds" consisting of numerous households all related to the eldest male in the extended family of that compound. Residence patterns were organized around a patrilocal system of residence, where the eldest male had a household with his wife or wives, their older sons and their wives and families. The largest compounds had been formed by an older man in the village, who had multiple (older sons) by the time of the study, and they, in turn had their wives, sons, and their families living in the compound with them. Compound size ranged from

about twenty people living together in two clustered residences to about 200 people living together in multiple clustered residences.

The Lebou in this village had settled in a traditional residence pattern within compounds based on the patrilocal organization briefly described above. It was also important, however, that the different compounds in the village all consisted of near and distant relatives along both the maternal and paternal lines. Preferred marriages took place within family lines, and endogamous, as well as exogamous marriages (outside the village), but still with relatives were the cultural norm. This was important for child care, as children were perceived to be able to move fairly freely around the village or at least between the compounds of the closest relatives (e.g., the maternal grandmother may have lived at the other end of the village) for play, work, and child care supervision.

Individual household composition as well as compound composition was important in our analyses (Bloch, 1989) under the hypothesis that the number of boys and girls of different ages and gender that a child might play with easily was expected to affect children's play. The number of boys and girls within a child's family ranged in size depending upon the specific stage of the family reproductive cycle. Some children that were observed during the 1973-1976 study, where three- to five-year-olds were studied, and during the 1979 study, where zero to six-year-old children were studied, were in families where they were one of seven children, while others were the first or second bom in families that were in an earlier period of the family reproduction cycle. Nonetheless, because of the compound organization, the nearness of other large families, including many similar-age cousins, children had many others with whom to play. Within this context, we observed two- to six-year-old children who engaged in solitary as well as social play and social play with both same-age and mixed-age peer/sibling groups. The vast majority of children in peer group play were siblings or cousins. Girls were observed to engage in somewhat more mixed-age social play with children who were younger than they, while boys engaged in somewhat more mixed-age play with older children (Bloch, 1988, 1989).[7]

The Emergence Of The Gendered Division Of Labor Through Children's Play-Work

While cross-cultural data generally support the conception that boys and girls engage in different activities—both play and work—during childhood, there are still

numerous inconsistencies in reports on specific samples (e.g., see Whiting & Edwards 1988). In African literature, however, the emergence of early differences in children's assignment to different kinds of work tasks, by gender, is well documented, as are the gender differences in the division of work during adulthood (e.g., Whiting & Edwards 1988; Harkness & Super 1986). Explanations for the division of labor in Africa are controversial. Some maintain that the gender divisions in labor represent complementary work patterns that, in the African context, have been necessary for social and cultural survival and reproduction. Others critique this perspective as one that supports continued lack of recognition of the role of women's work in production or economic activities in Africa, and continues inequalities between men and women in terms of the types of activities that are expected to do, and the type of participation that girls/boys/women/men are able to engage in with a modernizing or changing economy. Consequences of the gender division of labor that do not seem to favor women include lowered access to or success in Westernized schooling, as well as lowered participation in economic development projects and activities that provide greater economic income or resources to individual participants (see Stromquist, 1988, for example, on these points). A variety of studies document the extent to which participation in household labor diminishes African girls' ability to enter, participate successfully, or achieve in school (graduate, go onto higher education, etc.) (Stromquist 1988). Other literature documents different ways in which girls' household responsibilities and expectations for their reproductive/productive labor negatively influences their ability to participate in or learn to participate in economic development projects, when they are open to women. While the emergence of the gender division in labor that leads to these inequitable consequences is understood, no studies in Africa have yet documented how this difference or division occurs. Do children observe their elders and simply imitate them? Are they reinforced for some types of work or play and not others that would lead eventually toward gender differences in children's work patterns? Do children help to construct their own play and work patterns? Is there any evidence of resistance to the divergence in work by gender that is so well-documented in the African and cross-cultural literature?

While no study has provided the answers to the above questions, literature seems to support that all of these processes occur in a complex and interactive fashion as children construct and apply their understandings of culturally appropriate behavior. Schwartzman (1978) and Raum (1940) contest, through examples, that children imitate precisely the behavior of their elders, and document scenarios when children

play with their play as they construct their own version of their own behavior. The Senegalese studies conducted by the first author provide some evidence that can be used to describe children learning responsible work patterns through their play, and during "play- work" (see term in Bloch 1989). The following descriptions of Lebou children's play in the one village setting that we described above shows patterns of development of play and work during the two- to six-year-old period, divergence by gender, and some of the processes that are involved in the construction of gendered notions of play and work in this context.

Play, Work, and Play-Work in the Two- to Six-Year-Old Period

In the 1989 report by Bloch on two- to six-year-old children's activities, boys and girls appeared to engage in similar proportions of time in play, and both boys and girls engaged in similar proportions of thematic play or pretense play during the two- to four-year-old period (see Bloch 1989, pp. 139-141); however, by the five- to six-year-old period, girls were observed to engage in pretense play, while boys were not. In addition, boys and girls pretense play during the two- to four-year-old period was observed to be differently "directed" with different content or themes in play by gender (cooking, domestic cleaning, marketing, child care for girls more than boys while boys engaged in more thematic play related to cars/transportation and hunting activities than girls). While both boys and girls engaged in more responsible work during the five- to six-year-old period compared to the two- to four-year-old period, there were significant gender differences, with girls engaging in more responsible work than boys during both the two- to four- and the five- to six-year- old periods (Bloch 1989, p. 139). Finally, the 1989 analysis of Senegalese children's play and work showed that those children who engaged in more responsible work, engaged in less play ($r = -0.397$ between proportions of observations in play and those in responsible work).

Analyses of narrative prose records of children's activities that examined children's play and work patterns in greater descriptive detail suggested that girls were more likely to be asked to do work by their mothers or other female relatives, interrupted in their play to participate in momentary help with "women's work," and were more likely to self-initiate play-work, a category that Bloch described as combining "playing at learning the tasks for which they would soon take full responsibility." An example from this study (Bloch 1989, p. 139) illustrates this category more fully, with inserts

added by the current authors to describe differences in the labels play, play-work, and responsible work:

Binta (age six) has just returned from the village well with a small basin of water on her head <self-initiated or assigned "responsible work">. She pours some of it into the drinking water jar, and her mother says, take the rest and go wash your clothes. She puts the basin down and fetches her clothes and soap <Assigned work by mother; not "play- work">. She starts to wash her clothes, singing while washing <singing can accompany "work" as the phrase "whistle while you work" suggests; this was considered work>. Then Demba (another six-year-old girl) comes and calls her to come play. Binta tells Demba she can't go now, that she's "learning" to wash the laundiy. Demba comes over to Binta and starts to wash the laundry (several of Binta's cloth skirts) with her <this last discussion between the two girls, and particularly Demba's self-initiated participation in washing signaled "play-work">.

The emergence of gendered divisions in young Senegalese children's play, play-work, and work. As suggested above, the quantified proportions of observations in which children were observed in play and responsible work were observed to be somewhat different for boys and girls in this setting. Boys' and girls' themes in dramatic play varied along predictable lines with girls' play themes reproducing—in a fashion—the activities they saw older girls and women doing as their labor in the village: cooking, cleaning, marketing, and child care.[8] Small two- to four-year- old boys engaged in pretense that included some similar themes—cooking, child care, some agriculture, for example—but also included more pretense with vehicles or play construction. By five to six years, girls' play and play-work activities, where there was greater emphasis on playing at learning work, in the first author's opinion, continued; in addition, assigned or initiated activities that transformed the former "play/play-work" into nonplay or real work activities was also done. Boys, on the other hand, at five to six years, were no longer observed in pretend activities that had been observed earlier: carrying a baby on their back at age two years, helping others to cook with play materials, or even play with toy trucks that might be called pretense. They spent more time with other boys, frequently outside their village, exploring the countryside, climbing trees, swimming in nearby lakes, or playing sports games. After six years of age, even greater divergence in boys'-girls' activities were observed, with girls, by age seven, spending more and more time outside of school, helping with "women's work" activities, including agriculture, when possible; boys began to help more seriously with agricultural

activities in family fields as well as small animal herding activities, work generally only assigned to seven- to twelve-year-old boys.

The construction of these gendered differences in work and play patterns is not obvious. While there were too few examples of each type of play, play-work, or work to suggest that this process was studied sufficiently to draw conclusions, examples culled from the narrative reports on children's activities help to define how some of children's play merged into labor, and how some children learned to do, or not to do work expected for the opposite sex.

While children engaged in many different types of play, including oral joking, dancing, playing with musical instruments, and car or vehicle play, the most obvious types provide a more direct way to ages at which some forms of work began, and aspects of the processes involved with boys' and girls' construction of different types of labor.

Learning to labor at two. At two years of age, little real work was expected of the Senegalese children, yet boys and girls were given small errands to do by adults, almost as a preliminary to more serious errands or work that would be assigned later. Young children carried things to different people, or, for example, a cup of water into the house. There were no apparent gender differences in these assignments at this early age, although there were some differences in "play-work." Boys, at two, were observed in "animal beating," which generally referred to playful herding of small animals such as goats and chickens; this was generally some form of imitation of older boys, perhaps embodying the constructive aspects mentioned earlier by Raum (1940-1970). Boys also participated in early tam-tam (drum) making, observing or imitating older boys' soccer games (all considered play), and, in three cases, child-care related play-work. Two times, two-year-old boys helped someone older to take care of a younger baby, while once, a two-year-old boy was observed to tie a baby on his back, as older girls and women did; in this case his mother intervened, and, said no, the activity was "for girls." At three, boys were observed in different games such as hide-and- seek, playing at harvesting in a field along with older boys, and playing with constructing a car. In addition, three-year-old boys cut branches (small twigs) with rocks, and played at cooking corn (imitating older children). One narrative shows a child's pretense at harvesting in his father's field. By four, boys were spending somewhat more time with older boys, but also engaged in some pretense with group of young two- to five-year-old girls and some young boys in pretend play with

cooking outside the village. Children had leaves in small pots, and cooked evening meals. In another narrative, a young four-year-old boy helps to wash a pot with his older six-year-old sister. A four-year-old was assigned to feed ducks, considered an assigned task (work). Five- and six-year-olds were observed playing at constructing different transportation vehicles, playing at making and then doing hunting of small animals outside the village with self-made slingshots, playing soccer (not just imitating) with some older boys, and some work activities consisting of carrying vegetables from fields, peeling onions (ordered by a fourteen-year-old sister), emptying large basins of water, and running errands, the most common of boy's work activities at this age. One boy was also observed being ordered, but refused the assignment, and ran away.

Girls' labor was progressive as the boys' initiation into labor was; however, their activities varied some from boys, and we saw more consistent compliance to assigned tasks than with the boys. At two years of age, little girls imitated older girls and women by carrying tiny cans of water on their heads from the village well to their house. Progressively, as they got older and more capable, they carried larger cans of water on their heads until, by age seven, they could carry real buckets of water. The stage of learning to carry water was considered self-initiated "play-work." Play-work at learning to wash clothes was described earlier while play-work at progressively learning stages of peeling parts of onions or other vegetables, or pounding grain for the evening meal took the form of both assigned experimentation with some observation and some instruction as in the earlier example, described in the passage in Raum (p. 154 of this chapter), or self-initiated play-work as in the example of the two young four- year-olds beginning to learn to wash clothes (also described earlier). In no case, were there observations of young girls trying boys' or men's activities, or being told that something was boys' work (men's work). Girls frequently work with small dolls on their backs at young ages, pretended to cook with fairly intricate natural food (sand, leaves, onion peels, etc.) in small metal pots fabricated by adults, or pretended to do laundry, sweep, or carry water from the well. Each play or play-work activity progressively, by age five to six, developed into more serious errands or assigned tasks in child care of younger babies, more serious help with cooking, doing some laundry, or running errands to other parts of the village or marketing. While some of these activities were left to be "seriously" done as expected tasks at even older ages (e.g., eight to fourteen years), the frequency of times that tasks embodied more work than

either play or play-work by five to six years of age was noticeably different than that for boys.

Adult Belief Systems and Social/Economic/Cultural Factors that Support the Beginning Gender Division in Labor

Clearly, the majority of research that has assessed adult belief systems regarding children's work supports the notion that boys and girls are expected to do different types of work and from somewhat different ages. Harkness and Super's (1986) study is clearest in showing adult expectations for children to have different abilities beginning about the age of five. The research conducted in Senegal showed that mothers believed girls and boys should engage in different types of activities, and several examples document adult women negating boys' experimentation with "women's work" activities as early as two to three years old (see examples). In addition, adults believed that children needed to take on responsibilities from an early age (boys and girls) in this society, and many others where workload demands in agriculture and at home were great. Women's work in fields and in trading could not take place without a full support system of other younger girls at home to help cook, do laundry, and, especially, take care of young children when the mother was absent. While boys could do child care, girls were preferred child caretakers according to our interviews. Additional cultural-ecological data showed girls were more likely to stay close to their mothers, to other adult women, and in girl groups, while boys were more likely, by age four to six, to spend time away from home, and with same-age or older boy groups. The earlier studies in Senegal suggested that when children were near adult women, they were (not surprisingly) more likely to be assigned errands or other work, and probably pretended to imitate adult women's activities to a greater extent, too; boys, on the other hand, were less likely to be near, and more likely to be noncompliant when requests were made (Bloch 1988). When women were absent from the village due to wage labor, young girls were found to spend more time in play, and less in work, as compared to periods when their mothers were at home. Fathers, who were more likely to be absent from the village during the day, were more likely to be observed assigning tasks only if their sons accompanied them to their fields.

Consequences and Further Questions

The reports on children's early "learning to labor" through play and play-work activities in Senegal support other reports in many rural African cultures (e.g., Leacock 1976; Hampton 1989; Hark- ness & Super 1986; Lancy 1980). They document the gradual increase in work assignments as well as expectations and needs of adults to have children actively participate in work at early ages. By the early elementary years of seven to twelve years, girls' and boys' leisure and labor activities and the people they are around, in the Senegalese case described as well as in many other sites, are clearly differentiated.

The social and self-initiated processes that contribute to this early divergence in activities are as yet not clearly understood, although the brief observations described in literature as well as in the Senegalese research support experimentation, observation, gradual support and instruction, negation (as in "that's for girls"), as well as some resistance. Some boys tried women's activities at early ages only to learn through example and direct instruction that these activities were not for them.

Are these cases of simple play and work? In some ways, yes; they seem natural and fairly pervasive throughout the literature, documenting early gender differences in African children's activities. Yet, these differences are those that are viewed as "complementary" work patterns by some theories of gender differentiation in labor patterns, while others consider them the precursors to important inequities in girls' ability to gain access to or continue in schooling beyond the primary level because of heavy household (child care, cooking, etc.) responsibilities (Stromquist 1988). Beliefs about which types of reproductive and productive activities boys and girls and men and women can engage in as adults also contribute heavily, according to many economic development researchers to gender-related differential access to opportunities for participation in later economic activities in modern agricultural or wage sectors of the African economy. Questions remain as to the inevitability of these early differences in play, play-work, or work. Questions for research remain as to their relative contribution to later differential outcomes in schooling or job/resource access, in comparison with other factors (curriculum, teaching biases, different economic opportunities offered in adulthood). Questions remain as to the extent to which girls or boys resist these roles, and the consequences for those who might resist or learn cross-gender roles. Questions remain as to whether the views and values of

western researchers, and ideologies about gender roles have validity or should be counted as important in the African context. These and other questions raised in earlier parts of this chapter related to researching the play and work of young children in different cultural contexts remain for further inquiry.

Notes

1.   This subtitle is very intentional after the broad overview written earlier concerned with issues of definition, etc. The definitions used by Bloch in the Senegalese studies evolved over time from the first study begun in 1974 to the last sets of studies, on somewhat different issues, in 1990. Acknowledgment to Beatrice and John Whiting for urging the use of prose narratives to describe children's activities in research from 1979 onward, which allowed for analysis and reanalysis of categories that could be used, and interpretations by others than the primary researcher.

2.   Subsequent to the first three-year period in Senegal, some of these problems were rectified by an NIMH sponsored postdoctoral fellowship at the Laboratory for Human Development at Harvard University. There, the author gratefully acknowledges training in human development and anthropology by Beatrice Whiting and Robert LeVine, which helped to frame the future work of the author in Senegal and elsewhere.

3.   Of course, the U.S. health care system offers such care to children of middle-class or more elite backgrounds, who pay for such care, while still not ensuring basic good prenatal care, immunizations, or postnatal care for far too many children.

4.   While the U.N. and W.H.O. sponsored initiatives to immunize all children against normal childhood, deadly diseases, has been a particularly effective initiative in Senegal during the past decade, it is still very common for children to not be immunized, to not have immediate or long-term health care, and to have no easy access to clinics, medical help, or medication.

5.   These perceptions came from mothers who were asked "If a day care center were developed, but did not have enough room for all young children in the village, which age groups are most important to include in a day care center, and why?" When mothers believed that more children could be in a daycare, they did include older four- to five-year-old children in their discussion and explicitly stated that four- to five-year-olds might use day care for preschool purposes, but did not need supervision or custodial care. The preference for younger children's custodial supervision as the first priority for parents is understandable, but the fact that parents

perceived four- to five-year olds to be unneedy of this type of custodial supervision is also important, and fits within Lebou norms that children are old enough to care for themselves by this age, and can be easily supervised by other older children in their play throughout the village.

6.   This particular study suggested that there were two important predictors of women's participation in agricultural activities (traditional and wage-labor). These were the extent of availability of childcare providers (older daughters, grandmothers, co-wives) and economic need of the family.

7.   This finding related to same-age as well as mixed-age play in this group of Senegalese children is reported in greater detail in Bloch, 1988 for the 1973-76 study and in Bloch, 1989 for the 1979 study. The finding of same-age play, we believe, relates to the availability of similar age cousins in close proximity for play, as well as the cultural custom toward sex and age grouping of same-age children. Other studies of children's play groups have noted more mixed- age grouping of children, where the social density of children is less (see Konner 1975 on reports on the Kalahari Kung Hunter-gatherers, and Harkness & Super 1985 related to Kipsigis children's play and work).

8.   Girls also imitated dancing by women during festivals, weddings, etc., as well as some agricultural work they saw men and women doing outside the village.

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This is a selective bibliography on recent research on African children and play. It goes beyond the references cited in the chapter for those interested in examining children's play research in Africa, but is limited to the ERIC and journal searches that the two authors conducted. Finally, it concentrates on research conducted since the late 1970s when Schwartzman and Barbera's (1977) and Schwartzman's (1978) reviews were conducted.

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