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THE EVERYDAY LIFE EXPERIENCES OF THREE TO SIX YEAR OLD
CHILDREN WITH COMFORTING POSSESSIONS

by

Susan H. Harris

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Nursing Science
Philip Y. Hahn School of Nursing
University of San Diego

1990

Dissertation Committee:

June S. Lowenberg, Ph.D., R.N., Chair
Janet A. Rodgers, Ph.D., R.N.
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ABSTRACT

THE EVERYDAY LIFE EXPERIENCES OF THREE TO SIX YEAR OLD CHILDREN WITH COMFORTING POSSESSIONS

Susan H. Harris

Dissertation Committee Chair: June S. Lowenberg, R.N., Ph.D.

The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of comforting possessions in order to develop descriptive theory based on the perceptions, beliefs, values, symbolic meanings, and feelings of young children regarding comforting possessions. Using ethnographic methods, children with comforting possessions were observed extensively in a preschool setting [n=10]. Two of these children were later interviewed with a parent present. In addition, 17 other children were interviewed in the home or preschool setting with a parent present for a total study sample of 27 children. Several major patterns were supported by the data derived from these two sources. The first pattern suggested that the evolution of comforting possessions may be traced to infancy. Selection of the actual possession may be linked to adult choices in providing objects in the environment. What the adult chooses to provide to the child may be shaped by personal experiences in childhood with such

possessions. The second pattern suggested that children develop highly ritualized ways of handling and placing the comforting possession during use. The third pattern suggested that the children's varied use of the comforting possession may be placed along a continuum anchored on one end by nonactivity-specific use and on the other end by activity-specific use. Placement on the continuum may be related to stages of growth and development, gender, and parental inclination to control use. The final pattern suggested that children, particularly those attached to stuffed animals, personify comforting possessions by attributing to the possessions the human characteristics of gender and the capacity for sentience, mobility, role-taking, and communication and interaction. A conceptualization of comforting possessions was derived from these patterns which may be useful in stimulating further exploration of the phenomenon. In addition, the conceptualization may be tentatively considered by nurses and others involved in the care of children. In particular, it may be useful to incorporate the conceptualization into health education information on growth and development provided to parents of young children. Also, the conceptualization may be useful in planning intervention strategies for children who are ill or experiencing stress.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated with love and appreciation to
my husband and my children for their loving support
throughout my doctoral education;
and
to my father and in memory of my mother
for three lessons they taught me:
if something is worth starting, it is worth finishing;
if something is worth doing, it is worth doing well; and
with God's help, all things are possible.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Throughout this dissertation process, I have received assistance from a number of people to whom I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation. While every doctoral candidate attempts to form the ideal dissertation committee, I believe that my committee represented that ideal. Dr. June Lowenberg offered criticism and encouragement tempered with warmth and humor in exactly the right amounts to keep the project on course. At the worst of times, her positive responses to the study and my work served as a source of inspiration and direction. As a member, Dr. Janet Rodgers focused her discerning eyes on both the content and the mechanics of the dissertation and provided keen criticism with warmth and support. In addition, she offered steady encouragement and the occasional appropriate maxim as I struggled with balancing the dissertation and teaching. Dr. Judith Liu represented the outside world in a thought-provoking but always humanistic manner. Throughout my struggle to apply the methodology, her comments and insight as well as her sense of humor and appreciation for puns helped provide the impetus for completing the study. Without the unstinting gifts from these women of time, scholarship, and themselves, the study could not have been conducted nor the dissertation completed.

As a doctoral student, both professional and personal areas of my life have been touched by interactions with the faculty of the School of Nursing and my fellow doctoral students. I am grateful to

have shared this educational process with each member of those groups, especially those who participated in the magic of the Summer of 1985.

Without the cooperation of the director, teachers, parents, and students of the preschool setting, this study could not have been completed. Without the enthusiasm and openness of the teachers, parents, and children, my understanding of the phenomenon would have been severely limited. I would like to express my gratitude to each of these people for sharing a slice of their lives with me.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the material and emotional support of my husband, my children, my extended family, and my friends as I completed the study and the dissertation. Those individuals outside my family circle offered words of patience, hope, and confidence in the project. Two of my former students, Ann Mayo and Jan Lee Kwai, provided valuable reactions to the analysis. My father-in-law graciously consented to proof-read the final draft of the dissertation. My sons provided words of encouragement and moments of comic relief which renewed my flagging energy. My daughter provided a second pair of ears, eyes, and hands in the tedious preparation of transcripts as well as her optimistic attitude that this project would reach completion. My husband offered practical advice, an objective ear, loving inspiration, and the gift of solitude during moments of need. For all of these acts of generosity, I am indebted.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH STUDY

Familiarity of the Comforting Possession

In this culture, the notion of comforting possessions is accepted as a childhood tradition. Stuffed toys, fuzzy blankets, pacifiers, and the like are commonly provided to children and are familiar, everyday items observed in the possession of the child. Current handbooks on parenting frequently mention the importance of such items and offer guidance on how to respond to the child's need for them. For example, comforting possessions are described as objects which assist the child in coping with the everyday tensions and anxieties associated with childhood, such as bedtime [Brazelton, 1976, p. 101; Gesell, Ilg, & Ames, 1974, p. 288] and separation from the mother while exploring the environment [Brazelton, 1984, p. 56; Dodson & Alexander, 1986, p. 170; Leach, 1983, p. 241; Segal & Adcock, 1985, p. 124; Ulene & Shelov, 1986, p. 228-29]. Brazelton [1984, p. 60] particularly stresses the autonomous nature of the act of using a comforting possession and emphasizes the competence the child demonstrates when using one.

Others offer practical advice on how to create and provide a comforting possession [Ulene & Shelov, 1986, p. 90-91], preserve the unique scent of the possession [Ulene & Shelov, 1986, p. 90-91],

duplicate or provide for an extra comforting possession in case of loss [Dodson & Alexander, 1986, p. 170], or substitute a new possession for an old one [Segal & Adcock, 1985, p. 124].

Other cultural features suggest that comforting possessions are a common part of childhood. For example, the popular cartoon strip "Peanuts" details the experiences of a small boy named Linus who is accompanied everywhere by his "security blanket." Also, current and classic children's literature depict such beloved possessions as Pooh Bear in Winnie-the-Pooh [Milne, 1926], the Skin Horse in The Velveteen Rabbit [Williams, 1958], and the stuffed bear in Corduroy [Freeman, 1968].

Questions about Comforting Possessions

While the everyday familiarity of the subject suggests that the phenomenon of the comforting possessions has been well explored and described, there are gaps in our understanding of comforting possessions, particularly in the area of children's symbolic meanings and experiences with them. To date, most theoretical work has focused on proposing explanations regarding the development of such possessions. The concomitant research has focused on such variables as frequencies of reported use, the ages of children using such possessions, socioeconomic factors, personality factors, and play behaviors associated with use. Several identifiable gaps in the literature are in the areas of understanding the development of relationships with these objects, recognizing the patterns of using such objects for comfort in everyday life, and explicating the meanings of such possessions to the young child.

Purpose of the Current Study

It is important to identify differences in this study from previous work in the subject area. First, the initial conceptualization of the phenomenon of comforting possessions was not derived from previously conceived dimensions of the phenomenon drawn from a particular theory. Rather, the phenomenon was explored in order to develop a greater understanding of the phenomenon's dimensions. At the beginning of the study, the term "comforting possession" referred to the soft toy, blanket, bit of cloth, or other tangible object which the child selected from the surrounding environment, with which the child developed a relationship that extended over a period of time, and which the child used in everyday life in a comforting manner.

Secondly, this study was not directed toward testing any one particular theory. In part, this decision was based on the belief that a descriptive theory of comforting possessions could be derived by systematically analyzing empirical observations. This theory would preserve the variability and particularities of the individuals under study while providing a more generalizable world view. The resulting theory could then be examined for its congruence with other theoretical work on comforting possessions. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of comforting possessions in order to develop descriptive theory based on the perceptions, beliefs, values, symbolic meanings, and feelings of children regarding comforting possessions. It was anticipated that specific findings from this study would contribute to understanding the phenomenon of comforting possessions by explicating some

factors associated with the development of relationships with them, the patterns of use in everyday life, and the intrinsic meanings they hold for children.

Implications of the Study

Nursing, as a practice discipline, is involved in the care of children and families in a variety of settings where children may be ill or healthy. In these settings, nurses take on various roles, including those associated with protection of the child, support of the child's coping strategies, and provision of health education that promotes normal growth and development. It was anticipated that findings from this study would assist the nurse in understanding the phenomenon of comforting possessions, and allow incorporation of such knowledge into the theory base which supports nursing intervention. This would enable nurses to provide appropriate anticipatory guidance regarding comforting possessions to families of healthy preschool children. It would also facilitate nurses' use of comforting possessions when assisting young children to cope with a variety of difficult situations arising from hospitalization and treatment for illness.

Overview of the Dissertation

The completed dissertation which follows includes a review of the theoretical and empirical literature on comforting possessions in Chapter II and a description of the methodology of the study in Chapter III. Chapters IV, V, VI, and VII include presentations of the study data consolidated into the predominant themes which emerged

during data analysis. Chapter VIII includes a summary and discussion of the findings as well as recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to present and discuss the body of literature which exists regarding comforting possessions. Comforting possessions have been the focus of theory formulation and research by three major groups of developmentalists, including representatives of the psychoanalytic, social learning, and evolutionary-ethological schools of thought. The contributions of each of these groups toward understanding the phenomenon of comforting possessions in normal groups of children¹ will be explored chronologically within the context of each group's frame of reference. Those studies for which a specific theoretical paradigm has not been identified will be reviewed with the school of thought most closely associated with the theoretical and methodological stance of the study.

The Psychoanalytic School and Transitional Objects

Theoretical Formulations

The earliest discussions of comforting possessions emanated from the psychoanalytic school of thought, using data collected from case studies of children and adults participating in psychoanalysis.

¹While some psychoanalysts have focused on fetishes and transitional objects as they relate to other psychopathology or mental illness [Fisher, 1975; Sherman & Hertzog, 1983; Sperling, 1963; Wulff, 1946], this review will address only those theoretical perspectives and empirical studies which address the phenomenon as part of normal development.

Winnicott [1953; 1971] theorized that attachments to objects such as blankets or soft toys was a universal process which occurred in the critical period of development known as separation-individuation. According to this theory, infants who experienced "good enough" mothering developed the illusion that they were part of their mothers. As the child matured, became disillusioned, and perceived a separateness from the mother, the child experienced a rise in anxiety to which he or she responded by attaching to an object. This object was labeled the transitional object, since the child was supported by the object in the transition from the oneness with the mother to that of the separate self. The transitional object was purported to belong to a set of experiences known as transitional phenomena; both internal and external reality contributed to these phenomena which served to support the infant during the process of accepting external reality.

Winnicott [1953; 1971] further postulated that the infant assumed all rights to the object and was supported in this assumption by surrounding adults; thus, the object was experienced as real and vital rather than imaginary or hallucinatory. At times, the object was preferable to the presence of the mother in comforting the infant. On a more practical level, Winnicott suggested that the object had to survive the affectionate handling as well as mutilation stemming from instinctual loving and hating and should never be changed except by the infant. Finally, as the child matured, the emotional tie to the object gradually diminished, or decathected, but the object was not internalized, forgotten, or mourned.

Winnicott's theory of transitional objects provided a foundation for exploration by other psychoanalysts. Stevenson [1956] analyzed data on approximately 60 transitional objects of normal children, elicited through interviews with or letters from mothers as the informants or from case files in developmental centers. The retrospective data were not limited to any one age group. The data supported Winnicott's belief that the object served as an important source of comfort and was, at times, preferred to contact with the mother although the phenomenon was not necessarily universal.

Stevenson observed that many of the transitional objects were reminiscent of the mother or qualities of the mother through texture, smell, or name. Stevenson also found that some children used a series of objects rather than one, and she labeled them primary and secondary transitional objects to distinguish between them. While secondary objects obviously appeared at a later age, they also tended to be more sophisticated and were often personified by their owners. Indeed, Stevenson noted that they acquired additional meanings as they were carried along from one developmental state to another. Finally, Stevenson noted that most mothers who participated in the study recognized intuitively the importance of the object and avoided interfering with the child's attachment.

Using data collected from observations as part of what she referred to as a "rather unsystematic naturalistic pilot study" of normal infants and mothers [Mahler, 1972, p. 334], Mahler theorized that the development of the transitional object was part of the "beginning practising [sic] period" of the separation-individuation

process [1972, p. 335]. This sub-phase, which Mahler placed at the age of seven to ten months, was characterized by "rapid body differentiation from the mother," the establishment of a "specific bond" with the mother as a separate individual, and the growth and functioning of "autonomous ego apparatuses in close proximity to the mother" [1972, p. 335]. According to Mahler, the new relationship with the mother could "spill over" onto an inanimate object, thus transforming it into a transitional object for the child [1972, p. 335].

Based on clinical findings from her practice, Greenacre [1969, p. 147] postulated that the smell of the transitional object was important to the infant. In part, she attributed this importance to the co-mingling of body smells from both the mother and infant so that the object was a link between the infant and breast. Also, she speculated that the typical prone or supine position of the young infant in the crib placed the infant in more direct contact with smells thus emphasizing their familiarity and importance. Greenacre [1969, p. 145] mentioned that many infants would "reject a beloved object if it has been washed and only become reconciled when it has again attained its familiar smelliness."

While agreeing that the transitional object emerged from the separation-individuation process to assist the child in times of anxiety, Tolpin [1971] disagreed with Winnicott's assertion that the object was decathected but not internalized. Rather, Tolpin postulated that the soothing qualities of the mother were transferred to the object, and the infant used the object to ease the transition of separation-individuation. Tolpin [1971, p. 329] further postulated

that the soothing qualities were gradually internalized through a process known as transmuting internalization resulting in a "matrix of an ego that [was] now partially equipped to perform soothing operations for itself, but now without the need for the illusory external soother." The numerous, minute losses and reunions related to the object that the infant experienced in daily life were the key to the eventual internalization. From the transitional object which was "soft, furry, smelly, pliable, warm [and] concretely available" Tolpin [1971, p. 331] believed that the "psyche acquire[d] inner regulatory functions which eventually enable the child to *calm and soothe himself* with the '*normal workings of the mind*.'" Once successfully internalized, the object is no longer required by the child. As Tolpin explained, "the process of innumerable, repeated alternations between need for the blanket and relative disinterest in it ends in the blanket losing its vital importance for the child." Tolpin predicted a natural variation in the end of object use:

Although many toddlers discard it at the end of the period of its natural ascendancy [separation-individuation], some children continue to keep it around 'just in case' and give themselves an additional boost with it at bedtime or other times of stress, for longer or shorter periods of time [1971, p. 329].

Using data derived from clinical cases, Coppolillo [1976, p. 38] theorized that transitional phenomena, or the area of experience which is an "amalgamation of acknowledged, objectively perceived external reality and internally created subjective reality," are critical

in the development of the ego. Specifically, the transitional mode of experience provides an escape from being overwhelmed by either the internal drives or environmental demands, allowing the ego to develop normal structures for sublimating and neutralizing drives.

Brody [1980] criticized Winnicott's conceptualization of transitional objects for its broadness and universality, and suggested that his schema should be questioned until verified by objective data. Using data from extensive observations of 19 children between the ages of birth and three years, she postulated that the object attachment had more to do with its immediate availability to the child and the child's perception of the object as a body extension. Thus, the drive for contact with the object had more to do with an "instinctual aim to experience body boundaries" and "heightened wishes for skin-and-body contact" [Brody, 1980, p. 581].

Taken as a whole, the psychoanalytical theory which has developed concerning the transitional object suggests that the infant's attachment to the object begins during the first year of life in response to the separation-individuation, the object serves either as an external soother or as the precursor to inner self-soothing functions when the child feels overwhelmed by either internal drives or environmental demands, and object attachment diminishes in childhood when the object is no longer needed. Also, the transitional object is characterized by its tactile qualities of softness, warmth, and pliability and its unique, personal smell.

Empirical Evidence

Gaddini and Gaddini [1970] examined a large [n=1184]

convenience sample of urban and rural children from Italy of unspecified ages and reported that 4.9% of the rural children adopted transitional objects in contrast to 31.1% of the urban children. Of the small group [n=52] of foreign children residing in Rome included in the sample, primarily Anglo-Saxon in origin, 61.5% used such objects. Data collected in one hour interviews with subjects' mothers suggested that transitional object usage was generally part of falling asleep behavior, and was associated with children who did not sleep with their parents either in the same bed or in the same room. Thus, they attributed differences in percentages of use to differences in child care practices.

Ekecrantz and Rudhe [1972] interviewed mothers of 390 children between the ages of one and 16 regarding use of transitional phenomena. In this Swedish sample, 74% displayed some use, with 83.2% of the use beginning during the first year of life. Use of the phenomena continued into adolescence, although 64% had terminated their use by seven years of age. In a follow-up study of 77 six year olds with mothers serving as the informants, Rudhe and Ekecrantz [1974] reported that 65.2% of the children had attached to soft toys or cloths while 21.7% had multiple objects. The remaining 31.1% had developed patterns of sound and movement. The handling of the objects was described as simply holding or embracing [50%] or more active manipulation such as touching, biting, sucking, plucking, or twisting against the face [37.1%]. The frequencies of children using the object ranged from bedtime use [39.2%] to constant use [26.1%] with the remaining children falling somewhere between these

conditions [34.7%]. The children's emotional involvement with the phenomena was assessed as having a "strong demand" [23.9%], or simply a "wish to have" [23.9%], with the majority of the children falling somewhere between these two categories [52.2%]. Rudhe and Ekecrantz also interviewed the mothers regarding opportunities for physical contact with their children and the relationship of these opportunities to the development of transitional phenomena use. In contrast to the findings by Gaddini and Gaddini [1970], data from the interviews suggested that children with more opportunities for physical closeness during the daytime and at night were more apt to develop attachment to transitional phenomena.

Busch and McKnight [1973] conducted extensive interviews with 23 mothers regarding their attitudes toward the transitional objects of their children ages two to five years [n=40]. While they believed that parents did not consciously try to affect their children's relationship to transitional objects, they reported that unconscious feelings regarding the object led parents to be either "disturbers" or "facilitators" of such relationships. For example, parents who felt that the blanket was a response to deficiencies in parenting or that the child was overly dependent on the blanket limited the use of the object or did not make such objects available.

Using data from the same 23 mothers and 40 children, Busch, Nagera, McKnight, and Pezzarossi [1973] and Busch [1974] attempted to distinguish primary transitional objects from secondary transitional objects and explored dimensions of these. According to their definition, attachment to the primary transitional object, which

was usually a soft, malleable piece of material, occurred within the second half of the first year and lasted at least one year. The primary transitional object was characterized by its soothing functions, and could be distinguished from those objects which met other needs [such as the bottle] were provided by the parents [such as a pacifier], or from body parts [such as the fingers or thumb for sucking]. Use of the transitional object occurred predominantly at times for sleep or when the child was stressed. Many of the children used the object in conjunction with sucking [such as with a bottle, pacifier, or thumb]. Many children also responded to the tactile nature of the object through stroking of the body or by manipulation of the object in a ritualized manner. Secondary objects usually developed at the end of the second year of life and included stuffed toys or other objects which may have been part of play or fantasy, as well as serving in a soothing capacity. Busch, et al. [1973, p. 195] labeled the object of attachment around the age of two as the "secondary transitional object" and postulated that while the use of the object appeared similar, the classification should be considered "provisional" until the process and function of the subsequent attachment and its relationship to the primary transitional object, if any, was studied. In part, Busch et al. [1973, p. 195] distinguished between the two categories of objects because of the "enormous differences in development" between the child in the first year of life and the child nearing the age of two.

Hong and Townes [1976] surveyed mothers of children between the ages of seven months and eight years regarding

transitional object use. These children were the offspring of American medical housestaff [n=169], Korean-born housestaff training in the United States [n=50], and Korean housestaff remaining in Korea for training [n=60]. The findings indicated that 53.9% of the American children, 34% of the Korean children raised in the United States, and 18.3% of Korean children raised in Korea attached to a blanket or its equivalent. American children were more likely to sleep alone or away from their mothers, were either not breastfed or were breastfed for a shorter period, and received fewer hours of direct maternal care. Like Gaddini and Gaddini [1970], they concluded that child care practices, particularly those related to sleep, were correlated with transitional object attachment.

Kronish [1978] evaluated the relationships between attachment to a transitional object and amount of time the mother was available to the child during the first year, gender, sleeping arrangements, use of pacifiers and bottles, and maternal empathy as measured by the Psychological Mindedness Scale. The results of data collected by interview from mothers of two to four year old children [n=30] indicated that no significant relationships existed.

Boniface and Graham [1979] interviewed mothers of 702 three year old British children regarding the use of special soft objects at bedtime or during times of stress. Mothers indicated that 16.4% of the children used such objects. No relationship was found between such use and gender, socioeconomic class, or sleeping arrangements. A positive relationship was found between object use and levels of independence, sucking habits, and ease of going to sleep.

France [1980] interviewed mothers of 100 preschool children ranging in age from two to six in to elicit information regarding categories of transitional objects and how transitional objects might be used as adaptive coping mechanisms. Results indicated that transitional objects could be distinguished according to form [amorphous such as blankets or cloths as opposed to definite such as stuffed toys], age acquired [a mean of 12 months as opposed to a mean of 26 months], and behavior towards the object [comfort and oral stimulation versus communication and companionship]. France suggested that "preverbal" and "verbal" are natural categories for describing transitional objects.

Thomas [1980] observed four children between the ages of 23 and 30 months in their homes and a research nursery in order to answer the questions of how and under what circumstances these children used their transitional objects. In addition, mothers were interviewed for developmental information and attitudes toward attachment to objects. The data indicated that children used their objects under conditions of stress and no stress. Uses in conditions of stress tended to be body-related such as rubbing, stroking, and cuddling, while uses in conditions of no stress tended to involve play. Thomas also found differences in how and when children used their objects depending on how restrictive the mothers were in relation to the objects and some indication that gender differences existed in how blankets were used. While the size of the sample was small, this study was one of the few studies which included data collected by observation of children as opposed to data provided only by the

mother.

Litt [1981] compared the incidence of transitional object use between a convenience sample of upper and middle income children [n=119] and lower income children [n=166] on a 42-item questionnaire that included object use, child care practices, and individual development patterns. The children from the higher socioeconomic groups demonstrated greater usage [77% versus 46%], preferred blankets over stuffed toys, and first evidenced attachment to objects earlier than the children from the lower socioeconomic groups [1.03 years as compared to 1.31 years]. In addition, children from the higher socioeconomic groups tended to have greater oral and tactile involvement with their objects and used them under a wider variety of stressful situations. These children also differed significantly from the lower socioeconomic groups in that they tended to sleep alone in their own rooms from birth. Other variables that may differentiate these two groups were not addressed in this study.

Garrison and Earls [1982] studied a total community population [n=99] of three year olds in the United States and compared object use to temperament, clinical assessments, parental reports of behaviors, and observations of child play. While 39% of the children were currently using an object, an additional 8% had used such objects in the past. No relationship was found between object use and temperament as measured by a Behavior Screening Questionnaire. Significant positive relationships were found between object use and persistence/attention span and ease of management

of the child as measured by the Parent Temperament Questionnaire. In contrast, in the the structured play setting, children who were attached to objects were rated as demonstrating more anger and frustration during the play session, appearing to be more uncomfortable and anxious in the setting, and demonstrating more impulsive behavior than their counterparts who were not attached to objects. Garrison and Earls concluded that the interactional dynamics of children who attach to an object may be different than those children who do not.

Borella [1982] studied nine children between the ages of eight months and 31 months to examine their use of transitional objects during the separation-individuation process. The children were observed periodically during a period of several months at home and in nursery school in order to assess use of the object during daily activities. Borella concluded that conditions which precipitated use included sleep or tiredness, boredom, aimlessness, feeding, chastising, mother's arrival or departure, mother's inattentiveness, and mother's presence. While her original purpose was to examine differences in use of transitional objects during the subphases of Mahler's paradigm of separation-individuation, findings did not support use as phase specific.

Newson, Newson, and Mahalski [1982] retrospectively compared the use of transitional objects and sucking behaviors in a group of four year old British children [n=700] with information on their social behavior and adjustment when they reached adolescence [ages 11 to 16]. Data from this longitudinal study indicated that 30%

of the four year old children had used a "cuddly" [defined as a conventional soft toy or adopted cloth] with a significant positive association to socioeconomic class. Correlation of use of "cuddlies" with sucking behavior was not significant. In the follow-up study at age 11, the children remaining in the sample [n=500] who had been attached to a transitional object were less likely to be reported as timid or lacking in self-confidence, and were more likely to be reported as forthcoming with strange adults, as comfortable in a crowd of children, and as affectionate with their mothers. These children were also more likely to be reported as continuing to act out solitary dramatic fantasies. In the subsequent follow-up at age 16, the children remaining in the sample [n=260] were significantly more likely to be described as "tender-minded" and tended to be more affectionate with their mothers.

Mahalski [1983] studied the incidence of transitional objects in two groups of children in New Zealand. One convenience sample was composed of 158 mothers of 160 children around the age of 18 months. The mothers were interviewed at home at the outset of the study regarding the use of objects at bedtime and their views on child rearing. The mothers were re-interviewed by telephone six months and one year later for any changes in behavior. The second sample consisted of the remaining children in a multidisciplinary, longitudinal study [n=1037 out of an original cohort of 1661]. The mothers of this group were interviewed in person or surveyed by questionnaire regarding bedtime use of objects when their children were three, five, and seven years old. Data from both samples

indicated that the incidence of transitional objects at 18 months was 90% with a subsequent decrease to 44% by the age of seven. The strength of attachment as assessed by the mothers peaked at two years of age, with those children who attached to blankets displaying the strongest attachment. Findings suggested that only 25% of the children remained attached to the same object between 18 months and 30 months, although approximately 50% of children between the ages three years and seven years remained consistent in object choice. In addition, a positive association between sucking and object attachment was found at all ages.

Mahalski, Silva, and Spears [1985] studied the same two groups of children as Mahalski [1983] in order to examine the relationship between attachment to an object and such variables as gender, birth order, daily habits, and patterns of child care. The only significant relationship which the data supported was between object attachment and demonstration of a sucking habit.

Jonsson and Taje [1983] explored Winnicott's belief that infants require "good enough" mothering to be able to adopt a transitional object during separation-individuation. Clearly, "good enough" mothering is a difficult concept to operationalize. However, since many parents report that they are unable to comfort the infant with colic or to mitigate the discomfort, they selected a sample of infants with colic to represent a condition of "not good enough mothering" and matched these subjects with a non-colic control group. Interviews with the parents of 72 children indicated that 52% of the non-colic infants adopted a transitional object in comparison with

26% of the colic infants. Jonsson and Taje suggested that the lack of positive learning experience from physical contact [rocking, cuddling, being held] for infants with colic interferes with the development of a transitional object.

Summary

The psychoanalytic school of thought develops its theories from the case study material of individuals undergoing psychoanalysis. Using this source of data for theory development may create difficulties in the applicability of such theories to the general population for two reasons. First, case study material focuses primarily on amplifying individual characteristics rather than generating patterns of behavior common to groups. Secondly, those individuals who choose to undergo psychoanalysis may not be representative of the general population.

Since the psychoanalytic school of thought focuses on the development of the intrapsychic structure of the person, theories which derive from this school of thought, including the theory of transitional objects, can be difficult to operationalize for testing. This difficulty may, in part, account for the differences in definitions of transitional objects or phenomena which prevent comparison of findings among the studies. For example, the discussions of true transitional objects versus precursors, transitional objects versus transitional phenomena, or primary versus secondary transitional objects have not yet resulted in one accepted definition or set of characteristics of the phenomenon. As a result, research is hampered by the lack of an explicitly stated and carefully developed

description of the phenomenon to serve as base for a program of research. Further, those researchers who have moved toward trying to establish relationships between the incidence of object use with multiple social and behavioral factors are faced with contradictory results. For example, as previously noted, Boniface and Graham [1979] and Garrison and Earls [1982] found no relationship between object use and socioeconomic status, while Litt [1981] and Newson, Newson, and Mahalski [1982] found a significant positive relationship. Likewise, significant relationships between object attachment and sucking habits were demonstrated by Boniface and Graham [1979], Mahalski [1983], and Mahalski, Silva, and Spears [1985], although these findings were not consistent with those of Newson, Newson, and Mahalski [1982]. These results may reflect the inadequate descriptive base in that different defining characteristics undoubtedly lead to different conclusions regarding incidence and its correlates.

Some other methodological problems exist in the research stemming from this framework as well. On the whole, convenience samples have been used for study, thus limiting the applicability of the findings to the general population. Replications of studies have not been conducted. The age ranges of children have not been carefully reported or controlled in terms of developmental stages leading to confusion in comparing results. Further, retrospective collection of data from the mother of one or more children may lead to inconsistencies and inaccuracies in the data. While most authors emphasize the enthusiasm of mothers for this particular aspect of

child behavior, it is possible that beliefs or concerns about such objects may color the perceptions and reports from these respondents particularly in light of Busch and McKnight's [1973] findings regarding parents acting as facilitators and disturbers.

The Social Learning School and Attachment Objects

Theoretical Formulations

Social learning theorists are concerned with the development of behaviors which they define as responses to a variety of stimuli. As Bijou and Baer [1961, p. 25] proposed, the child is "conceptualized as an interrelated cluster of responses and stimuli" who interacts continuously with an environment that is conceived as "events acting on the child." The psychological development of a child reflects progressive changes in the different ways the child interacts with the environment. Behavior, also known as responses, may be explained as a function of stimulus events. Gewirtz [1972, p. 155] referred to the positive stimulus control that affects the infant's behavior, suggesting that the infant engages in social behavior for the sake of positive reinforcements. Within this framework, dependency is a collection of specifically conditioned chains of stimulus-response interchanges between the child and a class of people who share these stimuli and responses. Attachment behavior is a collection of specifically learned chains of stimulus-response interchanges between the child and any one social object. Both dependency and attachment are formed by the same process: various behavior systems including "approach, orientation, regarding, following,

remaining near, touching, smiling, and vocalizing" are acquired by conditioning. The physical and behavioral characteristics of individuals or classes of people become discriminative and reinforcing stimuli that maintain and control the infant's behavior [Ainsworth, 1969, p. 991].

Within this framework, separation from the attachment object [usually the mother] can lead to infant protest which has been conditioned to cues from the object's past preparations for departures and the resulting separations which have occurred. The protest behavior mimics those responses which would under other conditions have resulted in the object's return to the child [Gewirtz, 1972, p. 158]; Rajecki, Lamb, & Obmascher, 1978, p. 421]. The phenomenon of comforting possessions has been construed as a "generalization of the child's 'attachment' responses to a mother-like object stimulus" or as "a separate learned behavior possibly maintained by reinforcements provided during the mother's about-to-go-away cluster of behavior" [Boniface & Graham, 1979, p. 131].

Empirical Evidence

The social learning conception of comforting possessions has been examined through a program of research spearheaded by Passman [Passman & Weisberg, 1975; Passman, 1976; Passman, 1977; Passman, 1978; Passman & Halonen, 1979; Passman & Adams, 1982]. While some of Passman's earlier work seemed to focus on issues within an ethological framework, his work on the whole reflects an interest in experimental examination of stimulus-response.

Using the notion that a blanket or special soft object could act as an extension of the mother [attachment object], Passman and Weisberg [1975] exposed a sample of blanket-attached [n=32] and blanket-nonattached [n=32] children to a strange playroom situation [moderate arousal situation] and evaluated their reactions in terms of distress and exploratory and play behavior. The strange playroom situation presented different conditions to the children: mother present, familiar toy present, blankets [or attachment objects] present, or no object present. The blanket-attached children who had their blankets present demonstrated significantly less distress and explored and played more in the setting than other groups of subject children. When Passman [1976] repeated this experiment with a divided sample of 60 children under high arousal conditions [auditory and visual stimuli added to the strange situation], the presence of the blanket did not significantly alter the response of blanket-attached children. In a novel learning situation using a divided sample of 60 children, Passman [1977] found that in the presence of the the blanket for attached children, increased discrimination indices and delayed crying resulted. In each of these studies, the mother was clearly preferred to all other conditions.

Passman and Halonen [1979] surveyed the mothers of 690 children between the ages of 18 and 63 months for attachments to pacifiers, other hard objects, and blankets. It was not clear how stuffed animals were categorized in this study. Results indicated that 66% of these children had at some time been attached to a pacifier, 60% had at some time been attached to a blanket, and 28% had at

some time been attached to another hard object. Attachment to the pacifier decreased steadily from the ages of three to 24 months and then remained consistently low. Attachment to blankets increased until 18 to 24 months and then steadily decreased, although 16% of the sample were still attached to blankets at 60 months. The relatively small percentage attached to hard objects remained constant over age.

Passman and Adams [1982] assessed 100 preschool children for preference and reinforcing efficacy of attachment agents. Results indicated that all children selected their mothers more often than a blanket or control situation, although blanket-attached children approached their blankets more than the no object setting. In this setting, visual representations of the blanket were also effective reinforcers for blanket-attached children.

Summary

The primary contribution of the social learning school to the understanding of the attachment object relates to children's responses to stress. The collective findings suggest that, under specific conditions, the presence of attachment objects affects the level of distress and exploratory behavior of children attached to such objects.

To date, the research from this school of thought has not focused on the development of attachment or the specific qualities of the attachment. Rather, the assumption has been made that attachment occurs, thus giving rise to behaviors which may be studied. Identifying those children who are blanket-attached using a

maternal rating scale has been sufficient to create groups for further testing. It is not necessary to describe or define precisely what blanket-attached behaviors are or how blanket-attached children may use the blanket in everyday life. These approaches are somewhat problematic for the individual who is attempting to view the phenomenon within the context of normal child development.

The methodology of the research stemming from the social learning school provides for considerable control over variables, in that studies are conducted in a laboratory setting using a standard protocol and standard measurement tools. This allows for comparison of findings and replication of studies. The artificial environment, however, may not elicit behavior which occurs in natural environments. One question which may be raised regarding this program of research, then, is whether or not the findings may be applicable in natural settings.

The Ethological School and the Attachment Object

Theoretical Formulations

The ethological theory as formulated by Bowlby [1969] and Ainsworth [1969, Ainsworth & Bell, 1970] proposed that infants are born with a biological predisposition to seek proximity to and contact with adults in the immediate environment, subsequently forming an affectional tie that binds them together over space and time. This affectional tie is known as attachment. Behavior common to all infants, including clinging, sucking, and following, are believed to be vestiges of behavior that was important to attachment from earlier

stages in the evolution of man.² Signaling behaviors such as crying, babbling, or smiling, are believed to facilitate maintenance of adult-infant proximity. Adults are believed to be biologically predisposed to maintain proximity to infants as well as to respond to infant signals. Further, the amount of contact between an infant and a specific adult determines whether or not an attachment will form, although Ainsworth [1978, p. 437] stressed the appropriateness of the adult's responses to the child. Finally, infants have a set-goal or level of proximity to an attachment object [usually the mother] which they deem satisfactory, and the attachment object can serve as a secure base from which infants can explore [Rajecki et al., 1978, p. 420].

Within the ethological framework, comforting possessions may be viewed as an extension of the secure base of the attachment object, serving in the object's stead when the child moves away in an exploratory fashion [Rajecki, et al., 1978, p. 428]. Ainsworth [1978, p. 438] described the attachment to an inanimate object as a "supplementary or secondary" attachment which can only occur if the child successfully attaches to a primary object. Supplementary or secondary attachment was the result of "splintering off" of behaviors originally part of attachment to the primary object, resulting in these behaviors being directed toward an inanimate object. One example of such behavior would be that of the infant grasping a blanket or other soft object in the crib when placed there

² The ethological theory of attachment is grounded in the work of Harlow and his associates with non-human primates. One source for reviewing this research which focused on the development of attachment in monkeys is Schrier, Harlow, and Stollnitz [1965].

by the mother at naptime. Over time, the grasping behavior which originally served the purpose of bringing the infant into proximity with the mother becomes directed toward the blanket and serves as solace to the child.

Empirical Evidence

While a broad program of research related to attachment and attachment behaviors currently continues within the framework of ethology, little research has been focused on secondary or supplementary attachment objects. Although the lack of studies focusing on supplementary objects prevents the development of any conclusions regarding such objects, it is important to note that this research is based on the assumption that attachment to the mother can be reliably assessed in a laboratory setting.

Parker [1979] studied 40 children between the ages of 11 and 18 months who were evaluated in terms of their attachments to their mothers as well as their use of attachment objects. Differences between distress, interactive, and attachment behaviors of children who were attached to objects and those who were not attached were measured in the Strange Situation.³ Results indicated that children with objects displayed a greater overall capacity to tolerate anxiety and to play alone when briefly separated from their mothers than did the children without objects. When the separation was ended, the children without comforting objects displayed a greater overall

³ The Strange Situation is a standardized research strategy which creates separation situations in the controlled setting of the laboratory. It is currently favored by ethologists for its economy in terms of time in comparison to the earlier and more laborious field studies focusing on attachment [Tavecchio and Van Ijzendoorn, 1987].

need to be in physical contact with or in proximity to their mothers. In addition, those children who were evaluated as insecure in their attachments to their mother and who had objects, differed in the type of defensive behaviors and responses used in separation situations. Most importantly, Parker found that object attachment occurred in children who were not securely attached to their mothers.

Overall Findings from the Literature

The three groups of developmentalists reviewed have approached the study of comforting possessions from different theoretical perspectives; however, some findings of the respective empirical studies are compatible. Despite some of the inherent flaws in the assumptions underlying the research and the methodology selected for the research, some general propositions may be formulated regarding comforting possessions. Taken as a whole, the empirical studies suggest that:

- 1] A sizable number of children in cultures such as ours attach to objects such as soft toys, blankets, or pieces of cloth.
- 2] Attachment to such objects is generally reported to occur between the ages of six months and two years of age.
- 3] Object use may extend into adolescence, although use is generally reported to disappear in the school age child.
- 4] Attachment to objects seems to be negatively associated with patterns of physical proximity to the mother at sleeptime, and seems to be positively associated with socioeconomic status, parental

attitudes that facilitate such attachments, and sucking habits.

5] Use of objects is part of a variety of activities of daily life, although sleeptime and times of stress seem to be particularly important.

6] Presence of an object to which the child is attached may mitigate some stress in new situations, facilitating more exploration.

While the referenced studies that support these general propositions document the existence of the phenomenon of comforting possessions and several theoretical bases are postulated for their development, it is clear that the phenomenon has not been fully explored from the viewpoint of the young child who is attached to a comforting possession. What is missing is knowledge to assist us in understanding what the phenomenon is from the child's point of view regarding the development of a relationship to a comforting possession, the patterns of using a comforting possession after infancy, and the feelings associated with using a comforting possession. The current study represented an initial effort to address this particular gap in understanding comforting possessions.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this chapter is to present and discuss the epistemological assumptions and specific research strategies of this study. Since the question guiding the study focused on describing the phenomenon of comforting from the viewpoint of children, the study was classified as factor-isolating and factor-relating, with its purpose being the development of descriptive theory. Given the classification of the question, it was apparent that the methodology for the study should yield empirical data that was descriptive in nature and which could be analyzed to yield a descriptive conceptualization of the phenomenon of comforting possessions. Qualitative methodologies are appropriate for this purpose [Fawcett & Downs, 1985]; thus, this study was conducted using ethnographic methods.

Epistemological Assumptions

Ethnography is a qualitative methodological approach that focuses on everyday life experiences of the members of a social group or culture. Ethnography as a method may be defined as the systematic collection, description, and analysis of naturalistic data in order to construct a cultural theory [Aamodt, 1982, p. 210; Frake, 1983, p. 60]. As a methodological approach, ethnography stems from a phenomenological world view. Aamodt [1982, p. 211-13] has

delineated four major assumptions of ethnography as a methodology which are useful as a framework for discussing this current study.

The first assumption of ethnographic research is that the cultural systems in which all human beings are socialized provide a framework for human activity and interaction in everyday life [Aamodt, 1982, p. 211]. Benoliel [1984, p. 4] points out that the varying methodologies of qualitative research, including ethnography, may be viewed as a paradigm. This paradigm is based on beliefs about the nature of human beings and their individual and social relationships.

Benoliel [1984, p. 4] proposes that a particular group of beliefs supports the assumption that cultural systems provide a framework for everyday life. The belief system as described by Benoliel includes the view that social or everyday life is the shared creativity of individuals; this sharedness produces a reality perceived by the participants to be objective, extant, and knowable. A second belief is that the social world is dynamic and thus everchanging. Within the belief system of the ethnographer, the world is neither an external force independent of human beings and their activities, nor is it objectively identifiable; rather, there are multiple realities and multiple frameworks for viewing the world. Within this world, human beings are active; they construct and make sense out of the realities they encounter. Finally, patterns of interaction evolve from the process of negotiation and interpretation engaged in by human beings. These beliefs about the nature of human beings and their individual and social relationships serve as the underpinnings for

ethnography, which seeks to "discover the cultural knowledge people use to organize their behavior and interpret their experience" [Germain, 1986, p. 149].

In this current study, children in natural settings were observed with and interviewed about their comforting possessions. Emphasis was placed on uncovering their beliefs, values, and knowledge of the phenomenon of comforting objects and their patterns of behavior associated with their comforting objects. From the outset, I assumed that children actively involved with comforting possessions have constructed a view of reality regarding their comforting possessions which they are uniquely able to articulate.

The second assumption of ethnographic research is that abstractions from the empirical data of what people do [behavior patterns] and what people say they do in everyday life [ideas, beliefs, or knowledge] may be organized into a view of a culture or a cultural theory [Aamodt, 1982, p. 212]. This assumption of the ethnographer stems from the phenomenological perspective that human behavior is a "product of how people interpret their world" [Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, p. 13]. This process of interpretation may be captured by the researcher through the process of empathic or interpretive understanding. That is, the researcher seeks to reproduce in his or her own mind "the feelings, motives, and thoughts behind the actions of others" [Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, p. 14]. This means that the ethnographer attempts to see and experience everyday life from the point of view of those people involved [Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, p. 14]. By selecting ethnography as a

methodological framework, I assumed that the empirical data represented by the detailed, personal accounts of the children in this study could be organized into patterns of behavior and thought which would form the basis of a descriptive theory of comforting possessions.

A third assumption supporting ethnographic research is that the researcher is an active participant in data collection and data analysis [Aamodt, 1982, p. 213] through participant-observation and extensive interviewing. Lofland [1976, p. 8] describes the ethnographer's active participation as the process of developing "intimate familiarity." He characterizes intimate familiarity with a social group or setting as "easy, detailed, dense acquaintanceship. . . based on freeflowing and prolonged immersion" [Lofland, 1976, p. 8]. He further proposes that participant-observation or "direct bodily presence in the physical scenes of social life under scrutiny" is the ideal form of immersion, although he allows that "long, diverse, open-ended, semi-structured conversations with people who are participants in a situation" are another practical method of reaching such a stance [Lofland, 1976, p. 8].

Lofland stresses the need for intimate familiarity and justifies this view with several stances [1976, p. 10]. Most importantly, Lofland feels that "[I]f social science is the study of what people actually do . . . then an empirical science must directly observe that which it proposes to study" [1976, p. 10]. He feels that if we develop "characterizations" and "explanation" of a phenomenon based on anything other than "direct, empirical observation," we are at risk for

our conclusions to be invalid and unreliable [1976, p. 10]. Further, unless intimate familiarity is developed, researchers are at risk of assuming from their own everyday experience what is going on in the situation rather than "observ[ing], discover[ing], and articulat[ing] the "motives, meanings, actions, and consequences" of the situation under study [1976, p. 10]. Finally, Lofland proposes that "an empirical science is constructed . . . out of the interplay of data and perplexed perception that *gives rise to* concepts yet contains and *constrains* them by a context of concrete empirical materials" [1976, p. 11]. That is, the developing concepts are grounded in the rich, empirical, contextual data available through intimate familiarity.

In this study, my role was that of a participant-as-observer [Gold, 1969, p. 35-36] in a selected preschool setting and in homes of children, with my activities centered on observing the child in interaction with a comforting possession and interviewing the child about the possession. The observations and interviews were relatively unstructured, particularly in the early phases of the study, in order to assure that the subjects' views of comforting possessions dominated the data. The extensive amount of time spent with the children in the preschool in the presence of familiar teachers and the presence of a parent in the home interviews facilitated an environment of trust and ease which assisted with the establishment of intimate familiarity.

The fourth assumption regarding ethnographic research is that the analytic process of ethnography focuses on generating categories and discovering relationships between these categories [Aamodt,

1982, p. 213]. The analysis of data in an ethnographic study usually requires analysis of detailed field notes and is characterized by several general qualities. First, all analysis and resulting theory "grows out of" and is "directly relevant to" activities which occur in the situation studied [Emerson, 1983, p. 94]. Secondly, the concepts which are developed from the data are neither preconceived by the researcher nor are data classified according to an *a priori* system [Emerson, 1983, p. 94]. Finally, analysis does not occur as a distinct state of the research study, but occurs throughout data collection, recording, and coding [Emerson, 1983, p. 94]. Strauss refers to this as the "temporally developing character" of fieldwork [1969, p. 25]. Data analysis of this sort has been called "retroductive" rather than purely inductive or deductive. This retroductive process involves the researcher moving back and forth between the data and the theoretical framework emerging from the data until the best theoretical fit is achieved [Emerson, 1983, p. 95].

In this study of comforting possessions, field notes were developed based on the observations of children and transcripts of taped interviews. These field notes were analyzed extensively with the goal of identifying categories and relationships which naturally emerged from the data. Lofland [1976, p. 66] describes the role of the analyst as beginning with an "abstract sense of what a generic situation is and what generic strategies are," leading to immersion in the "concrete items of the actual social life," and ending with the development and construction of a "generically framed analysis of situations and strategies" which reflect this movement. Lofland

refers to this method of data analysis as the development of "disciplined abstractions" [1976, p. 62-63]. The data analysis for this study occurred throughout the data collection process as well as after completion of the observations and interviews. Thus, data collection in the final phases of the study was shaped in part by categories and questions arising early in the study.

Specific Research Strategies

This ethnographic study took place from January to December, 1989, and focused on the use of comforting possessions by 27 children. Specific research strategies were devised to protect the rights of the children who participated in the study and to guard the trustworthiness of the study.

Protection of Participant Children

The current study was reviewed and approved by the Committee on the Protection of Human Subjects at the University of San Diego prior to the initiation of the study and in keeping with the guidelines established by that body [see Appendix B]. Strategies to safeguard the participants from assumed risks of the study and to guarantee participants the right to consent and the right to privacy were developed and discussed with the director of the preschool, the teachers, and the parents of subject children.

Assumed Risks

Since this study focused on a phenomenon which is a normal part of childhood and the methodology was essentially non-intrusive, the study was considered to be relatively free of risk. While there is

always a minimal risk in this type of study that there may be a slight temporary increase in stress for children in the observation or interview situation, the presence of the parent in the home or the teacher in the classroom was included to help offset this risk and to assist with any necessary intervention. Children and parents were informed at the start of the interviews that behaviors which suggested that the child needed to end the interview would be respected. These behaviors included verbal cues, crying, or withdrawal from the situation.

During the observations in the preschool, only one child withdrew from an observation in the classroom. It was not clear whether or not the withdrawal from the situation was in response to a question about comforting possessions or simply a desire to change activities. This child proceeded to join a group of children in the family center and did not require intervention from a teacher.

During one interview, the child asked to end the interview in order to open a package sitting in view. The mother of this child independently intervened to capture the child's interest in the interview. The child responded by continuing the interview.

With these two exceptions in mind, it is fair to say that both the observations and interviews were characterized by warm, friendly exchanges regarding comforting possessions. In fact, several parents commented on the positive nature of the experience. These parents noted the value of the children having an opportunity to discuss their important possessions with an interested adult. Several older siblings observing the interview process asked if they could

participate. Also, one parent stated that she appreciated the opportunity to observe her child being interviewed in a respectful manner that elicited the child's opinions and feelings.

Informed Consent

All parents of prospective participants received a personal letter which described the purpose of the study, the research approach of the study, my background, and my telephone number. This information was also posted in the preschool throughout the observational period. Parents were given opportunities to discuss the study both in person and over the telephone. Parents in the preschool were assured that the study was not required by the school and that participation or nonparticipation would not affect the child's normal activities at the school. Parents were also assured that no child would be personally identified in the data collection nor in subsequent presentation of findings. Parents who were willing to have their children participate signed a consent form containing these provisos and kept a copy for themselves.

Prior to observations or interviews in the classroom, the verbal assent of the child or children involved was acquired by simple questioning. For example, in the classroom, I asked one child, "May I ask you about your bunny?" prior to proceeding with questions. In the block corner, I asked a group, "May I watch you building with the blocks?" before I sat down to observe. The children in the interview group indicated assent to participate by signing the consent form as their parents' witnesses.

Privacy

The privacy of the subject children and their parents was protected by coding names and descriptions in such a way that no child could be personally identified from the data. All tape recordings likewise contained no identifying information. Interview tapes were either given to the parents or destroyed at the end of the study. Copies of computer constructed field notes generated from written and taped notes and transcripts of interviews were stored in a locked file to which only I have access.

Summary

In keeping with university and federal guidelines for the protection of human subjects, this study was conducted with careful attention to protecting the rights of the children who participated. In particular, strategies were incorporated to minimize risk, to provide for informed consent and assent, and to provide for the privacy of individual participants.

Guarding the Trustworthiness of the Study

Setting

In the first phase of the study, children between the ages of three and five years of age were observed in the setting of a non-traditional, private preschool. This school, located in Southern California, draws its population of students from throughout a large urban and suburban area. This school is known for its particularly sensitive approach to children as individuals, its emphasis on development of the physical, psychological, and intellectual abilities of each child, and its supportive efforts to children in adjusting to new environments. Some observed strategies for supporting

children include encouraging gradual introduction to the environment, maximum parental contact, and the use of comforting possessions. Because the school's philosophy is unique and the cost of tuition is high [approximately \$4000 annually for all day preschool classes], the parents of children enrolled in the school are generally affluent and oriented toward selecting a particular environment for their children.

While it was clear at the onset of the study that this environment probably was not representative of preschool environments in general, the setting was purposively selected to maximize the study of the phenomenon of comforting possessions, which have been linked with higher socioeconomic levels and parental attitudes which facilitate attachment to such objects. The rationale for choosing this setting, then, was to have access to representative data [Sandelowski, 1986, p. 32] as opposed to a representative sample.

Sample

After discussing the purpose and strategies of the study with the director of the school and the lead teacher of the preschool, letters and consent forms were distributed to all families with children [n=42] in the preschool program. While not all children were expected to be observed using comforting possessions in the preschool and thus would not directly participate in the study, all parents were given an opportunity to consent or decline participation so that data regarding group activities could be collected without impinging on children's rights. Signed consent forms were returned

by 36 families, with two additional families declining to participate. The four remaining families were contacted several times without results. Since express consent was not available, these children were excluded from the study. Throughout the observations in the preschool, collection of individual or group data regarding these six children was scrupulously avoided.

A total of ten children were observed using comforting possessions in the preschool setting between January and April, 1989. While one other child used a comforting possession in the preschool setting, the family had declined to participate in the study. Of the ten children, two were interviewed to clarify and amplify data collected during observations.

While the data collected in the preschool supported several emerging patterns, I was concerned that these patterns might be circumscribed by the context of the preschool setting. Early in the study, some parents had indicated that while their children used comforting possessions, they did not use them in the preschool setting. Further, in the process of interviewing a child from the preschool, it became evident that his pattern of limited use in the preschool was different from his more diffuse use at home. These concerns prompted the strategy of conducting additional interviews with children not observed with comforting possessions in the preschool setting. Interviews were conducted between February and August, 1989, with 17 other children [16 were unaffiliated with the preschool] who were referred to the study by teachers, colleagues, or parents. These children were interviewed in their homes or school

settings with parents present after procedures of informed consent were complete.

Demographic data on the total sample [n=27] were collected informally as part of the observations and discussions with these children. This sample may be described as four three-year olds [one girl, three boys], nine four-year olds [eight girls, one boy], seven five-year olds [four girls, three boys], and seven six-year olds [four girls, three boys].

Two children in the sample were a pair of fraternal twins. Three of the children were from families with one Asian parent, and one child was from a family with one Hispanic parent. These three children were born in this country and spoke English as a first language. The remaining children were Caucasian. All families represented in the study could be described as traditional two-parent families with the exception of two children: one child's parents were divorced and one child's parents were a lesbian couple. All families could be described as belonging to middle to upper middle socioeconomic classes.

The purposive sample of this study was not representative of the general population of children in at least two ways. First, it did not necessarily represent the ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic diversity of the surrounding urban and suburban area. Secondly, since the purpose was to maximize data on comforting possessions, only those children who used comforting possessions were included. The sample could best be described as a judgmental sample [Agar, 1980, p. 120] with the children serving as the specialists in the area

of comforting possessions.

Observations

Observations in the preschool took place between January and April, 1989. Observational sessions ranged from one to six hours with an average of three hours once or twice each week during the 12 weeks the school was in session during the observational phase of the study. During these 12 weeks in the preschool, approximately 80 hours of observation were conducted. In order to accomplish theoretical sampling of events, observations were made at various times throughout the school day in order to include such activities as morning entry, meeting times, rest times, and activity times.

Dressed casually in the manner of the teachers, I joined the floor and table activities with the children in as nonintrusive manner as possible. After being introduced by the teachers, the children called me by my first name as is customary with the teachers, and frequently enlisted my participation in classroom activities. For example, children asked me if they could sit in my lap during meeting times, if I could read to them or assist with a project, or if I could help with dressing up, tying a shoelace, or opening a snack. Initially, I participated in many of these activities in order to get to know the children and teachers and to understand the everyday activities of the preschool. Over time, I became comfortable with redirecting these requests along to a teacher if the activity interfered with ongoing data collection and thus moved into the role of participant-as-observer. I found that I was able to prop myself in several strategic spots such as the beanbag chair in the reading

corner' or on the window seats and observe the movement of children and comforting possessions around the classroom. From these vantage points, I could move closer to and interact with a child using a comforting possession or a group where one of the observed children was involved.

While in the preschool, I used a small notepad, pen, and tape recorder to assist with taking notes. While I openly made notes using the notebook and recorder in the classroom, no child questioned what I was doing although one or two asked to write in the notebook. Throughout the observational period, I would share my observations with the teachers in order to validate my perceptions or to further clarify my findings.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with one child in the classroom of the preschool with the mother present, with another child in a public area of that child's school with the mother present, and with the remaining 17 children in the home. For the home interviews, one child had both parents present and the remaining 16 children had their mothers present. During the interviews the child was seated next to the tape recorder between the mother or parents and me, either on the floor or on a seat. While some children wanted the interview to take place in their own bedrooms, most of the interviews took place in the living rooms or family rooms of the homes.

Each interview began with me providing a brief description of my interest in comforting possessions and an assurance to the child

of the confidentiality of the interview. Also, the children were assured that the length of the interview was to be determined by them. In fact, the length of the interviews varied, with the shortest lasting about 20 minutes and the longest lasting about an hour and fifteen minutes. The termination of three of the interviews occurred when the children wandered away to become involved in a different activity. The remainder of the interviews were terminated when the children indicated that they felt they had told me everything they could about their comforting possessions. At the conclusion of the interviews, the tapes were played back to the children if they were interested in hearing their voices.

The interviews with the children were relatively unstructured, although a set of sample probes was developed to assist at the onset of the interviews [see Appendix B]. In the interviews, the child's initial answers and behaviors with the comforting possessions assisted the researcher in developing questions specific to that child. Careful attention to the child's cues allowed me to follow up on new ideas and develop additional probes and questions pertinent to the study. Over time, the interview questions began to focus on developing patterns including origins of the possession, how and when the child used the possession, and personification. In particular, the technique of hypothetically creating a situation to which the child could react was useful in exploring categories arising from previous data [Agar, 1980, p. 126]. For example, after several children had described taking their blankets with them in the car while accompanying their parents on errands but not into the actual

public buildings, I used this particular scenario as a hypothetical situation to explore the degree to which comforting possessions travel with children.

Throughout the interview, I was able to validate the child's responses with the available parent. Usually, the parent would simply nod in agreement with the child as the child described a particular dimension of comforting possession use. However, on three occasions, the parents looked confused by a particular answer from their child regarding the name of the comforting possession. On all three occasions, the child attributed a formal name to a blanket which the parents knew by the name of Blanket or Blanky. Each time, I commented that the parent looked confused or unsure which prompted the parents to clarify the information with the child. Only one parent indicated that she felt unsure about her child's interview responses. This parent expressed concern that her child was competing with a twin sibling and readily identified the areas of data in question. These data were excluded from data analysis.

All interviews were tape recorded. In addition, I took brief notes in a notebook during the interview to remind me of the context of the interview. Also, I tape recorded my impressions of the interview as soon as I had left the home or the classroom setting. Tape recorded interviews and notes were initially transcribed by two individuals. The transcripts were reviewed independently by two reviewers and changes were made only if both reviewers agreed to the changes. In a very few instances, background noise prevented complete transcriptions of brief interactions. These interactions were

excluded from the data analysis.

Field Notes

The notes taken during or after the observations and the interviews and the actual transcripts of the tape recorded interviews were used to construct a detailed set of field notes. Personal notes regarding the context of the study, my feelings and reactions to events in the classroom, and other circumstances surrounding the study were added throughout the study. This set of field notes served as the primary source of data for the study.

Developing the Analytic Scheme

Preliminary analytical notes were added to the field notes periodically throughout the study. These analytic notes were derived by sorting and coding the data contained in the field notes according to important observational or interview topics. For example, early in the study, such important topics included personalization of possessions, availability of the possessions in the preschool, intensity of use, handling of the possession, repetitive patterns associated with use, and recognition of value by others. These codes were refined throughout the study by posing questions which evolved from the data. Subsequently, the data were organized into broader patterns or typologies, leading to a final analytic scheme which included patterns of origin, use, and personification [Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, p. 79-94].

After developing the final analytical scheme, the field notes and the scheme were provided to two peers for review and verification. Both individuals developed comparable analytical

schemes. In addition, three participating mothers and the four preschool teachers were asked to review the analytical schemes and data in the form of drafts of data chapters. Feedback from these individuals suggested that the analysis of the data captured the everyday reality of comforting possessions for the children and for themselves. Finally, four children were interviewed after the analytic scheme was developed to check for member verification. Verification by these groups suggests that the final analysis is credible.

Summary

Lincoln and Guba [1986] have developed a set of criteria regarding the trustworthiness of qualitative studies. Strategies for meeting these criteria which include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, were incorporated into this study to meet these criteria.

Credibility

The length of time spent in the preschool and the close contact with the children meet Lincoln and Guba's [1986, p. 77] requirements for "prolonged engagement" and "persistent observation." In addition, using interviews from a separate sample provided for "triangulation" of data sources and methods. Throughout the study, the processes of "peer debriefing" and "member checks" were used to assist in developing the working analytical scheme.

Transferability

In presenting the data in this study, the narrative has been developed to include the context of the interactions or observations

as well as the actual words used by the participants. In keeping with Lincoln and Guba's criteria, this "thick descriptive data" has been provided so that other readers may judge the data and the subsequent analysis [1986, p. 77].

Dependability and Confirmability

The review of the field notes and development of comparable analytic schemes by two individuals is in keeping with what Lincoln and Guba call "establishing the audit trail" and "carrying out the audit" [1986, p. 77-78]. Verification by these individuals suggests that the process of the study was dependable and that the data and the construction of the analytic scheme was confirmable. Further, verification by teachers, mothers, and children as part of a process of member checks support the dependability and confirmability of the study.

CHAPTER IV

THE HISTORY AND EVOLUTION OF COMFORTING POSSESSIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to present and to discuss the data derived from interviews regarding the history or evolution of comforting possessions. During the initial part of each interview, questions were directed toward topics which would introduce me to the particular comforting possession and assist me in placing the comforting possession into some initial context which would facilitate developing a discussion of the possession. Asking such questions as "Can you tell me about your blanket," "How long have you had your blanket?" or "Can you tell me where your bear came from?" usually elicited a story regarding the origin of the particular possession. The responses to these questions focused primarily on the evolution or history of the possession. While I did not expect the children to be able to fully describe the attachment process, particularly given that this process usually occurs in a preverbal stage of infancy, several questions were focused on identifying the time frame of the child's relationship with the comforting possession and the initial placement of the comforting possession in the child's environment.

Some children had definite ideas about the history of their possessions. For example, when asked how long she had had her blanket, one five year old girl responded, "Very, very long." When asked when she specifically got it, she replied, "When I was a baby." Finally, she was asked who gave it to her and she replied, "My Mom

and Dad bought it when I was a baby." This historical account was verified by her mother.

For other children, the questions regarding the history were difficult and the child either referred the question to the mother or the mother volunteered the information. For example, one three year old boy thought that he "bued it" referring to his stuffed dog. His mother corrected this idea by saying, "That guy is from when you were born. That was when you were a baby. Somebody gave you that when you were born." When a little girl answered that she had had her blanket for "sixty-four days," the mother responded to the child, "Tell me, have you had it since you were a baby? I know how long you've had it. Should I tell Susan?" The child nodded and the mother responded, "Since she was a baby--a newborn baby. The same one."

The accounts of the children and mothers about the evolution of comforting possessions suggest four major patterns. First, variations exist in the continuity of use of particular comforting possessions. For the children in this study, many children had the same possession since birth, a few children replaced worn possessions with close facsimiles in a sequential fashion, and a few children added other possessions to the original. Second, while the child ultimately chooses the comforting possession, variations exist in the availability of objects from which to choose suggesting that parents influence choices by their selection of objects made available to the child and the manner in which it is made available. Third, in some families, the child's possession is similar to a parent's childhood

possession. Finally, the presentation of the possession to the child may reflect the anticipated attachment to the child on the part of parents, family members, or family friends.

Continuity of the Use of Comforting Possessions

For the children in this study, there was wide variation in the continuity of use of a particular possession. The comforting possession belonging to the children in this study also demonstrated a particular hardness. The data derived from interviews indicated that 11 of the 19 children continued to use the same possession selected during infancy, five children demonstrated a continuous use of a particular type of possession which was replaced by a facsimile when excess wear required this intervention, and three other children had added other possessions to their original selections. Each of these patterns is sufficiently different to warrant examination.

Original Possessions

The comforting possessions of those children who had maintained the same possession since infancy often showed considerable wear. Typical damage included fading of the original colors, loss of a lining, changes in the body shapes of animals, or holes created by ripped seams.

Several children acknowledged their role in damaging their possessions. For example, one six year old boy, Joshua⁴, described his blanket as "kind of like a big white blanket with blue and pink

⁴ All proper names used in the discussion of the data are fictional names assigned to the child to protect anonymity.

stripes." When he showed me the blanket, it looked like a strip of cloth made from old, white blanket material measuring about two feet long and about one inch wide. When I observed that there were some remnants of colored stripes left, Joshua explained that he "didn't like those colors" and in trying to "rip out all of the colors," he "ripped it up to pieces."

A five year old girl, Alison, showed me her rather large quilt and pointed out that the corner was missing. She explained that she "wanted to take some little pieces everywhere" and could not "take the big one because it drags" so "my Dad cut the corner off--I said I want him to cut the corner off. . . ." Her mother further described that "she had a favorite corner of her blanket and because she couldn't take all of it we cut off that corner so she could take that with her. . . ." Alison described her reaction to this operation as " I went crying downstairs" because "I don't have anymore blanket," then later reflected "But I still have it." During the interview, small pieces of the batting from inside the quilt fell out, but, while Alison noticed, she made no effort to replace the pieces.

Another six year old girl, Karen, reported that some of the stuffing of her lion was missing because "I'm just scratching it lots of time and then whoops--it'll come out." Also, she demonstrated how she wrapped one arm of the lion around her finger and as a result "the stuffing just goes down here [pointing to the lion's stomach]." This particular lion suffered an acute injury during a squabble with a sibling: "My brother pulled the tail. We were fighting then because I wanted [my lion] back and the tail was starting to rip and then I said

'Give it back to me--give it back to me' and then I said, 'Mom, Mom, [my brother] broke the tail.'" In the aftermath, the mother sewed the tail back on.

At times, the efforts at repairing and maintaining a possession altered the appearance of the possession and the child's use. For example, the researcher observed that the blanket of one five year old girl, Lauren, had two layers. The mother and Lauren laughed and explained that the second layer was "reinforcing." As the mother further explained, "And this real thin [layer] is all that's left of the original. And this thicker [layer], we put on as a backing at one point." One part of the blanket was identified as a special area and Lauren explained that this was because "I can scratch it." Her mother pointed out that this spot was repaired and that Lauren had developed a preference for scratching the repaired area. Another five year old girl, Caitlin, had developed an attachment to a corner of her blanket and constant use of it resulted in a seam ripping. The mother pointed out that the "more I sewed it the better she liked it because it was rougher."

Some parents responded to the changes in the appearance of the possession by suggesting that the child use a new one. As one mother of a three year old boy described, "He told me that we could get a new blanky and we went out and bought two new ones that are exactly the same as this--but he didn't want to sleep with them." Another child's mother described how she bought a "back-up" blanket for her daughter when she was 18 months old because the original blanket had begun to fray. After several months, the child

found the original frayed blanket, remembered it, and insisted upon using it thereafter.

Not all of the original possessions were used as single possessions. One child had used a dog and blanket in combination since infancy. In discussing these possessions, his mother referred to them collectively as one possession: ". . . when it comes to something that he really needs--then it's the blanket and the dog." Apparently, these two possessions have consistently been used hand-in-hand.

Sequential Possessions

For some children, the transition to a sequential object which was a close facsimile to their original possession was necessary and acceptable to the child. For example, one five year old boy was using his third yellow blanket. His mother explained that "there was one that he was given when he was born but it got totally shredded, so we had to replace it." It seems that each time the blanket was too worn for use, a new yellow blanket was purchased. The last time a yellow blanket was purchased, it was divided into two pieces and bound on all sides with blanket binding. These two pieces were currently being used interchangeably.

Another six year old boy was using his third rabbit named Bunny Ears. The original Bunny Ears was given to him when he was about three weeks old and had a music box in it. The second Bunny Ears was simply a stuffed rabbit. The child described their fate: "They're gone. I think the music box broke and the other's head fell off." His mother corroborated his account and further described, "I saved them for a while, then my husband, who is Mr. Clean of the

household, just tossed them during one of his cleaning sessions." His mother described the criteria for each subsequent rabbit: "[They] all need to be blue and they need to have cotton material on the ears." As a consequence, the transition to each subsequent Bunny Ears occurred smoothly.

One three year old boy, Spencer, requested a replacement for his "old sheep," which was the original sheepskin placed in his crib as an infant. This change occurred at Christmas when he was three years old. He had been sick with ear infections for a protracted length of time and had vomited on the old sheepskin. This left a stain despite numerous washings. Since the backing was getting quite thin, several holes developed. As a result, Spencer began to ask his parents for a new one. When he received the new one, Spencer placed the old one on his top bunk bed and put the new one on the bottom bunk bed where he sleeps. His mother expressed surprise that he had shown me the old sheepskin: "I'm surprised he brought this down. He never does He acts like it doesn't exist. And yet he wants to keep it on the top bunk bed."

Multiple Possessions

The third pattern regarding continuity of use was illustrated by two children who added a new possession to their original possession. Both children indicated that the combination of possessions was important to them. One six year old boy, Joshua, indicated that he had been given a teddy bear when he was about two. He called the bear "Dotty Boo" which was his early pronunciation of "Teddy Bear." Dotty Boo coexisted with his blanket

"Gummy-Gum" which had been with him since he came home from the hospital at birth.

One six year old girl, Rebecca, had used a blanket and a teddy bear since infancy. When she was about three years old, she got another bear while on vacation and she added this "Edie Bear" to her original possessions. While Rebecca currently has, by her own count, about twenty stuffed animals, this particular bear is the only one she elevated to special status. For example, when Rebecca goes to spend the night at a friend's house, both bears accompany her.

Another five year old girl, Lisa, showed me twenty stuffed animals of various sizes and characteristics arranged on her bed. Some of these animals appeared quite new while others looked like they had been frequently handled. She arranged them in a new order each night before sleeping. As she described it, "Every time I change my bed, I put them in different places." In discussing the history of this menagerie, it became apparent that several animals had been with her since infancy. When she was younger, two particular animals, White Bear and Peachy, were preferred. At times, these two still enjoy preferential treatment such as being selected for travel. At other times, the newest animal is considered the most special. During the interview, I commented, "I'm going to pretend that this is brand new. How would you know if he could be a special thing?" Lisa replied, "Like that. Cause he's brand new." At another point, I commented, "So, where some children have one special thing, you have a lot of special things." Lisa nodded her head in agreement.

As we continued to talk, Lisa's parents revealed that she had also used two blankets since her infancy. These blankets covered her each night and the preferred animals were in her crib. While it is difficult to track so many possessions and their symbolic meanings to this child, it seems apparent that she formed multiple attachments in a sequential fashion.

Selection of Possessions

The second major pattern emerging from the data on the evolution of comforting possessions involved the initial choice of the particular comforting possession. While the particular process of how the children attached to their possessions was not a direct focus of this study, some data illustrated this process. Since infants are not physically able to actively seek possessions for many months, adults participate to a degree in the selection by what they provide to the infant or small child. That is, the possession must be accessible to the child for it to be selected as a special possession. In this study, the data suggest that there is considerable variance in how the parents influence choice.

Some parents attribute the selection of the possession to the child. For example, one mother mentioned, "I said my Mom had made this one which was with yellow crochet and one with green crochet and for some reason this one was selected." Another mother commented, "Actually, this blanket was really made for his brother but he never attached to it--and Jonah found it." When describing her daughter's attachment, another mother said, "She was in a

bassinet for three months, and then she went into a portacrib. I think that's when she started." Each of these descriptions suggests an active role on the part of the child in choosing a comforting possession.

One child was recommended as a study participant by another mother who had observed that the mother in the family had very strong ideas about children and comforting possessions. During the interview of her four and a half year old daughter, who continues to use the same blanket she has had since she was an infant, the mother explained her beliefs. In her words, she "felt very strongly" that each of her children should have a blanket and she brought each of them home from the hospital wrapped in a blanket. She had selected one color for each child and would very carefully tuck it into the hand of the infants each time they went to sleep. In part, she said she did this so that they would choose a blanket over a pacifier. Also, she anticipated that there would be times when they would go on trips or rides in the car and the blanket would make everything very easy. In fact, each of her children had attached exclusively to the designated blanket and continued to use it well into childhood.

One four year old girl, Meagan, had some difficulty remembering how long she had used her blanket. Her mother answered the question by saying, "She used to have another blanket and she switched--I bet it was about two years ago." The mother further explained that "it was really me [sic] who switched the blankets because we were going to Aunt Patsy's house. She made that [the current blanket] for you and we wanted--rather than you

carry another blanket, you carried one she made. And that was a very easy switch for you. You just took it that next day and that was fine."

While these two examples suggest that parental influence can be quite direct, other examples suggest that parents may influence the choice in a much more subtle fashion. For example, the regular placement of an object in the crib may prompt its selection. As one mother explained about one of her son's two blankets, "This one he attached to first--because he was born in the summer and this was lightweight--and so it was in the crib." Another child attached to a sheepskin which had been placed in his crib since birth.

Despite the subtle role which all parents played simply by providing objects in the environment, two stories illustrate that parents cannot necessarily preselect the possession to which the child will attach. One five year old girl was given a handmade quilt featuring a very feminine ballerina motif which her maternal grandmother made in celebration of her birth. While this quilt was available to the child from birth, it was not chosen as a special possession; rather, the child attached to an older commercially made comforter which had previously been used by a stepbrother. Another mother purchased two soft teddy bears and one down comforter for her son, only to have him attach to the very thin diaper that had been placed under his chin to protect his clothing while being fed. In both cases, the mothers recognized the strength of the attachment and accepted the choices of the children.

Other findings suggest that particular characteristics of the

possession prompted an attraction. One six year old girl, Christine, showed how her blanket was unevenly worn, as a satin sheep applique' had been the particular place she had chosen to rub. In her words, "It's very ripped though, a lot on the sheep though." She further explained, "I used to rub it." Another five year old boy showed a particular attraction to fuzz and was very concerned that his blanket not lose its fuzz.

Finally, one story suggests that the selection may be a result of matching the child's particular needs or rituals with an object which fits that pattern. One five year old girl in the preschool was observed using a particularly rhythmical motion that could best be described as a gentle brushing back and forth when she stroked her rabbit's ears. While reading a story to this child on one occasion when the rabbit was not present, this motion was applied to my skirt. This rhythmical motion was discussed with the mother who reported that she had first observed this motion when the child was an infant prior to her attachment to the rabbit. The motion was not directed to any part of her body or clothing nor to her mother's body or clothing. Rather, this motion occurred as a waving motion in the space around her. Later, she applied it to the rabbit's ears.

A Family Tradition

For several children in this study, the child's comforting possession was remarkably similar to a parent's childhood comforting possession. One six year old boy, Joshua, was asked about how long he had had his blanket and he replied, "Something like--I

think she [his sister] bought it when I was born." Later, his mother filled in some of the details: "Joshua's dad had a blanket named Whitey. Theresa, [his sister] had a white blanket that we called Whitey before she could even call it that and then Theresa bought Joshua the same blanket and called it Whitey for Joshua--but he couldn't say Whitey and came out with Gummy Gum--so it seems to be a family tradition." This story illustrates the strength of family participation in the selection of this blanket. Indeed, in this case, the mother further explained, "We actually got him interested because Theresa was so excited about him having the same blanket. So we always put it in his bed and it was always laying down and so I think it's already in his memories from being in his crib or of it being with him. We used to wrap him up in it. It was a receiving blanket. In fact, when he came home from the hospital, we wrapped him in it because it was a present from his big sister."

Some comforting possessions were actually passed down to the child from an older sibling who had not chosen the particular item as a special possession. In response to questioning, a five year old girl, Lauren, announced, "My Grandma made it for me," but was unable to answer how long she had had her blanket. Her mother filled in the details when asked if the blanket had been made for the child's birth: "No, actually, she [the grandmother] had died before Lauren was born. She had made it actually for Michael [the child's older brother] and then I had always had one like this and she made it and crocheted the edge and Michael preferred another one so it never got used much and I was using it with Lauren and it was the one that

she fastened onto."

Another four and a half year old boy, Jonah, shared a family story regarding his blanket. When asked by his mother to show me what his blanket "really is," he responded, "It used to be my clothes when I was a baby." Indeed, when he shook out the possession, it was a knitted baby bunting with the bottom no longer sewed together. His mother prompted him to tell who had made the bunting and he answered, "Granny Grey. She is very old. She has to walk with a cane now." When asked if she had made the bunting before he was born, his mother explained, "Actually, this blanket was made for his brother but he never attached to it--and Jonah found it."

When discussing the respective ages of a teddy bear and blanket with six year old Rebecca, she referred the question to her mother. Her mother responded, "Well, they're both pretty much the same age. Um. She had these both when she was born. . . . They were gifts." Rebecca then explained, "This [referring to the blanket] is from my family, and this [referring to the bear] is from my grandmother." Her mother added to clarify, "This [blanket] is from Mom and Dad." Both Rebecca and her mother explained that the bear was a joint gift from "grandma" and the child's sister.

Another six year old girl, Kate, showed me her blanket which was a large puffy quilt featuring primary colors and many trucks and automobiles. Her mother explained that she had made the quilt in preparation for her first child who was this little girl's oldest brother. This brother did not attach to the blanket and thus it was

passed down through two other brothers who were also not interested in the blanket. In the mother's words, "It really became her special blanket--because at this point I had no time to make a girl's blanket--so it was the only blanket I had."

Outside the Family Circle

Not all possessions were given to the child by the immediate family. More distant relations and friends were also sources. When asked how long she had had her lion, a six year old girl hesitated and asked her mother, "How--how much?" The mother replied, "Since you were about two months old--so Gary's been with you for six years now--over six years." The child was able to identify the source of the lion accurately: "My cousins gave it to me." Her mother reported that eight cousins ranging in age from three years to 21 years had won the lion at a circus. They presented the lion to the child when first visiting her at the age of two months.

A three year old boy could not remember who bought either of his blankets so his mother explained that the first blanket was given to him by her friends as baby shower gifts. The second blanket was used by a friend's daughter and was passed to this child as an infant because it was no longer being used. This child's older brother had also been given his blanket by the family friends. Another girl was given her blanket by her grandmother's friend.

Summary

The accounts of the children and mothers regarding the history of their objects suggest that the comforting possessions in this study

generally evolved from the period of infancy.⁵ While there are variations in the continuity of use, the majority of children formed an attachment to a possession and maintained that attachment through the current study. For some, the possession did not survive infancy or early childhood and had to be replaced by a close facsimile. Only a few children formed multiple attachments. Parents participated in the selection of possessions either by directly selecting an object and facilitating its use, or more subtly, by placing an object in close proximity to the infant, thus making it available for attachment. The selection of objects made available to the child occasionally reflected the parents' own childhood choices. Also, the selection of possessions was impacted by the tradition of presenting the infant with gifts by family members, grandparents, and friends.

⁵ It is interesting that many of the comforting possessions were presented to the children at the time of birth or very early in life by family members or family friends. In discussing maternal attachment to infants, Rubin [1970] outlined several psychological tasks of pregnancy which needed to be accomplished in preparation for attachment. One of these tasks involves the acceptance of the child by the family and friends of parents. Leifer [1980] noted that the concrete tasks such as purchasing baby clothes and furnishings that are associated with the third trimester "served to heighten the reality of the baby" and increase the "emotional readiness" of the mother [p. 81]. The findings from the current study may be illustrative of the prenatal attachment process in that family members and friends may seek to provide objects to the child as concrete manifestations of their anticipation of a meaningful relationship with the child.

CHAPTER V

PATTERNS OF EVERYDAY USE IN THE PRESCHOOL

The purpose of this chapter is to present and discuss the data derived from observations which focused on patterns of use of comforting possession in the preschool. Data were collected in the preschool by noting the presence of a particular comforting possession and monitoring its use during preschool activities.

Patterns of Handling, Placing, and Using

The observational data support two themes. First, in this group of children, the handling and placing of the the possessions were highly ritualized. Secondly, usage varies along a continuum characterized on one end by diffuse, non-activity specific use and on the other end by rather discrete or activity specific use of the comforting possession. The observations of the children with comforting possessions suggest that children develop specific patterns of handling and using their comforting possessions. These patterns are incorporated into the discussion of each individual child.

Comforting Possessions in the Preschool: The Regulars

Four children regularly brought their comforting possessions to the preschool. These children demonstrated individual differences regarding their use, although a consistent, predictable pattern was observable for each child regarding how that child handled or placed the possession and the times of day and the activities during which

the child actually used the possession.

Victoria

One four year old girl in the preschool, Victoria, demonstrated a pattern of use of her diaper, Didi, which could be described as more diffuse and less activity specific. That is, she carried her Didi with her to many activities although the level of integration of the diaper into those activities seemed to vary with Victoria's involvement in the activity.

Victoria was observed several times emerging from the back seat of her mother's car or the carpool vehicle with Didi in hand. Once, she was observed waiting for her mother to unhook her seatbelt, and she busily chatted with her friend while occasionally sucking her thumb and rubbing Didi. She would carry the diaper into the classroom accompanied by her mother or the other carpoolers. At times, her mother carried her lunchbox and other personal effects.

On most mornings, Victoria would bring Didi to the morning meeting. Using two hands, she would rhythmically manipulate it through her fingers next to her nose and face while sucking her thumb. This ritualistic motion was consistently observed when Victoria was interacting with Didi. Victoria's interaction with Didi did not interfere with her ability to contribute to the group activities as she would talk around her thumb or remove her thumb to talk while putting Didi in her lap. For example, during one morning meeting, the group was discussing shapes. She answered several questions about the shapes of foods keeping her thumb in her mouth with her

Didi in her hands.

Victoria usually brought Didi to her activities. At times, Didi would remain in her lap and be used to wipe her nose or would occasionally be brought up to her face while she briefly sucked her thumb. At the height of an activity when Victoria was most involved with other children or the activity, Didi seemed to be forgotten. On one occasion, she placed her Didi behind her on the chair while she completed a dinosaur activity. At the end of the activity which lasted about 30 minutes, she stood up to take her papers and put them in her storage tub. She noticed Didi on the chair, gave a little gasp and gathered Didi into her arms, sucked her thumb and manipulated Didi as she walked over to her tub. Just before putting Didi in the tub, Victoria gave the diaper a big sniff. One of the teachers observed this behavior and commented, "One for the road!"

On another occasion, Victoria joined a group of little girls playing Baby in the family circle. Since she was the mother, her job was to dress up in high heels and a long skirt and then try to keep track of all the babies who were crying and crawling all around. Victoria brought Didi to the family center and dropped the diaper on the floor while she got dressed as the mother. When she got up to play, she left Didi on the floor. About an hour later, Victoria and her group were sent back to the family center to straighten up and then she noticed Didi on the floor. She immediately put Didi into her tub and returned to her friends. According to the teachers, this was typical of Victoria and Didi. She carried Didi with her to an activity, her involvement with Didi diminished once she becomes involved,

and Didi would be left wherever Victoria happened to be.

This pattern of leaving Didi wherever she happened to be may prompt the mother and teachers to direct Victoria to put Didi away. Frequently her mother would direct her to put Didi into her bin. For example, one morning Victoria jumped up from her mother's lap in morning meeting to join a particular activity. Her mother did not let go of her arm so Victoria leaned over to hear her mother say, "Put Didi in your tub." On another occasion her mother remained in the circle after meeting to talk with one of the other mothers. When she went over to the table where Victoria was working, she bent over and kissed her goodbye. At the same time, she removed Didi from behind Victoria on the chair and put it into her tub.

Once a teacher was observed assisting Victoria in putting her Didi away. She was joining the table where the numbers activity was and the teacher commented, "Victoria, do you want to put Didi in your tub before you join the table?" On these occasions, Victoria always acquiesced without comment. She could be observed tossing or pushing her Didi into her tub as fast as possible. There did not seem to be any ritual associated with putting Didi in the bin. In fact, on one occasion, she attempted to get one of the teachers to take her Didi back into the classroom and put it in her tub so that she would not have to lose her place in line for an activity.

At times this behavior of casually dropping Didi precipitated a search. One day when it was time to go for resting, I heard Victoria tell the teacher several times that she "need[ed]" her Didi. Each time, the teacher commented that she should get her Didi from her tub.

Finally, Victoria commented that she "want[ed]" Didi and could not find it. The teacher was occupied trying to get everyone to the bathroom before leaving for resting time, so Victoria stood next to me looking worried and saying, "I need Didi. I don't know where it is." In talking with her, she indicated that Didi was not in her tub. I commented that I had seen Didi in the windowsill of the Family Center. She replied, "I know, but I took it to meeting. Oh! I know where it is!" She ran outside onto the playground and triumphantly joined the rest of the group with Didi in hand.

During resting time Victoria assumed two poses with Didi. During a quiet story or music, she seemed to be more involved with Didi. She would rest quietly on her back and concentrate on manipulating Didi and rubbing her nose while she sucked her thumb. During a more exciting story or while chatting with another child, she would drop Didi into her lap and remove her thumb from her mouth.

It seems that with Victoria there were no clear demarcations between times for using Didi and times for not using Didi. For Victoria, Didi seemed to be an integral part of her everyday activities. She brought Didi with her to school and frequently incorporated the diaper into her activities. Her involvement with Didi was most intense during those times when Victoria was quieter and more centered on herself. When Victoria became more involved with other children and the activities themselves, she seemed to forget Didi, although a return to a quiet activity would prompt a search for Didi. Also, while patterns of placing or protecting were not part of her pattern of interacting with Didi, her handling of Didi was

highly ritualized.

Jonah

One four year old boy, Jonah, demonstrated a less diffuse use of his blanket and seemed to restrict its use to entry times, resting times, and those times when he was feeling tired. Jonah attended the preschool five mornings a week and stayed for the afternoon program three times a week.

On those days when he was staying for the entire day and would be participating in resting time, Jonah always brought his blanket. This particular blanket was derived from a knitted baby bunting and thus could be pulled over his body and head like a poncho with a hood. While his mother occasionally carried the blanket into the classroom in the morning, Jonah usually wore the blanket into the classroom either poncho-style or as a shawl around his neck, or carried it in a tightly wadded ball against his chest while he sucked his thumb. Once in the classroom, he would usually wander slowly toward the wall of bins and carefully place his blanket into his own personal bin. This placing involved putting the blanket into the bin, patting the ends into place, and briefly drumming it with his fingers while putting his thumb in his mouth for one last moment.

Occasionally, Jonah would sit down in the circle for morning meeting with his blanket in his arms. Some days, his mother would join him for morning meeting and sit on the floor with him in her lap, sometimes with the blanket on Jonah's lap. On these days, he would voluntarily put his blanket into his bin at the conclusion of the

meeting. Once the blanket was placed in the bin, it remained there during classroom activities in the morning and was not taken out until resting time. For Jonah, it seemed that the morning meeting provided a transition into the classroom and afterwards, his blanket was not needed.

One day Jonah was late for school because of traffic on the freeway and thus missed the transition of the morning meeting. He was accompanied by his mother and his two week old baby sister. After showing the teachers his sister, instead of placing his blanket in his bin as was his custom, he draped his blanket around his shoulders and wandered around the room. I chatted with him in the book corner and asked if he were planning to join any of the activities. His response, that of looking surprised and asking what activities were available, suggested that missing morning meeting had interrupted his usual pattern of entry thus contributing to his aimless behavior. About that time, the physical education teacher appeared in the classroom doorway. Jonah responded by volunteering to be in the first group for physical education, placed his blanket into his tub, and joined his classmates. When he returned to the classroom, his blanket remained in the tub and he stayed involved with several other children. It is interesting that on this one occasion when he missed morning meeting, he had a more difficult time getting involved with the activities and his blanket remained with him longer.

During the afternoon session after resting time, Jonah frequently kept his blanket with him. The teachers shared a picture

of Jonah curled up in the beanbag chair in the reading corner fast asleep with his blanket. They commented that this was typical of his afternoons: with his closest friends gone, he responded to his fatigue by being less involved with the preschool activities. Inevitably he would seek his blanket and, often, fall asleep.

Whenever Jonah's blanket was available to him and he was not engaged in a conversation or other activity, his thumb was usually in his mouth and his fingers would be drumming and patting the blanket in a rhythmic fashion. In a subsequent interview, he explained that it was the fuzz from the blanket which was important. It seems that the drumming motion created small fuzzy pieces which he could hold. At times, this activity seemed to be occurring almost unconsciously. For example, one morning Jonah was sitting by me in the morning meeting with his blanket in his arms using his drumming and patting motion. The teachers were forming a line to walk down to the playground for a school activity. When they asked for everyone wearing black or white to get in line, both Jonah and I got in line as we were wearing those colors. He carried his blanket with him to the line and was telling me about the black and white design on his tee shirt. As he was telling me this, he glanced down and looked very surprised to see his blanket. Immediately, he ran back to his bin and put his blanket away.

On one occasion in the preschool, a teacher called my attention to an interaction between Jonah and herself. She was wearing a very fuzzy white sweater knitted in the same sort of popcorn stitch as Jonah's blanket. He was standing behind her lightly rubbing his

hands across her shoulders. As he did this, a piece of fuzz came loose. He picked this up and tickled his nose with it as he sucked his thumb. This occurred rather late one morning on a day when Jonah did not have his blanket available to him. On another day, he showed me the fuzzy collar of his new winter jacket and showed me how he could pat it until a piece of fuzz came loose.

During rest time, Jonah demonstrated two different levels of activity with his blanket. During a quiet story or music, he would lay on top of his blanket with it partially wrapped around him. Occasionally, he would pull the blanket over his head and wear it as a poncho. He would hold the end of the blanket in his hands and use his fingers in the drumming motion on it. During this level of involvement, he seemed to be concentrating on the drumming motion and was very quiet and still. During a more exciting story or if he were interacting with another child, he would shift to a sitting position and move his blanket to his side or into his lap. At these times he did not suck his thumb, nor did he appear interested in the blanket.

It seems that for Jonah, the demarcations between times for using his blanket and times for not using his blanket were clearer than for Victoria. For Jonah, use of the blanket seemed to be associated with his entry into the classroom, designated rest times, and when he was feeling tired. Jonah's involvement with his blanket was more intense during these particular times in the preschool and his corresponding behavior was to be quieter and more self-centered. Also, Jonah demonstrated ritualistic patterns both when

placing his blanket in his bin and when handling his blanket.

Brooke

Another four year old girl regularly brought her blanket to the preschool. For Brooke, usage of her blanket was specific to rest time. Unlike Victoria and Jonah, her blanket usually arrived at school in a duffel bag and emerged only for resting. One morning, Brooke placed both her blanket and a stuffed dog into the sharing basket. She placed the dog in first, and then put the blanket on top stating, "That's how it goes." She then proceeded to participate in classroom activities apparently forgetting where the blanket was, as she had to be called back at the end of the day to ask if she wished to leave the dog and blanket overnight. Brooke responded by grabbing them out of the basket and taking them home.

During resting time, Brooke was observed literally "wrapped" up in her blanket. Since it was larger than a typical baby blanket, it was possible for her to roll herself up in it, although this required many tries. Often, only her feet would be left out, although this would prompt another try. When she was completely covered, then she was able to be still and listen to a story or music.

Brooke's pattern of using her blanket only for resting was consistently observed until a particularly stressful time occurred for her and her family. Her mother was pregnant with twins and was experiencing a number of complications toward the end of the pregnancy. Brooke reacted to this with some behavioral changes. For example, she was noticed to be wandering around the classroom instead of joining activities. She had difficulty getting her snack

from the snack corner and finding a chair at a table. Her face was often troubled and her voice took on a whining quality. Frequently, she would cry for brief periods of time. Also, during this interval, Brooke began to carry her blanket around the classroom.

On the first occasion I observed the blanket with Brooke in the classroom, I noticed that she brought it in her arms and carried the duffel bag as well. She took the blanket to morning meeting and sat patting it in a dazed fashion as if she were not part of the meeting. Afterward, she seemed to be having trouble getting down to the playground with the other children for a school ceremony, and was finally taken in tow by one of the teachers. Throughout this, she carried her blanket in her arms and the only interactions she had were with the blanket. During the ceremony, she remained peripheral to the other children and the excitement. Later in the morning, she carried her blanket to physical education. She became involved in a parachute game and for the first time that day, seemed to be participating wholeheartedly in the activity. At the conclusion of the game, she walked back to the classroom with the other children leaving her blanket behind. When the blanket was returned to her in the classroom, she looked surprised and then took the blanket and placed it in her bin.

On the second day her blanket was observed out of the duffel bag, Brooke did not aimlessly wander for as long as the day before and actually participated in several activities. Each time, she took her blanket with her. The blanket remained in her lap and she cuddled it. Also, she rhythmically played with her hair as well as

stroked the blanket in a methodical fashion. During a dinosaur bingo game, as she was reaching for a new card or markers, the blanket kept falling onto the floor. Finally, she wadded it up and put it on the chair and sat on it. On this day, I asked one of the teachers if she had noticed any difference in Brooke over the past few days. She immediately responded, "Oh, yes!" She corroborated that the teachers had noticed that Brooke was having several "hard days" and that the blanket was out of the duffel bag throughout the morning.

Five days later, Brooke was observed getting out of the car of another child in the school. The other child's mother was carrying the duffel bag. Brooke ran from the parking lot up to the preschool, despite the other mother's protestations, and only stopped when she found one of the teachers. She showed the teacher pictures of "Mommy's babies." On this day, while she had some initial difficulty joining in activities, she was able to participate with the other children in a pattern more similar to her behavior prior to the stressful period preceding the birth of the twins. Also, her blanket remained in her duffel bag.

Several weeks later, Brooke's mother brought her to school accompanied by the twin sisters. Her mother was carrying Brooke's blanket and placed it in her bin while telling Brooke goodbye. On this day, Brooke did not seek the blanket until resting time.

It seems that for Brooke, her usual interaction with her blanket was reserved for resting time. This was a consistent pattern until she experienced the stressful period related to the birth of her sisters. At that time, she began to interact with her blanket

throughout the day. When this particular stress was relieved, she gradually returned to her earlier pattern. Like Victoria and Jonah, Brooke's involvement with her blanket corresponded with her being less involved in an activity, and to be quieter and more self-centered. Brooke also demonstrated both ritualistic patterns of placing and handling of her blanket.

Sarah

Toward the end of the observational period in the preschool, four year old Sarah began to bring her blanket to school two days a week because she was beginning to stay for the all day program on those days. She showed me her blanket which was a brown, calico quilt in very good condition, and explained that she always used it for sleeping. Therefore, she brought it for resting time. Sarah's blanket remained in her bin in a white plastic grocery bag until it was time for resting.

After resting, the children were often allowed to play for a short period of time on a upper playground. This was a particular treat as a large, boatlike structure was available for climbing. One afternoon, I found the resters on the boat. While everyone else had left their blankets and other belongings behind in the resting room, the teacher reported that Sarah had not been comfortable leaving her blanket behind. Rather, she placed it in the white plastic grocery bag, put her arms through the loops like a backpack, and carried it with her to the playground and eventually back to the classroom.

It seems, then, like Brooke, that Sarah was bringing her blanket specifically for resting. During the brief period of time this behavior

was observed, she demonstrated a protective stance toward her blanket.

Comforting Possessions in the Preschool: The Irregulars

Two children brought their comforting possessions to the preschool on an irregular basis, although often enough that they were recognized by the teachers and children. These children also varied in the degree they used their possessions during preschool.

Erin

Erin, a four year old girl, was attending the preschool for the second year. The previous year, she brought her rabbit, Peaches, to school everyday. This year, according to her mother, Peaches always rode in the car but only occasionally did Erin choose to bring Peaches into the classroom. Her mother related Peaches' visits to stress. For example, she explained that Erin's grandmother was ill and they were moving to a new house. In response, Erin was using Peaches more often including bringing the rabbit to school.

Some days, Peaches was placed in Erin's bin while she participated in activities. On these occasions, Peaches might be visited or removed by Erin. For example, after making a whale, Erin wandered over to her bin and removed Peaches. She then wandered over to the book corner with Peaches in her arms. She sat down and looked through a book while flopping Peaches' ear back and forth with her hand in a rhythmical fashion. Peaches remained with Erin throughout the rest of the morning's activities, including snack time when Peaches sat on the table.

On another occasion, Peaches was in the bin while Erin took

part in a letter activity. She was very interested in carefully forming the letter C and concentrated for about thirty minutes on the task. At the conclusion, she gathered her papers together to have them stapled into a book. While it was not clear from my vantage point if Erin tore one of the papers or the teacher tore one while trying to staple it, the fact that one paper had a small tear upset Erin. She looked sad and sighed. The teacher offered to tape the tear and Erin declined. Finally, the teacher suggested she put the book in her bin. Erin complied, but while there, she lifted Peaches out of the bin and began to suck her thumb. She wandered for a few minutes with Peaches close to her face while sucking her thumb, and then joined in a pirate game in the block corner. When she had to jump or use both hands, Peaches would fall to the floor. When this happened several times, Erin dropped Peaches into her tub and left her there for the remainder of the morning.

On other days, Erin would keep Peaches with her during morning meeting and other activities. One morning, when Erin got up from the morning meeting circle to go to an activity, one of the teachers said to her, "Why don't you put Peaches away in your tub?" Despite the strength of the message, Erin resisted. She looked distressed for a moment, and then shook her head "no." She proceeded over to the activity table and participated in making a shell drawing. While she worked, Peaches either sat in her lap or on the table. Erin interacted with the other children around issues such as "I need the scissors" and with the teacher concerning "What do I do next?" Periodically, she would hold Peaches up and bring her face

close to the rabbit's face and hold a conversation. For example, when she finished the shell picture, the teacher exclaimed, "Erin, look at your shell. It is so colorful. How do you feel about that?" Erin replied, "Good." She then showed the shell to Peaches and asked, "Peaches, do you see my shell? What do you think about it?" Peaches evidently answered because I heard a squeaky little voice but could not make out the words.

While Erin would occasionally put Peaches down while involved in an activity, she always seemed to know where to find the rabbit. For example, she was observed playing dress-up with several other children. She went into the family center to select an outfit and placed Peaches on the windowsill. She made several trips out of the family center to seek assistance with buttons and zippers. At the conclusion of the game, however, she did not hesitate in going directly over to the windowsill to retrieve Peaches.

Since Peaches did not always come to school, I was curious about Erin's explanation for leaving Peaches in the car. One day on the playground when I had not seen Peaches for over a week, she asked me to help tie her shoe. While helping her, I commented, "I haven't seen Peaches for a while. What is Peaches up to?" In a hurry to get back to the game on the playground, Erin answered, "She's sleeping." I stopped momentarily and said, "Oh." Erin looked a little annoyed that I had stopped and said somewhat petulantly, "Well, you know, she's only two." With that, she rejoined the game.

It seems that with Erin, the rabbit was integrated into many activities in much the same way Didi was integral to Victoria's

activities. Despite the irregular attendance, Peaches was clearly an important component of Erin's activities, including conversations. When asked, however, when Peaches was most important to her, Erin replied, "When I go to sleep . . . I hug her and flop her ear with my hand." It is interesting that Erin's mother related the use of Peaches to stress, and that this reaction to stress was demonstrated during activities in the classroom. Like Victoria, Erin seemed somewhat removed and centered upon herself while using Peaches. In her case, it appeared to be a self-directed "time out," possibly allowing her to recover her composure. Unlike Victoria, she seemed to make choices about putting Peaches down or away as opposed to forgetting her whereabouts. Finally, Erin demonstrated patterns of handling Peaches and protecting her.

Amy

Amy was a three year old girl who occasionally brought her stuffed dog Barclay to the preschool. On the first morning I observed Barclay, Amy was returning to school from an extended absence due to a family vacation. She came into the classroom with Barclay under her arm holding her father's hand. She seemed somewhat shy about entering the classroom. She remained a few steps behind her father as though she were hiding until the teachers said hello and fussed over her a bit: "Amy, I'm so glad to see you!" She seemed to relax after this, said goodbye to her father, took Barclay and sat down at the playdough table with another child. In comparing this behavior with behavior throughout the observational period, it seems that Amy brought Barclay on this particular day as

she was somewhat concerned about returning to the preschool.

On the same occasion, while Amy was at the playdough table, she placed Barclay on the table between herself and the other child. The other child was using a utensil to model the playdough which Amy wanted to try. After trying unsuccessfully to take the utensil several times when it was put down on the table, Amy tried another approach. When she asked the other child, "Would you like to hold Barclay?", the other child nodded. Amy handed over Barclay with one hand and took the desired utensil with the other. The other child played with Barclay until Amy was ready to leave the table. At that point, they both departed leaving Barclay on the table. At meeting time, Amy retrieved Barclay and put him into her bin without a reminder. This particular incident was the only incident of bartering of a comforting possession that I observed during the course of the study.

On another occasion, Amy arrived in the preschool with Barclay under her arm accompanied by her father. At first, they walked around the room looking at the pictures displayed on the bulletin boards and the projects on the tables. Then, her father sat down for the morning meeting with Amy on his lap holding Barclay on her lap. Amy was very active in the morning meeting answering questions and participating in the discussion. Periodically, she would stop and whisper to her dad and pat the dog on the head as if she were making sure he was paying attention to the group. One time when she was doing this, I caught a few of her words. She turned to her father and said, "Daddy, you need to" At that point, he

reached over and stroked the dog as though it were a real puppy. Later in the meeting, Amy needed to go to the bathroom so off she went accompanied by her father and Barclay. When she returned, she sat down in the circle alone with Barclay and told her father goodbye. Barclay remained with her until the close of meeting and then Amy placed the dog in her bin.

Throughout my observational period, Amy would irregularly bring Barclay to the preschool. After a few minutes in the classroom or after morning meeting, he would be placed in her bin and would remain there throughout the morning. It seemed that Barclay served as a prop for Amy during the transitional time from home to school.

Comforting Possessions in the Preschool: Occasional Visitors

Four children occasionally brought their comforting possessions to the preschool. For all of these children, bringing the comforting possession on a particular day seemed to be related to a particular stressor.

Eric

Early in the observational period, the mother of five year old Eric offered to send his blanket with him to school since he did not regularly bring it into the classroom. I suggested that we wait and see if he offered to do this. While Eric and I did not actually discuss his blanket at school, I was able to observe him with his blanket on two occasions.

On the first occasion, Eric arrived in the classroom accompanied by his father, whom the teachers stated rarely brought him to school. While his father put away his lunch box and coat, Eric stood and

watched, holding his yellow blanket against his chest with his index and third fingers in his mouth. His father said to the teachers, "If it is all right, I will be staying with Eric through [the] meeting." The teachers assured him this would be fine and said to Eric, "Eric, what a special treat!" Eric just smiled and held onto the blanket. His father said, "Let's go see some of your projects." When Eric did not respond, he asked, "Do you have anything on the boards?" Eric nodded, and so his father said, "Let's go look." Eric took his father's hand and led him over to the bulletin boards near the children's storage bins. While near the bins, Eric took his blanket and put it in his bin.

The very next day, Eric arrived in the preschool with another mother and an older child from another classroom. The other mother helped him put away his lunchbox and jacket and then he went over to the row of bins and tossed his blanket at his bin. While much of the blanket landed in his bin, and the other mother remarked "Good shot!", Eric must not have been satisfied. He took the blanket back out, patted it into sort of a sphere, and then tossed it again. This time he left it and went to join the other children in the meeting circle.

The unexpected appearance of Eric's blanket was explained several days later by his mother. I commented to her that I had been surprised to see Eric's blanket and she seemed surprised and said, "Oh? Did he have his blanket with him?" She asked me which days and then thought out loud that he usually leaves it in the car. It seems that on these two days, his younger brother had been very ill and his mother was unable to drive Eric to school. Both days, Eric

had been very upset by the change and had to be put into the car while protesting. His mother went on to say that she was not surprised that the blanket was brought into the classroom under these circumstances.

Jonathan

At the beginning of the study when I was collecting consent forms, five year old Jonathan's mother called to tell me that I could certainly observe him but that he did not currently use a comforting possession. She then related that he had previously used a teddy bear but that now, it was not important to him. The way she knew it was not important to him was that Jonathan placed it in a particular spot on his bed and did not move it.

One day, a teacher approached me to tell me that Jonathan had brought his bear for "sharing" with the class on the prior day. The teachers had been surprised to see the bear and had been interested in the mother's interpretation. Later, I talked with Jonathan's mother and she related this account. It seemed that one day each week, Jonathan went to his grandmother's house after school. His grandmother expected him to either rest or nap while he is there, as he otherwise became overtired and was disruptive during the rest of the evening. Jonathan had difficulty resting on these days. What the mother noticed was that Jonathan had begun choosing to bring his bear for "sharing" on these days as though he were anticipating the difficult time later at his grandmother's house. Like Eric, then, Jonathan was bringing his bear in response to a very specific stressor that was not part of his everyday experience.

Elizabeth

Early in the study, I was told about five year old Elizabeth's blanket, Binky, during a conversation with Elizabeth's mother. She described how Elizabeth had attached to this blanket passed down from an older step-brother, rather than the frilly quilt handmade by Elizabeth's grandmother in honor of her birth. Her mother related that Binky would come down to breakfast with Elizabeth and then hang on the back of the chair until time to retrieve it at bedtime.

I observed Binky on one occasion in the preschool at the very end of the observational period. At that time, Elizabeth and her mother were engaged in a tearful parting before morning meeting. Her mother was carrying a Raggedy Ann comforter. Out of earshot of Elizabeth, I asked her mother, "Is this it?" She smiled and said, "This is it." Later when Elizabeth joined us, her mother said, "This is such a nice comforter. Sometimes I borrow it and wrap my feet in it when Elizabeth is not using it. It is very warm. Elizabeth brought it today because she thought she might feel a little sad and having her blanket here would help." Elizabeth placed the blanket in her tub and it remained there throughout the morning.

Several days later, Elizabeth was again having trouble parting from her mother before morning meeting. Elizabeth, her mother, and a teacher were arranging that Elizabeth would sit in the teacher's lap during morning meeting to help Elizabeth with this goodbye. In the course of the conversation, Elizabeth said to her mother, "You forgot my blanket." Her mother replied, "Well, this is a short day and so I'll be back soon and it'll be fine." Elizabeth had trouble saying goodbye

to her mother several other times, although her Binky did not come to school with her again.

Sean

Four year old Sean brought his teddy bear, Sweater, to school one time during the observational period. One of the teachers spotted Sweater in his bin and suggested that he introduce his bear to me. He agreeably brought Sweater over and I said, "Oh, Sean! Who is this?" He smiled and said, "Well, this is Sweater." I responded, "I'm delighted to meet you, Sweater" and Sean smiled. I asked him, "Is this your special bear?" and he responded, "Yes, it is." He then went on to tell me that Sweater was just visiting for the day although he did not indicate a particular reason for the visit. His mother had told me that Sweater used to come to preschool every day during the previous school year, but that now Sean was not interested in bringing him. According to the teachers, Sweater seldom visited the preschool any more.

Summary

From the observational data presented, it is apparent that many variations existed in the use of comforting possessions by the ten children who brought their comforting possession to the preschool. Four of the five children actually observed using the possession handled or manipulated the possession in a ritualized fashion. Four of these children demonstrated ritualized placing of their possessions such as in their storage bins with protection of the possession as one outcome. Three of these children demonstrated

ritualized use which involved bringing the possession into close proximity with their faces while sucking their thumbs. Finally, while using the particular possession, the children seemed to be less interactive with those around them suggesting that use occurs when the child is more absorbed in the self.

The children actually used their possessions for different amounts of time and during different activities. For three children, the use of the possession permeated all activities and occurred for greater periods of time; thus, this kind of use could be described as more diffuse and less activity specific. For the remaining children, the use of the possession was reserved for a specific activity such as the period of transition at the beginning of the preschool day, during resting, or in response to a particular stress. This kind of use could be described as more discrete and activity specific. Viewing these behaviors as the anchors for a continuum is useful, since it is possible to place children's usage of comforting possessions all along such a continuum. Variations in usage among these children observed in the preschool did not seem to be related to age, gender, or the inclination of the mother to control usage.

CHAPTER VI

PATTERNS OF EVERYDAY USE AS RELATED IN INTERVIEWS

The purpose of this chapter is to present and discuss the data derived from interviews which focused on patterns of use of comforting possessions in everyday activities. These data were collected during the interviews by asking a series of questions revolving around the core issues of when and how the child used the possession during the course of a usual day. Probes were directed at such topics as how the child actually handled or used the possession, times of day when the possession was important, kinds of activities in which the possession was included, and descriptions of how the possession was integrated into everyday activities.

The interview data supported the two themes which emerged from the preschool observations. First, in this group of children, like the children in the preschool, the handling and placing of the possession was usually highly ritualized. Second, usage varies along a continuum anchored on one end by rather limited or activity specific use of the possession and on the other end, by more diffuse, non-activity specific use. The discussions with the children and their parents regarding use of the comforting possessions illuminated how the children used their comforting possessions, that is, the specific manner of handling, and when the child used the possession: while resting or at bedtime, during play, during moments of stress or emotional upheaval, or when the child was injured. Further, for

some children, there was an indication that their individual patterns shifted along the continuum as they matured.

A Continuum of Use

In order to appreciate the full range of integration of comforting possessions into the activities of these children, it is helpful to examine two specific patterns of use: limited use and diffuse use. Since the children's handling of their possessions is part of their individual patterns, descriptions of their rituals are incorporated into the discussions of their patterns of use. Six children described patterns of use which were more limited and activity specific. Three children described patterns of use which were more diffuse and less activity specific. The behavior of the remaining ten children was quite varied, suggesting that the individual children developed their own unique patterns of using their possessions which may be described as falling along the continuum between these two extremes. Data from these children were particularly helpful in further understanding the function of the comforting possession when the child was tired or preparing for bedtime, during play, during moments of stress or emotional upheaval, or when the child was hurt.

Limited Use

Six children described their use as limited to specific activities, usually related to bedtime, times when the child was tired or sleepy, or during quiet times when the child was more self-absorbed. These children reported no integration of their comforting possessions into

other everyday activities. This group included three boys, two of them age three and one age six, and three girls, ages four, five, and six.

Spencer

Three year old Spencer introduced me to his sheepskin which he used to sleep on at night and when he napped. This particular sheepskin was a replacement for the original sheepskin placed in his crib as a newborn. At the time of the interview, the original sheepskin was kept on the top bunk of his beds, while the new sheepskin generally remained on the bottom bunk where he slept. Occasionally, Spencer brought his Sheep out to the family room to nap or to rest on while watching television with his family just before bedtime. Spencer's manner of handling his Sheep was consistent: he rested on top of the sheepskin and patted or rubbed it with his hand. Occasionally, he held it in his arms against his chest and rubbed the fur.

In response to several probes about different playtime or mealtime activities in which Sheep might participate, Spencer always shook his head no. One time I asked him, "How about if you are going to have lunch? Would you take your sheep and put it in your chair and sit on it for lunch?" Spencer shook his head no but smiled at his mother. She commented, "Sounds like a good idea to him but he really doesn't do it." At the end of the probes, I responded, "So it sounds like your sheep is mainly for when you are feeling tired and sleepy." Spencer nodded and smiled.

Ben

Three year old Ben had two blankets, one small quilt called "Blanky" and one large quilt called "My." He showed me that he used his two blankets in conjunction with each other by holding them both, although he specifically used the border on "My" by holding it in his hand and keeping it near his nose. In his words, "I--I--I do this [gathered up the blankets], and then in one hand [held the portion near the border], and then I put it like this and then I put it to my nose." Throughout the interview, he demonstrated this pattern of holding My's border while sucking his thumb.

When I asked Ben what "things do My and Blanky do with you?", he replied, "They play with me." When I asked how they played, he responded, "resting and wrestling." He further demonstrated that resting and wrestling involved wrapping up in the blankets when he was watching television or was involved in other quiet activities. Since Ben attended day care, I asked him if either My or Blanky went with him. He answered that Blanky went along. His mother indicated that Blanky was selected by her to go to daycare as it was much smaller and easier to take along. When I asked his mother if Ben's use was specific to resting times or used more throughout the day, his mother responded, "More when he is tired. And I try to keep it in the house at this point--keep it in his bedroom--though he will drag it out if he is watching TV or we're resting. When we're doing quiet activities. I don't think so much tired as quiet activities." She further elaborated that if she had not limited it, he probably would "carry it around all the time." She felt,

however, "As he got bigger, I started limiting it. When he started nursery school, why bother?" Ben's pattern of using his blankets, then, was impacted by this stance of his mother.

Heather

Four year old Heather also primarily used her blanket, Niney, for sleeping or resting. She demonstrated how she used her Niney by sucking her thumb, bringing a particular corner of the blanket close to her face, and tickling her nose. Here again, ritualized handling of the possession was apparent throughout the interview. When asked why that corner was so special, Heather replied, "Because it is as sucky as it can be." When asked what "sucky as can be means," Heather replied, "It means that it's the best."

In response to my question regarding where Niney usually stays in her house, Heather replied, "Cupboard." I responded, "In your cupboard. You have a cupboard where you keep it. Do you take it around the house with you or do you get up in the morning and put it in the cupboard?" Heather answered, "Put it in the cupboard--but Mom has to do it because I can't reach it." I responded, "So the cupboard's too high so you can't reach it. So your mom puts it away and it mostly stays there until it is time to go to bed at night?" Heather agreed, "Um-hm." In part, then, the availability of Niney was limited by storage in a cupboard out of Heather's reach.

In pursuing the notion of Niney staying in the cupboard, I asked Heather if her blanket was ever taken out for games or to go on short trips like to a friend's house. Heather replied, "It does go on

little trips." When asked what kinds of trips, Heather answered, "Like going on a boat or if I want to go and have a nap." Niney, then, was taken out of the cupboard to accompany Heather on family trips or if she wished to nap during the day; however, Niney was not usually taken to a friend's house. Heather's pattern of somewhat limited, sleep related use of her Niney was in keeping with her mother's parenting style as her mother "strongly" believed that comforting possessions such as a blanket should only be used for sleep.

Kate

Six year old Kate used a blanket which is actually a handmade cotton quilt covered with cars and trucks passed down to her from her three older brothers who did not attach to the blanket. With her mother's encouragement, she demonstrated how she pleated part of the blanket between her fingers and this allowed her to feel the blanket while sucking the fingers on her other hand. Her mother explained that earlier she had demonstrated this folding and said, "Look, Mommy, this is how I like to do my blanky."

For Kate, the blanket was only important early in the morning when she was waking up and at night, when she was settling down to eventually go to sleep. In the morning when she was still waking, Kate usually brought the blanket with her into the family room adjoining the kitchen and breakfast nook. In the afternoon or early evening, when she was tired, Kate also brought the blanket into the family room while she watched television. Eventually, the blanket would accompany her to bed. Kate reported that her blanket never

left the house, except when her family was traveling and would be away overnight. While she had spent the night at a friend's house, her blanket did not accompany her. When verifying Kate's account with her mother, she replied, "I think she covered it. I think it was pretty accurate. It stays where it stays--and is kind of there--and you use it to fall asleep--and watching TV--and when she takes a nap. She's pretty attached to it."

Lisa

Lisa, who was five years old, demonstrated a pattern of limited use of her multiple possessions. Currently, she reported only using her animals and pillows when she was sleeping or resting. According to her account, she placed these animals into different places on her pillow surrounding her head before she went to sleep. This particular pattern of use was reported by her parents as a change. When younger, she tended to sleep with a particular rabbit, bear, and quilt, although she put a number of other animals between her crib and the wall or on a shelf. During the past year, since a major move from another state to her current residence, this ritual of placing these animals on her pillow evolved. Also, her parents indicated that her pattern of using these animals for sleep or rest related times also represented a change. They reported that when she was younger, she would seek her animals when she was hurt or sad and would incorporate them into play activities. Also, they remembered hearing her talk with her animals and display emotions of sadness or anger in her conversations with them, although this behavior is no longer prevalent.

Joshua

Joshua, who was almost seven when interviewed, was very reluctant to discuss his use of the remains of his blanket, Gummy-Gum and his teddy bear, Dotty Boo. Prior to my arrival, he told his mother that "the blanket is babyish."⁶ Initially, he told me that he no longer used the blanket. After being assured that his answers would not be divulged to his friends, he acknowledged that his use was now limited to placing this strip of blanket on his pillow and his bear on his bed while he slept. If he spent the night at a friend's house, he left his "stuff" at home.

As we talked, it became clear that this limited use was not always the predominant pattern for Joshua. For one thing, this strip of blanket was all that remained from a large blanket which had been shredded from Joshua's frequent handling. Joshua's mother described how the blanket would accompany him down to the sofa to

⁶ Several boys nearing the age of seven demonstrated reluctance in discussing comforting possessions with me. One child used baby talk throughout our discussion, and made a silly face when posing for a picture with his blanket. When I described several boys' reactions to Jeremy, aged 6, and asked what he thought this might be about, he told me that only one friend knew that he has a blanket and this was a friend from infancy. This boy also had a blanket. If invited to spend the night at this friend's house, Jeremy would take his blanket. He would not, however, take it to any other friend's house. When I told him that the girls I had talked to did not seem to mind if anyone knew about their blanket and I did not understand this difference between girls and boys, he answered with a story about what happened to his father. It seems that his father took his blanket with him to spend the night at a friend's house, and several boys threw it on top of the house to tease him. Later, when Jeremy's mother told his nine year old brother that we were discussing blankets and stuffed animals or toys like his Bert, he avoided eye contact with me and looked at her very sternly and said, "Don't even ask." My own seven year old son expressed concern that people would find out about his blanket during this study. This contrasted sharply with the readiness to discuss possessions that girls of the same age demonstrated. While the data are limited, they suggest that gender is one factor that affects the actual use of the possession and the child's openness about such use. This factor would be important to examine in a study of older boys and girls.

watch television, or would keep him company in the family room if he were sick. For this child, it seems that as he has matured, the pattern of usage has shifted from a more diffuse use toward a limited use.

For this group of children, the actual handling of their possessions could be summarized by three patterns. Two children simply placed their possessions in a particular place while resting or sleeping. One child placed his possession and then rubbed or patted it while laying on top of it for sleep. The remaining three children brought a portion of their possession into close proximity with their faces and sucked their thumbs.

The limited use of a possessions by these children seemed to be related to several factors. Some children, like Spencer and Kate, never developed a pattern of using a possession beyond its role in their resting or sleeping behaviors even though their parents indicated that they had been free to expand their use of the possessions. Other children, like Ben and Heather, had been less free to develop other patterns of use due to restrictions imposed by their mothers. Lisa and Joshua reported current patterns which involved very limited use of their possession. Their parents, indicated, however, that this limited use was a reflection of changes in behavior over time and did not reflect their earlier use. Thus, limited use of a possession may also result from a particular child's pattern of growth and development.

Diffuse Use

Three children described their use of a comforting possession

as integrated into many activities throughout the day. This group included three girls, ages four, five, and six. In these particular interviews, the children discussed a variety of activities in which their possessions were participants indicating use far beyond the sleep or rest related use of the earlier group.

Meagan

Early in her interview about her blanket, four year old Meagan curled up in her chair with her blanket held close to her face and her fingers in her mouth. She maintained this pattern of holding her blanket throughout the interview. When I asked her a question about how she used her blanket, she proclaimed, "I bring it everywhere I go." She described how her blanket went with her when she went to school, and then remained in the car throughout the school day. According to her mother, the blanket was left in the car "because I ask[ed] her to." When discussing where her blanket was when she accompanied her mother on errands, she stated, "I would bring it." When I asked her whether the blanket remained in the car during errands such as the grocery shopping, she replied, "I would take it in the store." Meagan's mother, then, did not regularly limit Meagan regarding taking her blanket along. Rather, she limited it only related to school as no other children bring blankets to Meagan's preschool.

On one excursion from home, Meagan left her blanket at her grandmother's house and did not discover this until time to sleep at her own home. She reminded her mother, "Only one time, remember when the blanket wasn't in your car and I had to sleep with another

blanket at night time--and remember in the middle of the night I started crying and woke you and Dad up." On that particular occasion, Meagan was comforted by sitting in her father's lap while he watched basketball and eventually was able to fall asleep. As we discussed this occasion, I asked Meagan how she would feel if she lost her blanket for good. She thought and then replied, "I'd cry." After the interview, her mother commented that Meagan had previously told her, "If I lost my blanket, I could never be happy again."

Meagan and her mother also indicated that the blanket was moved around the house with her when she was engaged in different activities. When I asked her if she had a special place for putting her blanket in her room, she answered that it was kept "on my bed." Immediately, however, she added, "And I play with it." When asked how she played with it, she described, "When I play house I pretend that I--I need my blanket because I always want to be a baby." The blanket, then, became one of the props of playing baby.

Meagan also described a walk to the beach and an incident regarding her brother and her blanket: "One time my brother fell off a tree at the beach, right Mom? And I ran and get [sic] my blanket for him." Apparently, she believed that her blanket could soothe her injured brother.

Alison

During an interview with five year old Alison, I asked her if there was a special way she used her blanket in her bed. She replied, "Where I get out [out of my bed] I put it because it feels

much [sic] comfortable like that." She further clarified that "it's beside me" and demonstrated that she put the blanket next to her making sure that a particular special corner was "near my face." With the special part near her face, she was able to hold onto the soft pieces of the blanket's covering and suck her thumb. The pattern of holding pieces of the blanket near her face while sucking her thumb was repeated throughout the interview.

Alison also described several ways that her blanket was incorporated into play. She demonstrated how she could ball up her blanket and toss it into the air. She also described how she played "babies" with her blanket serving as "the covers over a bed." Finally, she occasionally used her blanket to create a tent under which she could crawl.

When I asked Alison if her blanket helped in any way when she was feeling sad, she replied, "I put it on top of me and I rest at times." She also indicated that the blanket was used this way when she got hurt, although the blanket had been used as a compress as well: "When I bumped my head, I just wrap [sic] it with my blanket."

According to Alison, "With my Mom--when I go to the store, I bring it. Sometimes I leave it in the car." Also, the blanket went with her to a friend's house: "I went to Amy's house. I brought my blanket because I spended [sic] the night there." Two strategies had been used by Alison's family to assist her in her attempt to take her blanket with her. When she was younger, her father had cut off her favorite corner so that she would have several smaller pieces to

carry with her while leaving the larger blanket at home. Eventually, she lost the pieces. Since her reaction to cutting the blanket the first time was to be very upset, her parents finally allowed her to bring the entire blanket. Her mother commented, "Before, when she was younger, she wasn't quite so attached--the blanket stayed at home. She seems to be becoming more attached--we went through a phase where we said "blanket stays at home" and then she started bringing the pieces. Now, we let her take it in the car."

Rebecca

Rebecca, who was almost seven when she was interviewed, also described a pattern of using her blanket and bear throughout the activities of her day. While she no longer used her blanket directly in contact with her body when sleeping or resting because it had become "itchy" as its lining wore out, she would occasionally place the blanket over her sleeping bag or on the foot of her bed. If invited to spend the night at a friend's house, Rebecca commented, "I won't even bother to bring it." Rebecca did report using her blanket during play, either as a mat on which to sit while playing a board game or as a doll blanket.

Rebecca's use of her Teddy was more extensive. Teddy would regularly sleep next to her and would be taken along to spend the night at a friend's house or on family vacation trips. Rebecca involved Teddy in her play activities in a variety of ways. Sometimes, she would pretend that he was a toy for one of her dolls. Other times, she would play pretend games with her extensive collection of stuffed animals. Rebecca described Teddy's role in these

games: "Well, sometimes I play games with my stuffed animals and sometimes I talk with him about who I should bring in." Rebecca also described how she had incorporated another bear, Edie Bear, who is dressed in more feminine clothes, and a tiny bear, Scooter, into a play family: "Teddy is the father, Edie Bear is the mom, and--I named the yellow bear Scooter--and he's the little baby."

I asked Rebecca about her use of either her blanket or Teddy bear or both when she was hurt. Since she did not remember, she asked her mother. Her mother answered, "No--not if you hurt yourself. But, maybe if you were angry or had to have time out in your room." Rebecca replied, "Yes! Yes! Yes, that was it." Rebecca went on to describe that she might use another animal for punching if she were angry, but did not use her blanket or bear for this purpose.

For this group of children, the actual handling rituals for their possessions could be summarized by two patterns. One child held her animal close by her side while sleeping. The other two children brought a portion of their possessions into close proximity with their faces and sucked their thumbs. For one of these children, there was also an element of placing her possession by her side when preparing for sleep.

While these three children each demonstrated a more diffuse use of their comforting possession, differences were apparent. While Meagan and Alison usually took their possessions along on everyday errands as well as overnights and family trips, Rebecca only took her blanket and bear on overnights or family trips. In part, this may be

a function of the fact that she is older. Meagan and Alison reported using their blankets as part of soothing rituals when they were hurt or upset. Rebecca, on the other hand, no longer remembered using her blanket or bear in that way. While Meagan and Alison reported using their blankets as part of play activities, it was striking that Rebecca had developed much more complex roles for her Teddy in her play activities. Finally, unlike the children in the limited use group who had moved from more diffuse use to sleep related use only, Alison appeared to be moving toward more diffuse use.

One other outcome of more diffuse use and the movement of the possession from place to place with the child is the inevitable misplacement of the possession, leading to a search for the possession when the child wants it. Alison provided a story which illustrated the family involvement of searching echoed by other participants. It seemed that she had misplaced her blanket behind a screen in the living room and had forgotten where it was. Her parents joined her in her search at bedtime and her mother located the blanket downstairs. Alison's father climbed the stairs with his arms folded to look like he had the blanket: "[W]hen he came upstairs--he was putting his arms like this and I thought he had the blanket hiding it." To Alison, it seemed that "it was magic when he was going to go to look for it." In actuality, she knew that "My Mom just threw it to him when he came upstairs." Alison clearly enjoyed this particular search, although her mother later wryly commented, "Just like her blanket--she doesn't keep very good track of her things." Other parents indicated that the searching for a comforting

possession at bedtime, particularly when everyone is tired, was sometimes an aggravating experience.

Role of the Comforting Possession in Everyday Activities

In the earlier discussion of the limited and diffuse patterns of comforting possession use, several important areas of everyday activity were mentioned. These included when the child is tired, sleepy, or preparing for bedtime, during play, during moments of stress or emotional upheaval, or when the child is hurt. While information provided by the nine children already discussed created an initial picture of when comforting possessions are used, it is possible to further illuminate these particular activities using data from the remaining interviews.

Resting and At Bedtime

Several children demonstrated elaborate ceremonies for using their comforting possessions at bedtime. For example, Jared, aged three, demonstrated how he placed his blanket and stuffed dog at bedtime. First, he created a sort of nest out of the blanket and put it under his head. After stretching out, he pulled his dog next to him up near his head. He commented, "My blanket snuggles up with us-- that's why I wrap up my blanket." Five year old Eric also had a specific way of placing his blanket when going to bed. He carefully spread the blanket out over the pillow until it was smooth. Then, he placed his head on the pillow but did not hold the blanket in his hand. He also sucked his third and fourth fingers while resting on the pillow. When I asked if he ever had to straighten it during the

night, he said no. His mother agreed that the blanket remained where it had been placed.

Other children required assistance in carrying out their bedtime ceremonies. Five year old Caitlin demonstrated how she used her blankets while she was sucking her thumb. First, she would find the special corner called Tony by locating its special smell. Then she would grasp it in her hand, suck the thumb of that hand, and tickle her nose, face, and neck with Tony. When I asked her what she did with the rest of the blanket, she proceeded to demonstrate how she spread out the blanket. Her mother commented, "We have a certain way we lay it out in bed It goes next to the wall stretched out completely so just the corner's up by her." Given how carefully the blanket was placed, I asked Caitlin what happened if she woke up in the night and it was no longer in that position. She replied, "I try to straighten this corner." Her mother added, however, "If it is a real big mess, she calls for Mommy and wakes Mommy up. 'Mommy, my blanket needs straightening.'"

For other children, the use of the possession at bedtime was the same as the use during the rest of the day. For example, four year old Judith sucked on her hooded baby towel named "Holdy" while holding it close to her. She reported that it would occasionally fall out of her bed, and then she would just climb out and pick it back up. Six year old Christine showed me how she put her blanket up against her face or wrapped it around her arm. She indicated that there were some special fuzzy places right on the edge that she enjoyed touching.

Playtime

How comforting possessions were incorporated into play in part seemed to depend on characteristics of the possession as well as the inclination of the child toward a particular activity. For example, those children with blankets were able to create tents with their possessions. Six year old Jeremy described one variation of the tent game, "Sometimes with like two chairs and I take a big blanket--a big, big soft one and I go put it over the two chairs so you can go under it." I asked, "Does [your blanky] go with you under it?" He responded, "Yeah." Five year old Caitlin played a second version of the tent game. She described this as "[I go] under the table and then I put the blanket [her special blanket] over the table." Jeremy also described the potential of a blanket as a setting for play. He described how he could "hide guys in there" by placing his blanket in a mound, creating wrinkles which could serve as caves, and then he could hide his figures in the caves. Also, he used the ridges as car roads.⁷

The imaginative use of the blanket was illustrated by the children in other activities as well. Five year old Lauren demonstrated how she could take her blanket and form it into a

⁷ This particular description by Jeremy was evocative of Stevenson's [1949] poem "The Land of Counterpane" which depicted a small boy sick in bed using his quilt as the terrain for a battle of his toy soldiers:

. . . And sometimes for an hour or so
I watched my leaden soldiers go,
With different uniforms and drills,
Among the bedclothes, through the hills;
I was the giant great and still
That sits upon the pillow-hill,
And sees before him, dale and plain,
The pleasant land of counterpane.

sphere shape and tape it together to create a steering wheel. She also demonstrated that she could pretend to have long hair by putting her Pitty on her head: "I like to use Pitty for my hair because I like long hair." Five year old Eric played a game with his two year old brother where each of them would put their blankets over their heads and chase each other saying "Oooh!"

Six year old Karen also gave an example of a stuffed animal being incorporated into imaginative play. She told me that she included her lion Gary in one of her games: "Many times I play babies and I pretend that she is the cat that we fight."

Stress or Emotional Upheaval

During times of stress or strong emotion, children sometimes simply used their possession in the same manner in which they always handled it. For example, I asked Jonah, aged four, if his blanket helped him when he was feeling sad. He nodded and said, "I play with it." He said this very softly and while bringing the blanket up close to his face, and sucked his thumb in the same manner he always used his blanket. Likewise, five year old Eric told me that he would hold his blanket and suck his fingers in response to a situation where he was sad or angry. When I asked him how this helped, he replied, "It helps me calm--it helps calm me down." Six year old Christine said, "If I was crying, I would put the blanket up close to me like I was going to bed."

Children also described ways of using their possessions which were not part of the usual pattern of handling. When I asked four year old Jonah about his feeling upset or angry and how his blanket

helped with that, he responded, "I go like this." He then wadded his blanket and punched it. He added, "I grab it. Sometimes I grab it like this and whip it!" His handling of his blanket was quite rough and his mother looked surprised and asked, "Are you angry with your blanket?" Jonah looked thoughtful and said, "No." I commented, "Sounds like you get some of that anger out on your blanket." Jonah nodded.

When I asked Jared, aged three, if his stuffed dog ever helped him when he was feeling sad, he responded affirmatively. When asked how, he answered, "He jumps in my ear." I asked him to show me and he put Ruffy up next to his face with the dog's nose in his ear and explained, "When he is in my ear. That's when he talks. When he is in my ear."

Five year old Lauren was discussing times when she used her blanket "Pitty" and her mother reminded her "Like, if you've watched something that is scary, you always get it then." I asked her how that helped and she replied, "I hide my head under my Pitty." It seemed that blocking the view of something scary helped Lauren cope with her fear.

One child told a story which suggested that the reaching for a possession during times of stress was somewhat automatic and unconscious. Six year old Karen described a situation where she was at school and feeling very upset. She reached behind her expecting to find her lion: "When I was at school in my reading group, and I thought I was at home, when some other kids were teaching me, then I reached back behind me--then I reached back and I thought--

that Gary was at school--but she wasn't." She elaborated, "It doesn't feel very good because Gary's not with me. I just reached behind me because I've had Gary for a long time." At home, "It makes me feel much more better [sic] because I get to feel her and hug her."

Injuries

When injured, some children sometimes simply used their possession in the same manner in which they always handled it to comfort themselves. Six year old Christine said, "I would hug it."

Children also described ways of using their possessions to assist with injuries which were not part of the usual pattern of handling. I mentioned to four year old Jonah that sometimes other children use their blanket when they got hurt and asked if he ever did. He responded, "I put my--I put it--my blanket--" and demonstrated how he wrapped the body part that was hurt in his blanket. For other children, this was not desirable because of the aftermath of an injury. As six year old Christine explained, "Well, I don't want to get any blood on it." Karen, age six, described her lion as taking a somewhat passive stance regarding injuries: "She just looks at it if it's real."

Perhaps the most direct involvement with healing was described by three year old Jared. When I asked Jared if his dog Ruffy ever helped him when he got hurt, he answered "Yep." When I asked how Ruffy helped, Jared replied, "He fixes me because he is a doggy doctor." I asked him to pretend that he had a hurt on his hand and show me how Ruffy helped. He responded, "He would put a bandage on my hand." He then took his dog and rubbed the

prominent part of the dog's nose over the part that was supposed to be hurt.

Five year old Lisa denied that she currently needed her animals when she was injured, although her parents indicated, "She used to want Peachy and White Bear when she was going to get a shot or something." Interestingly, however, when one of her parents doesn't feel well, she gives them Peachy and White Bear to hold while they sleep.

Summary

From the interview data presented, it is apparent that wide variation existed in the actual daily use of comforting possessions. For all of the children, elements of repetition were involved in the the actual handling and use of the possession resulting in the appearance of ritualized use. Of the 19 children who were interviewed, 11 demonstrated ritualized use which involved bringing the possession into close proximity with their faces while sucking their thumbs. Sometimes, this ritual also involved rubbing or tickling the face and neck with parts of the possession. Three children placed their possessions into a position which allowed them to lay on top of the possession and stroke or rub it, with one child also sucking his thumb. Two children held their possessions close to their bodies while sleeping, with one of them rubbing the animal as he fell asleep. Two children simply placed their possessions in a particular place while they slept. One child used a combination of rituals: she held the possession close and sucked her thumb during

the day and she placed her possession into a formation which allowed her to stroke or rub it while sucking her thumb.

For some children, use was limited to specific activities, usually revolving around being sleepy, tired, or preparing for bedtime. For others, use tended to permeate all kinds of activity during the day. While the limited use did not appear to be related to gender, it did appear to be related to both stages of growth and development and parental restrictions. The more diffuse use did appear to be related to gender, although this may be a product of this small sample.

In addition, the interview data provided a closer look at the activities into which children tend to incorporate their possessions. While bedtime or resting was one prominent category of activity, others included play, during times of stress or strong emotion, and when injured.

CHAPTER VII

PERSONIFICATION OF THE COMFORTING POSSESSION

The purpose of this chapter is to present and discuss the data derived from observations and interviews which suggest that some comforting possessions undergo a process of personification. During the study, several children captured my attention with the particular ways they viewed their comforting possessions and the ways in which they interacted with them. The data derived from observations of two of these children and interviews with four others suggested that some children attributed human characteristics to their possessions. Profiles of three of these children are helpful in introducing the themes of personification, with supporting data from other children substantiating the phenomenon.

Personification of Ruffy, Peaches, and Gary

Jared and Ruffy

Three year old Jared began our interview by showing me a rather worn blanket and a bedraggled, medium sized stuffed dog which his mother referred to as "his special doggy." Jared's brother called the dog Ruffy and Jared responded, "You are right, Aaron, his name is Ruffy." While Jared used both the blanket and dog at bedtime, he indicated that if he were forced to make a choice, "It would be [Ruffy]!"

As we discussed Ruffy, Jared attributed human characteristics

to the stuffed dog. For example, when I asked if Ruffy felt a certain way referring to Ruffy's texture, Jared responded, "He feels happy." Following his lead, I asked him to describe this. He added that as a response to feeling happy, "He runs around sometimes." As he stated this, he began to move the dog in a running pattern around the sofa where he was sitting. Jared labeled this running as a game called "jump-a-play." As described in earlier chapters, Jared also reported that Ruffy served as a "doggy doctor" who would place a bandage on any injuries by rubbing them with his prominent nose. Also, Jared reported that Ruffy comforted him when he was sad by "jump[ing] in my ear." This referred to the act of holding Ruffy close to his head so that Ruffy's nose was actually inside of Jared's ear. When I asked if Ruffy ever talked to him, Jared responded, "When he is in my ear. That's when he talks. When he is in my ear." Since Jared always referred to Ruffy as "he," I asked him if Ruffy were a boy and he verified that he was.

In examining Jared's view of Ruffy as portrayed in his words, it is apparent that Jared made several assumptions about Ruffy: his gender could be distinguished, he was capable of having feelings such as happiness, he was able to move and participate in a running and jumping game, he was able to be a doctor and apply a bandage, and he was able to talk with Jared when he was sad. While these assumptions regarding gender and the capacity for sentience, mobility, role-taking, and communication or interaction are typical of those that humans have about other animate objects, it is interesting that here Jared has assumed these characteristics for his stuffed dog.

Erin and Peaches

One day in the preschool, four year old Erin sat down in my lap with her stuffed rabbit Peaches. After sitting with her for a few minutes quietly sucking her thumb and flopping the rabbit's ear back and forth, the following conversation took place:

SHH: "Erin, who is this with you?"

Erin: "This is my rabbit Peaches."

SHH: "Well, I am glad to meet your rabbit."

Erin: "I feed her two carrots every morning for breakfast."

SHH: "I see. And what does Peaches think of that?"

Erin: "She likes it because they are her favorite."

SHH: "Well, Peaches--Erin takes care of you by bringing you carrots. I wonder what you do for her?"

Erin: [in a very squeaky, pretend voice] "I bring her cereal."

As we continued to sit together, Erin described how long Peaches had been with her and showed me several small tears on the rabbit's back. I noticed that Peaches had ponytail bands on each ear. I pointed to them and asked, "Erin, what are these?" She replied, "They are Peaches' ponytails." She then explained that her mother helped her put the bands on the rabbit's ears. I commented, "Let's see--who else has ponytail bands?" Erin laughed and said, "I have ponytails too." Again, since Erin referred to the rabbit as "she" and "her," I asked if Peaches were a boy or girl. Erin responded, "She's a girl."

About a week later, I observed Erin working at a table creating a shell picture. Peaches sat in her lap or on the table depending on the task Erin was completing. For example, when Erin was cutting out her shell, Peaches was on the table. When Erin was painting, Peaches was in her lap. Erin was interacting with the other children around such issues as who had the scissors and with the teacher regarding the next step in the project. Periodically, she would hold Peaches up and bring her face close to the rabbit's and hold a conversation with it. For example, Erin said to Peaches, "Peaches, do you see my shell? What do you think about it?" Peaches evidently answered because I heard a squeaky little voice although I could not hear the actual words.

In examining Erin's view of Peaches as portrayed in her words, it is apparent that she made several assumptions about Peaches: her gender could be distinguished, she was capable of making choices about favorite foods, she was able to move and bring cereal to Erin, and she was able to talk with Erin. Further, Erin's identification with the rabbit was suggested in the matching ponytail bands. Again, these assumptions regarding gender and the capacity for sentience, mobility, and communication and interaction are typical of those that humans have about other animate objects. Here, again, they have been applied to a stuffed animal as part of a process suggesting personification.

Karen and Gary

During the course of our interview, six year old Karen introduced me to her small, peach colored stuffed lion named Gary.

Karen was not sure if Gary was a girl or a boy: "I don't know if it is a girl or a boy. So sometimes it is a girl and sometimes it is a boy." Consistent with this explanation, during the interview, she sometimes referred to Gary as "she" and sometimes referred to Gary as "he."

When I asked Karen if Gary talked to her, she replied, "Um-hm." When I asked what kinds of conversations they had, she explained, "Sometimes she says, 'I'm thirsty'--but I don't have a milk bottle because I lost it." When I asked what else Gary talked to her about, she described how "she kind of fights with me--kind of pull fights--to try to get this [her thumb] out of my mouth." When I asked why Gary might do that, Karen explained, "Because he gets mad that I get bumps--like this" [indicating callouses on her thumbs from thumbsucking].

Karen indicated that Gary was not always a cooperative playmate: ". . . sometimes I have to take her and make her play with me." When I asked her to elaborate on the games they played, she described a game where she played babies and pretended that "[Gary] is the cat that we fight." When I asked if they played hiding games, she replied, "Um--not many times. Because [Gary] doesn't like to hide."

When Karen and I were looking at her lion's face, I commented that the face looked happy to me. Karen agreed and said, "She always smiles when somebody comes." Later, when I was asking her to describe Gary by selecting polar opposites from a set of adjectives I mentioned, I asked, "Would you say that Gary looks happy or sad?" The following conversation occurred:

Karen: "Sad sometimes."

SHH: "Sad sometimes. So Gary's expression changes."

Karen: "Yeah. Because he gets hurt sometimes."

SHH: "Yeah? And how can you tell that Gary is looking sad? What looks different?"

Karen: "Um--because she--her face looks different."

SHH: "Yeah? Her face sort of looks different to you?"

Okay--okay--

Karen: Everyday she looks different to me."

In examining Karen's view of Gary as portrayed in her words, it is apparent that she, too, made assumptions about Gary's capacity for talking, for expressing anger over thumbsucking through fights with Karen, and for making choices about play activities. Also, Karen felt that Gary's facial expression changed in response to emotional states. Unlike Jared and Erin, Karen could not be sure of Gary's gender; thus, she compromised by moving back and forth between feminine and masculine pronouns. Again, however, the human characteristics of sentience, mobility, and communication and interaction appeared to have been attributed to a stuffed animal as part of a process of personification.

The Personification Process in Animals

Other children who had stuffed animals for comforting possessions also described some human characteristics of these possessions, although the extent of the personification was less than the three children previously described. The characteristics

attributed by these children included gender and the capacity for communication or interaction.

Distinguishing Gender

Joshua called his bear "Dotty Boo" and Caleb called his rabbit "Bunny Ears." Both of these boys, age six, readily identified their animals as boys. Rebecca, also age six, referred to her Teddy as a boy, although she stated that she was not completely sure. Amy, age four, called her stuffed dog Barclay and referred to the dog as "he."

Capacity for Communication and Interaction

Two additional children provided data regarding the capacity for their animals to communicate or interact. During one morning meeting in the preschool, four year old Amy sat in her father's lap with her stuffed dog Barclay in her arms. She was highly participative in the meeting, answering questions and singing. Periodically, however, she stopped to whisper to her father and pat the dog on the head and point his head in the direction of the teacher speaking as though she were making sure he was paying attention. One time, she began to whisper to her father, "Daddy, you need to" Although the remainder of her sentence was lost, his response to her direction was to stroke the dog as though it were a live puppy in her lap. Here, Amy's assumptions about Barclay's capacity to interact influenced both her father's interactions with her and the dog, as well as her own interaction with the dog.

During an interview with Rebecca, age six, she described her bear as appearing to be both happy or sad. She attributed a happy feeling to him because his arms looked like "they were jumping up

like that." She attributed a sad feeling to him because his "smile" was turned down. While Rebecca discussed feelings for the bear, unlike the children previously discussed, her response suggested that she distinguished between the "appearance" of feelings and the actual conscious feeling.

Later, I asked Rebecca if her Teddy had ever talked to her. She responded, "He still does." When I asked what kinds of things Teddy talked to her about, she replied, "Well, sometimes I play games with my stuffed animals and sometimes I talk with him about who I should bring in [the game]." Teddy also was included in a decision about selecting another bear as a "special" animal. Rebecca described how she introduced the new bear to the other animals, most importantly Teddy, and then Edie Bear was accepted as a special bear.

Several things are interesting about this pattern of personification of animals. At the most minimal level of personification, that of distinguishing only one human characteristic, two six year old boys distinguished gender for their animals. Only one boy, age three, demonstrated the more active process of personification by assuming that his dog had gender and the capacity for sentience, mobility, role-taking, and communication or interaction. In contrast, four girls, ages four, five, and six, assumed gender and capacity for sentience, mobility, and communication or interaction for their comforting possessions. These data suggest that both age and gender are factors in the level of personification which occurs, although this may simply be a outcome of the number of girls

in the study.

The Personification Process in Blankets and Other Cloth Possessions

The children in the study who had blankets, cloths, or other comforting possessions made of material but not shaped to replicate an animal also described some human characteristics of these possessions. The extent of the personification appeared to be significantly less, however, than for the children who had stuffed animals. The human characteristics attributed to the blankets or cloth included gender and the capacity for communication or interaction.

Distinguishing Gender

Eight children clearly stated that their blankets or cloths were either boys or girls. This group included three four year old girls, three five year old girls, and two boys, ages three and four. Eight children did not clearly distinguish the gender of their blankets or cloths. Six children [including one three year old boy, one four year old girl, one five year old girl, two six year old girls, and one six year old boy] either said they did not know or simply called their possessions "it." The remaining two children in this group, two boys ages five and six, actively cast doubt on the ability of blanket to have gender. For example, Joshua, age six, commented, "It's a nothing . . . it's just--a blanket can't be a boy or a girl." Eric, age five, laughed when I asked him if his blanket were a boy or girl. He responded, "I don't know. I don't know because it is not alive."

Capacity for Communication and Interaction

Two children provided data regarding the capacity for their blankets or cloths to communicate. I asked four year old Judith if her cloth towel Holdy ever talked to her. She replied, "Yes," although she had difficulty describing her conversations. Six year old Christine told me that her blanket talks to her "sometimes." She described the conversations as discussions about the "pink one [other blanket] and stuff."

Distinguishing Body Parts

Three children made comments that suggested that they may have anthropomorphized their blankets. Three year old Ben described the important part of his blanket, a rounded corner with a ruffle, as its elbow. When describing how her blanket helped comfort her, four year old Heather commented, "She lets me suck her head." While describing the comforting nature of her blanket, five year old Caitlin said, "Like if--if she would be holding me when I got hurt--then it would be--it would be on my shoulder."

Several things are striking about the differences in the pattern of personification of animals as compared to the personification of blankets or cloths. Only eight of the 16 children assumed gender. These eight tended to be either girls of any age or younger boys. The eight children who did not assume gender tended to be boys of any age or older girls. Only two children, girls ages four and six assumed that their blankets or cloths were capable of communication. No children assumed that their blankets or cloths were capable of sentience or role-taking. Three children made brief

references which suggested that they recognized anthropomorphic characteristics of their blankets or cloths, although no other data was derived from following up on these comments.

Summary

From the data collected from the children in this study, it seems that the level of personification of blankets and cloths is considerably less than that of stuffed animals. In part, both age and gender may be factors in the level of personification which occurs. Another factor may be that stuffed animals are easier to personify because of obvious anthropomorphic qualities. For the children in this study, the age of acquisition or the length of time possessing the animal versus the blanket did not appear to impact the level of personification.⁸ It is possible, however, that as the child moves into a stage where the imagination takes hold, the process of personification occurs more naturally with stuffed animals versus blankets or cloths.

⁸ In examining the names of the blankets and cloths in contrast to the names of the stuffed animals, there is a noticeable difference in level of language. For example, many names of blankets or cloths appear to be composed of repetitious sounds which stemmed from infancy. For example, some names from these children included Didi, Bebe, Baba, Pitty, and Niney. Also, nine blankets were called "Blanket" or "Blanky" [often pronounced "Bwanket" or "Bwanky"] and the one sheepskin was called "Sheepy" or "Sheep." In contrast, the animals were named Peaches, Peachy, Sweater, Gary, Barclay, Bunny Ears, White Bear, Teddy, and Dotty Boo. Only one of these names, Dotty Boo, appears to have been derived from baby words. It is obvious that an infant or toddler probably did not immediately use these more formal names for their animals. What is interesting, however, is that these animal names seem to have progressed from their earlier form to a more formal name while the early names for the blankets and cloths endured.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the major findings of the study, draw conclusions where possible while recognizing the limitations of the study, and recommend areas appropriate for further research. Given the descriptive nature of the study, the findings and conclusions will focus on the description of the phenomenon of comforting possessions.

Summary of Findings and Conclusions

The findings from this study of children between the ages of three and six and their comforting possessions support four major themes. These themes describe the evolution of comforting possessions in the lives of these children, how children actually handle or use their possessions, when and in what situations children use their possessions, and the personification of possessions.

Origins of Comforting Possessions

The findings of this study suggest that the origins of comforting possessions may be traced to infancy. This supports the theoretical position and most previous research on transitional or attachment objects, with the exception of the work of Busch et al. [1973] who felt that primary and secondary transitional objects could be distinguished. Busch et al. [1973] contended that children in two separate developmental stages, infancy and around the age of two, attach to different kinds of objects which may appear to have the

same function. In the current study, 11 of the 19 children interviewed continued to use the same possession selected during infancy. Five children continued to use the same particular type of possession by replacing the worn-out original with a sequential facsimile. Three other children had added additional possessions to the original and thus currently had multiple comforting possessions. These last two patterns are similar to findings reported by Borella [1982, p. 103-109] who noted that the children in her study developed serial attachments which she labeled "layering" of possessions, as the child did not cast aside the previous possession. The findings also suggest that selection of a particular possession by the child was influenced either directly or indirectly through provision of a particular object in the environment. The choice on the part of the parent in providing a particular object was sometimes a response to their own childhood possession or an expression of bonds with family or friends.

Handling and Using the Comforting Possession

The children in this study all demonstrated highly repetitive and ritualized ways of handling of their possessions, while some of them also demonstrated highly repetitive patterns of placing of their possessions. For most of the children, the handling involved bringing the possession into close proximity with the face allowing the child to manipulate the possession. The placing of the possessions also involved bringing the possession into close bodily contact. These patterns are in keeping with the findings of Busch et al. [1973] that children focus on the tactile quality of the possession either by using the object on themselves or by holding the object at a distance while

handling portions of it. Rudhe and Ekecrantz [1974] also found similar patterns of handling. In the current study, the patterns for some children were quite complex and demanded the participation of a parent. For others, patterns were simpler and within the ability of the child to perform.

A Continuum of Everyday Use

In this study, patterns of when and for what activities the possessions were used were examined in both a preschool setting and in interviews of children in natural home settings. Both sets of data support the notion that a broad continuum of use of comforting possessions exists, which is anchored on one end by limited, activity specific use and on the other by diffuse, non-activity specific use. This continuum of use supports the findings of Rudhe and Ekecrantz [1974] who found that while 39.2% of their sample used the object at bedtime and 26.1% used the object all the time, 34.7% of the children fell somewhere between these two categories.

In the preschool, times that comforting possessions were most heavily used included the introductory period at the beginning of the day when the child was making a transition to preschool activities, resting time, and incidents involving stress. Data from the interviews suggest that comforting possessions were most often used for bedtime or resting time, during play, during times of stress or strong emotion, and when injured. It is apparent that many of the activities associated with comforting possession use are related to stress. It is interesting that comforting possession use under stress in naturalistic settings supports Passman's [1976; 1977; Passman & Adams, 1982; Passman & Weisberg, 1975] laboratory observations of

similar behavior.

In the current study, the level of use and the particular activities in which the comforting possessions are included may be influenced by the stages of growth and development of the individual child, the gender of the child, and the inclination of the parent to control the use of the possession. This latter observation supports Busch and McKnight's [1973] findings that parents may unconsciously act as disturbers or facilitators of comforting possession use.

Personification of the Comforting Possession

In this study, all of the children who had stuffed animals as comforting possessions attributed one or more of the following human characteristics to their possessions: gender, capacity for sentience, capacity for mobility, capacity for role-taking, and capacity for communication and interaction. In contrast, only half of the children who had blankets or other cloths as comforting possessions attributed one or more of the same characteristics. The personification of transitional objects was noted by Stevenson [1956] although not thoroughly described. France [1980] found that children with transitional objects that had more definite form, such as stuffed animals and dolls, tended to talk to the objects, parent the objects, treat the objects as companions, attribute their own behavior to objects, and to consider the object as a significant other. In France's study, these behaviors were in sharp contrast to behavior of children whose transitional objects were more amorphous in shape.

In the current study, age and gender seemed to influence the phenomenon of personification regardless of whether the child was

attached to an animal or a blanket or cloth. That is, the children most likely to personify their comforting possessions were younger boys or older girls.

Conclusions

Given that the purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of everyday use of comforting possessions in order to develop descriptive theory, it is appropriate that the conclusions take the form of a conceptualization of comforting possessions for children between the ages of three and six constructed from the synthesis of the findings of this study:

Comforting possessions are those objects to which children form an enduring attachment in infancy which is maintained through early childhood. At times, sequential substitution for the original object or the addition of another object to the original occurs. The use of the comforting possession is highly individualized; however, consistent patterns of handling of the possession and consistent patterns of everyday use may be distinguished for each child. Children employ comforting possessions during a variety of stressful and non-stressful events including, but not necessarily limited to, sleeping or resting, transitions to new settings, during play, or when injured or emotionally upset. For some children, personification of the comforting possession is one aspect of their relationship with the comforting possession. Patterns of use of comforting possessions are associated with factors including, but not necessarily limited to parental attitudes, stages of growth and development, and gender.

Since it is apparent that this conceptualization is grounded in the data from the study rather than extracted from a theoretical explanation, several dimensions of this conceptualization require discussion.

While it is no doubt confusing to add the term "comforting possession" to the literature which already includes the terms "transitional objects," "attachment objects," and "substitute objects," it seems appropriate to label the phenomenon with a term which reflects the central meaning of the phenomenon to the young child.⁹ The other terms used to designate the phenomenon reflect theoretical positions regarding the origins of the possession during childhood. Since no longitudinal studies focusing on the development and continuation of relationships to comforting possessions in children have been conducted, previous conceptualizations and labels may not be appropriate. In fact, findings from France [1980], Parker [1979], and Rudhe and Ekecrantz [1974] that attachment to the object may be noted by the parents earlier or later in infancy than the proposed separation-individuation process draw into question the notion of the "transitional" object. Further, the terms "attachment object" and "substitute object" focus primarily on the interaction between mother, child, and object in infancy with the conclusion that the actual objects represent an amalgamation of that interaction.

⁹ Other terms were considered throughout the study, including "treasured possession," "special possession," "loved possession." While these terms capture the quality of attachment to the possession, the actual use of the possession is missing. The term "comforting possession" was selected because it encompasses multiple meanings. Comfort can mean the actual state or feeling of relief, cheer, or solace, or it can mean that which gives or brings such a feelings. Certainly the possessions in this study were important both for their *comfort* and *restoration of comfort*.

While these terms reflect conceptualizations which are useful in proposing explanations for the initiation and early use of such objects in infancy and early childhood, they do not assist in understanding the continuation of use in the older child. In part, this is because existing theories do not address the continuing use of the possession into childhood. The term "comforting possession," then, was selected because it does not represent a particular theoretical stance. The introduction of the term reflects the need for collection of empirical data which will assist in explaining the development and continuation of use of such objects throughout childhood. With that data in hand, more appropriate terms may ultimately replace that of the "comforting possession."

The use of the words "consistent patterns of handling of the possession" and "consistent patterns of everyday use" are consciously used to underscore the repetitious nature of the behaviors associated with comforting possessions. At times, the behaviors seemed so choreographed that I have referred to them as rituals. While there are numerous social science theories which address the meanings of rites, rituals, and ceremonies, these theories are generally somewhat grand in focus, rather than focusing on understanding individual patterns of repetitive behavior in childhood.¹⁰ My purpose in

¹⁰ One exception is that of the biogenetic structuralists, including Piaget, who proposed that ritual serves the purpose of protecting the developing cognitive functions of the individual by providing a barrier to the disruption of the cognitive imperative cycle by unrelated events and stimuli. Repetitive behavior in this scheme would be categorized as "reproductive assimilation"; the functional repetition of elementary schemes would strengthen and extend those schemes as new environmental stimuli were encountered. That is, repetitive behavior in children would serve the function of assisting the child to assimilate events in the environment by strengthening cognitive schemes [McManus, 1979]. The purpose attributed to the ritual according to the

highlighting "patterns" in the conceptualization is to suggest that these organized sets of behavior deserve scrutiny regarding their origins, their evolution, and their demise. Having delineated the form of the patterns, additional attention can be focused on the functions of the behavior including those already identified.

The personification of comforting possessions by the children in this study were of particular interest, particularly as I struggled to understand the nature of the enduring relationship between comforting possessions and the children. Taking the stance of Piaget, the findings could be related to the egocentric thought processes of the preoperational child, generally including the age range of two to seven, which are characterized by animism.¹¹ Taking the stance of the symbolic interactionists, the findings could be related to practicing of roles as the child develops a unified conception of himself.¹² Regardless of the theoretical stance, most developmental

biogenetic structuralists is not unlike the purpose Coppolillo [1976, p. 38] attributes to the transitional mode of experience. He believes that it provides an escape from being overwhelmed by either the internal drives or environmental demands allowing the ego to develop normal structures for sublimating and neutralizing drives.

¹¹ In early childhood, all things are endowed with purpose and conscious activity by the child. As the child matures, only objects that move are alive. Finally, by the age of eleven or twelve, the child recognizes that only plants and animals are considered alive. One test of this explanation would be to examine the constancy of the theme of personification of comforting possessions with older children who move from the preoperational stage into the concrete operational stage [Ginsburg & Oppen, 1979, p. 94-95].

¹² Mead suggested [Meltzer, 1959; Cuzzort & King, 1980] that in the preparatory stage of infancy, the unsocialized infant is characterized by habitual behavior and meaningless imitation. For example, the child might regularly seek a comforting behavior in imitation of parents providing such an object, although the child would not yet have attached meanings to it. In the play stage, which corresponds to early childhood and the period of language acquisition, the child actually plays various roles. This is especially important in the sense of the child acting toward itself in roles, such as mother. The comforting possession could be offered to the self from the the point of view of one role and received from the point of view of the other role. Gradually,

theories would suggest that it is unlikely that the child acquires a stage of cognitive development which supports the process of personification much before the age of two. Personification, then, in the children of this study, was a process applied to the comforting possession long after the initial attachment. The purpose of this personification process is unclear; however, what part personification plays in maintenance of the relationship between child and comforting possession and the actual use of the possession needs to be explored.

Finally, this conceptualization suggests that there are multiple factors associated with children using comforting possessions, including but undoubtedly going beyond the few identified in this study: stages of growth and development, gender, and parental attitudes. Exploring and explicating these multiple factors could assist in further understanding this phenomenon.

Limitations of the Study

Since this study was designed to be an initial exploratory examination of children's perceptions of the everyday life meanings of their comforting possessions, the small sample was purposively selected to maximize the availability of data. As a consequence, the sample is not necessarily representative of the general population, especially in terms of ethnicity, cultural diversity, and socioeconomic status. Given this factor, the findings must be considered tentative until further research examines the phenomenon in broader, more

objects take on meanings from the activities directed toward them by the child and others.

diverse samples.

A second limitation of the study stems from the cross-sectional nature of the interview data. While each participant and that participant's mother or parents provided rich data regarding individual patterns, the data, particularly that which focused on evolution, must be recognized as constructed from recollection. It is possible that a longitudinal study which monitored the development and continued relationship with a comforting possession throughout childhood would yield very different results.

Recommendations for Further Study

As in any initial exploration of a phenomenon, the findings from this study suggest a number of unanswered questions, which in turn, suggest areas which are appropriate for further study. Indeed, a program of research could be developed which focused on the exploration of the phenomenon of comforting possessions throughout childhood. Some studies which would be most helpful include a longitudinal study of infants from birth through early childhood to examine the origins and continuing relationships of children and comforting possessions, ethnographic studies of toddlers through adolescents to examine the natural life span and the everyday activities associated with comforting possessions, follow-up studies which focus on explanatory factors regarding origins and patterns of everyday use, and a broad survey of a diverse population to establish the prevalence and functions of comforting possessions in diverse groups within the general population. Additionally, research ascertaining and documenting gender differences in the development

and use of comforting possessions would increase our understanding of the phenomenon.

Implications for the Profession of Nursing

Given the exploratory nature of this study, it is important to view the findings as tentative until confirmation occurs in the form of additional empirical studies. The preliminary conceptualization of comforting possessions may, however, be useful to nurses who work with children and parents in assessing the individual patterns of comforting possession use. This information may be useful in two ways. First, the nurse can assist parents in viewing and understanding the behaviors associated with comforting possession as part of a developmental phenomenon of childhood. While acknowledging that the boundaries are not fully understood, describing the patterns of handling and the continuum of everyday use may be reassuring to parents not familiar with the phenomenon. Secondly, for some children, appropriate strategies may be planned for incorporating the comforting possession into the variety of difficult situations facing children who are ill or experiencing stress.

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APPENDIX A

Committee on Protection of Human SubjectsStudent Research - Form D

The completed and signed form from the Committee on Protection of Human Subjects has been included immediately following this introduction as evidence that the study was reviewed and approved prior to data collection in conformance with university policy.

APPENDIX B

Sample Interview ProbesIdentifying the Possession

1. Can you tell me what this is?
2. Does it have a name? What do you call it?
3. Is _____ a boy or a girl? [insert name]
4. Does _____ go with you most of the time?
5. Would you say that _____ is special? How is _____ special?
6. Do you have anything else that is like _____?
7. Of all the things that you have, what is most important?

History

1. Where do you think _____ came from?
2. Did someone give you _____?
3. How did _____ become special to you?
4. How long have you had _____?

Physical Characteristics

1. How would you describe _____ to someone who could not see _____?
2. Can you tell me how _____ feels to you?
3. Can you tell me how _____ smells to you?
4. Does _____ remind you of a person?
5. Does _____ remind you of an animal? Something else?

Using the Possession

1. When do you use _____?
2. Do you sleep with _____?
3. When you sleep with _____, what do you do with it? Can you show me?

4. Do you play with ____? Is it ever part of your games?
How is ____ part of your games?
5. When is it most important to you to have ____?
6. What do you like best about ____?
7. When you are with ____, how do you feel?
8. Does ____ help you when you are hurt? How?
9. Does ____ help you when you are sad? How?
10. Does ____ help you when you are angry? How?
11. When ____ is not with you, where do you keep it?
12. Have you ever lost ____? Can you tell me what happened? How did you feel about that?
13. What kinds of things do you do to take care of ____?