Pickle Fights: Gendered Talk in Preschool Disputes

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This paper examines the effect of gender on how young children construct the texts that embody their everyday social interactions with peers. The analysis focuses on conflict talk among 3-year-old friends playing in same-sex triads at their day-care center. The gendered aspects of two disputes are made visible by interpreting them in terms of two models. Malitz and Borker's anthropological linguistic model characterizes feminine language style as affiliative and masculine style as adversarial. Gilligan's psychological framework, describing gender differences in reasoning about moral conflicts, characterizes the feminine orientation as focusing on the relationship and the masculine as focusing on the self. The two dispute sequences studied are also consistent with predictions made by Miller, Dunaher, and Forbes (1986) and Leaper (1988), that boys' conflict process is more heavy-handed and their discourse strategies more controlling, whereas girls' conflict is more mitigated and their discourse strategies more collaborative. The study demonstrates the gendered nature of children's peer talk at as young as 3 years of age.

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INTRODUCTION

Conversations are a fundamental, yet mysterious, part of our lives. Through them we learn to express ourselves as female or male. This paper is concerned with the connections between language and the development of gender identity in early childhood. What is the effect of gender on how children construct the oral texts that embody their everyday social interactions? Does the language that young children use in conflict episodes reflect gender socialization and, if so, in what way? I present a close analysis of two long disputes that occurred during the spontaneous play of 3-year-old friends in same-sex groups. The paper contains four sections. Part 1 is a survey of gender socialization in childhood through language socialization by adults and peers. Gender differences in dispute management are also discussed. Part 2 is a description of two frameworks for thinking about how gender is reflected in the ways that language is used. Part 3 is a description of the study of two disputes over a plastic pickle, one in a girls’ group and the other in a boys’ group. Part 4 contains concluding remarks.

GENDER SOCIALIZATION THROUGH LANGUAGE

Gender Socialization Through Language Socialization

Expectations about appropriate gendered behavior are powerful. Feminist scholars and others have pointed out that gender is “the primary category by which the social world is organized” (Eagly, 1987; Goffman, 1979; Hare-Mustin, 1988; see also Kessler & McKenna, 1978). However, thinking about gender is complicated. Thorne (1980, 1986) argues for an approach that analyzes the way gendered behavior is shaped and constrained by the situation and the context. According to Deaux and Kite (1987), research on gender is moving more in this direction. In addition, feminist scholars in a variety of disciplines have argued that discussions of gender must be broadened to include factors such as class, race, and ethnicity. Thus, the study of the interconnectedness of language and gender depends as much on what we understand the characteristics of gendered behavior to be as it does on which aspects of language and which aspects of situations we choose to study.

Language is a part of culture and an instrument for transmitting and perpetuating implicit, historically situated, and culture-bound principles of social order and systems of belief that define and assign unequal social value to femininity and masculinity. Not surprisingly, recent sociolinguistic research in various cultures has found gender differences in the speech styles of adults (e.g., Philips, Steele, & Tanz, 1987; Thorne, Kramarae, & Henley, 1983). From this we can expect that language is a major influence on what and how children learn about gender and that gender is a major influence on the way children use language in everyday life. Language functions not only to initiate novices but also to perpetuate and enforce asymmetrical gendered behavior by means of reconstructing social relations between and among females and males in countless ordinary daily conversations over a lifetime.

The process by which children and other novices learn to use language in ways that fit a culture’s norms of appropriate feminine and masculine behavior is called language socialization (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). The influence of language as a powerful tool of gender socialization has, until recently, been largely overlooked in child language research. In a review of the language acquisition literature, Klann-Delius (1981) declares that studies that test whether or not there are gender differences in children’s language are in “dire need of being developed.” Such studies are beginning to appear.

Interaction with adults is one way that children are “socialized through language and socialized to use language” (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986, p. 2) according to the local gender ideology and norms. Sociocultural information about gender is encoded in the organization of discourse. Thus, adults influence children by providing models of women and men talking to each other (Fishman, 1983), as well as to children (Freedie & Lewis, 1977; Gleason, 1987; Lewis & Cherry, 1977), that children can identify with and learn from.

Gender Role Socialization Through Peer Talk and Peer Play

Children spend much time in the company of other children. So, in addition to language socialization by adults, we can expect language socialization by peers. In a review of cross-cultural studies of child development, Whiting and Edwards (1988) conclude that patterns of interpersonal behavior are most influenced by the company that one keeps and the organization of activities performed with that company. If girls frequently engage in different activities than boys do, which evoke different forms of social organization, then there will be differences in their behavior. We would expect this to be true for language behavior, although research has just begun to study this question.

Just how much children play with same-sex companions, given the chance to do so, and what sorts of activities same-sex groupings prefer, are important questions for understanding the nature of peer talk in childhood. Same-sex play increases the opportunity to learn about, try out, reproduce, and solidify gender-appropriate styles of language use. Whiting and Edwards (1988, p. 81) claim that the “emergence of same-sex preferences in childhood is a cross-culturally universal and robust phenomenon.” Their cross-cultural research and the work of others found that children begin to show preferences for same-sex companions around the age of 2 or 3 years. Same-sex play increases with age and is more prevalent in the peer group than in the mixed-age group. The robustness of same-sex play shows up even in mixed-sex play, where a child’s nearest companion will often be of the same sex. Cahill (1986) notes that same-sex play co-occurs with children’s inclination to regard members of the other sex with “benign hostility,” as if they were tainted. Thorne (1986) found that working-class elementary school children defined girls as “polluting,” and it is more taboo for a
boy to play with a girl than vice versa. This gender mythology heightens children’s awareness of sexual boundaries and, presumably, strengthens their belief in its importance.

Given the possible universal preference for same-sex play starting in very early childhood, how do female and male play groups differ? In what ways does same-sex play in childhood constitute an experience of growing up in different conceptual, social, and linguistic environments? Do girls and boys have different experiences of common events such as conflict? How do girls’ groups and boys’ groups function in ways that produce predictably different speech events?

Female and male play groups in the United States have been found to differ in marked ways that exert powerful influences in shaping behavior (Brooks-Gunn & Matthews, 1979; Cahill, 1986; Ellis, Rogoff, & Cromer, 1981; Maccoby, 1986; Thorne, 1986). Of particular relevance to this paper is the observation by Jennings and Suwalsky (1982) that white, middle-class, 3-year-old girls in dyads spent more time in sustained, mutual play, whereas boys spent more time in solitary play, interactions with others that were sustained, or interactions in which they pursued their own activity or attempted to impose their own ideas. McLoyd (1983) reports that lower class boys in same-sex groups who play-acted domestic script fantasies (e.g. playing “mommy,” “daddy,” and “baby”) did so less frequently than girls and for a shorter time. Such group play turns into solitary play or play alongside another child with toys such as trucks, in which they create individual fantasy scripts.

Maccoby (1986) notes that, although there is considerable overlap between boys and girls on individual social characteristics, as a group their social behaviors are highly differentiated by sex. Thorne (1980, 1986), on the other hand, emphasizes that situations constrain behavior. Girls’ and boys’ behavior may be more a function of the particular context of their play activities than of intrinsic gender attributes. Goodwin and Goodwin (1987) stress the same point in the study of children’s speech. Finally, Maccoby (1986, p. 271) points out that “we have a clearer picture of what girls’ groups do not do than what they do do,” so there is a need for a “more clearly delineated account of interaction in female social groups.”

Gender Differences in Dispute Management
In this paper I use the definition of conflict proposed by Eisenberg and Garvey (1981, p. 150): “an interaction which grows out of an opposition to a request for action, an assertion, or an action . . . and ends with a resolution or dissipation of conflict.” The disputes discussed in this paper are mutual oppositions, rather than an opposition raised by just one child.

Observing children’s conflict management provides a lens on the social and linguistic context of development. C. Shantz (1987) suggests that conflicts are an important part of getting to know other people. Conflicts arise because of incompatibility in wants, goals, and behavior. Successful resolution requires the participants to adapt to each other. Goodwin and Goodwin (1987) point out that conflicts provide an opportunity for children to demonstrate and learn a variety of discourse skills. Miller, Danaher, and Forbes (1986) frame two perspectives on conflict: the first is to see it foremost as a contest, a “competition of viewpoints,” and to focus on the tactics used for persuasion and control; the second perspective considers the emotionally threatening aspects and focuses on tactics that restore interpersonal function and harmony. Thus, each conflict has the potential of being aggravated and escalated or of being mitigated and resolved with a sense of community restored. Seen in this way, it is not surprising that nonaggressive conflict doesn’t block friendships in childhood; Green (1933, p. 251) found that, in childhood, “mutual friends are more quarrelsome, and mutual quarrels are more friendly than the average.” Moreover, in some cultures, conflict is a form of sociability and a display of solidarity (Schilder, 1984).

Studies of conflict in the child development literature, however, have been largely about aggressive conflict that injures or threatens to injure another person. Boys’ play is more physically aggressive than girls’ (DiPietro, 1981; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974, 1980). Nevertheless, physical force accounts for a small percentage of the strategies that children use to manage conflict (Eisenberg & Garvey, 1981). Preschool girls have more nonaggressive conflicts than preschool boys do (D. Shantz & Schorner, 1977), fighting more often over issues of personal control, whereas boys fight more over objects. Considering such differences, it seems reasonable to ask whether there are other differences in girls’ and boys’ disputes and, if so, how they affect girls’ and boys’ characteristic verbal strategies for conflict management.

TWO MODELS OF GENDERED STYLES
IN CHILDREN’S TALK
A research program that aims to describe and eventually explain the acquisition and cultural transmission of gender through language is faced with the question of how to theorize gender. How is femininity different from masculinity? To look at verbal conflict through a gendered lens, we need a model of gender and an idea of what features of language use differentiate the sexes.

Affiliative Versus Adversarial Styles
Maltz and Borker (1982) present a model of gender-marked language use. They hypothesize that, between 5 and 15 years of age, American children learn conversational rules from same-sex peer groups with different results. However, it is clear that even the speech of children younger than 5 can be differentiated by gender (Garcia-Zamor, 1973; Haas, 1979; Leaper, 1988; Meditch, 1975; Sachs, 1987). Maltz and Borker claim that boys’ and girls’ speech is thought to have different content and to serve different purposes. Male speech can be characterized as competition oriented, or adversarial. Boys’ (and men’s) groups are
thought to be hierarchical and competitive. Boys play in larger groups (Brooks-Gunn & Matthews, 1979), and their play is rougher than girls’ (DiPietro, 1981). Maltz and Borker (1982, p. 207) state that boys use speech to “1) assert one’s position of dominance, 2) attract and maintain an audience, and 3) assert oneself when other speakers have the floor.”

On the other hand, female speech can be characterized as **collaboration oriented**, or affiliate. DiPietro (1981), Fishman (1983), Goodwin (1980), Kalčík (1975), Leaper (1988), and Maccoby (1986) claim that girls (and women) use language more cooperatively, sharing turns to speak more often than boys, showing more verbal organization of group behavior, acknowledging what others have said, and expressing agreement more. They show more interest in what other people are saying by responding to and elaborating on what others have said, by making more supportive comments, by asking more questions, and by working harder to keep conversations going. Closeness has been proposed as a developmental theme for girls, whereas separation is a theme for boys (Bakan, 1966; Chodorow, 1978; Eagly, 1987). Maltz and Borker (1982, p. 205) claim that girls learn to use words: “1) to create and maintain relationships of closeness and equality; 2) to criticize others in acceptable ways; and 3) to interpret accurately the speech of other girls.”

James and Drakich (1987) observe that (white, middle-class American) women’s affiliative orientation makes it difficult for women to assert status or dominance. Consistent with this is the popular belief that an assertive woman is “pushy” or a “bitch” but an assertive man is “manly.” Competition has even been called a “taboo” for women (Miner & Longino, 1987). Girls criticize other girls for being “bossy” or “mean” if they tell others what to do. Presumably what is being objected to is the creation of inequality through a dominance hierarchy. Lever’s (1976) study has often been referred to in discussions of females and conflict. She found that fifth-grade girls’ play and games did not tolerate or resolve conflict but disbanded instead. Subsequent work by Goodwin (1980) and Goodwin and Goodwin (1987) shows that urban, working-class, black girls do engage in conflict and can be even more skillful at it than boys. They frequently have conflicts and exchange ritual insults without disrupting their play. In this study, arguments were as common for girls as they were for boys and could even be more extensive. Girls also were skillful in legalistic debate. On the other hand, Goodwin (1980) found that the social organization of the girls’ group was more egalitarian than the boys’, with minimal negotiation of status. This group’s activity was linguistically organized by syntactic forms that enabled joint decision making and joint action. Requests were presented in the context of what the situation or the group required, rather than of what a group member was obligated to do. The structure of the boys’ group was more hierarchical. The boys were more self-serving and negotiated status more. Their requests for action were usually issued in the form of direct commands.

In a study in which dominant and subordinate middle-class children were paired as play partners, Camras (1984) found that dominant boys were much less polite than either dominant girls or subordinate girls and boys. On the other hand, older dominant girls were as polite as or more so than their subordinate partners or younger dominant girls. Camras (p. 263) interprets these results as showing that these dominant girls “are gradually socialized to mask their exercise of power during conflicts with use of polite language.” Goodwin (1980) also found that, in certain activities, girls mitigated their attempts to control other girls and avoided the appearance of hierarchy. Thus, girls and women are forced by gender prescriptions to avoid or limit direct self-assertion during competition and conflict, at least in certain situations.

**Focus on the Relationship Versus Focus on The Self**

Another perspective on gender and conflict that is concerned with the themes of affiliation and independence comes from the work of Gilligan (1982, 1987, 1988) and her associates. This work looks at how females and males differ in reasoning about hypothetical and real-life moral conflict. Gilligan’s model makes predictions that are relevant to young children’s verbal management of conflict. Gilligan claims that people approach the resolution of moral conflict from “care” and “justice” orientations. Women are most likely to focus on the care orientation and men on the justice orientation. However, both orientations are used by women and men, although only one is focused on at a time. Neither orientation belongs to just one sex. The following discussion transposes Gilligan’s care and justice orientations into a hypothesis about young children’s everyday conflict styles.

**Female-Associated Conflict Style: Focus on the Relationship**

The focus in this study focuses on maintaining the connection between oneself and others in intimate groups, on defining the self in the context of the relationship (Gilligan 1987). Terms used by others to describe this focus are **communion**, **affiliation**, empathy, **interdependence**, and involvement (Bakan, 1966; Eagly, 1987; Leaper, 1988). This perspective pays more attention to the needs of others. The following characteristics of this perspective, presented in Gilligan (1987), might also be associated with girls’ dispute management. A person who operates from the care orientation (1) assumes connection between the self and others, frames conflict resolution in terms of the relationship; (2) shows greater tolerance of, compassion for, and responsiveness to others; (3) emphasizes understanding and communication through listening and speaking, hearing, and being heard; (4) seeks agreement and tries to respond to everyone’s needs; (5) shows less legalistic elaboration; (6) shows willingness to make exceptions to rules; (7) appeals more to a particularistic understanding of others and less to a universal point of view.

Recent research on girls’ language use is consistent with these predictions. Miller et al. (1986, p. 543) claim that their female subjects were more concerned with maintaining interpersonal harmony during conflict than boys were. Observing racially and socioeconomically mixed 5- and 7-year-olds playing in mixed-
groupings, they found that girls used significantly more tactics that mitigated conflict, such as compromise and peaceful acquiescence, than boys did. They also used less heavy-handed persuasion tactics. Leaper (1988) found that collaborative speech acts were more frequent than controlling speech acts in the dyads of middle-class, educationally advantaged girls aged 4 to 9 years. Girls also showed greater positive reciprocity. Other studies that do not have conflict as their focus support the theme of mitigation as a female-associated behavior. Preschool girls give directives and otherwise regulate the behavior of peers using mitigated and indirect speech (Sachs, 1987). They learn to "say it with a smile." Differences in directness in the speech of American women and men have been noted by Gleason (1987).

**Male-Associated Conflict Style: Focus on the Self**
The justice orientation focuses on autonomy (Gilligan, 1987). Terms used to describe this focus are agency, self-assertion, individuality (Bakan, 1966; Eagly, 1987; Leaper, 1988). This orientation tends to appeal to a universal point of view, rather than to the particular concerns and needs of others and of one's relationship with them. The following characteristics of this perspective, discussed in Gilligan (1987), may also be associated with boys' dispute management. A person who operates from the justice orientation (1) frames conflict in terms of individual rights that must be respected in the relationship; (2) values detachment, independence, and autonomy; (3) assumes separation and the need for an external structure of connection; (4) steps back from the situation and appeals to a rule or reasons from a principle to resolve conflict, valuing logic, rationality, and control and often losing sight of the needs of others; (5) attends to rights and respect.

Recent research on boys' language use is consistent with these predictions. Miller et al. (1986, p. 543) claim that the boys in their study were more "forceful" in pursuing their own agenda than the girls were. Boys also had more conflict episodes than girls did, which was also noted by Dawe (1934). They engaged in the more heavy-handed tactics of threats and physical force. Boys' dyads have shown greater amounts of controlling speech acts and more negative reciprocity (Leaper, 1988). Sachs (1987) found more unmitigated requests and prohibitions in the speech of preschool boys. These results are consistent with those of Lever (1976), who found that fifth-grade boys' games involved continual quarrelling and that they seemed to enjoy legalistic disputes about rules.

**THE PICKLE FIGHTS**

**Method**

The conversations to be examined here are from an extensive research project with 3- to 5-year-old children at a day-care center in a large midwestern city. The children were grouped into 12 same-sex triads on the basis of friendship and age. The groups were formed after consultation with the children's teachers. The participants in this study were educationally and socially advantaged, middle-class, urban children who were predominantly white. The children attended the day-care center for full days, year round, and had known each other for 1–3 years.

The triads were videotaped during the regular day-care day in one of the children's usual play areas, which was separate from the larger group. The only children in the room were those being filmed. They were not supervised by an adult, although an assistant and I sat somewhat out of sight in a play loft above and behind the children's play area. The children knew we were there. They were videotaped on three separate occasions, each time playing at one of three types of activities. Each group was videotaped for a total of approximately 75 minutes (25 minutes per session).

The choice to group in triads rather than dyads was made on the assumption that this would produce more talk. It also produces greater complications in recording and transcribing because the three voices must be identifiable. To solve this problem, each child wore a vest that had a lavaliere microphone attached to the front and a wireless microphone transmitter in a pocket on the back. An audio technician, who was out of sight, recorded each child's voice on a separate audio cassette at the same time that the three voices were mixed onto the videotape sound channel. Later, during transcription, if it was unclear which child was speaking, the transcriber could verify by playing back that child's individual audiotape.

This paper examines extended disputes that arose in 2 of the 12 triads: one in a girls' group and the other in a boys' group. The girls' ages were 3.0, 3.7, and 3.11 years; the mean was 3.7 years. The boys' ages were 3.8, 3.9, and 4.0 years; the mean was 3.8 years. All but one (Lisa) were firstborn children.

The conflicts both come from housekeeping sessions. For this activity, the room was set up with a number of props for dramatic play. There was a housekeeping area that had a toy stove and sink, a basket of lifelike plastic food items, cooking pots, plastic eating utensils, and paper plates and cups. Nearby was a child-size dining table with three chairs. A doll's high chair was placed on the fourth side. In a nearby area there was a telephone next to a child-size easy chair. There was also a doll's bed with dolls and blankets in it. Close by was a doll's 'kit. There was an area with dress-up clothes and a mirror.

These two sessions produced two long disputes. Both were fights over one of the food items, a plastic pickle, that had become part of one child's play. The girls' conflict lasted 1 minute and 45 seconds and contained 40 turns. The boys' conflict lasted 5 minutes and contained 70 turns. In a study of nearly 200 preschool children, grouped into dyads, Eisenberg and Garvey (1981) found that 92% of conflict episodes were shorter than 10 turns and 66% were shorter than 5. The average length of children's conflicts has been computed across a number of studies to be 24 seconds (C. Shantz, 1987). The greater length of the disputes discussed here could have come from a variety of factors, such as the fact that they occurred in a triad; they were not monitored by an adult who, in other
circumstances, might have stepped in and terminated them; the participants were friends; and the dispute was over an object that was the only one of its kind.

Differences in the Use of the Pretend Frame by the Girls and the Boys
The number of themes involved the girls' and boys' fantasy play in the full session was similar: five themes for the boys and seven themes for the girls. However, a more interesting pattern emerges if one looks at the number of times that the children changed the theme of their play. There were 7 theme shifts for the girls and 17 theme shifts for the boys. Shifts were from pretend play themes like preparing food, talking on the telephone, taking a trip, and dressing up. In addition, two of the shifts out of a pretend play theme for the boys involved unresolved conflicts or competition for resources. These shifts served as transitions out of the conflict. They provided temporary resolution of the dispute, but conflict resurfaced in the next play frame. There were no shifts out of a play theme and into another for the girls as a result of conflict. Play theme shift was not the mechanism that the girls used to resolve their dispute.

The different number of play theme shifts in the two groups reflects the different balance struck in each group between (a) involvement in the joint construction of pretend play and (b) opposition that prevented the joint construction of pretend play. The girls' agenda appeared to be that of jointly inventing and sharing play. Their conflict episodes did not prevent the rich elaboration of their pretend play. In fact, each girl used the pretend frame to try to convince the other girl to let her have the pickle. On the other hand, the boys' agenda seemed to be to oppose one another. Their strategies escalated the conflict. They used the pretend frame less than the girls. The result was that their pretend play was much less developed, each play theme lasted for a shorter time, and there were many more play frames attempted.

The Girls' Session: Preliminary Discussion
The girls' disputes in this housekeeping session were characterized by the participants' ability to find (or acquiesce to) resolutions, to maintain their pretend play themes through the dispute, and to maintain group cohesion. Three strategies in particular that helped maintain group cohesion during conflict were characteristic of this group: compromise, clarification of intent, and evasion (see Eisenberg & Garvey, 1981, and Miller et al., 1986). Despite some physical aggression (pushing a child down, grabbing for the pickle), the pickle fight did not break up the pretend play frame of preparing food.

A degree of harmony in play was established before the pickle fight. The following discussion describes the context preceding that dispute. Two interconnected pretend play scenarios have been going on in adjacent areas since the session began 11 minutes before the girls' pickle fight. Mary and Lisa are absorb-

ed in playing with dolls at the doll bed. Nearby, Sue is preparing food for everybody in the kitchen area. Sue keeps Mary and Lisa involved in her pretend frame of food preparation by describing what she is doing and checking back with Mary and Lisa about what food they want to eat. She is taking the role of the mother and has indicated that she considers Mary and Lisa her children. Meanwhile, Mary and Lisa are taking care of their babies. Both subdivisions of the triad have stayed with their own theme since the beginning of the session, using language to maintain connection between the two groups. An effective strategy for doing this that they frequently use is for one girl to ask for clarification of another's feelings or intent and to clarify her own behavior in connection with their pretend play. Miller et al. describe this as a conflict mitigating strategy, but it also functions in nonconfictual interactions, as shown in the following example of interaction that takes place in overlapping pretend frames. This example took place prior to the pickle fight.

Sue is in the kitchen area preparing food; Mary and Lisa are playing with the dolls at the doll bed. Sue keeps including Mary and Lisa in her pretend play frame, despite their absorption in their own, by telling them what she is doing and asking about their wishes. (In the transcriptions below, overlapping utterances are indicated by a caret [ ^ ] at the place where the subsequent phrase starts to overlap. The line numbering is from the original transcript. Some lines from the transcript were omitted because they are not related to the topic; omission is indicated by a series of dots. A dash indicates a break in the utterance. An increase in volume is marked by underlining. The children's names are fictional.) In the following segment, simultaneous talk is represented vertically; one conversation has a food theme and the other has a doll theme.

**FOOD THEME**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Utterance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Sue: (to Mary and Lisa) I'm gonna cook sandwiches. We're gonna eat them for supper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Mary: We're gonna have milk, right?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Lisa: Yeah, we're gonna have milk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Sue: (setting out plates) One for Mary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Mary: (to Lisa) And this baby, know what, my baby has to go to bed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Sue: I'm gonna set up the table, ok?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Lisa: (to Mary) Oh, your baby has to go to bed?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**DOLL THEME**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Utterance</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mary leaves the doll play with Lisa and comes over to Sue who is at the kitchen table. Sue and Mary converse (lines 40-44) while Lisa talks to herself (lines 41-44).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SUE:

40 Sue: I'm setting up the table, you want some eggs?
41 Mary: No, I want, um, cauliflower.
42 Lisa: Oh, this shirt is too big for baby.
43 Sue: Cauliflower.
44 Mary: (to Sue about the cauliflower)
45 Mary: That's big, I can't eat it.
46 Sue: Lisa, do you want eggs?
47 Lisa: I want eggs, yeah, eggs are really good.
48 Sue: I want eggs
49 Sue: Okay.

In this example, Sue announces to the others what she is doing (“I'm gonna cook sandwiches,” “I'm setting up the table”). At 27 and 30 she asks tag questions that are directed to either Mary or Lisa (“We're gonna have milk, right?”), and at 40 and 46 she asks each one if they want some eggs. Asking is a way of keeping tabs on one another and of including Mary and Lisa in her pretend play. In addition, both Mary and Lisa do their part in maintaining a connection with Sue. Mary responds with a thoughtful reply about the cauliflower and Lisa is enthusiastic about eggs. This conversation is representative of other sequences in the girls’ session in which connection was maintained by asking for or giving clarification about behavior, wishes, or intent. Use of this strategy is congruent with Maltz and Borker's claim that girls learn to create and maintain relationships of closeness and equality. It is also consistent with Gilligan’s “care” orientation, which focuses on the relationship.

The Girls’ Pickle Fight
The pickle fight is the longest series of oppositions in the girls’ session. While Mary and Lisa were playing with the dolls, Sue was preparing food for all of them by herself. She has been involving them in her play throughout their own play, as seen in the example in 3.3. But now, Mary has left Lisa at the doll bed and has joined Sue with the intention of choosing food herself. Both Mary and Sue are choosing things to eat from the food basket at the stove and bringing the food to the table where Lisa is now sitting. Mary moves into Sue’s role of food preparer/mommy and makes a decision about what is for dinner. Sue opposes, and each in turn grabs for the pickle. This is the beginning of the pickle fight. The fight is presented in sections. It is described in terms of conflict-management strategies based on those proposed by Eisenberg and Garvey (1981) and Miller et al. (1986).

213 Sue: And strawberries for dinner, right?
214 Mary: And the- this for dinner. (Mary puts the pickle in a pot on the stove)
215 Sue: And the pickle. Do you like pickle? (Sue takes the pickle out of the pot)
216 Mary: And this (the hamburger) is for dinner. (Mary pulls the hamburger and pickle out of Sue’s hand and puts them back in pot)
217 Sue: No, they aren’t for dinner,
218 no, Lisa wants pickles. (Sue tries to grab the hamburger and pickle back from Mary but she holds on and puts them back in the pot)

Both Mary and Sue have used or attempted physical force to get possession of the pickle. At 216 Mary grabs it from Sue and at 218 Sue tries unsuccessfully to grab it back. At 217 Sue contradicts Mary’s assertion that the hamburger is for dinner. She invents a reason for why she should get the pickle, arguing not in terms of what she wants, but in terms of what Lisa wants, even though Lisa herself has not made her wishes known yet.

At 219 Sue continues to oppose Mary and insists that Lisa wants the pickle. Mary replies with a counter reason, that Lisa has something already, and she seems to be suggesting that there has been a fair distribution of food.

219 Sue: No, Lisa wants pickles. (Sue tries to grab the pickle again)
220 Mary: She gots (unintelligible).

At 221 Sue goes over to Lisa at the table and asks for clarification of what she wants. Sue is presumably asking for confirmation of her claim that Lisa wants the pickle, and Lisa provides it.

221 Sue: You want pickle, Lisa?
222 Lisa: Mmmhm.
(Mary brings the pickle over to Lisa at the table)
223 Sue: Lisa says she wants pickle.

At 223 Sue again insists that the pickle should go to Lisa and cites as evidence the fact that Lisa said she wants it. Lisa confirms Sue’s claim, making an alliance with her. Mary accepts this, but she still wants the pickle.

At 224 Mary invents a compromise, using the pretend frame, saying that she will “cut” the pickle. Lisa rejects this. Mary insists on her proposal, giving as justification that she “needs” to. Meanwhile, Sue has gotten involved in looking for other food and either avoids or ignores the discussion or is too preoccupied to join in. At 228 Mary takes the pickle off the table near Lisa and puts it back in the pot on the stove once again. At 230 Sue takes it out of the pot.

224 Mary: I’ll cut it in half.
225 Lisa: No, that’s not fair!
226 Sue: (looks for other food) And the oranges.
227 Mary: I need, I need to cut it in half, one for dessert and
228 one for you.
(Mary takes the pickle back to the stove and puts it in a cooking pot)
At this point the alliance between Sue and Lisa dissolves. Lisa moves out of the pretend frame, criticizes Sue, and rejects her proposal.

247 Lisa: No, that’s not a whole half, that’s an egg! (disparagingly)

At 248, without an ally, Sue pulls back from the fight. She turns away from facing Mary and Lisa, which takes some of the force out of her opposition. She uses the pretend frame to further mitigate her opposition. Her tone softens. She clarifies her intent, which also has the force of insisting on the pretend logic.

248 Sue: I’m pretending I gave you one. (She turns away from Mary and Lisa.)
249 Lisa: (pause) No. (surprised, doesn’t accept this explanation)
250 Mary: (pause) No. (surprised, doesn’t accept this explanation)

At 251 Sue appears to avoid quarreling. She evades, offering a different food.

251 Sue: Do you want the oranges?
252 Lisa: I need one.
253 Mary: Orange.

The following section is a transition out of the dispute, a prelude to the resolution of the fight. In it the girls jointly reflect on what just happened. They step out of the pretend frame and try to clarify each other's behavior. They describe or excuse the quarrel as just play (“just pretending”). This is a patching-up process that brings them to a face-saving resolution. Their commentary on the play frame dissipates the opposition and forms a basis of agreement among them.

254 Mary: (to Sue) You were just pretending. (ameliorating tone)
255 Sue: You were just pretending it was tomato. (agreeing in an ameliorating tone)

257 Sue: It was an orange.
258 Mary: Yeah.
259 Lisa: Ok, and I get the pickle. (takes the pickle off the table)

The pickle fight is over quickly at 259. Sue gets her way, Lisa gets the pickle, and Mary gives in. The food preparation fantasy continues. However, one effect of the conflict is that a new role for Mary and Lisa in the food play is getting negotiated. The power in the group gets redistributed right after the pickle fight. Sue is no longer exclusively in charge of preparing the food. She now has to share this role. She no longer can act as if she is the mother and Mary and Lisa are the children. At 260 she tells them which food they are having. Mary resists her idea at 262–263 by telling her that the food will be for dessert and then
ending the utterance with a tag question asking for Sue's agreement. At 264 Sue
acquiesces to the redistribution of power in the group. The acquiescence con-
tinues at 277, 279, and 281, where Sue shifts from telling Mary what food will
be served to asking her.

260 Sue: And here's one for you.

262 Mary: No, that is going to be for dessert.

263 This is gonna be for dessert, ok?

264 Sue: Oh.

265 Mary: Yes, it is.

272 Mary: There. Here's some- or- here's some pepper for me. Here's lots of
strawberries.

277 Sue: Can you give Lisa one? Give Lisa one.

278 Mary: I'll give her all of them.

279 Sue: All of them?

280 Mary: Just those.

281 Sue: Those? Can I have one of them?

In conclusion, the girls' pickle fight contains a number of opposition-insis-
tence-opposition sequences. However, the girls also use a variety of tactics and
reasons to elaborate on their resistance to each other's opposition and to negotiate
a resolution. Mary is persistent in using the pretend frame to argue for a compro-
mise to satisfy everyone who wants the pickle ("I'll cut it in half, one for Lisa,
one for me, one for me"). The girls' conflict process maintains interconnected-
ness among the group members and stability of the play theme.

The Boys' Session: Preliminary Discussion
There were a number of features that differentiated the boys' dispute from the
girls'. The boys' fight was a more extended struggle for control of the pickle. It
lasted two and a half times longer than the girls' fight. It was principally between
two of the boys, Kevin and Nick. However, Nick was able to make an ally of the
third boy, Joe, who alternately stepped in for him and escalated the fight or
moved out of it and played by himself. Neither Kevin nor Nick was willing to
give in to the other. Their insistence on getting their own way escalated and
extended the fight. Eisenberg and Garvey (1981) note that insistence is the least
adaptive strategy for ending conflict. The use of more heavy-handed dispute
tactics and the more adversarial quality of boys' interactions has also been noted
in studies with larger data samples discussed earlier. The boys' fight was tem-
porarily concluded by inventing and switching to a new pretend theme, taking a
trip "to another nation," which didn't require the pickle. (The idea for taking this
trip came about because Nick had just gone to a local Festival of Nations that
featured activities, crafts, and foods from many nations.)

Another difference in the boys' pickle fight, compared with the girls', is that it
disrupted the boys' play. In fact, throughout their 25-minute play session, dis-
putes frequently erupted over control of various objects, such as who got to push
the buttons and talk on the telephone. Connected to this is the fact that there were
17 theme shifts. It is not clear what the frequent theme shifts and shorter pretend
play episodes were due to. Perhaps it was the nature of the play resources in the
housekeeping situation. Resources that are more associated with boys' play
preferences, such as trucks (see Connor & Serbin, 1977), might produce more
extended pretend play scenarios. As mentioned earlier, shorter pretend play
scenarios in boys' groups have also been noted by Jennings and Suwalsky (1982)
and Mcloyd (1983).

There were two aspects of the boys' pickle fight that were unique to their
conflict process: (1) the appeal to rules to settle the dispute, and (2) the threat of
separation as a way to solve the conflict. Both were ways in which they tried to
establish control. In addition, the heavy-handed tactics of physical intimidation
and threats of physical force played a major role in their fight. The two main
combatants, Kevin and Nick, did not use mitigating strategies like clarification of
intent, ignoring, or acquiescence. Compromise tactics were tried by Nick, with-
out success. Finally, the boys' fight did not result in a redistribution of power as
the girls' fight did; instead it resulted in a stalemate.

Two separate play themes have been in progress since this session began 12
minutes before the boys' pickle fight: food preparation and telephone play. Dur-
ing this time, each of the boys has changed the theme of their play at least once,
moving back and forth between the telephone and the kitchen area. Joe and Kevin
are at the telephone. Nick has left them and is sitting at the table preparing the
food. Throughout their telephone play he has been describing what he is doing,
but they have not paid attention to him. In part, this is because Kevin and Joe
have been quarrelling about how to play with the phone. Like Sue, before the
pickle fight, Nick plays with the food while the rest of the group plays with other
resources. However, in the examples to follow, Nick's statements report what he
is doing. They neither elicit nor receive a response from the others ("I'm having
dinner," "I'm cutting the cauliflower"). Contrast this with Sue's questions to
Mary and Lisa about what they want, which elicit replies in lines 40-49 (Sue:
"Lisa, do you want eggs?" Lisa: "I want eggs, yeah, eggs are really good"). The
boys' verbal interaction is not designed to, and does not, connect the group
across the two play themes like the girls' does.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FOOD THEME</th>
<th>TELEPHONE THEME</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nick: (at table) I'm having dinner.</td>
<td>Kevin: (on phone) Hi, oh yeah. This is Kevin and this my friend Joe. Oh, yeah. Okay. Bye-bye. Okay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>105</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick: I'm gonna have-</td>
<td>Joe: (to Kevin who is still on the phone) Now can I call again?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>109</td>
<td>Kevin: (still on the phone) Oh, sure, that's 108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nick: I’m gonna have cauliflower. Joe: (to Kevin) Now, I’ll do it. (makes a call)
Kevin: (to Joe) Okay. You- No, I’ll push the buttons.
Joe: I will!
Kevin: (pushes the buttons) There! Now the person’s there you wanted.

Nick: I’m cutting the cauliflower. Joe: (to Kevin) Then I can (i.e. it will be Joe’s turn) and then you push the buttons. I’ll push one more button.

Nick: I’m cutting the cauliflower. Kevin: (on the phone) Oh boy. Your phone is broken too. I know it. Oh, bye-bye.

The Boys’ Pickle Fight

Nick has been playing with the food at the table and intermittently watching Kevin and Joe. Now Kevin leaves the phone and approaches the table. The food is spread out in front of Nick, who has turned to watch Joe on the phone.

Kevin: (at the table) Pickle. (takes the pickle)

Nick turns back, continues cutting the cauliflower, starts to reannounce that fact, and then sees that Kevin has the pickle.

Nick: I’m cutting— I’m cutting- No, I have to cut that!
(Nick tries to take pickle back from Kevin)

Kevin: No, I cut it.

Nick: No! No, no, no! You’re the children!

Kevin: No, I’m not!

At 149 Nick insists on his right to continue to play with the pickle. Kevin rejects his reason. Nick counters with a reason in a pretend frame (“You’re the children!”), which presumably vests him, as the parent, with the right to prepare the food. Kevin denies being “the children.” Nick continues to angrily insist, citing as reasons that he “has to” and “wants to” cut the pickle. He also claims the right of possession.

Nick: (screams) Kevin, but the, oh, I have to cut! I want to cut it! It’s mine! (in a whining voice)

Nick is not successful in getting the pickle back. He complains to Joe, who has been using the phone. Joe’s strategy for solving the dispute is to threaten physical force, a win-lose plan that pits Nick and Joe in an alliance against Kevin. This aggravates the competition over the pickle and perhaps distracts Kevin from reasoning with Nick. Kevin gets into an opposition-insistence-opposition sequence with Joe and Nick.

Nick: (whining to Joe) Kevin is not letting me cut the pickle.
Joe: (joins conflict and says to Nick) Oh, I know! I can pull it away from him and give it back to you. That’s an idea!
Kevin: Joe!

Nick: I can pull it, take it away from you and put it in the oven.

(Kevin runs away with the pickle and Nick chases him.)

Kevin: Don’t, Joe, don’t, don’t,
don’t, don’t!

At 162 Nick invents an imaginary reason to get the pickle, an apparent compromise that utilizes the pretend frame, expressed as an order to Kevin. He and Kevin again get into an opposition-insistence-opposition sequence. Joe has gone back to the phone.

Nick: You have to make a pickle salad! So I’ll put it in the pot.
Kevin: Don’t.

Nick: You have to make a pickle salad, Kevin. (Nick follows Kevin around the room)
Kevin: Don’t (Joe returns to the dispute)

Joe: You have to make a pickle salad.
Kevin: Don’t, Nick. I’m gonna have—

At 169 Joe again threatens physical force. He shows his anger, faces Kevin, points at him, and uses a mild curse word. He orders Kevin to give the pickle back and threatens force if Kevin doesn’t comply. Kevin continues to resist. At 174 he rejects Joe’s proposal, stating outright that he doesn’t like it.

Joe: Oh, you get it back and bring it to Nick! I’ll get it!

Darn you Kevin! (Joe gets more agitated, plants his feet, clenches his fists, and spreads two rigid arms out to his sides as if to block Kevin.)

Kevin: No, Joe!

Joe: I’ll give it back to Nick, if you don’t! I’ll get it away and give it back to Nick if you don’t. (Joe lifts and spreads his arms down rigid again)

Kevin: Joe! Joe! That’s
not a way to solve the problem Joe, because I don't like that. (Kevin pushes the back of Joe's arm with the blade of his plastic knife)

At 177 Nick proposes another imaginative resolution, an ad hoc alternative that is compatible with his pretend play; he will get the pickle after Kevin cuts it. Kevin orders Joe to stop bothering him. Joe and Nick again insist that Nick "needs" the pickle. Kevin insists on "cutting" the pickle first.

177    Nick:  I'll after you cut it, I'll put it back together and I'll cut it.
179    Kevin:  No, Joe, don't.
180    Joe:    Well, Nick needs it.  
181    Nick:  (conciliatory) I really need it to make a pickle salad.
182    Kevin:  Nick. Can't cut it now.
183    I'm going to.

Joe again proposes physical force. Nick also tries to get the pickle from Kevin, and when Kevin orders him to stop and walks away from him, Nick screeches, begs, and continues to insist that he "needs" the pickle. Kevin continues to refuse.

184    Joe:    Well, I'll get it away! (Joe gets up to go to Kevin)
185    Kevin:  No, I just cut it. (rubs plastic knife on pickle)
186    Joe:    (turns to Nick) Nick, I'll get your pickle back.
188    Kevin:  (moves away) I'm sorry, I already cut it, in half
189    I'm sor-  
190    Nick:  I'll get it, I'll get it! (goes to Kevin)
191    Kevin:  Don't! (goes away from Nick)
192    Nick:  (screeches) I need it! Oh. (begs) Please give it back to me. (Nick walks after Kevin who scampers away)
193    (Joe appears uncomfortable, looks at the camera, and leaves the area)
194    Nick:  I need it.
195    Kevin:  No.

Nick again proposes physical force and Kevin again opposes him.

196    Nick:  (Nick chases Kevin) I'll grab it from you.
197    Kevin:  No. (runs away from him) Don't, Nick. I'm not gonna let you have it, if you're not gonna let me- if you're not gonna tell me.

Nick follows up on the pretend alternative that he proposed in 177. Joe has left the quarrel and plays with the telephone.

200    Nick:  (conciliatory tone) I need- I need to get that pickle back.
201    Cause I'm gonna put it back together.

Kevin, still holding the pickle, goes over to the phone and grabs it from Joe. They get into an opposition-resistance-opposition sequence over the phone.

202    Joe:    (at the telephone) I'll call one more person.
203    Kevin:  No, I'm gonna call a person. (Kevin grabs the phone from Joe)
204    Joe:    Ow! I will.

Kevin, who now holds the phone, hands the pickle to Nick without a word. Nick, however, continues the opposition. At 205 his strategy is an appeal to an ad hoc rule. The rule also fits in with the pretend frame. Kevin joins in with him in pretending to cut the pickle, and Nick appeals to another rule, in a pretend frame, to try to stop him. When Kevin doesn't pay attention to that admonition, Nick invokes the pretend frame again to tell Kevin that he can't cut the pickle because he, Nick, has already "cut" it. Joe continues to stay out of their fight, playing alone and talking to himself.

205    Nick:  But you- but our rule is put it back together. (he pretends to cut the pickle)
206    Kevin:  Cut, cut, cut, cut, cut, cut, cut, cut, cut, cut, cut, cut,
207    Kevin:  (sitting next to Nick, looks up from the phone and also pretends to cut the pickle with his knife) Cut, cut, cut, cut, cut.
208    Nick:  No, no! No, no! (pulls pickle off table, holds it away from Kevin)
209    Kevin:  You can't, Kevin. Our rules is you can't, Kevin, with a sharp knife.
210    Kevin:  (reaches over to the pickle with his knife, trying to cut it) I can't cut.
211    Nick:  You really can't cut this pickle. I already cut it in half. (Kevin keeps reaching with his knife to cut it)
213    Nick:  I'll put it back together. Putting back together. (sing-song)
219    Nick:  (starts to pretend to cut the pickle again) Cut, cut, cut, cut, cut, cut, cut, cut, cut!
220    Kevin:  (starts to pretend to cut the pickle too) Cut, cut, cut, cut, cut, cut, cut!

Then Nick appeals to a principle that preschoolers often hear, namely, to "be cooperative," and threatens Kevin with separation from "the family." Perhaps thinking that he is still the parent, he assumes the right to decide who stays and 'who goes. When this doesn't work Nick threatens to send him away again, to bed this time.

221    Nick:  (pulls the pickle away from Kevin) No, no, no! I'll, I'll make- (Kevin pushes Nick in the chest) you have to go out of this family if you don't co- operate with this family.
223    Kevin:  Joe! no, Joe, no! (Joe has stood up behind Kevin, and Kevin turns around apparently surprised)
224    Nick:  Nick:  Well, then I'll send you to bed and you'll never have a sweet- your dinner.
225    All right?
This starts another opposition sequence between Kevin and Nick. At 226 Kevin counters Nick’s proposal by inventing a new play theme in which he tells Nick that he is going to leave him. Nick picks up on this and orders him to go away. Kevin reverses himself and refuses. This precipitates another cycle of oppositions in which Nick orders Kevin to leave and Kevin refuses.

226 Kevin: I’m not- I’m not- I’m not gonna be with you.
227 Kevin: I’m gonna go to drive somewhere else.

229 Kevin: I’m going to another place if you’re not gonna do this.
230 Nick: Go to another country.

232 Kevin: No, I won’t.
233 Nick: Go to another country, go to another nation.

235 Kevin: No, I won’t. I’m here. (holds the phone)
236 Nick: Drive off to another nation.
237 Kevin: No, I won’t.

At 238 Nick decides to pursue the idea of going away himself. He develops the new pretend theme, announcing his intentions to the others.

238 Nick: I’ll tell part of my family I’m gonna
239 take a trip to another nation.

241 Nick: (goes over to Joe) I’m gonna take a trip to another nation.
242 Joe: (unintelligible)
243 Nick: What? With my baby, all right? All right. With my baby. (gets a doll from the doll crib)
244 Kevin: (on the phone) Hello? Oh, well, I bet they can.
245 Nick: (sing-song, boasting) I- I’m taking a trip to another nation.

Nick sits down with the doll on a foam chair next to where Kevin is playing with the phone. At 247 Kevin opposes him for the chair.

247 Kevin: No, this is mine. No this is my car. That’s my car.
(Kevin stops talking on the phone and pulls on the chair)

At 249 there is a transition out of their quarreling. There is a détente, or respite, when Nick, who is sitting on the chair, offers Kevin a place on it.

249 Nick: Okay, well you can sit by me. (very conciliatory tone)
250 Kevin: (sits down on foam chair next to Nick) Sure, okay.

At 251 Nick and Kevin move into a new pretend frame. Nick announces it and Kevin agrees.

251 Nick: We’re going to another nation.
252 Kevin: Yeah.
253 Nick: So we won’t be with this family so much. Right?
254 Kevin: (no verbal response)

At 253 Nick comments retrospectively on the dispute that happened in the previous play frame while they are in the new one of taking a trip “to another nation.” Nick indirectly refers to their dispute by criticizing “this family,” as if it is something outside of themselves. This is also an indirect acknowledgment of the unpleasantness of their fight. There is a momentary truce. Unlike the girls, they don’t seek to retrospectively understand the others’ actions during the dispute (e.g., Mary to Lisa: “She was just pretending”; Sue to Mary: “You were just pretending”). Rather, by attributing their quarreling behaviors to “this family,” they distance themselves from their own actions. Leaving the “family” is a way to leave their quarreling selves behind. They move on, and at 255 they change to another theme, dressing up.

255 Kevin: (jumps up from the chair) Oh boy, what did I forget? I forgot my coat! (goes over to dress-up clothes)
256 Joe: I forgot my coat. This is my coat. (goes over to dress-up clothes)

In conclusion, the boys’ dispute is escalated and stretched out by many more rounds of opposition-insistence-opposition in which they resist doing what the other wants them to do. They use more directive speech and coercive physical tactics such as threats and physical intimidation (chasing, blocking.) Although Nick made two proposals: one at 162 (“You have to make a pickle salad! So I’ll put it in the pot”) and the other at 177 (“after you cut it, I’ll put it back together”), the boys do not jointly negotiate a resolution. All of this contributes to the greater rigidity and tension in this fight. Even when Kevin gives the pickle back to Nick at 205 and turns his attention to controlling the phone, Nick still tries to dominate him and Kevin continues to oppose Nick, as if their play agenda is one of opposition.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the two disputes reveals similarities and differences. Both disputes are complex because of their length and the range of strategies the participants used. Both make use of pretend and real elements in interesting ways. Both
are precipitated by a child’s attempt to maintain control over a resource that he or she was playing with and that a playmate has become interested in. There are quarrels over an object, as well as quarrels over interference in one’s ongoing activity. Finally, in both disputes an alliance was formed between one of the disputants and the third child (the bystander).

The way the children conduct the pickle fights is consistent with generalizations in recent studies of young children’s sex-related strategies for negotiating conflict (Miller et al., 1986) and other forms of discourse (Leaper, 1988), which involved a total of 162 children and the analysis of more than 1,000 conflict episodes. In these studies, boys were found to engage in more conflict. Their conflict is described as more heavy-handed and more controlling. Girls’ negotiation of conflict is described as more mitigated than boys’, and their discourse is characterized as more collaborative, suggesting greater (apparent) interpersonal harmony.

In addition, when the pickle fights are interpreted in terms of Maltz and Borke’s model and Gilligan’s “different voices” framework, they do not look like random events. The two dispute processes are congruent with the predictions made by these frameworks. The boys’ pickle fight fits Maltz and Borke’s claim that boys use language “to assert one’s position of dominance.” The girls’ pickle fight fits their claim that girls use language “to create and maintain relationships of closeness and equality” and “to interpret accurately the speech of other girls.” When the pickle fights are interpreted through Gilligan’s framework, the girls’ focus on the relationship shows through in their negotiations, which serve to enhance communication and respond to the needs of others. Negotiation through clarification of intent, compromise, and evasion mitigates opposition and works through conflict to find a resolution. The girls’ real interest appeared to be in jointly constructing and maintaining their pretend play. Their conflict process kept them on that track. In the boys’ pickle fight, the focus on the self shows through in their insistence on getting their way, their appeal to self-serving rules and threats of separation, and their lack of joint negotiation. The boys’ longer and more insistent conflict process made it difficult to develop their pretend play scenarios very much, although, as mentioned, Nick tried some proposals. Gilligan’s model has been proposed to account for gender differences in adult and adolescent moral reasoning processes. This study indicates that Gilligan’s model is useful for interpreting face-to-face verbal conflict management by children as young as 3 years of age.

In regard to the discussion of gender socialization in part 1, there are questions this study has not addressed and that we need to understand better. In what ways are “gendered” behaviors due to the activities and social organization of female and male groups? Although features of the pickle fights are consistent with what previous research labeled feminine and masculine, this should not be taken to mean that girls or boys only function in these ways, that their styles are mutually exclusive, or that these are essential, intrinsic, and biologically deter-

mined attributes. Gender and situation are confounded. Gendered behavior is situationally dependent. Some work has already shown this (e.g. Goodwin, 1980; Thorne, 1986), but we need to do much more. In a different play activity, for example, a boy-associated activity like playing with trucks (Connor & Serbin, 1977), these girls and boys might interact differently. In addition, conflict in triadic interaction may be different for girls or boys from conflict in larger groups or in dyads. Future research needs to address these and other issues concerning the systematic variation of girls’ and boys’ language behavior.

In conclusion, the pickle fights provide insight into the negotiation skills that 3-year-old children are developing through the process of constructing a world of shared fantasy. The ways that conflicts are resolved, or whether they are resolved at all, have immediate consequences for the continued construction of the oral texts that embody their social interactions. This study, then, is as much about how very young children construct a world of meaning with their friends as it is about their arguments. The pretend play framework is sensitive to opposition. Pretending can be derailed by conflict, and it can be creatively enriched and developed by conflict. Observing children’s arguments can show us just how fragile—and how resilient—their process of constructing shared meaning is.

REFERENCES


