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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on behavioral dimensions of playfulness: (1) in a developmental framework; and (2) in a situational framework. As a result of theoretical model building, it was hypothesized that there may be a resurgence of playfulness, assumed to be a personality trait of the player, in adolescents. The most significant finding is the emergence of a much more differentiated behavior within playfulness in adolescents as against the unitary trait found in kindergartners. Also, when teachers' conceptualizations of playfulness in the adolescent were analyzed for positive and negative connotations, one-third of the teacher-mentioned attributes were negative for behavior in the classroom as against one-fourth for playfulness at large in the adolescent. Finally, from the information on situational determinants of playfulness at the adolescent level, it would appear that young people and adults are aware that specific behavioral dimensions of playfulness can be shown more freely in an unstructured setting.
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Playfulness and Creativity:

Some Developmental and Situational Aspects¹

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In our endeavors to assess personality traits, it is appropriate to use a developmental framework when investigating both continuity and change. Stability and consistency can be considered adjuncts to continuity since they may refer to a continuing characteristic either in the same individual or in a group of individuals at different stages of development. Moreover, it is necessary to look at the same behavior in different settings and look at some of the overt operational correlates. Recent theoretical formulations by Emmerich (1968; 1969) and Mishel (1969) also point in this direction.

Playfulness, first conceptualized as a quality of play in kindergartners (Lieberman, 1965) and later hypothesized to become a personality trait of the player (Lieberman, 1966; 1967) was studied on the basis of these assumptions. At the kindergarten level, playfulness emerged as a unitary trait made up of physical, social and cognitive spontaneity, manifest joy and sense of humor. As a result of theoretical model building (Lieberman, 1967) based, among others, on the work of Piaget (1945), Getzels and Jackson (1962) and Torrance (1962), it was hypothesized that there may be a resurgence of playfulness, now appearing as a personality trait, in adolescents. Empirical observations of adolescents also helped in formulating this hypothesis.

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While, in itself, playfulness is worthwhile being investigated for its major components, its importance is increased by the hypothesis that it might be a clue to cognitive style, in particular divergent thinking. Such a relationship was found at the kindergarten level.

One aspect of the long-term research design is to explore whether playfulness as a personality trait is a unitary behavior dimension across physical, social, and cognitive functioning at various age levels. Another aspect is to examine whether certain playfulness traits are situation-specific, especially, at later age levels, when behavior becomes more differentiated.

At this point in our investigations, which have now gone on for a decade, it might be appropriate to pause and take stock, and to share some of the challenges and the disillusionments of having become involved with playfulness. Within the time limits of this presentation, the looking back and the looking ahead will focus on two aspects:

1. Behavioral dimensions of playfulness in a developmental framework.
2. Behavioral dimensions of playfulness in a situational framework.

Behavioral Dimensions in A Developmental Framework

Our early interest in play and creativity and a possible relationship between the two was sparked by repeated references to the importance of "combinatorial play" and even "playfulness" in creative individuals. These labels were used when describing adults or late adolescents. Operational correlates of the concepts, if mentioned, were vague.

Two questions suggested themselves for immediate investigation. One was: does playfulness have any relationship to play? If so, can it be measured at an age level when play dominates behavior and can it then be an aid to early identification of creative potential? It was this conceptualization that led to the first study being carried out at the kindergarten level.

The second question addressed itself to the problem of identifying and measuring playfulness. Both at the kindergarten and at the high-school level, teachers were actively involved in formulating the operational correlates of playfulness. On the basis of these criteria, rating scales were developed for both age groups. The behavioral indices of playfulness were set forth along ten subscales. At the kindergarten level, five major areas--physical spontaneity, joy, sense of humor, social spontaneity, and cognitive spontaneity--were covered, and ^{within} each frequency and/or intensity of the behavior was assessed separately. For instance, for "manifest joy" the two questions read: "How often does the child show joy in or during his play activities?" and "With what freedom of expression does he show his joy?" While the number of scales were the same for the adolescent level and while the areas covered were comparable, the structuring of the 5-point scale went from a playfulness to a nonplayfulness dimension rather than asking for more or less playfulness as in the kindergarten format. It was hoped that this would give added information on the "negative end" of playfulness, and to some extent aid. In our presentation here, the developmental comparison can, of course, only deal with the playfulness dimensions.

Additional data on the developmental aspect of playfulness were obtained from using a 40-item Trait Check List to assess playfulness in high-school students. A further refinement and the teasing out of what might be called a "pure playfulness syndrome" resulted from this phase of our investigations. A graphic presentation of our findings is shown in Table 1 of the Hand-out. The most striking difference between the kindergarten and high-school cluster is that at the A-level, the cognitive aspect is not part of it. As a matter-of-fact, a cluster made up of Physical Alertness, Enthusiasm, Intellectual Curiosity and the ringer question of Achievement Orientation emerged as a separate factor in the high-school setting. In the further refinement of the Trait Check List, the physical aspect falls by the wayside and we have a light-hearted entertainer who may be witty but is also disruptive and attention-getting.

Behavioral Dimensions in a Situational Framework

Even before the data confirmed a more differentiated syndrome of playfulness at the adolescent level, it had been planned to study the extent to which setting influences the manifestation of playfulness in older individuals. Community centers provided the unstructured setting to contrast with the classroom. Undergraduate students who acted as group workers observed the adolescents and collected data in the form of anecdotal records. A content-analysis comparing these to the teachers' formulation of playfulness showed five situation-spanning playfulness traits, and six situation-specific in the leisure-type setting against a single one in the classroom.

From Table 2 it can be seen that the situation-spanning traits include humor, teasing, friendly and/or outgoing behavior as well as intellectual and physical restlessness. However, group-workers and teachers viewed the importance of these dimensions differently so that a rank-order correlation only approached significance at the .05 level. Situation-specific traits in the leisure-type setting appear to be, to some extent, refinements of the situation-spanning traits. Expectations in the structured classroom are, of course reflected in the only situation-specific trait of "eager and energetic."

Implications and Conclusions

From a developmental point of view, the most significant finding is the emergence of much more differentiated behavior within playfulness in adolescents as against the unitary trait in kindergartners. Because of their composition, the two factors at the adolescent level obtained from the Rating Scale were labeled "social-emotional playfulness" and "academic playfulness." The latter, with its saturation including the ringer question of achievement motivation, in addition to alertness, enthusiasm and intellectual curiosity, might even be called the type of playfulness approved by the teacher for the classroom. In the planned follow-up, measures of divergent and convergent thinking will be correlated with the separate clusters of playfulness. It will be interesting to find out whether the youngster more concerned with excellence in grades and tests would also be the one high on convergent ability, and whether social-emotional playfulness might relate more to the divergent thinker. In line with Wallach and Kogan's (1964) findings, it is possible, of course, that a high-

intelligent-high creative group would score high on both types of playfulness.

Another aspect of the developmental difference needs to be related to classroom behavior. The five-year old who hops, skips, shows manifest joy and glint-in-the-eye behavior, is friendly and imaginative in his dramatic play is not only showing expected but also accepted behavior in the kindergarten setting. However, the light-hearted entertainer, who may be witty but is also disruptive and attention-getting at age fifteen is more likely than not frowned upon by his teacher. As a matter-of-fact, when teachers' conceptualization of playfulness in the adolescent were analyzed for positive and negative connotations, one-third of the teacher-mentioned attributes were negative for behavior in the classroom as against one-fourth for playfulness at large in the adolescent.

This ties in with Getzels and Jackson's observations that the intelligent student was preferred to the creative student not only by teachers but also by parents. And yet the type of behavior subsumed here under playfulness related significantly to divergent thinking at the kindergarten-level and seems to be a prerequisite or at least correlate of creative thinking at later age levels.

From the information on situational determinants of playfulness at the adolescent level, it would appear that young people and adults are aware that specific behavioral dimensions of playfulness can be shown more freely in an unstructured setting.

The question that remains to be answered is how we, as psychologists, and educators, can harness the spontaneity at the adolescent level so that fun is still part of learning, especially in the high-school classroom.

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Hand-cut

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TABLE 1

Behavior Dimensions of Playfulness: Developmental

K-Level		A-Level		Trait Check List
Scale		Scale		
Physical Spontaneity		Physical Mobility		Light-hearted Baiting and teasing; Entertainer; Intent on having a good time; Jokers; mischievous; witty
Joy		Joy		
Sense of Humor		Humor		
Social Spontaneity		Group Orientation Friendly		Extroverted; attention- getting; disruptive
Cognitive Spontaneity		Erratic (Play)		

Traits listed showed factor loadings of .50 and higher

TABLE 2

Behavior Dimensions of Playfulness: Situational

Leisure-type: Community Agency

Structured: Classroom

Situation-Spanning

Humor

Humor

Teasing

Teasing (Pranks)

Friendly

Extroverted

Curious

Creative

Harsophy

Fidgety

Situation-Specific

Involved in sports

Eager and energetic

Showing off

Giggling, laughing

Gossiping

Rhythmic body activities

Flirting

Traits listed were mentioned at least 5 times