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Playing games, particularly pretense games, is one of the areas where young children first enter into collective, conventional practices. This chapter reviews recent empirical data in support of this claim and explores the idea that games present a cradle for children's growing into societal and institutional life more generally.

Play, Games, and the Development of Collective Intentionality

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Human beings have a capacity which, as far as I can tell, is not possessed by any other animal species, to assign functions to objects . . . only in virtue of the collective assignment or acceptance of the object as having a certain status and with that status a function. . . . Status functions are the glue that holds human societies together.

J. Searle (2005)

Play is a widespread phenomenon in the animal kingdom. But only humans engage in games, that is, in rule-governed, conventional play activities. We move pieces of wood on a board according to some arbitrary rules, making some of the pieces queens, others knights, and the whole activity that of chess. We walk on stages and declare war or peace—in games of make-believe. No other species engages in such kinds of conventional rule and pretense games.

Ontogenetically, human children from their second year on start to enter into such shared pretense and simple rule games. In fact, early pretend play and other games can be considered one of the core areas where

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children first participate in collective, or “we,” intentionality (“We together play this game”), involving the joint creation of conventional facts (“This piece of wood is the queen in our game of chess”). Playing games is one cradle, or zone of proximal development, for later and more sophisticated forms of collective intentionality and conventionality. This is the rough picture I draw in this chapter.

Collective Intentionality: Some Conceptual Distinctions

Intentionality, in the broad philosophical sense of “aboutness,” is the mark of the mental (Brentano, 1873) and pertains to all content-full mental states, such as perceptions, beliefs, desires, and intentions that paradigmatically we ascribe to individuals.

Collective intentionality is shared we-intentionality that we ascribe to a group of subjects and is not directly reducible to individual intentional attitudes (e.g., Bratman, 1992; Gilbert, 1990; Searle, 1990, 1995; Tuomela & Miller, 1988; for an overview, see Tollefsen, 2004). When you and I meet and agree to take a walk together, to use an example from Margaret Gilbert (1990), we form and then pursue the joint we intention (“We walk together”), which is not reducible to the sum of my individual intention, “I walk,” plus your analogous one. When I pursue my individual intention to walk and you pursue yours, we might end up walking beside each other but not together. In contrast, when we pursue our we-intention, we cooperate: we walk together.

Within the class of collective intentional phenomena, some further taxonomic distinctions are relevant (for the following, see Searle, 1995). Walking together is an example of an activity that does not essentially involve the conventional use of objects. However, an important subclass of collective intentionality does involve the conventional use of objects and the collective ascription of functions to these objects. Using tools to build something together or using pieces of wood to play chess together are examples.

Two kinds of functions can be distinguished here, with two corresponding degrees of conventionality. First, *causal usage functions* are functions we ascribe to objects when we use them instrumentally, that is, as tools, and when we design and create objects as tools. The objects fulfill the function due to their physical causal makeup—the knife due to its sharpness, the hammer due to its hardness. Such causal usage functions are thus conventional in a weak sense: nothing in itself makes a certain object a tool, but we can assign the function to the object simply by making use of its intrinsic physical makeup for our instrumental purposes.

Status functions, in contrast, are conventional in a stronger sense.¹ They are assigned to objects merely as a matter of collective practice, where the objects cannot fulfill the function due to their intrinsic properties. A slip

of paper is money, for example, and a piece of wood in chess is a queen, but one could have decided to pay with wood and play with paper. An object has a certain status function only by virtue of the collective intentional treatment of it as having this status function: the status function is brought into existence, constituted merely by collective intentionality. “X counts as a Y in context C” is the formula that expresses status function creation. “This piece of paper counts as money in our currency area,” for example, or, “This piece of wood counts as a queen in chess.”

Collective intentionality with the creation of status functions is what lies at the heart of institutional reality. Status functions create institutional facts (“this is a queen,” “this is money,” “this is a university”), that is, observer-dependent facts that hold only in the eyes of a beholder collective creating them, in contrast to brute facts “out there” (“this is a piece of wood”). Institutional reality as a system of status functions pervades our normal adult social life to the degree that we live as much in an institutional as in a natural world: we go to work or school, earn money to pay our rent, own property, are citizens, husband, or wives, and all day long we utter sounds with semantic status functions (meaning), that is, we speak a language.

Specific normative dimensions are involved in collective we intentionality. In cooperation, we commit ourselves to pursuing the joint action and are therefore responsible for trying our best in this pursuit. The assignment of causal usage functions brings with it the notions of good functioning and malfunctioning and the notions of correct and incorrect uses of tools. Status functions, finally, involve a specific kind of rule: constitutive rules. Whereas regulative rules regulate an already existing activity (for example, rules regarding on which side to drive regulate driving, which already exists before the rule), constitutive rules bring into existence the very activity they apply to (Rawls, 1955; Searle, 1969, 1995). For example, the rule of chess that “the king can be moved one field in all directions” does not regulate an activity that already exists, but it, together with the other rules of chess, constitutes chess. Formally, “X counts as a Y in context C” specifies a constitutive rule: that X is a Y in the relevant context. That it is a Y in the relevant context confers normative powers to the objects and carries normative implications (that it ought to be treated as a Y). A piece of wood is a queen in the context of chess, and that means it has the power to move in certain ways, ought to be used accordingly, and ought not to be used as firewood in this context, for example.

In sum, collective intentionality involves two or more subjects who share an irreducible we-attitude, paradigmatically a we-intention. Some forms of collective intentionality involve the collective assignment of functions to objects. The strongest forms of such functions, status functions, are those that get collectively assigned to objects merely by virtue of convention, when objects are collectively treated as having that function (“counting as something”). Constitutive rules underlie status functions, create

institutional reality, and bring with them normative implications that the objects be treated according to the rules in the relevant context.

Collective Intentionality and Playing Games

How do children develop into the normatively structured institutional reality that makes up our adult everyday world? One interesting possibility is that playing games serves a prominent role in children's development into institutional reality. More specifically, early pretend play or make-believe, on the one hand, and rule games, on the other hand, constitute children's entry into collective intentionality with the creation of status functions.

Cultural Learning and Playing Games. In our own work on the development of play (Rakoczy, 2006a; Rakoczy, Tomasello, & Striano, 2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2006; Tomasello & Rakoczy, 2003), we build on recent approaches to cultural learning (Tomasello, Kruger, & Ratner, 1993; Tomasello, 1999). In outline form, the general picture of early cognitive cultural development according to these approaches is as follows. From around their first birthday, human children, and probably only human children, begin to understand others and themselves as persons in a basic sense, as intentionally perceiving and acting in the world, and therefore as potential cooperators. In virtue of this understanding, they enter into forms of joint attention, shared action, and imitative cultural learning—into what can be called the most basic units of collective intentionality and culture. Through cultural imitative learning, children acquire new action forms. On one hand are instrumental actions, many of them involving artifacts such that children learn the causal usage functions, the intentional affordances of such tools, and so in some sense inherit the culture's accumulated technical wisdom (see German, Truxaw, and Defeyter, Chapter Six this volume). On the other hand, children in the second year start to imitatively acquire communicative actions, gestural and linguistic, as conventional means for talking, which opens up radically new possibilities for thinking as well.

The general picture here is a dialectical one: human infants are cognitively equipped to understand each other as persons, as potential cooperators. Based on this equipment, they enter into culture and collective intentionality, and the reason that no other species joins in this entry is that no other species shares the underlying cognitive equipment. Entering into collective intentionality and culture and acquiring conventional practices and a language shape and transform children's individual cognitive development by supplying them with new means for thinking, much as Lev Vygotsky (1978) and George Mead (1934) have stressed.

When we apply this general approach to play and games, the following picture emerges: humans share with many species the ability to play. But only human infants are cognitively capable of cultural learning, of entering into collective intentionality, and so they grow into shared forms of conventional, rule-governed play, that is, into playing games. And playing games,

in turn, in a dialectical fashion, provides children with a cradle for engaging in more complex forms of collective intentionality and conventionality.

I now sketch this picture in more detail for games of pretense and simple rule games.

Pretend Play. Rule games are by definition systems of constitutive rules that assign status functions to the objects involved. Chess, for example, is constituted by the system of rules underlying it (“This counts as the queen,” “This counts as moving the queen”). Pretend play usually is quite different from rule games in that it centers around fictional matters and is normally not an activity with fixed underlying rules. Rather, often the pretenders together make up the topics of the pretense on the spot. Despite these differences, though, pretend play can also be considered a joint activity with (ad hoc) constitutive rules and status function assignment (Walton, 1990). Let us turn to pretense first and then come back to rule games.

Eve takes her cell phone, puts it to her nose, and says, “Hm, how delicious this banana is.” She then offers it to Adam (“Here, have some”), who starts to make peeling movements on the phone. He then puts the phone to his mouth and makes enthusiastic chewing movements and “Yum” sounds. Eve joins in, and finally they close the episode by saying, “All gone, eaten up.”

Although this is not an instance of playing an established game with fixed rules, it is an instance of collectively playing a game with the assignment of transient status functions, making up ad hoc constitutive rules on the spot. “This cell phone counts as a ‘banana’ in our pretense context” is the central status function assignment. As the scenario unfolds, “It counts as peeled now” and then “It counts as eaten up now” enter the scene.

These assignments bring with them a normative structure of the joint activity. “X counts as Y in context C” means that in C, X ought to be treated accordingly as a Y. In Eve’s and Adam’s pretense game, once declared a banana, the phone ought to be treated accordingly in the game. Some pretense acts are inferentially licensed in the game, and others are not. Pretending to peel the phone/banana, eat it, or make it into a milkshake are licensed; pretending to drive it or pretending to fax it are not.

What about the phylogeny and ontogeny of pretend play? First, pretend play is a uniquely human phenomenon. Although there are a few anecdotes of pretending in human-raised animals (for an overview, see Mitchell, 2002), these are difficult to interpret, and generally it is quite clear that no other species reliably engages in pretend play as we know it (for an excellent review of precursors to pretend play in great apes, see Gomez & Martin-Andrade, 2005). Ontogenetically, children in Western societies start to engage in simple pretend play in their second year. Early pretense usually occurs with caregivers (Haight & Miller, 1992; Slade, 1987) and centers around replica objects such as toy cups and plates and simple corresponding pretense actions such as pretending to eat and drink (e.g., Elder & Pederson, 1978).

But how should early pretending in, say, two-year-olds be characterized? Is it an egocentric activity, not involving much collective intentionality and social understanding, let alone an understanding of conventionality, as Piaget (1962) claimed?

Against this individualist picture and in line with recent cultural learning theory, I argue here that (1) early pretending is an essentially social activity, acquired through cultural imitative learning, and (2) early social pretense is an instance of collective we-intentionality with the conventional assignment of status functions.

Regarding the ontogenetic origins of pretend play, there are several lines of empirical data that can be taken as suggestive of or evidence for claim 1. First, cross-cultural studies have shown that the structure and contents of pretend play in children vary a great deal across cultures (e.g., Gaskins, 1999; Haight, 1999). However, more stringent studies looking at the differential acquisition of pretense in different cultures would be needed here. Second, naturalistic observations of children in the family context have found that early pretending is mostly done with and initiated by the parents (e.g., Haight & Miller, 1992; Slade, 1987). Third, El'Konin (1966) reports old experimental Soviet studies (Fradkina, 1946; Neverovich, 1948, as cited in El'Konin, 1966) that showed that young children only did pretense actions they had seen in others, did them with the same objects, and were unable to transfer them to new objects.

Finally, in an attempt to test claim 1 against Piaget's views rather directly, we recently did some studies that were inspired by these old Soviet ideas and methods (Rakoczy, Tomasello, & Striano, 2005a)—the “tools and toys” studies, we call them. Eighteen- and twenty-four-month-old children, it was shown, acquired pretense acts with novel objects (“toys”) in much the same way they acquired instrumental acts with novel objects (“tools”): by imitation. Furthermore, they did hardly any creative pretense acts (but many creative instrumental acts), and during pretense acts they showed significantly more and stronger social behavior, such as gazing, and in one study smiling, to the adult. These results suggest that children in their second year start to imitate pretense actions with objects in similar ways as they have already before imitated simpler kinds of actions, with this early pretense being a little creative and essentially social activity, creativity and solitary pretense being later achievements. Tools become tools for children in similar ways as toys become toys: through picking up the intentional and cultural affordances and functions of objects by observing adults' action with these objects.

Let us now turn to claim 2: that beyond being an essentially social activity, early pretense is an instance of collective we-intentionality involving the conventional assignment of status functions. Young children's everyday social pretending in the family suggests that from the moment they engage in pretense, young children participate in collective intentionality with the assignment of status functions. However, in the recent theory of

mind literature on young children's developing pretense, the danger of overinterpreting children's cognitive sophistication based on such observations has been stressed. Perhaps what we naturally observe are mostly well-practiced routines without much understanding.

What is thus needed to provide evidence for claim 2 is children's social pretense in more stringently set-up situations. Collective intentionality with the assignment of status functions creates an inferentially and normatively structured space of reasons. When we act together and assign a status function, certain acts of one participant warrant (make inferentially appropriate) certain successive acts of the other participant. When in the absence of a regular board and regular figures, we play chess together with pieces of stone, assigning each piece the function of a figure, your move with one of the stone pieces warrants certain moves of mine (for example, your threatening my king warrants my moving it).

In the case of pretense (see Walton, 1990; Harris & Kavanaugh, 1993), suppose we pretend together that the X is a Y (for example, the stone is a glass) and has some property (perhaps is full of rum), and now you pretend to transform the Y in some way (adding cola, ice, and lemon to the rum in the glass, thus making it a Cuba libre), this sets the scene for my successive actions in our joint pretense. In the context of this joint pretense, the stone counts as a glass, and it counts as full of Cuba libre now, and I have to treat it accordingly: for example, if asked in the pretense whether there is alcohol in the glass, it is warranted to answer yes now; if the fictional glass is big, and if I pretend to drink the whole glass alone, in our pretense scenario I count as drunk.

Harris and Kavanaugh (1993), in an elegant set of studies, showed that children from two years engage in such inferentially appropriate pretense acts (though with topics more appropriate for this age). When the experimenter pretended to pour tea into a cup, for example, children pretended to drink from the cup. When the experimenter pretended to spill tea on the table, children pretended to clean the table.

Based on these studies, we recently tested young children in even more stringently set-up situations (Rakoczy, Tomasello, & Striano, 2004; Rakoczy & Tomasello, 2006). Children (old one year olds and young two and three year olds) saw pairs of superficially analogous incomplete as-if behaviors with objects, pretending to do an action and unsuccessfully trying to do the same action, for example, to pour from a container into a cup. In both cases, the actor would make pouring movements with a novel container over a cup but without any actual pouring taking place. In the one case, he would mark it with signs of playfulness and sound effects as if pretending to pour, and in the other case, he would mark it with signs of surprise and frustration as if trying to really pour. Importantly, the container did contain water and thus could be used to pour.

The logic is the following: in both cases the child sees superficially analogous movements, but they constitute radically different intentional

actions. In the trying case, the model wants to properly perform the action but fails. If the child understands the intentional structure of the model's act, this licenses the inference, "If I want to do the same, other means should be used."

In the pretense case, in contrast, the model performs an intentional pretense act involving the assignment of a status function ("This act counts as pouring" and "The cup counts as full now"). If the child understands this as such, it licenses the child's entering into a joint *we*-pretense organized around this status function ("We pretend that the cup is full now") with appropriate inferential pretense acts (for example, pretending to drink from the cup what the model had pretended to pour in).

Two- and three-year-olds (and to some degree one-year-olds) showed this systematic and differential response pattern: after trying models, they themselves then really did the action or tried to, but with different means. For example, they made use of a tool to open the container first and then poured. After pretense models, in contrast, they performed appropriate inferential pretense acts (for example, they pretended to drink from the cup into which the model had pretended to pour).

This systematic pattern of responses is best interpreted, I suggest, in the following way. In both cases, children discern the intentional structure of the model's behavior and respond accordingly. In the trying case, children perform an appropriate individual instrumental act. In the pretense case, they join into a collective *we*-pretense centered around the status function introduced by the model's overture.

That is, young children respect the inferential normative structure that comes with collective intentionality and status function assignment, as indicated in their own actions. But what do they understand about the normativity that status functions introduce? Are they really following a rule, or are they just acting in accordance with a rule, so to speak? Do they indicate an awareness of the normative structure more directly and explicitly as in their own acts? Would they not only act correctly themselves but criticize others for incorrect acts? This is crucial, as critique, beyond mere surprise, in response to incorrect acts is the hallmark of appreciating normative structure (mere surprise is the appropriate response when there are acts deviant from purely statistical regularities).

In a pilot study, I recently began to address this issue (Rakoczy, 2006b). Three-year-olds were engaged in a game of pretense with status functions assignment to objects. For example, with a pile of clothespins, one clothespin was pretended to be the knife, and all other clothespins were pretended to be carrots. The child and the adult pretended to peel the carrots with the knife and cook and eat the carrots. Then at some point a third character (a puppet) joined in the pretense ("Oh, may I join your game?") but performed pretense acts that were normatively inappropriate in the light of the status functions of the objects. For example, she pretended to eat with the clothespin that was the knife. In about 50 percent of these cases, the

children explicitly protested such violations of the constitutive rules of the pretense game (for example, “No, that’s not a carrot; that’s our knife!”).

In sum, in joint games of make-believe, young children from age two actively and knowingly participate in collective intentionality with status function creation, as indicated in their own competent inferential actions and their normative responses to other’s mistakes.

Rule Games. Rule games are conventional activities, defined by a system of constitutive rules and corresponding status functions. Children’s understanding of conventional rules has been a topic in developmental psychology since Piaget’s pioneering work (1932). In this work, Piaget focused on children’s understanding of the contingency of conventional game rules—the fact that they could have been otherwise. To this end, children were asked where rules of games come from and whether they could be changed. Based on children’s responses to such questions, Piaget concluded that children until well into the concrete-operational period lack a proper understanding of conventional rules: young children view both conventional and moral rules as given and unalterable and do not distinguish the two types of rules from each other (and from brute laws of nature).

More recent research has challenged this general picture (e.g., Nucci & Turiel, 1978; Smetana, 1981; Turiel, 1983): this research has shown that much younger children, in some studies even preschoolers, distinguish moral from conventional rules and understand that the latter are more alterable and context relative, and they do distinguish conventional rules from brute laws of nature (Kalish, 1998).

One limitation of these studies for the theoretical purposes in this chapter is that they focused on only a specific and narrow class of conventional rules, regulative rules such as etiquette and rules of conduct (regarding table manners, greetings, and so on), but hardly used constitutive rules creating status functions such as rules constitutive of games.

Another limitation is that most of them used an interview methodology similar to the one Piaget used, focusing merely on children’s rather abstract conception of conventional versus moral rules, potentially underestimating very young children, and neglecting children’s concrete understanding of the normative aspects of rules in practice (for example, how children act based on their rule understanding and how they react to rule violations).

Therefore, in recent research, we investigated children’s understanding of constitutive game rules with a new, action-based methodology (Rakoczy, Warneken, & Tomasello, in press). The logic was similar to that in the pretense study mentioned above: children were engaged in a joint game with a partner, when at some point a third character came and wanted to join the game but violated the constitutive game rules. Children’s understanding of the normativity of the game rules can be seen in action in their normative responses (protest, critique) to rule violations by another character.

In one study, for example, three-year-olds were shown novel actions with novel objects that were marked as conventional games in the experi-

mental condition (in the control condition, the same actions were shown to the child but were not marked as part of a game). In the experimental condition, an experimenter showed the child the novel objects; declared, "I'll show you a game; it's called 'daxing' [novel verb]," and presented the target act (for example, pushing a wooden block to a target location with a special tool). She also made accidental mistakes, such as moving the block to the same target location but without the tool, marked as such ("Oops! That's not daxing"). In the control condition, the experimenter performed the same behaviors with the objects, but they were all marked neutrally: "Look, one can do this, and this." After the demonstration and after the child acted with the objects, a puppet announced, "I will dax too" (experimental condition) or "My turn" (control condition), and performed some act different from the target act. The children showed clear verbal protest to the puppet (for example, "No, that's wrong") in 50 percent of the trials in the experimental condition (but rarely in the control condition).

A second study investigated young children's (three-year-olds') understanding of the context-relative normativity of constitutive rules. "X counts as a Y in context C" means that in C, X ought to be treated as a Y, but it does not carry any normative implications of how to treat X outside C. Imagine the following. You and I are having a picnic in the park with lots of cookies. At some point, we are bored and feel like playing chess. In the absence of a proper chess board, we draw one on the ground and use some cookies as chess figures. The big cookies are the queens. Now, before and after that game of chess, eating your big cookie is a perfectly fine act. But during the game, eating your big cookie is eating your queen, a normatively very inappropriate act.

Following a similar logic in the study, an experimenter and the child played with some known objects such as building blocks. First, they used them in the normal way of building a tower. Then the experimenter started the game ("I'll show you a game, it's called 'daxing'") in which the object got a status function (one block was used as a die), and the experimenter and the child played the game together. Then came the puppet, announcing that she would join in the game in the experimental condition. In the control condition, in contrast, she announced that she would not join but rather would do something different. Formally speaking, in the experimental condition, the puppet entered into context C (and thus subjected herself to the rule in question), whereas in the control condition, she stepped out of C (and therefore outside the scope of the rule).

Children showed protest in response to the puppet's acts in more than 60 percent of the experimental condition (but in only less than 10 percent of the control condition). That is, children not only understood the normative structure of the game rules but also appreciated the context relativity of this normative structure.

Summary and Discussion

Children from age two years begin to engage in joint games—games of make-believe and simple rule games. Both kinds of games are instances of collective intentionality involving constitutive rules and the assignment of status functions to objects, and young children both play these games appropriately themselves and criticize others who do not. That is, in both their own acts and their responses to others' mistakes, they indicate an awareness of the normative structure of status function creation in games.

Indeed, games are probably the first area where children actively participate in collective intentionality with the assignment of status functions.² Although a lot of research in the past two decades on children's understanding of conventional regulative rules (by Smetana, Turiel, and colleagues) has shown some remarkable proficiency in preschoolers, little research exists on children's understanding of constitutive rules and status in areas other than games. The few studies on this topic have mainly yielded negative findings for children younger than five or six years old.

Regarding semantic status functions of language, for example, studies on lexical realism from Piaget on found that preschoolers are not very proficient at answering questions about the contingent, conventional semantic status of words—for example, "Could cows be called 'horses'?" (e.g., Brook, 1970; Homer, Brockmeier, Kamawar, & Olson, 2001; Piaget, 1929; Rosenblum & Pinker, 1983). Regarding property, interview studies suggest that young children do not systematically distinguish property as a status from possession as a brute fact (e.g., Hook, 1993).

More generally, Kalish, Weissman, and Bernstein (2000) found that young preschoolers were not very proficient at verbal tasks that required an understanding that collective decision (by an experimenter and the child) could create or change status and conventional facts such as the name or property status of objects. How, then, do these negative findings relate to the findings reported in this chapter on children's early playing of games (as an indicator of understanding conventionality in the stronger, status function creating sense)?

First, methodological differences probably can account for some divergence here. Whereas our studies on playing games investigated children's actions and responses to others' acts in joint games, the studies on status understanding in other areas all made use of purely verbal tasks. That is, understanding at different levels may be tapped in different studies (understanding implicit in action in our studies; explicit understanding in the verbal tasks). Furthermore, the task demands of many verbal studies (for example, on lexical realism) in this area are immense, as very stringent tasks were used that require sophisticated counterfactual reasoning—for example, in our society, X counts as a Y, but it could have been otherwise; X could have counted as a Z.

But even if one takes these methodological differences into account, differences in content remain that may be relevant. In some sense, one could say that playing games is a nonserious activity, whereas naming and dealing with property and making collective decisions are very serious activities. But in which sense is playing games nonserious? In pretense, the status functions apply only fictionally: "This telephone is a banana" is not literally true; it is fiction (Walton, 1990). This, however, does not apply to rule games. When I put the ball into the net in soccer, it really is a goal, not just a fictional goal (and think of how serious the whole business around games of soccer is). So clearer explications of what the intuitive notion of (non)seriousness here might mean are needed.

Playing games is a very concrete activity, here and now, in contrast to abstract statuses of names and property rights. Relatedly, the child can actively control the game, at least partially (especially pretend play games), in a way in which she cannot control the practice of giving names or creating currency. Again, what concreteness and controllability mean exactly needs to be spelled out in more detail before the role they play empirically can be investigated more thoroughly.

One relevant aspect here is the scope of the context in which a status function obtains. "X counts as Y in C" applies to games, names, money, property, government, marriage, and all the rest of institutional reality. But whereas C in the case of names, property, and money is usually at least the whole society ("This piece of paper counts as money in our currency area"), in games, context C is much more concrete and narrower: "This telephone counts as a banana in our pretense game," "This wooden block counts as the die in our game." Accordingly, whereas young children do not have much experience with moving in and out of whole societies or currency areas (let alone of controlling them), children do experience moving in and out of the relevant contexts in games every day, and to some degree they experience control over them.

Partly because of this, playing games might not be only the first area where children enter into status assignment, but a cradle, zone of proximal development, or bootstrap for the development into collective intentionality with conventional creation of status and institutions more generally.

This squares with a recent proposal by Kalish (2005). Roughly, his claim is that preschool children have only a partial grasp of status functions. They appreciate the normative aspects of status, but they fail to understand the observer and context relativity of status (that is, fail to distinguish institutional facts and brute facts). The latter, negative part of the claim is grounded in the kind of negative evidence on preschoolers; understanding of names and collective decision mentioned above.

But although young preschool children do not yet have a general understanding of the observer-relative nature of status applicable to different domains (games, names, property) and in different tasks (different kinds of verbal interviews on origins, alterability and relativity of status), playing

games might be the first step (the zone of proximal development) toward such a general understanding. In games, particularly games of pretense, even two-year-olds participate in the collective assignment of status, in the creation of institutional facts, and this in controllable and small-scale contexts into and out of which the players can move at will. Thus, it might be in games that they first come to understand not only the normative aspects of collective intentionality with status function creation but also the observer dependence and context relativity of status. And this understanding in the context of games might lay the foundation for developing a general understanding of the world-making power of collective intentionality and conventionality.

This possibility has been nicely expressed by Kendall Walton (1990) regarding one important area of status functions, namely representations in the arts: “Objectivity, control, the possibility of joint participation, spontaneity, all on top of a certain freedom from the cares of the real world: it looks as though make-believe has everything. . . . The magic of make-believe is an extraordinarily promising basis on which to explain the representational arts—their power, their complexity and diversity, their capacity to enrich our lives” (p. 68).

Future research will shed more light on how the magic of make-believe and other games lays ontogenetic foundations for developing into the institutional reality of adult life.

Notes

1. I am following Searle (1995) here regarding the relation between function assignment and conventions: conventions in the widest sense are arbitrary coordinated behavioral regularities based on mutual expectations in a community (see Lewis, 1969). The assignment of functions, particularly status functions, though, is more than conventional. That something has a certain status function (for example, that a slip of paper is money) holds not in virtue of conventional statistical regularities alone, but because of normative rules (“such and such slips of paper count as money in our society”). However, convention is involved in which objects are assigned the status: that it is paper in our society is a conventional matter; it could have been plastic bags or rubber balls. Which objects get status function is rather independent of their intrinsic properties; in contrast, causal use functions are essentially anchored in the causal properties of the objects, and which causal properties are assigned usage functions is only conventional. This is the sense in which status functions are conventional in a stronger sense.

2. Of course, language is the first instance of collective intentionality involving status functions into which young children enter in rudimentary form beginning at the age of about one year. However, arguably young language learners do not have to see speech acts as sound events (brute fact) that have semantic status (institutional fact). Rather, young children hear through the sounds, directly perceiving them as meaningful. The situation is different in the case of games, because there, status functions are assigned to physical objects that children surely see as such. Particularly in the case of pretense (for example, “this telephone counts as the banana”), children have to distinguish the brute fact about the object (it is a telephone) from its status function (“banana”) in the game.

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