

# Children's Games as Mechanisms for Easing Ethnic Interaction in Ethnically Heterogeneous Communities: A Nigerian Case

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## 1. Discussion of Theory

Properly speaking consideration of children's games belongs to the broader category of play. In that category there is a wide range of human activity too long studied in isolation: jokes, relations of privileged familiarity, riddles, puns, sporting events *etc.* Some areas now considered part of play were at best until recently only peripheral or esoteric interests of the anthropologist. For whatever reason, this regrettable neglect now seems to be at an end. A number of recent articles (HANDELMAN and KAPFERER 1972; BATESON 1955; MILLER 1973, and others) attest to the lively interest in the subject among anthropologists.

This paper focusses on one theoretical issue: the relationship between children's games and what GOFFMAN (1959) has termed the front and back stage areas of social interaction. In particular, it looks at children's games as mechanisms for socialization and in that respect offers some methodological suggestions regarding the study of cultural imprinting of patterns. Games clearly reflect underlying cultural patterns and prepare children, including adolescents, for proper interaction in the "real" world beyond games. Thus, there may be games common to members of all ethnic groups in a heterogeneous area while at the same time there may be games reserved for members of a given ethnic group. The sharing of common cognitive patterns found in