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Play Activity of Preschool Children: Joint Play with Parents, Game Preferences and Favorite Toys

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The article analyses the representations of preschool children's parents about their child's play activity. First of all the research deals with the consideration of place of joint play of children and parents in general structure of family leisure time and involvement of parents in child's play (as a participant or as a manager of a role-playing game). Besides we analyze preschoolers' game preferences: favorite toys and games of children.

The article is based on the materials obtained from the sociological poll of 1936 parents, whose children attend Moscow kindergartens. The research was conducted by the Institute of Sociology of Education (Russian Academy of Education) in 1997. During the analysis of the materials special attention was given to the influence of various demographic and socially-stratification factors on the answers of parents about play activity of preschoolers.

Keywords: preschool childhood, joint play of parents and children, family leisure activities, games and toys preferences.

The article is devoted to the representations of preschool children parents about their children's play activity. Special attention is given to the consideration of place of joint play of parents with their child in general structure of family leisure time, involvement of parents in child's play and also activity of adult as a manager of a role-playing game. Besides we analyze representations of parents about game preferences of preschoolers: what toys and games are preferred by their children.

The representation about play as leading activity in preschool age is accepted in Russian psychology (L.Vygotsky, A.Leontev, D.Elkonin

etc.) (Vygotsky, 1966, Smirnova, 1997, Elkonin, 1987, Elkonin et al. 1989). At the present moment a great number of researches concern features of children's play and its influence on development and formation of child's personality (Smirnova et al., 2005, 2006, 1997). In this article children's play is discussed in a special way. The researchers have made an attempt to consider parent's opinion towards preschoolers game.

The basis of the article is represented by the materials obtained from the sociological poll of 1936 parents, whose children attend Moscow kindergartens. It continues a whole cycle of our works about preschool sociology (Sobkin et al.,

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2012, 2002, 2011, 2011a). During the analysis of these materials we will try to estimate influence of various demographic and socially-stratification factors on the answers of parents about play activity of preschoolers.

Joint play in the structure of family leisure time

In order to find out what place is occupied by joint play of parents with their child in general structure of a family leisure time a special question was asked to respondents concerning the typical way of spending free time with their child at home. The general average data on preferences of various kinds of joint activity at leisure time by parents of preschoolers is given in Table 1.

Apparently from the data resulted in the table, among various kinds of activity preference to joint play with the child at leisure time is given by almost a half of interrogated parents (49,1 %). And significant distinctions in answers of fathers and mothers are not revealed. At the same time it is indicative that the gender of a child makes significant impact on the opinions of parents concerning joint play. Parents of boys choose joint play more often, than parents of

girls (accordingly: 52,2 % and 44,5 %; p = .001). It is peculiar both for fathers, and for mothers (Fig.1).

Parents' preferences of play activity in leisure structure also depend on the age of the child (Fig.2). Thus, parents of the senior preschool children (5-7 year old children) choose the given type of activity much less often, than parents of younger children. It is important to highlight that when a child reaches this age the general structure of joint leisure of parents with him also changes.

And finally, the material status of a family plays also an important role: needy parents choose joint play with their child essentially less often than prosperous (accordingly: 42.8% and 51.6%; p = .0004).

Involvement of parents in their child's play

In order to find out the degree of parental involvement in play activity with their child, a special question has been offered to the respondents: «Do you play together with your child?». It is necessary to notice that answers allow to find out not only the inclusiveness of parents in their child's play but also to distinguish

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Table 1. J	Joint activit	v of parents	with their	cniia at i	eisure time	(%)

Types of joint activity	%
Reading of books	53,9
Joint play	49,1
Walks	44,5
Watching TV	25,5
Watching DVD, video	18,3
Involving the child into housework	16,8
Building, constructing	16,2
Modeling, drawing	15,2
Music listening, singing	10,2
Playing the computer	6,1
The child organizes his free time himself	9,3

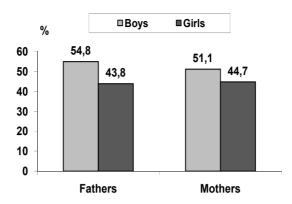


Fig. 1. Answers of fathers and mothers of boys and girls about joint play with their children (%)

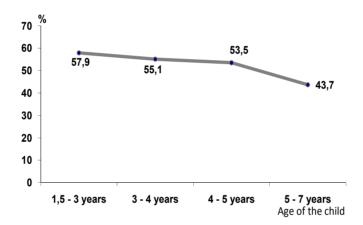


Fig. 2. Percentage of parents, preferring to spend their free time at home with the child in a joint play in dependence of the age of the child (%)

those reasons in connection with which parents don't take part in joint play, for example: child's preference of independent, separate play; inaptitude of parents to play with their child; lack of free time for joint play. Distribution of parents' answers to this question is given in Table 2.

The analysis of the received answers shows that the involvement of parents in joint play depends on the child's age (Fig.3). Thus, with children of 4-5 years play 65,1 % of parents, whereas with children of 5-7 years - 59,1 % (p=.04). Moreover parents of the senior preschool children (5-7 years) more often, than parents of 4-5 year-old children notice that their children

prefer to play independently (accordingly: 25,1 % and 20,1 %, p = .04).

The graph shows that up to the senior preschool age there is a gradual withdrawal of parents from joint play with their child and child's orientation to independent, separate play increases. Saying differently at the stage of senior preschool age a child's play activity becomes more self-dependent.

Distinctions of parents' involvement in joint play degree depending on child's gender which we have already mentioned is confirmed. Thus, parents of girls mark their lack of free time for joint play more frequently than parents

Answer to the question	%
Yes, I play together with my child	63,7
No, my child prefers to play by himself	22,5
No, I am not able	3,0
Unfortunately, I don't have enough time	10,2

Table 2. Distribution of answers of parents to the question on their involvement in joint play with their child (%)

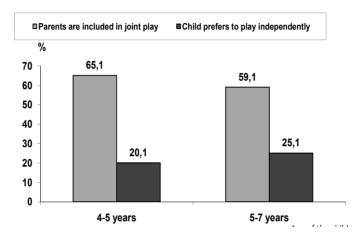


Fig. 3. Involvement of parents in joint play depending on the age of the child (%)

of boys (accordingly: 11,7 % and 9,0 %; p = .04). Gender of parents also has a significant impact on their involvement in a play with the child. So, mothers answer that they play with their child in 65,7 % of cases, and fathers – in 58,3 % (p = .001).

Influence of socially-stratification factors is also traced. Parents with higher education note their involvement in joint play with the child more often than parents with secondary education (accordingly: 66,5 % and 60,6 %; p = .02). In comparison parents with secondary education mark independence of their child in play more frequently than parents with higher education (accordingly: 25,7 % and 20,6 %; p = .01). It is remarkable that unmarried mothers, in comparison with married, more often mark their inability to play with their child (accordingly: 4,6 % and 1,7 %; p = .004).

Activity of parent as a manager of a role-playing game

For the analysis of adult's activity as organizer of a role-playing game for the child a question on whether parents invent plots for play or fairy tales for their child was asked (Table 3).

Results received show that parents invent plots for games to children till 5 years much more often, thus organizing their play activity. For example, for children of 4-5 years 31,9 % of parents think out fairy tales and plots for games, and for children of 5-7 years – only 22,9 % (p = .001). Age dynamics is shown in Fig. 4.

Again it confirms results of the previous analysis of the play activity age features. At the age of 5-7 years serious changes in the structure of preschoolers play activity occur, as well as the role of an adult in this activity changes. If earlier

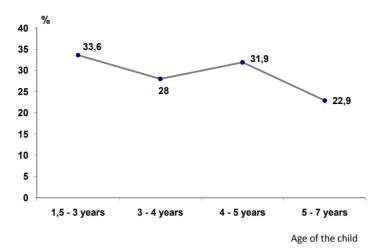


Fig. 4. Percentage of parents who regularly invent fairy tales and plots for games for their child accordingly to the child's age (%)

Table 3. Distribution of answers of respondents to the question «Do you invent fairy tales for your child, interesting stories, plots for the game?» (%)

Answer to the question	%
Yes, but it is rare enough	60,1
Yes, regularly	26,9
No	5,0
I am not able	4,5
Unfortunately, I don't have enough time	3,5

adult played an important role in the organization of children's play, then (since 5 years) a child becomes more independent in his play activity. Pointing out that the answer «I am not able to invent plots for games» is more often given by parents of children older than 4 years (Fig.5). If parents of 3-4 year-old children note inability to think out plots for games in 1,7 % of cases, then among parents of children of 4-5 years this answer is chosen by 5,4 % of parents (p = .04).

Therefore at the age of 5-7 years the structure of organization of play activity changes. First of all it can be seen from the increase of child's self-dependence, escalating independence in his play activity. The withdrawal of parents from

joint play with their child is observed. It can be seen that by the age of 4 years parents often show uncertainty in their ability to participate in their child's play and to become an organizer of a role-playing game. In other words, at a transition stage to a role-playing game, the adult often appears incapable of its organization.

Children's game preferences

During the poll parents were asked to answer which of the listed types of games their children usually prefer to play in (Table 4).

From the data resulted in the table it is visible that game preferences differ depending on the gender of children. Boys much more often than

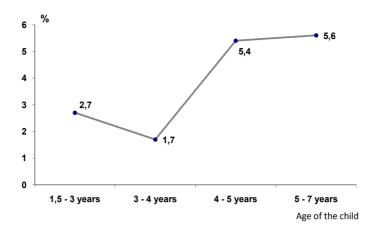


Fig. 5. Percentage of parents who have noted inability to invent fairy tales and plots for games for their child, depending on the age of the child (%)

Table 4. Game preferences of preschool children

Types of games	%	Parents of boys	Parents of girls
Active games, sports games	52,3	53,8	51,6
Board games	42,2	39,2	44,5
Building, constructing	41,7	50,8	31,2
Games in family	24,7	9,7	39,9
Computer games, game console	23,0	28,4	17,4
Games in characters from books, films, cartoons	13,3	13,0	13,6
Military games	12,3	21,4	3,1
Games in different professions	7,3	4,6	10,5

girls prefer to play computer games (accordingly: 28,4 % and 17,4 %; p = .0001), military games (accordingly: 21,4 % and 3,1 %; p = .0001) and also to build and construct (accordingly: 50,8 % and 31,2 %; p = .0001). Girls more often than boys prefer board games (accordingly: 44,5 % and 39,2 %; p = .01), games in family (accordingly: 39,9 % and 9,7 %; p = .0001) and in different professions (accordingly: 10,5 % and 4,6 %; p = .0001).

Also age distinctions in game preferences of children are observed (Fig. 6 and 7).

It can be seen from the results presented in Fig. 6 that different types of games are preferable

during the different age periods. Children of 1,5-3 years play board games much more rare, than older children (27,4 % at 1,5-3 years and 39,2 % at 3-4 years; p = .01). War games are also much less often preferred by children of 1,5-3 years in comparison with children of 3-4 years (accordingly: 5,2 % and 11,3 %; p = .04). Among the parents of children of 1,5-3 years computer games are marked only in 5,2 % of cases whereas among parents of children of 3-4 years their amount reaches 10,8 % (p = .04). Moreover it is shown on the chart that both child's age and frequency of parent's choice of computer games gradually increases.

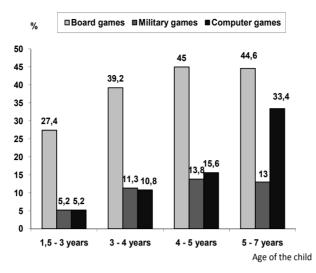


Fig. 6. Growth of popularity of different types of games depending on the age of the child (%)

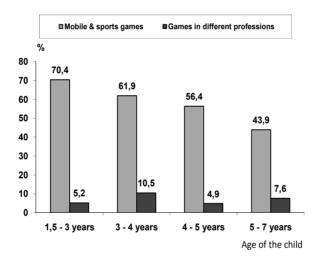


Fig. 7. Falling of popularity of different types of games depending on the age of the child (%)

From Fig. 7 it is visible that preference of sports games decreases with the years (children of 4-5 years – 56,4 %, children of 5-7 years – 43,9 %; p = .0001). Games in different professions are more often preferred by children of 3-4 years in comparison with children of 4-5 years and children till 3 years (accordingly: 10,5 %, 4,9 % and 5,2 %; p = .01).

Representations of parents about game preferences of their children depend on demographic and socially-stratification factors.

So, fathers more often than mothers note among the game preferences of their children games where they act like books, films and cartoons characters (accordingly: 16,1 % and 12,4 %; p = .02). Mothers more often than fathers point out child's preference of games in family (accordingly: 27,0 % and 18,8 %; p = .0003) (Fig.8).

It is necessary to point out that parents with higher education mark games of their children in characters of books, films and cartoons more

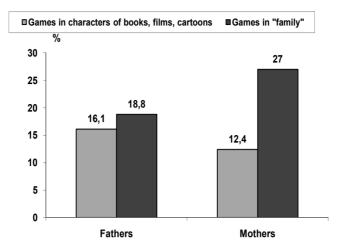


Fig. 8. Representations of fathers and mothers about game preferences of their child (%)

often than parents with secondary education (accordingly: 17,1 % and 8,3 %; p = .0001). Parents with secondary education choose games in "family" more often than parents with higher education (accordingly: 28,5 % and 23,4 %; p = .007).

Income level of a family also influences parents' representation of game preferences of their child. Computer games are less often marked by parents from needy families (18,8 %) in comparison with prosperous parents (24,6 %; p = .006). The similar parity concerns such type of game as building and constructing (37,1 % in needy families and 44,1 % in prosperous; p = .006). Games in different professions are more often marked by parents from needy families, compared with the more prosperous (accordingly: 10,1 % and 6,4 %, p = .003).

Dependence of children game preferences from marital status of their parents is also observed. Table 5 shows significant distinctions in preferences of different types of games by children from divorced and married parents (answers of married and unmarried mothers were considered).

These results show that children whose mothers are divorsed prefer sports games, while

children from complete families prefer board games, constructing and computer games.

Preference of different types of toys

In the research parents of preschool children were asked: "What is your child's favorite toy?". Obtained answers were grouped into 12 categories:

- Animals
- Traditional dolls
- Modern dolls (Barbie, Baby Born, Baby Annabelle)
- Traditional characters of children's subculture (Winnie the Pooh, Piglet, Pinocchio, Carlson, etc.)
- Modern characters of children's subculture (Spider-Man, Batman, Ninja Turtles, robots, etc.)
- Military toys (toy soldiers, tanks, guns, etc.)
- Transport toys (cars, motorcycles, etc.)
- Games with rules (dominoes, bingo, puzzles, etc.)
- Materials for productive game (building kits, Lego, blocks, etc.)
- Sport toys (ball, hockey, soccer, etc.)
- Didactic toys

Table 5. Dependence of children's	game preferences from m	arital status of their parents (%	6)

Types of games	Married mothers	Unmarried mothers	P =
Mobile games, sports games	50,5	60,8	.003
Board games	44,2	42,6	.02
Building, constructing	43,7	33,6	.003
Computer games, game console	23,8	17,8	.03

Table 6. Types of toys preferred by preschool children (%)

Types of toys	%
Transport toys	31,1
Animals	30,5
Traditional dolls	17,5
Materials for productive game	13,6
Modern dolls	7,0
Modern characters of children's subculture	5,7
Military toys	4,6
Not toys	3,2
Traditional characters of children's subculture	3,1
Sport toys	2,2
Games with rules	1,4
Didactic toys	0,5

 Not toys (game console, GameBoy, PSP, computer, bicycle, etc.)

General average data on preferences of different toy types of preschool children are shown in Table 6.

The obtained data show significant difference in preferred types of toys for boys and girls. Boys more often than girls prefer transport toys (accordingly: 43.3 % and 6.0 %; p = .0001), materials for productive game (accordingly: 15.0 % and 8.0 %; p = .0001), modern characters of children's subculture (accordingly: 7.2 % and 2.1 %; p = .0001) and military toys (accordingly: 6.6 % and 0.5 %; p = .0001). Girls more often than boys prefer animals (accordingly: 41.5 % and 20.2 %; p = .0001), traditional dolls (accordingly:

34,8 % and 1,6 %; p = .0001), modern dolls (accordingly: 14,8 % and 0 %; p = .0001) and traditional characters of children's subculture (accordingly: 4,9 % and 1,3 %; p = .0002).

It is important to point out the age changes. Fig. 9 presents those types of toys preference of which increases with the child's age.

Thus, children of 4-5 years are more likely than younger children prefer modern dolls (accordingly: 4,9 % and 0,4 %, p = .002); among the parents of 5-7 year-old children the percentage of those who point a doll as a favorite toy for the child grows up to 17 % (p = .003). Modern characters of children's subculture are more often preferred by children of 4-5 years than of 3-4 year-old children (accordingly: 5,7 % and 0,8 %,

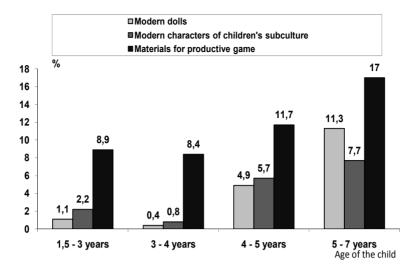


Fig. 9. Increased preferences of various types of toys with the age of the child (%)

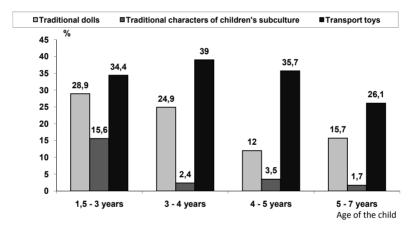


Fig. 10. Decrease of preferences of various types of toys with the age of the child (%)

p = .002). Children of 5-7 years are more likely than children of 4-5 years, prefer play materials for productive games (accordingly: 17,0 % and 11,7 %, p = .04).

The Fig. 10 shows the decrease of child's preferences of several types of toys with the growth.

Children of 4-5 years are much more rare than 3-4 year-old children play traditional dolls (accordingly: 12.0 % and 24.9 %; p = .0001). Children of nursery group is much more likely than older children prefer to play traditional

characters of children's subculture (accordingly: 15,6% and 2,4%, p = .0001). Transport toys are often preferred by children of 4-5 years than 5-7 year-old children (accordingly: 35,7% and 26,1%, p = .003).

Structural analysis of toy type preferences according to the age of preschoolers

In order to clarify the age dynamics of those changes in game preference of boys and girls, as well as to analyze the impact of socio-

demographic parameters, we carried out a special factor analysis. For this purpose, a data matrix which fixes the particular preferences of toys for boys and girls of different age groups in terms of their fathers and mothers (for data analysis, we also differentiate the position of married and unmarried mothers) was formed. Thus, factor analysis was subjected to a matrix dimension of 12x12: where strings - different types of toys preferred by children, and columns point out view of fathers and mothers (married and unmarried) about the preferred types of toys of their children, taking into account age and gender of children. Factorization of this matrix by principal component analysis followed by rotation on the criterion «Varimax» Kaiser allowed to construct a simplified three-dimensional factor model, which describes 75.5 % of the total variance. As a result three bipolar factors were divided.

The first bipolar factor F1 (44,2 %) has the following structure:

Transport toys	0,850508
Military toys	0,818520
Materials for productive game	0,724199
Animals	-0,923507
Traditional dolls	-0,868932
Modern dolls	-0,768501

The structure of this factor is quite interesting. As we can see on the positive pole of this factor such toys as transport (cars, motorcycles, etc.), military toys (toy soldiers, special equipment) and various types of building kits are grouped together. Thus, we can say that at the positive pole toys which can be called "materials, means for children's play" were grouped. Playing with these types of toys children are not attached to certain roles, but basically manipulate and manage them as the means of play. At the negative pole of this factor animals (soft toys) and dolls were grouped. It should be noted that, in contrast to the positive pole of this factor, here we can see together such

types of toys that encourage the adoption to the roles. Playing with animals and dolls, children learn a role position.

The second bipolar factor F2 (18,5 %) – «games with rules - sport toys" has the following structure:

Games with rules	0,796055
Not toys	0,650056
Sport toys	-0,825868

In the structure of this factor on the positive pole are games with rules and not toys. As we have noted under the concept "not toys" we mean first of all computer games and video game consoles which also can be called games with rules, because these games also mean abidance by rules. Thus, we believe that the positive pole captures the assimilation of game rules. At the negative pole sport toys which first of all mean the manipulation of certain objects (eg. ball) are grouped. Also we should note that the use of these toys can mean a moment of competition ("the agonist desire to defeat an opponent") (Johan Huizinga Homo Ludens, 1992).

The third bipolar factor F3 (12,7%) «didactic toys – traditional characters of children's subculture" has the following structure:

Didactic toys	0,595263
Modern characters of children's subculture	0,509810
Traditional characters of children's subculture	-0,872255

This factor is of particular interest for our study. We can see that at the positive pole of the factor didactic toys combine with modern characters of children's subculture. At the negative pole are traditional characters of children's subculture. This result seems to be very important to for the research. In fact the theoretical didactics of educational games and toys emphasizes the importance of using the characters of traditional

children's subculture. It is most probably believed that through the traditional models children are able to perceive and understand the proposed problems and, therefore, successfully cope with them. However our results, in contrast, show that educational games and toys are not based on traditional characters of children's subculture, though are based on the use of modern heroes of children's subculture. A possible reason is that the developers of modern didactic toys actively use the modern context of children's subcultures: fashion heroes and characters provide (from their point of view) the attractiveness of educational games and toys.

Of special interest for us is the placement of parents' views (married mothers of boys and girls of all ages, as well as unmarried mothers and fathers of boys and girls) in the space allocated to factors. We shall describe the features of placing of different groups of parents on the axes of factors F1 and F2 (Fig.11).

Fig. 11 shows that all parents of girls grouped at the negative pole of factor F1, and parents of boys - on its positive pole. Thus, we can conclude that parents of girls fix that their child prefers to play with dolls and animals, learning a role

position. Parents of boys fix that their child prefers "toys-means" (transport and military toys and materials for productive game). If we face the place of parents' opinions on the axis of factor F2, we can see that the characteristic age pattern in the changing of toy preferences of children. Thus, we see that in general with age there is a transition from manipulation (sport games) to games with rules. The older the child is, the more his play activity is focused on conformance to certain rules and norms.

Thus, the Fig. shows peculiar results of age dynamics of boys and girls play activity. As we see from quadrants I and IV boy's parents (fathers of boys and married mothers of boys of 4-5 and 5-7 years) fix the orientation of their child to the toys-means and abidance by rules in play. Parents of girls (married mother of girls of 4-5 and 5-7 years, unmarried mothers and fathers of girls) with abidance by rules in play of their child fix an orientation on the development of the role-playing position. Such differences, in our opinion, determine the gender-specific development of role-playing game: for girls through the development of the role relationships, and for boys through the

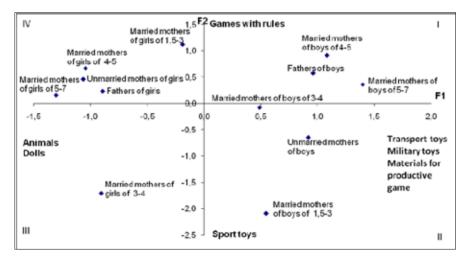


Fig. 11. Placing of married mothers of boys and girls of all ages, unmarried mothers and fathers of boys and girls on the axes of factors F1 and F2

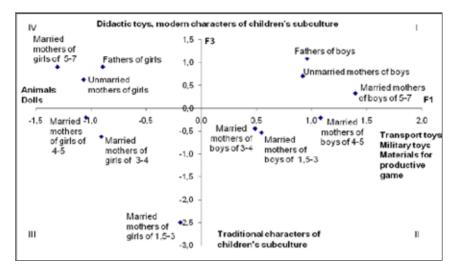


Fig. 12. Placing of married mothers of boys and girls of all ages, unmarried mothers and fathers of boys and girls on the axes of factors F1 and F3

development of gaming facilities (using toysmeans).

Let's consider a particular gaming preferences of preschool children placing married mothers of boys and girls of all ages, unmarried mothers and fathers of boys and girls on the axes F1 and F3 (Fig. 12).

Fig. 12 shows that the certain age dynamics of children toy preferences exists. If young children prefer games with traditional characters of children's subculture, then in the age of 5-7 years an abrupt shift in preference for didactic games occurs. These changes in the selection of toys mark the stage of preparation for school. At the same time, gender differences - focus on the role for girls and orientation to the facility for boys - is also stored in didactic games.

On the basis of the conducted research the following conclusions are made:

 In the structure of family leisure time play activity of parents with their child takes a leading place. Parents' involvement in joint play with the child depends on the child's age. In the age of 5-7 years the structure of play is changing a lot. The play becomes more independent from the adult.

- The study highlighted a number of age and gender characteristics in the game preference of preschool children. Boys significantly more likely than girls prefer such types of games: computer games, building and construction, military games. Girls are significantly more often than boys prefer board games, playing in "family" and in various professions. In preschool age the interest for board games, computer games and military games constantly increases and the interest for outdoor games and games in various professions gradually reduces.
- Didactic games in the structure of children's play are related to modern characters of children's subculture.
 These social factors and cultural context should be taken into consideration by the developers of contemporary didactic games.

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Игровая деятельность детей дошкольного возраста: совместная игра с родителями, игровые предпочтения, любимые игрушки

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Статья посвящена изучению представлений родителей детей дошкольного возраста об игровой деятельности их ребенка. Специальное внимание уделено рассмотрению места совместной игры родителей с ребенком в структуре семейного досуга; включенности родителей в игру своих детей (в том числе как организатора сюжетно-ролевого пространства игры); игровым предпочтениям дошкольников (выявлению любимых игр и игрушек). В работе анализируется влияние различных демографических и социально-стратификационных факторов на представления родителей об игровой деятельности детей дошкольного возраста.

Работа основана на материалах, полученных в ходе анкетного социологического опроса, проведенного сотрудниками Института социологии образования РАО в 2007 году. В ходе исследования было опрошено 1936 родителей детей дошкольного возраста (от 1,5 до 7 лет), посещающих ДОУ города Москвы (всего 45 ДОУ).

Ключевые слова: дошкольное детство, игровая деятельность дошкольников, семейный досуг, совместная деятельность родителей с ребенком, игровые предпочтения дошкольников.