Blocks and Matchboxes: Negotiation of a Shared Reality Between Two Siblings

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Brian Sutton-Smith has pointed out that if folklorists were to study children's activities and performance then "our ideas of structure and function might. . . change considerably" and we might become less "adult-centric" (68). Goodwin's extended discourse analysis of Philadelphia children, concluding that children tend not to mitigate disputes in the same ways as adults ("Aggravated Correction"), ratifies the idea that researchers, when examining interaction between children, would do well to free themselves of assumptions about communication based on study of adults. Keeping this in mind, this paper examines the dialogue between an eight-year-old boy, Danny, and his six-year-old sister, Crystal, in order to understand the dynamics creating and sustaining a brief episode of their play. They *work* to play, continually meeting in their engagement with each other at the juncture of will and concession.

The play session examined here took place one evening after dinner and before bedtime as the two siblings played with blocks and matchbox cars on their living room floor. Both Danny and Crystal have spent a considerable amount of time with their blocks and are proficient at using every block available to build quite sophisticated structures which sometimes rise higher than their waistlines. This particular evening their play revolved around the construction and use of a parking garage and a church. The opening phrase recorded in this play session reflects the fact that their play began a few minutes before the tape recorder was turned on, as Crystal replied to Danny. "Nuuh uuh, this is the poli:ce." Their play continues for approximately ten minutes, ending only when interrupted by their mother.

Fieldwork Methodology

Situational and temporal constraints dictated the data available for study. Ideally, a videocamera would have been used to capture the kinesic cues accompanying the dialogue. Even had a videocamera been available, however, the intrusiveness of it would have required prolonged initial contact with Danny and Crystal in order that they become comfortable with its presence. As it was, I soon discovered that my *own* presence was intrusive. My intentions were to observe Danny and Crystal at play and to record their dialogue as I took notes on their activity. But in spite of their having known me for years,

both Danny and Crystal remained very aware of my presence in their home throughout the few days available to gather data. It seemed unnatural to them for me to be in their home without talking with their mother, Deborah, and yet when I talked with her, they would extract themselves from their play to join in on our conversation. Crystal also was persistent about wanting to be around me whenever I visited their home and, therefore, would play only infrequently with Danny while I was there.

Deborah, their mother, consequently agreed to discreetly place a tape recorder near them as they played with their blocks and matchboxes one evening before bedtime. Playing together with toys is a routine way for Danny and Crystal to spend a period of time each evening. Whereas during the day they spend a good deal of their time outdoors and typically playing with friends of their own respective ages and genders, rather than with each other, it is common for them to spend their evenings together, arranged with their paraphernalia either in the center of the living room floor or on the floor of Danny's room, playing as their parents go about evening tasks and activities. On this particular night, this pre-bedtime play frame ended, as is usually the case, only when Deborah intervened feeling it was time for Danny and Crystal to go to sleep. As usual case, on this night both Danny and Crystal maneuvered to prolong their play; although a substantial part of their dialogue can be interpreted as conflict-ridden, they ended their play reluctantly.

In spite of my best intentions to unobtrusively document Danny and Crystal at play in their natural environment, it is clear that at some level, at least, on this evening Danny was aware that Deborah was quieter than ordinary. He clearly articulated this awareness near the beginning of the play session:

22 Danny: [to Deborah, their mother] () playin' a game
23 You can't talk?
24 You're not talking.

25 Deborah: Yeah I am.

26 Danny: [chanting] 1-2-3,
27 4-5-6,
28 7-8-9-10
29 11,12.
30 12:00 o'clock.

After gaining a response from Deborah, Danny immediately slipped back into play, absorbed in chanting numbers. With the exception of two further

appeals to Deborah to intervene in disputes later in the dialogue, neither Danny nor Crystal spoke to Deborah, nor, according to Deborah, did they exhibit any other signs of awareness of a change in their usual environment throughout the remainder of their play session.

Data and Transcription

The dialogue between Danny and Crystal was transcribed using a simplified version of the transcription method introduced by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (731-33), as follows:

10[1]	Danny:[2] He'd put his **bombs**[3] out on the side
11	and go phheeeooowwww
12	and blow their car to smithereens.
13	Crystal: dheww, dhewww dheww dheww dheww dheww dheww[4] dhewwww
49	Crystal: Ummmm//[5][firmly] **No**. You're not supposed to=
50	Danny: I just have to drop the truck off.
51	Crystal: O:**KAY**.[8] Then I'll have to **dri:ve**[6]**my truck**.[7]

1. Line Number.
2. Speaker. If in parenthesis, indicates uncertainty about speaker's identity.
3. Boldface indicates emphasis.
4. Phonetic lettering indicates simulations of noises, rather than speech; length and sound are rendered as closely as possible to Danny and Crystal's simulations.
5. Double slashes indicate the point at which talk overlaps with talk of subsequent speaker.
6. Lengthening or drawing out of a sound is indicated by a colon following the syllable lengthened; double colons indicate more prolonged lengthening.
7. Punctuation is used to indicate intonation:
   -A period indicates a falling contour.
   -A question mark indicates a rising contour.
   -A comma indicates a falling-rising contour.

8. Capitals indicate increased volume.

> *B1ank parentheses indicate inability to transcribe material; material in parentheses indicate uncertainty about transcribed material.
> *Bracketed materials are descriptive notes.
> * An equals sign indicates that the sentence fades out.

Each of the 244 lines represents a phrase or utterance rather than a turn. Following Marjorie Goodwin ("Processes," and "Aggravated Correction") a "phrase" here refers to a unit of thought or a message whereas a "turn" represents the totality of phrases uttered by one participant before another participant begins to speak. With the exception of three turns by Deborah (lines 25, 146 and 247), the first two of which were provoked by either Danny or Crystal, the entire dialogue is between Danny and Crystal. (Deborah's line 247 is "It's time to go to bed," which effectively ends the play frame.) Although it was not possible to measure pauses and gaps down to tenths of a second, they are reconstructed as accurately as possible in most cases to within a second and, since they are an integral part of the dialogue, have been assigned line numbers. Note that pauses in dialogue do not necessarily reflect lapses in interaction. Danny and Crystal were actively engaged in manipulating blocks and matchboxes. The vocal pauses probably reflect a few moments during which both children were concentrating on physically maneuvering a block or car; the balance of the dialogue suggests that even during lengthy pauses the two remained cognizant of each other's actions. It is important to remember that even if dialogue at any given moment reflects a crack in the play frame, the non-verbal play frame may still be intact at that moment.

Exploring the Parameters of the Play Frame

Goffman discusses frames constructed by individuals *(Frame Analysis);* here Danny and Crystal are constructing a play frame together. The blocks and matchboxes are objects that serve as both map and territory as Danny and Crystal execute their joint transformation into other objects. The placement and identification of "things" at times solidifies the play structure. Things serve as physical representations through which Danny and Crystal can act and as spatial markers enabling them to work within a spatial frame with its own rules about distance and location. In this sense, things are signs: One matchbox represents a truck, another a police car. As signs, things share the

common property of being able to sustain innumerable transformations based upon no more than shared imagination and thought; a block can represent a church door one moment and a parking garage wall a moment later.

The momentary nature of play and the successive transformations it sustains are especially characteristic of children's play (McDowell "Notes"); it echoes the transitoriness which characterizes child friendships (Opie and Opie 324). In dialogic fashion, play both requires and is a reflection of fluid social organization. Things—here, blocks and matchboxes—are an ideal format for experimenting with transformations and for testing and negotiating roles, identities, and relationships. Although in this sense things are viewed as "maps," signs representing possible courses of movement and action, things also cease to be map in play and become territory (Bateson "Theory"). At certain points in the play session, both Danny and Crystal lose sight of block-as-wall or block-as-ramp and begin to perceive the physical entities which the blocks are to represent as being real. Through this, their own roles become real, supporting the theory that play, although different from everyday reality, is by no means divorced from it (See, for example, Sacks and Schwartzman; as cited in Goodwin "Serious Side" 315).

Things have meaning here because it is in large part through them that Danny and Crystal negotiate and bargain as they wind through the process of designing and constructing their play frame. A substantial portion of their dialogue involves exchanges over their respective ideas and notions of what these things are to mean, or denote.

This is sometimes reflected in questions, as when Crystal asks Danny:

20 Crystal: What are you making?
21 Something else?

and later, in response to his statement, "I'm going to change this into somethin' neater" (line 113), when she inquires:

114 Crystal: **Not a church anymore**?
115 The prettiest little chu:rch?

Negotiation of things also involves judgment and evaluation, as when Crystal assesses one of Danny's changes in the block structure:

108 Crystal: How come you put it out like that?

109 Danny: ( )

110 Crystal: It looked better how it was.
111 [makes small rhythmic noises]

Things are manipulated through roles and rules, and their transformations require consensus. It is when Danny's and Crystal's interpretations of roles and rules differ that the play frame begins to show significant signs of stress, tension, and potential dissolution. Goodwin and others have identified organization and structure of argument among groups of children and some of the kinds of exchange that emerge in them (Goodwin "Processes," "Aggravated," "Serious Side"; Maynard; Sacks): Are dyadic disputes between mixed sex siblings similarly organized? What pattern do Danny and Crystal exhibit as they seek to construct their playframe? Throughout the following pages I attempt to unravel a segment of the dialogue within this play frame to chart its trajectory. I begin with one of the most intense passages of conflict and negotiation:

35 Danny: [singing] Gonna bring my?
36 [chanting] Can I come in?
37 Can I come in?

38 **I don't wanna come in**.

39 Crystal: No.

40 You can't come in.

The mildness of Danny's chanting in lines 35-37 abruptly changes to a rapidly spoken "I don't wanna come in" in the next line. Line 38 directly contradicts lines 36 and 37 ("Can I come in?" repeated) and is the first indication of denial of his intention to enter (presumably) the garage they have made with blocks. The rush characterizing his utterance of line 38 also suggests that Danny somehow knows he is transgressing rules of some sort. Since these rules have not been previously spelled out in this play session, it would seem that they have been formulated throughout the course of previous play sessions and are implicitly understood by Danny and Crystal.

Crystal prefaces her turn by flatly denying Danny entrance, "No" (line 39), continuing:

40 You can't come in.
41 [raising voice] **YOU CAN'T COME IN**
42 you have to a:sk.

Goodwin suggests that "turn-initial prefaces can be characterized by three different intonation contours, depending upon their semantic content" ("Aggravated Correction" 669). The falling-tone and flatness of Crystal's intonation of "No" emphasizes the finality of her opposition to Danny. In the next three lines of her turn, Crystal states the rules, repeating herself in lines 40 and 41 and raising her voice in line 41 for additional emphasis. Thus, in a single turn, four characteristics of what Goodwin has termed "aggravated disagreement" (657) have emerged: 1) signaling opposition in turn-initial position, thus immediately creating what Halliday and Hassan refer to as "polarity" (178); 2) intonation contour, here a falling contour; 3) repetition; and 4) emphasis, here both in the form of volume ("**YOU CAN'T COME IN,**"line 41), and extended vowel length ("a:sk," line 42). These characteristics can be seen repeatedly throughout subsequent turns.

In addition to these characteristics of aggravated disagreement, changes in strategies prolong the dispute that has begun.

43 Danny: I'm not coming in.

44 Crystal: What are you doing there?

45 Danny: I'm going to do something.
46 I'm not coming in all the way.
47 I'm not coming in all the way.
48 Can I come in?

Danny's initial response is to deny that he is "coming in" (line 43). Crystal, perhaps putting more stock in Danny's actions than in his words, asks with suspicion, "What are you doing there?" (line 44). Danny's next turn consists of four phrases. His first phrase is vague and ambiguous; its evasiveness seems an effort to throw Crystal off his tracks. He then radically revises his previous statement; rather than denying his intended action, he repeats himself and qualifies his intended action, "I'm not coming in all the way" (lines 46 and 47). Having hurriedly sought to avoid potential conflict over his transgression of the rules that seem to be at issue, Danny completes his turn by asking "Can I come in?" (line 48). Although this can be interpreted as a contradiction of his previous turn phrase in which he stated that he was not coming in, it can also be viewed as concession on his part, a recognition that he must negotiate to forestall a brewing dispute.

As we see in successive turns, however, these two questions used as consecutive turn-conclusions have been unsuccessful at stemming disagreement over the rules that are to guide the construction of play. Crystal's next

turn, in which she seeks to correct Danny's attempt to disregard the rules, continues the disagreement.

Crystal again prefaces her turn with "No," followed by another appeal to the rules, "You're not supposed to=" (line 49), although this time an "ummm" before "no" hints at a moment of indecisiveness on her part.

49 Crystal: Ummmm // [firmly] **No**. You're not supposed to=

50 Danny: I just have to drop the truck off.

51 Crystal: O:**KAY**. Then I'll have to **dri:ve my truck**.

52 Danny: Oh, come on
53 Can't **I** drive it i:n?

54 Crystal: [firmly] **No**. You drive my truck.

Just as Crystal says "no," Danny interrupts, informing her, "I just have to drop the truck off' (line 50). There is an element of paradox here. The dispute concerning trucks is clearly within the play frame, but it also embodies a negotiation of just what that frame is, or rather, who governs its construction. The very act of arguing here is the creation of the play frame.

Danny's qualifier "just" is his next strategy to get Crystal to agree to a change in the rules. She resolutely begins her turn with "o:**KAY**" her emphasis on "kay" followed by a sentence beginning with "then" indicates that she has made her decision about how the rules are to be followed. Danny next appeals to her sense of reason, prefacing his request with "Oh, come on (line 52). Crystal's next two turns are prefaced with an aggravated "No." Her refusal to back down continues the series of disagreement turns. The severity of the disagreement escalates beginning with Danny's next turn.

57 Danny: I'm **JUST** driving it in.
58 **OPEN THE DOOR**.
59 I'm going to drive it **whether you like it or not**.

60 Crystal: **What?**

62 Danny: I'm going to go **if you like it or no:t.**

63 Crystal: **WHAT?**

64 Danny: I'm going to go **WHETHER YOU LIKE IT OR NO:T.**

Danny begins his turn by again seeking to minimize his desired action with the qualifier "just" (line 57). However, in the next phrase of this turn, he changes strategies, using an imperative to command Crystal to "**OPEN THE DOOR**" (line 58). He concludes his turn by threatening Crystal with overriding her expressed sense of the point of negotiation, "whether you like it or not" (lines 61 and 62). It is difficult to determine whether Crystal's next two turns, in which she asks, with a rising intonation, "What?" (lines 60 and 63), stem from a genuine inability to hear Danny's statements or whether they are disagreement prefaces, as discussed by Goodwin ("Aggravated Correction" 668), intended to challenge, irritate, or refute Danny. Whichever the case, here they set up a brief cycle in which to each of Crystal's turns Danny repeats his previous threat, "I'm going to go if you like it or no:t" and in which each turn is uttered more forcefully than the last. What had begun as negotiation and bartering over the design of the play frame now seems to have resulted in a standstill. Bateson remarks that "threat is another phenomenon which resembles play in that actions denote, but are different from, other actions" ("Theory" 42). This might be an instance where we can simultaneously invert "This is play." to "Is this play?" and "This is threat." to "Is this threat?" As both Danny and Crystal become more firmly entrenched in their own perspectives, they become less able to resolve the dispute at hand and slide further out of the play frame in which they began their dialogue.

Crystal's next turn, in which she pleads "Do::n't" (line 65), marks the beginning of a reversal in this disagreement sequence.

65 Crystal: Do::n't.

66 Danny: [impatiently] I'm dropping off your truck.
67 Look what you **DID**.
68 [car noises]

69 Crystal: (**Back**, Danny.)
70 I can fix it **ea**:sily.

71 Danny: [**car noises**]
72 No, you **didn't**.
73 You didn't put that together like that.

74 Crystal: We:lll, then you better git your **truck**.
75 'Cause it doesn't know where to go:.

After impatiently responding "I'm dropping off your truck" (line 66), Danny shifts from his defensive position to an offensive one as he criticizes Crystal, saying, "Look what you did" (line 67). This is the beginning of a shift in the nature of the argument as well; for rather than concerning itself with the rules, it concerns the design of things with which they are playing. Rather than deny anything, Crystal concedes responsibility for the act, stating that she can fix what she has altered.

The disagreement is continued, however, when in Danny's next turn he corrects Crystal's remedial actions. He begins with "No, you didn't" (line 72), repeating part of line 72 in line 73 and elaborating on it for emphasis, "You didn't put that together like that." Crystal's next turn shifts the focus of responsibility to Danny again. She prefaces her turn with "We:ll, then you better. . . ," as if to warn Danny of his own responsibility. She continues her turn by providing an explanation for why he must act, thereby tempering her order, " 'Cause it doesn't know where to go:" (line 75).

This is the beginning of the end of the disagreement sequence.

76 Danny: [car noises]

77 Crystal: It's going to park right here.
78 Okay, git your **tru:ck**.

79 Danny: You have to bring it to me.

Rather than reply directly to Crystal, Danny continues to make car noises, possibly his way of forcing closure upon the disagreement sequence. Crystal expands upon her turn, pointing out where the truck will park before issuing a directive to Danny, "Okay, git your tru:ck" (line 78). His next turn is interesting because it instructs Crystal, "You have to bring it to me" (line 79), without sounding like an imperative from him. He accomplishes this by beginning the phrase with "you have to," a phrase implying obligation on the part of the hearer but, lacking a first-person pronoun, succeeds in sounding as if there is no person directing its use.

Crystal's response, although exasperated, does not contribute to the dispute in the same way as a direct refusal would have done.

80 Crystal: I **JUST** we:nt.
81 You should've **told** me./ /
82 (truck)

83 Danny: I have to walk all the way?
84 That's about ten **mi:les**.

Crystal's turn communicates inconvenience, but not refusal or impossibility, and paves the way for Danny's next turn. Both of these turns serve as a transition back to the sweeter side of the play frame, in which lightness and pretend again reign over excessive seriousness and willfulness. In his turn Danny is able to use his imagination again as he first queries, "I have to walk all the way?" (line 83), followed by an imaginative, non inflammatory estimate of the time it will take him, "That's about ten **mi:les** (line 84). Following a lapse in communication in which Danny and Crystal were unable to distinguish between map and territory, these latter two turns, in which the siblings grossly exaggerate the inconvenience of a pretend distance, manage to reestablish a distinction between map and territory.

Goodwin has identified pejorative person descriptors, such as "nuckelhead" and "egghead," found within disagreements among urban black children ("Processes"). In only one dispute sequence in this play session are pejorative descriptors used. Danny's use of "dumb" and "weird" are not allowed within the limits of the play frame, as Crystal makes clear by immediately appealing to Deborah-this is one of only two instances during the entire play session in which Crystal breaks the play frame by appealing to an outside authority; Danny's description of Crystal's block design as "weird" and "dumb" is unacceptable.

144 Crystal: Mom
145 (1)

146 Deborah: [faintly] Hmm.

147 Crystal: Danny says my umm. how you come out it looks umm,
148 **du:mb.**

Danny immediately defends himself, reporting to Deborah, "I said it looks weirder than // other places" (line 149). When Crystal interrupts him to correct what he is telling Deborah, "He says it looks like that and he says it looks dumb just because I put that **block** // there" (lines 150 and 151), Danny again interrupts her, denying her coverage of the affair and repeating his version of what he did say: **''No, I said it looks wei:rder than other pla:ces**" (line 152 and 153).

Even though this disagreement sequence is ostensibly about the design of their blocks, Crystal feels justified in breaking the play frame when Danny's judgments become pejorative. The threat to the play frame is short-lived, however. Deborah does not continue to interact with Danny and Crystal, and they do not pursue their reportage. Instead, following several

seconds of no verbal exchange at all, Crystal begins singing, absent-mindedly, a short non-sensical song. Danny is also quickly absorbed in play again, devoting the next few seconds to reproducing car noises.

One other extended disagreement sequence concerns block design. Crystal begins this with a negative imperative, telling Danny, "Do:n 't, I don't want you to wreck it" (line 199). Danny's response, "I thought you wanted it how it was," attempts to clarify his understandings of Crystal's design purpose. Crystal prefaces her next three turns with "No":

200 Danny: I thought you wanted it how it was.

201 Crystal: No, I want it like it was be**fo:re**.

202 Danny: I'm doin' that.

203 Crystal: No: Like it **was**.

204 Danny: You couldn't get in that way.

205 Crystal: No, I liked it liked that.
206 Like it **was**.
207 Do:on't.

Although Danny is offering to fix the blocks to suit Crystal's design wishes, he challenges her ideas at the same time, continuing to offer her alternatives:

210 Danny: Or do you want it that just blocked off
211 like that with that there.
212 And you want the ramp up there
213 (3) And that thing back where it was.
214 Do you want it yes or no?
215 **Tell** me now.

216 Crystal: Yes.

217 Danny: Like it was?
218 (1)
219 Crystal: No, like **this**.

220 Danny: Where, but how'd you get in?

221 Crystal: well, you take **this** off
222 And then you put that there
223 And then you take **this** off
224 And you
225 Do:on't.

All of Danny's turns here begin as design questions. When Crystal responds affirmatively to Danny's question, Danny presents an alternative design, impatiently ending his turn with an imperative demanding immediate response from Crystal (line 214). In limiting Crystal's choice of answer to either "yes" or "no," Danny succeeds in retaining power over the block design-in spite of having asked Crystal about her preferences. Although Danny directs multiple questions concerning her preferences to Crystal, ultimately he seems to ignore her wishes. The play session begins to disintegrate as the two again begin to dispute rules:

226 Danny: This is still **mine** Crystal.

227 Crystal: [to Deborah] Danny gave it to me
228 and now he's saying it's his again.

229 Danny: No, I'm not. I never **gave** it to you.
230 Crystal: When I said, Can I have it then you said **ye:s**.

231 Danny: Okay, I **did**, but now I don't **want** you to.
232 And anyway, it's **mine**.

233 Crystal: [laughs] Don't change the rules.
234 You can't change the rules after you have them.
235 [strange noise] Maah.

236 Danny: Crystal, it's **MY** church now. It's still mine, o**KAY**?
237 Crystal: Then where did you ( )

238 (1)

239 Danny: OKAY, oKAY, BUT I WANT IT **BACK** NOW.

240 Crystal: No, you can't have it no:w.

241 I'm gonna give it to Mom.

242 Danny: **OKAY**, o**KAY**, I, I, I can do what **I** want it now.

243 Crystal: ( )

244 Danny: Crysta:l

245 Crystal: ( )

Danny wants complete control of the objects of play, using the possessive "my" or "mine" three times within a span of four turns and "I want" twice within the same span of turns. He is insistent, emphasizing "**MY**" (line 236), and reiterating within the same turn, "It's still mine, o**KAY**?" His repetition of "okay," both in lines 239 and 242, betray his frustration and impatience. Crystal alters herinitial response pattern of objecting by pointing out Danny's contradictions, "When I said, Can I have it then you **said ye:s**" (line 230), and invoking the rules, "Don 't change the rules" (line 233), "You can't change the rules after you have them" (line 234), and finally appealing to their mother. Their dialogue has ceased to have any of the elements of transformation of objects, roles, or design in it; it now exists outside of a play frame.

Goodwin "described ways in which interaction occurring in the midst of a specific play activity, jump rope, is continuous with that outside the play frame" ("Serious Side" 315). The game provides a forum not separate from everyday reality but rather a part of the social order. Blocks, although not as highly patterned an activity as organized jump rope games, is still rule-governed. The disputes and disagreements in the play session examined here are part of Danny and Crystal's social order as they use their blocks and matchboxes to negotiate design of the play environment, rules and roles in their shared play frame. Because they are dealing with pretend, or fabrications, they have the chance to "play the world backwards" (Goffman 1975: 133), making their activity more flexible than reality. But as Goffman also points out, "the world of practice is both simpler and more complex than real-life situations" (1975:65); here the complexity is reflected in the constant arbitration necessary to sustain the play frame.

Gender, Age, and Speaking Style

Beginning in the 1970s, several scholars approached the study of sex and language from various angles. Robin Lakoff presented widely-cited evidence

that more frequent use of tag questions by women than by men may reflect women's uncertainty, tentativeness, and perhaps lack of self-esteem; Deborah Jones's work recognized gossip as a legitimate genre for study, having its own rules of communicative competence (Hymes); and various anthropologists and dialectologist have examined phonological, morphological, and lexical differences between the sexes in numerous cultures (see Coates). Only a few scholars have focused their work on children. Trudgill's work in England found a clear differentiation in pronunciation between six- to ten-year-old girls and boys. Goodwin has found that girls and boys in both same and mixed-sex play groups in Philadelphia use different "directives"—for example, beginning utterances with "let's," indicating cooperation rather than the competition which characterizes boys' play ("Processes,""Aggravated Correction," "Children's Arguing").

None of this work is conclusive; the studies by each of these scholars seem to have multiplied exponentially the questions needing to be asked and reexamined concerning the relationship of gender and language. Some of these questions can be applied to Danny and Crystal's play: Does one or the other employ the interrogative more frequently? What does a comparison of their respective directives ("Aggravated Correction") yield? How does the content of their speech differ, and how are their speaking styles different?

Goodwin's work was with groups of neighborhood children between the ages of four and fourteen and was carried out over a period of 18 months; whereas, the dialogue examined here is dyadic, between siblings, and limited to one short play session. All of these may account for the different results I found in this dialogue.

Although initially examining this dialogue for "directives," or instructions to others, I eventually surmised that they could not be separated from a larger category of what I labeled "challenges." Challenges sometimes resemble Goodwin's directives; as often, they are alternatively direct protests of varying degrees, revisions of previous statements, criticisms, judgments, and corrections to each other-all efforts to shape the playas it was happening. Goodwin has pointed out that power is an important element in conversation ("Processes of Dispute Management"); these challenges in one way or another all reveal an effort on the part of the speaker to either assert or reclaim some power over the direction and design of the play frame.

Danny begins four of his utterances with "no," while Crystal begins ten of hers with "no." Overall, 41 of her utterances can be considered challenges, but only 26 of Danny's. This does not necessarily suggest that Crystal is being more aggressive. It could imply that, since she is younger and/or a girl, she must work harder to continually assert herself in the presence of an older brother who is dominating their play. Her numerous "no's" reflect her

struggle to defend her role as co-architect of the play frame. It would be interesting to see if in a year or two she has developed more sophisticated, subtle and, perhaps, more effective strategies to defend her interests.

Some of Danny's other utterances might be considered what Sacks calls "impression management" ("Button, Button"). These are a tacit form of power management. For example, Danny says "I don't want to come in," "I don't want to come in." In the next line he loses his restraint, saying "Not all the way." The sudden switch indicates that he does indeed want to come in. Beginning his turn by stating he did not want to come in was thus a way of dissuading Crystal of his real intentions and an attempt to manipulate her response.

What other differences are there in Danny and Crystal's language? Coates has observed that girls' and boys' speech differs prosodically, that girls use a greater variety of intonation with more frequent shifts in tones (125). I have identified 19 instances in this dialogue where Crystal draws out and emphasizes her vowels, compared with only six such instances by Danny, one of which was a sound, "bee:p," rather than an actual word. Both Danny and Crystal use rising, falling, and level tones to express themselves; at times softening their voices and at times raising them. Danny makes more noises simulating machinery—police sirens, car engines—than does Crystal.

One theory on the use of questions in conversation states that they have a nurturing role; another posits that they are a sign of subservience. One researcher suggests that questions display greater control over the conversation than statements, since they demand or command certain responses and propel the conversation forward along a certain path (Cameron, et at). In this "strip of discourse," twelve of a total of Crystal's 104 utterances are questions, and thirteen of a total of Danny's 98 utterances are questions.[1] Looking more closely at the questions asked, it becomes evident that the use of many of these questions here is quite different from questions adults sometimes employ to enhance and nurture conversation. Neither are they calculated to propel the conversation forward; this is one indication of how radically different the dialogue in play is from conversation.[2] How, then, do Danny and Crystal use questions? The questions Danny and Crystal ask of each other seem to have layers of messages and motives; all are focused at some level on the actions and intentions of the other.

One of Danny's questions (line 23) is directed to Deborah, and another, "Can I come in?", is repeated three times, sung in lines 36 and 37, and then spoken more forcefully in line 48. Another request, "Can't I drive it i:in?" (line 53), is performed again in line 55 with the phrase "at least" added ("Can I at least drive it in?") to lobby Crystal to comply with his request by suggesting that it is minimal. His next question, "I have to walk all the way?"

(line 83), followed by "That's about ten **mi:les**," is a playful protest. Line 178, a request, "Can I use one of those ramps over there Crystal?", implies Crystal's proprietorship over some of the blocks. (This is one of the few lines in the entire dialogue establishing rules regarding proprietorship in their play.)

The next four questions to some extent solicit information: "Do you like it better how it was Crystal?" (189), "You like it like this?" (208), "Like it was?" (217), "Where, but how'd you get in?" (220). The first three of these solicit Crystal's opinion, with line 208 perhaps questioning her taste. Line 217 questions one of her block designs by suggesting that she has failed to include an entrance. From this perspective, this question might be seen as an example of mitigation, for rather than directly accusing Crystal of doing something wrong, his question format provides her room to explain her design. Danny's last question, "Crystal, it's my church now. It's still mine, o**KAY** (line 236), is really not a question so much as it is a threat or warning to Crystal that he intends to keep the church.

Crystal's first three questions "What are you making?" (20), "something else?" (21), "What are you doing there?" (44), all seek information from Danny about his action. Line 60, "**What**," is repeated in line 63. Line 108, "How come you put it out like that?" is asked partially for information but also possibly as a way of challenging Danny's action. Crystal's next five questions, "**Not a church anymore**?" (114), "The prettiest little church?" (115), "You're putting that in the middle?" (116), "It isn't" (121), "What is it?" (122), are all of a series that mildly protect the construction changes Danny is engaging in (lines 112 and 113) and, at the same time, seem designed to get him to clarify his aims and design. The sense of mild bewilderment in this packet of questions portrays Crystal's relative newness at this process called negotiation. The double diminutive, "prettiest little," reflects an aesthetic sense that contrasts significantly with Danny's utterances. The next question, "Do you need these?" (line 182), is informational, and Crystal's last question, "If you don't want to play with it anymore could I?" (line 198), is a request.

There seems to be little difference in the use Danny and Crystal make of the question format. Almost all of their questions can be seen as veiled challenges or as reconnaissance queries whose purpose is to test the play ground. For the most part their questions are frank, lacking any softening prefaces or turns of phrase that might characterize a conversation by adults. This lack of formality might be seen as a sign of sibling comfort.

One final question concerning Danny's and Crystal's relative styles is the content of their utterances. Danny's world is one of cops, fast cars, and arrests-all typically boys' concerns. Crystal is content responding to this kind of pretend, but at no time does she initiate it. Although she makes noises,

she does not simulate car engines as does Danny. Several of Danny's utterances are threats. Crystal shows every intention of designing and adhering to rules and resists Danny's efforts to trespass them, but she does not make any threats. When she needs to assert her opinion, she follows up her challenge with relatively lengthy explanations for the position she has taken. Danny does not offer the same involved explanations for his position; this may suggest that he is more comfortable feeling dominant than is Crystal.

I have stated above that a large number of Danny's and Crystal's utterances can be construed as attempts to gain power and to influence the trajectory of their play. In spite of the power element in their play, there is an equally strong effort to maintain the play frame; they share an affinity for keeping the reality they are creating alive. Sometimes this is accomplished by sustaining each other's pretend (Crystal's "That boy is going to arrest me), offering choice (Danny's "Do you want it like it was?"), and exaggeration (Danny's "I have to walk all the way?/ That's about ten **MI:LES**."); all of these function as negotiation.

One of the most intriguing possibilities of the ways in which the two negotiate to maintain the play frame is through the use of nonsense sounds and speech. Non-speech sound seems to be a way to back off from conflict when it threatens to jeopardize the play frame. Whereas silence might crack the play frame, nonspeech sound sustains it while channeling conflict away. As mentioned above, both Danny and Crystal engage in "nonsense" singing; these utterances lack the structure of grammar. Words without meaning would appear to carry no message content. Their message, though, may be an important "metamessage," akin to the function of poetic embellishment that McDowell has discussed as being integral to conversation ("Poetic Rites"). That is, the nonsense songs abet in reinvoking the play frame when its edges begin to show signs of strain. They diminish the power struggle inherent in communication via words and sentences.

The limitless number of realities to be built into a play frame also establishes grounds for power struggles and for assertion of one's will. The play frame requires continual shifts in means and message and a willingness to forego resolution. Through their respective styles, Danny and Crystal demonstrate their "communicative competence" by continually renewing their shared play frame.

NOTES

1. This total number of utterances here includes sung passages but not noises, e.g., Danny's expression of car motors and their "nonsense" utterances.

2. Little girls playing tea party or house seem to know exactly how to mimic these nurturing questions in simulated conversations. This raises some interesting questions dealing with reflexivity in children's play conversations.

TRANSCRIPT

Crystal: Nuuh uuuh, this is the po**li:ce**.

Danny: You should be arrested.

Crystal: Nuuh uuuh! [Sort of laughter]
(Don't wanna be ( ) arrested.

Danny: This is another police but he just pretend
pretends like he is but now he doesn't have his fast car so
he can't **catch** anybody.
If he had it he'd go fphhhhheeeeeeeewww

Crystal: He'd **chase** 'em.

Danny: He'd put his bombs out on the side
and go phheeeooowwww
and blow their car to smithereens.

Crystal: dheww, dhewww dheww dheww dheww dheww dheww dhewwww

Danny: They don't park down there.
Only the **trucks** do.

Crystal: Nooooo, I don't

Danny: ( ) make it into in... in**ven**ient. [convenient]

Crystal: Can't just umm trucks and cars
'cause I don't **like** it back the::re.

Crystal: What are you making?
Something else?

Danny: [to Deborah, their mother] ( ) playin' a game
You can't talk?
You're not talking.

Deborah: Yeah I am.

Danny: [chanting] 1-2-3
4-5-6,
7-8-9-10
11,12.
12:00 o'clock.

(1)

No, it's not any of those. It's ( )

( ): [Car noises again, softly] Dheww, dhwee

(3)

Danny: [singing] Gonna bring my?
[chanting] Can I come in?
Can I come in?

I don't wanna come in.

Crystal: **No.**
You can't come in.
[raising voice] **YOU CAN'T COME IN**
You have to **a:sk.**

Danny: I'm not coming in.

Crystal: What are you doing there?

Danny: I'm going to do something.
I'm not coming in all the way.
I'm not coming In all the way.
Can I come in?

Crystal: Ummmm//[firmly] **No**. You're not supposed to=

Danny: I just have to drop the truck off.

Crystal: O:**KAY**. Then I'll have to **dri:ve my truck**.

Danny: Oh, come on
Can't **I** drive it i:n?

Crystal: [firmly] **No**. You drive my truck.

Danny: Can I at least drive it in?

Crystal: **No.**

Danny: I'm **JUST** driving it in.
OPEN THE DOOR.
I'm going to drive it **whether you like it or not.**

Crystal: **What?**

(1)

Danny: I'm going to go **if you like it or not.**

Crystal: **WHAT?**

I'm going to go **WHETHER YOU LIKE IT OR NO:T.**

Crystal: Do::n't.

Danny: [Impatiently] I'm dropping off your **truck.**

Look what you **DID.**
[car noises]

Crystal: (**Back**, Danny)

Crystal: I can fix it **ea**:sily.

Danny: [**car noises**]

No, you **didn't**.
You didn't put that together like that.

Crystal: We:lll, then you better git your **truck**.
'Cause it doesn't know where to go:.

Danny: [car noises]

Crystal: It's going to park right here.
Okay, git your **tru:ck.**

Danny: You have to bring it to me.

Crystal: I **JUST** we:nt.
You should've **told** me.//
(truck)

Danny: I have to walk all the way?
That's about ten **mi:les**.

Crystal: I'm pretending this car drove there.

[car noises again- several seconds]

Danny: Beep beep bee:p

( ): [various noises; no dialogue]

Crystal: I'm waiting until it's **dark** outside.
That's when it's ( )

(20) [intermittent car noises by Danny]

Crystal: One person can't come
because it has to walk all the way over there
and climb up there and walk over right there
and walk right there
and walk right there
and then walk into the house.
And it has to get in **this** car.

Danny: Hey, police, I'm going to ar**rest** y:ou.
[car noises]

Crystal: Boy oh boy, that boy is going to ar**rest** me
[mock alarm]
(4)
I can't even hear you.

Danny: I know. ( ) [car sounds]

Crystal: It's coming in.
(3)

How come you put it out like that?

Danny: ( )

Crystal: It looked better how it was. [makes small rhythmic noises]

Danny: I'm going to change this into whatever you want. I'm going to change this into somethin' neater.

Crystal: **Not a church anymore?**
The prettiest little chu:rch?

Crystal: Go::lly. You're putting that in the middle? Our cars could run into it and then they can't=
[softly] That's right.
Now the cars can't get in the other **side**.

Danny: It's not a church anymore.

Crystal: It isn't
(3) What is it?

Danny: It's just this thing.

Crystal: But it **has** to be a church or **some**thing.

Danny: Okay, it's still a church but it's **dif**ferent.

Crystal: Now the cars can't get over to the other si:de.

Danny: There.
They will be.
(20)

Crystal: [softly] Hey don't leave that block lying there.
( )
(7)

Danny: No.

Crystal: huuh [intake of breath] Yeah!!
(2-3)

Danny: Don't put it on that one. Put idon [it on] the other

one.
Dumb.

Crystal: No, I know ( )
( )
No, I just want to do it.

Danny: Weei:rd.
(2)

Crystal: Mom
(1)

Deborah: [faintly] Hmm.

Crystal: Danny says my umm. how you come out it looks umm, **du:mb**

Danny: I said it looks weirder than // other places.

Crystal: He says it looks like **that** and he says it looks dumb just because I put that **block** // there.

Danny: [forcefully] **No, I said it looks wei:rder than other pla:ces.**

( ): [soft noises]

Crystal: [singing] If you do nothing
then this is what you'll play
Hee haw,
hee haw,
hee haw, hee haw, hee haw
Hee haw,
// hee haw,
hee haw, hee haw, hee haw

Danny: [car noises]

Crystal: No, I don't wanna go up that way because I can't get in
the other side so I'm gonna go a different
Oh! **pooey**, I was gonna go that way and I needed that ramp the:re.
Danny: (Don't ha wa eh

Eh wah be go be dey
Enot ta)

Crystal: [singing, this time in high, almost unintelligible voice, silly, same song as above]
[again, sort of preoccupied. Then same tune, humming, no real words, except for hee haw]
Oh oh hee haw
Oh Loo:k

Danny: Can we use one of those ramps over there Crystal?
(5)

Crystal: No:
Look at the **blocks** that you don't need.
Do you need these?
Oh, I know what I can do with these.

(1)

Danny: I'd really '**preciate** it if you gave me two of 'em. [softly] But I know you won't.

Crystal: Oh, I know.

Danny: I want this to be wrecked.
Do you like it better how it was Crystal?

Crystal: [softly] Yess.

Danny: I can't believe you do.
[car noises, then tune Crystal was singing, briefly, but different with consonants] Vee vaw
vee vaw
vaa vaa vaa
(8)

Crystal: ( )
If you don't want to play with it anymore could I?
Do:n't, I don't want you to wreck it.

Danny: I thought you wanted it how it was.

Crystal: No: I want it like it was **befo:re.**
Danny: I'm doin' that.

Crystal: No: Like it **was.**

Danny: You couldn't get in that way.

Crystal: No, I liked it like that.
Like it **was.**
Do:on't.

Danny: You like it like this?

Crystal: **Yeah!**

Danny: Or do you want it that just blocked off
like that with that there.
And you want the ramp up there
(3) And that thing back where it was.
Do you want it yes or no?
Tell me now.

Crystal: Yes.

Danny: Like it was?
(1)

Crystal: No, like **this.**

Danny: Where, but how'd you get in?

Crystal: Well, you take **this** off
And then you put that there
And then you take **this** off
And you
Do:on't.

Danny: This is still **mine** Crystal.

Crystal: [to Deborah] Danny gave it to me
and now he's saying it's his again.

Danny: No, I'm not. I never **gave** it to you.

Crystal: When I said, Can I have it then you said **ye:s**

Danny: Okay, I **did**, but now I don't **want** you to.
And anyway, it's **mine.**

233 Crystal: [laugh] Don't change the rules.
234 You can't change the rules after you have them.
235 [strange noise] Maah.

236 Danny: Crystal, it's **MY** church now. It's still mine, o**KAY?**

237 Crystal: Then where did you ( )
238 (1)

239 Danny: OKAY, oKAY, BUT I WANT IT **BACK** NOW.

240 Crystal: No, you can't have it no:w.

241 I'm gonna give it to Mom.

242 Danny: O**KAY**, o**KAY**, I, I, I can do what **I** want it now.

243 Crystal: ( )

244 Danny: Crysta:l

245 Crystal: ( )

246 Danny: [to Deborah] Mama::

247 Deborah: It's time to go to bed.

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