Preschoolers' Social Lives

- The preschool years are marked by increased interactions with the world at large.
- Around age 3, children begin to develop real friendships.
- Peers come to be seen as individuals with special qualities.
- Relationships are based on companionship, play, and entertainment.
- Friendship is focused on the carrying out of shared activities (rather than just being in the same place at the same time!).

With age, preschooler's view of friendship evolves.

- Older preschoolers see friendship as a continuing state, and as a stable relationship that has meaning beyond the immediate moment.
- Older preschoolers pay more attention to concepts such as trust, support, and shared interests.
- Even by age 3, children are interested in maintaining smooth social relationships with their friends, trying to avoid disagreements.
Some children are more readily liked by their peers than others:

- Qualities associated with popularity:
  - physical attractiveness
  - being outgoing
  - being sociable
  - speaking more
  - smiling more
  - having a greater understanding of others' emotions

- Qualities associated with disliked children:
  - more likely to be aggressive
  - More disruptive,
  - impose themselves on their peers
  - less cooperative
  - do not take turns.

Are unpopular preschoolers destined for a life with few friends? Not necessarily!

Social skills that are associated with popularity can be taught by parents and teachers as well as enhanced through a warm, supportive home environment.

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Playing by the Rules: How Play Affects Social & Personality Development

Categorizing play:

- Three year olds typically engage in **FUNCTIONAL PLAY** which involves *simple, repetitive activities*, that is, doing something for the sake of being active. (playing with dolls, skipping, jumping rope, etc)
(Categorizing play, continued)

- By age 4, children typically engage in CONSTRUCTIVE PLAY which involves manipulating objects to produce or build something (legos, puzzles, etc.).
  - Constructive play allows children to test developing cognitive skills.
  - Constructive play allows children to practice motor skills.
  - Constructive play allows children to problem solve.
  - Constructive play allows children to learn to cooperate.

The social aspects of play
(How Play Affects Social & Personality Development, continued)

Mildred Parten (1932) noted various types of play...

- PARALLEL PLAY is when children play with similar toys, in a similar manner, but do not interact with each other.
- ONLOOKER PLAY occurs when children simply watch others play but do not actually participate themselves.

(Mildred Parten’s various types of play, continued)

- ASSOCIATIVE PLAY is where two or more children actually interact with one another by sharing or borrowing toys or materials, although they do not do the same thing.
  - In COOPERATIVE PLAY, children genuinely play with one another, taking turns, playing games, or devising contests.
More about the effects of play on social and personality development…

- Associative and cooperative play generally do not emerge until the end of the preschool years.
- The nature of a child's play is influenced by their social experiences.
  - Children with preschool experience engage in more social behaviors earlier (associative & cooperative play, etc.)

Television: Learning From the Media

- Average preschooler watches 20 to 30 hours of TV a week!
- Consequences of TV viewing are unclear.
- Children do not fully understand the plots.
- They may have difficulty separating fantasy from reality.
- Some information is well understood by young viewers, i.e. facial expressions.
- Yet, much of what is viewed is not representative of events in the real world.

→ Television may be harnessed to facilitate growth.

- Sesame Street is the most popular educational program in U.S.
- Viewers had significantly larger vocabularies.
- Lower income viewers were better prepared for school, scored higher on tests of cognitive ability, and spent more time reading.
Television: learning from the media?

- Critics of *Sesame Street* suggest that viewers may be less receptive to traditional modes of teaching.
- There are difficulties in assessing the effects of educational viewing, (e.g. the effects may be related to parenting).
- **BUT overall the results of watching *sesame street* seem to be positive**

Aggression and Violence in Preschool Children

- **AGGRESSION** is the intentional injury or harm to another person.
- Infants do not act aggressively, however, by the preschool years children demonstrate true aggression.
- The frequency and duration of aggressive acts declines throughout early childhood.
- Aggression is a relatively stable trait, the most aggressive preschoolers tend to be the most aggressive school aged children.

Even though most children are not exposed directly to real-life violence, television models aggression for them!

- TV has a clear impact on social development
  - We know that preschoolers imitate violence they see on cartoons
  - Does imitation lead to actual aggression?
    - Tough to answer definitively!
      - Conducting a true experiment would be unethical
      - Correlational studies clearly suggest subsequent aggression
    - Just as kids can learn aggression, they can unlearn! Observation of nonaggressive models leads to reduced aggression levels.
Gender Identity:
Developing Femaleness & Maleness

- Gender, the sense of being male or female, is well established in young children. (Sex typically refers to sexual anatomy.)
  - One way gender is manifested is in play.
    - During the preschool years boys increasingly play with boys.
    - Girls tend to play with girls.
  - Gender out-weighs ethnic variables when it comes to play
    - An Asian American boy would prefer to play with an African American boy than with an Asian American girl

- Preschoolers also begin to develop expectations about appropriate behavior for girls and boys.
- Like adults, preschoolers expect males to be more independent, forceful and competitive and females to be warm, nurturing, expressive and submissive.
- These are expectations and not truths about actual behavior! But viewing the world this way affects preschoolers behavior!
- However, young children typically hold stronger gender-stereotypes than adults.
Several theoretical explanations for gender related attitudes exist.

- **Biological perspectives** argue that physical characteristics associated with the different sexes, hormone differences, and differences in the structure of female and male brains might lead to gender differences.
  - (inborn genetic factors → gender differences)

(Theoretical explanations for gender related attitudes, continued)

- **Psychoanalytic perspectives** attribute gender differences to **IDENTIFICATION**, the process in which children attempt to be similar to their same-sex parent, incorporating the parent's attitudes and values.
  - (gender development results from moving thru stages related to biological urges)

(Theoretical explanations for gender related attitudes, continued)

- **Social-learning approaches** argue that children learn gender-related behavior and expectations from direct training and from their observation of others, including the media.
  - (Gender related behavior & expectations learned from observations of others in their environment)
(Theoretical explanations for gender related attitudes, continued)

- **Cognitive approaches** argue that individuals develop a **GENDER IDENTITY**, the perception of oneself as male or female.
  - To do this they develop a **GENDER SCHEMA** (a cognitive framework that organizes information relevant to gender).
  - Preschoolers begin developing "rules" about what is right, and what is inappropriate, for males and females.

(The cognitive approach as an explanation for gender related attitudes, continued)

- By the time they are 4 or 5 years of age, children develop an understanding of **GENDER CONSTANCY** (the belief that people are permanently males or females, depending on fixed, unchangeable biological factors).
- Sandra Bem believes that one can minimize rigid views of gender by encouraging children to be **ANDROGYNOUS** (a state in which gender roles encompass characteristics thought typical of both sexes)
  - Males as assertive & gentle
  - Females as empathetic & competitive

Parenting styles

Four parenting styles:

- **Authoritarian**
  - highly controlling, little discussion ("My way, or else").
- **Authoritative**
  - limits placed, but also warm, nurturing, encouraging independence within those limits ("Let's talk about it").
- **Indulgent** (also called Permissive)
  - involved, but with few demands or restraints.
- **Neglectful**
  - uninvolved in child's life.
Classification of Parenting Styles

| Demanding, controlling of child | Authoritative | Authoritarian |
| Undemanding, uncontrolling of child | Indulgent | Neglectful |

Fig. 9.6

Discipline Strategies

- 1979 Swedish law forbids any type of physical punishment by parents.
- Cross-culturally, U.S. and Canada among those most favoring corporal punishment.
- Alternatives include use of time-outs, reasoning with child, positive reinforcement, loss of privileges.