

**Children's Experiences of Video Game Consumption:
Development, Socialisation and Identity.**

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Dina H. Bassiouni

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Abstract

This research study investigates children's experiences of video games consumption. Video games, played on a wide range of consoles, computers and mobile devices, have become key resources in the lives of children in the Western world and beyond. Apart from a common cultural assumption that playing video games must be 'bad' for children, there is relatively little research that explores their role in children's social and personal lives. The study takes a social constructionist ontological stance and uses an adapted discourse analytic method with qualitative data sets. The participants of the main study were 22 children of mixed gender aged between 6 and 12 interviewed in focus groups and, in one case, in a family setting, all with full parental consent, between June 2nd and 14th 2011 in Egham, UK. The main data sets consisted of approximately 27,000 words of focus group and in depth interviews, moderated and fully transcribed by the researcher. In discussing their experiences with video games, the children drew on five overlapping but distinct interpretive repertoires: 1. Digital Savviness and Group Membership, 2. Video Games, Children's Age and Gender, 3. Video games as a Source of Empowerment for Children, 4. Video Games and Children's Development and Socialisation and 5. Negotiating the Ideological Dilemma of Video Games in Popular Culture. Video games were not only a leisure activity but also a shared cultural resource, which mediated personal and family relationships and their developing senses of gender and identity. Importantly, the research suggested many positive aspects of video games for children's development and socialisation, with apparent benefits for motor, cognitive and also social skills. Video games are a far from solitary pleasure for children. They constitute a shared cultural vocabulary upon which children draw to form and maintain relationships, friendship groups and to negotiate social status and gender identities. The conclusions offer suggestions for future research and for the theoretical development of the area.

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Chapter One

Introduction and Outline of the Study

Chapter Outline

This chapter will introduce and outline the study, summarise key issues of topic, research philosophy and method. It will list the key research questions, and set out the structure of the thesis. Finally, the chapter summarises the key findings.

1.0.0 Introduction to the Research Topic

It is taken as axiomatic that many children's social and material environment is very different today than in the past. A defining characteristic of today's environment for children in developed and developing countries is the ubiquity of digital media provided by computers, computer and video games, and communication technological advances. Relatively few studies in management and consumer research have explored children's engagement with computer games and online communication. This research investigates the quality of children's experience of computer and video games as it is lived and reported by children. Conventional wisdom often holds that excessive engagement with video games is bad for children in various ways. On the other hand, some researchers have argued that video and computer games are actually beneficial to children as they have the capability of enhancing certain cognitive and social skills. This research study explores the implications of playing video games for children's development, socialisation and identity, from the subjective perspective of the children themselves. Throughout the study, the term 'video games' as opposed to computer games will be used for clarity, for reasons that are explained below.

In this study the term "video games" will be used as a collective term to refer to the various types of electronically controlled games played using any platform such as computers, games consoles, online games, and other game-like technology gadgets. This term may sound somewhat dated compared to 'computer games' but it allows the scope of the study to embrace the various different formats of games played on different devices.

1.1.0 Nature of The Study

The study takes a wide-ranging and cross-disciplinary perspective focusing on children as consumers of video games. The overall aim is to better understand the subjective experience of children and their gaming engagement and to explore the various implications from a consumer perspective. It has to be acknowledged that the gaming phenomenon has become a regular activity in the lives of many young children in many countries today as affluence increases and middle classes in developing countries expand. This area, specifically the social and developmental implications of children playing video games, remains relatively under-researched. Yet there has never been a better time to study video games as they continue to supplement other media as a mainstream leisure activity. Thus, this study aims to investigate the children's consumption of video games from their own perspective of their experience with video games. It is argued that the presence of video games in the centre of the children's lives has made their social and material environment quite different from those of previous generations. This area of consumer research is relatively infrequent due to the focus on methodological priorities that are usually concerned with the nature of the video games rather than the quality of the experience of children with the gaming culture. Thus, as has been highlighted, the topic has relatively little prior empirical research and robust theory has not yet evolved. Consequently the research orientation of the study is exploratory rather than confirmatory. This study is based within the interpretive paradigm as the aim of the study is to understand children's experience with computer and video games as it is 'lived', from their own perspective rather than studying them as part of the physical world and looking at the phenomenon from a traditional scientific and theoretical structure.

1.2.0 Research Philosophy and Methodological Orientation

This research falls broadly within Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) as it views children as "interpretative agents" and video games are considered as elements for generating meaning and culture for those children. CCT is invoked in this research as it investigates the experiences of children as consumers of video and computer games in order to develop theoretical knowledge about children's actions, marketplace behaviour and the cultural meanings embedded in such a dynamic relation. CCT is

based on investigating the relationships among consumers' personal and collective identities, as well as the socio-cultural, experiential, symbolic and ideological aspects that create their culture (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Discourse analysis is chosen as the analytical method of this research, since it focuses on the use of language in the construction of meaning. This is an exploratory study that aims to understand how the children make sense of their digitally mediated social world, so the use of language and conversation among the children is explored since it illuminates how they create their own meanings and perceive their own world (Easterby et al., 2008). Thus, taking a discourse analytic approach in interpreting the children's accounts of their own experiences with video games might reveal the implications of video games on their lives socially, cognitively and emotionally. This take on discourse analysis is adapted from Potter and Wetherell (1987) and Fairclough (2003)'s take on DA in management and organisation studies. The ontological basis of this interpretation of DA is social constructionism. This research assumes that children construct the social world they live in through language and discourse. This research paradigm has been chosen for its ability to look at and theorise new issues in the social world in terms of the meanings people give to their subjective experiences of those issues (Saunders, 2009). It is suggested in this research that children create their own reality in important senses, by, for example, adapting technology in creative ways, sharing experiences with peers and creating new games from existing material and this stance broadly requires adopting a relativist ontological take consistent with a social constructionist epistemology. Social constructionism essentially tends to explore the meanings produced at a certain time in an attempt to form knowledge that "creates as well as describes the world" which is the basis of hermeneutic research (Banister et al., 1994). Accordingly, in the light of this philosophical view, children would interpret situations differently based on their own experiences of life. This research is offering one way of understanding the phenomenon of video gaming from the perspective of a limited sample of children and does not make universalised claims. Knowledge, in this research, is believed to be constructed rather than discovered since it results from the subjective interaction between the researcher and the children. Moreover, the analysis of qualitative data sets through interpretive methods is considered an ideal approach for this study given the qualitative, exploratory nature of this research. Qualitative research entails the active participation of the children in the process by

taking into account their input and their understanding of their own social and cultural world while acknowledging that this understanding is socially constructed and that absolute realities cannot be accessed (Banister et al., 1994).

1.3.0 Sampling and Data Collection

At the beginning of the research process, an extensive cross-disciplinary literature review and a descriptive exploration of the games environment were conducted. The problem and focus evolved over time and access to participants was a major issue. The focus was placed on UK children, although the ubiquity of video games for children is equally in evidence amongst the rising middle and upper classes in Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries. The data collection consisted of five, fully recorded and transcribed, focus group interviews with children aged 6-12 in the UK, and 3 in-depth interviews with three siblings, in addition to an interview with their mother. Moreover, two expert interviews were conducted with gaming industry practitioners to capture the industry's view of the phenomenon as well. In addition, informal data gathering included informal conversations with young adult gamers, with parents, and with other children about the role of video games in their lives.

1.4.0 Research Questions

As Hudson and Ozanne (1988) would argue, sometimes the research hypothesis is forgone when a priori conceptual framework could not capture the flow of human experience. This is the case in this research as relatively little empirical research has tackled the experience of children with video games. Furthermore, since this research is investigating the experience itself, then each situation is seen as unique and no streams of experience submit to experimental, statistical, comparative or causal control and manipulation as Denzin (1983) would argue (p.132). As a broad research aim, the study explores the role of video games in children's lives, as reflected in their lived experiences, focusing particularly on issues of development, socialisation and identity. Uppermost in the researcher's mind was the conventional wisdom, often repeated in popular press, that video games are a 'bad' thing for children, allegedly causing them to be fat and unfit, lacking in social skills and even that playing video games causes aggression and violent behaviour. There are sensational press reports of children having to be treated by psychiatrists for video game 'addiction', and adults

sometimes refer to ‘the good old days’ when children played traditional games out of doors. The striking thing is that most children appear to be doing very well, even though video games are now a part of the huge majority of children’s lives in economically developed countries, and of many in developing countries. It is to be admitted that some research literature (cited later in the thesis) is beginning to emphasise positive benefits for children playing video games, including effects on cognitive skills and co-ordination, although few have yet engaged with the issue of video games’ role in children’s social and emotional development. The study therefore set such prejudices aside in order to access the children’s own views, subjecting these to a discourse analysis in order to theorise the action-orientation and structure of children’s discourse around the role of video games in their lives. The literature review, the pilot interviews with children and the experts’ interviews that were conducted helped solidify the research questions, as follows:

1. What is the impact of video games and digital interaction on children, socially, emotionally, and cognitively?
2. Is children’s environment today a harmful one because of their deep engagement with video games and communications technology?
3. What are the implications of video games on children’s senses of identity and membership in social reference groups?
4. What are the implications of video games and technology on children as consumers?
5. How does the children’s access to online gaming and communication affect their socialisation and social development?
6. What are the children’s motives for engaging in online gaming? Are they seeking fantasy, escape and fun or autonomy, authenticity, social positioning?

These research questions helped structure the literature review and guided the interview protocols, and the subsequent analysis. They drew on a wide range of published research in a number of different disciplines in social, health, addiction and children’s studies.

1.5.0 Structure of the Research

Chapter 1 Outlines the whole study and sets the context for the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2 Develops the theoretical context of the study with a cross-disciplinary investigation that explores related researches that were conducted on children's sense of identity, socialisation, brand awareness and other issues that might have further implications of children's consumption of video games.

Chapter 3 Provides a detailed market study of the video gaming environment and the different gaming platforms, genres and games.

Chapter 4 Puts forward the philosophical approach and the methodological orientation that is adopted in the study.

Chapter 5 Sets the empirical context of the study, highlighting the data gathering procedure, sampling as well as the analysis.

Chapter 6,7 and 8 Highlight the socially constructed findings from the discourse analysis of the focus groups and in-depth interviews conducted within the framework of five interpretive repertoires.

Chapter 9 Discusses the implications and issues arising from the study, linking the literature review with the discourse analysis.

Chapter 10 Concludes the study, highlighting the major findings in the light of the research questions and providing recommendations for future research and for the theoretical development of the area.

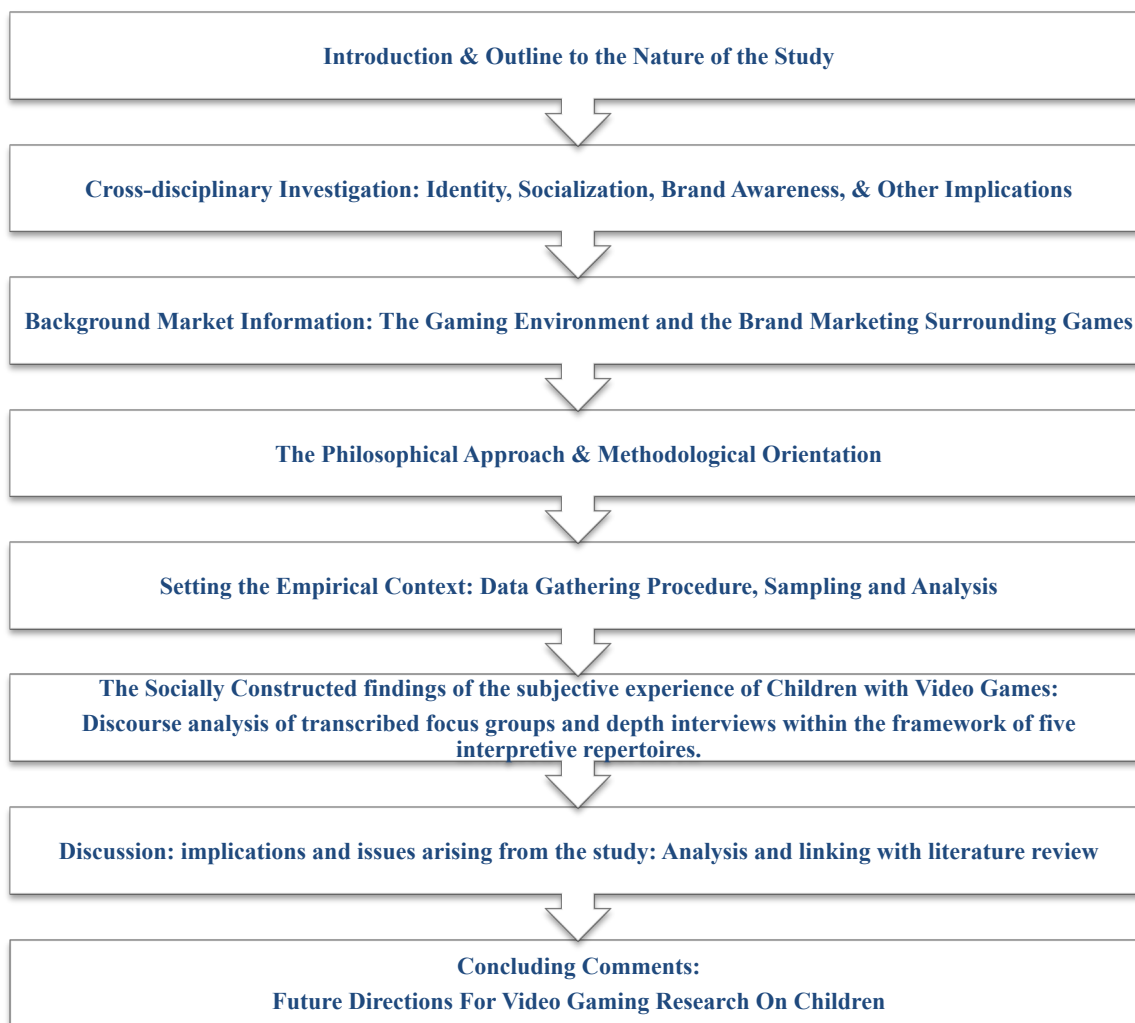


Figure 1: A graphic of the thesis structure

1.6.0 Key findings

The discourse analysis resolved the many comments the children made about their experiences of video games into five overlapping but distinct ‘interpretive repertoires’, following Potter and Wetherell (1978). An interpretive repertoire is a discursive resource that orients and frames talk around a particular topic. In-keeping with discourse analytic principles, the analytical focus falls not only on the content of what is said but also on the putative motives of the speaker. Thus the analysis does not simply report what is said but also acknowledges the action-orientation of talk and text. Discourse is assumed to be dynamic and the interpretive repertoires are resources for social positioning and identity. For example, the analysis draws attention to occasions when children make a point that supports their desired identity within the friendship group.

The repertoires are:

1. “Digital savviness and group membership”:

This repertoire refers to the ways in which children’s ideologies for social status, group membership, identity representation and self-actualisation are to a certain extent shaped by their ownership, consumption and knowledge of video games.

2. “Video games, children’s age and gender”

In this repertoire the children expressed how video games are a shared interest among them, but only as a concept, not in terms of games. Gender and age difference dictate difference in genres of games being played.

3. “Video games as a source of empowerment for children”

How video games seem to be quite an important site for the negotiation and struggle for power within family dynamics.

4. “Video games, children’s development and socialisation”

This repertoire concerns the developmental and socialisation aspects of video games, including the role of children’s video games in family dynamics.

5. “Negotiating the ideological dilemma of video games in popular culture”

On the one hand, children enjoy video games and view them in a positive light, but on the other hand, they are acutely aware of the negative stereotypes around video games. In this repertoire we analyse some mechanisms children use to distance themselves from the negative stereotypes related to video games, especially, addiction.

The findings support the repertoires and the discussion elaborates on them and connects them with the streams of research discussed earlier in the literature review. Overall, the study suggests that the negative stereotypes around children and video games may be premature. One parent confirmed that video games had, in her opinion, been highly positive in helping her child’s social and cognitive skills and ability to concentrate. Many children referred to happy times playing video games with parents, while there was a consciousness of the potentially negative consequences of playing

for prolonged periods, playing online with strangers, or becoming too obsessed with a game. In addition, it seemed clear that video games are far from a solitary pleasure, since they acted as a shared cultural vocabulary for children to draw upon to negotiate their friendships, group members, and social status.

Chapter summary

Chapter One has summarised the trajectory of the study. The chapter outlined the key research aim and issues, and described in brief the chosen research paradigm and method, before listing the research objectives. Finally, the chapter outlined the main findings of the study. Chapter Two will now develop the theoretical context for the study with a detailed cross-disciplinary literature review.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Video Games and Generation Z: Children's Development, Socialisation and Identity

Chapter outline

Chapter two offers a detailed review of relevant literature encompassing previous research into video games, children's development and socialisation, addiction, and research in social and cultural studies. The review is cross-disciplinary, drawing on work from a wide range of health, social science and management literatures reflecting the boundary-spanning nature of the topic. The review begins by examining the marketing category Generation Z, since this is often how children are defined in attempts to target them as consumers. It goes on to explore the question of what influence video games have on children's outlook, their emotional and cognitive development, their behaviours, personalities, and relationships.

2.0.0 Defining Generation Z

This study focuses on a population segment marketing agencies sometimes refer to as Generation Z. Other terms identifying this generation include The Post Millennials (Oblinger and Oblinger, 2005), The New Silent Generation (Sladek, 2007), Digital natives (Prensky, 2001), Generation M (Roberts et al., 2005), Net Generation (Tapscott, 2009) among many others. Researchers from various disciplines have tried to identify this generation age group and the characteristics that set it apart from the previous generations (Oblinger and Oblinger, 2005; Strauss and Howe, 2006; Tapscott, 2009; Lancaster and Stillman, 2003; Martin and Tullgan, 2001; Zemke et al. 1999; Sladek, 2007). However a precise and agreed upon definition of this generation and its age cohort has been a challenge (Montgomery, 2009; Palfrey and Gasser, 2008). Yet the general consensus about Generation Z, is that it consists of those children born, roughly, from 1995 onwards (Oblinger and Oblinger, 2005; Sladek, 2007) and this is the approach adopted in this research. Similar to other age cohorts, this generation consists of individuals who are born within the same time span and share a group identity based on the common history experienced from encountering

similar events that shape their behaviour and traits as they grow up (Jones et al., 2007).

2.1.0 Generation Z and Media

Recently, attention from social scientists, marketing and media agencies has been channelled to Generation Z, since it is widely considered to be exposed to commercial and social influences which previous generations did not experience, at least not to the same degree (Berk, 2009). Specifically, Generation Z is the first generation of children to have access on a wide scale to online, interactive computer games in their own homes; they are said to be “born with a chip” (Berk, 2009; Abram and Luther, 2004). Not only this, but there is a sense that profound cultural shifts are being seen around the conduct and experience of this age group. For example, unlike earlier generations, they are considered by the marketing industry to have a high degree of autonomy as consumers (Ekström, 2007) and they are regarded as having considerable influence in family consumer decision making (Thomson et al., 2007; Tinson and Nancarrow, 2005), yet they have less autonomy than previous generations to play away from adult supervision out of doors (Weir et al., 2006) and therefore spend more time in their home playing video and computer games and watching TV or communicating with friends via mobile devices (Burdette and Whitaker, 2005). Finally, and importantly, their psychology may be different to previous generations due to the fact that new forms of communication, whether mobile phones or virtual communication via the Internet, have removed the idea of waiting time in their lives, thus they have become accustomed to immediate gratification: they are known as the ‘now’ kids (McNeal, 1999). Those children did not experience living without mobile phones and Internet, they do not wait for letters to arrive since they now have emails, nor do they resort to books for information since it is all there on the Internet whenever they need it. This implies that Generation Z have a different form of socialisation to previous generations and that their experience of life and responses to it may be different since their behaviours are framed within a social and technological environment which is, in some ways, distinctive to this generation (Ekström, 2007).

2.2.0 Generation Z in the Trade Press

Many of the possibilities mentioned earlier are not necessarily grounded in robust social research but are regarded as common knowledge in marketing trade press and popular psychology (e.g. “Kidfluence” Sutherland and Thomson, 2003; “Brandchild” Lindstorm and Seybold, 2003; “Born to Buy” Juliet Schor, 2004; etc). Nonetheless, they have wide credence even though it is difficult to support such assertions positively. What cannot be doubted is that knowledge about Generation Z is still relatively undeveloped given the fact that they are the first generation to have online games as a regular part of their daily routine as a substitute to the traditional outdoor play due to relative restrictions imposed by parents for security reasons (Weir et al., 2006). The increasing awareness of crimes that involve children, including sexual offenses and abduction, has made many parents fear letting their children play outdoors and they found in video and computer games the solution to keep their children entertained while maintaining their safety. More speculatively, it is argued that Generation Z’s ownership of mobile devices, access to the Internet and the exposure to influx of information from online and offline adult media (Gunter et al., 2004) seems to be different, and in particular more, than any previous generation. Marshall (2010) noted that with this change in children’s environment due to direct and indirect exposure to media, there is a need to explore how they engage with such a commercial world.

2.3.0 Generation Z in Comparison to Previous Generations

Many difficult questions are raised concerning Generation Z. While every generation tends to feel that the younger generation is lacking in qualities such as self-sufficiency, motivation, maturity, skills and so forth, it cannot be said yet what the influence, if any, of the Generation Z lifestyle will have on their lives as adults. Some educators have suggested that Generation Z has a shorter attention span, and there is some evidence that there is a rise in instances of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and related developmental psychological conditions (Hill, 2006; Chan and Rabinowitz, 2006). It is a matter of speculation as to whether such conditions are related to the lifestyle of Generation Z, especially many hours of online activity. A first step would be to discover more about the subjective experience of Generation Z and in particular with regard to their virtual lives, by which is meant

their online experiences of games, communication, consumerism and socialisation. It is sometimes claimed that the lives of the children of this generation are more fulfilling than the previous generation. This argument has credence in a sense that these children have resources, access to advanced technology and exciting hi-tech games that allow them to communicate with other children, or even adults, from all over the world, without having to leave their house or even their bedroom. But whether they are happier or better equipped to face the life ahead of them is difficult to say.

2.4.0 Investigating Generation Z's Experience and Lifestyles as Consumers

This section looks at Generation Z's experiences and lifestyles as consumers. It has been argued that Generation Z are somehow different as consumers from other generations due to the increased availability of digital technology, changes in children's modes of socialisation, and apparent changes in family dynamics around consumer decision making.

Investigating the area of video games, touches on a number of different but connected areas and questions. Fundamentally, the question asked is the experience of life of Generation Z really different from that of previous generations, and if so, in what ways, and what are the implications?

2.4.1 Generation Z and Digital Technology

At a very young age, the children of this generation have become more accustomed to the conveniences that technology provides. As Beastall (2008) states, this generation has an advanced relationship with technology that has been formed from early experience (Beastall, 2008). This is evident in several technological realms; mobile penetration, PC penetration and spread of Internet and video games that were factors resulting in the emergence of the phenomenon known as the adultification of children/kids getting older younger. These factors are discussed in the following sections.

The high penetration of mobile phones continues to increase among Generation Z. According to Childwise Monitor Report, a UK leading research specialist on children and their families, in 2009, half of the UK children aged between 5 and 10 were

reported to have mobile phones compared to 95% of those aged between 11 and 16 (Childwise, 2009). It is believed that mobile phone companies are exploiting the parents' growing fear for their children's safety and providing them with solutions that would enable them to monitor their children closely. However, at the same time this situation is causing children of this generation to be exposed to mobile phones at such an early age, with some starting to use it before even entering preschool.

Mobile phone penetration is not the only technology children of this generation are being exposed to. The PC penetration and the spread and ease of access to the Internet have a somewhat greater effect on those children. It has been reported by Childwise that in 2009 all children in the UK aged between 5 and 16 have access to a PC at home, and almost half of them own their own PC or laptop (Childwise, 2009). So children are now growing up and finding PCs an integral part of their home and their life. Some children now learn how to use the computer mouse before they can write their own name (Childwise, 2009). Moreover, in 2001, it's been suggested that one in five children aged between 0 and 4 access the Internet and 30% of them use games consoles (Childwise, 2001). Websites like Mickey Mouse Clubhouse, Club Penguin, and other Disney games are developed to appeal to this younger generation. Furthermore, research reported that 37% of children aged between 5 and 16 have researched or bought products online (Greenfield, 2004). So what is currently being witnessed is a digitally savvy generation who grew up with an influx of technological exposure that they tend to master at a much younger age than the previous generations. As Griffiths (1996) argued, with the explosion in the UK home computer game market, children are becoming "keyboard junkies" (Griffiths, 1996).

2.4.2 The Adultification of Children, the "Kids Getting Older Younger (KGOY) Phenomenon

The increase in availability of digital communications technology to children is said to have led to an explosion of information that children nowadays are exposed to at a very young age, causing the phenomenon some call "Kids getting older younger" (Sutherland and Thompson, 2003) while others call it the "adultification of children" (Sutherland and Thomspson, 2003). This phenomenon has resulted in having the children more knowledgeable, critical and their belief that they are smarter consumers

than their elder counterparts (Haynes et al., 2002; Tinson and Nancarrow, 2005). Thus, children are claimed to develop and show analytical skills at an earlier age than previous generations. Generation Z children have even been reported to have developed a cynical attitude towards advertising and they view it as a tool to be used, which they can control, for their own benefit (Childwise, 2003). Being subjected to the world at an early age, Generation Z children believe that they are well equipped to make decisions and make judgments on whether the information which they receive is credible or not. They also believe that this information can be a source of power to influence their parent's decisions. This will be further analysed in the coming sections.

Accordingly, the influence that these digital technological advances have brought about to the world should not be underestimated. It has even been widely argued that the PCs and the Internet are playing a vital part in the shaping of today's children, evolving their knowledge and empowering them (Sutherland and Thompson, 2003). Having realised that, some markets are exploiting this trend, the mobile market is one of them, as mentioned earlier, and the toy market is another. Recently, toys which were originally developed for young adults are being introduced to very young children (Cross, 1997). Postman (1994) claimed that childhood is disappearing as younger children are being targeted, with the help of media influences, for products that were once aimed at young adults and adults (Postman, 1994). With Generation Z, traditional games, outdoor play and physical interaction are increasingly being replaced by digital play and virtual interaction through games that were originally targeting adults. Thus, differences in knowledge, attitudes and behaviour that set children apart from adults may have diminished (Goldberg et al., 2003).

2.4.3 Generation Z and Brand Awareness

Technological advances have not only been shaping Generation Z's behaviour and attitudes, but also being heavily exposed to media and the Internet at such a young age has resulted in children formulating strong views on brands (Achenreiner and John, 2003). As has been mentioned earlier, one of the titles given to this generation is Generation M (for Media) (Roberts et al. 2005), referring to their intensive exposure as well as use of several media sources concurrently. It is argued that this generation

is the most brand conscious generation ever due to their extensive brand knowledge and strong preferences formulated at such a young age (Achenreiner and John, 2003). It has been acknowledged that the “new” media, which refers mainly to the Internet, has radically shaped children of generation Z’s experience and understanding of brands and influenced the way they think and learn (Greenfield and Yan, 2006; Nairn et al., 2008). In earlier generations, this knowledge of brands was attained by product familiarity and previous experience with the product which eventually increased by age and exposure (Achenreiner and John, 2003). However, this generation is equipped with the Internet through which they can learn about a product or a brand, independently of their parents, through other consumers’ experiences and reviews posted in blogs on the Internet.

2.4.4 Changing Patterns of Brand Awareness in Children

It has been long recognised by research in various social science disciplines that children are able to recognise brands as young as 3 or 4 years old (Chaplin and John, 2005; Derscheid et al., 1996), and as they reach middle childhood (7-8 years of age), they develop an evoked set of brands within familiar product categories and they often use the brand names in a generic way to refer to the product (John, 1999). At a later stage of development, children’s views on brands develop from being perceptual and only focusing on observable concrete features of a product, to being conceptual in which they start forming brand associations and identifying oneself with the brand (Chaplin and John, 2005; Achenreiner and John, 2003). As is the case with older consumers, the children of Generation Z are now purchasing products for the image associated with them rather than their functional features (Achenreiner and John, 2003), which gives credence to the ‘kids are getting older younger’ phenomenon that is widely associated with this generation.

2.4.5 The Early Development of Self-Brand Connections

Achenreiner and John (2003), highlight the fact that socialisation of children in the consumer world is highly affected by ‘consumption symbolism’ which children of this generation have shown early signs of adopting compared to other generations. Now, children as young as 8 years old realise that having the right brands are the quickest way to acceptance by reference groups (Kantrowitz and Wingert, 1999;

Chaplin and John, 2005), so they are using brands for impression formation at a very young age. As Lindstorm and Seybold (2003) indicate in their book “Brandchild”, children are becoming increasingly “bonded to brands” at a young age. Consequently, it is inferred that children of Generation Z are ahead in their development of self-brand connections than previous generations. Previous generations of children exhibited a limited degree of self-brand connection based on concrete associations such as usage and ownership of a brand, and as they reached adolescence these connections were multiplied (Chaplin and John, 2005). However, with Generation Z children, it has been observed that they view brands as products which embody their self concept and personality and ensure their reference group affiliation, so they understand their importance in impression formation and management (Jamison, 1996; Achenreiner and John, 2003). Hence children’s consumption practices are no longer framed solely by family consumption styles but rather to a great extent by peer consumption styles as well (De la Ville and Tartas, 2010).

2.5.0 Generation Z and Power

Marketers have realised that this generation, Generation Z, is actually a lucrative generation. It has been noticed that, given their young age, Generation Z have shown what a powerful market they are. Unlike previous generations which were regarded as an influence market influencing their parents’ decision making, this generation is also a primary market having their own spending power as well (McNeal, 1999).

Generation Z’s power of spending is basically generated from the money they receive from their allowances which have increased compared to previous generations (McNeal, 1999; McDermott et al., 2006), relatives’ birthday and seasonal money gifts which can count for 10% of kids’ income, chores and work that they perform, and when they simply ask for it (McNeal, 1999). It has been reported that in the United States, 86% of the children get the money when they ask for it (McNeal, 1999). In 2005, Childwise reported that in the UK purchases made from children’s own money, were estimated at £3 billion and about £30 billion for child-influenced purchases. Thus the direct purchasing power of Generation Z’s children is considerable.

2.5.1 Generation Z's Newly Acquired Constitutive Power

Marketing to and for children has significantly empowered them (McNeal, 1999), though not necessarily in a good way. Treating children as a targeted market segment, along with cultural shifts in parenting styles (Tinson and Nancarrow, 2005), have given children a constitutive power which undermines the structural power of parents (McDermott et al., 2006; Ekström, 2007). This constitutive power can be seen in the way children talk about their experience of consumption and the strategies they use to undermine parental authority in order to get the items they want. So on one hand, the children are aware of the soft power, which is usually referred to as 'pester power', they have over their parents and know exactly how to exploit it, and they sometimes use it inconsiderately. On the other hand, the parents are also more aware of other dangers which face children outside their home, so they yield to their children's pester power and try to make their bedroom a haven of safety. Moreover, there is a trend towards parents ceding to their children's requests due to feelings of guilt, hence giving more power to this group of consumers to make up for the inconveniences the parents bring about to the family (Piacentini, 2010). So in a sense, in indulging the children, the parents are expressing a need to show love, to nurture and more importantly to protect. Yet, it is argued that still the parents are capable of wielding authority when they feel strongly enough about something, especially when the safety and well-being of their children is at stake.

2.5.2 Generation Z and their Intra-Familial Relationships

An important factor that has to be acknowledged when studying Generation Z, are their intra-familial relationships and how they differ from those of earlier generations. Children's roles, especially in Westernised cultures, have witnessed a radical change compared to children's roles in earlier generations. The traditional family model which children were brought up in has also changed and now many children are experiencing a non-traditional family model that affects their socialisation, identity, and behaviour. Not only this, but the changing family model has taught the children new strategies to influence their parent's decisions and being equipped with the Internet they now not only have power but also knowledge. These areas will be covered in the below sections.

2.5.3 The Evolution of Children's role in Westernised Family Dynamics

Even though children of Generation Z are considered a primary market, as noted above, they are also a very powerful influence market, some argue more influential than previous generations (Thomson et al., 2007; Ekström, 2007; McNeal, 1999). Children in general have been recognised to play a vital role in influencing family purchase decisions both directly and indirectly (Thomson et al., 2007). Direct influence over parental spending is seen when children make a specific purchase request. Indirect influence occurs when parents purchase products that they know their children prefer.

One assumption is that, as the role of children in the typical family model changes, as is the case with generation Z, the power of children over the parents increases accordingly (Tinson and Nancarrow, 2005; McDermott et al., 2006; Ekström, 2007; Sutherland and Thomson, 2003). Looking back at the role of children of previous generations, it is known that children's role within the family was fairly limited. The long acknowledged Victorian principle of children's role in the family to "be seen and not heard" was challenged by the upsurge of independence among adolescents brought about by Elvis, the Beatles and the rise of pop culture (Pendergast, 2008, Sutherland and Thomson, 2003). Accordingly, adolescents were given some degree of autonomy and voice within Western and Western influenced families; which were later passed on to their children as well. Following in the footsteps of Generation Y, children of Generation Z now demand to have an equal right with adults to have their opinion heard (Thomson et al., 2007; Ekström, 2007); as Sutherland and Thomson (2003) highlight, Generation Z children's motto is "speak with me and not at me". This shift in the role of children has also brought about the need for giving the children a voice even in the field of marketing research as Marshall (2010) noted.

2.5.4 Changes in Parenting Styles and The Adoption of a Pluralistic communication typology

It has been argued that the need of children of Generation Z to be heard by their parents is due to the shift in parenting styles from authoritarian parenting to a more negotiated (labelled as 'authoritative') and eventually permissive parenting (Tinson and Nancarrow, 2005). With earlier generations, parents adopted an authoritarian parenting style through which they exercised a restrictive, punitive parenting attitude

and the children were expected to obey the rules without arguing. However, as children gained more autonomy and developmental psychology activists started condemning this style of parenting, the 'authoritative' parenting style, where verbal give and take is allowed, gained popularity.

As Stueve and Pleck (2001) highlight, parents' roles have changed and brought about changes to children's roles within the family. In family-consumer socialisation studies, researchers have put forward a four way typology of communication patterns within the family; *lassiez faire*, in which control is rarely enforced; protective, which is the opposite extreme of *lassiez faire*, where control is highly enforced and debate is rarely encouraged; pluralistic, in which debate is highly encouraged and minimal control is imposed; and finally consensual, where both high degrees of control as well as debate are imposed (McDermott et al. 2006; Carlson et al., 1992). It is argued that with Generation Z, a pluralistic approach is the current common communication pattern within the family as debate is a necessity and control is rarely imposed unless the safety and well being of the children are jeopardised.

2.5.5 Shift in the figures of Traditional Family Model

It is acknowledged that there has been a radical shift from the traditional family model of a feared father figure and a repressed mother to a more egalitarian model of having fathers as co-parents and mothers as career women (Stueve and Pleck, 2001; Tinson and Nancarrow, 2005) in Westernised countries. Other researchers have attributed this increased autonomy of children in the family model to the shift from the socio-oriented communication structure, where children are expected to conform to parents' authority and not argue, to the concept-oriented communication structure where children are encouraged to debate and develop their own ideas (Moschis and Moore, 1979; McDermott et al., 2006; Ekström, 2007).

Having recognised the different perspectives on the changing role of children in the family model and the reasons for it, and the implications for children's power as consumers, the fact that the family structure itself has changed and affected the role of the children accordingly cannot be disregarded. Four relatively unconventional family models have been on a steady increase in Western and Western influenced families,

and these are the models which Generation Z are born into. These are dual income families where both parents work outside of the home, and thus little time is spent with the children (Lee and Beatty, 2002); single parent families, one of the fastest growing family models in this generation (Tinson and Nancarrow, 2005); blended families that result from divorce and remarriage of one or both parents (Sutherland and Thomson, 2003) and finally multi-generational families, in which children grow up living with their parents and grandparents as well (Sutherland and Thomson, 2003).

2.5.6 The Rise of Non-traditional Family Model: Dual Income, Single Parent, Blended Families and Multigenerational Families

Growing up in dual income families, single parent families and blended families is claimed to have given rise to a new phenomenon that Dan Acuff termed “filiarchy” (1999). ‘Filiarchy’ describes how a lot of power is given to the children by their parents in order to make up for the inconveniences that the parents have brought about to the family, such as not spending enough quality time with the children, or the loss/lack of a second parent, or the introduction of a new step-parent and maybe in some instances step-siblings (Acuff, 1999; Sutherland and Thomson, 2003). Thus, parents tend to cede to the children and their requests as a way to feel less guilty about not fulfilling their duty entirely towards their children. Bent Houggard (2005), a Danish psychologist, uses another term for this trend, that is “curling parents”; in which parents tend to do everything to make their children’s lives as easy as possible (Ekström, 2007). Datamonitor, a UK market research agency, reported that children are making use of their current circumstances and using it against their divorced, working, or single parents to get their own way (McDermott et al., 2006), thus increasing children’s autonomy as consumers.

Apart from single parent, dual income parents and blended family models, Generation Z also witnessed the rise of the multi-generational families. This model appeared as grandparents tend to live longer now and they are sometimes much younger than the traditional grandparents. This trend has led to what David Foot, a Canadian economist and demographer, calls “six pocket children” (Foot and Stoffman, 1998; Sutherland and Thomson, 2003). Thus it is claimed that not only does Generation Z have two

sources of income, those of the parents, who are considered two pockets, and the grandparents, who are considered to be two additional pockets of income. Thus it is argued that Generation Z children are becoming more autonomous consumers than the earlier generation. This autonomy coupled with mastering technological skills, such as PCs, video games and the Internet, gives Generation Z the freedom to explore online and gather information to support their requests for products that are sometimes not appropriate for their age and in some cases parents lack information about them. Yet equipped with media and the Internet, Generation Z make well-supported requests that are considered the new influence strategy widely used by this generation.

2.5.7 Emotional versus Rational Factors as Decision Drivers and Children's Influencing Strategies

Another factor that family research has paid little attention to as Park et al. (1991) claim is the emotional factor that dominates the parents' decisions rather than rationality in certain instances. Emotions such as love, sympathy, sacrifice, altruism, fear, and guilt are usually the drivers for parental behaviour. In their research, Hamilton and Catterall (2006), have come to realise that sometimes parents purchase commodities and cede to their children's requests even though it goes against their better judgment, just for the sake of saving their children from experiencing social differences from their peers and the potential stigmatisation such as bullying that they might encounter (Hamilton and Catterall, 2006). Thus it becomes difficult for parents to wield absolute authority over children, because they don't want them to feel left out of the wider group nor jeopardise their emotional well-being.

In addition to that according to Lee and Collins (2000), there are particular strategies used within families in order to influence family decision making, and apparently these strategies are now mastered by Generation Z. For example, emotion and bargaining strategies have been long acknowledged as two of the main strategies used by children to influence their parents' decision making (Palan and Wilkes, 1997; McDermott et al., 2006; Lee and Collins, 2000; Thomson et al., 2007). As noted above, with the rise of single parents, dual income parents and blended family models, these two strategies are assumed to work best since they allow the children to

emotionally manipulate their parents to get what they want, thus the phenomenon of ‘curling parents’ mentioned earlier.

Another example concerns the power of coalition as another strategy to influence their parents’ decision making (Thomson et al., 2007). By identifying a common interest with another family member, whether a sibling or a parent in a cross-generational coalition, children realised that they are strengthening their position and thus having a greater influence (Filiatrault and Ritchie, 1980). Children felt they were taken more seriously when suggesting an idea or making a request that is supported and backed up by another family member (Thomson et al., 2007). Marketers seem to have also recognised the power of cross-generational coalitions and started marketing toys including video games around nostalgic themes that have a ‘retro’ appeal linking parents and children (Cross, 2010).

2.5.8 Knowledge versus Experience and The Evolution of Pester Power to Expert Power

When it comes to experience, Generation Z children like other generations’ children lack experience that is naturally attained by age and exposure, yet unlike previous generations, they are considered very knowledgeable children for their age. Media certainly play an important role in the diffusion of information and in the awareness process of products (Hackley, 2010), but the Internet and peer experience are the most significant sources for information that Generation Z children rely on to become more knowledgeable about a product, thus they become more influential in persuading their parents (Thomson et al., 2007).

Having knowledge about product attributes, children of Generation Z realised that they can justify their requests to their parents by supporting them with reason (Thomson et al., 2007), and this is considered an influencing strategy that children of Generation Z employ (Lee and Collins, 2000). Even though it has been acknowledged by research that within the family realm, it is the perception of being savvy rather than the reality that counts, children of this generation believe that they are shrewd knowledgeable buyers (Tinson and Nincarrow, 2005). Research done on previous generations has referred to children’s influence on family purchases by “pester

power” (Ekström, 2007; McDermott et al., 2006). Pester power is defined as the effect of children nagging on their parents to cede to their requests. Having this in mind and looking at children of Generation Z, it is argued that there is a move from “pester power” to “expert power”. Children have developed into “knowledge authorities” conveying cultural and social information to their parents as well as technological skills (Sutherland and Thomson, 2003). Having been socialised at a very young age by Internet and media, Generation Z children possess knowledge about products and their consumption, especially technological and entertainment products that, in many instances, their parents lack (Thomson et al., 2007; Ekström, 2007; Tinson and Nancarrow, 2005). This trend has made some researchers claim that children are now beginning to be regarded as “equal” to adults (Ekström, 2007). Generation Z children are seen as competent human beings rather than a growing but incomplete human (Quortrup, 1994; Lee, 2001; Ekström, 2007) specifically when it comes to technological, social and cultural knowledge. Tufte and Rasmussen (2010) noted that children today are more ‘social beings’ than ‘social becomings’ socialising their parents into the technological and social realm. This explains why the children’s autonomy in household purchases has extended from minor basic purchases to major household purchases including electronic gadgets, automobiles, holiday destinations to name a few.

2.5.9 Reverse Socialisation

The children of this generation are no longer just absorbers of knowledge, like previous generations’ children, but also providers and equals. Thus Generation Z children are currently playing a vital role in the diffusion of new technology and innovation to parents. In an exploratory study that was conducted on the children of Generation Y, it was found that two thirds of them provide information and/or advice to their parents that influence the purchase decision (Ekström, 2007). So, one can try to postulate the growing effect that Generation Z would have on their parents. It is debated that what is being witnessed is a matter of ‘reverse socialisation’ (Ward, 1974; Ekström, 2007), in which parents are socialising the children and conditioning them by encouraging them to make sound arguments to get what they want (Moschis and Moore, 1979; Caruna and Vassallo, 2003; Thomson et al. 2007), while the children are socialising their parents into new trends by passing on to them their

knowledge and skills when it comes to innovation and technology (Ekström, 2007; Thomson et al., 2007). In her research, Ekström found that children are continuously socialising their parents, not only prior to a purchase but also during and post the purchase incident (Ekström, 2007). Socialisation is an on going life long process (Brim, 1966; Ward, 1974, Ekström, 2006) which is not unidirectional or one sided where parents influence children or children influence parents, but rather a dyadic interaction whereby each can influence the other (Ekström, 2010). Looking back at the literature, it is noted that the process of children being socialised by peers and media and then influencing their parents has been defined as “retroactive socialisation” as described by Riesman and Roseborough (1955) and Ekström, (2007). Thus it can be argued that Generation Z children can be more agentive and socialise their family into certain consumption styles usually in the technological and social spheres where they have more experience and interest.

2.5.10 Summarising Comments

Accordingly, with the rise of the authoritative/permissive parenting style, changes in the traditional family model, and Generation Z’s expert power gained through the media and Internet, it can be understood why Generation Z’s autonomy has extended to influence major household purchases. Realising this increasing power of children over family decisions many firms, especially in the automobile industry, started appealing to children in their advertisements by showing TV screens with cartoons to attract the children to the ads and act as an influence factor if a new car purchase is brought up by the parents. Hence, Generation Z children not only feel their rising constitutive power within the family, they also have it affirmed by external marketing agents when they see marketing that acknowledges their power as consumers.

2.6.0 Generation Z and the Implications of Technology

Children of this generation are assumed to be subject to a mediated experience of life to a far greater extent than previous generations. One of the titles given to this generation is Generation M, standing for media (Roberts et al., 2005), since they tend to see more TV and Internet in an unrestricted environment and have less direct experience of life as autonomous individuals away from their home and family. Rosen

(2007) has touched upon the media and technology factor, suggesting that children of Generation Z:

“....spend their days immersed in a ‘media diet’ accumulating a fulltime job plus overtime devouring entertainment, communication, and every form of electronic media. They are master multitaskers, social networkers, electronic communicators, and the first to rush to any new technology. They were born surrounded with technology and with every passing year they add more tools to their electronic repertoire” (Rosen, 2007).

Consequently, it is important to understand the effect of extended hours of use of virtual technology and exposure to digital media on this generation, since their experience of life may be mediated in an unprecedented way.

2.6.1 Generation Z and Video Games, Are they this Generation’s TV?

Recently, researchers have focused their studies on analysing the effect of playing video games on children in the light of the rise in adoption of the games culture in today’s children. It has to be acknowledged that the children of this generation are driven by one main factor that sets them apart from previous generations: they have grown up surrounded by electronic media and exposed to playing video games from infancy (Beck and Wade, 2004; Carstens and Beck, 2004; Shaffer et al., 2005). It has been reported that children in the UK in 2009 spend an average of 1.6 hours per day playing on games consoles, an average that has been steadily increasing in the past three years (Childwise, 2009). Others have reported that almost 6 and a half hours are spent each day by children between 2 and 17, in front of an electronic video screen, either a TV, computer or video games console (Woodward and Gridina, 2000).

Moreover, it is argued that video games are this generation’s TV, since they have become an integral part of their daily life (Snyder, 2000) and children are said to prefer video games to TV since they provide them with a certain degree of control (Griffiths, 1996 citing Greenfield, 1984). It has been reported in research conducted by BLM Azure, a UK toy and games media specialist company, that 86% of children in the UK access the Internet to play online games (Goldie, 2007). Furthermore, it has been reported that in the UK, 83% of children between 5 and 16 years have a game console at home and that 66% of them have their own game console (Childwise,

2009). Based on these figures and researches, it is argued that video games constitute a significant part of Generation Z daily routine. Thus, in order to understand this phenomenon, some perspectives need to be examined and they are the social, physical, mental as well as psychological implications of video games on children.

2.7.0 Social Implications

One main argument that is widely pinned to the children's current extended exposure to virtual technology and media is that it affects their social interaction style, sometimes to the extent of leading to the under-development of their social skills (Griffith, 1999). It is assumed that with children spending so much time watching TV and playing video games, and spending less time socialising with other individuals whether at home or outside of the house, their social skills are impaired. Social scientists concurred that today's children are viewed to be "less" social than previous generations, spending less time with their parents who are usually busy working, and being less likely to play with other children in their neighbourhood or join social clubs, often for security reasons (Weir et al., 2006). This reflects the popular negative assumptions about the social implications of video games on children.

It is acknowledged that children of this generation spend much of their spare time playing video games, with the majority of them playing those games in their own rooms. It has been reported by Childwise that 58% of children in the UK aged between 5 and 16 play video games in their bedroom (Childwise, 2009). As those children become more dedicated to their gaming activities, the parents may become more alienated and it becomes hard to keep up with the rapid changes in the children's technological and virtual world, so that the generation gap between them widens (Fromme, 2003). Tufte and Rasmussen (2010) note that children today are living in a consumer and media society which they quickly adapt to and feel comfortable in especially in relation to media and technology, whereas the older generation are often lagging behind, trying to keep up and defend traditional cultures and norms. This consequently creates a self-perpetuating divide as time poor parents become relatively alienated by the increasing virtual expertise and involvement of their children with their new adopted lifestyle. And accordingly, parents complain that their children have become "less" social since they no longer spend time with them,

yet the case at hand here is that children developed a different form of sociability since they feel disconnected from their parents and find them not interested in their gaming culture, thus they tend to socialise virtually with other individuals who share the same interest with them (Fromme, 2003; Howe and Strauss, 2000).

2.7.1 The Introduction of a new form of ‘Sociability’ and The Evolution of Children’s Play Space

Some studies argue that playing video games inhibit social skills in children (Bacigalupa, 2005), while other studies suggest that they are actually the core of social activities for today’s children and that they enhance the social interaction and promote growth and enhance problem solving (Olson et al. 2008; Griffiths, 1996). Bacigalupa (2005) has identified some attributes for measuring the development of social skills, some of which are friendliness, helpfulness and cooperation, confidence, belongingness and security (Bacigalupa, 2005). These attributes are the core of many video games which children play today, since they are based on forming teams and cooperating to reach the next level. In addition to this, children feel a sense of belongingness when they play those games with other people who share their interest.

Thus children of Generation Z are not “less” social than earlier generations, but they have developed a new form of sociability that is more suitable to their current environment they are living in, based on virtual interaction. As Jenkins (1998) argued, online games should be regarded as the “virtual play space” for the children of this generation, as they make up for the increasing confinement of children to their homes and the lack of safe places (Buckingham and Green, 2003). These games are seen to generate almost the same entertainment and pleasure that preceding generations had from outdoor play, such as having a goal driven activity, exploring new space, and mastery of activities, male bonding and a degree of self control rather than parental control (Buckingham and Green, 2003).

2.7.2 The new culture of video games

Parents’ perception of how video games inhibit the social abilities of their children may be based on a bias, since video games have evolved from a non-interactive hobby, in which a player is playing against the computer or game console, to a highly

interactive one with multiple other players. Thus, Selnow's (1984) argument that children playing video games engage in an unhealthy relationship with the computer regarding it as an 'electronic friend' is no longer viable with the current video games culture (Griffiths, 1996). Most of today's video games promote cooperation and teamwork and are often based on social interaction, as they enable chatting and conversing with other players in co-operation or competition. So children are no longer playing against the computer but rather against other individuals. Thus video games are no longer designed as a purely solitary form of activity but they are rather designed to produce meaning and pleasure in a socially interactive context in which a pretext for friendship negotiations is provided and a medium for competition as well as conflict (Buckingham and Green, 2003). Furthermore, as the children play these games together, it is argued that they are subjected to a form of healthy competition and they tend to develop cooperation skills which are a vital component in social interaction skills (Olson et al. 2008).

2.7.3 Video Games as the New “Social Agent” for Generation Z

It can be argued that Generation Z tends to express their feelings and emotions more openly and easily than the previous generations (Lenhart et al., 2001). This could be seen in their desire and openness to share information, experience of game play and opinion through digital storytelling; i.e online blogs, websites such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, etc. and other social media (Squire et al., 2005). Another important aspect of gaming is that it provides children with material to converse about with each other afterwards, so games act like a “social agent” between children specifically boys since it tends to be the main topic in their daily conversations (Berk, 2009; Howe and Strauss, 2000; Bacigalupa, 2005). Not only this but a new tradition has been lately held by this generation and that is LAN parties, where children/gamers get together at one's house to indulge in a weekend or a day of continuous gaming for fun. Thus video games have become the core of Generation Z's social environment.

2.7.4 Video games, the New form of ‘Cultural Capital’

Willis (1990) described early in the nineties in his book 'Common Culture', how advertising is considered a form of 'cultural capital' for children of the previous generation (O'Donohoe, 1994). But that was before the upsurge of the gaming

phenomenon, thus it can be argued that the ‘cultural capital’ of the children of Generation Z, are the video games. Ethnographic scientists put forward a framework for assessing the uses of mass media dividing it into structural uses and relational uses (O’Donohoe, 1994). However these uses seem to apply as well with the concept of video games. Structural uses suggested for the mass media are either environmental in terms of providing entertainment or regulative in terms of structuring time, activity or talk (O’Donohoe, 1994). Video games could be seen to have those structural uses, since they entertain children and players in general and provide companionship as well as structure the time and give children an activity that would entail engaging in talks with players who share the same interest. As for the relational uses they are fourfold. First, it is said that mass media facilitates communication, second, mass media is considered to provide opportunities for interpersonal affiliation or avoidance, third, social learning can result from mass media, and finally mass media allows individuals to express their competence (O’Donohoe, 1994). It can be argued that those fourfold relational uses of mass media can be applied to video games, since video games are increasingly based on social interaction to promote cooperation and teamwork (Buckingham and Green, 2003). In addition, many games require children to engage in healthy competition that develops their cooperation skills (Olson et al. 2008).

2.8.0 Physical Implications

Having looked at the emotional and social implications of video games on Generation Z, we will now look more closely at physical implications. As is the case with the social implications, many researchers concede that with the upsurge of the Internet and video games, children nowadays spend less time exercising and playing outside like previous generations did (Bacigalupa, 2005; Roberts et. al, 2005). As Childwise reported (2001), four out of ten pre-schoolers went to swimming exercise (Childwise, 2001), a far lower percentage than previous years. The rise of the Internet and video gaming is said to have transformed physical play into virtual play (Buckingham and Green, 2003). This trend has given rise to certain physical and health concerns that social scientists have touched upon in their studies, some of the most common ones are for example obesity, sleep deprivation and night owl syndrome among others. There are also some serious rheumatology related adverse effects that result from

prolonged gaming. Moreover, video gaming companies felt the urge to introduce new games and gaming consoles that promote physical activity to improve the general public opinion that video games impede physical activity of children. With this introduction, new forms of gaming related casualties appeared. However, not all research done on the physical implications of video games focus on the negative effects. Some recent research argues that video games improve mental capabilities of players. These issues are discussed in the following sections.

2.8.1 Common Medical Concerns Associated with the Gaming Lifestyle

It is argued that the percentage of obese children in this generation is by far greater than previous generations and this is attributed partly to the children's new adopted behaviour of spending their time playing video games indoors and sometimes in their bedrooms instead of exercising outside. It has been recently reported in a study conducted on children between 9 and 11 in the UK, that many of them are sleep deprived, half of whom have stated that they stay up playing computer games (Harrison, 2010). In fact in 2009, it has been reported that 31% of children aged between 5 and 16 in the UK, tend to play with their game console in bed at night (Childwise, 2009). Thus it is argued that children of this generation suffer from lack of sleep, since the majority of them stay up late playing with video games or watching TV. Conditions such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)* have been reported to manifest as a result of lack of sleep. In addition to the ADHD, it is said that staying up playing video games has a negative effect on children's concentration, since they would have lower energy levels the next day, and on their behaviour, since they become irritable. Consequently, there may be a negative effect on their school work (Harrison, 2010). Furthermore, researchers have reported that the 'night owl syndrome', which is a condition that results from not getting enough vitamin D usually obtained from the exposure to the sun, is increasing among the younger generation. Another disorder that can result from the deficiency of vitamin D is depression. These health concerns are due to the current lifestyle that children are

* ADHD is noted in this research here and in subsequent chapters because of the specific references made to it by one of the participants. It is recognised that the relationship between ADHD and video games consumption is far more complex than this thesis can explore.

adopting of spending a lot of time indoors on their computers or game consoles and not being exposed to enough sunlight (Harrison, 2010).

2.8.2 Extreme Adverse Effects of Prolonged Gaming

More serious medical concerns have been voiced about video games and their effects on players generally since new forms of pain were reported amongst heavy players (Griffiths, 1996 citing Loftus and Loftus 1983). Rheumatologists reported common gaming problems that arise from repeated button hitting and joystick pushing such as blisters, sore tendons, calluses, numbness in the fingers, hands and elbows (Griffiths, 1996) as well as musculoskeletal disorders, deep vein thrombosis, etc. (Chan and Rabinowitz, 2006). Also several studies on this issue have reported other problems that Griffiths (1996) cite in his book, "Electronic children" and they are:

"wrist pain (McCowan 1981), neck pain (Miller, 1991), elbow pain (Bright and Bringhurst, 1992), tenosynovitis (also called 'nintendinitis') (Reinstein, 1983; Brasington, 1990; Casanova and Casanova, 1991; Siegal, 1991), peripheral neuropathy (Friedland and St John, 1984), enuresis (Schink, 1991), encoprisis (Corkery, 1990) and epileptic seizures (Rushton, 1981; Dahlquist, Mellinger and Klass, 1983; Hart, 1990)" (Griffiths, 1996, p.50).

These adverse effects resulting from gaming are relatively rare and therapy would involve not playing for a period of time till symptoms disappear and in cases of enuresis and encoprisis, children are urged to pause the game in order to use the bathroom since they get too involved in the game that they forget to go to the toilet sometimes (Griffiths, 1996).

2.8.3 Traditional Gaming versus New Gaming Causalities

As the studies on the detrimental nature of video games on children increased, and how they are considered 'exercise impeding agents' (Fromme, 2003), since children have replaced physical play with digital play, gaming companies started coming up with new video games that promote and facilitate physical fitness such as Wii Fit by Nintendo, and Xbox 360 by Microsoft. It is argued that casualties caused by the gaming lifestyle children can be divided into two categories, those resulting from the traditional gaming mode, and those from the new gaming mode that promotes physical movement. Some of the reported causalities from the traditional gaming

mode include: eye strain and risk of photosensitive seizures that can be caused from eye fixation on the screen with flashing and flickering light; a 'space invader wrist' or also known as 'Halo wrist' which is basically painful stiffness of the wrist that result from the prolonged playing sessions; palmer hidradenitis that is a dermatological condition resulting from the prolonged gripping of the joystick or controller that result in excessive sweating and painful lesions on the palms and fingers.

On the other hand, casualties caused from the newly introduced physical video games include shoulder inflammation from the strain placed on the shoulder during games involving the movement of the upper body, tendon strain and inflammation of the wrist and forearm that result from the prolonged grip on controllers such as those required for the Guitar hero game, and joints injuries and torn cartilages that result from playing vigorous sports simulation games.

2.8.4 The Physical Benefits of Video Gaming

Much of the research conducted on the physical implications of video games on the players indicates how harmful they are, yet there is also research that highlights the beneficial side of the video games. In March 2009, it was reported in the popular media that a team of researchers at the University of Rochester, New York, claimed that playing video games improves players' contrast perception in images as they become more aware of colour changes and movement in on-screen images. Another research study published in September 2009, by the journal of BMC Research, indicated that playing video games increases the amount of grey matter in the brain which translates into more efficient brain activity, thus explains why the mental activity of players of video games is higher than non-players.

2.9.0 The Theoretical Mental/Learning Implications of Video Games

One of the most controversial arguments among researchers is whether media and technology including video games, help or impede the process of cognitive and emotional development as well as learning/ pedagogy in children. It is argued that many researches are currently concerned with the pedagogy of Generation Z children, since pedagogy is concerned with the creation of forms of consciousness and the development of subjectivities from the children's surrounding environment

(Buckingham and Green, 2003). The question is therefore concerned with how playing video games and interacting with digital communication technology helps or hinders children's learning.

As is typically the case in social science studies, the topic has several dimensions. On one end, psychological theorists, such as Greenfield (1984), tend to regard video games as a vehicle for developing knowledge and skills in children in a relatively de-contextualised manner (Buckingham and Green, 2003). On the other hand, social theorists such as Bernstein (1990) and Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) argue that for children to learn, they must be exposed to "official educational knowledge" (Buckingham and Green, 2003). In between these two extremes are theorists who put forward a "social theory of learning" such as Lave and Wenger's (1991) situation learning theory. This theory views video games as an informal learning experience that should be considered as a practising outlet for children and an "apprenticeship" opportunity for them to become competent social beings (Buckingham and Green, 2003).

2.9.1 The Academic Performance of Generation Z and Video games as the New Learning Culture

Some researchers concur that a high level of exposure to media and video games is detrimental to children's academic performance (Roberts et al., 2005, Bacigalupa, 2005). It has been remarked that children who spend more time playing video games get lower grades than those who spend less time (Roberts et al., 2005). However, it must be noted that today's media and video games differ from the earlier ones as has been highlighted earlier, since they are of an interactive nature which engages the children rather than a passive, one way media (Larson, 2001), and that interactivity provides an excellent model for learning as argued by some researchers (Dill and Dill, 1998).

Based on the theory of motivation and emotion (Solomon, 1983), video games are considered highly motivating tasks since a great effort and energy is exerted towards a difficult yet possible task where success is rewarded (Dill and Dill, 1998). James Gee (2003), a social scientist and a member of the National Academy for Education in the

United States, has identified in his book, 36 learning principles that can be derived from all types of video games, including the violent ones, two of which are; the active learning process and commitment to it (Gee, 2003). It is argued that while playing video games, Generation Z children are engaging in a form of learning based on trial and error, and they have a sense of commitment towards the game being played and reaching the last level or the highest score is the aim they strive for. Moreover, some researchers have taken a step further and stated that video games are the “exemplary teachers” to the children of this generation (Gentile and Gentile, 2008). This statement was based on noting several exemplary dimensions of video games some of which include, having clear objectives with adaptable difficulty levels, learning actively through practice, over learning to reach mastery, increasing difficulty across levels thus applying previous lessons learned (Gentile and Gentile, 2008).

2.9.2 Generation Z and the Practicality of Learning

It is observed that the children of Generation Z are more into the practicality of learning and learning through trial and error. It has been stated that the interactive and multimodal nature of the current video games, where children learn by exploring, interacting, collaborating with and competing against other players to discover the game, actually contributes largely to their learning process and mental capabilities (Arnseth, 2006). Furthermore, it has been argued by Veen and Vrakking (2006) that children of this generation have developed meta cognitive capabilities on their own and without instruction that are necessary for various types of learning including enquiry based learning, discovery based learning, networked based learning, experiential learning, collaborative and active learning to develop their own knowledge (Veen and Vrakking, 2006). Homo Zappiens has been proposed as a term referring to this new generation and their new intake of learning that is quite different from their previous predecessors (Kirschner and Karpinski, 2010). Consequently, it is acknowledged that video games facilitate learning by allowing children to have a sense of the bigger picture and experience the integration between knowing and doing. Having said that, it also has to be acknowledged that even though video games contribute to the process of children’s pedagogy, yet the traditional and formal cultural knowledge that were previously attained through reading of long books that

familiarise the children with the language, grammar and spelling, is not supported by the new gaming lifestyle Generation Z are now adopting.

2.9.3 Video games as a Tool of Recruitment in the Workforce

Moreover, it has been argued that video games tend to develop critical thinking in children and instil the exploration of rules and consequences, and help them learn perspective taking and conflict resolution skills, as well as providing them with simulations of life that they might not encounter in reality at such a young age (Olson et al., 2008). Some professions in certain fields, such as the military, aviation, health care use those video games or other video game type media as a way of training and recruiting their candidates and simulation (Arnseth, 2006; Ondrejka, 2006) such as the CIA and the UK army. It has been proven that these games are an accurate measure of the psychomotor skills (Carter, Kennedy and Bittner, 1980 cited in Griffiths, 1996) and that's why the US army uses them to train gunners (Trachtman, 1981 cited in Griffiths, 1996). And in April 2009, the British Army launched a game entitled 'Start Thinking, Soldier!' as a free web based flash game designed to attract new recruits to the military (Hackley, 2010). Thus since they have been proven effective in training elders, they can also be effective in the learning process and training of children to help them develop necessary life skills.

2.9.4 Empowering Pedagogy versus Protective Pedagogy

Buckingham and Green (2003) suggested that societies claim to adopt an empowering approach in the pedagogy process, helping the children to be competent and autonomic, yet what societies are actually espousing is a protectionist pedagogy, in which the segregation of children from unfamiliar situations that are assumed to cause harm, is practised (Buckingham and Green, 2003). In video games, it is argued that children are 'learning to learn' which is more essential than 'what they actually learn', since the ultimate pedagogy process is the one that does not only result in the training children are subjected to while playing but also on the lessons learned by themselves while playing (Buckingham and Green, 2003). Thus parents' attempt to impose a certain kind of control on their children's physical movements and relationships with the world outside, has consequently lead to allowing children greater freedom and

autonomy within the home in terms of their voice and access to putatively adult technology such as mobile phones, computers and video games.

2.10.0 Psychological Implications of Video Games Consumption

Another area of concern that has been touched upon by research regarding Generation Z and the extensive media and video games exposure, is the psychological implications that might arise. Some psychological disorders are said to be related to the current lifestyle children are leading today such as proneness to ADHD mentioned earlier, violent tempers, addiction or depression (Griffith, 1999). Moreover, stereotypical opinion about minority groups is said to be instilled in the children's perceptions as most video games promote those ideas. On the other hand, it is argued that these video games do not have a detrimental effect on children as claimed, but they rather help children to vent out their negative emotions (Olson et al. 2008). In addition, some therapists argue that video games have proven to be valuable in treating young children for emotional and cognitive disorders (Spence, 1988; Gardner, 1991) and in confidence building (Griffiths, 1996). These issues will be further discussed in the following sections.

2.10.1 Aggressive and Violent Behaviour Among Generation Z

Aggressive tempers and high risk behaviours of today's children have been widely attributed to playing violent video games, yet researchers have been unable to provide a clear casual link that these games actually are the reason for this violent tendency in children (Anderson and Dill, 2000). Some research asserts that such violent games are a main cause for an increase in high risk behaviour among children that includes aggression, hostility, early drug and/or alcohol abuse as well as early sexual activity (Erwin and Morton, 2008, Yao et al., 2010; Griffith, 1999; Anderson and Bushman, 2001; Dill et al., 2005). Popular media coverage of video games related crimes often reflect this widespread concern that video games are causative factors in violence. This argument points to games in which players are rewarded for the number of kills they achieve, such as Grand Theft Auto, Call of Duty and Man Hunt to name a few. There is a suggestion that some children may be unable to differentiate between reality and games and therefore potentially engage in extreme criminal acts.

On the other hand, other researchers concur that the rate of juvenile crime has diminished noticeably even with the increase in adoption of the video game lifestyle among children of Generation Z (Ferguson, 2008; Kutner and Olson, 2008). Another argument is that not all video games are violent and have brutal plots incorporated into them, and that only a minority of children prefer this genre of games (Olson et al., 2008). Furthermore, it has been reported that violent video games can sometimes assist in venting out certain emotions and help in coping with anger (Olson et al. 2008). Thus the aggressive content of the video games has a rather relaxing effect on the players since it allows them to release their stress and anger in a non-destructive way (Bowman and Rotter, 1983; Kestenbaum and Weinstein, 1985 cited in Griffiths, 1996).

2.10.2 Video games and Stereotyping Minorities

Another argument that has to be taken into consideration is that in video games minorities are stereotyped and this actually shapes the children's perception and understanding of minorities (Dill et al. 2005). For example, many studies have found that women are underrepresented and objectified in video games (Dill et al., 2005; Dill and Thill, 2007); Middle Easterners are represented as targets of violence (Dill et al. 2005); male African Americans are stereotyped as either athletes or gang members who use extreme guns (Burgess et al., 2007); while Asian men are portrayed as martial arts fighters (Burgess et al., 2007). This stereotyping has led researchers to conclude that racism, violence and sexism themes that are adopted in video games tend to condition children into viewing the world in a way that resembles the games they play (Griffiths, 1996).

2.10.3 Addiction to Video Games

Video games addiction is a quite prominent research topic in social sciences. From the emergence of video games researchers have identified addictive features of video game playing since it involves engagement with the game to a very high degree, withdrawal from other activities, and physical and mental symptoms when being stopped from playing (Griffiths, 1996 citing Soper and Miller, 1983).

It has been reported that video games designers are constantly building in new techniques that adds to the addictive nature of the games currently played by Generation Z children. One of the most used addictive techniques is the idea of random awards in which unexpected achievement awards are given to players throughout their playing session. This technique ties the children to the game more intensely as they are in constant anticipation for their next award which is usually publicised through their social network sites such as Facebook. In his research Griffiths (1996) identifies two types of addiction when it comes to video games; those addicted to the machine itself and crave the rewards for social achievement and enhancing skills in competition, and those who play for the sake of escapism and for the relaxing feature of submerging oneself in the realm of fantasy and avoiding reality.

As a sign of children's over dependence i.e. addiction to video games, some behavioural signs may be witnessed, such as stealing money to buy new games (Griffiths and Hunt, 1995), stealing the new games and engaging in felonious acts to obtain those games (McLaure and Mears, 1984), missing out from school and not doing homework and getting bad grades, sacrificing social activities and increased level of aggression (Griffiths and Hunt, 1995).

2.10.4 Games as Therapy

In contrast to being addictive and eliciting negative behaviours, games have also been proven to be useful in therapy of children due to their ability in promoting fantasy, ventilating emotions and feelings, and building rapport between patient and therapist (Griffiths, 1996 citing Spence, 1988 and Gardner, 1991). Anna Freud (1928) and Melanie Klein (1932) are also well known for adopting this strategy in their therapeutic practices (Griffiths, 1996). Some of the positive therapeutic effects that have been put forward by therapists on the importance of video games include, as has been mentioned earlier, increased eye-hand coordination, better attention span and motivation, development of cognitive skills, enhanced sense of control and mastery, and less involvement in youth problematic behaviour due to the engagement with the 'addictive nature' of video games (Griffiths, 1996 citing Butterfield, 1983; Greenfield, 1984; Anderson and Ford, 1986).

Observing children while playing video games, gave therapists such as Gardner (1991) and Spence (1988) the opportunity to better monitor their young patients' behaviour thus be able to offer guidance (Griffiths, 1996). Such observations included, a child's adopted problem solving strategies, the eye-hand coordination, dealing with joy and frustration when winning or losing, the way aggression and violence is released and the sense of achievement among others (Griffiths, 1996). In addition to this, Spence (1988) has argued that video games can bring about several behavioural changes in children including building up relationships with people who share the same interest, and the development of cooperative behaviour, the release of aggression in a non-destructive medium and boosting self esteem.

Another therapeutic value for video games is its use in treating some cognitive and perceptual motor disorders (Griffiths, 1996; Ondrejka, 2006). Video games can act as a diversion for children from doing involuntary acts such as picking their face or lips or biting their nails since they provide a psychologically rewarding experience as argued by Phillips (1991) in his study on the use of video games in physiotherapy. Furthermore, some therapists argue that video games offer a helpful distraction from the side effects of chemotherapy for children with cancer (Griffiths, 1996). It was reported in the UK media in 2009 that scientists at Oxford University suggested that some games, such as a game named Tetris, are actually beneficial in treating cases of post-traumatic stress disorders.

2.10.5 Other Psychological Implications/Benefits and Summarising Comments

Video games are said to give children a sense of confidence along with increasing their computer skills (Griffiths, 1996). Furthermore, they may be an essential exercise in fantasy for children with three major effects. Video games may help in regulating arousal through escapism, recreation and competition, equipping the children for reality through simulation, and dealing with confidence issues through ego boosting from winning and reducing anxiety (Griffiths, 1996). Thus it is argued that video games appear to have some positive implications that can be rewarding in solving some psychological issues that some children encounter.

Long term effects of video games on children's behaviour remains speculative, yet it is argued that their effect will be greater than the effect of TV on children since video games requires the active involvement of children in them (Griffiths, 1996). In an attempt to conclude this debate, Anderson and Dill (2000) put forward a plausible argument that violent video games can induce aggressive and violent behaviour in children who have increasingly hostile and violent predispositions from their surrounding environment (Anderson and Dill, 2000). Hence, the video games themselves may not be causative agents but form part of a generally dysfunctional and damaging developmental environment in some cases.

2.11.0 Cultural Theory, Identity and Gaming

The following section will move away from psychological and developmental theories of video games and children, to consider social and cultural theories.

2.11.1. Baudrillard and Hyper-Reality and the Alterations of Perceptions

Postmodernist and post-structuralist writers have suggested that contemporary life is profoundly affected by the new technologies of media, especially the Internet, social networks and video games. Before the new media forms mentioned earlier, Baudrillard (1981) argued that the current consumer lives in hyper-reality in a virtual world in which the signs and symbols of existence are sometimes more real than existence itself (Paramentier and Rolland, 2009). The idea of Baudrillard's hyper-reality is further analysed in a review of Baudrillard's *Live Theory* by Paul Hegarty (2004). Hegarty (2004) states that in Baudrillard's *Simulation and Simulacra* book, Baudrillard states that hyper-reality is mainly produced by media which is considered the reproduction of the real from the model of the real (Hegarty, 2004). This is true in the current media forms that the world has been witnessing. With the widespread presence of reality TV, the Internet, social networks and video games simulating daily life routines and/or real concerns such as thefts, wars, etc. the media has reproduced real life experience and presented it as a model of the real. Baudrillard goes on to argue that in an era of complete transparency and visibility provided by digital media, "the virtual aspires to be the real" (Hegarty, 2004:84). This begs the question of which reality Generation Z children live in- the real, or the hyper-real.

The hyper-real state is not solely attributed to technology as Hegarty (2004) argues, but what shapes people's perception. Children are more exposed to this hyper-real world, and the ideas and the alteration of perceptions that 'accompanies' this technology (Hegarty, 2004). For instance, identity, gender and racial positions in particular are being mobilised by engagement with mediated experience and, for young people, online and offline gaming provides a valuable resource for information, communication, identity positioning and experimentation. Many of Generation Z's perceptions of the world they live in is largely shaped by the media they are exposed to rather than real life physical encounters and incidents that build experience. Thus as Baudrillard (1994) argued perceptions of the world are being altered by new forms of media made available through technological advances that allowed media to become the map/model that tries to regenerate the real (Hegarty, 2004). Accordingly Baudrillard (1988) argues in *The Ecstasy of Communication*, that the "screen has replaced the scene" (Hegarty, 2004).

2.11.2. Automation and the Evolution of Man Into an Objective Social Becoming

Another argument that Baudrillard makes is that with increased automation and the increase in push button control, "man has evolved into an objective social becoming" (Hegarty, 2004). This is seen as technology evolved from being a functional utility into a significant necessity that shapes everyday life. It has to be acknowledged that children today constitute a digi-modern generation in the sense that their worlds are defined substantially by their engagement with online media and virtual experiences. They are born surrounded by all forms of technological advances. O' Donohoe refers to Willis' (1990) portrayal of young people lives:

"... a vibrant symbolic life and symbolic creativity in everyday life, activity and expression....Most young people's lives are.... full of expressions, signs and symbols through which [they seek] to establish their presence, identity and meaning." (O'Donohoe, 1994 citing Willis, 1990 p.1).

Thus, being submerged in a life full of technological advances, Generation Z children tend to live in a hyper-reality based on symbolic acts, expressions and identity. Baudrillard argues that with all the technological advances that recreate, enhance,

multiply and bring reality to subjects in digital media including video games, there has never been a more ‘realer’ world than now (Hegarty, 2004:9).

2.11.3. Identity and Simulation: The Promise of Video Games

Social scientists have argued about the uses of mass media in general. Some considered it an opportunity for play and pleasure (Stephenson, 1967), while others noted that it is a form of escapism (McQuail et al. 1972). It has to be noted that at the beginning of the emergence of the gaming phenomenon, a promise was made for the technological elite community and the players, who were the main initial target for this industry (Barlow, 1996). The promise was that these games will enable them to form complex social networks, create new businesses, master new skills and aid them in escaping from reality to a digital world where almost anything is possible (Ondrejka, 2006). However, unexpectedly, the digital world experienced a staggering growth and popularity among almost everyone who is interested in discarding their real life and identities and creating new ones through the game (Ondrejka, 2006) and also among the younger generation who are still in the process of developing their own identities. It is argued that the digital world of games offers players with virtually limitless opportunities of self discovery, identity experimentation as well as escapism (Yee, 2006a).

2.11.4. Online Identities and Consumer Socialisation in the Light of Techno-Futurism and Post-Modernism

The term “Pseudonymity” was suggested to refer to the act of being submerged in the virtual reality and leaving the real world identities behind (Ondrejka, 2006). Being submerged in playing is considered by some post-modern researchers such as Featherstone (1991) as a means of defence when reality becomes hard and mastery is unachievable. Thus it is claimed that irony and playfulness become the gateway and the creative outlet for escapism (O’ Donohoe, 1994), allowing gamers to pretend and gain access to vicarious experience and lifestyle which Crosier (1983) denotes that otherwise would be rather impossible to encounter in reality. It is also argued that gaming and the process of seeking vicarious experience is considered a form of consumer socialisation that helps in fuelling and channelling aspirations and energy

towards a specific activity (O' Donohoe, 1994). Thus some gamers seek in video games a channel for acquiring a sense of achievement even if it's on a gaming level. The view in favour of video games and virtuality and how it can free people radically, immersing their lives in dreams and fantasies and extending space while removing the need for a body, is said to belong to the techno-futurism of the 1960s to which Philip K. Dick and Marshall McLuhan belong (Hegarty, 2004). However post-modernists, especially Baudrillard, are scornful of the idea that digital media provides man with a space for freedom and self-discovery. Baudrillard argues that digital media actually traps humans and adds further constraints to their identity, and as he puts it "we become terminals in a creeping virtualisation" (Hegarty, 2004: 129). This is specifically true with Generation Z children who are born surrounded with various types of digital media and they fail to even imagine life without the technological gadgets they were born with.

2.12.0 Generation Z's Liminal Experience

The idea of identity experimentation through online gaming seems to be quite significant for young adolescents who reported using the Internet for specifically such a reason (Gross, 2004; Maczewski, 2002; Valkenburg et al., 2005). According to developmental psychology and theories of socialisation, children at the threshold of adolescence are assumed to be experiencing a stage of transition in which they need to redefine and develop their own identity (James and Prout, 1990) and they struggle for connectedness (Valkenburg and Peter, 2008). Turner (1967) identifies this liminal stage and describes it as "fruitful darkness", in which a child/ tween experiences a gap between the self they are and the self they long to be (Turner, 1967). Thus a tension exists between the child's conceptualisation of how the society positions and reacts to them and their real social position. Arnold Van Gennep (1909) has defined the liminal phase as the "rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age" (Turner, 1995:94) thus it can be argued that children at the threshold of adolescence are facing this stage of social ambiguity, which is accompanied by categorical invisibility and egocentric tendencies arising from the fear of social reprisal from being, as Turner would refer to them, "betwixt and between" (Turner, 1974: 1995). Piacentini (2010) notes that this phase of transition from childhood to adolescence is a major rite of passage common in all societies and due to the absence

of the initiation rites, consumption habits tend to symbolise the transformation process from childhood to adulthood. It is further noted that in Western and Westernised countries, children tend to communicate their maturity and ‘adulthood’ through material possessions that establish their identity and prestige among their peers (Piacentini, 2010)

2.12.1 Generation Z and Structure/ Anti-Structure

It can be argued that at this stage of life, tweens go through an anti-structure process in which they are in a transition stage, neither being children or adults, and thus become liminals experimenting with identities to reach a structured stage where they have a clear sense of self (Turner, 1995). Thus, exploring new identities is considered an essential task for the development of the child’s identity in order to reach a stable, clear and unified sense of who they are (Valkenburg and Peter, 2008). Thus, identity experimentation, accessible through video games, is a tool to reach a desired end. The reason why the online games and the virtual world are the current popular playground, and/or the laboratory for such identity experimentation, is the virtual aspect of the experience that diminishes the real life social repercussions that might be otherwise encountered in the offline world (Turkle, 1995). Children at this stage are preoccupied with their social standing and public transformation to teenager hood, so they prefer to stay in the shadows, accumulating knowledge and experience, while shielded by the virtual anonymity provided by the online games. Thus they are spared social scrutiny from the real world. Baudrillard puts it in *Simulation and Simulacra* (1994) that humans “wish to be seen and not seen, they wish to appear but not lose their privacy” (Hegarty, 2004:114). This is specifically applicable if we take into consideration the modern digital media and contingencies for simulation it offers.

2.12.2 Generation Z and Video Games as a Temporary Status Reversal

It can also be argued that tweens of Generation Z use video games as a form of temporary liminality to withdraw from the normal modes of social obligations imposed on them by their role in the society. This idea is noted by Turner (1995) as he believes that as more social constraints are put on humans in their functional day to day activities, they tend to seek a separate activity to channel their implicitly desired social models through “ritual liminality” (Turner, 1995: 176). Turner (1995) refers to

liminality as a tool for status reversal at times and he gives the example of Halloween which he claims exemplifies liminal motifs. Turner argues that with masks children ensure their anonymity, thus “masking endows them with the powers of feral, criminal autochthonous and supernatural beings” (Turner, 1995:172). This concept can also be applied to video games and how the anonymity provided within the online gaming community and the vicarious experiences that children experience in the games nurtures their imagination and striving for power whether as criminals or as supernatural heroes or villains. Turner also refers to Anna Freud’s take on this issue, noting that she believed that when children play the roles of animals or monsters, it is in fact a defence mechanism utilized by their ego to unconsciously identify themselves with objects that threaten them (Turner, 1995:174). Anna Freud claims that by doing so, children feel that they are enhancing their powers by the taking the powers of the objects that cause them fear (Turner, 1995: 174). Turner continues to explain that being temporarily permitted to indulge in illicit or extravagant behaviour that would otherwise be condemned by society is emotionally satisfying (Turner, 1995:176). Thus it is suggested that Generation Z use video games to channel their energy, their aspirations and imagination so for example; as Turner (1995) notes, “the structurally inferior aspires to symbolic structural superiority” in liminality phases made possible by video games.

2.12.3 Generation Z and Video games: Structure and Agency

There is an on going debate about whether children’s experiences are determined by the technology that engulfs them, or whether they are active agents in constructing those experiences within the mediating effect of the technology. Some theorists assume a static opposing relationship between structure and agency; that the power of agency undermines the power of structure. Taking this view into consideration, some argue that the children are passive dupes influenced by the power of online games. Others argue that with children having an active role in shaping these online games by adapting them and sometimes subverting their rules, their power should not be underestimated and that the online games are subject to negotiation and interpretation (Valkenburg and Peter, 2008). Yet as Valkenburg and Peter (2008) note in their conceptual research a dynamic relationship between structure and agency is feasible,

with structural forces such as social, economic and technological exerting a profound effect but within which children find space for self autonomy in some forms.

2.12.4 Anthony Giddens' Theory of Structuration

Anthony Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration dismisses this dichotomy between structure and agency and endorses the idea that structure works through agency and agency works through structure since they are interrelated and mutually interdependent. Following this stream of thought, online games and children are both affecting one another; it's a two-way relationship rather than a one way. Children of new generations are always trying to 'invade' the world of the generation that precedes them in an attempt to be accepted and included, thus the power of online games is recognised. Yet with current games, children are empowered by being given the freedom to have some agency over the characters and roles being played. Not only this, but also those children break the rules of the games, defying the system and sometimes even creating their own new games based on existing ones (Pearce et al., 2007) in an attempt to distinguish themselves from the previous generation, and thus make alterations in game play that would serve as an exclusive differentiator to their generation. This phenomenon helps account for the life cycle of games and how a once popular game becomes unpopular with the next generation (Valkenburg and Peter, 2008), as children of later generations strive to differentiate themselves from the previous ones by rejecting the old games and adding their versions to them, in an attempt to mark their existence.

2.13.0 Collective Identity and The Use of Language in Video gaming

Another phenomenon that needs to be highlighted is that children playing video games tend to develop a strong and meaningful 'collective identity' with other players; consequently creating an informal social group, which is based on, shared interest and voluntary membership (Friedman and McAdam, 1992). In a study by Griffiths et al. (2003), it has been highlighted that players tend to play with friends, whom they have played with online before or have just met online more often than they play with real life friends and family members (Griffiths et al. 2003). Within these informal social groups, players tend to formulate the culture of the group and its identity through the interaction and the common social norms in the electronically

mediated communication thus develop a sense of ‘we-ness’ among its members. This is achieved sometimes by devising their own set of language and codes that are meaningful to them and that accordingly help in incorporating themselves into their new found reality featured in the game world (Fayard and DeSanctis, 2009).

Moreover, studies have shown that language is usually the outcome of discussing and acting upon objects of common interest, giving meaning and structure to the social interaction (Fayard and DeSanctis, 2009). Accordingly the electronic aspect of the conversations made in such social groups revolving around games and the need for a quick representative communicating language that would aid in coordinating real-time action that is vital in those games, gave rise to a language based on common abbreviations, symbols (smiley), informal spellings, etc. (Ferrara et al. 1990). Thus, once a language is constructed, boundaries and identities of the social group are defined, and a form of life is approved and adopted. And this is the case with communities of online-video players, including children.

2.14.0 Advantages and Disadvantages of Online Video Gaming to Children’s Identity

With online games, children get the opportunity to communicate with other people from various cultural backgrounds as well as different ages. This aspect of the experience has faced a lot of criticism. On the one hand, some researchers argue that this is dangerous since children talk to anonymous strangers online (Harman et al. 2005), and building multiple relationships with the help of technology might actually confuse the children and increase their doubts about their true identity and decrease their self concept unity (Valkenburg and Peter, 2008; Reid, 1998). On the other hand, other researchers argue that this online experience can actually help children learn how to relate to a wide variety of people and eventually improve their social competence (Suler, 2005). Not only this, but also encountering various people gives the children the opportunity for self-discovery and validation and accordingly reach self-concept clarity and stability (Bruckman, 1992).

2.15.0 Males Greater Inclination to Master Video games

A main observation that has been noted by several studies is that males tend to play and master video games significantly more than females (Griffiths, 1996). This observation enticed the video games industry to introduce she-versions of the popular games in order to expand the market, yet still the female participation in the gaming field remains quite limited. Many reasons have been given to such a phenomenon. A study that examined 21 video games, suggested that the reason for the male dominance in games is because the content of the games itself are more masculine oriented and contains limited female images (Griffiths, 1996). And as Gutman (1982) notes in the categorisation model of consumers: most video games are designed by males for males. Another explanation for this is that women have been socialised not to be comfortable with expressing aggressive behaviour even through combat and war games and they would prefer more whimsical, less demanding activities (Griffiths, 1996). Some other studies have referred to the physiological gender difference between males and females, denoting how males on average excel more at visual and spatial skills that require depth perception and image solving more than females (Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974). These skills are said to be quite essential in game playing since they facilitate hand-eye coordination and the timely processing of spatial relationships (Griffiths, 1996). And thus not being able to excel in video games tends to foster a sense of reluctance by the females to join the gaming arena.

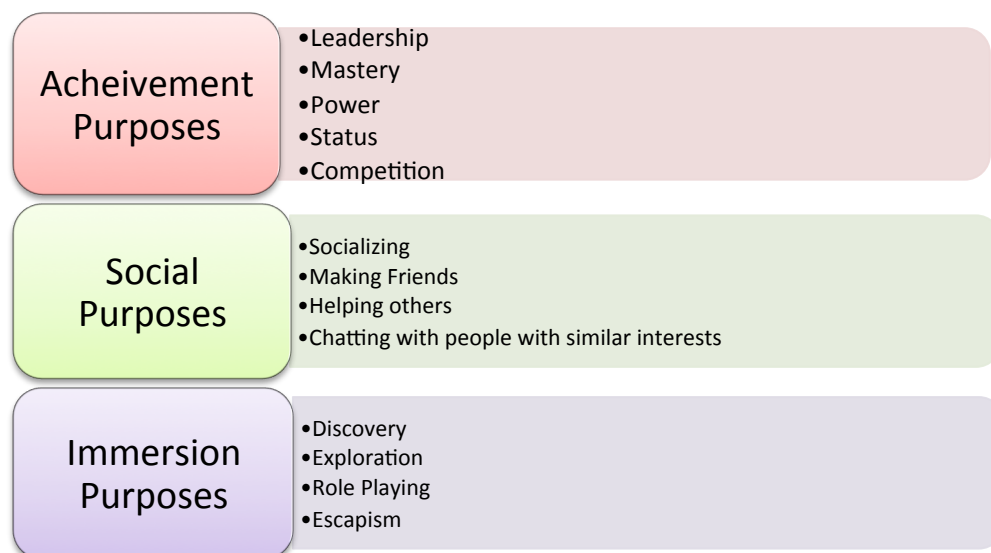
2.16.0 The Taxonomy of Gamers

The Taxonomy of gamers has been a rather popular topic among researchers. Some based their taxonomy on the interaction mode of the players and categorised them into: socialisers, achievers, killers, and explorers (Bartle, 1996). While others such as Yee (2006a) based his taxonomy on the motivation behind gaming. Some tried to identify the players' gaming orientations whether they are single oriented players, community oriented players or off-real world players (Whang and Chang, 2004). It is notable to acknowledge that several games have a simulation aspect to their nature, linking to Baudrillard's categorisation of the successive phases in image simulation (Hegarty, 2004:50).

2.16.1 Taxonomy of Gamers based on Motivation and Player's Gaming Orientations

Yee (2006a) used motivation behind gaming to categorise gamers into three groups: achievement, social and immersion. Achievement purposes refer to motivation to achieve such ends as leadership, mastery, power, status, and success on competition. Social purposes include making friends, helping others and chatting with people with similar interests. Immersion purposes include discovery, exploration, role-playing and escapism in an attempt to relax and avoid real life problems (Yee, 2006a; Yee 2006b). Please refer to figure 2.1.

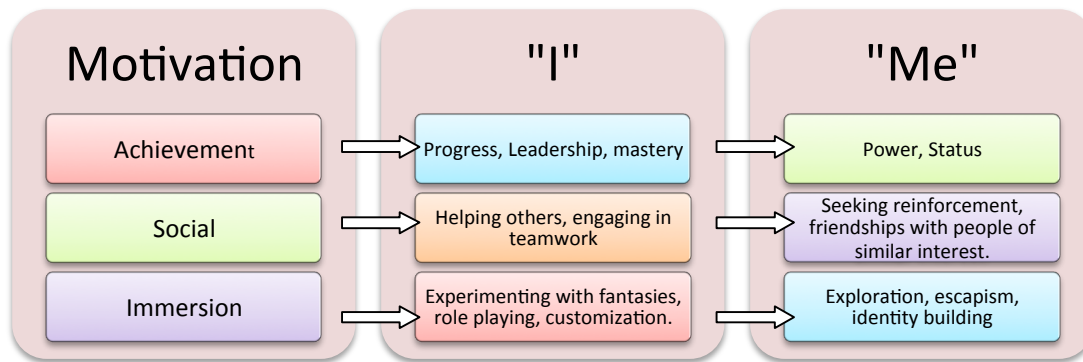
Figure 2.1: Types of Gamers based on Motivational Purposes



Source: Abstracted from Yee, 2006(a); Yee 2006(b)

Yee (2006b) analysed the motivational factors and their effect on both the “I” and the “me” sides of the gamers’ identity (see figure 2.2). He argues that the player aiming at achievement, the “I” is seeking progress, leadership and mastery, while the “me” is seeking power and status through competition (Yee, 2006b). As for the socially motivated gamer, the “I” is seeking helping others and engaging in teamwork and the “me” is seeking reinforcement and friendships with people with similar interests (Yee, 2006b). And finally the “I” of the immersion gamers is trying to explore things and experiment with fantasies and roles through role playing and customisation, while the “me” is engaged in acts of exploration, escapism and/or identity building (Yee, 2006b).

Figure 2.2: Motivational Factors and their effect of “I” and “Me”



Source: Abstracted from Yee, 2006b

Another study conducted on Lineage players, a popular online game where players assume new identities, classified online players into three categories (Whang and Chang, 2004). The first category is the single oriented players, who seek neither achievement nor social collaborations, but consider the online game as a place to experience individual freedom. Community oriented players is the second category, where being social and successful is considered the ultimate goal. In this category, the behaviour of the players is based upon expressing common goals and interests in order to form a sense of comradeship and loyalty. As for the third category according to, the off-real world type of player, who project an off-reality and anti-social attitude in the game. They tend to place a high importance on strength and success and believe harming other players in the game world is all right as long as the main objective is reached (Whang and Chang, 2004).

2.17.0 Baudrillard’s Categorisation of Image Simulation and Identity Positioning

In his book *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994), Baudrillard acknowledges that simulation is not mere imitation but rather a process of replacement and he puts forward four successive phases for image simulation (Hegarty, 1994:50). It can be argued that image simulation resembles in theory role playing games, since gamers of this genre create a character to play with, known in popular media as avatars. The character/avatar created can either be as closer or further away from the real self of the player (Zackariasson, et al., 2010). This is realised by Baudrillard in his categorisation as he identifies four types for image simulation; one that is a reflection

of profound reality, another that masks and distorts a profound reality, a third that masks the absence of a profound reality and finally one that is pure simulacra as it does not depict any form of reality (Hegarty, 1994:50).

2.17.1 The Evolution of Baudrillard's Image Simulation

In 2009, an empirical study conducted on players of Second Life, a virtual world role playing game, has identified four types of identity positioning adopted by players in these genre of games when constructing their virtual characters/avatars and those are; duplication, improvement, transformation and metamorphosis (Paramentier and Rolland, 2009). Those four types cohere somewhat with Baudrillard's categorisation of image simulation. The first type is duplication and reflection of profound reality since players belonging to this type tend to create their avatars as replicas of themselves, both appearance wise and behaviour. Thus there is hardly any distinction between their real selves and their virtual selves (Paramentier and Rolland, 2009). On the other hand the second type of identity positioning is the improvement and masking profound reality. This type tends to create characters that are a partial extension of themselves; usually they transfer only the most positive aspects, whether appearance or behaviour to their avatars (Paramentier and Rolland, 2009). Thus the improvement type tends to mask or pervert a profound reality that they cannot be or can no longer be in the physical world, yet there is still similarities between their virtual self and their real self.

As for the third type, it is the transformation and masking the absence of profound reality. In this identity transformation type, they tend to transform their appearance and behaviour and remove from their avatars anything they reject about themselves (Paramentier and Rolland, 2009). Thus their virtual world is considered a platform for identity development and deeper personality exploration and self-rebuilding and invention as they try to mask the absence of a profound reality. It has to be noted that the virtual world of the transformers is quite distinct from their real world, as they tend to break free from all the behavioural and physical restrictions imposed on them in their real world.

At the other extreme is the metamorphosis and pure simulacra identity positioning type, who tend to create alternative imaginary selves that are not in any form related to their reality. Unlike the transformation type who evolve their appearance and identity, this type tend to change their appearance and identity completely so that nothing in their avatars is related to their real selves. Thus the characters created by the metamorphosis players can be seen as means for experimenting with other personalities and escaping from the limitations of the physical world (Paramentier and Rolland, 2009).

2.17.2 Identity Reinforcement and Identity Opening Up

Other principles that were highlighted by Paramentier and Rolland (2009) in their study include whether the virtual character created is considered identity reinforcement or identity opening up. In the duplication and improvement identity positioning types, the players are simply reinforcing their identity or parts of their profound reality. On the other hand, the transformation and metamorphosis identity positioning types are opening up their identities since the risks of being self-exposed is limited and thus they are encouraged to become more daring and experiment possible selves and not limit them to their imagination and/or fantasies. Accordingly, they tend to mask the absence of a profound reality or as been mentioned earlier, engage in pure simulacra that bears no relation to their reality.

2.17.3 Role Playing Games (RPGs) and Online Identity RPGs and Avatars

In video games, role playing is considered a vital activity with more than 70% of players engaging in some form of role-playing games (Griffiths et al., 2003). In RPGs, players create a virtual character which they call avatars. An avatar, as noted above, is considered an extension of the gamer, a digital interactive social representation of themselves, it is the output of their customisation and selection. Thus Avatars are regarded as the “virtual self” developed to represent the user virtual identity in role playing games (RPGs) (Zackariasson, et al., 2010 citing Meadows, 2008; Filiciak, 2003). This virtual identity/avatar is regarded as the outcome of incorporating the hidden aspects of the physical world identity into a virtual public expression (Hemp, 2006). In the gaming realm, one can shape their virtual identity as closer or further away from their actual identity as been highlighted earlier

(Zackariasson, et al., 2010). Accordingly it is argued that this virtual world attained by gaming is considered a “playground for identity construction” and experimentation (Turkle, 1995).

2.18.0 Identity Plurality and Identity Experimentation

The idea of identity plurality and identity experimentation is not strict to the modern theorists nor to a specific discipline. It is rather a widespread notion that even thousands of years ago, Socrates tried to draw the attention to through his saying, “know thyself” (Paramentier and Rolland, 2009). It has long been argued whether identity is an internal psychological mechanism that is both stable and permanent (Erikson, 1966) or it is a dynamic process of socialisation and self-building that is based on the relationship with others (Mead, 1963).

It is widely accepted that Identity is in a continuous process of building and rebuilding. Paramentier and Rolland (2009) argue that identity is actually based on a dual psychological process: an emotional closure process that results from the interaction with others, thus creating role identities; and an imaginative process that develops possible selves fuelled by experiences and fantasies. Thus Gaulejac (2008) argues that in a hyper modern society, individuals are becoming multi-belonging. This is especially resonant when considering the younger generation and the different statuses and roles they play in both their offline and online world that result in developing plural identities that are appropriate to every context.

Moreover, virtual worlds provide children with a huge range of encounters that vary from experimenting with changes in gender, relationships, and behaviour, that might be difficult and sometimes impossible to experience in their real life due to physical, social and/or psychological reasons. In a research study conducted by Griffiths et al. (2003), it was found that 15% of video game players engage in gender swapping, with a higher tendency of the males using female characters (14%) compared to females using male characters (1%). Some research has shown that when experimenting with identity and creating Avatars, players tend to build their Avatars closer to their ideal selves rather than their real selves (Bessière, et al., 2007). This is just one side of the argument since other research studies claim that Avatars can either be as closer or

further away from the real self of the player depending on the character itself (Zackariasson et al., 2010).

2.19.0 Digi-post-Modern Consumption and Redefining Great Narratives

With the shift from modern, rational, utilitarian consumption to post-modern, hedonistic, experience based consumption, a further shift towards a digi-post-modern consumption is currently being witnessed. It has long been acknowledged that consumption nurtures identity by providing a way of creating a meaning in life. It is also argued that specific aspects in life which are called “great narratives”, such as religion, mythology, etc., were used as sources for this process of identity building (Paramentier and Rolland, 2009). However, with time these great narratives have been marginalised; as individuals no longer search for utility or pleasure through their consumption, but they rather desire to experience a new self, an alter ego, that gives them a better opportunity to position themselves by experimenting and building their own identity.

Accordingly, virtual online identities/avatars in virtual worlds are considered the new narrative identity through which individuals “incarnate” a new self for themselves and experience an alter ego that is immersed in a new world/ a second life, to help in their identity experimentation and building (Paramentier and Rolland, 2009). This narrative identity is quite crucial and quite popular especially among the younger generation who are, as has been highlighted earlier, still in the process of identity formation and thus the virtual worlds become their identity playground in which they experiment with different characters that might be totally or partially different from themselves in the real physical world.

2.20.0 Social and Economic Benefits of Online Gaming

It is argued that social as well as economic values are obtained from the emergence of the online gaming culture (Zackariasson, et al., 2010). Economic significance is seen with the recent alliances of companies such as Adidas, American Apparel, Toyota, Nissan, BMW and Vodafone among others with the designers of games (Zackariasson, et al., 2010), thus the online world of games has offered businesses a new online landscape to broaden their commercial activities and product placement

(Fetscherin and Lattemann, 2007). On the other hand, the social significance is argued to be the ability to create “avatars”, (Zackariasson, et al., 2010 citing Meadows, 2008, p.15) i.e. a virtual identity that is the core of the role playing games (RPG) genre such as World of Warcraft. These virtual identities are said to open venues for experimenting the various, sometimes hidden and unconscious aspects of the gamers’ identity that would most likely be impossible to duplicate in their real physical life. Thus it is considered crucial in the process of identity building and experimentation, especially with children.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Two has reviewed an extensive range of varied literatures in order to build an overall picture of extant research into children and video games. Since the focus is placed in this study on children as consumers, they are considered as marketing agencies see them, as Generation Z, an emerging group of autonomous consumers with growing buying power. Social studies have suggested that, alongside increased access to digital gaming technology, children have been subject to additional social changes that have influenced family dynamics and the power balance between children and adults. Children have been seen to enjoy increased constitutive power as consumers and family decision-influencers, while being subject to restricted activities in some respects in comparison to previous generations. Studies have produced competing findings on whether video games are bad or good for children in general, but on balance there are many positive aspects which suggest that negative outcomes are dependent not only on the video games themselves but also on other factors in the children’s social and cultural environment. Chapter Three will now make the topic under investigation more concrete by developing the gaming environment with a review of the genres of particular games and their characteristics.

Chapter Three

The Gaming Environment: Branding and Marketing

Chapter Outline

Having reviewed a wide selection of research literature relevant to children and video games in the previous chapter, Chapter Three moves on to consider the industry and consumer environment for games playing and marketing. It is important at this point to set out something of the technical, branding and marketing issues around gaming to establish a more detailed context for the analysis. In this chapter, the history of video games will be outlined and the different types of gaming consoles available in the market as well as the different genres of games. It is important to take in all video games regardless of age classification because a) many children have access to games classified for an older age group and b) standards of classification have changed so that games formerly aimed at adults have been re-classified for a children's market. This descriptive account contextualise the stories of the children so that when they talk about playing games, it would be clear exactly what kinds of games they are referring to. The chapter begins by discussing children's games in general, before discussing the evolution of computer and video games.

3.0.0 Introduction

This chapter represents the researcher's attempt to map the terrain of video games in 2010 in order to better understand the experiences of children as consumers of video games. The video gaming industry moves on quickly, and the games scene is already changing. Nonetheless, this chapter remains important since it frames the subsequent findings and could also help in setting the stage for future researchers to describe the gaming environment in which this research is produced especially since this environment is rapidly changing. Accordingly this contextual chapter helps in drawing a picture of how the gaming environment is like in 2010 at the time this research is produced.

3.1.0 The Emergence of Games

Games, in general, are usually said to appear in times of war, political instability and socio-cultural uncertainty to allow people to suspend themselves from cultural

consequences as well as real life problems. Games were used as a means of venting personal stress and providing escapism from the real world (Pearce et al. 2007). Some activists even argue that games can actually empower people towards real change.

As is the case in traditional games, many video games are based on themes that are extracted from real life incidents. The majority of popular games have themes that revolve around wars, police chase, SWAT forces, historical events, and sometimes even daily routines. Unlike the traditional games, video games amplify these themes with graphics and story lines that submerge the player into a complex, extraordinary environment.

3.2.0 Sources of Information and Reasons Why People Play Games

This chapter will explain the types of video games consoles and the genres of games since their emergence in the 1960s. Much of the information in this section is gathered from two secondary sources: a case study on the home video game industry prepared by Charles W. L. Hill, from the University of Washington, and World Guinness Records 2010 the gamers edition, supplemented by informal information and insights from the pilot study interviews with professionals and adult gamers. The reason for relying significantly on the two published sources is that the Charles W.L. Hill's case study covers the entire history of video games and is regarded as a highly authoritative source even by Microsoft, who uses it as a credible source for depicting the video games history in their business presentations. As for the World Guinness records 2010 gamers' edition, it contains detailed information on the types of consoles and genres of games, including how they emerged and their relative popularity, and this information is based on empirical data gathered from the market. There are also many popular websites describing the games and their genres but these are generally a less reliable source. The chapter is divided into four parts: 1) History of video games 2) Types of gaming hardware in the market 3) Genres of games 4) Top ten games of 2010.

3.3.0 History of Video Games and The Emergence of the Industry

The digital games industry originated in the 1960s, but it wasn't until 1972 that the industry began to proliferate in the gaming market after the introduction of the

computerised table tennis game called Pong. The success of Pong encouraged companies to enter the market, and in 1976 about twenty different companies were crowding into the home video game market introducing various games. In addition companies were competing on new forms of hardware in the form of consoles to play the games with.

It wasn't until the advent of three new games to the home market in 1976, Space invaders, Asteroids, and Pac Man, that video games gained popularity among the mass audience. The success of those games was attributed to the fact that all three of them were adapted from popular arcade games and thus all three helped drive demand for players.

3.3.1 The Beginning of the Early Decline

Following the introduction of Space Invaders, Asteroids and Pac Man, the industry witnessed a huge upsurge the subsequent three years with many companies entering the market and introducing new games and new hardware systems. However, in 1983, sales of home video games plunged. This was mainly due to the introduction of personal computers. At that time it was predicted that the era of dedicated game machines was over and the video game industry was dead. One company after another started selling off their game business as no one seemed to want to have anything to do with the home video game industry. Yet only one company was convinced that this business is still lucrative and that it was not a lack of interest in home video games that had killed the industry, but it was rather bad business practice. This was Nintendo of America (NOA).

3.3.2 Nintendo's Success Story

Nintendo recognised that the key to the market was great games and that the collapse in the industry was because the last generation of games were poor and even great hardware does not sell itself. So, following their successful introduction of Donkey Kong before the downfall of the industry, they decided to further exploit the characters and add new features to the game and launch Super Mario Brothers in 1985. Then Nintendo introduced another successful game whose idea was based on folklore, literature, and pop culture and that was the Legend of Zelda.

With strong distribution and sales efforts Nintendo succeeded in the market and by 1990, the home video game market was worth \$5 billion worldwide and Nintendo dominated the industry with a 90 percent share of the market for game equipment.

In 1996, Nintendo realised that in order to garner a solid position in the industry, they have to focus on its core demographic, seven to twelve year olds. Thus Nintendo succeeded in launching Nintendo 64 (N64) which was targeted at children and young teenagers.

3.3.3 Sega's re-entry and The introduction of violent games

Following Nintendo's success, other companies started re-entering the market and introducing new games. Sega's first game, Periscope, in which the objective was to sink ships by firing torpedoes, was a big success. The company continued to invest heavily in game development, using the latest electronic technology. In 1992, after Acclaim Entertainment released its Mortal Kombat hand-to-hand fighting game, Sega launched another version that became more popular since it allowed players to rip off heads and tear out hearts. This was thought to mark the opening of the door to more violent games.

3.3.4 Sony's Business Extension Strategy

Soon after, in 1995, Sony entered the battle, launching Sony PlayStation. Being a consumer electronics giant with a well-established position in the Hollywood movie business and the music industry, Sony believed that it had access to significant intellectual property that could form the basis of many popular games. Thus it could leverage its presence in the film and music business to build a strong position in the home video game industry. In developing PlayStation, Sony targeted males in the eighteen- to thirty-five-year age range which was evident in the content of the games and their advertisements.

3.3.5 Microsoft Strategic Entry

With the beginning of the new millennium, radical events were witnessed that included Sony's PlayStation2 launch in 2000 and Microsoft entry to the home video game market in 2001 with a console named Xbox. Even though Microsoft was

considered a late entrant to the video game industry, it was no stranger to games since it is considered one of the largest publishers of PC and online games, with hits such as Microsoft Flight Simulator and Age of Empires I and II and MSN Gaming Zone site. Furthermore, Microsoft was not new to gaming hardware either; its joysticks and game pads outsell all other brands.

Microsoft was worried that Internet-ready consoles like PlayStation2 might take over many web-browsing functions from the personal computer. So Microsoft's entry into the home video game market was a reactive response to a potential threat from Sony.

3.3.6 The Second Industry Decline

With the launch of Microsoft Xbox, Nintendo Game Cube and Sony's PlayStation2, sales of video game hardware and software rose to a record of \$9.4 billion in 2001, up from \$6.58 billion in 2000. However in 2002 the momentum of sales started to slow significantly. In an attempt to revive the business, companies started cutting down their prices. It started with Sony which cut the price for PS2 from \$299 to \$199. Then Microsoft quickly followed, cutting the price for Xbox from also \$299 to \$199, while Nintendo cut its price from \$299 to \$149. A year later, with the market still suffering and competition increasing; Sony cut prices again, this time to \$179 a console. And again, Microsoft followed with a similar price cut, and in March 2004 it took the lead, cutting Xbox prices to \$149 thus matching Nintendo's price.

3.3.7 Microsoft and the Introduction of Online Enabled Video Games

In 2002, Microsoft announced that it would introduce a new service for gamers, Xbox Live that would enable its subscribers to play online enabled versions of Xbox games with other online subscribers for an annual fee of \$50. By mid 2004, Xbox live reportedly had over one million subscribers, but by end of 2004 Xbox was still a distant second to PS2 in the video game market and Microsoft was registering significant losses. Yet Microsoft's strategies indicated that it was in the business for the long term. And in 2009, Xbox Live was reported having over 20 million active subscribers.

3.4.0 Gaming Hardware available in the market 2010

3.4.1 PS3 (PlayStation3)

PlayStation is a Sony product and is considered the most successful hardware introduced in the gaming industry since its first version in 1995. Sony continued in releasing modified versions; in 2000 PlayStation2 was released and in 2009 PlayStation3 slim was launched. Sony innovated a motion sensitive controller that opened the door for several new games that would appeal across various generations and stand up against the accusations that games impede physical activity. Sony also announced that it had over 27 million users worldwide in its PS online community network and that a new system of achievement has been launched called “Trophy”. Trophy is a reward system that comes in four grades- platinum, gold, silver and bronze- and it enables players to upload their trophies on the network and compare with their friends. As noted earlier in the literature review, designers strive to add reward techniques to the games to make them more addictive and this ‘trophy’ system is an example.

3.4.2 Wii

Wii is a product by Nintendo, one of the first companies to enter the gaming market since the 1960s. The Hardware specs of Wii have not changed radically since its launch in 2006. Nintendo was the first company to release the motion gaming by introducing hardware that was motion sensitive, Wii Fit and games that would be of interest to the consumer such as sports. This was done in an attempt to counter accusations that games do not promote a healthy lifestyle.

3.4.3 XBOX 360

XBOX 360 is the latest Microsoft product. Microsoft’s entry into the home video game market in 2001 was a reactive response to a potential threat from Sony and other companies that had a potential in taking over many web-browsing functions from the personal computer. With the introduction of Xbox Live in 2004, Microsoft pioneered the online gaming realm and was soon followed by the competitors. In 2008, in an attempt to further enrich the gamers’ virtual experience, Microsoft launched Xbox Experience that allows owners of Xbox 360 to create customisable

avatars, host virtual parties and play community-created games. Furthermore, Microsoft recently launched Kinect offering controller free gaming that features a camera that can recognise where gamers are in 3D space and allows them to use their whole bodies to control their games.

3.4.4 PC

Hardcore PC gamers are renowned for adapting their equipment and building their own machines. In addition to that, there are many firms offering high-end custom hardware off the shelf such as Alienware that was established in 1996 and is currently considered one of the biggest players in this field. PC gaming is considered the heart of LAN parties where people get together to have a weekend of gaming and sometimes they even travel great distances to attend them. An example of a LAN party is one that took place in 2007 in Sweden consisting of 10,544 unique computers and 11,060 participants. The main problem that plagues the PC games industry is the severe PC game piracy that it is constantly subjected to. Some of the most popular games in the industry are actually PC enabled such as World of Warcraft and the Sims.

3.4.5 DSi

DSi is the latest version of DS designed by Nintendo and released in 2008. DS along with the latest versions are one of the most successful handheld gaming hardware in the market. Nintendo was targeting the very young generation with this portable gaming device and it succeeded in capturing this market.

3.4.6 PSP (PlayStation Portable)

PSP was launched by Sony as a counter to Nintendo's DS. Yet PSP is considered one of the "coolest" gadgets ever made. It targets a slightly elder age group than Nintendo's DS. It has a lot of features such as an LCD screen for high quality images and it has a built-in microphone for use with games as well as applications such as Skype since it also has a built in Wi-Fi thus can be easily connected to the Internet.

3.4.7 Mobile Phone Gaming

In 1997, Finnish mobile company, Nokia, introduced its mobile phone games with Snake, the game that is considered the first mobile phone game based on the popular video game called Nibbler released in 1982. This was considered a strategic movement that succeeded in putting games in the palms of people who would not traditionally consider themselves as gamers. Not only did this movement increase the gamers' base, but it also opened the door for a new market for games designed for mobile phones that have quickly matured and became comparable to handheld consoles.

In 2009, Mobile phones in gaming witnessed a massive increase after the release of the iPhone and iPod touch. Mobile companies are still trying to introduce phones that would have strong gaming platforms as the Apple products mentioned earlier, yet it is very hard to keep up. In 2009, the number of game and entertainment applications available for the iPhone and the iPod touch via Apple's App store were around 21,178 applications. These applications account for over 30% of all App Store applications and are mostly puzzle games followed by action and arcade titles respectively.

3.4.8 Future Gaming

The Gaming Industry is quite progressive and rapidly growing with hardware and software becoming obsolete in a matter of months. New games and new hardware are frequently and continuously introduced. It is speculated that soon a future of hands-free and server powered gaming will dominate and the days of hardware-heavy game play will be a thing from the past. People with low spec PCs and Macs were introduced to a new small piece of hardware called OnLive that is designed to allow users to play high end games that otherwise wouldn't be possible. OnLive also can offer a service for those who don't have a PC by using a MicroConsole that does the job of the PC and displays the games on the TV.

Another exciting new gaming technology is the Cloud Gaming that was introduced in 2009. This technology allows users to stream games directly to their homes via the Internet (the cloud) rather than having to buy or download the copies.

3.5.0 Shooting Games

It has been known for generations that boys consider playing chasing and shooting great fun, and that any game that features these two aspects can guarantee success and popularity. The first idea of the shooting games started in 1961 with a game featuring two spaceships trying to gun each other down, called Spacewar. Then in 1973, students at NASA added guns to the prototype of a maze game called Mazewars and introduced the first person shooter (FPS) type of shooting games. First Person Shooters (FPS) put the player in the midst of the action, allowing him to view the game through the eyes of the character so that usually only his gun barrel is what appears on the screen itself. Soon after this evolution in shoot-em-up games, more innovative and advanced games began to bolster in the market starting with Space Invaders and Star Wars, to Gradius and Commando thus making shooting the default activity in arcade action.

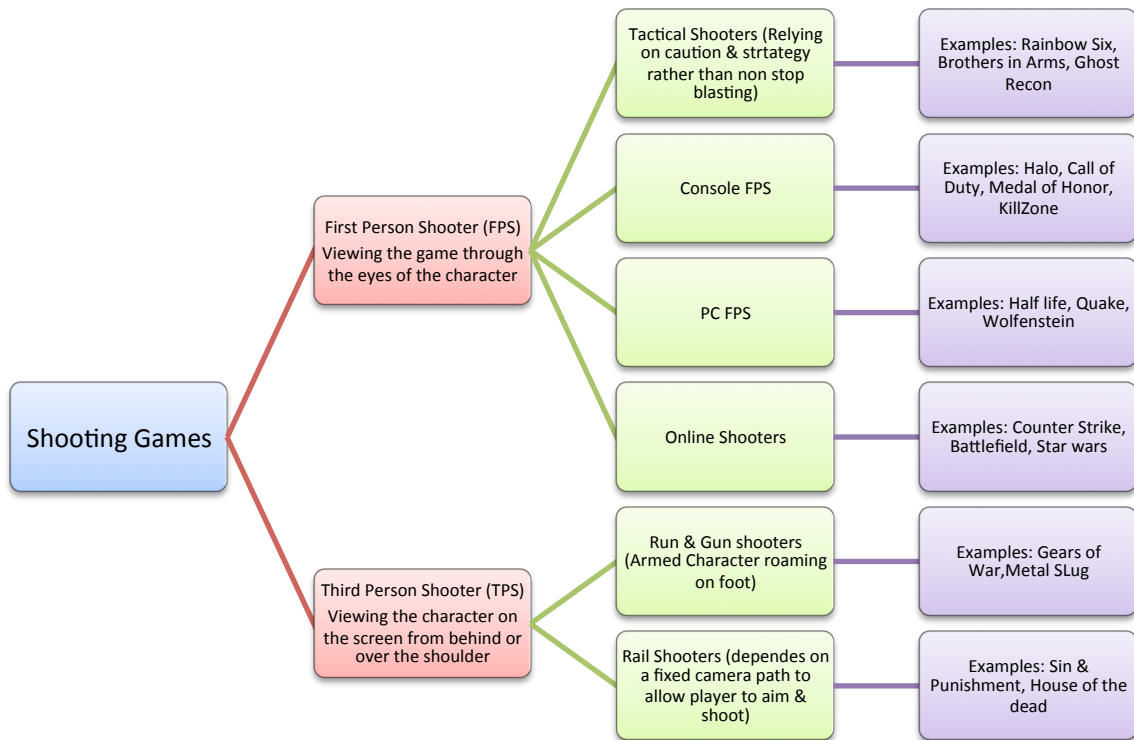
3.5.1 Genres of Shooting Games

New concepts were introduced in this genre that gave gamers different ways and different reasons to play, such as extra lives, power-ups and high score tables to name a few. Figure 3.1 illustrates the several genres in this category. In 1993 the modern FPS became the dominant form of shooter games and gamers were taken by the idea of the new virtual immersive worlds that the increasingly powerful 3D hardware was offering. Games such as Halo and Killzone are considered the most popular video games in first person shooter genre in the 21st century.

Many games were launched in 3D such as Tomb Raider and Resident Evil, and this opened the door for a new type of shooting games that is the third person shooters (TPS). In the TPS genre, the player tends to view his character on screen, either from behind or from over the shoulder, rather than seeing through the character's eyes as in FPS. This genre is considered to foster the co-operative playing. And accordingly more games started to be designed with an emphasis on teamwork, launching games to be played cooperatively.

Moreover new forms of shooter games started to appear such as Run and Gun shooters, Rail shooters, Tactical shooters which are all based on a more caution and realistic type of shooting based on strategy and tactics that requires different skills.

Figure 3.1: A Schematic of Types of Shooting Games



Source: Abstracted from multiple sources

3.6.0 Sports and Racing Games

Ever since video games appeared in the market, sports and racing games existed. The first appearance of a sport title was in 1958 with a game called Tennis for Two created by American physicist William Higginbotham. Yet it wasn't until the launch of the Atari game Pong in 1972 that the sports genre began to grow. Pong was a tennis simulation that was considered addictive and highly competitive and helped in inspiring a new generation of game designers focusing on sports.

Starting 1980s racing games began to gain popularity among both designers and players, games such as F1, Virtual Racing, Super Mario Kart and Need for Speed to name a few appeared.

3.6.1 Other Sports Genres in this Category

Pitch based games started with soccer games since it was considered the most popular sport globally. This genre of games was pioneered by FIFA, a game developed by US developer Electronic Arts (EA), which is considered the longest running and most successful developer of sports games. Soon after the launch of FIFA in 1993, Superstar Soccer and Pro Evolution Soccer joined the fray.

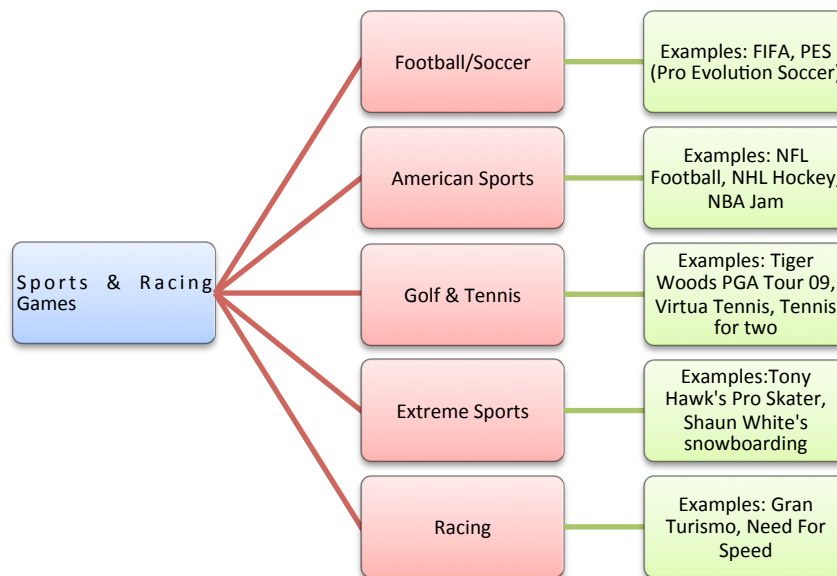
Although soccer and some other American sports have traditionally dominated the sports genre, yet gamers still enjoyed some successful tennis and golf games such as Virtual Tennis and the most popular Tiger Woods PGA Tour that is said to have offered golf fans an unprecedented level of realism in gameplay.

Developers also looked beyond conventional sports and started designing games that would appeal to extreme sports fans such as skate and snowboarding games and “street” versions of soccer and basketball games; in an attempt to offer theme variations to gamers. Figure 3.2 illustrates the above mentioned genres.

3.6.2 Redefining Sports Games

One of the most important recent innovations in the sports genre has been Nintendo’s launch of Wii Sports in 2006 which has a collection of golf, bowling, boxing, tennis and basketball games. Wii Sports is actually considered the best selling video game of all time as it sold 45.7 million copies between its launch in 2006 till 2009. It is said that this launch has revolutionised gameplay with players using the new Wii’s remote and controllers are actually simulating actual sports physical actions. Thus it is considered that compared to other gaming genres, sports and racing simulation games are growing more realistic and are becoming the closest genre to replicate the real-life experience, allowing gamers to live out their sporting dreams either on the pitch or on the track.

Figure 3.2: A Schematic of Sports and Racing Games



Source: Abstracted from multiple sources

3.7.0 Action-Adventure Games

The action- Adventure genre of games started as early as 1976 with a text-only game called Advent that didn't gain much popularity. But soon in 1981 this genre became more popular with the release of Donkey Kong, described as a 'richly diverse' action-adventure game. In 1986, this genre grew further when The Legend of Zelda was launched. This game emphasised the concept of open- world exploration with players directing their own characters from an overhead perspective. These games proved highly popular and developers realised that the main key to the success of the action-adventure genre is diversity, as no single style of gameplay is dominating but, rather, players guide their characters through the rich game environment provided and use their skills and wit to negotiate a series of hazards.

3.7.1 The idea behind Action-Adventure Games

Developers build action-adventure games around a strong story that is often characterised by investigation, exploration and some puzzle solving activities that allow the narrative to develop. The action-adventure genre is considered to be the genre that has it all since the gameplay can vary and the storyline can either be complex or simple but the player is always in the midst of intense action and that is what makes this genre popular.

3.7.2 Action-Adventure Game Genres

With new technology, developers started pushing the definition of the action-adventure games further and several new sub genres appeared; narrative adventure, sandbox adventure, stealth and survival horror which are depicted in figure 3.3.

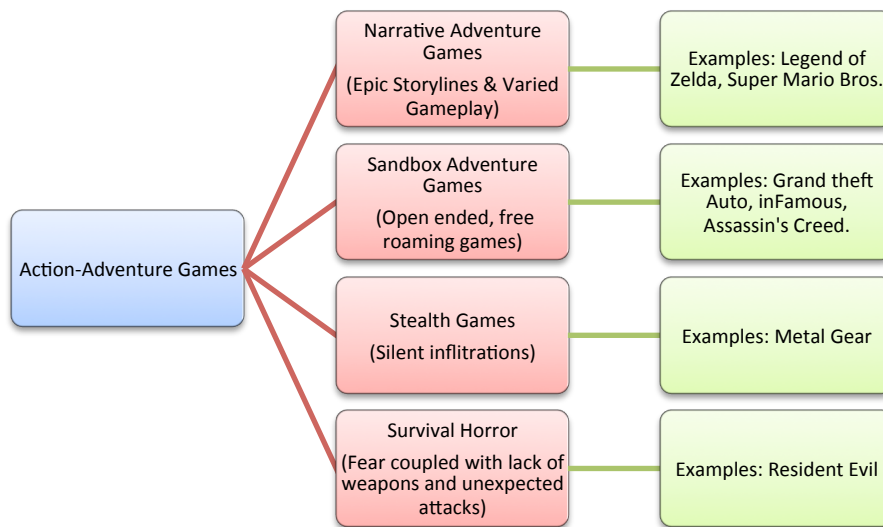
Narrative Adventure Games: are the typical action-adventure games which are characterised by epic storylines, puzzle solving and combat. Legend of Zelda and Super Mario are considered two of the top games in this genre.

Sandbox Adventure Games: are open-ended, free roaming games where players dictate both the pace of the game and the order in which it progresses thus they are given full freedom to complete objectives in any order they choose or to simply explore the open world environment. The most popular games in this sub-genre are Grand Theft Auto, Assassin's Creed and inFamous.

Stealth Games: is a different sub-genre that requires a soft touch and silent infiltration to complete the objectives without being spotted, as the slightest slip can alert the level's guard and result in having to restart the level again. Metal Gear is considered the best selling Stealth game since its first version in 1987.

Survival Horror Games: is the last genre in this category, in which fear is the main focus that differentiates it from the other action-adventure games. These games depend on having a dark, oppressive environment with little weapons and a series of unexpected attacks, and atmospheric sound effects to keep the player alert. The most famous game in this sub-genre is Resident Evil.

Figure 3.3: A Schematic of Action-Adventure Games



Source: Abstracted from multiple sources

3.8.0 Fighting Games

The fighting game genre is self-explanatory, as it revolves around players taking control of characters and engaging in combat with one or more enemies. The fighting games genre is considered the most controversial genre as some games feature violent and sexually explicit moves such as Thrill Kill games and some critics consider them to be “senselessly violent” yet they are still a rather popular gaming experience among players.

Heavyweight Champ is considered the first fist fighting game in the fighting genre released in 1976. It wasn't until early 1980s that fighting games began to be recognised in the arena with the advancement in graphics and hardware. The Karate Champ and Kung-Fu Master are said to have set the bar for many of today's fighting games.

3.8.1 Fighting Games Sub Genres

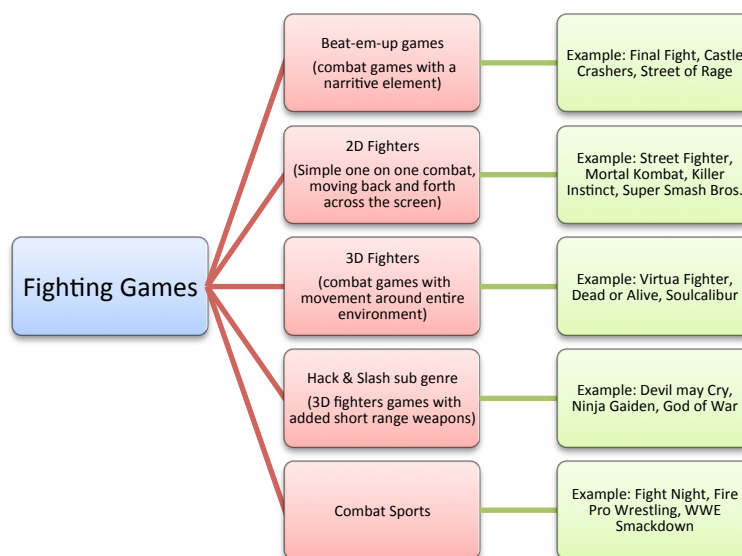
Beat-em-up Fighting Games: The game, Kung-Fu Master, was the first to introduce a narrative element and multiple on screen enemies for players to battle. A better example for this genre is Final Fight, which was later launched and along with Castle Crashers and Streets of Rage.

2D Fighter games: Unlike the beat-em-up genre the 2D fighting sub-genre is rather a simple one-on-one combat featuring the player and an opponent who battles it out until one of them is left standing. The majority of games emphasised hand-to-hand combat based on martial arts where characters are given attributes such as power, speed and stamina. The most successful game in the 2D sub-genre is Street Fighter, Mortal Kombat and Killer Instinct.

3D Fighter games and sub-genres: in 1993 3D fighting took gamers to a new level, allowing them to move around the entire game environment rather than just forward and backwards on the 2D plane. The advent of the 3D fighting games gave rise to a new sub-genre called Hack and Slash which added short range weapons to the game. This sub-genre is defined by explicitly violent combat that rewards the players for style. Some of the popular ‘hack and slash’ games in the market are Devil May Cry, Ninja Gaiden and God of War to name a few.

Combat Sports Games: is another sub-genre which came a long way from just boxing to more of wrestling that dominated the combat sports with games such as WWE and Fire Pro Wrestling that became popular.

Figure 3.4: A Schematic of Fighting Games Genres



Source: Abstracted from multiple sources

3.9.0 Party Games

Party games are mostly created for a family audience, encouraging gamers to play together, thus it is considered a 'multiplayer centric' experience. Technical limitations were the main reason why this genre remained relatively underdeveloped compared to the other genres in video games industry. It wasn't until Nintendo's release of N64 console in 1996 that featured four controller ports along with the release of Mario Party series that this genre began to proliferate in the market. Soon after Nintendo's success, Sony released more party games taking this genre to a different level. It is said that Nintendo popularised the party games and Sony revolutionised them, becoming the champion in social gaming. It is argued that as the gaming industry continues to expand and becomes more inclusive, party game genre will continue to grow to provide gamers in search of the ultimate shared experience.

3.9.1 Party Games Genres

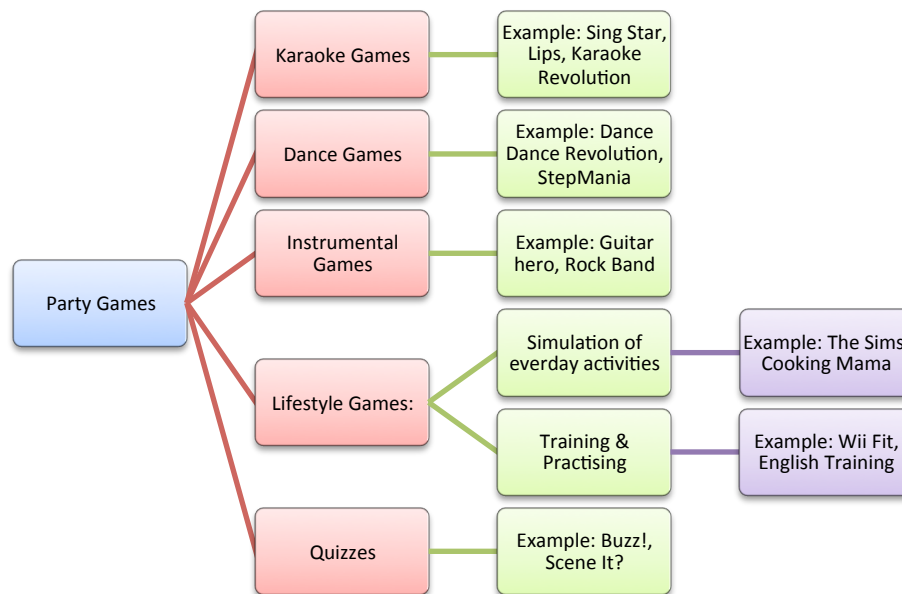
With technical advancements, party games became no longer restricted to one location, as gamers were given the chance to party together while performing in different locations. In recent years, party games witnessed an expansion in the genre. These sub-genres are summarised in Figure 3.5 below.

Music and Dance Games: As a sub genre of party games, music games are based on karaoke which was first released in the 1990s in Japan. It wasn't until 2003 that it became popular with games such as SingStar and Lips. Another sub genre is the dance-based games which relied on mats at the beginning on which players dance but recently motion sensors have replaced the foot-activated pads in the mats. Dance Dance Revolution is considered the most popular and the healthiest video game in this sub genre as it is said to help players burn a huge number of calories while playing. On the other hand, Guitar Hero is seem to have revolutionised the party game genre and added a new sub-genre based on instruments. This sub genre has become hugely popular across gamers of all generations.

Lifestyle and Quiz Games: Another sub genre is lifestyle games. Lifestyle games tend to fall in one of two categories; a simulation of the everyday activities game form such as The Sims and Cooking Mama, or a form offering real benefit such as

improving mental or physical skills such as Wii Fit and English Training. As for the Quizzes sub genre, they are said to have encouraged families worldwide to gather around their consoles, promoting a new family based activity. The two most well known games in this category are Buzz! and Scene It?.

Figure 3.5: A Schematic of Party Games Genre



Source: Abstracted from multiple sources

3.10.0 Puzzle Games

In 1952, Alexander S. Douglas from Cambridge University created the first puzzle game that features noughts and crosses. Soon after this, many other computer experts began developing simple programs based around number games. Those designers seem to have realised that a successful puzzle game has to be easy to pick up but difficult to put down and takes minutes to grasp but years to master. Puzzle games are known to entice players to use their brains to solve problems and discover solutions. The most famous puzzle game is probably Tetris, the original block dropping puzzle.

4.1.1 Genres of Puzzle Games

There are four sub genres of puzzle games as illustrated in Figure 3.6.

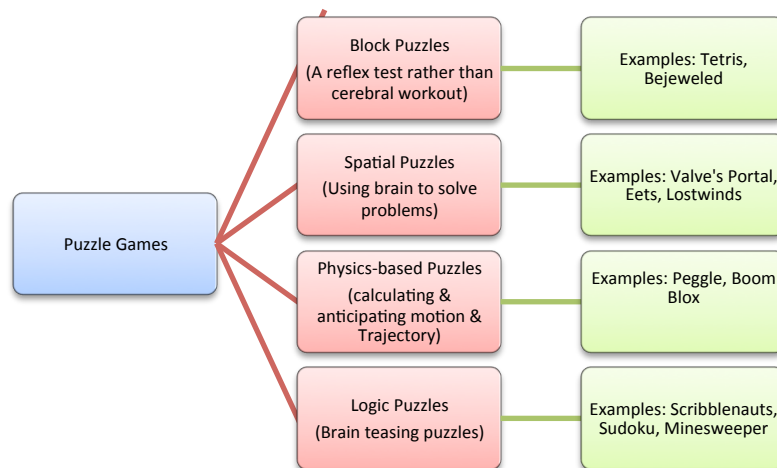
Block puzzles games are considered more of a reflex test rather than a cerebral workout. The most well known games in this category are Tetris, Bejewled and Zoo

Keeper. Unlike block puzzles, spatial puzzles draw on spatial intelligence as they depend on using the brain to explore and solve problems based on trial and error. Eets and Valve's Portal are considered examples of this genre. As the name indicates, physics based puzzles rely on basic laws of physics and calculating and anticipating motion and trajectory. In this sub genre, Bloom Box and Peggle are considered two of the most popular physics games. When it comes to Logic puzzles, lateral thinking is the key component to excelling in this category, as players try to find a pattern or complete a sequence from an arrangement of numbers, words or shapes. Sudoku is considered the classic logic game that was replicated due to its popularity.

4.1.2 The Recent Upsurge of Puzzle Games

It has to be noted that the graphical simplicity and addictive qualities of puzzle games have made them particularly suitable for handheld devices such as mobile phones and portable consoles like PSP and Nintendo's DS. As critics attack violent, sex explicit games, puzzle games are viewed as the desirable unadulterated version of games that innovation and development should be channelled upon.

Figure 3.6: A Schematic of Puzzle Games Genres



Source: Abstracted from multiple sources

3.11.0 Role-Playing Games (RPGs)

Role Playing Games (RPGs) are considered the true epics of video gaming since they offer a high degree of escapism not available in the other genres. RPGs are usually based on the players taking charge of a small group of heroes on a long adventure

fighting against evil to save the world. RPG genre started in 1974, when students at Southern Illinois University created the first computer based RPG Dungeons and Dragons (dnd) that soon became a popular gaming series.

With the rise of home PCs, a flurry of new RPG releases started to appear, such as Dunjonquest and Ultima that featured animated graphics. Soon after the PC penetration, and the rise of games consoles, Atari released the first console RPG, Dragon Stomper, in 1982 giving it the best game title in the US video gaming history. And in 1985, with the advent of 3D, RPGs genre moved to another dimension with more vivid environments that succeeded in capturing more players.

It is argued that today, the RPG genre seem to offer extremely varied gameplay for players featuring vast landscapes, massive battles, rich storylines and role playing games that can be close to reality or further away from it as illustrated in figure 3.7 which depicts the genres and games in this category. Thus RPGs are claimed to be the core activity for video gamers seeking escapism on different scales.

3.11.1 Genres of RPGs

There are several sub genres within the RPGs category. First it is necessary to distinguish between Western RPGs and Japanese RPGs. The Western RPGs are the classical descent of the first RPG released. They follow a free-roaming approach to combat and exploration featuring a core storyline with hundreds of optional off-shoots and real time combat. The most popular games in this sub genre are Oblivion and Star Wars among others. On the other hand, the Japanese RPG (JRPG) follows a linear storyline, random turn based combat and some of the well-known games in this category are Dragon Quest and Final Fantasy.

Another sub genre is Action RPG that is more about hack and slash, real time combat with large numbers of enemies rather than about character interaction. This genre is exemplified in games such as Diablo and The Witcher.

3.11.2 Massively Multiplayer Online RPGs (MMORPGs)

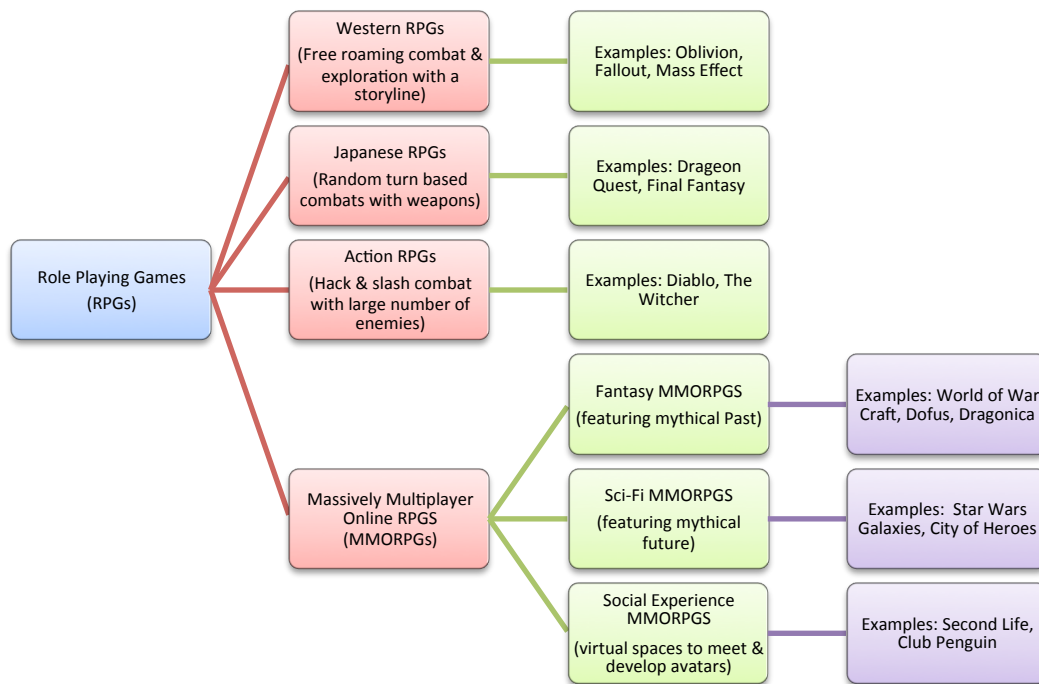
Multi-user RPG appeared in 1991 and Neverwinter Nights was the first graphical MMORPG game in history. However it wasn't until 1997 that Richard Garriot termed this sub genre MMORPG standing for massively multiplayer online role playing games, to describe his game Ultima Online. MMORPG have three main forms:

Fantasy MMORPG: is well defined with the most popular game in this genre, World of Warcraft, which features a land of dwarves, orcs and epic quests.

Sci-fi MMORPG: Unlike Fantasy MMORPGs that cater to players interested in a mythical past, Sci-fi MMORPGs cater to players who are more interested in a mythical future. Thus games in this sub genre usually allow players to pilot spaceships through distant star systems and colonise planets such as in Star Wars Galaxies or in other forms of games let players assume roles of heroes and villains in a comic book world such as in City of Heroes.

Social Experience MMORPG: Designers realised that some players are more interested in the social experience of the MMORPG than in the game element itself. This resulted in the development of social MMORPGs that offers virtual spaces for people to meet and develop avatars and in game residences. It is worth noting that in fantasy and sci-fi MMORPGs, players engage in an act-in-character role playing for an assumed personality that is usually, if not always, different from their real self. While on the other hand, social MMORPG encourages players to be themselves, recreating their looks and tastes in the virtual space through their avatars. As a result, new social and psychological phenomena began to appear in the society such as real-life relationships that started through the MMORPG and identity experiments and testing. Two of the most famous games in this sub genre are Second life and Club Penguin.

Figure 3.7: A Schematic of RPGs Genres



Source: Abstracted from multiple sources

3.12.0 Strategy and Simulation Games

The games in the Strategy and Simulation genre are based on three simple concepts: harvest, build and win. These three concepts can be applied to armies, cities or even life itself, giving designers and players infinite game scenarios. Soon with advancements in games hardware enhancing their graphics capability, strategy and simulation games started visualising geography, cities and units giving its players a more strategic experience.

3.12.1 Turn-based Strategy Games and Real time Strategy Games

As developments in processing technology increased, new sub genres were gauged in the realm of video gaming, described in Figure 3.8 below. At the beginning, this genre featured turn-based strategy games, in which players control and manage their units sequentially or simultaneously. The best known example of the turn based strategy games is the Civilisation series, which has been a hit since its release in 1991.

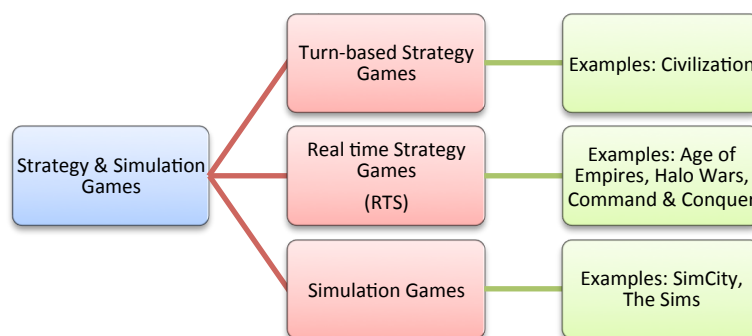
Recognising the importance of time management and immediacy requirements in game plots, designers developed the real time strategy games (RTS) to allow players

to operate against each other concurrently rather than consecutively as is the case in turn based strategy games. RTS games gained popularity with titles such as Warcraft and Command and Conquer that are said to have set a benchmark in strategy gaming.

3.12.2 Simulation Games

The main theme that strategy titles revolve around is military conquests and battles. Yet another form of strategy games appeared when designers removed the combat context from the strategy game creating a social simulation sub-genre. Simulation games usually deal with civilisation building rather than battlefield and military handling. Simulation games are described by some critics as the “super category” of gaming due to the vast diversity of its settings allowing players to control aspects of almost any imaginable societal system or life process such as cities, parks, zoos, homes or even schools to name a few. The first game in this sub genre was Little Computer People released in 1985; however it wasn’t until 1989 that this sub genre became popular in the market when SimCity, a quintessential government simulation game, relying on time and resource management, was released. In 1991, another simulation game that combined strategy with game element seeking to develop and guide an entire civilisation over the course of the millennia was created. This game entitled Civilisation received many awards. In 2000, The Sims was released, becoming the best selling PC series of all time. Critics believe that the reason for the popularity of this genre lies in the degree of escapism it offers its players.

Figure 3.8: A Schematic of Strategy and Simulation Game Genres



Source: Abstracted from multiple sources

3.13.0 Top 10 Games in 2010 in Ascending Order

10. Grand Theft Auto (GTA): originally released in 1997. GTA is considered the top game in ‘open-world crime simulation’ in which players strive to defy the police, federal agents and even helicopter gunship just to complete a level. This game, which belongs to the sandbox action-adventure category, faces a lot of controversy for its crime theme and violence.

9. Super Smash Bros.: released by Nintendo in 1999, Super Smash Bros. features a mix of platforming, fighting as well as partying all in one game. Even though it belongs to the 2D fighting category, this game has been reported to be one of the most popular games on the Wii console and the best selling fighting game. This game has been considered a fun fighting game that would keep gamers entertained for an average of 66 hr 32 min as has been tracked from Nintendo channel statistics.

8. Gears of War: launched by Microsoft in 2006, Gears of War is considered an epic third person shooter game especially for Xbox 360 owners. In 2008 when Gears of War 2 was released, 1.5 million players logged on to Xbox live making the largest number of people ever playing the same game simultaneously.

7. World of Warcraft (WOW): launched by Blizzard Entertainment in 2004, WOW is considered the biggest and most popular Fantasy paid- MMORPG in history as well as the fastest selling PC game to date.

6. Super Mario Bros.: developed and launched by Nintendo in 1985, Super Mario Bros series is considered the best selling gaming franchise across genres, selling over 201 million copies. The game is a 2D action-adventure genre featuring Mario, the Italian plumber who is regarded as the most famous gaming icon in history.

5. Metal Gear: released by Hideo Konami (Japan) in 1989, Metal Gear is an elaborate, complicated, tactical espionage series belonging to the action-adventure category. This game is considered the first game to fully utilise stealth and the top seller in the stealth genre, selling 26.5 million copies till 2009.

4. Guitar Hero: launched in 2005 by Red Octane/ Activision, Guitar Hero games series has been awarded the people’s choice when it comes to rhythm games. In the period 2005 and 2009, Guitar Hero has sold over 32 million units.

3. The Legend of Zelda: The Legend of Zelda series produced by Nintendo remains a classic and successful action-adventure game since its release in 1986. It is based on

a narrative adventure with a mixture of platforming, puzzle solving and combat. It has an outstanding online rating of 98%, making it the most critically acclaimed game of all time.

2. Call of Duty (COD): Activision released Call of Duty in 2003. Even though the game series started by setting its roots in World War II, it has transitioned successfully into modern warfare with the support of game design that increased its popularity immensely. Call of duty is a FPS console fighting game combining gameplay with a multiplayer mode making it currently the most important multi-format shooter in the world. It is often played online in teams.

1. Halo: designed and launched by Microsoft in 2001, is a FPS console fighting game. Halo depicts a perfect video game design as Microsoft succeeded in developing an iconic character, excellent level design, perfect game controls and unparalleled multiplayer options to make it the number one video game across genres.

(Source: World Guinness Records 2010 the gamers edition)

Chapter Summary

Chapter Three has outlined the landscape of video games as it has evolved across multiple hardware platforms and through many manifestations of software and graphics capability. Children, and especially boys, are very familiar with the full range of gaming possibilities and often access games that are designed for a higher age classification. This descriptive account of the video games scene, drawn mainly from two authoritative reviews, sets out the wider market context for the study and illustrates the complexity and variety in games playing modes. Having set out this context, the thesis will now move into theoretical issues by setting out the philosophical and methodological bases for the study in Chapter Four.

Chapter Four

The Philosophical Approach and Methodological Orientations

Chapter Outline

Chapter Four will address the research philosophy of this study given the nature of the phenomenon to be investigated. It describes the origin of the study in the researcher's personal observation and experiences and outlines informal interviews the researcher undertook which framed decision later taken about the research questions. The overall purpose of the study is described and how this feeds into the various methodological choices. The study is located within an ontologically relativist social constructionist paradigm using qualitative data sets and interpretive analysis, locating the study broadly within Consumer Culture Theory. These choices are described and a justification offered for them.

4.0.0 Purpose of the Study

It is acknowledged that with the rise of digitisation in several aspects in the communications environment, children's social and material life is quite different today than in the past. Children today are born surrounded by a ubiquity of digital media especially computers, video games of many varieties, and smart mobile phones. This phenomenon raises several questions regarding its effect on children, socially, cognitively, psychologically as well as physically. Relatively few studies in management and consumer research have touched upon the children's experience with video games and online communication. Thus, this research explores the engagement of children with video games. Conventional wisdom holds the idea that video games have a detrimental effect on children and consider them the reason for the perceived increases in violence or anti-social behaviour. Sometimes video game culture among children is also linked with disorders such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). However, there's also research that argues that video games have benefits for children as they have the capability of enhancing certain cognitive and social skills. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to investigate the quality of the experience of video games from the children's viewpoint, while also considering peripheral viewpoints from caregivers/parents. This study looks into the

change in the children's play environment brought about by technical, social as well as cultural changes and its effect on the children's identity realisation, socialisation and power negotiations within the family.

4.1.0 Introduction to the Methodological Considerations

In this section the various methodological issues surrounding the investigation of this topic will be discussed, leading to the choices that have been made for empirical data gathering and analysis. This study explores a topic with relatively little prior empirical research, the engagement of children with video games from the perspective of their own subjective experience as it is lived. Theory is not robust in the area, especially since the phenomenon of contemporary video games and social networking for young children is relatively recent in many countries.

Consequently the research orientation of the study is exploratory rather than confirmatory. The study presented additional difficulties with regards to access to children, and the need to gain a rounded understanding of the conditions under which children experience these games and other online media resources, and how they integrate them into their own social lives. As a result of these initial considerations and the barrier to entry given the vulnerable nature of the subjects, it was decided that qualitative data sets analysed through interpretive methods would be the best way forward.

4.1.1 Since children create their own reality in important senses, by, for example, adapting technology in creative ways, it seemed important to take a relativist ontological stance and to assume a social constructionist epistemology. This research paradigm has been chosen for its ability to look at new issues in the social world and to understand the meanings people give to them, adjust ideas and sometimes make a contribution to the evolution of new theories (Lewis et al., 2009). The pilot studies for this research (outlined below) supported the idea that communications technology cannot simply be said to have effects on children in a simplistic and unidirectional way. Rather, there is interplay of structure and agency, which falls under Anthony Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration that fosters the duality of structure and agency. In this study this is apparent whereby it has been noted that children take the

technology and adapt it in creative ways to help define their identity and shape their view of the world.

4.1.2 Initial progress consisted of an extensive cross-disciplinary literature review and a descriptive exploration of the games environment. The study will move on to entail fully recorded and transcribed focus group interviews with children aged 6-12 in the UK. The focus is largely on boys as the more active video game players, but girls are also interviewed for a greater perspective on the phenomenon. Moreover, in order to increase the reliability and validity of the study and reduce bias, a data and method triangulation approach is adopted whereby different qualitative methods are utilised and multiple viewpoints are taken into account. Thus, in depth interviews with children, their parents as well as a couple of the gaming industry practitioners were conducted.

4.2.0 Initial Pilot Studies and Informal Background Information

At the beginning of the study it was important to conduct some pilot interviews in order to have a feeling of where the research might be going. It has to be acknowledged that the idea for studying children's experience with video games, stemmed from the informal observation of the researcher on children of her personal acquaintance. The researcher witnessed how video games are an integral part of the lives of many very young children. Informal observations generated many ideas for this study as it progressed, and some support for the suggestion that video games have become an integral part of the daily lifestyle of many of today's children.

4.2.1 Two UK-based experts in the computer and video gaming industry were interviewed in order to gain a practitioner perspective and an initial understanding of how gaming works and how the industry views its relation to children. Furthermore, three initial pilot interviews were conducted with boys aged between 10-15 from the researcher's home country, Egypt, who belong to the higher socio-economic class thus lead a Westernised life, pretty much similar to the one children in the UK lead in terms of access to games technology and freedom to play on it. This represented an attempt to an initial understanding of the children's perspective of gaming and its importance to them. Further informal discussions were later held with adult (18-20)

male gamers in the UK who reflected on their experiences with games since they themselves have been younger. They also helped the researcher understand the gaming scene of the market, the motivations of gamers and the sense of actualisation within the social group children get from playing the games.

The experts' interviews, the informal observations, and the initial interviews with children, all provided the researcher with a preliminary guideline to the research and added important background context essential for shaping the research questions and method.

4.3.0 Ontological and Epistemological Considerations

A fundamental aspect of social research is to render meaning to the lived experience of humans in various contexts. Thus this social research study aims to understand the lived experience of children with video games and how this new phenomenon is shaping their view of the world. Kuhn (1970) popularised the act of having a set of guidelines, implicit and explicit, that shape the course of research towards knowledge and termed it a "paradigm". Defining a paradigm is crucial for any study since it shapes the investigation according to the basic world view endorsed that not only underpins the research strategy and the methods adopted but also the ontological and epistemological view points.

Since it is argued that children create their own reality by, for example, adapting technology in creative ways, it seems important to take a relativist ontological stance and to assume a social constructionist epistemology. Thus, in order to understand the children's video gaming culture, the experience of those children and their perceptions and the meaning they give to this phenomenon need to be analysed.

Accordingly, this study is seeking to understand the subjective reality of the experience of children playing video games in an attempt to begin to understand and theorise this phenomenon in the light of consumer culture theory.

4.3.1 Ontological Stance of the Study

Considering the research philosophy adopted in this study, it depends on the assumption that social life is self-constructing in important respects. Ontology is

concerned with the nature of reality, and a subjectivist/relativist ontological viewpoint is adopted in this study. In contrast to the objectivist/realist ontology, which emphasises the power of external reality on social entities in defining their reality and existence, subjectivist/relativist ontology considers that social phenomena are developed from the perceptions and actions of social actors themselves, that is, reality is said to be socially constructed as “human knowledge is created, transmitted, and maintained in social situations” (Berger and Luckmann, 1967:3; Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). The subjectivist/relativist view acknowledges the importance of exploring the details of a situation by analysing the subjective experience of social actors in order to understand their reality, especially by communicating and sharing these experiences with others. Language forms the medium by which the social actors share and communicate their experience which is a central focus of the analysis (Hackley, 2003:102; Shotter, 1993). Since this is an exploratory study that aims to understand how the children make sense of their digitally mediated social world, the use of language and conversation among the children is crucial since it illuminates how they create their own meanings and perceive their own world (Easterby et al., 2008). Thus, in the subjectivist/relativist philosophical stance, social reality is viewed as socially constructed. Not only this, but the relativist also acknowledges that different researchers would have different views and that the “truth can vary from place to place and from time to time” (Collins, 1983: 88). Accordingly, since the world is continuously changing, views tend to change as well giving rise to more interpretations and different meanings to the experiences encountered by the social actors that are infinite. Thus multiple realities exist since it is not only time and place bound but also it is essentially mentally perceived hence different individuals and groups have different perspectives (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). As Banister et al. (1994) notes:

“Completely valid research, which captures and represents an unchallengeable ‘truthful’ view of reality, is not possible. We must recognise that all research is constructed, that no knowledge is certain, whatever the claims, but is rather a particular understanding in process, and that different understandings, different ways of knowing exist.” (1994: 157).

Accordingly, this study makes no claims in regards to the universality of findings, but seeks to offer a rich description of the locally situated phenomenon that may entail qualitative insights into wider issues.

4.3.2 Epistemological Stance of the Study

Epistemology is acknowledged as the philosophical view of ‘what constitutes acceptable knowledge’ (Lewis et al., 2009) in a given study and there are two main stances in research; a relativist/ social constructionist view and a realist view. Social constructionist epistemology holds the idea that reality is socially constructed through humans’ interactions, language as well as other social practices (Hackley, 2003). Social constructionism tends to explore the meanings produced at a certain time in an attempt to form knowledge that ‘creates as well as describes the world’ which is the basis of hermeneutic research (Banister et al., 1994). Accordingly, this philosophical view holds that individuals would interpret situations differently based on their own experience of life and view of the world that would vary from one person to the other. In addition to this, it has to be acknowledged that the subjectivist/relativist epistemological view holds that culture is in an on-going process of creation and re-creation that is shaped by various external factors that include social interactions and the physical environment of the subjects that result in constructing a subject’s view of the world (Easterby et al., 2008). Accordingly, social constructionist interpretations are time and context bound since they rely on the understanding of the meanings, motives, experience of subjects at a particular place and time (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988).

4.4.0 The Human Nature Viewpoint

Another important assumption that needs to be considered in this study is human nature. Burrell and Morgan (1979) differentiated between two approaches concerning the relationship between human beings and the environment. From a subjectivist/ relativist viewpoint, it is argued that human beings play a vital role in creating their own environment, exercising their free will and control over their social world thus advocating a “voluntarism” approach (Burrell and Morgan, 1979: 2). The interpretive approach to research fosters this idea that humans actively create and interact to shape their environment and that it is through this interaction that they create meaning

(Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). While the other extreme is the objectivist approach that suggests that humans are conditioned by their environment and their experience is a product of this conditioning (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). This objectivist approach fosters “determinism” and views human beings as being controlled by their environment rather than being the controller of their environment as the subjectivist advocates.

4.4.1 The Duality of Structure and Agency

In this study, as noted previously, a subjectivist/relativist approach is adopted that endorses the idea that children’s subjective experience is the creator of their own social world. This is to an extent, since the role of the environment that is surrounding those children has to be acknowledged as well. Considering this study, children and technology in terms of computer, video games and mobile phones, are both affecting each other. Children of Generation Z tend to be born in a technologically advanced environment, surrounded by various technological gadgets that they master at a very young age and at the same time they are empowered through these gadgets. Anthony Giddens’ (1984) Theory of Structuration describes the duality of structure and agency, which fits the approach of this research since a key assumption is that technology does not only influence children’s lives in a purely unidirectional way. The assumption is that children, while clearly subject to technological forces beyond their control, are also active agents within their limitations and that they use video games as a discursive resource to accomplish their own social and developmental ends. Children have always adapted and modified games, and in the case of video games this can be seen to happen in certain respects. The idea of ‘duality of structure’ in structure and agency should not be regarded as pre-ordained. It needs to be acknowledged that there is an on-going interaction between social structure and social action, as structures are created and recreated through social action and the agency of individuals, and structure then guides and constrains individual agency (Easterby et al., 2008:77).

4.4.2 Children as Social Agents

It is acknowledged in this study that children play a role as social agents in creating their own experience of the social-technological world that they are born into, and

there is a need to understand how they create, modify and interpret this world in which they live in. It is notable in this study to take Hirschman and Holbrook (1986) mediating view that falls between the positivists' deterministic approach where human behaviour is dictated by outside influences, and interpretivists extreme voluntaristic model. Hirschman and Holbrook (1986) state that:

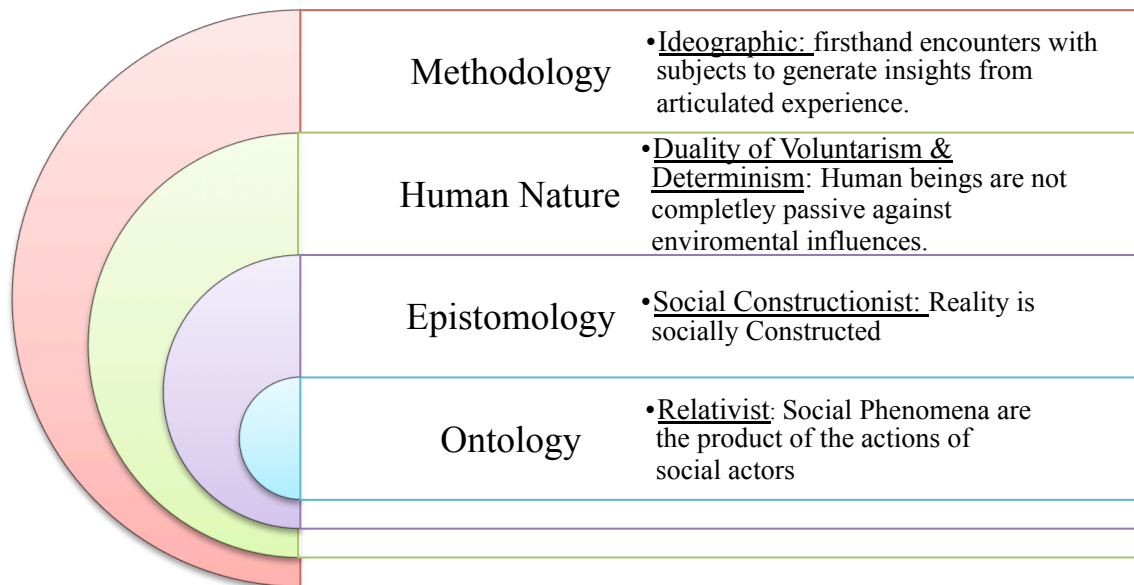
“.....the long sought-after consumption experience must be viewed as an emergent property that results from the inter-relationships and overlaps among person, environment, thought, emotion, activity and value” (1986: 236).

Thus children's constructed 'reality' develops from an 'inter-subjective' social interaction rather than an 'external' or 'objective' one (De la Ville and Tartas, 2010). And in this study, not only are children assumed to be active agents in negotiating the role video games play in their lives, but the games themselves are, in turn, acting as a social dynamic that facilitates children's changing social role within families and friendship groups.

4.5.0 Ideographic versus Nomothetic Approach

Two approaches to social sciences have been put forward to choose which data gathering technique to be utilised depending on the nature of the study (Burrell and Morgan, 1979: 6). The subjectivist/relativist fosters an 'ideographic' approach that advocates the importance of obtaining first-hand knowledge through direct encounters with the subjects under investigation in order to explore their experience in a more vivid and deeper manner. This approach is different from the objectivist view that engages in a 'nomothetic' approach, more common in natural sciences and based on a systematic protocol for gathering data and testing theories. So rather than engaging in a nomothetic study interested in statistical generalisations, this study seeks to reach some idiographic insights that emerge from the articulated subjective experience of children playing online computer and video games (Hackley, 2003:73-74).

Figure 4.1: Schematic Assumptions about the Subjectivist Nature of this Social Science Study



(Source: Adapted from Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Hackley, 2003 and Lewis et al., 2009).

4.6.0 Qualitative versus Quantitative Data Sets

The main purpose behind this study is to investigate children’s experience of video games in the wider context of their lives and relationships. It is suggested that this area remains relatively under-researched due to the focus on methodological priorities that are usually concerned with the nature of the games rather than the quality of the experience of children within gaming culture. This study recognises and explores the complex and dynamic nature of the social world these children are experiencing, in an attempt to gain valid knowledge and understanding of the nature and quality of their experience. Thus qualitative research is suitable as it entails the active participation of the children in the process by taking into account their input and their understanding of their own social and cultural world while acknowledging that this understanding is socially constructed and that absolute realities cannot be accessed (Banister et al., 1994). Accordingly, a qualitative research approach is adopted since it is believed to suit this topic as it is a study that does not aim to produce laws or generalisation but it is rather an investigation that is exploratory in nature.

4.6.1 Qualitative Data Sets

Researchers interested in a measurable, quantifiable study that can be replicated and universalised, utilise the quantitative approach in data gathering in which they try to test a hypothesis. This approach is quite common for a highly researched topic that requires some statistical findings in order to be generalised. Yet given a relatively under-researched topic, that requires exploring a complex and relatively unknown phenomenon, it is considered more appropriate to employ a qualitative approach in data gathering in order to be able to extract some meaningful insights about the phenomenon. Qualitative research tends to offer valuable insights to people's lived life, thus investigating and understanding of issues from the subjects' own perspective (Burton, 2000: 202). Elyes (1989) defines qualitative research as:

“methods of examining the social world, whereby central importance is given to the actor's definition and behaviour..... the task of the research [is] to uncover the nature of the social world through an interpretive and empathic understanding of how people act and give meaning to their own lives.” (Elyes, 1989: 207 cited in Burton, 2000).

Accordingly, qualitative research is viewed as “part of a debate, [and] not fixed truth” (Banister et al., 1994) since it attempts to explore and bridge a gap between a phenomenon of interest and our representation and interpretation of it at a specific point of time to reach an understanding. And it has to be acknowledged that this process of representation and interpretation is rather an on-going process since the world changes and thus the views change, which give rise to more interpretations and more meanings that cannot be limited or controlled. Accordingly, this study is considered a snapshot of children at one point of time based on one aspect of their life as consumers, which is their experience with video games.

4.7.0 Techniques of Data Gathering

Two techniques are adopted in data gathering in this study: focus groups and in depth interviews. With the upsurge of social theory and social reform, interviews and group interviews are said to have become more humanised and reflexive rather than “instruments for pathological diagnosis” (Fontana and Frey, 2005: 696). Thus, realising that interviewing can result in richly contextualised accounts in participants' lives that come about in the form of active interactional encounters between the

researcher and the participant, social scientists began to use this technique extensively. Silverman (1993) argues that interviewing has become a common and widely accepted social research approach.

4.7.1 Semi Structured Interviews

Since this is an exploratory study, a semi-structured approach for both the focus groups and the interviews is adopted. Given the relative novelty of the research topic, semi-structured interviewing is believed to be the most convenient for this study since it helps establishing familiarity with the phenomenon (Fontana and Frey, 2005: 704) and gives the researcher a degree of flexibility in designing and refining the questions in the research process as new threads appear. It also tends to give the subjects freedom to express their thoughts and raise issues that might not have been previously identified by the researcher, thus bring about deeper and sometimes new insights (Horton et al., 2004:340). This was especially apparent when conducting the focus groups with the children, as not having rigid and structured questions helped the researcher gain more information from the participants. They were highly enthusiastic about the topic and touched upon many issues of interest that the researcher had not been aware of prior to those focus groups. Not only that, but it is also clear that using a structured method would not have been successful especially when dealing with this specific age group, children from 6 to 12, in this specific topic, video games which is a prime interest of their lives. It was acknowledged that children of this age want to talk about video games and having pre-set rigid questions would have made them lose interest in participating, for not being able to express their views freely. Thus adopting a semi-structured format rendered great benefit to the research for subjects were able to express their thoughts and views without any constraints, resulting in deeper insights as well as the realisation of a couple of new threads.

4.8.0 Focus Groups

Focus groups have been frequently used by market researchers. They gained popularity within the social science studies from the 1940s, especially when investigating issues such as domestic violence, drink driving, etc. or sensitive subjects such as children (Burton, 2000; 188-190). This technique is based on group discussions that aim to look into a certain topic and explore the participants' views

and experience of it (Kitzinger, 1994). It is argued that the value of the focus group lies in the interaction that takes place between participants who not only state their opinion and experience but also explain the logic behind their opinions (Catterall and Maclaran, 1997). This was apparent in the present study when conducting the focus groups, as children were not only stating their views and opinions on video gaming, but they were also actively discussing and debating them amongst each other. Mallalieu et al. (2005) recommended this method as it results in acquiring rich data within a relaxed yet stimulating environment. This was supported since the technique was quite beneficial to the researcher as it helped to generate deep insights of the children's experience with video games.

4.8.1 Collective Remembering and Group Think

Kitzinger also argues that focus groups can help the researcher access 'collective remembering', as some stories from respondents can trigger the memory of other respondents with related stories (Kitzinger, 1997). Also the idea of 'group think' is claimed to be another outcome of focus groups, especially when members of the group are familiar with one another (Fontana and Frey, 2005:705). Accordingly, having respondents who know each other and share a community of interest tends to stimulate discussions and comments and bring about vivid descriptions of shared experience, as they feel relaxed and unthreatened. This was the case when carrying out the focus groups, as respondents knew each other from either school or the club they go to. Accordingly, they were telling stories of shared experience and reminding one another of incidents and challenging each other's answers. Thus the process of questioning and challenging others views and backing up one's own, and building up on others' views, brought about valuable interaction and insights to the researcher. It also provided the researcher with the opportunity to interact directly with a relatively larger number of subjects, recording their own words and gathering rich data from them.

4.8.2 Limitations of Focus Groups

Acknowledging the limitations of focus groups is important in order to try to be conscious of them while conducting the research. These limitations include having a respondent who dominates the group discussion, and/or having some respondents who

are reluctant to participate. Having realised that, there was a need to obtain responses from all members of group, thus a system of taking turns was adopted with the children to encourage them to participate. Another limitation was the nature of the subjects, i.e. the children; specifically boys aged 6 to 12. This age group sometimes tends to be restless and hyperactive, and this was the case in some of the focus groups conducted, especially since the topic discussed is of great interest to them. In some cases the children's increased enthusiasm sometimes drifted the conversation to other un-related topics. At this point the researcher had to steer back the conversation to the main topic. In another case with younger subjects, aged 6, upon knowing of a fun activity going on in the playground, they became edgy and lost interest in continuing the interview. At this point the researcher had already gathered enough insights from them and wrapped up the interview since keeping them any longer would not have rendered any additional value.

4.9.0 In-Depth Interviews

In-depth interviews are frequently used by researchers who place an importance on the exploration of salience rather than striving for theory testing and generalisation. This technique focuses on exploring the subjects' views and understanding and interpreting the meanings they give to their own lives thus accessing their world and seeing it from their perspective (Burton, 2000:197). Depth interviews have the ability to probe other sub-areas of interest as they appear in the interview (Goulding, 2002). Burgess (1982) summarises the significance of in-depth interviews:

“[it gives the researcher] the opportunity to probe deeply to uncover new clues, open up new dimensions of a problem and to secure vivid, accurate inclusive accounts that are based on personal experience” (Burgess, 1982: 107).

4.9.1 The Nature of the In-Depth Interviews Conducted

In this study, in-depth interviews that are semi-structured in nature are conducted since this technique tends to be flexible and adaptable and almost similar to a natural conversation. This technique was employed to capture rich, detailed representations of the children's experience with video games while being flexible in pursuing other avenues of interest as they emerge in the conversation. As noted earlier, a total of 6 in depth interviews were conducted; two interviews with practitioners in the gaming

industry, three interviews with children aged 12, 9 and 5, as well as interviewing their mother. Interviewing practitioners at the very beginning of the study was quite beneficial for the researcher as it helped her gain a perspective on the gaming industry and the market's philosophy behind introducing the gaming consoles as well as the different computer and video games. This was put in comparison with how the children viewed those games and their actual experience of them. Furthermore, interviewing three siblings and their mother was also valuable as it shed light on not only different age and gender gaming preferences, but also the parent's view in relation to their children's view and how it differs as well as the role video games play within the family context. Accordingly, rich data were acquired from conducting those in-depth interviews that later helped shaping the analysis.

4.10.0 The Multi-Method Approach and Triangulation

Reliability and validity are concepts usually associated with research in the positivist/realist paradigm. Qualitative/interpretive research does not maintain a claim that its findings amount to universal truth, and therefore findings are invariably contextualised rather than universal. Nonetheless, it is important to maintain standards of scholarship and to try to ascertain that findings are not purely subjective but are grounded in evidence. So in this study the concepts of reliability and validity are used not to imply that findings are claimed as universal truths but as an attempt to support findings more carefully by using more than one source of information where possible, and by balancing findings in one area of data with findings from others. As Davis (2010) highlights that when researching children, using multiple methods to triangulate and confirm meaning and the authenticity of data is highly recommended. This is usually done by combining complementary techniques to add nuance and depth to the data and taking into account multiple viewpoints while eliminating the drawbacks of using only one method of data gathering. Accordingly, in this study both data and method triangulation are adopted. Triangulation is regarded as a way of providing richer, and more reliable interpretations since it takes into account multiple standpoints to try to represent the phenomenon of interest from various angles, bridging the gap between the phenomenon and our understanding of it (Banister et al., 1994:145). It is acknowledged that relying on only one source of information, results in acquiring limited insights.

4.10.1 Data Triangulation

In this study, data triangulation was attempted by collecting information from different participants from both genders and with varying age brackets as well as roles. In addition, parents and practitioners were interviewed, in order to gain a wide perspective of the phenomenon at hand. Thus five focus groups were conducted on children between 6 and 12, four of whom were male based and one female based. Three in-depth interviews were also conducted with boys aging 12 and 5, and a 9-year-old girl, in addition to an interview with their parent/mother. Furthermore, two interviews with practitioners in the gaming industry, as noted earlier, were also conducted to gain a rounded view point and taking into consideration different perspectives pertaining to the phenomenon.

4.10.2 Multi-Method Approach

In addition to data triangulation in the sense of engaging with different participants to investigate similar questions, it is recognised that a multi-method approach can be useful in social science research since it deals with the uneven and complex area of humans and their experience of life. Combining more than one method of data gathering is considered beneficial in understanding how participants construct their lives and give meaning to their social world (Fontana and Frey, 2005: 722; Davis, 2010). In this study, two types of interviewing were adopted as has been highlighted earlier. These were in-depth interviews with practitioners in the gaming industry to help familiarise the researcher with the market perspective, followed by focus groups with children aged between 6 and 12, then in-depth interviews with children along with their parents, in order to formulate a rounded perspective.

4.10.3 ‘Conversation with a Purpose’

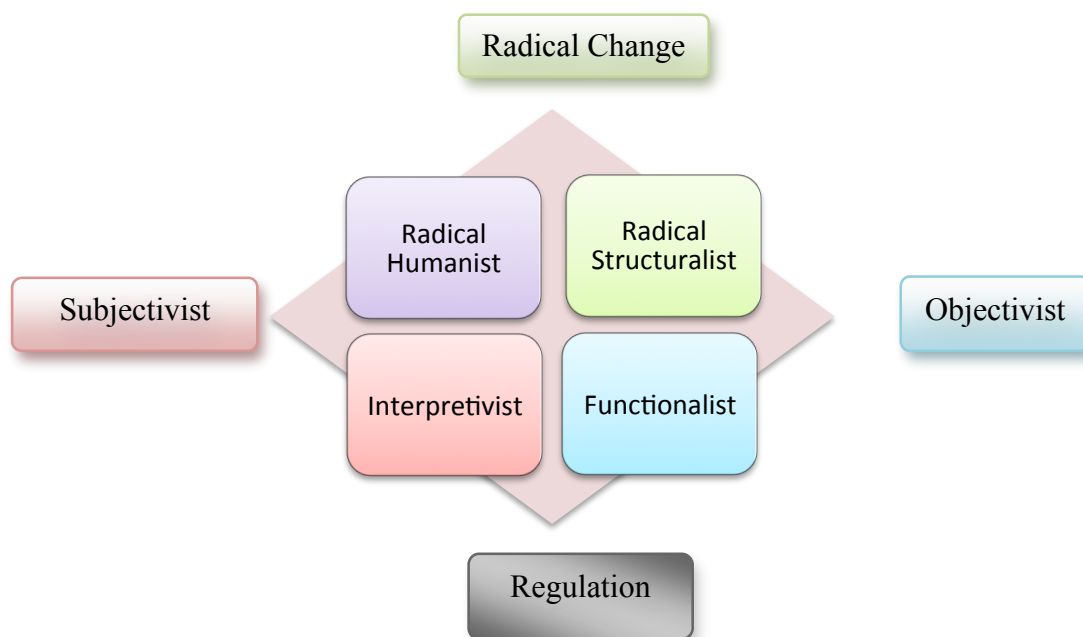
Bingham and Moore (1959) describe interviewing to be ‘conversation with a purpose’. The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the experiences of children with video games and how various aspects of their lives might be affected. Since the core of this study is the children, the interviewing method is considered the most appropriate approach when dealing with such participants. The method is particularly valuable with sensitive participants such as children. This can be attributed to the openness and flexibility of this tool that can be used to empower the

children and attempt to free them to express their views with a sense of security, in order to have a better understanding of their lived social and cultural world (Banister et al., 1994). Thus the focus of the research is to do research ‘with’ the children rather than ‘on’ them (Banister et al., 1994).

4.11.0 Extant Research Paradigms

In an attempt to map intellectual approaches in social theory, Burrell and Morgan (1979) devised four paradigms that define different perspectives to the social world based upon various meta-theoretical assumptions of the nature of science in terms of objectivity and subjectivity and nature of the society in terms of regulation and radical change (Burrell and Morgan, 1979: 24). These four paradigms help researchers in identifying the most convenient frame of reference with regard to social theory, thus adopting related theories and perspective.

Figure 4.2: Four Paradigms for the analysis of Social Theory



(Source: Abstracted from Burrell and Morgan (1979).)

4.11.1 The Interpretive Paradigm

As noted earlier, this study adopts a relativist ontological approach concerned with the social construction of reality related to the experience of children with video games. This experience is considered an emergent social process that is created by the

children themselves who play an active role in shaping their social world. Accordingly it is argued that this study is located within the interpretive consumer/marketing research paradigm (Thompson, 1997; Thompson et al, 1989; Belk, 2006; Szmigin and Foxall, 2000). The Interpretive paradigm is explained by Burrell and Morgan (1979):

“...[it] is informed by a concern to understand the world as it is, to understand the fundamental nature of the social world at the level of subjective experience. It seeks explanation within the realm of individual consciousness and subjectivity, with the frame of reference of the participants as opposed to the observer of action.” (p. 28).

It is widely acknowledged that the interpretive paradigm deals with “naturalistic” or “humanistic” consumer research as Belk et al. (1988) and Hirschman (1985) suggest respectively (Szmigin and Foxall, 2000). Interpretive research depends on qualitative data gathered and analysed to develop insights that are socially constructed by subjects through their language, actions as well as other social practices (Hackley, 2003:74). The interpretations attained do not represent objective facts nor form absolute reality, but they are rather interpretations of data that are constructed from the social worlds of subjects by means of their language and other symbolic communicative objects. Gadamer (1975) argues “all knowledge and all science rest on interpretation” (Holbrook and O’Shaughnessy, 1988:401). Hirschman (1985) suggests that science is still created by people and as such is subject to the influence of their attitudes, personalities etc., thus it should not be viewed as an unbiased, phenomenon based, process of truth discovery but rather as “an inherently normative person centred enterprise” (Szmigin and Foxall, 2000:192). Hence, to say that a research study is interpretive is not to give it a special status but to acknowledge the elements of subjectivity and construction that enter into all social research.

4.11.2 “Verstehen” of the Children’s Experience

In this research the interpretive paradigm is adopted because the aim of the study is to understand children’s experience with video games as it is ‘lived’, from their own perspective rather than studying them as part of the physical world and looking at the phenomenon from a traditional scientific and theoretical structure. Hirschman and Holbrook (1986) emphasised the importance of studying consumption from the

subjective experience of the consumers in an attempt to look at “reality” rather than defining a “real world” based on objective reality.

Hence, it can be argued that the role of interpretation is to bridge the gap between a phenomenon of interest in our social world and our understanding of it and accordingly this process of interpretation tends to be incessant as not only does the social world change but also our relation to it. Seeking understanding- *Verstehen*- of individuals and how they give meaning to their world is what differentiates social science research from other sciences (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). This entails understanding- *Verstehen*- the meanings individuals develop through their shared language, contexts, gestures, and other symbolic objects in their culture (Wax, 1967). Thus there’s a constant need to interpret and reinterpret accounts since additional meanings and representations continue to emerge and interpretations are always incomplete. Denzin (1984) highlights this aspect of the interpretive paradigm noting that “one never achieves *the* understanding; one achieves *an* understanding” (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988: 510).

4.11.3 Criticism of the Interpretive Paradigm

The interpretive paradigm has attracted criticism. One argument from Calder and Tybout (1987) suggested that the contributions of an interpretive paradigm should not be considered a contribution to scientific knowledge as they tend to provide “provocative and entertaining reading” (Calder and Tybout, 1987:139), rather than rigorous scientific knowledge. These authors suggest that the only scientific benefit from an interpretive paradigm is to produce hypotheses that can be tested in empirical studies. It has been countered that this argument fails to recognise that consumer research, as a social science rather than a natural science, deals with humans and seeks to reach some degree of understanding- ‘*verstehen*’- of the meanings humans give to their lives. The aim is for the interpretivists to understand behaviour and not necessarily to predict it (Holbrook and O’Shaughnessy, 1988; Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). This understanding is attained from interpreting the humans’ shared signs based in their language, contexts, roles and other symbolic communication objects that define their “sense of social existence and identity” (Holbrook and O’Shaughnessy, 1988; Wax, 1967). Moreover, this understanding is constantly

changing since the social world constructed by the culture, language, meanings and so on are continuously being created through the interaction of people or as Wax (1967) puts it “meaning is dynamically created through the act of living”. This is axiomatic in the children of Generation Z and how their experience of life is quite different from the previous generations with the abundance of video games and other technological gadgets that have digitised their experience. Thus it is important to investigate how those children interpret their world in an attempt to create an understanding of their experience of it.

Accordingly, it is noted that most criticism of the interpretive paradigm is at the epistemological level, which is concerned with how it deals with the process of evaluating and analysing the knowledge and data obtained and how representative they can be (Szmigin and Foxall, 2000).

4.11.4 The Interpretive Paradigm and Managerial Implications

Looking at this research from a different angle, it is argued that adopting the interpretive paradigm in research, “shifts the focus away from managerial usefulness” (Szmigin and Foxall, 2000:189), since the emphasis is placed on social scientific insight rather than on managerial implications. Interpretive research studies are not necessarily devoid of managerial interest and can help managers understand their consumers and bring them closer to their experience so as to develop insights that are usually not captured by quantitative data. Szmigin and Foxall (2000) describe the usefulness of the data attained from the interpretive paradigm as:

“An understanding of different consumers’ constructed realities is not only of use to academic researchers, but is also a reminder of the fluidity, complexity and dynamism of the market to those managers who need to understand it” (p.189).

Consequently, the managerial insights to be gained from interpretive research studies may be significant, but they are not necessarily part of the key research questions which focus, rather, on revealing the experiential world of the participants.

4.11.5 Critical Marketing Theory and the Nature of This Research

Critical marketing is a broad and nebulous category of marketing studies, which is generally positioned to question and critique the simplicities and cause-effect assumptions of managerial marketing. It is a tradition of scholarship that focuses on critique, power and ethics in marketing studies (Hackley, 2009; Saren et al., 2007; Tadajewski, 2010). This research follows the principles of critical marketing by looking at the phenomenon of children and computer and video games not only through a narrow managerial lens but also from a social scientific perspective. While the research may generate some insights that have a managerial implication, the main focus is on wider issues that include ethical, developmental, social, legal, relational and cultural aspects, since it is a multi-disciplinary study. Hence, the study brings in several perspectives from various social scientific fields rather than focusing on the managerial perspective solely, which is consistent with the principles of critical marketing studies. Critical marketing studies take a holistic, social scientific perspective on topics in marketing and are driven by broad intellectual values in addition to managerial values (Saren et al., 2007; Tadajewski, 2010; Hackley, 2009). Thus, this study is conceived in this vein, as a multi-disciplinary social scientific study of a topic in marketing. The present study could be conceived as one which coheres with some aspects of critical marketing in regard to its focus on ethical, developmental and policy issues around the topic. In addition, in-keeping with critical marketing principles, it seeks theoretical inspiration from multi-and cross-disciplinary sources. Nonetheless, the topic falls clearly within the scope of marketing, management and consumption studies, and in particular interpretive consumer research, as conceived by critical marketing authors.

4.12.0 Cultural Engineering and Consumer Culture theory (CCT)

Holt (2004) suggests that marketing must be considered a cultural process rather than a managerial technique. Holt further argues that interpretive research is needed to understand the managerial role in the cultural construction of brands. Marketers are usually portrayed as “cultural engineers” who communicate and dictate symbolic cultural and functional meanings to the consumers through their commercial activities embedded in their brands (Holt, 2002). Market symbols are central to the development of consumer culture, which highly depends on the individual exercising

freedom of choice in the realm of everyday practises mediated by socio-cultural and socio-historic ideologies and global mediascape (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Holt, 2002). Levy (1959) suggested that brands have a symbolic and cultural role; especially when it comes to social status, group membership and identity. Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) looked at brands from a consumption perspective and argued that the rational evaluation of the product utility is not the only factor that motivates consumers, but also the symbolic value of the utility, the desire for fun and fantasy that develop an experiential, emotional psychodynamic aspect to consumption of the utility itself is a main aspect in consumption. It can be argued that video games have such a symbolic value that Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) highlighted as they fulfil the desire for fun and fantasy and create an experience for players. Thus, video games can be understood as elements for generating meaning and culture (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). This theoretical orientation falls broadly under the label of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT).

4.12.1. Why CCT Fits the Nature of the Study

CCT is based on investigating the relationships among consumers' personal and collective identities, the socio-cultural, experiential, symbolic and ideological aspects that create the culture lived by the consumers, as well as the nature and dynamics of the sociological roles inflected through a set of theoretical questions (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Accordingly CCT explores a broad range of not only social and cultural questions related to consumption, but also managerially relevant questions, in order to generate insights on consumers and consumption (Holbrook, 1987). CCT is also said to help explain how children use brands as part of their reality construction and individual and group narrative (Marshall, 2010). Thus CCT is seen as fitting for this research and is utilised to investigate the experience of children as consumers of video games. The aim is to develop theoretical knowledge about children's actions, marketplace behaviour and the cultural meanings embedded in such a dynamic relation.

4.12.2. CCT Analytic Orientation

Several distinct theoretical approaches and research goals fall under CCT, which includes discourse analysis, semiotics, grounded theory and other approaches to name

a few. These research traditions might entail different approaches but they have one common theoretical orientation that is the study of culture complexity, while emphasising the use of qualitative data sets and the need for insight gathering rather than quantitative generalisation or hypothesis testing. CCT based theoretical approaches aim to, as Arnould and Thompson (2005) argue:

“...explore the heterogeneous distribution of meanings and the multiplicity of overlapping cultural groupings that exist within the broader socio-historic frame of globalisation and market capitalism.” (Arnould and Thompson, 2005).

Thus these research traditions are concerned with meanings produced from the people’s language, behaviour and social practices. The desire is to attempt to understand an aspect of participants’ social lives rather than to generate universal facts. This research aims to understand the children’s experience of video games and how it shapes their culture and socialisation, thus a research tradition that falls within CCT, discourse analysis, is adopted. It should be noted that CCT is concerned with conveying behavioural patterns and sense making interpretations of consumers’ conceivable actions, feelings and thoughts (Kozinets, 2002; Thompson and Hirschman, 1995; Holt, 1997; Arnould and Thompson, 2005), rather than generating theories to determine action as a causal force. Thus, qualitative data analyses are commonly used techniques in CCT (Kozinets, 2002; Murray and Ozanne, 1991; Spiggle, 1994). In this research, since the focus is on the experiential and socio-cultural dimensions of children as consumers of video games, experiments and surveys would not be appropriate (Sherry, 1991).

4.12.3. CCT and Consumer Experience

One of the core concerns of CCT is the consumer and how they consume in the myriad messy context of everyday life, while taking into consideration the social influences and dynamics (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). In this research it is believed that the socio-cultural, experiential, symbolic and ideological aspects of children’s consumption of video games do not only shape their experience and identities, but also give meaning to their lived culture. It is argued that CCT investigates the relation between the consumers’ lived culture and the symbolic and material resources in their life, in this case, video and computer games. CCT theorists such as Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) and Geertz (1983) emphasise the role of

interpretive research in conceptualising culture by investigating the neglected experiential, social, and cultural dimensions of consumption. This is where this research's role is conceptualised, since very few research studies have touched upon children's experience and the social and cultural aspect of consuming video games. Children's experience, meanings and symbolic actions are considered key aspects that structure personal and communal consumer identities. Hence, CCT is concerned with the overlapping and even conflicting meanings, identities, and practises that consumers, in this case children, construct in an attempt to make sense of their environment within the socio-historic frame of globalisation and market capitalism (Kozinets, 2001). This is achieved by looking into the texts, commercially produced images, symbolic actions and objects that form an interconnected system of meanings to orient the children's experiences and lives as consumers of video games.

4.12.4. CCT and Culture production

Unlike anthropological studies, CCT views consumers as “interpretative agents”, “culture producers” rather than passive dupes (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). It is the socio-cultural, experiential, symbolic and ideological aspects of consumption in the consumers' lives that result in meanings and cultures, which they construct to make collective sense of their environment. A widely accepted framework of thought in CCT is that consumers are actively and incessantly altering symbolic meanings encoded in the global mediascape in an attempt to pursue personally edifying goals (Holt, 2002; Kozinets, 2001). This is quite prevalent with children of Generation Z and their experience with video games and how by enacting and personalising cultural scripts to manifest their own personal and social circumstances, they attempt to align their identities and lifestyle goals with the structural imperatives of a consumer driven economy. Another view on the consumers' culture production states that consumers seek to defy consumerist norms and challenge corporate power by altering and personalising the symbolic meanings and culture scripts within a global mediascape (Kozinets, 2002; Murray and Ozanne, 1991). Thus CCT's role is to study the complex culture produced from the experiential, socio-cultural perspective of the children as consumers given the constructed meanings and symbolic actions.

4.12.5. CCT and Collective Identity/ Communities

It has been highlighted that CCT views consumers as “interpretive agents” constantly altering and aligning cultural scripts with personal and social environment to produce their own identities and lifestyle. Children usually do this through the constructed system of interconnected meanings that orient their experiences and lives in order to give them a sense of belongingness. It can be argued that Maffesoli’s (1996) ideas on neo-tribalism is interwoven within this genre of CCT, in fact tribal aspects are quite pervasive in modern consumption (Arnould and Thompson, 2005) and especially in the video gaming realm in general. This is apparent as consumers, in this case players, including children, develop collective identities and take part in solidarity rituals creating transient cultural worlds that pursue their current shared consumption interests in video games. Kozinets (2002) refers to this form of constructed culture as “culture of consumption” where consumers adopt what is usually a temporary collective identity grounded in common lifestyle interests and leisure avocations. Thornton (1996) tends to refer to this phenomenon using another term; “sub-cultures” and he states that youth sub-cultures are quite pervasive in today’s world as they tend to foster collective identities grounded in shared interests, beliefs, meanings, habits, social practises and status systems.

4.12.6. CCT and The Role of the Marketplace in the Construction of Individual and Collective Identities

The marketplace plays a vital role in how consumers construct individual and collective identities by providing an extensive and heterogeneous palette of resources (Murray, 2002; Thompson and Hirschman, 1995). As noted earlier, consumers sometimes seek to oppose the dominant lifestyle norms and mainstream consumerist sensibilities while challenging corporate power when redefining and personalising the symbolic meanings and boundaries within the marketplace powered by global mediascape (Brown et al. 2003). This is especially true with the younger generation who are widely accused of being rebellious and defying the norm, and therefore attracted to transgressive sub-cultural activities. Video games may fall into this category, partly because they were, initially, things that adults could not share, and also because in many cases they push boundaries of taste and offensiveness. Furthermore, as noted earlier, video games are often thought to be ‘bad’ for children,

therefore making them more attractive to children. In this regard the deep resonance video games have for children might be partly explained by thinking of them as having a sub-cultural element in that players of particular games form groups to play online or to talk about games and these groups can at times fall outside normal family or social groups for the children.

4.12.7. CCT and the Ethos of Radical Individualism

Furthermore, in a post-industrial world, forces of globalisation have brought about socio-economic transformations revolutionising traditional forms of socialisation. These encourage “a dominant ethos of radical individualism oriented around a ceaseless quest for personal distinctiveness and autonomy in lifestyle choices” (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). This is quite axiomatic in the phenomenon of children and video games, as they are continuously trying to set themselves apart and prove mastery of games, even of those that are not designed for their age group. Accordingly, CCT adopts the idea that consumers produce their own lived culture through the interconnected system of constructed meanings, symbols and identities as active participants in that culture and not just as passive recipients of it. Not only this, but also consumers’ lives are constructed around multiple realities (Holt, 2002, Kozinets, 2001, Holt and Thompson, 2004; Martin 2004) that they sometimes tend to repress, however they use consumption as a gateway for their fantasies, invocative desire and identity play thus creating experiential realities which video games tend to foster.

4.12.8. CCT and Socio-Historic Patterning of Consumption

Socio-economic transformation and forces of globalisation have brought about many alterations to consumers’ lived culture, as noted earlier. One aspect that portrays this transformation is the evolution of socialisation and the appearance of fluid hyper-cultural social contexts. Peñaloza (1994) terms the hyper-cultural phenomenon, “acculturation” where socially constructed cultures is the norm and is a consumable commodity that aims to orient and assert the anchoring for an identity. This phenomenon tends to prevail especially with children of Generation Z triggered by their consumption of video games and other technological gadgets that tend to be the norm in their lived environment. In the case of video games, as a global consumer

culture phenomenon, we see in the literature review they have had an impact on social relations in the form of family dynamics, children's socialisation, and the development of children's self and social identity, as they become acculturated to the new virtual groups and communities associated with video gaming and social networking communities.

4.12.9. CCT Summarising Comments

Hence, CCT tends to investigate the institutional and social structures that influence the children as consumers such as gender, social, family and household roles as well as the economic and cultural influences brought about by globalisation (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Belk et al., 2003; Arnould, 1989). Moreover, CCT looks into the children's constructed ideological patterns of symbols and meanings since they are considered key to generating insights into their experience as consumers and their dominant interest and lifestyle goals within the society by examining their thoughts, actions and feelings (Hirschman, 1993).

4.13.0 Inductive versus Deductive Research

Another way of conceiving social research that has been taken into account for this study is whether a deductive approach or an inductive approach would be most useful. The deductive approach is usually linked to positivistic scientific research and is considered a "top down" approach to research that commences with testing a hypothesis and ends with developing a theory. Thus taking this into account, for the purpose of this social scientific study, the deductive approach is considered not suitable. This can be attributed to the fact that this study aims to explore and understand the nature of the experience of children with video games rather than testing a theory. And since it is an exploratory social science study, exploring a phenomenon would be considered more appropriate than seeking a cause-effect relationship between variables, since each situation is seen as unique. Denzin (1983) argues that experience does not submit to experimental, statistical, comparative nor causal control and manipulation (1983: 132) thus a priori conceptual framework could not capture the flow of human experience (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). Accordingly in this study, no hypothesis was proposed, and an exploratory inductive approach is adopted.

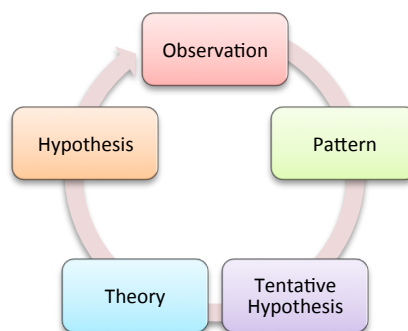
4.13.1. The Self-Corrective Circle of Hermeneutics

Unlike the deductive approach, the inductive approach is considered a “bottom up” approach to research since it attempts to generate less structured patterns and relationships and offers alternative explanations to the phenomenon, thus gaining an understanding of the meanings children associate to their experience with video games. However, it has been argued that the majority of social science studies that are based on inductive reasoning approaches, have also an element of deductive reasoning at a certain phase in the study (Trochim, 2006). This argument is further supported by Hackley (2003) who argues that in the research process, scientists learn from their experience, formulating tentative ideas and during the course of the study the thoughts are modified based on the new experience encountered. Hackley (2003) goes on to describe the essence of a true social scientist and it goes as follows:

“The true social scientist meets this challenge by being ‘open’ to new ideas and tries to understand them in terms of his or her existing knowledge” (p. 95).

Accordingly, even an inductive research approach has a deductive stage in the process. Another way of looking at it is that a researcher goes through a cycle of inductive and deductive stances where his arguments are in a continuous state of evolving and modification, (see Figure 4.3); this is described as the self-corrective circle of hermeneutics or abductive semiotics (Holbrook and O’Shaughnessy, 1988:401). Hence, the abductive approach offers a more flexible research structure that permits the modification of the research emphasis as the research progresses.

Figure 4.3: The Abductive Cycle of a Social Scientist



(Source: adapted from Trochim, W., 2006 on Inductive and Deductive Thinking: Research Methods, Knowledge Base).

4.14.0 The Principle of Reflexivity

One of the most distinctive features for qualitative research is the principle of reflexivity. This entails the acknowledgment of the process of obtaining, analysing and interpreting the material, since both the researcher, and the researched, are considered “collaborators in the construction of knowledge” (Banister et al., 1994: 149). Since the researcher and the children being researched are part of the same social world, it is important to understand the perspectives of the people being looked at, without marginalising the influence of the researcher’s own life experience on the construction of knowledge. Hirschman (1986) emphasises the ‘interactive’ nature between the researcher and the researched, where the researcher cannot distance themselves from the phenomenon under study nor can the researched be understood without the researcher’s personal involvement (Hirschman, 1986:238). And as Szmigin and Foxall (2000) argue, that knowledge is not discovered, but rather constructed since it results from the subjective interaction between the researcher and the phenomenon (2000: 190).

Thus it is important to acknowledge that the researcher did have an effect on the interviews in many ways and that the research itself is essentially ‘value-laden’ specifically through language and how the researcher positioned herself in the context, process and production of the research, not to mention the choice of the phenomenon to study and the findings the researcher deemed important. This is termed ‘personal reflexivity’, which is argued to be a form of “disciplined self reflection” (Wilkinson, 1988: 493). Personal reflexivity helps the researcher to acknowledge who they are, as their values, interests and individuality would definitely influence the process of the research as well as the outcome. As DuBois (1983) frames it “the knower is part of the matrix of what is known” (DuBois, 1983: 111).

4.15.0 Demand Characteristics

Another way the researcher may influence the response of the researched is during the process of gathering information. The research participants may attempt to speculate on the aims of the study and try to confirm what they believe are the desired outcomes (Banister et al. 1994:6; Orne, 1962). Thus in order to account for this, the researcher

paid attention not to give the subjects of her interviews any clues so as not to bias the information gathered.

On another stance, during the process of gathering information, the researcher, as noted earlier, observed her primary subjects in a natural setting of their social world as they were engaged in performing the act of playing video games. This was of great value to the research as children were observed while they were already busy interpreting and understanding their environments for themselves (Banister et al. 1994: 41) thus it was important for the researcher to try not to give any clues about the aim of the study or what might be expected to emerge from them.

4.16.0 Barriers to Entry

Even when access is granted, there is still the actual entry in the real everyday setting of the subjects' lives. This sometimes involves the researcher in having to get behind fronts put on for their benefit (such as fake ignorance) (Banister et al., 1994). In this study, two forms of barrier to entry were encountered. One of these concerned access to children due to perceptions of ethical considerations and the fear of jeopardising the safety of those children. The other barrier to entry was to gain the children's trust and get them to share their experience with the researcher. Dealing with the relatively elder group of male respondents, 9 to 11, the researcher had to fake ignorance of computer and video games and requested that they would explain everything to her. This aided in getting the children's insights on the phenomenon itself and helped in forming a deeper understanding of how children view and define video games related issues. Calder and Tybout (1989) emphasise the benefits of role taking as a method that helps bring the researcher closer to the researched, thus be able to capture rich details and accounts of the subjects' lives which helps the researcher to experience and see the world from their perspective and this was attained in this research.

4.17.0 Gender Issues

Women are usually seen as non-threatening but are treated with more suspicion than male researchers when something serious is being researched (Banister et al., 1994; Hunt, 1989). The effect of a man interviewing a woman and vice versa was considered (Burton 2000: 213), especially since the study is concerned with a fairly

male-dominated activity, i.e. video games, while the researcher is a female. Denzin's (1989) view on gendered interviewing that "gender filters knowledge" has been taken into account. In the case of this study, Warren's (1988) assumption was supported since as a female researcher I felt that access and quality of data were influenced by the perception of the researcher as harmless or invisible, added to it faking ignorance thus gratifying the ego of the male respondents and getting them to share their knowledge in a much more cooperative way. In fact two cases are worth mentioning here; in one of the focus groups a 9 year old boy assumed responsibility and took a leading role in the interview to make sure all his colleagues are calm and disciplined, repeating words such as "quiet! The lady here is trying to do her interview!". This child obviously presumed that since the researcher is a female, she might not be able to control the boys in the interview. In another instance, another boy, 8 year old, after the researcher claimed ignorance of video games and not having any previous experience with them, he took responsibility to explain and define every tiny detail that is video game related that were mentioned by him or his colleagues during the interview. This was quite helpful as it allowed the researcher to gain a deeper insight into how the children actually define video games related issues.

4.18.0 Ethical Considerations

For the UK data gathering, a non-random approach based on convenience sampling and snow balling was adopted given the difficulty of access. Ethical considerations are acknowledged since the age of the study group subjects is considered ethically sensitive and requires permissions on several levels. On one level, the study has been granted an ethical permission from the Research Ethics Committee of Royal Holloway University of London. In addition, written consents from the parents of the children interviewed were obtained before any interview was conducted (refer to Appendix A for a sample of the parents' consent letter). Furthermore, the interview and the focus group took place in a safe and neutral setting such as an open space area whether a playground, a club or the child's house with parents presence in the house but not necessarily in the same room.

Moreover, participants were informed that this is a study to understand the children as consumers within the family as a consumer unit. Questioning focused around

children's experience of the virtual world through video gaming. They were also informed that their participation is not mandatory and that they can end the interview whenever they like. In most cases, the children did not want to end the interview and claimed that the time of the interview flew by so quickly that they didn't realise that three quarters of an hour had passed. This showed the researcher that video games are quite an interesting and engaging topic to the children, especially boys.

The participants were asked whether they would prefer to stay anonymous or disclose their names in the study, they didn't seem to mind disclosure. However the researcher saw it as appropriate to assign aliases and that documents created from this study would not bear names of any participant; instead, just the aliases were used when required, since it is considered an important aspect of research ethics that the anonymity of participants is preserved.

In terms of data security, participants were informed that there is only one copy of the recorded file on the researcher's computer (with a backup on her external hard drive) and that no other person has access to it. Furthermore, to confirm that their contribution is accurate, the participants' permission to keep the transcripts of the interviews is requested.

Essentially this exercise was a simple and informal face-to-face discussion about the way the participants perceive their life and influence through the window of video games. The findings from this study are presented in a manner that will not knowingly lead to any legal action, or defamation of character.

4.19.0 Empirical Data Gathering

Despite the popularity of video games as a leisure phenomenon, relatively few research studies have investigated children's experience of them. Accordingly, this study will gather empirical data sets derived from the understanding of the experience of Generation Z as it emerges or as it is lived in terms of their role as consumers in today's market, especially in regards to how their life is influenced by video gaming consumption. Interpretive research, which is used in this study, often draws on qualitative data sets and entails a focus on the first hand experience of the study

subjects through interviews, focus groups, surveys or observations (Thompson et al, 1989; Belk, 2006; Szmigin and Foxall, 2000). Hence, focus groups as well as in depth interviews were conducted with children as the primary subjects from both genders with an inclination towards males, aged between 6 and 12. This inclination is mainly attributed to the difficulty of finding girls to participate in the focus group, as video gaming is more of a male-oriented activity than a female-oriented one. Also some insights were gathered from the parent of interviewed children and practitioners from the gaming industry in the UK.

4.19.1 Some Other Important Considerations in the Data Gathering Process

Since this study employs a qualitative data gathering technique, that does not require providing significant statistical generalisations, thus samples need not be randomised (Hackley, 2003:37) and were gathered based on convenience and snowball sampling as noted earlier. It is helpful for interviews to be conducted in natural field settings, as they help in making the respondents open up and share their experience more comfortably thus meaning can be derived from the context (Fontana and Frey, 2005:704; Hudson and Ozanne, 1988:515). Reaching a level of comfort with the children is crucial since it allows the researcher to view things in a similar way to the children thus be able to understand their experience more thoroughly. Accordingly, the focus groups were conducted in a setting with which the children were very familiar, a club at which many of them would gather daily before and/or after school and during school holidays. In addition to the groups, the researcher was able to observe and interact with children as they played their video games in the club which has a set of consoles. Regarding the in-depth interviews, they were conducted in person with the targeted sample. The aim to have 4-5 focus groups was achieved as five focus groups were conducted; 4 were male and one female. As for the interviews, individual interviews with 3 siblings (two boys and a girl) aged 12, 9 and 5 took place as well as interviewing their mother, in their own home. Also two in-depth interviews with practitioners in the gaming industry were conducted at the first phase of the research in the offices of the practitioners.

Figure 4.4: Schematic of the focus groups' participants:

Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2	Focus Group 3	Focus Group 4	Focus Group 5
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 4 boys• O.K. (11 years)• J.T. (10 years)• J.S. (10 years)• J.L.(7 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 5 boys• R.S. (6 years)• K.J. (7years)• V.R. (7 years)• F.F. (8 years)• L.S.(9 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 3 girls• S.T.(12 years)• A.D.(8 years)• F.G.(7 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 4 boys• J.T. (10 years)• C.T. (10 years)• B.R. (11 years)• J.G. (11 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 4 boys• B.S. (10 years)• N.G. (8 years)• K.H. (8 years)• C.W. (7 years)

4.20.0 Preliminary Interview Questions

In this section, an outline of the preliminary interview questions is presented. This outline was derived from the study's research questions and is not the final format or order of the interview.

- How long have you been a gamer? And how often do you play online computer and video games?
- Do you own a computer? A gaming console? Is it yours or does it belong to one of your siblings/parents?
- Which genres of games do you prefer playing? And why?
- If you have a one day off and you can do whatever you would like, what would you do? And why?
- How do you get your new games? How do you know about them? How do your parents feel about games that are not suitable for your age?
- Do you talk about games with your friends at school? What exactly do you discuss with them? Would you consider it an icebreaker when meeting a new friend? Or do you consider it an integral part of your daily conversations with your friends?
- Did you experience any physical injuries or conditions from playing video games?
- In the future, do you still see gaming as an integral part of your daily routine?

These questions informed the structure of the focus groups loosely, since conversation often became spontaneous and took its own course within the general scope of the questions. Thus the questions enabled the researcher to have a guide for the groups but also allowed flexibility to depart from the questions where the group spontaneously took another course of interest.

4.21.0 Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis refers to a range of approaches to the analysis of qualitative data sets, usually but not necessarily forms of talk and text. Being an interdisciplinary approach, conversation and discourse analysis tend to draw insights from linguistic concerns and language philosophy which structures the talk and the processes by which speakers construct their worlds (Schwandt, 2001). Accordingly DA is prominent in sociolinguistics, cognitive psychology and communication studies (Schwandt, 2001) since it is a method to generate insights and gain understanding of how and why individuals use language to explain their lives, their actions, their feelings and behaviours, their relationships and the world in general (Dick 2004). Studies based in social constructionism tend to fall under discourse analysis as it enables the researcher to understand how and why individuals use language to construct their identities and the world in which they live. This study falls within this realm as it tries to draw insights on the experience of children playing video games and how it shapes their environment and socialisation. Thus social constructionism backed up by discourse analysis would help understand the ideological effects of children's constructions powered by their experience with video games through their used language in explaining their own perspective of the phenomenon.

4.21.1 Discourse Analysis and the Nature of the Study

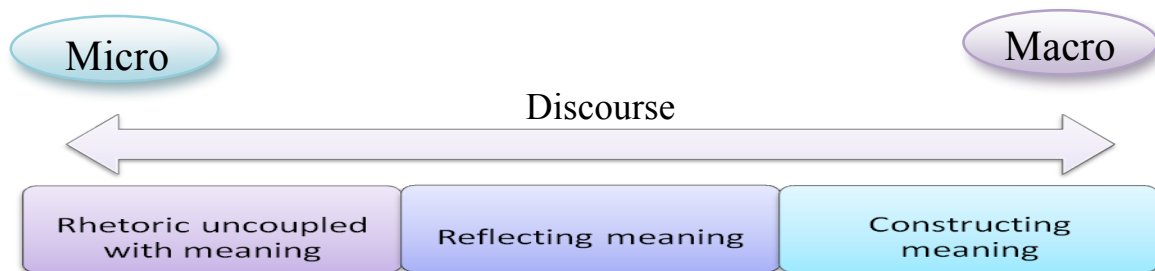
In this study the main method of data analysis is adapted from Potter and Wetherell (1987) from Social Psychology and Fairclough (2003) in Management and Organisation Studies. DA explores the ideological effects of the children's constructions, that is examining their experience through their used language in an attempt to generate insights that contribute to the understanding, establishing, maintaining and changing social relations of power, domination and exploitation (Fairclough 2003). This approach also connects with the Foucauldian approach to discourse that takes into account social and cultural systems of power and knowledge by which subjects construct their worlds (Gubrium and Holstein 2000). The analytical focus falls on the structure, function and action orientation of talk and text (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). The discourse is analysed not only for structures of meaning but also for the social function served by a given mode of expression. Talk is hence thought of as having an action orientation in the sense that it is not merely *about*

things but it also *does* things, such as achieving a certain social positioning for the speaker.

4.21.2 Discourse Analysis: Micro and Macro Levels

Discourse analysis has been acknowledged as a method to generate social and cultural insights through the language used by the individuals to explain themselves, their emotions, their relationships and the environment that surrounds them. There is no one method of discourse analysis, discourses can be explained at differing levels, in fact there is a spectrum along which discourses can be positioned that was highlighted by Alvesson and Karreman (2002). This spectrum of analysis ranges from micro, specific organisational contexts to the examination of the use of more macro discourses, which pervade society more broadly. So at one end discourses are considered as a separate rhetoric uncoupled with meaning, followed by an approach that considers discourse as reflecting meaning and at the further end of the spectrum there is the approach that considers discourse as a structuring, constituting force which determines meaning, practice and subjectivity within a society (Alvesson and Karreman, 2002). See below Figure 4.5.

Figure 4.5: Discourse Spectrum



Source: Adapted from Alvesson and Karreman, 2002.

In this study, the researcher started off exploring the micro discourses in terms of examining the language used by the children to explain their view on their experience with video games and analyse the discourse to reflect meaning, then link these to more macro discourses in an attempt to explore changing social relations of power, socialisation, domination and exploitation, thus examining language not just as a reflection of meaning but as constructing meaning.

4.21.3 Language

Discourse analysis has been used as a generic term for research concerned with language in its social and cognitive context. It has been acknowledged that DA tackles linguistic concerns and language philosophy, thus focuses on language as a social practice in its own right and examines how individuals use it to define themselves and the world they live in. There is a huge variation in types of DA depending on the level of discourse itself that have been highlighted in figure 4.4. Potter et al. (1990) also claim that two books on DA might not have any overlapping content (Potter et al., 1990). Not only this, but it can be argued that within the same level of discourse different researchers analyse discourses differently. This thought stemmed from Potter and Wetherell (1987) who argue that different researchers in DA generally agree on a sole thing that is “terminological confusions abound” (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 6). Thus even consistency across discourses does not illustrate the underlying reality of the phenomenon or a personality trait but rather it is considered a signpost to a specific repertoire that helps in drawing insights on the phenomenon. Marshall (1994) further explains this view noting that anti-essentialist viewpoints whether the subjects of the study or the researcher, draw on alternative versions of reality according to their experience. Thus social research that falls under a social constructionist approach is concerned about representing a social phenomenon rather than capturing a social phenomenon (Derrida, 1973). Accordingly, it can be argued that this research employs DA as it does not aim to test theories but is merely a tool for creating a subjective understanding that is socially constructed by both the subjects and the researcher.

4.21.4 DA and Identifying Interpretive Repertoires

In DA, it has been acknowledged that the unit of analysis is the language rather than the individual themselves. Accordingly, language plays a powerful, active, and constructive role in reproducing and transforming power relations within a society along several cultural and social dimensions (Anderson, 1988). It is acknowledged that analysing discourse requires deploying a degree of intuition to identify interpretive repertoires, which are implicit themes, suggested to generate insights for a phenomenon (Holloway, 1989; Billig et al., 1988; Potter and Mulkay, 1985). The notion of interpretive repertoires is not a theory but rather an analytical approach that

offers a high level of flexibility and permits many variations especially with research based in social constructionism such as this one. Potter and Wetherell (1987) refer to the idea of identifying interpretive repertoires as an initial gross categorisation of the empirical data that constitutes a primary step in the analytical approach to discourse. And since the researcher is concerned with regularities at the level of language, it is important to analyse the empirical data and identify major interpretive repertoires for further analysis. These regularities at the level of language are emergent socially constructed repertoires that are identified and have a regulatory effect on the social domain (Marshall, 1994; Dick, 2004). In other words, they act as repertoires through which participants construct meaning. As noted in Chapter One, the analytical phase of the study identified five major interpretive repertoires from the data sets. These repertoires are then broken down and discussed in detail with regard to the various implications in the analysis.

4.21.5 Criticisms of DA

Like other research methods, DA is criticised heavily. The social constructionist stance of DA draws particular criticisms (for example Reed, 1998; Newton, 1998). Some of these criticisms claim that DA denies the existence of real world out there and encourages a moral nihilism where unethical acts are dismissed as having no material reality (Reed 1998). These accusations are countered by Fairclough (2003) who argues that critical DA focuses on analysing discourse to understand the way subjects construct their lives and that those constructed realities are not independent from material realities (Fairclough, 2003). Furthermore, Dick (2004) counters the nihilism argument by pointing out that DA focuses on language as a deterrent for our understanding of social practices, even those unethical ones, through constructed discourse and those understandings are not rigid but are rather open to change (Dick, 2004).

4.21.6 Transcription Difficulties

It is acknowledged that DA as a research method has many limitations which were taken into account when conducting the research. Some of these limitations include difficulties of transcription due to ambiguities and different coding schemes (Stubbs, 1983). In this research, data sets were conducted in person by the researcher and also

transcribed by hand by the researcher following Potter and Wetherell (1987) transcription conventions and amounted to approximately twenty seven thousand words of interview text. Since it is acknowledged that possibilities for re-interpretation of the interviews exist, the transcribing was carried out in as natural style as possible, preserving informal and grammatical linguistic speech so that the meaning would be as clear and transparent as possible. Repetitions, stutters and stops were noted so that the reader can capture the essence of the actual interview and have as accurate a representation of it as is possible.

Chapter Summary

Chapter four has discussed the various methodological issues relevant to the study, locating it in an interpretive/social constructionist research paradigm. The various choices of data gathering method, sampling and data analysis were explained in the broader context of the research philosophy that frames the study. Discourse analysis, as the chosen analytical approach, was discussed, and the wider context of Consumer Culture Theory consumer research was also outlined in order to further locate the study within relevant literatures. The level of discussion focused mainly on theoretical issues. Chapter Five will now explain how these theoretical issues translated into specific detail as regards the practical issues of data gathering and analysis.

Chapter Five
Setting the Empirical Context:
Data Gathering Procedure, Sampling and Analysis

Chapter Outline

This thesis has now set out the research aim and objectives for the study, established a theoretical context in a cross-disciplinary review of previous published research, and located the study within an interpretive and qualitative research paradigm. The thesis now develops the empirical phase of the research by setting out in greater detail the practical steps that were taken to gather and analyse the data sets. The process of deciding on analytical method, sampling, and conduct of the data-gathering sessions is described.

5.9.0 Re-iteration of the Nature of the Study

As noted in previous chapters, the study at hand aims to investigate children's experience with video games. It is argued that the presence of video games in the centre of their lives makes their social and material environment quite different from those of previous generations. It is acknowledged that some researchers have studied video games and their effect on adult players (such as Griffiths, 1999), yet there is little empirical research that studies the engagement of children with video games. This study is methodologically unusual in that it assesses the phenomenon from the perspective of the children themselves, taking into account their own subjective experience. One reason why there is relatively little research that tackles the children's experience is the difficulty of research access because of the vulnerable nature of the subjects and the legal constraints, especially in the UK, that hinders researchers from approaching children as subjects of their research. Moreover, the phenomenon of children's lives revolving around digital communication is relatively recent, and therefore it is still not yet recognised as a major subject of social study in some countries. Thus robust theory that explores this phenomenon has not yet evolved. Accordingly, an exploratory approach is adopted in the present study rather than a confirmatory approach, in-keeping with the early stage of development of this

field of research in a study which takes on the subjective perspective of the children themselves as users/consumers of video games.

5.10.0 Methodological Approach

As noted previously, the theory in this area of research is not yet well developed and there is a need to generate deeper qualitative insights rather than seeking cause-effect relationships. It is axiomatic that exploring the children's experiences of video games and how this informs and shapes their culture and socialisation is conveyed by the children's behavioural patterns and their sense making interpretations of their actions, feelings and thoughts. These patterns and interpretations are produced from their language, behaviour and social practices (Hackley, 2003; Easterby et al., 2008), thus in this research these aspects are scrutinised in an attempt to understand an aspect of the children's social life. This research falls broadly within Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) as it views children as "interpretative agents" or "culture producers" rather than passive dupes as Arnold and Thompson (2005) put it, while video games are analysed as elements for generating meaning and culture for those children. Accordingly, discourse analysis is chosen as the methodological approach, since the analysis of qualitative data sets through interpretive methods is deemed the best way forward in this research given its qualitative, exploratory and language-mediated nature. The textual data analysed was gained through interviews and discussion groups with children and their parents, and also from practitioners in the gaming industry. In addition, informal data informed the interpretation, including informal discussions with adult players, and observation of and inter-action with children as they played the games. The aim overall is to generate insights into how the children make sense of their lived world of video games and how they attempt to give meaning to it. Ethnomethodological data were also used to give context to the analysis, these included field notes and researcher's observations. In this sense, the knowledge gained represents the meanings children attach to their experience with video games.

5.11.0 Data Gathering Process

The data gathering process started with a small pilot study and two practitioner interviews to explore possible ways forward in the study and to elaborate on contextual understanding of the video games area. Although the main interest was in

the consumption of video games by children, an initial decision was taken to solicit interviews from senior professional game industry managers as well, in order to add context to the later findings. These interviews were important as they offered first hand information about the gaming industry and where the children fit within the industry plans. Due to some technical difficulties with the recording equipment, only one interview was fully audio recorded and fully transcribed while the other was not recorded and the researcher depended on taking notes in the interview. Initial pilot interviews with three children were also carried out. This assisted in shaping the agenda for questioning and the research questions in subsequent data gathering.

Subsequently, in the main data-gathering phase of the study five semi-structured focus/discussion groups were conducted with a total of 20 children, with no parents present, at a children's day care centre, Surrey, on the 2nd and 3rd of June 2011 as well as four in-depth interviews with three siblings and their mother (separately) in their own home on the 14th of June 2011. In addition, use was made of informal discussions with parents, children and centre employees, and, as mentioned above, informal observation of and interaction with the children. This informal data, including casual conversations, comments and informal inter-actions was important in helping to elaborate on the contextual understanding of the topic outside the formal settings of the focus groups.

5.2.1 The focus groups and the interviews each lasted between 15 and 50 minutes. Within this timescale the children spoke enthusiastically and easily about the topic. Time was limited due not only to the children's attention spans but also because of limits on the time made available for the research in the day care centre's routine. The focus groups and interviews were semi-structured in that they entailed the researcher moving through a series of predetermined questions with the overall aim of understanding the role of video games in the children's lives, while allowing the discussions and comments to evolve freely and spontaneously around these topics. The decision of conducting focus groups in a day care centre was quite beneficial to the study as it resulted in capturing rich data within a relaxed, safe and neutral yet stimulating environment for the children. All data sets were audio recorded and fully

transcribed. The researcher was the moderator of all interviews and focus groups that were conducted.

5.12.0 Sample Selection

In a study of this nature convenience sampling is the only approach possible given the extreme sensitivity of gaining access to children for research purposes in the UK. This involved lengthy negotiations and bureaucratic process. The access that was eventually gained was of high quality, with a set of children for whom access to computer and video games as well as other handheld technology was taken-for-granted among their peers. The age range of children to take part was decided upon, and all parents were asked for and gave their consent. These children were entirely at ease in the environment of the day care centre and they were also at ease with the researcher and became very friendly with her over a period of two days. Consequently, the formal focus groups were lively and energetic with children offering their views in an uninhibited way. The children gave every impression of thoroughly enjoying the focus groups, and they took full advantage of the opportunity to offer their own views and experiences. It is recognised that a small convenience sample such as this will not yield universally applicable findings. The sample group was ethnically heterogeneous but relatively affluent and articulate and not representative of the wider UK demographic in terms of class, ethnicity or parental income. This is an assumption as it was not possible or appropriate to ask detailed questions of parental background. However, in-keeping with interpretive research principles, it was felt that the experience of these children held insights that may well reflect elements of commonality with larger numbers of children, given that the experiences they describe are common to children across demographic categories. In fact, this is part of the interest of the topic, since video games act as a common cultural vocabulary for children of very different backgrounds.

5.3.1 The first interviews in the pilot study were conducted with two senior practitioners in the gaming industry, who gave their time and shared their knowledge and experience. This provided valuable context for the study. The first practitioner is a CEO of a UK based company that designs video games and has a partnership with Sony Computer Entertainment Europe (SCEE) to design social video games. The

second practitioner is the regional director of business development in a big multinational company that is a major player in the video gaming industry developing consoles and games.

5.3.2 The focus groups and interviews were conducted with children aged between 6 and 12. It was decided that this age range was the most suitable to interview because younger children might not be able to articulate their feelings about video games so lucidly, while older ones (teenagers) might be inhibited from doing so to a stranger. Four of the focus groups were with boys only, and one had three girls. In previous studies, researchers have suggested that boys and girls differ in their ability and preference for video games, as boys tend to be more into video gaming (Griffiths and Hunt, 1995). Hence the researcher decided not to have any mixed gender focus groups for fear that the boys would dominate the focus group and the girls would be reluctant to participate. The children, especially the male focus groups, were very enthusiastic indeed about the topic and happy to talk at length about their experiences of computer games in their lives. The girls, while less ebullient, were also keen to talk about the topic.

5.3.3 Four in-depth interviews were conducted with three siblings and their mother (each separately, on the same day, in their home). The children were two boys aged twelve and five and a girl aged nine. This data-gathering phase enabled the topic to be viewed from within a family dynamic and therefore added valuable context to the de-contextualised focus group data sets. The total time spent with all interview participants and focus group subjects amount to five hours of interviewing with an average of 30 minutes each.

5.13.0 Interview Locations

The pilot interview that was conducted with the CEO of a gaming company was held in one of the meeting rooms at a building in London, where his friends and colleagues would meet weekly to discuss the new trends in the market and other topics of interest. The other practitioner was interviewed at a location near his house that was of convenience for both him and the researcher. As for the focus groups, the day care centre in Old Windsor was approached with the help of a university contact. The day

care centre caters for children ranging from 4 to 12 who attend this club after school and on holidays. The Club was approached at the beginning of the summer break to ensure a suitable number of children would be present. As for the in-depth interviews, they were conducted with members within the same family at their home. The researcher interviewed the three siblings and the mother each on their own in the living area.

5.14.0 Interview Agenda

The pilot interviews substantiated by literature review in the early stage helped in shaping the interview agenda, which evolved progressively throughout the study. At the beginning, based on the literature review, the primary interest was on identity as most research touched upon the reason why players enjoy playing video games and how these games offer them a ‘playground’ for identity experimentation and self-realisation, coupled with an experience of escapism and fantasy. Yet, after conducting pilot studies, it became clear that these are just two among many potential issues, which arise in this area of study. It was apparent that socialisation issues varying across multiple themes are relevant to such a phenomenon. An additional fact was that, unlike most of the previous published research that focuses on adult players, this one is investigating children and their subjective experience of video games. Consequently, the issues arising needed to be framed by previous research focusing specifically on children in particular.

5.5.1 The Importance of the Socialisation theme

Socialisation themes varied from child-parent socialisation to child’s socialisation with the surroundings, whether with siblings, other children or other individuals. Also it was claimed that with the upsurge of the digitisation phenomenon, children have a new form of socialisation with other children in the form of video games developing a form of neo-tribalism or a collective identity around a common interest. However, it was evident that the bigger portion of children’s socialisation is still based on the traditional means of school and club peers rather than strangers on the web. Video games were not necessarily a form of escapism or identity realisation or experimentation that was radically removed or separated away from the rest of life, but rather a continuation. For example, most of the children who claimed an interest

in doing sports were also interested in playing video games of that sport. In other words, video games seemed to extend and elaborate on the socialisation and identity issues that children engaged in in their lives outside of video games. The location of video games on a continuum of socialisation rather than as an arena which is separate and distinct from other facets of their lives, such as school, physical play, family inter-action and face-to-face social engagement, is an important analytical point. This is attributed to the simplistic cause-effect theses that are often claimed as regards video games and their putative unidirectional ‘effects *on*’ children’s development and behaviour. In sum, it was considered that socialisation themes rather than identity themes offered a more resonant analytical approach to studying the phenomenon of children and their experience with video games.

5.5.2 The Final Interviews Agenda

The in-depth interviews were conducted with a loose agenda since the expertise and experience of the interviewees was being sought so they needed the flexibility and informality to develop their own responses. After an opening comment from the interviewer about the broad topic of interest, the discussion flowed naturally with occasional interjections for elaboration. The focus groups and interviews with children took a slightly more structured approach. Due to the nature of the children, whether the over activity or shyness, it was important to have a semi structured interview to make sure that the children stay focused and did not deviate too much away from the topic discussed. The interview pattern consisted of the following:

- An introduction phase in which the researcher introduced herself and explained in a simple manner her research topic. Also, the researcher faked ignorance of video games, in an attempt to illicit more cooperation from the children and to entice them to share their experience more freely. This was very successful as children, especially boys, felt more powerful and sought to share as much information to prove their expertise in the field.
- Participants/children were then asked to introduce themselves and talk about what game consoles they own if any and what games they play, and which genre they prefer and why. This was just a stage for warming up the children, to engage their

enthusiasm and to observe their preference for the genres of games and the reasons given for this.

- Following that, children were also asked about the frequency of playing video games, and whom they play with. They were also asked how they obtain new games, and how they find out about them. Each participant was given a chance to answer the question and the researcher rarely needed to ask for elaboration, as the children were very enthusiastic about the topic and had so much to say and express.
- At this point the researcher steered the topic away from video games and attempted to explore other activities that the participants engage in and to what extent they enjoy them. This was in order to gain some understanding of the relative importance of computer games to the children in relation to other activities.
- At this stage a strong rapport between the researcher and the participants had been established and more enthusiasm for the topic took over as the researcher opened the floor for the children to share any other experience or opinion related to the topic.

The interviews did not have a time limit and they reached a natural end as conversations. The researcher kept asking the participants if there was anything else they would like to share several times and each time a new idea was put forward until there was none left. At this point the interview was terminated and the participants were thanked for their collaboration.

5.15.0 Ethical Issues

Normal ethical approval was gained from the university after scrutiny by the research ethics committee. However, in this study there were additional ethical issues involved because the study involved children as research subjects/participants. Due to the vulnerable nature of children, there are many legal constraints on access to them. Accordingly, any researcher who wishes to approach children is asked to go through a series of criminal checks and ethical consents to ensure that they are of no danger to the children. However since the researcher is not an EU resident, the criminal record check was waived, but ethical consents from the university and the department had to be acquired. This was just the primary stage, as further consent from the day care

centre had to be attained. The access gained (helped by the kind solicitation of university contacts) was highly unusual and therefore extremely valuable. Even with a recommendation and support from one of the board members of the club, it took two months of bureaucracy and negotiation to finally be able to go to the club and conduct the focus groups.

5.6.1 Once at the club, the researcher was required by the club manager to obtain the individual consent of the parent of each child to be involved. After spending two days at the club, the head helper asked the researcher to consider a part time job in the club. However, the club manager remained worried about giving consent for research to be carried out in the club.

For the parental consents, the researcher devised a form in which the research issue was explained and the questions to be asked to the children were listed. None of the parents refused to allow their children to participate after reading the form. The form is reproduced in Appendix A.

5.16.0 The Researcher and Participants' Reflexivity and Sincerity

It needs to be acknowledged that this research is based within the social constructionist theory that places an importance on the interactive construction of knowledge between the researcher and the children being researched. The theory implies that knowledge is an on-going process of creation and recreation and that social interaction is central in constructing a subject's view of the world (Derrida, 1973). Hence, the researcher and the children could be viewed as collaborators in the construction of knowledge on the phenomenon under study. Accordingly, it was important to explore the perspectives and views of the children being researched, without neglecting to account for the influence of the researcher's own life experience on the construction of knowledge. This essentially follows DuBois's (1983) dictum about how the knower is part of the matrix of what is known. Personal reflexivity is acknowledged as the researcher notes that the interviews and analysis of discourse texts are value-laden. This is recognised through the language and how the researcher positioned herself in the process of the interviews, not to mention the choice of the findings the researcher deemed important.

5.7.1 Many discourse analytic studies consider the variations in accounts (Elliott 1997, Potter and Wetherell, 1987), which can reveal the function of discourses or interpretive repertoires. The familiarity factor among the children was beneficial to the research as children were aware that they have to warrant their beliefs and stories. It seemed clear that male children especially were subject to a social expectation that they were knowledgeable in particular games and game genres, so voicing their knowledge in the setting of a focus group among friends reflected and amplified the kind of identity strategy they would undertake in natural settings when they interacted with these friends and others outside the interview room. Being seen to be au fait with games was an entry ticket to the friendship group.

5.17.0 Analytical Procedure

Potter and Wetherell's (1987) transcription conventions were adapted in the transcription of data sets. Since all interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded-except for one (as noted earlier)- ten transcripts were reproduced in full as well as field notes. This amounted to approximately twenty seven thousand words of transcribed data. In order to preserve the anonymity of the participants in this study, pseudonomic initials replaced their real names.

Figure 5.1: Transcription conventions adapted from Potter and Wetherell (1987).

=	Indicates the absence of a discernable gap between speakers
(.)	A pause of less than 1 second
(1), (2)	A pause of 1 second, 2 seconds and so on
(...)	Some transcript has been deliberately omitted
[DB laughs]	Material in square brackets is clarifying information
<u>They</u>	A word or phrase underlined indicates additional emphasis
[as you can	Left square brackets indicates overlapping speech.

5.8.1 Interpretive Repertoires

Lately many studies have been using the NVivo program for extracting major themes in qualitative data analysis. However this study resorted to the traditional way of analysis in which the transcripts were read many times in the process of coding and extracting major themes. Colour coding was used with the physical transcripts. This is mainly attributed to the researcher's desire to analyse not only the spoken language but also to look deeper at the context in which points were made, taking account of the tone as well as the body posture that contributed to the understanding of the phenomenon. The author personally conducted all the interviews and focus groups, and then personally transcribed all data sets by hand. A personal approach to the data analysis was preferred over the use of impersonal data analytic software because of the nuance and texture that first hand experience of a social situation can capture. In addition, the informal and subjective elements of the data gathering process were brought to bear on the data analysis, and this would not be so easy to do using data analytic software. The data transcripts were read and re-read many times and grouped into key themes, many of which were subsequently subsumed into others. The themes inter-act and overlap, but after exhaustive analysis it was felt that five themes in particular captured the essence of the findings most appropriately. The themes were interpreted in terms of Potter and Wetherell's (1987) analytical concept of 'interpretive repertoires', meaning ways of talking about something which forms a discursive resource which orients the speaker in terms of alternative subject positions. The interpretive repertoire is a very flexible concept that can be seen as a framework of representation that may include particular words or phrases but may also include broader forms of representation such as tone, ideas and gestures and abstract categories. Interpretive repertoires are not mutually exclusive- they overlap and interpenetrate each other, and they may be made up of many sub-repertoires. However, they represent major categories and themes from which the overall findings and conclusions are considered within the light of the extant literature. Overall, interpretive repertoires offer a way of organising qualitative data sets thematically and in the next three chapters this study begins to elaborate in detail on each repertoire.

5.8.2 Each interpretive repertoire represents a super-ordinate category of meaning that runs through the entire data set. In other words, the various repertoires are not

treated as if they emerged within isolated fragments of data only but as general categories reflecting a holistic sense of analysis that may be illustrated by quotes from any of the interviews or focus groups, and informed by the researcher's understanding of the whole topic gleaned from informal data as well. While attention is paid to gender and age issues, the repertoires are supported by quotes regardless of the age or gender of the speaker where appropriate if it supports and illustrates the repertoire. There is no suggestion in this form of DA that the interpretive repertoires described are the only ones that could possibly have been extracted from the data sets. Rather, they are assigned through the interpretive judgment of the researcher, balanced by the consideration of all other contextual issues. For transparency, a selection of the transcripts is reproduced in Appendix B.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 5 has addressed the practicalities of carrying out the empirical phase of the research, and described the procedures of carrying out the focus groups and interviews, the schedule of questions, how ethical issues were handled, and the assumptions the researcher brought to the conduct of the interviews and focus groups. The next three chapters will offer the findings with a detailed account around the five major interpretive repertoires arising from the discourse analysis of the focus groups and interviews.

Chapter Six

Findings I

Chapter Outline

Chapter 6 begins detailing the analysis and findings of the empirical research. This and the subsequent two chapters will set out the way in which the empirical datasets have been interpreted and resolved into five interlocking and overlapping interpretive repertoires. Chapter Six deals with the first two interpretive repertoires, 'Digital Savviness and Group Membership', and 'Video Games, Children's Age and Gender'. Subsequently, Chapter Seven will deal with one repertoire in some detail, 'Video Games as a Source of Empowerment for Children', and the accounts of the last two repertoires, 'Video Games, Children's Development and Socialisation', and 'Negotiating the Ideological Dilemma of Video Game in Popular Culture' will be detailed in Chapter Eight. Each interpretive repertoire will be described drawing on many of the data sources, as will be explained throughout. The findings chapters will focus on the interpretation of empirical data, while Chapter Nine will offer the theoretical contribution by linking the findings back into the earlier literature review.

6.0.0 Introduction to the Interpretive Repertoires

In this research study data were collected from five focus groups and six in-depth interviews, as noted in previous chapters. In the coding process of the transcripts, five main categories of interpretive repertoires are resolved. These repertoires are intended to offer a holistic insight of the varying positions and arguments of the participating children, informed by information from parents and industry representatives. Thompson's (1990) phenomenological and paradigmatic categories of insight provide the framework of this chapter. The transcripts are analysed and interpretations are formulated that resonated with the researcher and shed light on the phenomenon of children and video games from a new angle. The analysis is intended to make the researcher's reasoning and analysis as transparent as possible using direct quotes from the data sets. Following are the five main categories of interpretive repertoires constructed in this research. Each repertoire will be described and then supported by direct quotes from the data sets and the reflexive interpretation of the researcher

1. "Digital savviness and group membership"

2. “Video games, children’s age and gender”
3. “Video games as a source of empowerment for children”
4. “Video games, children’s development and socialisation”
5. “Negotiating the ideological dilemma of video games in popular culture”

6.1.0 Digital Savviness and Group Membership

This repertoire focuses on the role of video games in children’s social standing. It seemed that knowledge and ownership of video games and consoles was important in defining the children’s social status and for being an accepted member of the group. Moreover, savviness in the sense of having authoritative knowledge of digital media, games and related jargon seemed to be a way for asserting power within a group by maintaining a certain subject position. This repertoire also touches upon other implications of social identity that describe how video games have become a social agent for the children along with traditional non-gaming social activities.

In the following section, the construction of this repertoire is detailed through the sub-themes that make up the super-ordinate theme. The first one is described as the ‘cool’ factor.

6.1.1 The “Cool Factor”

In this section, we look at how knowledge of video games and ownership of consoles are considered an important way for children to make friends and become a member of the in-group by appearing ‘cool’. In one of the focus groups conducted, ‘O.K.’, an eleven-year-old boy, when asked how long he has been playing video games, stated the following:

“FG-1:

‘O.K.’ Male 11 yrs.: I haven’t been playing it that long, it’s probably, last year or the year before when all the consoles came out and everything and everyone started talking about it (...) yeah I kinda felt a bit left out so I had to have it to be part of the group and everything.”

‘O.K.’’s association of the ownership of consoles to being part of the group gives an idea of how children view video gaming as a ticket for group membership. It is quite

clear from what he said that he didn't want to feel left out as other children were talking about the consoles while he wasn't part of it. The desire for the sense of belongingness to the group is what drove him to start playing video games. The factor of "coolness" that lends itself to consoles was also apparent in another focus group when 'B.R.' an eleven-year-old boy voiced a sentence of assertiveness as 'J.T.' ten-year-old boy was naming the consoles he owns:

"FG-4:

'J.T.' Male 10 yrs.: I have xbox, wii, DS, Nintendo 64=

'B.R.' Male 11 yrs.: =this is cool=

'J.T.' Male 10 yrs.: yeah I know they are cool"

It seems that children view the ownership of certain consoles as the gateway for group membership and acceptance, i.e. being "cool". However, not only do the children realise that but also the parents.

6.1.2 In the interview with the mother of three children, she revealed the real reason why she introduced video games to them. The mother explained that her eldest son suffers from attention-deficit hyper-activity disorder (ADHD), which inhibited his social interaction as he found it difficult to make friends. Realising that video games are children's ticket to acceptance and group membership, she decided to get them different consoles so as to keep up with the other children and hope her eldest son would benefit from them given his condition.

"Interview-4:

Mother: (...) but there are also aspects of his ability with social interaction (.) because he finds it more difficult to make friends (.) so as his friends were all playing computer games we made the decision just to buy every console so we bought the Xbox, we bought the Wii and we bought DSi and that was the first they had any exposure to it and he had to keep up with that because of friendships (.) but what it do (.) it improved his motor skills in his fingers (...) so as he got better at writing and playing games, his confidence also built up as well (...) [previously]he would never stick at a task, but to learn how to play the computer games with his friends he had to sit at night on his own and be able to be as good as them (...) it is a challenge to him".

This quote shows that the boy's mother believed that video games actually helped her twelve-year-old son, 'J.M.', make friends, improve his skills of concentration and build up his confidence by making him more popular and 'cool' within his peer group. This was clearly a very welcome improvement in her son's social confidence which apparently resulted in an improvement in his skills of concentration and social inter-action. Consequently the mother allowed her son to have the game console in his room so he would play whenever he likes.

Looking at this example from 'J.M.'s angle, as he mentioned earlier in his interview and his mother supported, video games are a challenge for him. He needs to master them, in order to fit in among his friends and to overcome his ADHD. In so doing he wins entry to the social peer group because he now has something in common with the other boys to talk about.

6.1.3 The idea of being part of the group even extends to the games being played either online or offline. In one of the focus groups, when asked if they like video games, an argument between two children, 'N.G.' and 'C.W.', aged 7 and 8, was witnessed, one of whom claimed he preferred a traditional board game to video games.

"FG-5:

'N.G.' Male 8 yrs.: we love them (.) we love them [video games]

'C.W.' Male 7 yrs.: not as much as I like Lego star wars

'N.G.' Male 8 yrs.: come on (.) number 3 on the Wii?

'C.W.' Male 7 yrs.: no not on the Wii

'N.G.' Male 8 yrs.: ohhhh come on!!"

In this argument, seven-year-old 'C.W.' voiced his preference for a game named Lego star wars over video games. 'C.W.' claimed that this game is an actual Lego game and not a video game as the researcher and the other boys in the focus group thought. At this point eight-year-old 'N.G.' heatedly dismissed that preference and thought it was quite unbelievable that 'C.W.' would prefer an actual Lego game to video games. So within every age group, there seems to be a number of games that can be called the "in games" or the accepted games to be played. If a child is not

playing them then they are highly criticised by their counterparts as is the case mentioned above. Another incident -within the same line of thought- took place when an eleven-year-old boy, 'B.R.' made an over-generalising statement that he and his friends, present in the focus group, all love a certain game. This statement gave rise to an interesting conversation among the four boys taking part in the focus group, aged between 10 and 11 present:

“FG-4:

- 'B.R.' Male 11 yrs.: (...) we all love Pokémon
'J.G.' Male 11 yrs.: I have the latest one
'J.T.' Male 10 yrs.: I don't play it much anymore
'B.R.' Male 11 yrs.: yeah but you traded it (.) you traded it with me
'J.T.' Male 10 yrs.: yeah I traded it today
'C.T.' Male 10 yrs.: you outcast!!”

In this conversation, eleven-year-old boy 'B.R.' mentioned a video game called Pokémon. Apparently this game happens to be quite a popular game among males of this age group as has been observed from different focus groups. 'B.R.' claimed that they all love the game and this sentence gave rise to two different responses from his friends; 'J.G.' another eleven-year-old boy, was keen to mention that he has the latest edition of the game, hence asserting the “coolness” and superiority. While on the other hand ten-year-old boy, 'J.T.' stated that he doesn't play it anymore, and in fact he traded it with 'B.R.', the eleven-year-old boy. At this point 'C.T.', another ten-year-old boy called 'J.T.' an “outcast” because he has given away the game, which is what he believed the “in game” or “The” game to be played. From this conversation, children associate meaning and status to the ownership of consoles and playing specific games. Fondness for particular games can denote a symbol of maturity or emotional development, at least within the children's peer group.

6.1.4 The sensitivity of age for particular games was illustrated in the opposite way as well. While some children earned disapproval for liking games that were regarded by the group as young for their age, others earned respect for playing games that were age restricted for an older age group. In one of the focus groups, when the researcher

asked an eight-year-old boy to list the games he played, the following conversation resulted from his answer:

“FG-2:

‘F.F.’ Male 8 yrs.: Fifa, the Simpsons, James bond =

‘L.S.’ Male 9 yrs.: =what James bond

‘R.S.’ Male 6yrs.: James Bond!! You are not allowed to watch that (.) you have to be double your age to watch that

‘V.R.’ Male 7 yrs.: double your age! It’s 12?=
‘K.J.’ Male 7 yrs.: yeah 12

‘R.S.’ Male 6 yrs.: yeah well you are not 12, it has a lot of blood

[RS, KJ, VR yukkkkkkk]

‘D.B.’: so it’s not your age but=

‘F.F.’ Male 8 yrs.: =it’s okay [calmly smiling]”

It is apparent that the answer given by eight-year-old ‘F.F.’ elicited different sentiments among different age groups. The game, James Bond, is a 12+ certified shoot-em-up game and ‘F.F.’ listed it among the games he plays even though he is only eight. So on the one hand nine-year-old ‘L.S.’ viewed this as an achievement and something to look up to, as in being able to play such games, which he is probably not allowed to play. On the other hand, the younger boys were quite shocked as to how he could play such a 12+ game filled with blood and gore and viewed it as disgusting. However, the reason why ‘F.F.’ listed this game could be attributed to the desire for status among his friends by claiming the ability to play advanced games for elder players. This was quite apparent by his calm, poised reply dismissing his friends’ uproar on his choice of games. So it can be argued that the children in these focus groups consider three factors as affecting their social status among their counterparts; the consoles they own, the games they play (so if they have access to adults games then they are “cooler”) and their mastery or skill level in playing the games.

6.1.5 This was further witnessed several times in different focus groups. In the case of console ownership, the following was encountered with two ten-year-old boys, ‘C.T.’ and ‘J.T.’, when ‘C.T.’ was asked which games he played. He insisted on

naming the consoles he owns first in a bragging manner while his friend, 'J.T.' sarcastically pointed out that 'C.T.' actually owns all kinds of consoles:

"FG-4:

'C.T.' Male 10 yrs.: I have (.) let me go through my games consoles first =

'J.T.' Male 10 yrs.: =all of them

'C.T.' Male 10 yrs.: 2 DSs, a gameboy, an xbox with kinect, a Nintendo wii and I think an old Atari I'm not sure".

It can be seen how 'C.T.' was taking pride in the ownership of different consoles, naming all the types of consoles even those that no longer exist in the market i.e. Atari. This was 'C.T.'s way of claiming superiority among his friends through his ownership of the different consoles. As for mastery of games, in one of the focus groups, a seven-year-old boy claimed that his friends actually seek his help to reach advanced levels:

"FG-1

'J.L.' Male 7yrs.: sometimes my friends ask me to help them with their games...the advanced levels".

There was a tone of gratification as 'J.L.' was saying how his friends seek his help to finish their games. In another focus group, when the researcher was introducing the topic to the boys and saying that she is seeking their experience of video games, an eleven-year-old boy 'B.R.' immediately sought attention by claiming superiority over the other boys in the group. He decided to make it clear that he's the expert in the group since he helps them all with their games. This statement didn't fall too well on the other boys as they voiced their disagreement with it. What is worth mentioning is that only the younger boys, ten-year-old, expressed their disagreement whether fully or partially. As one of them 'J.T.' dismissed the idea of being helped at all and said that he was the one helping him. While the other, 'C.T.' agreed reluctantly and implicitly that he was being helped, but still said that he does not help him with his games at home. However, the other eleven-year-old boy, 'J.G.', who did not take part in this argument, was the one who put an end to it by telling the other boys in a firm voice to stop arguing.

“FG-4

- ‘B.R.’ Male 11 yrs.: I help all these guys (.) I help CT (.) I help JG (.) JT=
‘J.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: =hey hey no you don’t, I help you
‘C.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: ok ok you don’t help me with my games at home
(.....)
‘J.G.’ Male 11 yrs.: Guys! Don’t argue”

It can be inferred that those boys viewed that reaching a level of mastery in video games and helping others confers status in the group through authoritative power. Power here is in terms of status among their counterparts and ego satisfaction. Some children seem to resort to the traditional technique for expressing power by not engaging in arguments and rather putting an end to them, as eleven-year-old ‘J.G.’ did.

6.1.6 In the following quote two boys tried to outdo each other in knowledge in explaining a technical term, the mini-clip, to the researcher:

“FG-2:

- ‘F.F.’ Male 8 yrs.: you just type in ‘mini clip’ and then you type the name of the game or the genre and lots of games come up
‘K.J.’ Male 7 yrs.: or in the bookmark page you write it down there and so you save it and then you go and click on there and it just comes up”

‘K.J.’ the seven-year-old boy decided to show off his knowledge and elaborate on the knowledge that ‘F.F.’ had offered. This was his way to ensure his status among the other boys by showing off his digital knowledge. In another example of one-upmanship in game-related knowledge and skill, ten-year-old ‘J.S.’ showed an interest in comparing his level with his friends:

“FG-1:

- ‘J.S.’ Male 10 yrs.: well yeah (.) I sorta have an account, which shows which level you are on compared to your friends”

This seemed like quite an important issue for ‘J.S.’ to know where he stands among his friends when it comes to the game level. So, again, achieving mastery in video

games is an integral part in the children's ideology of social status. This ideology seems to extend to the younger age groups as well. In Interview-3, five-year-old 'L.G.' expressed his fondness for video games, even though not many of his friends play them. He even preferred them to other outdoor activities:

“Interview-3:

'D.B.': why do you love it?

'L.G.' Male 5 yrs.: it's just they are so cool

'D.B.': and do your friends all play it?

'L.G.' Male 5 yrs.: no not many (.) some of my friends (.) all the other guys in my school they don't even have the wii

'D.B.': do you like the trampoline more or playing the video games more?

'L.G.' Male 5 yrs.: I think I like the video games better

'D.B.': why?

'L.G.' Male 5 yrs.: because they are quite cooler”

From this conversation, the link between video games and group membership or social status is not quite clear. Other children within the same age group of 'L.G.' do not share the same interest or are still too young to realise the connection. However, upon interviewing 'L.G.'s mother, she helped clear up the rationale behind his comments:

“Interview-4:

Mother: [laughing] yeah that's his social status, he's more advanced than children of his own age, because at the club all the children can't get through levels that he's able to do at home so he shows them and at the club they come and say to me that L has to show the bigger children again how to defeat something on level 43 (.) I don't understand it (.) so he understands social hierarchy and he likes that”.

As the mother noted that 'L.G.' is actually smart and happens to be quite good at video games. This is attributed to the fact that he started playing them at a very young age. The mother explained that when she decided to get video games consoles at home to help her eldest son with his social skills, the younger one was just 2 years old and he used to sit around his siblings playing with unplugged game controllers mimicking their movements. After a year or so, the mother said she plugged the

controllers for him and he was a natural. So, accordingly, ‘L.G.’ was introduced to video games at a very young age, hence his mastery of those games. While attending the club, elder boys usually seek his help with the games, which gratified his ego, as it made him feel important and superior. So, while other children his age were playing with Lego in the day care centre, he was actually helping the older children to finish their game.

6.1.7 Accordingly, there seems to be a wide held ideology among children about social status, group membership and the consumption and ownership of video games and video games consoles. Some parents seem to be aware of this ideology and buy the gaming gadgets for their children in an attempt to protect their children from feeling left out and make sure they fit in among their friends. In an interview, the regional director of business development in a big multinational company that is a major player in the video gaming industry developing consoles and games, had the following to say about video games:

“Interview -5:

‘M.M’: it [video games] has become a way of self expression, self definition for sure, a way for status so where you sit we have a gamer points which shows how many games you played how far you’ve gotten in each of the games and you get badges as you go further so there’s people who will not give up their character or id because it’s got all of their accumulated score (.) and I’ll tell you that the avatars very interesting, all my kids have avatars now, so it’s gone from being okay not only just I have a name and I have a whole bunch of statistics, but now I dress them, I have them say things, so there is a self actualisation and self representation thing is happeningit’s a universal language now, they play the same games, they post the same things, ...”

Accordingly, it could be inferred that to some extent the gaming industry itself realises the connection between status, identity and games, especially when it comes to achievements and scores. It is apparent from the practitioner’s comments presented above that he is considering the entire age range of players not just young video games players. However, his statement warranted what some of the children interviewed talked about checking their levels compared to their friends and helping

others with their games, thus claiming mastery and superiority over their counterparts. His comment that ‘all the kids have avatars now’ squared entirely with the findings from the present study of children below 12 years of age.

One of the most popular games identified by the children interviewed in this research is club penguin. Almost all children interviewed mentioned it as a game they played. Club Penguin is a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) that has a social interaction at its core. In this game, penguins are identified as quasi-avatars, in which children name, dress and play around with their avatars. As the practitioners stated, these have become a form of self-actualisation and representation for the kids. So children’s ideologies for social status, group membership, identity representation and self-actualisation are to a certain extent shaped by their ownership and consumption of video games.

6.1.8 The “Kids are getting older younger” Factor

In this section, we look at how children claim their expert knowledge of video games. In particular, they can voice their opinion about video games and related issues in a very confident manner, presenting themselves as knowledgeable beyond their years.

When the researcher was introducing the discussion topic to the children, she received different reactions from different groups. So, for example, in the focus group with the older boys aged between ten and eleven, when the researcher expressed her wish to talk with them about video games while questioning their expertise of it, the following occurred:

“FG-4:

‘D.B.’: I’m studying computer games and your experience of it since you are the experts right? [a sweeping agreement from all participants : yes we play more than anyone! ANYONE]”

In this conversation, the boys deliberately confirmed their expertise of video games and supported this claim by mentioning that they play more than ‘anyone’. It is clear how they take pride in such knowledge since they believe it sets them apart from their

‘J.T.’ apparently wanted to show off his knowledge of a term in video games usually familiar to older players who play this genre of games. ‘J.T.’ was not only showing off his knowledge of the term but also his preference and ability to play games which are above his age. What was quite interesting is how he made a joke out of ‘C.T.’’s ignorance of what “RPG” meant in a lightly manner. So again the child was showcasing knowledge and skills of video games as well as his ability and access to play games meant for older children. This seemed to be the children’s means for claiming status and ensuring group membership. They have a major investment in this knowledge because their status and membership of the social group depends on it. The discursive function of displaying this knowledge is to make a claim for social status and authority within the group. If their knowledge, skills, and expertise in games is challenged and undermined by other children they have to defend that, which is why the debates could sometimes become quite intense and heated. If someone was revealed as a fake who pretended to have more knowledge of the games than he actually does, then this would seriously undermine their personal credibility within their peer and friendship groups.

6.1.11 Another aspect of this is the intensity of arguments, which further underlines the importance of knowledge of games in these children’s senses of social identity. As has been witnessed, some of the children voice very strong opinion about video games related issues. Depending on the intensity of their argument, approval and support from the remaining children may be granted. So for example, in one of the focus groups eleven-year-old ‘O.K.’ believed that unless video games introduced new technology then it is a waste of money to buy them. At that point, seven-year-old ‘J.L.’ decided to support ‘O.K.’’s opinion to prove his knowledge and wisdom among their peers, especially since he was the youngest in the group.

“FG-1:

‘O.K.’ Male 11 yrs.: it kinda depends on what new technology comes out (.) and if there’s nothing new (.) then no point, it’s all been there done that sort of thing

‘J.L.’ Male 7 yrs.: yeah if you buy too much technology, then what’s the point in getting it?! Because there’s always gonna be new technology and you are just

wasting your money (.) you just (.) you need just a small amount like a wii or DS or like two gadgets

(.....)

‘O.K.’ Male 11 yrs.: a good way of gaining money as well (.) selling old game consoles and games, you get 50 to 100 quit for

‘J.L.’ Male 7 yrs.: yeah and you just don’t play it and it is just a waste of money, why would you have lots lots of games (.) you are just getting lots and lots of games and then (.) you wasted it (.) you’ve just wasted it all

(.....)

‘O.K.’ Male 11 yrs.: you might as well keep the consoles for like ages and when you are 80 and want to sell them [laughing] they’ll be antique (...) then you make a lot of money”

‘O.K.’ voiced his opinion on the necessity of new technology in new video games, and was supported by ‘J.L.’ and other members in the focus group. This act of reinforcement encouraged eleven-year-old ‘O.K.’ to express more mature ideas concerning this matter. ‘O.K.’ suggested selling old video games and consoles as a source of money or waiting for them to become antiques then earning more money when selling them. This kind of thought seems rather economically advanced for eleven-year-old children. Even seven-year-old ‘J.L.’ could not keep up with ‘O.K.’ since he probably did not get the idea or rationale behind ‘O.K.’’s words thus he just repeated the same words to the effect that buying too many consoles is a waste of money. Hence in this example it can be inferred that ‘O.K.’ was expressing advanced opinions and suggestions to substantiate his superiority among his peers.

6.1.12 This was further illustrated at a later stage in the focus group.

“ FG-1:

‘J.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: well there’s one company that brought out 5 shooting games but they are all the same!

‘D.B.’: do you know the names of these games?

‘O.K.’ Male 11 yrs.: they are all the call of duties and =

‘J.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: =you just get (.) they are just shooting

‘O.K.’ Male 11 yrs.: yeah, it’s not fun (1) I thought it was pretty cool when the first one came out but then as the others come out, it’s the same, it’s BANG

[All boys: Bang, Bang, Bang,.....]”

In this conversation ten-year-old ‘J.T.’ stated his frustration with a video gaming company that introduced shooting games that are all the same. And when the researcher asked ‘J.T.’ to name those games, ‘O.K.’ decided to cut ‘J.T.’ off and name some games. However, ‘J.T.’ was a bit annoyed and you could see that he wanted to be heard, so he cut off ‘O.K.’ but then didn’t know what to say so he repeated what he said earlier. His authority had been subverted and he was trying to reassert his authority and his status in the group. Yet, that hardly had any effect on ‘O.K.’ who proceeded where ‘J.T.’ left off. ‘O.K.’ explained how at the beginning the games were cool but as they’ve become repetitive they were no longer fun, just “Bang”. It needs to be noted that at this point in the focus group, the posture of ‘O.K.’ changed dramatically. At the beginning he was sitting just like all the other boys in the group. However after voicing strong opinions about the topic and implicitly claiming superiority, he sat back and crossed his legs smugly. His posture displayed confidence and gratification, as if he had won a contest. This change in attitude and behaviour exemplifies how displaying expert knowledge in video games and voicing adult-like opinions are important in establishing social status and identity among child peer groups. The point here is not that children are using games as an exclusive discursive resource to draw upon to make claims about identity and status. Children have always done this and the present participants also used references to their sporting prowess or their literary knowledge and other activities to similarly impress their peers and make claims about status and identity. This research has observed that computer games have become *another* discursive resource for children to draw upon in this respect.

6.1.13 Another example of such strong opinions voiced by some children to claim maturity and status was witnessed in focus group four.

“FG-4:

‘J.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: you know what I don’t understand about video games (....) you can’t have 18+ games with all the shooting but you can join the army at 16 and shoot real people and use real guns (.) it doesn’t really make any sense.... cause if you can get an 18+ game then basically there’s no point for rating cause you use real guns when you are 16

- ‘C.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: yes! THANK YOU! I’m telling that to my mom
- ‘J.G.’ Male 11 yrs.: (....) there’s a point to play call of duty when you are 18 and go to war at 16 cuz the thing is if you go at 16 to the army and someone shoots you, you die but in video games you don’t die
- ‘D.B.’: when you go the army you don’t go to war
- ‘J.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: yeah but there are real guns there cuz you have to train”

In this conversation, ten-year-old ‘J.T.’ expressed his frustration with the rating system of video games. In order to support his views and make a rationalised claim he resorted to comparing 18+ video games to the army. ‘J.T.’ wondered why they can join the army at the age of 16 but are not allowed to play 18+ video games until they are 18. He claimed that there’s no point in rating games since at the age of 16 they get introduced to real guns in the army. This conviction resulted in two different sentiments among the boys. On one hand ten-year-old ‘C.T.’ seemed to have found the perfect argument to voice to his parents so he would be allowed to play those 18+ games. While on the other hand, eleven-year-old ‘J.G.’ attempted to explain the reason behind having a rating system, yet due to his immature critical power (given his young age), he ended up supporting ‘J.T.’’s argument while not realising it. ‘J.G.’ said that there should be a rating system in games, because when you go to the army and you get shot you die but in video games you do not die. This statement is both rationally and critically flawed, since one: ‘J.G.’ confused the army with war and two: he actually supported ‘J.T.’ argument with this statement rather than refute it. But what needs to be noted is that ‘J.G.’ felt a need to participate in that conversation stating a different opinion rather than supporting a younger peer opinion that would probably diminish his status among the group. Accordingly it is noted that as arguments become more intense among the children, this illustrates what is at stake—the importance of displaying expert knowledge of games to claim and impose social status and superiority.

6.1.14 Video Games as The “Social Facilitator”

In this section we look at the role of video games as a facilitator of social contact as a major shared interest in children’s lives. We will also explore the difference between the way boys and girls view video games. In the interview conducted with the CEO of

a video gaming company, he stated that video games have become an important factor in children's social lives.

“Interview-6:

‘T.M.’: one of the main reasons why people especially kids liked the online games is the fact that they are no longer playing against the computer but they are playing against real people who sometimes they might know; “oh I’ve beaten Billy who lives down the street”. So it’s the sense of competitiveness and relevance to reality that made these games popular (.....) Furthermore, this link to reality has brought the kids more topics to talk about in social contexts. So they would go on for weeks talking about the new move that Sam came up with in level 3 of the war of crafts game or something (.....) As mentioned these collaborative games gave rise to a new form of conversation on what happened after the game. “Post player social iteration” (.....) besides these online games are the new way of making friends who share the same interests. It’s more like meeting people in the football practise and things like that with online games; you always have someone to play with who is interested in the same game you are interested in. The virtual world of gaming is like a tennis club; you go in and meet people who like the same sport or game.”

In this conversation, the practitioner ‘T.M.’ states that the social interactive nature of online video games is the reason for their popularity among children. Children are no longer bound by place since they can play with their friends and neighbours online while each is at his/her home. ‘T.M.’ claims that this has given rise to “post player social iteration” as children tend to talk about the games and the levels they have reached and other related gaming topics. He further denoted that online video games are similar to football and tennis clubs where children who share the same interest, meet up and socialise. This is the practitioner’s view of online video games and their role as a social facilitator in the lives of children.

6.1.15 If we look at what the children interviewed had to say about that matter we find that some children confirmed what the practitioner reported earlier on the role of video games as a social facilitator in their lives. This was illustrated by several exchanges in the focus groups.

“FG-1:

‘J.L.’ Male 7 yrs.: (...) my friend Neil, he’s like got tons of games, he’s got like more than 25 Wii games (.) he’s got a whole box of them but he (.) when I come around to his house (1) he teaches me how to play some games.”

Seven-year-old ‘J.L.’ gave us an example of what he does when he visits his friend at his house. Apparently video games are one of the activities children engage with when together. The researcher observed the sense of sheer excitement as ‘J.L.’ was mentioning his friend and the number of games he owns and how he teaches him how to play when he visits him. Another example of this from the same focus group is ten-year-old ‘J.S.’ who said that he was going to sell his console because none of his friends play on it anymore. Apparently his friends had different consoles and none of them played on the one he has (among other consoles) so he decided to sell it since it’s no longer a shared interest.

“FG-1:

‘J.S.’ Male 10 yrs.: ehhhh I’m about to sell my PlayStation cuz nobody plays on it anymore and I don’t play on it.”

So it can be argued that children use video games not only for social identity and group membership but also as a social facilitator. This boy was selling his PS since his friends had moved on to other consoles, so it is clear that they discuss video games and influence each other’s choices.

6.1.16 This was further substantiated in a different focus group with older boys aged ten and eleven. In that focus group an interesting conversation occurred as ten-year-old ‘C.T.’ asked the researcher to ask one of his friends ‘J.T.’ if they had a video games marathon today. And that elicited the following conversation:

“FG-4:

‘D.B.’: ok guys first of all I want to ask you the obvious question, do you play video games?

[yessssss with a big roar from all participants]

‘C.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: ask him if we have a video games marathon today
‘J.T.’ Male 11 yrs.: that’s the only reason I came in today
‘B.R.’ Male 11 yrs.: same!”

From this conversation, it seems that the reason why those boys attended the club on that day was because they were having a video games marathon. This shows the importance of video games as a social activity in the lives of those children, especially boys.

6.1.17 In the case of the girls, it seems that video games is more of an activity to fill free time but not a means for expressing social status, nor does it act as a social facilitator to a great degree. This was witnessed in the focus group conducted with the girls as they said talking about games was quite trivial so they did not do it often amongst their friends.

‘FG-3:
‘D.B.’: (.....) do any of your friends play this game?
‘F.G.’ Female 7 yrs.: I don’t know (.) but I do know that Izzy who is not in my school plays it
‘D.B.’: yeah, do you talk and say what level you reached
‘F.G.’ Female 7 yrs.: Nooo [in dismay]
‘D.B.’: it’s not a topic to discuss
‘S.T.’ Female 12 yrs.: Nooo [with the look are you serious of course not] no it never really comes up at any time no (.) if we talked about everything it would be the last thing we talk about if we run out of ideas
‘D.B.’: and I believe that would never happen [laughing]
‘S.T.’ Female 12 yrs.: yeah totally!! [laughing]

From the above quotes, it is inferred that girls within different age groups do not actually talk about video games with their friends as actively as do boys. In fact it seems almost a taboo to do so. Both seven-year-old ‘F.G.’ and twelve-year-old ‘S.T.’ reported this. Thus video games do not seem to play the social facilitator role in these girls’ social lives to the extent they do with boys. As ‘S.T.’ said, if they run out of topics then it would be the last topic to bring up and that is an unlikely possibility. Accordingly, it can be argued that for girls, video games are not such a powerful

means of claiming social status. However, they might still play a role in group membership ideologies but to a much lesser extent than for the boys. Since this study was mainly looking at males and only one female focus group was conducted, that observation cannot be rigorously substantiated in this study. However, even with such a small sample, it is interesting to note the striking contrast in the emphasis and tone of discourse around video games between girls and boys. The following will elaborate in more detail on this, dealing with the ways in which video games appear to play a role in constructing children's age and gender positions.

6.2.0 Video Games, Children's Age and Gender

Previous research that tackled video games conceded that generally males play video games more than females. Physiological gender differences and cultural socialisation are the two main reasons given. Accordingly in this research, the main focus was on boys' experience of video games. However, for control and comparison, girls' experience was also investigated. One of the five focus groups conducted was with girls and a depth interview was carried out with a nine-year-old girl. The information gathered from these two sources helped in drawing out some differences between boys and girls' experience of video games, one of which is alluded to above. Consequently it was important to have a repertoire that touches upon how gender roles are played out especially when it comes to the genre of games preferred, the time played and the importance of video games in their life.

6.2.1 When the researcher asked the regional director of the video gaming multinational company what he thought was interesting about video games, he had the following to say:

“Interview -5:

‘M.M.’: (.....) you just wanna immerse yourself in that world and it's kinda (.) let's say that's the fun part about it [video games](.) it can be scary, it can be intense, but it's entertaining (.) yeah and I think those are the elements (.) the interesting thing is those are the games that I think when we say kids I almost immediately got in my mind 14 to 20 year old boys, right (.) it's not it anymore, now we are talking about 12 to 30 year old boys and girls.”

In this conversation, ‘M.M.’ noted that unlike when video games first appeared, now video games appeal to both boys and girls. This can be attributed to the different genres of games that were introduced in the market such as social games. These social games mostly appeal to females who don’t like the more violent ones. Accordingly, the industry increased the genre spectrum of games to capture a larger market that would include both boys and girls within a wider age range. This observation was substantiated by the focus groups and interviews the researcher conducted in this study.

In the following section, we put forward and investigate four major differences between the experience of boys and girls with video games. These are games preference, time played, the importance of games, and the relation of children with their siblings (either from same or opposite gender) when it comes to video games.

6.2.2 “I like this game!” Gender Roles and Power

In this section, games preferred by males versus females are listed to help draw an insight into what aspect of the game each gender is drawn to. Not only does preference of games differ across genders but it also differs with age. When interviewing the CEO of a video gaming company, he had the following to say about children:

“Interview 6:

‘T.M.’: (....) younger age has proved to be less gender specific; in other words, boys will play with dolls if they look like action man.”

To some extent, the researcher at the beginning was not sure about the validity of ‘T.M.’’s statement. However, after conducting the focus groups and speaking with boys within the age range of six to twelve, the above statement was supported. As the younger boys listed the games they played, the researcher realised that those games are more like dress-up games which are usually popular among girls, but with a masculine twist. So metaphorically boys were playing with “dolls that looked like action man”. Two of those games that are popular among children are “club penguin” and “moshi monsters”. At least one of these two games was mentioned in almost all the focus groups conducted. However, the researcher noticed that some boys were

quite keen to deny playing those games any more as they got older. This was attributed to the fact that such games are usually played by younger children. Thus it might be that those boys did not want to be associated with such youngsters' games. This identity dilemma can be witnessed in the following conversation:

“FG-4:

‘J.G.’ Male 11 yrs.: (....) we all have club penguin and moshi monsters

‘J.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: Nooo

‘C.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: not moshi monsters

‘J.G.’ Male 11 yrs.: not moshi monsters but we’ve all got club penguin

‘B.R.’ Male 11 yrs.: no not anymore

‘J.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: not anymore

‘B.R.’ Male 11 yrs.: and even moshi monsters, I’m kinda getting off them now”

In this conversation, ‘J.G.’ made an overgeneralised statement about the games he and his friends present in the focus group play. However, they denied playing them, in fact they seemed to be ashamed of being associated with those games. This made sense to the researcher as at an earlier stage in this focus group, two of the boys who denied playing ‘club penguin’ and ‘moshi monsters’, said the following when the researcher asked them to list the games they have.

“FG-4:

‘B.R.’ Male 11 yrs.: (....) cuz I’ve got a little brother Neil, we’ve also got younger games

‘J.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: the annoying games”

From the above quotes, it is apparent how ‘B.R.’ and ‘J.T.’ labelled games aimed at young children as “The annoying games”. Accordingly it was only normal for them to dismiss playing such games any more for the gratification and establishment of their sense of status and identity.

6.2.3 Furthermore, it is notable that the three boys, ‘J.T.’, ‘C.T.’ and ‘B.R.’ when the researcher asked them earlier to name the types of games they play, they listed 18+ certified games.

“FG-4:

‘J.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: I like (.) I like strategy, shoot-em-up, action and =

‘B.R.’ Male 11 yrs.: =adventure=

‘J.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: =adventure (.) they are all pretty good (.) ah and action

(.....)

‘C.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: [I play] call of duty black ops, halo, assassins’ creed, robin hood, call of duty modern warfare 2, gears of war (....) I also like strategy games but I prefer shoot-em-ups”

Apparently, some boys (aged ten and above) tend to play the 18+ certified games as means to establishing status and identity among their peers as well as claim maturity. This was further substantiated in the depth interview conducted with twelve-year-old ‘J.M.’ who also reported playing such 18+ certified games like his friends at school.

“Interview-2:

‘J.M.’ Male 12 yrs.: I play batman, mortal combat versus DC, universe, call of duty, call of duty 2, black ops and that’s it.

(.....)

‘D.B.’: Do your friends play them as well?

‘J.M.’ Male 12 yrs.: yeah and some of them at the same time as me online.”

So on one hand, some of the boys prefer to play adult games since maybe they want to be associated with adults thus for status and identity reasons. While on the other hand, some boys play the usual boys’ games targeted at their age and view the adult games as disgusting and violent.

“FG-1:

‘J.S.’ Male 10 yrs.: Dragon quest knight (.) and (2) Pokémon, power rangers and transformers (.....) they are kinda fighting games

‘G.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: I play on my DS (.) I got stuff like (.) mmm harry potter which is adventures (.) and then I’ve got Fifa which is sports

‘O.K.’ Male 11 yrs.: I usually just play sports games (.) em Football (....) Fifa and all that (.....) emm (2) I don’t really play all the shoot-em-ups and everything [look of disgust and dismay] (.....) All my friends got different games with machine guns and everything (.) my mom

doesn't let me to have all those because they are all 18 rated and stuff

'G.T.' Male 10 yrs.: yeah like call of duty

'D.B.': you don't play these games, right?

[Nooo...

'G.T.' Male 10 yrs.: no, they are just really really really really violent

'O.K.' Male 11 yrs.: yeah very gore

'G.T.' Male 10 yrs.: yeah people's brains go buffffffffffff

[ohhhhhh...

'G.T.' Male 10 yrs.: Really bad"

In the above quotes, the boys list games which are rated within their age range such as Pokémon, power rangers, transformers, harry potter, Fifa, etc. These games are either sports games, adventure games or games that were originally a movie or a cartoon. Even though 'O.K.' and 'G.T.' from FG-1 are the same age as 'C.T.', 'J.T' and 'B.R.' from FG-4 who reported playing 18+ rated games, 'O.K.' and 'G.T.' find those games violent and filled with "gore". It might be a defence mechanism to cope with their parents' rules of not playing adult games, yet it seems as if it is their choice not to play them.

Some of the games listed above are also quite common among boys of a younger age (seven and eight year old).

"FG-5:

'K.H.' Male 8 yrs.: I normally play games which make (.) have kinda of adventures like aim practice.

'N.G.' Male 8 yrs.: and I like Mario galaxy 2, Mario galaxy 1, (...)

(.....)

'C.W.' Male 7yrs.: and I just (.) I like shopping cart hero 2, I like balloon star defence 3"

From the quote above, it is apparent that with younger age, the boys tend to prefer adventure games rather than shoot-em-up or fighting and action games. This is further clarified at a later stage in this repertoire.

6.2.4 As for the girls interviewed, it seems that the games they prefer to play are more like the ones played by the younger boys, adventure games rather than shoot-em-up and fighting games. This was expected to a certain extent since several researchers have noted how females tend not to play violent games. So, in the depth interview with nine-year-old 'L.M.', she mentioned the games seven and eight year old boys usually play along with other lifestyle games that are mostly social games.

“Interview- 1:

'L.M.' Female 9 yrs.: something (.) umm like Mario games and (3) I play like life games when you get to control key people (.) and that's mostly what I like to play (.....) like a real world adventure but it's not actually real.”

From the above quotes, it is apparent how 'L.M.'’s interest in games as a girl is quite different from boys of her age yet a bit similar to younger boys. It seems that girls prefer social games in which people and real life-like situations are portrayed. This was further substantiated in the focus group conducted with three girls. The researcher asked them to list the games they like to play and the following was their answers:

“FG-3:

'A.D.' Female 8 yrs.: angry birds (....) I like smurfs (...) you've got a village and you've got to grow plants and protect the village and (.....) and I like Hob (...) it's a rabbit (.) where you have to hob through platforms and then you collect the eggs and (.) one of my favourite games on my mom's computer is club penguin and pop girl.

'F.G.' Female 7 yrs.: I got brain training and I'm looking after a dog called whistle (.....) I like about my DS and I can write messages to people on my DS it says on the game.

'S.T.' Female 12 yrs.: (.....) I play on my Nintendo with the Nintendo farms which is really cute with animals and stuff (.) and then on the Internet, I play this game about finding the treasure (.) it's called treasure island (.....)”

Again, the games that the girls listed are almost all concerned about the following themes; building, planting, interacting, collecting rather than fighting, shooting, racing or even sports. It is noted that some of the games mentioned are common between

them and younger boys such as club penguin and Mario. This relative popularity of club penguin among young boys and girls can explain why older boys refused to admit playing them. This can be attributed to the possibility that those boys started to understand the cultural ideologies of what defines masculinity. Thus, violence, shooting, racing and even sports are typical preferences for men, while dress-up games such as club penguin are more feminine and whimsical.

6.2.5 Gender and Age Differences Within Family Dynamics

As noted above, male gaming preferences are different from female preferences, especially at an older age. In this study, as the researcher was exploring socialisation among siblings, it came to her attention that even though video games seem to be a common interest among siblings. It does not necessarily bring them together. Gender and age difference dictate difference in genres of games being played. One of the depth interviews was conducted with nine-year-old 'L.M.'. 'L.M.' has two brothers, five-year-old 'L.G.' who plays the same games as her and twelve-year-old 'J.M.' who plays completely different games. When the researcher asked her if she watches her brothers when they play, she heatedly expressed her frustration with their games.

“ Interview -1:

'D.B.': (.....) do you watch the boys when they are playing their games as well?

'L.M.' Female 9 yrs.: I have to (.) it's really boring boyish games and stuff (.) yeah (.) it's really annoying.”

In this conversation, it can be interpreted that 'L.M.'s frustration is more from her older brother's games rather than the younger one. She and her younger brother actually play the same games. Thus this scenario is more plausible given what has been mentioned earlier about younger boys sharing the same interest in games genre as girls. While elder boys tend to play different games, or as 'L.M' puts it “boring boyish games”. In the focus group conducted with the girls, twelve-year-old 'S.T.' had the following to say when the researcher asked her if she played with her ten-year-old brother:

“FG-3:

‘D.B.’: ok I know you have a brother (...), do you play with him?

‘S.T.’ Female 12 yrs.: No [laughing] noooo (.) we play commmpletely different games (.....) so I play on the computer the treasure island games and he plays Pokémon and stuff like that (.) yeah so we don’t really play together.”

From the above conversation, it is apparent how game preference differs from boys to girls. It seems that although video games are a shared interest among children, this operates only as a concept but not in terms of specific games. Thus playing video games is not necessarily an activity that brings siblings of different ages or genders together.

6.2.6 In one of the boys’ focus groups, it was apparent how uncommon it is for the boys to play with their sisters whether older or younger.

“FG- 1:

‘D.B.’: ok so two little sisters and two big sisters (.....) And do you play together? do they play with you or=

[Nooo, sometimes, no, normally we don’t.....”

It needs to be noted that those boys were ten and eleven years old, and one of them was seven. At that age, the boys’ preferences start moving towards more stereotypically masculine themed games such as sports, fighting, racing, and shoot-em-ups. Older boys prefer not to be associated with the feminine social games girls and younger boys tend to play. Thus, to admit to be playing with their sisters would be a social “faux pas” at this age. An interesting aspect to this is a statement that was made by eleven-year-old ‘J.G.’ in another focus group when he was asked if he plays with his siblings.

“FG-4:

‘J.G.’ Male 11 yrs.: (...) I play with my brother obviously and my sister has two games which is like a dog island and she has a pig so sometimes I like (.) I have to help her with the game (.)”

From the above quotes, it is apparent how ‘J.G.’ saw it was okay for him to admit playing with his brother. While on the other hand, when it came to his sister, he said he “had to help her” but not play with her. It can be argued that he’s assuming masculine superiority as he was keen to make it clear that his only associations with female games which his sister played are more of helping but not playing.

6.2.7 Even playing with siblings of the same gender seems to be not quite a common practice among children. When the researcher asked a seven-year-old boy, ‘K.J.’ if he played video games with his elder brother, the following was his answer:

“FG-2:

‘K.J.’ Male 7 yrs.: I have an elder brother (.) he’s 9

‘D.B.’: (.) so do you play with him?

‘K.J.’ Male 7 yrs.: emmm (.) no no

‘D.B.’: why not?

‘K.J.’ Male 7 yrs.: he would play on DS and I would go on mom’s computer and play club penguin and miniclip.”

Even though they are both males, ‘K.J.’ did not play with his elder brother as would be expected. This can be attributed to that fact that ‘K.J.’ is young and still plays games like club penguin that are more “youngsters and girly” games, while his brother might be into the more mature ones in terms of games preference. Thus the above conversation substantiates what has been highlighted earlier that as boys grow older their declared preference becomes more stereotypically masculine, and that younger boys tend to fall within almost the same gaming preference as girls.

6.2.8 Another incident that clarifies this is the interview with five-year-old boy ‘L.G.’ who dismissed playing video games with his elder brother because he is violent, but admitted to play with his sister.

“Interview- 3:

‘D.B.’: and do you play with J [12 yr old brother] ?

‘L.G.’ Male 5 yrs.: no cuz he’s always hurting me (.) he’s always hurting me

‘D.B.’: ok then do you play with L [9 yr old sister]?

‘L.G.’ Male 5 yrs.: yeah (.) I play with her”

When ‘L.G.’’s mother was later interviewed she further supported the researcher’s insight on gender and age differences within siblings socialisation.

“Interview-4:

Mother: ‘L.M.’ [Female 9 yrs. old] is more into social games and ‘J.M.’ [Male 12 yrs. old] is more into the boyish games (.) ‘L.G.’ [Male 5 yrs. old] is still young, he doesn’t like the games that ‘J.M.’ plays and he plays with ‘L.M.’ instead, the more girly ones (.)”

It might be expected that at a very young age there are games equally enjoyed by boys and girls, such as books, stories and TV cartoon. As the children get older they may become more conscious of gender differences and peer group expectations around those differences. Cultural and social expectations and stereotypes start dictating gender specificities; hence preferences for games, including video games start diverging.

6.2.9 Gender and Age and Commitment to Video Games

In this section, we continue the gender theme with reference to commitment to games in terms of how long they play for. In the case of boys, time ranging between 15 minutes to two hours and a half is the most common duration of playing reported by the boys interviewed in this study. This appears in the following quotes taken from the different focus groups conducted.

“ Male Respondents:

FG-1:

‘D.B.’: How many hours do you usually play?

‘J.L.’ 7 yrs.: Hours (....) I think I play around an hour a day

‘O.K.’ 11 yrs.: I normally play an hour, or half an hour (...) normally twice a week, (.) half an hour twice a week or something (.) so about an hour a week maybe

‘J.T.’ 10 yrs.: I’m allowed any day a week (.....) of having half an hour of tv a day (.) half an hour but I always break it, I go an hour

‘J.S.’ 10 yrs.: play for half an hour on my DS (.) I’m allowed like (.) mm I’m allowed my DS and stuff on weekends

FG-2:

‘D.B.’: ok how long do you play?

‘L.S.’ 9 yrs.: [laughing] ages

‘F.F.’ 8 yrs.: I don’t play that often cuz I’m usually watching TV (.) but I still play on my playstation quite a lot but when I play, I play for a bit (.) like 20 or 30 mins that’s it (.) but I still play it quite a lot

‘L.S.’ 9 yrs.: he [addressing RS] plays a lot (.) he plays for 2 and half (.) he’s like obsessed with it=

‘R.S.’ 6 yrs.: =WHAT?! I only play for an hour

FG-5:

‘D.B.’: How long do you normally play?

‘C.W.’ 7 yrs.: I normally play 15 mins or an hour (...) I don’t do it everyday

‘N.G.’ 8 yrs.: one hour a day (..) two hours on Sundays

‘B.S.’ 10 yrs.: half an hour a day

FG-4:

‘D.B.’: ok so what is the max no of hours do you play?

‘J.T.’ 10 yrs.: I have played for 4 hours straight

‘B.R.’ 11 yrs.: the longest time I’ve played straight was about 2 hours (.) but after one hour I swap my game so I’m not really addicted to the game

‘C.T.’ 10 yrs.: well the longest time I’ve ever played was 7 hours straight (...) I started at 12 and it was a brand new video game.”

From the above quotes, it seems that boys within different age ranges tend to vary in their video games consumption. Older boys claim to play longer hours than younger ones, even though young boys claim that they play quite a lot. This was apparent in two scenarios highlighted above; one when eight-year-old ‘F.F.’ stated that he plays around 20 to 30 minutes and insisted on repeating that it was quite a lot. When the researcher asked seven-year-old ‘J.L.’ how many hours he played, he first exaggerated the answer by saying “Hours”, only to realise later that it was around an hour a day. On the other hand, the majority of the older boys do not seem to play less than an hour a day. This suggests differences in consumption patterns between younger boys and their older counterparts.

6.2.10 Girls seem to play much less than boys in general, at least as suggested by the one focus group conducted. Below are some of their quotes on their time commitment consumption of video games.

“FG- 3: Female Respondents:

- ‘F.G.’ Female 7 yrs.: I normally do it [play games] for 15 min
- ‘A.D.’ Female 8 yrs.: I (2) I play twice a week (3) I get to play on the computer about 10 min and a half
- ‘S.T.’ Female 12 yrs.: well I sort of play every other day (.) so I don’t play everyday but I play for about half an hour or an hour (.) so I play a lot longer than everyone else (.) cuz I would just sit there and play and play and play (.....) the maximum would be about an hour and a half (.) that would be a bit stretching it (.) it becomes boring after a while (.....) no matter what it is, I’ll find it a bit boring and I would go do something else”

From the above quotes, it seems that girls’ average time of playing is around half an hour, in contrast to boys of the same age who claimed up to four hours of continuous playing in a session. The issues around this differing time commitment are discussed in greater detail later in the thesis.

6.2.11 The Relative Importance of Games for Each Gender

In this section, the relative importance of video games for boys versus girls is assessed based on the focus groups and interviews conducted. Boys’ enjoyment of and commitment to games was apparent from the extract below:

“FG-2:

- ‘R.S.’ Male 6 yrs.: emmm (.) because they are fun (.) once you get into it you get into it=
- ‘L.S.’ Male 9 yrs.: = it keeps you entertained =
- ‘F.F.’ Male 8 yrs.: =and with all the action, if you like blood gore you are gonna love shooting games (.....) it’s like non-stop action
- ‘L.S.’ Male 9 yrs.: you can play it forever”

This was a common sentiment among the boys with just one exception, a brief comment from two boys in Focus group 1 saying that games got boring after a time.

This was the only negative comment about games in the data sets, and might have been a case of trying to seem more grown-up to impress the interviewer. As a generalisation, the boys' views of video games were overwhelmingly positive.

6.2.12 When talking to the girls, it seemed that video games were not as important to them as they are for the boys.

“FG-3:

- ‘S.T.’ Female 12 yrs.: well they are really something to pass the time
- ‘F.G.’ Female 7 yrs.: it’s just we don’t play games we do other things that we really like doing
- ‘D.B.’: how important are games to you?
- ‘S.T.’ Female 12 yrs.: not that much, not that important at alllll [answered immediately]
- ‘A.D.’ Female 8 yrs.: I wouldn’t (2) I wouldn’t mind if our DS got flushed off the toilet
- ‘S.T.’ Female 12 yrs.: I like it because it passes the time, if I’m reaaaaaaaaaally bored then I would play it, yeah so if I just done my homework or something like that and I got nothing to do and there’s nothing on TV and I’m reaaaaaaaaaally bored then I would go play that and that’s something to do.”

In this conversation, it is clear that those girls place little importance on video games. They seem to consider them an activity merely to ‘pass the time’. Eight-year-old ‘A.D.’ might have exaggerated a bit when she claimed she would not mind if her DS got flushed down the toilet. It is understood though that to her, the DS is of relatively little importance. This assumption must be treated with caution, given the small sample size, but it does offer a tentative support to the intuitive idea, suggested by previous studies, that girls are simply not as active consumers of video games as boys.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Six has begun to elaborate the findings of the empirical phase of the study, by detailing the outcomes from the discourse analysis of the various data sets. Two interpretive repertoires have been discussed so far, 1. “Digital savviness and group membership” and 2. “Video games, children’s age and gender”. The findings suggest

that video games are a significant part of the social world of these children and act as resources for constituting social and gender identities. Chapter Seven will continue reporting the findings from the discourse analysis with the third main interpretive repertoire, “video games as a source of empowerment for children”.

Chapter Seven

Findings II

Chapter Outline

Chapter Seven continues the detailed description of findings from the discourse analysis by elaborating on the third of the overlapping and inter-locking interpretive repertoires, called 'games as a source of empowerment for children'. Chapter Six touched on the issue of power in the sense that the shared experience of video games operated as cultural resource that the children used to make assertions of identity within the social peer group. Chapter Seven develops the issue of power more broadly to extend into the area of family dynamics. There is a wider cultural tendency that children are becoming more autonomous as consumers, and this is bound up with changes in the way they exercise constitutive power within the family setting.

7.0.0 Games As A Source Of Empowerment For Children

Previous research has suggested that video games are a source of empowerment for the children. In order to investigate empowerment, the researcher put forward some concepts that help reach an understanding of the issue. Those concepts are related to the family and the environment in which the children are brought up. Thus, the change in the traditional family model and the parenting typologies are explored. Further, a dyadic power relation between children and video games is suggested given the data collected in this research.

7.1.0 Changes in the Traditional Family Model

During the data collection, a particular trend was apparent in almost all the focus groups and interviews conducted whether with the practitioners, parent or children. Unlike the conventional opinion about video games being a solitary pursuit that undermines family time, video games appear to be a part of spending quality time with the family. Both practitioners interviewed highlighted this opinion, although they would have an interest in doing so. In the case of the CEO of a gaming company, he believed that video games are similar to Disney movies. His point is that upon their appearance, they were mainly targeting children. However, at a later stage of

development, their target became both children and parents, both of whom enjoy the entertainment together. He argued that this is the same scenario with video games.

“Interview-6:

‘T.M.’: Games were first intended at children but then they were a way for spending quality time with children, parents and kids sit together and enjoy playing a game, which they can talk about later, and have a memorable experience for them. Disney movies were like that and this is how it started first it was a kids movie then a kids movie that parents can also watch and enjoy. This is intended to increase family participation. The father playing football or rugby with his sons has evolved into the father playing online and video games with his sons. Part of it came from the parents remembering how much fun they had playing those games as kids (.....) even grandparents can play with their grandchildren such games that promote spending quality time.”

In the above quote, ‘T.M.’ states that video games are meant to increase family time together, even time with grandparents. He then goes on claiming that father-son relationships have evolved from playing sports to playing video games. This, too, was supported in some of the data. He argues that video games are part of Generation Z’s parents’ childhood, thus playing the games with their own children evokes nostalgic memories of their own childhood. This is probably true with some parents, especially young parents who belong to affluent Western families. Those parents are more likely to have been introduced to video games when they first appeared in their childhood. However, it cannot be argued that all parents have had the same experience.

7.1.1 The other practitioner, who is the regional director of a video gaming multinational company, also supports the concept of video games as a family activity.

“Interview- 5:

‘M.M.’: (.....) they [video games industry] looked at what we call “the megatrends”, they looked at things like mobility, where they had the DS (.) they looked at ageing, they looked at health as something important, they looked at the cocooning of the family, as families coming and staying at home more and these were trends that globalisation and a whole a lot of other things have brought about (.) and with the wii DS, they very quickly when you saw the DS in advertising at least in the UK, they were showing older couples, they would show elderly people

playing brain age, and they had a (.) they were tapping into people wanting to stay home (.....) everyone would say that's kids game but now you find more parents playing with their kids brain age and Sudoku and a whole number of other things (.....) you know I started playing video games when they just started and now I am in my 40s so I've been playing for almost 30 years so (.) but I can't do this [mimicking thumb controller movement] and I do want to play with my kids so I think they said wow that whole group is now grown and if they are buying the console (.) are now different and they'll care about these things and by the way the decision maker isn't always the kid, it's mom and she wants to be able to say oh I got a console for the kids but I use it for wii fit too (.) where the dad says oh yeah I got a DS for the kids but I use it for brain age so it's always a way to feel good about the fact that you just got a games system (...)"

In the above quote, 'M.M.' explains how some cultural, social, physical and economic factors shaping the industry of video gaming. Those factors are called "megatrends" within the industry and include changes in the traditional family model and activities, physical health of the parents, mobility concerns, etc.. 'M.M.' argues that globalisation along with other factors have led to the growing trend of family cocooning as more children tend to stay at home even after they grow up. Another salient factor is that grandparents tend to live longer, thus their role in the upbringing of their grandchildren cannot be overlooked, as they tend to spend more time with them. 'M.M.' argues that video games are an activity that even grandparents would enjoy doing with their grand children. He goes on describing his own personal experience with video games to express the growing trend of parents who had video games growing up and now want to play them with their children. He argues that the video gaming industry has realised the constraints on spending time with their children or playing outside facing those parents and accordingly introduced games and consoles to accommodate to their needs.

7.1.2 He further touches on a rather important issue of purchasing power and decision making within the family model. 'M.M.' states that parents still possess the primary purchasing power and that the decision of buying video games is mainly made and approved by the parents and not the children. He mentions how the industry

has realised that if they can expand their market by introducing games that would appeal to the parents, the decision of purchasing the games and the consoles would be facilitated by their becoming a source of family enjoyment together. His reason is that parents will feel good to make this purchase since it's no longer a gadget that provides games for the children only, but they too can enjoy some games on it. The industry's view is actually substantiated when examining the adverts of some consoles- particularly the Wii consoles ads- as they target the whole family rather than just the children.

At a certain stage in the interview with 'M.M.', he mentioned his experience with video games as a parent of two children himself.

"Interview-5:

'M.M.': I play games occasionally, it's not what I have a passion to do, if I have some time and it's raining or I can play with my kids something interesting then we'll play it but I say less than an hour a week and on weekends maybe 2 hours on a rainy cold dark weekend (...)"

Here, it can be suggested that some parents actually consider video games as one of the family activities to be done given certain circumstances such as bad weather for example.

7.1.3 This trend was further supported in the interview with the mother of three who stated that she plays with some of her children their video games.

"Interview-4:

Mother: (.....) oh yeah I do I am able to play all the games with them (.) I don't like 'J.M.'s [12 yrs. old son] games because I don't like the blood and I don't like the mortal combat where you fight (.) I actually feel tense inside when playing it I'm like oh my god I'm gonna be killed (.) and I see him playing the batman game and he would jump up and down and I'd be like [holding her breathe] I feel the tense inside (.) but I loved animal crossing (.) I love playing that with 'L.M.' [9 yr. old daughter] (.) I've even got my own profile so we have 'L.M.', 'J.M.' and mom as my profile so I send them letters and I give the money to upgrade the house and pay the mortgage [virtually]."

From the above conversation, it seems that not only fathers are involved with their children in playing video games, but some mothers are as involved as well. Even though due to some gender differences that dictate gaming preferences, mothers don't usually play the "boyish" games, but they still tend to play some games with them. Those are usually social and adventure games that appeal to girls and younger boys. However, as the boys grow older and start playing the fighting games, they tend to bond more with their fathers, as it becomes a shared interest. This is of course only applicable to parents who play video games.

7.1.4 Practitioners and parents interviewed are not the only ones who reported the trend of having video games as a family activity but also the children. In focus group 4, eleven-year-old 'J.G.' stated that he plays video games with his father and he enjoyed the opportunity to spend time with his father during a busy working week.

"FG-4:

'J.G.' Male 11 yrs.: well I'm not an only child (.) the thing is we have quite a lot of wii games and all my family enjoy the wii except for my mom obviously so my dad plays games with me and so like yesterday we were playing (.) I also like sports games so I was playing NBA 09 with my dad (.) and I play with my brother obviously and my sister (...) so like I do my homework first and then I like get ready for bed and ummm since I'm older than my brother, I don't go straight to bed I go like (.) I have time with my dad (.) cause he's at work and my mom's at work but my mom can't really do these like games so I do it with my dad for about 30 min or an hour (...) but if it's a holiday (...) so I'd probably like maybe play some video games with my dad cause I've got a free day (.)"

In the quote above, 'J.G.' substantiates two of the researcher's insights mentioned earlier. The first one is how some children resort to video games as an activity to spend some time with their busy parents. And the second one is how as boys grow older they tend to play the video games with their fathers rather than the mother due to the gender preferences for games genres. This was quite apparent in two instances, first when 'J.G.' states that all his family enjoys Wii games except his mom. Later he

mentioned that his mom could not play those games, thus he plays them with his dad. ‘J.G.’s use of the word “obviously” when reporting that his mom does not enjoy video games could be attributed to the beginning of his recognition of the cultural ideologies that define and differentiate gender preferences and identities. It needs to be noted that he is eleven-years-old and this is part of his natural development into adolescence. Thus, as we can see from the quotes in this section, children are empowered by video games to a degree, in the sense that, through games, they can gain access to time spent with their parents as an equal.

7.1.5 On the other hand, some of the boys interviewed mentioned how video games are their gateway for having some space away from social interaction with the family. This is clear from the quotes below taken from two male focus groups.

“FG- 4:

‘J.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: I play most of the time in my room or anywhere quite (.) anywhere quite (3) well you can’t (3) emm (1) sometimes you (.) sometimes it gets annoying of everyone shouting trying to read something (2) yeah when someone asks questions and everyone is answering and shouting (...)

FG-5:

‘B.S.’ Male 10 yrs.: they are fun

‘N.G.’ Male 8 yrs.: they keep you occupied

‘B.S.’ Male 10 yrs.: you play online and no one can disturb you

‘N.G.’ Male 8 yrs.: true (.) yeah it’s more like people can disturb me cause they would keep going whaaaaat whaaaaat [making noises].”

Apparently, just as some children find video games a way of spending time with their parents, some children find video games as a way of zoning out from family interaction. Thus it can be argued that video games are children’s means of deploying power within family context as they are utilised as a source of family interaction or an escape from it. A child can justify being alone in their room as they are playing a game in a way that does not normally generate a negative reaction, especially since other family members might object to the noise from the game, as ‘N.G.’ suggests above.

7.2.0 The Six Pockets Phenomenon

This section continues with a focus on changes in the traditional family model that were supported in this study. As has been mentioned earlier by one of the practitioners, grandparents tend now to live longer and their role in their grandchildren's lives can be quite prominent. This was evident in some of the focus groups with the children of both genders and the interview with the mother of three.

In the girls' focus group, seven-year-old 'F.G.' reported that her parents got her the video game console and it was her grandmother who got her the games for Christmas.

"FG-3:

'F.G.' Female 7 yrs.: last Christmas I got it [DS] from my mom and dad and then the games (.) five games I got from my grandma."

Grandparents seem to find video games a suitable gift that they feel children will like. In a boys' focus group, eight-year-old 'N.G.' also highlighted that since he likes to buy things with his own pocket money, his grandmother tends to give him game cards (vouchers) for him to spend however he likes.

"FG-5:

'N.G.' Male 8 yrs.: and game money (.) so game cards (.) I once got a game card that was one hundred pounds I think it was my grandma (.) my mom and dad normally do or I buy with my own pocket money."

This trend seems to be quite popular, as children tend to get more games and gadgets from their grandparents and do not just rely solely on their parents. Thus it seems that those children have several pockets to spend from, their parents' as well as their grandparents'. This trend is termed the 'six-pockets phenomenon' (Sutherland and Thompson, 2001) referring to the grandparents' pockets as an additional source of spending power for the children.

7.2.1 This insight is further substantiated by the interview with the mother of three.

“Interview-4:

Mother: (.....) I don't buy games unless they are second hand but my mom does (.) my mom buys them games (.) she bought them all their DSi s as well.”

From the above quote it seems that the grandmother is the one who spoils the children by getting them new video games and video gaming consoles and gadgets that the mother herself declines to purchase. Again, video games can be seen to play a role in the changing social dynamics of the family, since the child's desire for the games drives the changing dynamic with the grandparent helping the parent with the cost. The interesting thing is that in previous generations neither parents nor grandparents would normally be so indulgent, it is something about the power of these technologically advanced games that seduces the carers into indulging the child's desire for them. It may also be that the social element of the games is seen to promote satisfying inter-action between the generations, either through playing them together or simply as a source of common purpose. Games can act as a conduit for deepening family bonds in ways which position the children as family participants and quasi-adults, in comparison to earlier eras in which children's activities, games and roles were more sharply demarcated from those of adults.

7.3.0 Are Children Really That Powerful? Part 1

In this section, we investigate further the power the children have within the family. Parenting typologies in recent years seem to have shifted towards a more pluralistic parenting. This parenting typology grants the children a higher degree of autonomy, although within certain limits, as has been observed in this study. Some parents refuse to yield to their children's requests for new toys and gadgets (including video games) unless they save up for it or they get them as gifts in their birthdays or Christmas time. In this negotiated way, some parents seem to permit a degree of monitored financial/monetary independence to their children. Those parents seem to adopt this technique in an attempt to teach the children the value of money and develop their sense of responsibility and patience, as reported in this study. In the interview with the mother of three, she highlights this issue.

“Interview-4:

Mother: they [her children] get them as presents in Christmas and birthdays and we do go to Game in Stains and buy second hand games (.) I wouldn't buy a new game (.) the only one I said to J I will buy is the new batman arch asylum coming out in October and he's already put it in my calendar on the phone (.) I have promised him faithfully that he will definitely get that because he's done well at school this year but otherwise I don't buy games unless they are second hand but my mom does (.) my mom buys them games (.) she bought them all their DSi s as well.”

The above quotes help gather an insight into how some parents negotiate power with their children. The fact that this power is increasingly negotiated rather than structurally imposed is significant, because video games can act as the currency for this negotiation. The mother states that she gets the games as presents in birthdays and Christmas and only buys second hand games for her children herself. The only exception is made as a reward for performing well at school. However, as highlighted in the previous section, grandparents tend to come in and grant the children what they request. It can be argued that some grandparents are the ones responsible for the pampering and spoiling of the children, since the children tend to get what they want with them, with little to no consideration to the rules their parents set. Of course, this situation occurs within extended families that have grandparents nearby and involved with the family, although increasing divorce rates along with increased longevity may have increased the involvement of grandparents in some UK families.

7.3.1 The children's views about strategies for obtaining resources with which to obtain games and consoles are also important to this issue. Below, some representative quotes from the boys' different focus groups that highlight their experience with this matter are offered.

“FG-1:

‘O.K.’ Male 11 yrs.: well my birthday is coming up this week so I just see if there's anything football or sports and ask my parents to get it for me (.) anything sporty I don't have.

‘J.L.’ Male 7 yrs.: I ask my dad to get me the game and he got me it and (.) I saw a new game on the TV (.) and my birthday was coming up and I said (.) “Dad can I have this and that and the other” and he got me it.

FG-2:

‘F.F.’ Male 8 yrs.: yeah but then you have to save up for it or if it’s your birthday (.) cuz I get about 50 pound on a money roll so I could get like an HD game for my PlayStation.

‘L.S.’ Male 9 yrs.: we [‘L.S.’ and his 6 yrs. old brother ‘R.S.’] wanted the new DS and mom wouldn’t let us and so only if we save up together we can get one and share it (....) well pocket money, birthdays and sometimes if you are lucky you find money on the streets and you just pick it up.

FG-4:

‘B.R.’ Male 11 yrs.: I normally save up from my own money (.) I do lots of chores (....) I’d wash my dad’s car and I get 5 pounds for it (....) sometimes my parents get it for me in Christmas.

‘J.G.’ Male 11 yrs.: well sometimes I save up, sometimes I use my Christmas money or birthday money or get it in Christmas like that or anybody in my family get it and sometimes it’s just a treat for like being good for the whole year.

‘G.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: well I don’t ask I say can I (.) am I allowed to this game and he says well yeah you have to save up your money so I do and then eventually they’ll bring out a new game and then I’d change my mind (.) ohhhhhhhh nooooo they just brought out this one and it’s about 20 pounds more expensive (...) it depends if I have almost enough money then my parents might tip in a little bit of money.”

From the above quotes, it seems that boys within the age range of six to twelve realise that in order to acquire the games (along with other things as well) they have one of two options. Either they wait for an occasion like their birthdays or Christmas to ask for them as gifts, or they save up for them. Having the games as gifts is usually the traditional way of children getting what they wish for. However, there seems to be a trend of children also buying what they want with their own money, thus using primary purchasing power. The children tend to save up this money from their own pocket money, money gifts on occasions as well as money earned from performing chores within the house. Thus, the children are not simply asking for what they want

but marshalling negotiating skills to obtain it, including utilising emotional leverage in the form of asking parents or grandparents for money. It seems that some parents endorse this process to socialise their children economically by giving them a sense of responsibility about money. Furthermore, the parents seem to feel that allowing children a voice in buying decisions around video games helps them to learn lessons of patience, budgeting and the value of things.

7.3.2 This phenomenon of negotiated autonomous consumer power seems to be applicable to children from both genders, as the same answers were reported in the girls' focus group.

“FG-3

‘S.T.’ Female 12 yrs.: I normally buy my own gadgets cuz I bought my laptop, I’ve bought my DS, I bought my phone, I bought my iPod (.....) oh because I normally get quite a lot for my pocket money and for my birthday for example for Christmas I got 300 pounds (.....) yeah (.) it’s just that my parents gave me the money and so I just ask for money every year now I don’t actually ask for anything else (.....) yeah I tell them because they always have to come with me to check (.....) yeah I just like the independence really (....) that was about when I was 10 that I started doing that (.) cuz my mom thought I was old enough to do it by myself (.) but not at 8 or 9 cuz I was a bit to young.”

As can be seen, twelve-year-old ‘S.T.’ reported that she likes the independence granted to her by her parents when it comes to buying. She also highlighted that she gets quite a lot of pocket money. Hence, it might be argued that parents who foster this technique of parenting in this case gave their children sufficient pocket money to be able to cover the expense of games and consoles. Another point that needs to be taken into consideration is that, it seems that parents do not grant total independence to the children, since some form of monitoring is performed. This is apparent as ‘S.T.’ states that her parents always go with her to check what she is buying. Moreover, ‘S.T.’ highlighted that her younger brother who is ten-years-old has been recently granted the same kind of independence but to a much lesser degree. She added that he is only allowed to buy games but not consoles like she does. The reason given for this

difference is age. Thus, it seems that as they grow older, parents tend to allow children greater economic autonomy.

7.4.0 Are Children really that Powerful? Part 2

Recent conventional wisdom assumes that children have greater autonomy than previous generations, partly due to the digitisation phenomenon and their specialist knowledge of computers and digital communication, which might in some ways exceed that of their parents and carers. As has been highlighted in the previous section, some parents seem to grant their children some degree of limited economic autonomy in the sense that power is negotiated and games (and funding for games) is a site of the negotiation of parental power. It can be argued that there is a form of conditional independence around the purchase and use of video games. However, this is certainly limited. While interviewing the boys, several statements were made that showed that parents still exert quite a strong grip over their children's digital activities. This is evident from the following quotes.

“FG-1:

‘J.L.’ Male 7 yrs.: I don’t really go with my parents to buy stuff; I’m not really allowed to buy things (.) emm without permission (2)... they don’t really want me to buy anything that could be quite expensive and I don’t know and they would be spending a lot of money.”

In the above quote, seven-year-old ‘J.L.’ seemed quite understanding of why his parents do not allow him to buy things on his own nor join them when buying things. From his account, it seems that his parents explained their point of view to him and he is accepting it. Apparently, this form of explaining rather than enforcing points of view is quite common among parents. However, it can be argued that some people mistake this form of conversation and parenting with ceding to children and giving them more power, which is not necessarily always the case. This actually reflects a softer parental style, though not one necessarily lacking in parental authority.

7.4.1 This type of soft power parenting that we have been highlighting in this repertoire is to some extent summarised in the following quote.

“FG-4

‘J.G.’ Male 11 yrs.: I also see lots of adverts sometimes when my mom’s shopping and after she’s finished maybe as a treat (.) not that I would get one but as a treat I could look inside and see what I can save up with and so I would go into game or game station and have a look and go ohh what’s this and see if it’s good enough to save for it and I see them on bus stops and I also get inspired by my friends that’s how I got to play Pokémon cause I’ve seen them playing it and I was like ohhh what’s this, what’s Pokémon it’s coming out in Christmas I might get that so we could play with each other (.....).”

From the above quote, the rules these parents enforce are quite clear and children tend to conform to them. ‘J.L.’ highlights the boundaries his mother set for a treat, so for example he is only allowed to check new games but she would not necessarily buy them for him. He is supposed to either save up for them or wait for Christmas or his birthday. So apparently some parents seem to adopt a rather communicative way of parenting, where they set their rules and explain the reasons behind them rather than simply enforcing them. However, it needs to be noted that this parenting style does not necessarily take away from their power as parents. Thus it can be argued that it is not that parents have less power over their children but it is rather a shift of power from structural to constitutive and negotiated, or perhaps ‘soft’ power.

7.5.0 Do The Children Deploy Pester Power Or Expert Power?

In this section we attempt to shed some light on whether the children’s power over their parents has changed from pester power to expert power because of the digitisation phenomenon. The rationale behind this investigation is to assess the actual knowledge of the children compared to their parents and what techniques they resort to in order to get what they want. In the interview with twelve-year-old ‘J.M.’, it was apparent that he reached for his uncle’s advice and recommendations when it came to gaming. He did not assume superior knowledge or expert knowledge; he rather resorted to children’s traditional behaviour of pestering their parents to some extent.

“Interview-2:

‘J.M.’ Male 12 yrs.: well I’ve got an uncle in Dublin, J., he tells me all about the games and when the new games are coming out and all that (.) and he tells me what to do in levels and where I can get games and all that (....) yeah I buy them (...) mom lends me some money that I get to spend.”

This is further substantiated in focus group 4, as ten-year-old ‘G.T.’ highlights that his father is sometimes the one who informs him about new games. He further illustrates how he pesters his father into buying new games that he tried with his friends.

“FG-4:

‘G.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: my dad sometimes tells me and when I go to my friend’s house they’ve got a new game and I’m like what’s that and they’d say it’s a new game and sometimes I play around with theirs and then I’d be WOOOOOOOOOOOW cool game THIS IS AMAZING (...) I was playing at my friend’s house and when I got back I went to my dad and said do you know that game at my friend’s house (.) weelllllllll can I get it?”

The power of nagging seems to still be a common way children use to get what they want. The quote above, though, is more interesting for the way that the son feels no inhibition about asking the father for the game, because the father seems just as involved in games himself and the two discuss them as equals. So, while there is still a power inequality based on access to economic resources, the gap is not as great as might be expected, because it is narrowed by the mutual interest in the games.

7.5.1 Ten-year-old ‘C.T.’ explicitly admitted pestering his parents. What should be noted is that ‘C.T.’ is an only child and instead of wishing he had siblings or complaining of having no one to play with, he expressed sheer happiness for being an only child.

“FG-4:

‘C.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: no(.) only child (.) and I’m happyyy (.) I’m spoilt [laughing]

‘G.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: he gets 70 pounds a week for doing nothing [referring to CT]

(.....)

‘C.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: I wait till they are not very new and then [smiling]..... I ask my parents
(.) well it comes to nagging really (.) PLEAAAAAAAAAAAAASE (.) 5
min later FINEEE.”

From the above quote, it can be interpreted from ‘C.T.’s words as he said; “I’m spoiled” that he believes that as an only child, he gets his parents’ full attention and greater access to resources than he would not have got if he had siblings. This gets a bit clearer as one of his friends, ‘G.T.’ mentions that ‘C.T.’s parents actually give him a huge amount of pocket money without asking him to earn it by doing any household chores or anything. Some children then, see that having siblings means that their parents’ attention and resources are going to be divided among them. Not only does being an only child ensure their full acquisition of their parents’ resources but also they can play their video games without having to share it with their siblings.

7.5.2 This was a common complaint among the children interviewed who had siblings, especially if there was only one video gaming console in the house.

“FG-2:

‘L.S.’ Male 9 yrs.: he [referring to ‘R.S.’ his younger brother] plays a lot (.) he plays
for 2 and half hours (.) he’s like obsessed with it=

‘R.S.’ Male 6yrs.: WHAT?! I only play for an hour

‘L.S.’ Male 9 yrs.: as soon as he gets home from the club or school, he goes straight on
the computer and I’m like can I have a go, I need to check
something and he’s like no and so I go and watch TV and then an
hour later I would go and he would be no and I’d be like ok

‘D.B.’: well if he takes all the time how long do you play?

‘L.S.’ Male 9 yrs.: well if I wake up early enough I would get half an hour or 40 mins

‘D.B.’: do you want to play more then?

‘L.S.’ Male 9 yrs.: YES [gasping]

‘F.F.’ Male 8 yrs.: yeah me too but my brother wouldn’t let me watch what I want to
watch (.) when I want to watch Britain got talent last night but he
wanted to watch the Simpsons.”

In the above quotes, ‘L.S.’ was complaining that his younger brother is obsessed with video games, as he would not let him have a go, to the extent that the only time he can

actually play games is early in the morning, probably when his brother is still sleeping. As eight-year-old 'F.F.' joins the conversation and voices his frustration with his younger brother as well who wouldn't let him watch his program on TV, we realise that this is a common quarrel among siblings within almost every household. Before video games, there was the TV quarrel but now it's more likely to be related to video games and who gets to play first and for how long. Thus it can be argued that again video games seem to play a role in the evolution of social dynamics among siblings. They are a source for the negotiation of power, not only between children and their parents, but also between siblings.

7.6.0 Empowering Pedagogy Versus Protective Pedagogy

In this section, we explore the role video games play in children's learning. We also try to investigate the parents' adopted pedagogy typology, especially when it comes to video games, and whether it is an empowering pedagogy or a protective one. It has been noted that video games have become a daily activity for many children. A conventional wisdom is that children do not learn anything useful from video games. Even the rules of the games themselves are sometimes poorly understood by some children who play them. This argument is based on the observation that some of those children tend to play the games in different ways from that intended. The CEO of the video gaming company further explained this observation and voiced his view regarding this matter.

“Interview 6:

'T.M.': Children are always trying to evolve the games and break the rules. If we look back at bikes, kids built up ramps and started doing acrobatic moves with bikes. Same thing with online and video games, they tend to do things that the game is not designed to do. So a grown up would be playing grand theft to reach the next level, while the kid would play it to try the new moves and find new ways for crashing the car and so on. It's a getaway for them to try things that would be almost impossible to do in real life (...) Unlike books and old games where you have to follow the rules, now these online games they give you permissions to go off script and that is exactly what children are looking for. For them it makes life more fun. They are a facility to do what we want to do rather than what we have to

do. They also tend to be conversational rather than presentational. Games facilitate play rather than dictate play nowadays with the online games.”

From the above quotes, ‘T.M.’ makes a rather important observation as he highlights the resemblance of video games to other children’s games, like riding a bike. He argues that children break the rules of the games as an integral part of their development and identity realisation. He further highlights how video games help in the learning process of children, as they learn by trial and error. Moreover, he suggests that video games offer a degree of independence, since children often explore and discover the games autonomously, or through their peer group rather than through their parents or teachers. He states that video games “facilitate play rather than dictate play” especially given the interactive nature of many of today’s games. Thus video games have become a source of empowerment and identity realisation for children as they get a chance to try things they might not encounter in real life and they are free to set their own rules. In this sense, video games can be understood as a technological advance on traditional children’s playground games. The importance of this point is clear- children are not merely passive ‘dupes’ at the mercy of marketing and technology, they actively inscribe games culture with their own identity strategies.

7.6.1 An additional aspect of rule-breaking and autonomous exploration is that children often play games that are marketed ostensibly to older age groups. The researcher noticed that this phenomenon seems quite common among eight to twelve year old boys interviewed, who tend to play 12+, 15+ and 18+ certified games, sometimes with the active participation of their father. In the interview with the regional director of business development of a major multinational video games company, this point was raised.

“Interview 5:

‘M.M.’: I think that people are responsible for what their children buy and I think (.) it’s no different than books or music or anything else (.) so my feeling on that is I think that we as an industry, and the government has a role to play but I think that the industry is the most responsible, needs to have consistent and effective rating systems, they need to make sure that those rating systems are enforced to

the best of their ability so whether the government enforces that or the retailers would enforce that or if it's the industry themselves who enforce them (.) and then ultimately the decision needs to be managed at home (.) it's like television or music that within appropriate lyrics (...) I enforce that (...) Microsoft actively support the rating system, actively support the retailers to enforce it (.) make sure that they enforce it cuz the retailer just like cigarettes or anything else you could sell it and we have actually put an age rating system in our console so if I indicate as a parent that no game rated 18 or over can be played on this console and my son decides to sneak in his friend's game the console won't allow it to play (.) so there's parental control to make sure that in those situations where you are enforcing the rules, you have a clear rating system, and then still somebody tries to sneak something (.) you know, mom and dad can still make sure it doesn't happen (.) but there are still a number of people who (.) maybe don't police it nor do they enforce the parental control.”

In the above quote, as an industry practitioner, ‘M.M.’ states that the gaming industry and the government both have a role in making sure children do not play ‘adult’ games. However, he stresses that the bigger role is rather on the parents and carers as they are the ones responsible for what their children buy and consume. He goes on to argue that adult video games are similar to television with adult content, music with inappropriate lyrics and adult activities are portrayed, such as smoking cigarettes. Thus, in his view, the parents play the main role in controlling and overseeing their children’s consumption and actions. On the other hand, he claimed that the industry’s role is limited to devising a rating system that would allow parental control of what games are being played. It seems that some companies have already enforced and installed that rating system in their consoles. As for the government, he argues that its role is to enforce a consistent and effective rating system to prevent retailers from selling adult games to children just as they do with cigarettes. ‘M.M.’ reflects on his own experience as a parent and says that he enforces such control over his children, as he believes that a decision is ultimately made at home and that parents have the power to control and police their children’s acts. Yet he recognises that some parents choose not to enforce such structural power on their children, as they tend not to police their children nor enforce parental control over video game playing. Of course, the games industry pushes the boundaries of realism in violence in games because it is a selling point, and it is convenient to leave the responsibility for monitoring their use to adult

carers. The slackness of many adult carers' attitudes towards age ratings on video games seems clear from anecdotal evidence, at least in the UK. Moreover, it could be argued that the boundaries between age classifications for games have become blurred, partly because advertisements and trailers for new games can easily be seen by children on the Internet, TV or posters, and perhaps because the 'adult' games are, still, animations, and therefore easily dismissed as a child-like entertainment, even if they portray extreme violence, sexuality, law-breaking as, for example, in the notorious Grand Theft Auto.

7.6.2 Above was the practitioners' view, it is now important to present what some of the children had to say about their perceptions of adult video games. It needs to be noted that those adult games appeal mostly to older boys (eight and older) and that girls find them quite violent and boring, as noted in the second repertoire. Boys' perceptions of adult video games were quite diverse. Some reported their dislike, while others voiced their passion for such games and their frustration with their parents' when they are denied access to them. In focus group 1, eleven-year-old 'O.K.' said that he doesn't play the shoot-em-up games because he actually doesn't like them. At a later stage in the interview he mentioned his mother's refusal to allow him to play such games. This statement initiated a conversation against violent games that might have been influenced by two factors. The first factor might be the parents' viewpoint on these games and the way they rationalise these views to their children. As for the second factor, it might be that those boys thought that the researcher was seeking to articulate a negative view about video games so they were trying to say things that would confirm that.

"FG-1:

'O.K.' Male 11 yrs.: All my friends got different games with machine guns and everything (.) my mom doesn't let me to have all those because they are all 18 rated and stuff

'J.T.' Male 10 yrs: yeah like call of duty (.) halo and call of duty

[yeah... 'O.K.' 11 yrs, 'J.L.' 10 yrs., 'J.S.' 7 yrs.

'D.B.': you don't play these games, right?

[Nooo...

'J.T' Male 10 yrs.: no, they are just really really really really violent

“FG-4:

‘J.G.’ Male 11 yrs.: (....) the thing is we have quite a lot of wii games and all my family enjoy the wii except for my mom obviously so my dad plays games with me (....)”

It seems that boys view mothers as anti-video games, while fathers tend to be more positive about them. This common sentiment among the male children is reflected in the quote below, which has already been referred to above but is worth repeating in this context.

“FG-4:

‘G.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: you know what I don’t understand about video games (...) you can’t have 18+ games with all the shooting but you can join the army at 16 and shoot real people and use real guns (.) it doesn’t really make any sense

‘C.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: yes! THANK YOU! I’m telling that to my mom”

In the above conversation, we notice how ten-year-old ‘G.T.’ is quite annoyed about the rating system in video games. Apparently, it seems that like some other boys, his parents, especially his mother, do not allow him to play 18+ video games. Earlier in the focus group ‘G.T.’ mentioned his dislike of very young children’s games and described them as “the annoying ones”. In addition, the reason we assume it is ‘G.T.’’s mother who does not allow him to play the 18+ games and not his father is that when one of the other boys in the group mentioned that his mother does not allow him to play the 18+ games, ‘G.T.’ said that he actually plays with his father to avoid such a problem. As for the above conversation, we find that ten-year-old ‘C.T.’ got excited on hearing ‘G.T.’’s argument and obviously decided to use ‘G.T.’’s rationale to convince his mother to play such games. Thus again, it seems to be the mother who is the source of disagreement over children playing adult video games.

7.6.5 This seems to be another example of how video games tend to shape the negotiation of power among parents and children. It is apparent that boys tend to refer to their father or another male figure within the family who would be familiar with such games and willing either to play with them (as has been noted earlier) or to give

advice on new games. This was witnessed in several instances in different focus groups and interviews conducted with the boys. Below are some examples of this:

“FG-4:

‘G.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: yeah that’s what I did (.) I was playing at my friend’s house and when I got back I went to my dad and said do you know that game at my friend’s house (.) weelllllllll can I get it?

FG-1:

‘J.L.’ Male 7 yrs.: I ask my dad to get me the game and he got me it and (.) I saw a new game on the TV (.) and my birthday was coming up and I said (.) dad can I have this and that and the other and he got me it.

Interview-2:

‘J.M.’ Male 12 yrs.: well I’ve got an uncle in Dublin, (...), he tells me all about the games and when the new games are coming out and all that (.) and he tells me what to do in levels and where I can get games and all that.”

In the above quotes, it is apparent how the boys rely more on their fathers or any male relative for issues related to video games. It might be that they sense that those men would relate more to them as they would understand and accept their preferences. Thus they can get what they want without having to go through the negotiation process, which they expect to encounter with their mothers, due to difference in moral positions on adult video games between male and female carers. This also signifies how power is very much negotiated within gender ideologies.

7.6.6 Stereotypically, mothers are supposed to be more interested in their children’s education, while fathers are more inclined to be liberal with them, including being slack about letting them play violent video games. This stereotype was challenged in one example because one mother was aware of the educational, particularly the therapeutic, value of games, even violent ones, for her own son. This boy stated that his mother does not care about him playing 18+ certified games. However, when the mother was interviewed, she mentioned that she is aware that those games are 18+ certified but she regarded video games as a form of therapy for ‘J.M.’ rather than just a game. This is due to the fact that he has attention deficit hyper activity disorder (ADHD). After he began to play video games, she witnessed a huge improvement in

him especially with motor skills and concentration. Thus she knowingly allowed him to play adult video games in the interest of his own intellectual, social and motor development.

“Interview -2:

‘D.B.’: aren’t these 18+ certified?

‘J.M.’ Male 12 yrs.: yeah but my mom doesn’t care

Interview-4:

Mother: ‘J.M.’’s Xbox is in his bedroom so I don’t limit him but he generally would play no more than an hour and a half at a time.”

From the above quotes it might be thought that this mother is adopting an empowering pedagogy with her children, that is, allowing them to make their own autonomous decisions about their game playing. But her strategy is more subtle than that.

7.6.7 When the mother was asked if she allows her children to play online games with strangers, the following was her reply:

Interview-4:

Mother: I don’t allow it [playing with strangers] not yet (.) I’m not ready to take that leap (.) I think they are too young (.) I think there’s far too much given access to children on those live games and that’s actually no for me (.) we have Wi-Fi throughout the house and they could have access but we just blocked it completely (.) same thing ‘J.M.’ [12 yrs. old son] has a Facebook page but I have all his log in details so although I allow him to interact I have his login and I would go into his page check his messages and check what they are doing (...) that’s an absolute no for me being able to play with people we don’t know about (.) I don’t want my 12 year old play with a 50 year old (.) it’s just an absolute no for me (.....) I mean playing online live with people that could be adults that you don’t know that’s an absolute no (.) and for ‘L.M’ [9 yrs old daughter] and ‘L.G.’ [5 yrs. old son] it’s just a no no.”

Accordingly, even though she allows her children a certain degree of freedom to play the games they like, she still exercises a degree of control over who they play with, for their own protection. This seems to be what most parents of these children are doing, trying to balance a degree of empowerment for their children while retaining some control for the children's protection. Indeed, one could argue that the empowerment is a proxy for control, since the parents are allowing the children the appearance of autonomy in an area that is, in fact, relatively easy for the parents to monitor and control. Games are played in the home and the parents can monitor at arm's length the type of games played and the time they are played for, and who with. Thus from all of the above quotes, it can be argued that parents deploy strategies of control that fall along a continuum between an empowering pedagogy and a protective one, with the video games providing a site for the negotiation of control. Some of the children believe that their parents are fully empowering them since they are allowed to, for example, play 18+ games. However, parents retain a degree of power by controlling what they play or who they play with. It can be argued that sometimes fathers play the games with their sons, achieving a degree of monitoring as well as bonding.

7.6.8 Another way the parents tend to exercise a protective power over their children is by setting boundaries to their daily video gaming consumption. The children interviewed in this study have all highlighted that there are rules and limits to playing video games that their parents set. So for example, some were not allowed to play during weekdays. Others were only allowed to play after they had finished their homework. Some were allowed to play any day but for a specific time that usually did not exceed an hour especially during weekdays. These parental practices of power could be defied, particularly by boys. Some of them even explicitly noted that they tend to break the rules set by their parents for the consumption of video games and television.

“FG-1:

‘J.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: I’m allowed any day a week (.) I used to have a rule but I (.) I’m always breaking the rule now (.) of having half an hour of tv a day (.) half an hour but I always break it, I go an hour

‘D.B.’: okay so you have half an hour of TV and half an hour video games=

‘J.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: =yeah but I always break that rule (.) I’m normally having like (.) hour and a half, two hours or something.”

In the above quote, ten-year-old ‘J.T.’ highlighted that his parents allowed him to play video games any day of the week but for only half an hour. Apparently ‘J.T.’ used to abide by the rule his parents set when he was younger but not any more as he explicitly noted. This is an example of how children attempt to unilaterally renegotiate their parents’ power. The important aspect here is how the children view their parents’ rules and regulations. In another focus group, ten-year-old ‘G.T.’ claimed that his parents exaggerate the length of time he plays video games. He said they ask him to stop playing and go outside for a break.

“F.G-4:

‘G.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: I think my parents exaggerate how long I play (.) well sometimes I might only play 3 hours and my parents would come and say ohhh you’ve been playing for 4 hours you need to go outside and something like that.”

So it seems that when parents attempt to exercise some protective power over their children, the children do not perceive it favourably. It can be argued that children do not realise the consequences of prolonged playing and cannot relate to what their parents warn them against. This tends to stem from their perception that they are invincible and in control. This seems to result in a struggle of power between the parents and the children. The parents are trying to protect their children, while the children believe that their parents are exaggerating the threats. Video games seem to be quite an important site for this negotiation and struggle for power within family dynamics.

7.7.0 Are Children Influencing the Video Gaming Industry?

So from the above sections, it can be argued that video games play a significant role in children’s lives, and also have a major role in family dynamics as a site for the negotiation of parental power and children’s autonomy, and also as a site for emotional negotiation around time and bonding with family members. However, it might be the case that they are also influencing the video gaming and retailing

industry just as it is influencing them. As we note above, it is recognised by the industry experts that children are active rather than passive in their consumption of video games, and that they play by their own rules. This was recognised upon interviewing ‘M.M.’, the regional director of business development of a major multinational company in the video gaming industry. The researcher asked ‘M.M.’ whether the industry tries to make the games more affordable to the children taking into consideration their relatively limited primary purchasing power.

“Interview- 5:

‘M.M.’: no I don’t think we take it into consideration which is why some interesting things are happening in the industry like second hand games (.) so what happens is somebody buys a game and they’ll play it very actively for two days, finish it and then they’ll sell it back and get and it’s traded in and still has its value so they resell it (.) so it’s interesting because we price our games at premium let’s say 50 pounds, you can buy it 3 days later slightly used for 40 pounds or 30 pounds (.) now that’s great because the company, the retailer selling it bought only one copy but they get to sell it for a total of 80 pounds(.) right (.) and for us as a game develop publisher that’s not so good (.) we sold it for 40 to get 50 and we only get 40 even though they did two transactions (.) now that’s the business side (.) from a consumer side, yeah the kids go in and they’ll either share games, we see that happen a lot, or they will buy used games (.) but some of them save up, I think what happens is that they care about certain games so it’ll be like I just got my graduation money, I really want this game and that’s the one I want and they’ll go out and they’ll buy it (.) and they’ll know that they can either trade it in as long as it’s still got value or lend it to a friend for another game (.) so there’s a very active second hand market that’s out there for the kids who earn a lot.”

In the above quote, ‘M.M.’ sheds some light on how the video game market is affected by children’s consumption of video games. At the beginning, ‘M.M.’ notes that as an industry, they realise that children are a major consumer market. However, the video gaming industry does not reduce the prices of their games and gadgets to make it more affordable to children. This has resulted in the emergence of a second hand market and also of informal sharing of games, especially among children. No matter how much a child saves from his pocket money and birthday gifts, they still

cannot necessarily afford to buy many games because of the high cost per game. Thus children began sharing and swapping games with their friends as a solution to the problem. Realising this, some retailers seized the opportunity and offered to buy and sell second hand games.

7.7.1 This concept seems to have appealed greatly to both parents and children. In the interview with the mother of three, she highlighted that she only buys second hand games (as been highlighted earlier). The only exception would be for a game that she knows her child really cares about, and then she would buy it as a reward for good behaviour or excellence in school. This also confirms what ‘M.M.’ the practitioner said earlier that children tend to save up for games they really like and buy as a first hand user, while less important games are usually bought as second hand. In addition to that, grandparents are often the extra pockets from which children tend to seek funding for games. As for the children, they seemed quite accustomed to the sharing and buying of second hand games. This is apparent in the below quotes taken from focus group 4.

“FG-4:

‘G.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: I don’t play it [Pokémon] much anymore

‘B.R.’ Male 11 yrs.: yeah but you traded it (.) you traded it with me

‘G.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: yeah I traded it today

[At a later stage in the focus group.....]

‘G.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: sometimes (.) you don’t actually have to buy games (.) sometimes you can swap games

‘C.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: I did that in one game (.) I swapped one game and they gave me discounted money of it

‘G.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: or sometimes they might give you a game that’s just as good as this game like give you an offer or something.”

In the above quotes, the two solutions children resort to in order to acquire video games are presented. One of the traditional practices among children is swapping of games, toys and other possessions. Sharing or swapping of video games is simply another form of social interaction among children and an extension of activity that

pre-existed video games. However, the emergence of a second hand market in games represents the response of the video games retailers to the particular dynamics of children's activity in the market. As children resort to buying second hand games, fewer units would be sold which would result in lower sales for the game copyright owners. Accordingly, it can be argued that an element of agentive action can be seen in the way that children consume video games in response to the structural limitations of market conditions. With the appearance of a second hand video games market and sharing of games, it is no longer just about the influence of games on children, but the reciprocal influence of the children on the market of video games as a whole. These children seem to be adapting the games to some degree to suit their own social, financial and developmental needs. In addition, as the practitioners noted above, the industry is very aware of the ways in which children enjoy the plasticity of games in that they can adapt them to their own social situation by changing rules, sharing, playing online, playing games beyond their age category, and trading in second hand games. In so doing, they are to a degree influencing the market.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Seven has detailed the third interpretive repertoire, 'Games as a Source of Empowerment for Children'. It is apparent that children see games as empowering in many ways. Knowledge of video games acts as an important social enabler, helping to establish relationships and hierarchies in peer groups and playing an important role in constructing emerging gendered subject positions. Within the family, video games are a site of negotiation of parental power and family relationships. The autonomy children feel within the family as a result of being allowed to buy or play the game of their choice is one they can trade off for enhanced status in their peer group, but, importantly, this autonomy is constrained, since parents are fully aware that in allowing a degree of freedom of choice around playing video games, they have a negotiating tool to use to exert control in other areas. The interesting thing here is not that parents and children negotiate control, since they have always done so, but that video games have, in a short time, become such a rich site for this negotiation. Chapter Eight will now complete the findings by detailing the final two interpretive repertoires.

Chapter Eight

Findings III

Chapter Outline

Chapter Eight concludes the analytical findings with the final two interpretive repertoires, entitled 'Video Games, Children's Development and Socialisation', and 'Negotiating the Ideological Dilemma of Video Games in Popular Culture'. As with the previously described repertoires, these are overlapping and interlocking discursive resources but also constitute discrete categories across the data sets. Once again, the findings are rhetorically positioned against conventional wisdom that takes as axiomatic the negative influence of video games on children's physical, cognitive, social and emotional development, but the data sets offer some richer nuance on this theme.

8.0.0 Video Games, Children's Development and Socialisation

Another important angle that needs to be investigated is the extent to which video games may affect children's development and socialisation. Conventional wisdom often holds that video games impede children's development and tend to have a negative effect on their academic performance. This is usually attributed to a lack of concentration in school, resulting from lack of sleep the night before because of playing games until late.

It was apparent from the interviews and focus groups that the children were aware of such allegations. The children's views were mixed. Some felt that video games were a good thing, while others conceded that there may be negative aspects. Below are some quotes from different focus groups where children name what they believe video games does to them on a physical and developmental level.

"FG-1:

'O.K.' Male 11 yrs.: [I play sports games] on the wii and everything because it (.) it makes you (.) it keeps you fit as well

'J.T.' Male 10 yrs.: yeah sports fitness

FG-3:

‘F.G.’ Female 7 yrs.: well (2) emm (1) on brain training there’s a man and he speaks to you and he trains your brain

FG- 5:

‘B.S.’ Male 10 yrs.: they help you learn (...) because they (.) like in there if something happens to someone in real life it will show you how to do it (.) in general (.) like sometimes you have to (.) if something happens to them you have to do something like (.) ummm that medical thing where you like

‘D.B.’: CPR?

‘B.S.’ Male 10 yrs.: yeah and you know how to do it

‘C.W.’ Male 7 yrs.: two of the games on my mom’s DS are for brain training

‘B.S.’ Male 10 yrs.: sometimes you have to do things with the controller that’s like makes your arms like stronger.”

In the above quotes, the children mention three attributes of video games’ usefulness according to their belief. The first attribute is physical fitness, which is usually associated with new sports games supported by consoles which require motion on the player’s part, such as the Wii and Xbox 360. It is true that some physical activity is required when playing such games. Accordingly some children view that playing those games helps keep them fit and strong. It needs to be noted that eleven-year-old ‘O.K.’ who mentioned playing sports games for such a reason, is actually a very sporty boy. He claimed to be playing several sports in and outside of school and noted that video games are rather an extension to his passion for sports. He always buys sports games and when he is not playing outside, he is inside playing those sports themed games.

8.0.1 A second attribute of video games is that they can be seen as teachers for real life situations. This attribute was put forward by eleven-year-old ‘B.S.’ who believes that video games teach him things that would prepare him for real life and which show him how to react in certain situations. ‘B.S.’ tried to illustrate his point by giving an example of knowing how to perform a cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) however, he failed to remember its name. Hence, it can be argued that some video games might actually be teaching children some things that are advanced for their age, and may amount to constructive and useful knowledge. It is true that there might be

violence in some games, but there's also beneficial knowledge in them. Thus video games seem to be one of the sources from which children tend to pick up knowledge about the world, some good and some not so good.

8.0.2 The third attribute that was expressed is also related to learning and as the children put it, video games help in “brain training”. This attribute was mentioned by both ‘F.G.’ (seven-year-old girl from focus group 3) and ‘C.W.’ (seven-year-old boy from focus group 5) as they mentioned that they play games that help them train their brain. When the researcher asked ‘F.G.’ to elaborate a bit more on what kind of brain training she receives, she failed to explain further what she meant. She simply answered saying that it “trains your brain to do stuff”. It is well known that IQ can be improved through practice at IQ-style questions and puzzles, and some games are designed and marketed with this in mind. The children pick up this aspect, without necessarily understanding what cognitive skills development may mean. In connection with this point, at a later stage within the course of data gathering, the mother of three also mentioned learning games.

“Interview-4:

Mother: ‘L.G.’ [5 yr old son] plays on my laptop (..) he goes on to CBB website and plays word games (...) word games (.) it's all learning games (.) he doesn't do any fighting games or anything and that's how he's been getting the number sequencing as well (.) so it's about school learning and related to school kind of curriculums.”

Apparently, some parents encourage their children to play certain video games that aid in enhancing their children's capabilities in problem solving and other learning skills. These games seem to incorporate knowledge and skills similar to those found in school curriculums. In the interview with the mother, she explained how her five-year-old son is actually smarter than his siblings and other children in his school. She noted his early exposure to video games as he grew up to find them an integral part of his elder siblings' daily routine. She mentions that since he was a toddler he would even watch her play Sudoku on her laptop. She stated that soon enough he understood the sequencing of numbers even though he was not able to do the sequencing he understood the concept of the game, and also of other games that his siblings played.

If we look at the age of the children who mentioned “brain training” as an attribute of video games, we find that they are relatively younger children (seven-year-olds). It can be argued that this younger age group tends to play this genre of games, the learning games, upon an encouragement from their parents. This is assumed as both of them mentioned that they play these games on their mother’s consoles (DS or laptop). This assumption was further supported by the mother’s interview as she mentioned allowing her five-year-old to use her laptop to play word games.

8.1.0 Video Games Are Quite Good, BUT...”

In this section we put forward the negative physical concerns related to video games that were mentioned by some of the children interviewed. The main concern those children expressed was that when they play for a long time, their eyes tend to hurt.

“FG-1:

‘J.L.’ Male 7 yrs.: games are actually quite good, but if you play it for too long, it really damages your eyes, your eyes go (.) ehh

FG-3

‘A.D.’ Female 8 yrs.: but it [eyes] does hurt after a while

‘S.T.’ Female 12 yrs.: yeah your eyes

‘F.G.’ Female 7 yrs.: yeah when I spend time on my DS or TV like half an hour or something my eyes really hurt and I could hardly open them again.”

In the above quotes, it seems that some children experience discomfort in their eyes when playing video games for a prolonged time. This seems to be the most common complaint among children when it comes to video games probably because of the noticed immediate effect. It is notable that this complaint is not only linked to playing video games but also to watching TV. Seven-year-old ‘F.G’ highlighted this resemblance in the effect of video games and TV on the eyes. So it can be argued that the most shared complaint about video games among children is similar to the complaints related to spending too much time in front of a TV or a screen in general. Indeed, parents used to be concerned about the effect of prolonged TV viewing on children’s eyesight, but this argument is seldom heard nowadays. Moreover, some of the evils of playing video games in conventional wisdom, such as not getting enough

sleep, absorbing bad information, and not being physically active enough, are also similar to those voiced about television many years ago.

8.1.1 In another focus group, amidst a conversation on the longest time the boys played video games non-stop, ten-year-old ‘C.T.’ reported he once played for seven hours without a break. When the researcher asked him what made him stop, ‘C.T.’ said that he couldn’t continue because his eyes started to hurt.

“FG-4:

‘D.B.’: and when you stopped you stopped because you were tired or you got bored?

‘C.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: actually No (.) If I play for too long when I close my eyelids it gets really hurt (.) ummm that’s when (.) when that starts to happen I just go off

‘D.B.’: okay (.) how did you go for 7 hours without going to the bathroom or eating or anything?

‘C.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: I didn’t realise it (.) I kept on

‘J.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: I always go to the toilet

‘C.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: I didn’t need to go to the toilet.”

In the above conversation, the researcher tried to understand how ‘C.T.’ managed to play for seven hours non-stop without even going to the bathroom. This seemed important because not using the bathroom for a long time can cause those children health problems that were highlighted in the literature review. It also measures the degree of the child’s attachment to the video game and whether he has control to pause the game and respond to his/her body needs or not. Some might argue that this can be an indication of addiction to video games. However, it seems that the boys interviewed do not feel that they have this problem.

8.1.2 Experiencing discomfort in the eyes was not only reported to be caused by playing for prolonged time but some boys also reported it when playing 3D games. This was realised in an informal conversation that took place at the club during lunch break on the first day, as a ten-year-old boy ‘M.K.’ approached the researcher with a question. At the beginning, ‘M.K.’ was hoping that the researcher would explain to

him the reason why his eyes hurt when he plays 3D games on his DS but not as much when turning the 3D feature off. He even got his DS to show the researcher what he meant. ‘M.K.’ was soon joined by his friend ‘L.K.’ who supported his argument. The main concern those two boys had was whether they would lose their sight eventually if they continue playing such 3D games. Of course this is an unlikely outcome from playing 3D games, but it seems that this is the result of their parents’ socialisation. It might be that in an attempt to get their children away from game consoles, parents utilise a fear mechanism where they exaggerate the harmful effects of games. Accordingly, when those boys experienced some discomfort in their eyes while playing 3D games on their DS, they were worried that what their parents warned them about would actually be true. Moreover, during the course of the study, children interviewed seldom reported any other physical complaints that they experienced when playing video games. Even though there has been some concern in the literature about possible repetitive strain or similar injuries resulting from prolonged use of consoles but the children interviewed for this study reported no such effects.

8.2.0 Therapeutic Benefits of Video Games

It has been reported above that the mother of three felt that video games had helped her son’s ADHD, supporting the notion, found in some of the literature, that far from having negative effects on children’s development, video games can actually have a therapeutic value. She said that she introduced video games to her children two years ago when she realised that knowledge of video games provided children with a route to entry into the peer group. She was hoping that they would help her son, ‘J.M.’, make more friends and improve his social skills since due to ADHD it was difficult for him to make friends. However, since she got the games, she had noticed a significant improvement not only to ‘J.M.’’s social interaction and confidence but also to his concentration and motor skills. Improvement in ‘J.M.’s’ motor skills, specifically in his fingers, from using the game console, resulted in improved handwriting, which further built his confidence as his mother reported.

“Interview-4:

Mother: ‘J.M.’ didn’t like computer games to start with because he’s got attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and with that comes his difficulty to do motor movements with his fingers so but there are also aspects of his ability with social interaction (.)

cuz he finds it more difficult to make friends (.) so as his friends were all playing computer games we made the decision just to buy every console so we bought the Xbox, we bought the Wii and we bought DSi s and that was the first they had any exposure to it and he had to keep up with that because of friendships (.) but what it did (.) it improved his motor skills in his fingers (.) so his writing has improved because the muscles that he uses have actually improved his writing (.) so as he got better at writing and playing games, his confidence also built up as well (...)
improved motor skills in his hands (.) also improved his concentration span (.) because that something that comes ADHD 'J.M.' finds it very difficult to sit down and do a task (.) but when he found he was getting better at games (.) he would sit for longer

'D.B': did you find he improved academically or was it the same?

Mother: I'm not sure it was down to the computer games (.) I think it's bound to age because boys develop a little bit later but this is the first year that his academic ability (.) I'm not sure whether it is related or not but I think that the motor movements was the big thing because to be able to write fast is necessary to be able to learn and concentrate to be able to learn (.) I do think that there was (.) and sticking at a task (.) 'J.M.' would never stick at a task but to learn how to play the computer games with his friends he had to sit at night on his own and be able to be as good as them (.) so it made his concentration maybe a little better."

In the above conversation, the researcher was wondering whether video games have also helped improve 'J.M.'s academic ability. However, his mother was not sure if the improvement could be attributed to the video games or was the natural course of his cognitive development. Yet she admitted that being able to write fast and concentrate are crucial for learning and those have improved as his motor skills improved and his concentration span increased, apparently with the help of video games. The challenge motivated 'J.M.' to play the video games and he himself sensed the rather favourable change they had on his skills. Not only does he now have more friends but he has also gained confidence in school as he is able to concentrate more and has better and faster writing skills. Accordingly it can be argued that video games might be beneficial to some children suffering from ADHD, as they appear to have been to 'J.M.'. This could be attributed to the increased levels of motivation, concentration and hand-eye co-ordination elicited by playing the games.

8.2.1 Playing video games is sometimes said to have a negative effect on children's schooling to the extent that if they have and play consoles in their bedroom instead of sleeping they can be too tired to study the next day, as we noted above. In the case of 'J.M.', this was not regarded as an issue by his mother. He was not a 'big sleeper', and in any case his access to games at night was controlled.

"Interview 4:

'D.B.': does it affect his sleep?

Mother: J. doesn't really sleep anyway (.) never has (.) he didn't sleep for the first 5 years of his life (.) it's true (.) 15 min at a time every since he was a new born (.) now he goes to sleep about 10 o'clock (.) he doesn't play computer games after half seven in the evening, nobody does in the house (.) but he would happily be awake till 2 or 3 in the morning."

Hence, there was no support in this case for the common general assumption that video games deprive children of sleep. Clearly, it is not the games themselves but the child and the parenting style in the household that influence how much sleep the child gets. Children sometimes need to be told to go to sleep, and video games have not fundamentally changed this aspect of family life.

8.3.0 Video Games and Children's Socialisation

One of the main aspects that require investigation is how video games affect the process of socialisation within family dynamics. Video games have become an almost indispensable daily activity in many families with children. Thus the effect of video games on the socialisation of family members and other children is another interesting angle in the exploration of the social implications of video games. In this section, we explore the effect of video games on three types of socialisation based on the experience of children. These three are: socialisation with the parents, socialisation with siblings and socialisation with other children.

8.4.0 Video Games and Quality Time with Family

It is sometimes assumed that video games are solo activities that inhibit the social skills and development of whoever plays them, especially children. However, it seems that this view can be challenged. One reason for that could be how the industry's

target market has evolved and expanded. Video games now appeal to different age groups of both genders. According to the CEO of a video gaming company who was interviewed, video games have now become a way for parents and even grandparents to spend quality time with their children.

“Interview 6:

‘T.M.’: Games were first intended for children but then they were a way for spending quality time with children (.) parents and kids sit together and enjoy playing a game, which they can talk about later, and have a memorable experience for them. Disney movies were like that and this is how it started first it was a kids movie then a kids movie that parents can also watch and enjoy. This is intended to increase family participation. The father playing football or rugby with his sons has evolved into the father playing online and video games with his children. Part of it came from the parents remembering how much fun they had playing those games as kids (...) so even grandparents can play with their grandchildren such games that promote spending quality time.”

In the above quote, ‘T.M.’, the CEO of a video gaming company in the UK, claims that video games are somehow similar to Disney movies. Like Disney movies, video games were ostensibly made for children but soon broadened in their appeal to increase family participation. This is attributed to the emergence of various games that appeal to different age groups. Thus the idea of spending quality time with the children now extends to joint video gaming. Moreover, ‘T.M.’ suggests that one of the reasons why some parents may substitute traditional family bonding activities such as sports with video games is because playing video games was an intrinsic part of their own childhood. It can be argued that most of the young parents in Western societies have witnessed the appearance of video games and have played them at a certain point of time in their childhood or adolescence. So having the opportunity to play them again with their children brings back “fun” memories. This is the practitioner’s view of video games. For parents of young children today, video games are not an alternative activity that is separate from traditional children’s games- it is simply another game.

8.4.1 Even though practitioners claim it is a family activity, some news media attack video games and suggest that parents complain about how video games are eating away family time. Hence, it is important to see if parents hold that same opinion or not. In the interview with the mother of three, she actually supported the practitioner's claim, as she reported spending time with her children playing video games (as has been highlighted earlier). In this interview, the mother stated that she actually enjoys playing some of the games with her children. Those are usually social games that are popular among young children and girls. However, she tends not to play with her eldest son who plays the more adult games. Accordingly, it can be argued that video games are sometimes a way to spend quality time with family members. Yet gender and age tend to play a role in the extent to which this concept is applicable, because older boys who prefer adult games sometimes play them with their Dads. Mothers who are familiar with video games tend to play with their daughters and younger sons.

8.4.2 In the other practitioner's interview, he reflected on his own experience with video games as a parent himself. This is beneficial as we have an opportunity to consider the view of a father within the family just as we viewed a mother's opinion on such an issue.

“Interview 5:

‘M.M.’: so you see I buy it for my kids but I may be playing it and that happens quite a bit more now because you've got this generation of people who've grown up with video games who are now comfortable with that so they'll enjoy a sports game or a certain category like a shooter game such as call of duty for example that they want to play (.....) I play games occasionally, it's not what I have a passion to do, if I have some time and it's raining or I can play with my kids something interesting then we'll play it but I say less than an hour a week and on weekends maybe 2 hours on a rainy cold dark weekend.”

From the above statement, ‘M.M.’ seem to be a living example of what ‘T.M.’, the other practitioner interviewed, describe as parents driven by nostalgia to play video games with their children. ‘M.M.’ stated that he grew up with video games and so he is quite comfortable playing them with his children.

8.4.3 Having explored the opinion of both practitioners and parents, it is important to consider the children's views on video games and family socialisation. However, on speaking to the children, opinions varied. Some children reported that video games are not a family activity while others noted that video games are a way for spending time with their Dads specifically. This was noted in boys aged ten and above. Yet in focus group 3, twelve-year-old 'S.T.' reported that the only time her family gets together to play is at Christmas and they usually play a board game and not a video game.

"FG-3:

'S.T.' Female 12 yrs.: yeah the only time I really play with my family is like on Christmas and we just got a new board game or something like that and we all play it but other than that we never really play together."

Thus, it should be noted that not all families are familiar with video games and consider it a family bonding activity. While on the other hand, some boys reported that they play with their Dads. Some do it in order to get an opportunity to play adult games, and others state that they play with their Dads in an attempt to spend quality time with them. Below are two quotes from focus group 4 that explain this.

"FG-4:

'J.T.' Male 10 yrs.: I play with my dad [as a technique to overcome the mother's worry about the game content]

In the above quote, when some boys reported that their mothers are usually against them playing adult games, ten-year-old 'J.T.' revealed his technique to overcome such opposition. 'J.T.' simply plays with his Dad who apparently plays those adult games, thus he waives his mother's concern about the games content. On the other hand, some boys actually reported video games to be means for socialising with their Dads.

"FG-4:

'J.G.' Male 11 yrs.: well I'm not an only child (...) all my family enjoy the wii except for my mom obviously, so my dad plays games with me (...) so I was playing NBA 09 with my dad (.) and I play with my brother obviously

and my sister (...) I like have to help her with the game (.....) I do my homework first and then I like get ready for bed and ummm since I'm older than my brother, I don't go straight to bed I go like (.) I have time with my dad (.) cause he's at work and my mom's at work but my mom can't really do these like games so I do it with my dad for about 30 min or an hour (....).”

The above quote seems to support what ‘T.M’ the practitioner suggested about video games and increasing family participation. Based on eleven-year-old ‘J.G.’ statement, his family enjoys playing video games, with the exception of his mother, as has been highlighted in the previous repertoire on gender differences and preference of video games. Yet the point here is that ‘J.G.’ considers playing video games, specifically Wii, as a shared family activity as he plays with his Dad and siblings. From ‘J.G.’s words, it is apparent that he considers video games a suitable activity for him to spend some quality time with his working father even during weekdays. Thus it is viewed as means for father-son bonding. Thus in some families video games tend to offer a different opportunity for family socialisation and bonding. As we have witnessed, some children support the practitioner’s claim that video games are or can be a family activity rather than a solitary experience. So from the above quotes it can be argued that the parents, who played video games growing up, tend to be comfortable playing video games nowadays with their children. Hence, in these households, video games become a means for family socialisation and bonding, mediated by age and gender preferences.

8.5.0 Video Games and Siblings’ Socialisation

As noted in the previous section, video games might have a favourable effect on parent-child socialisation, given the parent’s prior exposure to video games. It is assumed that since video games are quite popular among children, then it should be a shared interest between siblings thus enhancing their socialisation. However, this does not seem to necessarily be the case. No children who were interviewed reported playing video games with their siblings. In fact, it seemed almost a taboo to do that. This can be understood in different gender siblings due to differences in game genre preferences. However, it was even noticed with same gender siblings, who reported not playing with their brothers and rather playing alone or with their friends.

In the below quote taken from focus group 1, when the researcher asked the boys if they play with their siblings, they dismissed it.

“FG-1:

‘D.B.’: ok so two little sisters and two big sisters....do you play together? Do they play with you or=

All boys at the same time: ‘J.T.’ 10 yrs., ‘O.K.’ 11 yrs., ‘J.S.’ 10 yrs., ‘J.L.’ 7 yrs. [Noooo, sometimes, no, normally we don’t (.....)”

The tone in which the boys expressed their response to the question was quite interesting. The researcher did not expect them to react quite so dismissively, as if it was something “uncool” to be playing with your siblings, especially if they were girls. Again this touches upon the gender difference in game preferences and identity realisation and construction that those children experience at such an age. Perhaps it could be argued that because of the importance of video games in children’s peer group socialisation it is important for them to deny playing the games with their siblings.

8.5.1 This dismissive reaction was not only experienced with the boys but also with the girls interviewed.

“FG-3:

‘D.B.’: ok I know you have a brother Jack, do you play with him?

‘S.T.’ Female 12 yrs.: No [laughing] noooo (.) we play commmmmpletely different games (...) so I play on the computer the treasure island games and he plays Pokémon and stuff like that (.) yeah so we don’t really play together.”

In focus group 3, twelve-year-old ‘S.T.’ denied playing with her ten-year-old brother. She attributed it to the fact that they play different games. This supports what was mentioned earlier about different gender and game preference. So it can be argued that video games do not play a strong role in the socialisation of siblings of different genders.

8.5.2 It seems that not only does gender play a role when it comes to video games and the socialisation of siblings, but also age plays an important role. Even in same gender siblings, game preferences differ with age. This is particularly apparent in boys whose preference for games changes as they grow older. Young boys seem to prefer games free from violence, and these games also usually appeal to girls of all ages. Yet as they grow older, they tend to prefer the more adult violent games. They underline this stage of their development by explicitly dissociating themselves from playing the other young children's games. In focus group 2, seven-year-old 'K.J.' reported that he does not play with his nine-year-old brother.

"FG-2:

'K.J.' Male 7 yrs.: I have an elder brother (.) he's 9

'D.B.': so do you play with him?

'K.J.' Male 7 yrs.: emmm (.) no no

'D.B.': why not?

'K.J.' Male 7 yrs.: he would play on DS and I would go on mom's computer and play club penguin and miniclip."

The games 'K.J.' plays are usually games that appeal to young children. And since his brother is a bit older (even though not much) it seems that he prefers playing the more adult games that come on the DS. Accordingly it seems that video games are not likely to enhance siblings' socialisation even though it is a common interest. However, it is a common interest as an activity, but when it comes to games genres, each has a different preference. Nowadays designers introduce all sorts of games that would serve different tastes based on gender and age group, so there are many choices to make, each of which reflects the child's sense of their own maturity and peer group membership.

8.5.3 A quite interesting observation regarding that matter was noted in the interview with the mother of three. She reported having recently bought a trampoline for her children. The reason she said she bought the trampoline was to get her children spending time together playing. Even though all her three children play video games, as she reported, each plays on their own. That is why she bought the trampoline to get them to play together as siblings used to in the 'old days'.

“Interview-4:

Mother: I bought it [trampoline] because I felt that the children have such different ages that they don't have common interests and I want them to be able to play together (.) because years ago we were able to go out and play on the street and you can't do that now so I bought them the trampoline so that they weren't gonna be watching TV and they spend hours on the trampoline (.) we started the Wii on every single day and it's maybe twice or 3 times a week now (...) it's taking over from the computer games (.....) it [video games] does affect communication because they sit silently (.) it's not like they are playing games where they are playing together and interacting as siblings (.) they play by themselves solo games.”

From the above quote, the mother touches upon several points of interest, one of which is how siblings' socialisation in the past differed from today. She remembers how siblings used to go outside in the streets to play together but now that is not done so much. She might have been referring to lack of parents' time to take the children outside but more likely she was referring to safety reasons and the perception that the streets are dangerous for children to play in. She also mentions how the communication among her children is affected by video games as they sit silently playing solo games. This somewhat supports the suggestion that video games do not necessarily enhance siblings' socialisation. In fact it can be argued that video games affect the style of communication among siblings to a certain extent, because while they are playing the games they are not communicating with each other. This contrasts with the many TV advertisements for Wii, for example that portray family members of all ages playing active games together. However, while children are focusing on the game and not communicating whilst playing solitary games, they might be communicating when they are playing team games online, and of course they talk to each other about the games.

8.6.0 Socialisation with Other Children

Even though it seems that video games do not directly assist socialisation among siblings, they seem to be at the core of children's socialisation with other children. In the quotes below we see how video games play a vital role in the socialisation of children with their friends.

“FG-4:

‘C.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: ask him [‘J.T.’] if we have a video games marathon today
[addressing the researcher]

‘J.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: that’s the only reason I came in today

‘B.R.’ Male 11 yrs.: same.”

In focus group 4, when the researcher was asking the boys whether they like playing video games, the above exchange took place. As we can see, the reason why those boys came to the club that day was because they had a video game marathon, where they can compete and play with their friends’ video games all day. This shows the importance of video games in the lives of those boys and in their socialisation with their peers.

8.6.1 In addition to enhancing face-to-face peer group socialisation, video games are now offering children means of virtual socialisation with their friends.

“FG-2:

‘L.S.’ Male 9 yrs.: I play with my friends online on Xbox (.) we pick a time and we all go on to play together but we can’t chat or anything.”

In the above quote, nine-year-old ‘L.S.’ seems to be a typical example of some boys today who tend to play video games online with their friends. Given time tied parents and safety considerations along with other reasons, it is sometimes argued that children today have fewer opportunities than in previous decades to spend time with their friends. However, with the proliferation of video games as a shared interest among children and the upsurge of Internet and online games, children have found a new way of socialisation. Thus it seems that these online video games offer children a virtual gateway for socialising with their friends in addition to physical socialisation. This is further supported in the below quote taken from another focus group.

“FG-4:

‘B.R.’ Male 11 yrs.: we all got Pokémon and we play (.) connect to a portal and battle

‘C.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: I play on multiplayer when my friends come around my house (1) I can also be playing alone and then call for a friend’s help to finish the

game (.) for example ‘B.R.’ here I would be playing a game and then I would call him to arms and he would fly into my game and help me battle.”

In the above conversation, we get a feeling of how those boys socialise playing online video games. It seems that video games are a shared activity with friends that is not confined by place. Children seem to play video games when they are physically together in the house, school or club, and also online when each is in their own home. Even though parents might see their children playing alone and become worried about their children’s social abilities, yet those children are not necessarily playing alone. Those children are experiencing a new form of socialisation, which some parents might not be fully accustomed to.

8.6.2 Furthermore, on interviewing the children, it came to our attention that some of them use those video games and their consoles for chatting with their friends. This seems to be even more common in girls. Below are two quotes that exemplify this in two different occasions, one from a focus group and the other from an interview.

“FG-4:

‘J.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: okay, on Xbox if you have friends and you can send requests and then if they are online you can talk to them either through a microphone or through your Kinect (.) so yesterday my friend he wasn’t actually playing he just turned the Xbox on and turned the TV off so he was just walking around his house talking to me and I was playing and he wasn’t actually doing anything he was just eating breakfast.”

“Interview-1:

‘L.M.’ Female 9 yrs.: mostly chat to each other on it [the game, animal crossing](.) cuz you get to go through this game to meet other people so it’s really fine (...) people that you do know (.) like Ella my friend (...)and so my uncle Jack (.) he loves animal crossing on the Wii (...) I can actually get through the game to meet other people.”

From these quotes, it is inferred that video games, specifically the online ones, have provided children with a new means of socialisation. Online video games can be seen as virtual playgrounds for children to interact, play and socialise with their friends. It

needs to be highlighted that media stories reflecting a fear of children interacting with strangers through these online games can actually be influenced by the parents. Children reported not playing with people they don't know, as it was not allowed by their parents.

8.6.3 On another note, in the interview with the CEO of a gaming company in the UK, he further explained why video games and online ones are quite popular among children nowadays.

“Interview-6:

‘T.M.’: One of the main reasons why people especially kids liked the online games is the fact that they are no longer playing against the computer but they are playing against real people who sometimes they might know (...)brought the kids more topics to talk about in social contexts (...) Post player social iteration (...) these online games are the new way of making friends who share the same interests. It's more like meeting people in the football practice and things like that (...) The virtual world of gaming is like a tennis club; you go in and meet people who like the same sport or game.”

From a practitioner's point of view, ‘T.M.’ believes that the main element that attracts children to video games is the interaction. Children get to play games with their friends, not bound by place or time. This provided them with new forms of conversation and socialisation. He further supports his argument by stating that video games are similar to sports practices that children attend. There are always others to play with who share the same preference for games. Online video games seem to be the new platform for socialisation of children with their counterparts. However, it needs to be highlighted that virtual socialisation is a continuation of traditional socialisation rather than a substitute for it. Children who play online video games seem to play with their already established friends from school, club, neighbourhood or relatives.

Additionally, as we have seen, video games are a rather important tool for children's socialisation with their friends, but not necessarily with their siblings. This could be attributed to difference in age and gender. However, friends are normally within the

same age range and same gender, thus preferences tend to be similar. Accordingly, children tend to share more common activities with their friends than their siblings. Unlike previous generations, with the availability of online video gaming, children do not have to socialise as much with their siblings any more since other options are available (in this case their friends). Thus it might be that the option of being able to play online video games with friends have resulted in decreased siblings socialisation within households. Children are not so reliant on their siblings for social contact as there are opportunities for social contact with non- family peers, and this non-familial interaction is facilitated by video games, virtual gaming and online communication facilitated by games consoles.

8.7.0 Sociability versus Traditional Forms of Socialisation

So it seems that video games have expanded and added to the traditional forms of socialisation for children. It is argued that even a collective identity now exists among children, based on their shared interest in video games. As has been highlighted in the previous section, video games, especially the online ones, have provided children with a virtual playground. It needs to be noted that some parents impose rules to ensure the safety of their children in such a virtual world. Thus this virtual playground may be an extension of acquaintances and friends arising from traditional forms of socialisation rather than complete strangers. However, since video games have become another daily activity in children's lives, it is important to see whether this is at the expense of other traditional activities such as watching TV for example.

8.7.1 The two practitioners interviewed held somehow contradicting views when it comes to whether video games are eating away from TV time or not. On the one hand, the CEO of the video gaming company believes that video games have replaced the TV in the lives of children today.

“Interview-6:

‘T.M.’: It used to be stop watching the TV and go outside to play and now it's stop playing games and go watch TV.”

‘T.M.’ believes that parents' anxiety about their children spending too much time in front of the TV instead of playing outdoors has changed to an anxiety about them

spending too much time playing video games. It seems that he believes that parents consider watching TV to be less of an issue than playing video games. On the other hand, ‘M.M.’, the regional director of a video gaming multinational company has a different view.

“Interview-5:

‘M.M.’: now are they [children] more active with those [video games] than television or movies, well I still think that the experience of games is intense, it requires your attention where there’s still a lot to be done to be entertained, just sit back and watch a movie or watch a television show and just passively enjoy that (.) so I do think that there’s a you know if people work all day and they have some other activity doing, studying or otherwise then they decide they are going to play games, that’s a high level of commitment so I don’t think there’s a lot of people who do that for long period of time.”

In the above quote, ‘M.M.’ highlights the difference between the nature of TV versus that of video games. He suggests that video games have an “intense” nature, as they require a “high level of commitment” from the player. Thus, he argues that after spending a long day at work or school, other options of entertainment that require less commitment are usually more appealing. This includes passively watching TV for example. Accordingly, ‘M.M.’’s point is that video games do not necessarily compete with watching TV due to the difference in the nature of the activity and level of commitment.

8.7.2 This was actually supported twice in this research. In focus group 2, there was a consensus from all the boys that they like watching TV.

“FG-2:

‘K.J.’ Male 7 yrs.: I watch TV=
‘L.S.’ Male 9 yrs.: =yeah I do watch TV
‘V.R.’ Male 7 yrs.: =yeahhhh
‘R.S.’ Male 6 yrs.: =I really like TV
‘F.F.’ Male 8 yrs.: you like TV?
‘R.S.’ Male 6 yrs.: yeah all I do is sit like this [mimicking sitting lazily watching TV]
‘F.F.’ Male 8 yrs.: I don’t play that often cuz I’m usually watching TV”

From the above quotes, it is apparent how those boys like watching TV. Not only this, but it seems that the reason for this is the fact that it is passive, unlike video games, which require their full attention to reach further levels. What is worth noting as well is that eight-year-old ‘F.F.’, who previously boasted of playing adult games and his proficiency in them, now claimed that he does not play that often as he is usually watching TV. This was further expressed by another boy in interview 2.

“Interview 2

‘J.M.’ Male 12 yrs.: (....) if it’s a Sunday and I’m not doing anything, either watch teli, go out with my friends or play the xbox
‘D.B.’: which is going to take the bigger chunk of your time?
‘J.M.’ Male 12 yrs.: probably would be watching teli.”

In this interview, twelve-year-old ‘J.M.’ also mentioned that watching TV takes a bigger chunk of his time than playing video games or spending time with his friends. Thus it can be argued that video games do offer children with a new daily activity that they can use to enhance their socialisation with their parents and also their friends. However, video games do not necessarily eat away from the time spent in other activities, this is due to the intense nature of video games that places them in a different category of activity.

8.8.0 Negotiating the Ideological Dilemma of Video Games in Popular Culture

In this final interpretive repertoire we explore a dilemma that appeared during the data gathering process. Popular media seem to paint rather a gloomy picture of video games and their allegedly detrimental effects, especially on children. The word ‘addiction’ often appears in media coverage about video games, and there have been stories of therapeutic clinics that have emerged to ‘cure’ people, usually children, of their addiction to video games. This was quite apparent when interviewing the children in this research. It happened more than once that when the researcher introduced the study and explained its focus on children’s experience of video games, the children would say spontaneously, and defensively, that they are ‘not addicts’. The way those children associated playing video games with addiction was quite interesting since the researcher did not mention addiction to the children. Hence, it seems that the children are experiencing an ideological dilemma. On the one hand,

they enjoy video games tremendously and are very enthusiastic about them. On the other hand, they are acutely aware of the negative serotypes around video games playing and are keen to distance themselves from them. Accordingly, they became quite defensive when claiming that video games is not so important in their lives and that they enjoy other activities quite as much as they enjoy video games, if not even more. This interpretive repertoire explores the ways children negotiate this ideological dilemma in order to express their positive enthusiasm for video games while at the same time distancing themselves from the negative associations around ‘addiction’ to games.

8.9.0 “Video Games are Amazingly Addictive”

In one of the focus groups, the researcher, as usual, introduced the study to the boys and expressed her interest in knowing their experience since they are users and experts in video games. Immediately upon saying that, there was an assertive uproar from all of the boys in the focus group stating that they play more than anyone. It needs to be taken into account that those boys were ten and eleven year old boys. Thus they were keen to express their interest in video games as a prominent activity in their daily lives.

“FG-4:

‘D.B.’: I’m studying computer games and your experience of it since you are the experts right?

[a sweeping agreement from all participants [‘J.T.’ and ‘C.T.’ Male 10 yrs, ‘B.R.’ and ‘J.G.’ Male 11 yrs]: Yes we play more than anyone! ANYONE!!”

As we can see from the above quote (also reproduced earlier in the thesis) that those boys claim superior knowledge of video games since they believe they play more than ‘anyone’. Hence comes their claim of expert knowledge of video games. In truth, their expertise is probably quite limited in comparison to that of older players. Yet that claim might be interpreted in two ways. One interpretation might be that the environment in which those boys are brought up in is not particularly into video games thus they have not encountered anyone who plays more than them (perhaps because of a lack of elder siblings or relatives who would usually play more). The other interpretation is that the boys might be claiming expertise as an act of social

gratification and assertiveness. These two factors are quite common in that age group as they are in the process of identity realisation and formulation. But the main point here is that those boys claim that they play video games more than ‘anyone’.

8.9.1 Almost the same situation was encountered in the girls’ focus group. As the researcher was introducing the study, eight-year-old ‘A.D.’ interrupted and jokingly claimed that as children they are addicted to video games. This was her perception and she believed that this was why the researcher was talking to children, with the aim of analysing their addiction.

“FG-3:

‘D.B.’: I wanted to speak to you because you are the users of video games=
‘A.D.’ Female 8 yrs.: =addicted [laughing]”

It can be argued that ‘A.D.’ was referring to the same thing as the boys in focus group 4. She was aware of the negative media stereotype around video games and claimed, ironically, that she was ‘addicted’. It seems that children have a flawed understanding of addiction. This might be attributed to their young age, and the society’s exaggerated reaction towards video games. This has accordingly resulted in an ideological dilemma, as the children enjoy video games and are quite enthusiastic about them, yet they do not want to be identified as addicts of video games for what it holds in the society.

8.9.2 Since the study is about the experience of the children, it is essential to try to generate an insight on why children love video games and what they find appealing in them. Children interviewed in this study were all enthusiastic about video games and they gave many reasons why they liked them so much. In focus group 2, they boys highlighted the entertainment aspect of video games.

“FG-2:

‘R.S.’ Male 6 yrs: emmm (.) because they are fun (.) once you get into it you get into it
‘L.S.’ Male 9 yrs.: = it keeps you entertained =
‘F.F.’ Male 8 yrs.: =and with all the action, if you like blood gore you are gonna love shooting games (.) it’s like non-stop action.

‘L.S.’ Male 9 yrs.: you can play it forever.”

From the above quotes, video games seem to be a source of entertainment for children. Since there are several genres of video games, this makes it appealing to a lot of children with different tastes.

Another interesting conversation within the same line of thought is how children do not usually realise how long they are playing video games.

“FG-4:

‘J.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: (...) I didn’t realise how long I was playing on it (...) I think my parents exaggerate how long I play (.) well sometimes I might only play 3 hours and my parents would come and say ohhh you’ve been playing for 4 hours you need to go outside and something like that.

‘B.R.’ Male 11 yrs.: how long have we been here for?

‘D.B.’: well 45 min

[All boys: Wowwww

‘J.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: see I didn’t know that that was this long=

‘B.R.’ Male 11 yrs.: =I thought we’ve been here for like 10 mins=

‘J.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: =cuz it’s all about video games

‘D.B.’: really?

[All boys: yeahhhhhhhhhh

‘J.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: if I’m playing online a game for 15 min I think I’ve been playing for like 2 mins

‘J.G.’ Male 11 yrs.: yeahhhhh

‘J.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: it’s because we are talking about video games

‘J.G.’ Male 11 yrs.: video games are quite fun.”

Children claim that they lose track of time when playing or talking about video games because it is enjoyable, “fun”. This explains their enthusiasm and willingness to talk about video games with the researcher and take part in the study. This was felt in all focus groups conducted as well as the interviews with the children. However, this enthusiasm was explicitly expressed in focus group 4, as we’ve highlighted in the previous quotes. Furthermore, at a certain stage in this focus group, ten-year-old

‘C.T.’ reported that he once played for seven hours straight. He said it was a new game he just got and he imagined he was the person in the game.

“FG-4:

‘C.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: well the longest time I’ve ever played was 7 hours straight (...) I started at 12 and it was a brand new video game (.) it’s about last year now (...) I didn’t need to go to the toilet

‘B.R.’ Male 11 yrs.: yeah he got sucked and didn’t realise how long he was playing

‘C.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: in a way you sometimes you imagine you are the person in the game.”

The above conversation is an example of how children can sometimes get “sucked” into the video game and lose track of time. This might be seen to be an early sign of addiction. However, as has been highlighted in the previous repertoires, video games are more of an entertaining daily activity to some of those children, yet not the sole activity they are engaged in. It is true that they might sometimes spend more time on it but they tend to get bored after a while as noted in previous repertoires. So there is a potential contradiction for the children to negotiate, whereby on the one hand they love the games and admit to playing them a lot, and, on the other, they need to distance themselves from games playing patterns that might appear to fit the ‘addictive’ stereotype.

8.9.3 The children do seem to realise the addictive nature of video games, and also that it sometimes affects some of them. This was apparent at a later stage in focus group 4 as the boys were discussing their own opinion of what makes video games addictive.

“FG-4:

‘J.G.’ Male 11 yrs.: if you are bored then you could like play them [video games]

‘C.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: I know why they are so addictive

‘J.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: why?! Because they are amazing=

‘C.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: =you keep on playing and then you die and die die die die die die and die again you just get even more motivated to complete it=

‘J.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: =and then you get better and better =

‘C.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: =sometimes I got soooo annoyed at the computer once I picked up the keyboard and slammed it on the floor.”

In the above conversation a dreadful picture of violent boys is realised. This is the kind of attitude that scares parents and makes them worry about their children because of the effects video games have on them. From the researcher's point of view, it was felt that it is not unlikely that children would get frustrated when losing several times in a row. Yet the researcher believed that 'C.T.' was stretching it a bit too far to draw attention to himself, especially since he was doing that during the entire focus group. The accuracy of the story cannot be confirmed. However, it needs to be taken into account that the challenge aspect is something that draws some of those children to the game. Moreover, it is likely that there is an element of frustration upon losing and the reaction to it would rather depend upon the environment in which the child is brought up. 'C.T.' happens to be an only child and he even explicitly noted that he is "spoilt". All children have tantrums at some point, but in the context of a video game a violent loss of patience and self control takes on a potentially more sinister aspect as a possible symptom of gaming addiction.

8.9.4 Another interesting conversation took place in the same focus group, as 'C.T.' reported knowing someone who played video games for twelve hours straight. This was a defensive technique utilised by 'C.T.' so as not to feel or look too odd among his peers for playing seven hours straight.

"FG-4:

'C.T.' Male 10 yrs.: I've beaten everyone here (.) I'm the addict (.) I know a person who played 12 hours straight

[All boys: No wayyyy

'B.R.' Male 11 yrs.: oh my God!

'J.T.' Male 10 yrs.: he must be reallllllly sad!! [Pathetic tone]"

In the above quotes, we see that 'C.T.' admits being the addict among his friends since he played video games the longest time straight without stopping. But he immediately tries to defend himself by reporting someone else who played almost double his time. The reaction from the other boys was quite interesting as they were in disbelief that someone would stay that long playing video games. The boys seemed quite dismissive and repulsed by such an action. Ten-year-old 'J.T.' believed that that person is pathetic. This seems to be how those children view anyone who plays video

games for such long hours. Those are the real ‘addicts’ from which these children are attempting to distance themselves. However, it also seems clear that the length of time spent playing games could well fall into a category that some might regard as an addiction. This may be erroneous- a person who reads a book for seven hours straight is not called a reading addict. But in popular media such video games marathons can sometimes be viewed as excessive. The children thus have to negotiate the ideological dilemma quite carefully, but they do describe some behaviour that might be categorised as excessive or, even, ‘addicted’, even though that judgment may well be incorrect.

8.10.0 “We are NOT Addicts of Video Games and Here’s the Proof”

In the previous sections, we explored the level of enthusiasm children have for video games. We also noted how the topic of addiction usually comes up whenever video games are mentioned. Popular media usually adopts a negative perspective concerning video games and their effect on children. This has in turn resulted in a growing scare among some parents. Accordingly, children grow up having parents warning them against playing video games for too long, in case they become addicts. This stereotype of a keen gamer as a de facto addict resulted in an ideological dilemma for the children. On the one hand they enjoy video games, while on the other hand they don’t want to be labelled as addicts. In this section, we explore the defensive techniques the children utilise to argue that even though they like video games, they are not addicts. Of course the way they express this is often quite implicit, as they do not want to draw attention to the issue of addiction, yet they subtly want to make sure they distance themselves from it. This was done in four ways that are presented in the following sub-sections.

8.11.0 “Too much is boring!”

Based on this study, video games seem to be an activity children are engaged in to fill their spare time or when they are bored. However, playing video games for too long has also been reported to be quite boring in itself. Accordingly, as is the case with other traditional toys, video games can be fun at the beginning and when they are new but they can become boring and children lose interest in them eventually, especially if

there is nothing new about them or they play for a long time. This is clear in the below quote taken from focus group 1.

“FG-1:

‘D.B.’: okay (.) but do you like playing them [video games]?

‘O.K.’ Male 11 yrs.: certain amount of it [video games] yes but if you plan to play it for an hour=

‘J.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: = yeah you get sick of it=

‘O.K.’ Male 11 yrs.: =yeah, boring=

‘J.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: =you get like oh man!! I gotta do this=

‘O.K.’ Male 11 yrs.: =you get a bit frustrated really

‘J.L.’ Male 7 yrs.: once you’ve played it for way too long, it gets quite boring

‘J.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: and like when you complete the whole thing, it gets boring

‘O.K.’ Male 11 yrs.: it (.) It kinda depends on what new technology comes out (.) and if there’s nothing new (.) then no point, it’s all been there done that sort of thing.”

In the above conversation, it is clear how those boys find playing video games for too long potentially boring. As has been highlighted in previous repertoires by one of the practitioners interviewed, video games are a source of entertainment that requires an effort and a level of commitment from the player. This aspect of video games seems to make them less appealing to some children as is noted in the above quotes. Having to play for a long time can become frustrating and eventually they become ‘sick of it’. Moreover, as ‘J.T.’ highlighted, video games become boring once they have completed the whole game. Within the same line of thought ‘O.K.’ states that if new games do not have any new technology in them then there is no point playing them since it is mere repetition of old things which is also boring. From this, it can be inferred that what draws some children to video games, is new innovation in game play. Once games become repetitive, those children tend to lose interest in them just like in the case of other toys. It seems that both genders find video games a diverting supplementary activity to engage in when they have some free time, yet too much can be boring. In focus group 3, the girls had the following to say about playing video games.

"FG-3:

‘S.T.’ Female 12 yrs.: well they are really something to pass the time

- ‘F.G.’ Female 7 yrs.: it’s just we don’t play games we do other things that we really like doing.
- ‘D.B.’: how important are games to you?
- ‘S.T.’ Female 12 yrs.: not that much, not that important at all [answered immediately]
- ‘A.D.’ Female 8 yrs.: I wouldn’t (2) I wouldn’t mind if our DS got flushed down the toilet
- ‘S.T.’ Female 12 yrs.: I like it because it passes the time, if I’m reaaaaaaaaaally bored then I would play it, yeah so if I just done my homework or something like that and I got nothing to do and there’s nothing on TV and I’m reaaaaaaaaaally bored then I would go play that and that’s something to do (.....) the maximum would be about an hour and a half (.) that would be a bit stretching it (.) it becomes boring after a while.... no matter what it is, I’ll find it a bit boring and I would go do something else.”

In the above quotes (that were reproduced in earlier repertoires as well), twelve-year-old ‘S.T.’ explains how video games are a means to pass the time. ‘S.T.’ says that if she finished her homework and there is nothing to watch on television and she is bored, she would usually play video games. We see that playing video games here comes as a last resort when other activities are not satisfactory. This is supported by seven-year-old ‘F.G.’ who clarifies saying that video games is not their core interest and that they enjoy other activities as well. The concept of boredom is also brought up as ‘S.T.’ adds at a later point that the maximum she would play is an hour and half, after which she gets really bored. So again it seems that video games are a supplementary activity as they are not the core of children’s activities.

8.11.1 Nonetheless, it also needs to be noted that the comments above playing down the role of video games in the children’s lives contradict other comments that show the enthusiasm and engagement many children have with games. As we have noted, some children stated that they might play for up to 7 hours. This contradiction reveals the ideological dilemma, as the children have to locate their own game playing within the discourse of addiction. On the one hand, they enthusiastically confirm their status as gaming experts, who have gained their expertise through a great deal of playing, yet on the other hand they also have to play down their reliance on video games as a

source of entertainment in order to deflect the latent accusation that they may be gaming ‘addicts’.

8.12.0 The Appearance of New Technology

The second piece of implicit evidence noted by the children in this study to rhetorically position themselves as ‘not addicts’ is by showing interest in newer technology such as iPads and playing down the salience of video games in their lives. This is apparent in the following quote.

“FG-1:

‘J.L.’ Male 7 yrs.: I think I’m gonna get sick of it [video games]

‘J.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: I like iPads

‘O.K.’ Male 11 yrs.: well it’s been over-ruled by iPads and everything gaming which isn’t a bad thing but not particularly a good thing either because iPads are probably just as bad if not worse than computer games (...) because (1) you can download so many games for free and (.) they’ll all be so addicting you can’t stop people playing them

‘J.L.’ Male 7 yrs.: they [video games] are good but some of them are a waste of money.”

In the above quotes, a sense of confusion is witnessed as the boys try to explain how video games are now less cool than iPads. ‘O.K.’ strives to make sense and decide whether video gaming is good or bad. This is the dilemma that he as well as the other boys are facing as they do like games yet they also seem to be repeating the words of their parents to some extent. A seven-year-old cannot usually judge if something is a waste of money or not, thus ‘J.L.’s words are probably what he hears from his parents. So we can see the dilemma within even just one sentence “they are good but some of them are a waste of money”. The first half of the sentence seems to be ‘J.L.’s own perception of video games, while the second half of it seems to be what he is repeating from other sources. Thus some children are facing quite an ideological dilemma when it comes to video games. Once again, some of them play down their enthusiasm for video game in some comments, while playing up their own expertise in and enthusiasm for video games in others. Implying that video games are yesterday’s toy and are already out of date seems to be one discursive strategy they can use.

8.13.0 Engagement in Other Activities

The third defensive technique the children seem to utilise to play down the idea that they might be video games ‘addicts’ is reporting their engagement in other activities. They claim that they enjoy those activities just as much as video games. It can be argued that it is normal for children to be involved in a variety of activities and that mentioning them is not surprising. However, what makes this issue interesting is the timing and the way those children reported their interest in other activities. Moreover, some of them claimed to barely play video games, directly contradicting their claims earlier in the focus group. Thus it can be interpreted that this contradiction stems from an ideological dilemma as the children try to play down the intensity of their enthusiasm for video games so as not to be labelled as addicts. One of the themes of discourse analysis is to look for variation in accounts, and the variation in this case revealed the ideological dilemma. The way non-gaming activities are reported and video games are dismissed is interesting. In focus group 4, the researcher was trying to understand what the boys like the most about video games, when she was cut short and the conversation took a rather interesting turn.

“FG-4:

‘D.B.’: From what you guys are saying I get the impression that you are playing a lot of hours and you are always connected=

[All boys at the same time: Noo Noooo

‘C.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: I’m not addicted [defensive tone]

‘B.R.’ Male 11 yrs.: well neither am I (.) I would play with my hamster

‘J.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: it depends (.) on Sundays I barely play at all (.) I would play for about half an hour or something (2) ah because we have (.) mornings on that day, so I get to go to games workshop and when I’m back I might do my homework or play a little bit (2) on schooldays I sometimes play before school or tidy my room and then at night I usually do my homework or go to scouts or something like that and sometimes I play with my dad (2) on Saturdays I go running in the morning for about an hour and then (.) I sometimes go outside and sometimes I don’t so I stay and play games

‘C.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: I do rugby 3 times a week, cricket 2 times a week, I do fencing 3 hours a week (.) ummm and I do swimming and I also do running apart from my video games.”

While interviewing the children, the researcher never mentioned addiction nor hinted at it. However, as is apparent in the above quotes, the boys misinterpreted the researcher's intent and immediately took a defensive stand to spontaneously defend themselves against any implied suggestion that they might be 'addicts'. It needs to be noted that the researcher was not accusing the boys of addiction but rather wanted to know what they liked the most about video games. The defensive reaction of the boys shows the dilemma they encounter. Some of them saw a need to explicitly say they are not addicted and report the number of times a week they are engaged in sports like rugby, cricket, fencing and swimming. Others mentioned playing with their pets. And others gave a full description of their weekly activities to suggest that video games play a rather minimal role in their life.

8.13.1 Reports of interest in other activities were further encountered in the same focus group as well as others, as will be presented below. The researcher asked the boys and girls how they would like to spend their day if they had the choice to do whatever they want. This was to see if video games would be mentioned and to measure its importance in the children's lives compared to other activities.

"FG-4:

'J.T.' Male 10 yrs.: I would probably try to get a day out with my friends (.) I would probably try to go to my friend's house and play (1) not necessarily video games but we could go outside

'B.R.' Male 11 yrs.: what I would do, I have a friend who lives close (.) ummm and I have this massive like a field of green which like a park near it and a tennis court (.) so what I would do I would get a football, a tennis racket and a basketball and I would do a bit of basketball, a bit of football and a bit of tennis and then I would go to my friend's house and then I play with the dog (4) and then I would play for an hour or half an hour on Xbox or something

'J.G.' Male 11 yrs.: I'd probably like maybe play some video games with my dad cause I've got a free day (.) maybe if my friend is free I'd go to their house (.) I'd maybe go on my bike (.) cause in Egham people love their bikes and skateboards and stuff like that

- ‘C.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: First I’d probably sleep in then I would phone my friend and go to his house for a bit and then come back (2) just hang around the house a bit (.) then play with my lizard a bit.”
- FG-1:
- ‘O.K.’ Male 11 yrs.: Swimming (.) I’d spend it swimming (.) I wouldn’t spend it on computer games
- ‘J.T.’ Male 10 yrs.: About half of it on football and half of it on (2) games
- ‘J.S.’ Male 10 yrs.: going on my bike with my friends
- ‘J.L.’ Male 7 yrs.: I think I would have (.) if it was the whole day, I think I would have football for half a day and then a mix between TV and (.) DS
- FG-3:
- ‘S.T.’ Female 12 yrs.: I would probably go swimming then (.) probably might go shopping or something like that (2) don’t know (2) ummm I would go out with my friends and would just lounging around doing nothing really just relax (...) not as much, I would just watch teli and I might as well sleep [laughing] but not much playing really (2) umm read
- ‘A.D.’ Female 8 yrs.: if I (.) I would go swimming on the weekend and then maybe do some football with my friends (2) and read a book (4) do a little bit of (.) quite a lot of swimming (1) play in the garden and that’s it yeah.”

In the above quotes taken from three different focus groups, we find that most children seem to prefer spending their day in outdoor activities with their friends. Doing sports such as football, basketball, rugby, swimming, biking, going to friend’s house, playing with pets, reading, sleeping and watching television are some of the activities those children reported to prefer doing. Video games were rarely mentioned and they seem to be an activity to fill a free time, a sort of a last resort when all other activities are done. We find some of the boys explicitly reporting that they wouldn’t spend a free day on video games if they had the choice, such as eleven-year-old ‘O.K.’ who would rather spend it swimming. Those children made it seem like video gaming is a default activity they engage in when there is no alternative. Had they been given the choice, they would have chosen more outdoor activities. However, if we look at the entire focus group and how they talked about the games, it is apparent that this is still an enjoyable activity to them. Thus, there’s a contradiction, as they seem to

enjoy video games, however they would prefer other outdoor activities. This might be attributed to time tied parents or even due to weather conditions that do not allow them to play outside. Also safety reasons might be another issue that hinders children from playing outside and confines them to the house.

8.14.0 Growing Out of Video Games

The fourth way children seem to dismiss their addiction to video games is by claiming that as they become older, they will grow out of them. This was reported in several focus groups. Some children believe that as they grow older, they will play less video games and become more involved in sports for example. In focus group 1 this idea is supported.

“FG-1:

‘J.L.’ Male 7 yrs.: No, I think I’m gonna be playing football instead of sitting on the computer.....[later in the interview] I like games, and I like sports but I haven’t made up my mind

‘J.S.’ Male 10 yrs.: I only go (.) Don’t really play computer games nowadays, I used to play a lot though when I was young but I don’t.”

The dilemma between liking video games and playing sports is witnessed as seven-year-old ‘J.L.’ is torn between the two. He explicitly states that he likes both yet he has not made up his mind as to which one he would prefer doing when he grows up. However earlier in the focus group, he seemed to have a strong opinion about video games. He stated that he would rather be playing sports rather than sitting in front of the computer. But later as the boys shared their experience and enthusiasm about video games, ‘J.L.’ sounded confused as to what he prefers more; video games or sports. In the same focus group, ten-year-old ‘J.S.’ claimed that as he’ll grow older, he would probably not be playing video games. He based his claim on his experience as he used to play more when he was younger but now he is playing a lot less. Thus it seems that children are aware that video games is just another activity and they will either grow out of it or replace it with other activities that would be more appealing. The same reaction was encountered in focus group 5 as presented below.

“FG-5:
‘D.B.’: do you think video games are good?
‘N.G.’ Male 8 yrs.: yeaahhhhh
[All boys at the same time: yeaaaahhh
‘D.B.’: do you think when you grow up=
‘B.S.’ Male 10 yrs.: =only if you play it at a sensible amount of time
‘D.B.’: do you think when you grow up you are going to play more?
‘C.W.’ Male 7 yrs.: probably less
‘B.S.’ Male 10 yrs.: I’m gonna be playing football
‘N.G.’ Male 8 yrs.: probably the same [supporting ‘B.S.’]
‘K.H.’ Male 8 yrs.: same”

From the above conversation, it seems that some children view video games to be good given it is played “a sensible amount of time”. Again the idea of addiction to video games implicitly appears as ten-year-old ‘B.S.’ refuses to admit that video games are good, unless they are conditioned with a time limit. Moreover, ‘B.S.’ held a strong opinion for he believed he would be playing football when he grows up rather than video games. It can be argued that the self-confidence in ‘B.S.’ tone made the younger boys support and adopt his position. They all agreed that they would be playing less, as they grow older.

8.14.1 Within this same line of thought lies the below conversation taken from focus group 2.

“FG-2:
‘D.B.’: do you think you will be playing more, as you grow older?
[All nod in agreement saying Yessss]
‘R.S.’ Male 6 yrs.: yes so then you can get =
‘L.S.’ Male 9 yrs.: = cuz then there will be more consoles ...yeah and we will get to play all the 18 games and stuff
[All at the same time: yeaahhhhhhhh, call of duty and naming other games]
‘D.B.’: so you think you are going to be playing more?
‘F.F.’ Male 8 yrs.: yeah (.) well not necessarily=
‘L.S.’ Male 9 yrs.: =when we are teenagers=
‘F.F.’ Male 8 yrs.: =yeah we are gonna be playing so much more than we do now=

‘L.S.’ Male 9 yrs.: = but when we are like thirty=
‘F.F.’ Male 8 yrs.: =adults (.) twenty something (.) we are just gonna be playing it for a
little while
‘R.S.’ Male 6 yrs.: we will be watching over our kids=
‘K.J.’ Male 7 yrs.: we will be stuck on our computer working
[The boys start mimicking elders doing business and acting all serious and then cracking up in
laughter]

In the above conversation, the boys agree that they will be playing more video games as they grow older, contradicting the children quoted before, although their comments also seem somewhat contradictory in themselves. The reason why they say so is that they know that as they grow older they will be able to play adult games. They believe they will be playing more as there will be more games to play. However, they also believe that this is just a phase during adolescence and that their interests will change as they become adults. It can be argued that this belief is due to the fact that they relate to the adults in their lives, such as parents for example. Children see their parents busy working and taking care of them and this is how those children believe they will eventually become as they become adults. Thus it can be argued that playing video games is seen as a temporary phase in the lives of children. This confusion perhaps reflects the liminal character of video games, since they are ‘games’ so by definition things of childhood, yet it is well known that many people (men in particular) play these games well into middle age.

8.14.2 Media panic about the negative effects of video games addiction places children in this ideological dilemma. Video games play a role in children’s socialisation and evolving sense of identity, yet the idea that a child is a video game addict is not attractive, evincing an image of a lonely, maladjusted and geeky kid. They clearly enjoy video games immensely and cannot hide their enthusiasm when questioned, especially since their knowledge of games plays such an important role in their own sense of social status and development. Yet, faced with the negative image of the gaming addict, they also have to distance themselves from this image to maintain their subject position as a self-aware, well-adjusted and ‘cool’ member of the social group. They have to negotiate this dilemma by using a number of rhetorical strategies to play down their need for or reliance on games. This sometimes involves

contradicting themselves about the extent to which they play the games or rely on them for their entertainment. Of course, if a child spends a great deal of time playing sports they are not said to be sports addicts, or reading addicts, or dance addicts. This dilemma only attaches itself to video games, because of the negative media stereotypes reported.

8.15.0 Summary of Key Points

This chapter concludes the reporting of findings from the discourse analysis with the final two of five interpretive repertoires. These five repertoires tend to overlap and are composed of other sub-repertoires. For example, there were three main elements that appeared to contribute to the social construction of children's social status among their peer group. The first factor is ownership of certain consoles as the gateway for group membership and acceptance, i.e. being "cool. The second factor is the games played, because within every age group, there seems to be a number of games that can be called the "in games" or the accepted games to be played. The third factor is their mastery or skill level in playing the games, as children viewed that reaching a level of mastery in video games and helping others is an assertion of skill that earns status within the group. Accordingly, children's ideologies for social status, group membership, identity representation and self-actualisation are to a certain extent shaped by their ownership and consumption of video games. Hence, just as they might resort to claims of their sporting prowess or literary knowledge, children now use video games as a discursive resource to make a claim for social status and authority among their peers.

8.15.1 Another insight that emerged from the analysis is that in some families video games tend to offer an opportunity for family socialisation and bonding. Yet gender and age tend to play a role in the extent to which this concept is applicable, because older boys who prefer adult games sometimes play them with their Dads. Mothers, at least those familiar with video games, tend to play with their daughters and younger sons. There are two aspects to this that need to be highlighted: identity and power negotiation. The identity aspect touches on the fact that at a young age, gender differences are negligible as boys and girls tend to play almost the same video games. As they grow older, cultural and social predispositions start dictating gender

specificities, hence preferences start diverging. The second aspect is that video games tend to shape the negotiation of power among parents and children. It is apparent that usually boys tend to refer to their father or other male figures within the family who might be familiar with such games, as a playmate or source of advice on new games. Children, particularly boys sense that with the male figure of the family (usually the father) they can play the (violent) games they want to without having to go through the negotiation process that would have to with their mother. Thus, this also illustrates one way in which power is negotiated within gender ideologies within families.

8.15.2 Some children find video games a way of spending time with their parents. However, at other times some children find video games a way of zoning out from family interaction. Thus it can be argued that video games are a means of children deploying power within the family context, as they are utilised as a source of family interaction or the lack of it.

8.15.3 Another insight is that video games are not necessarily an activity that brings siblings of different age or gender together in a joint activity. Video games do seem to be central to many children's socialisation with other children outside the family since it is a shared activity that is not confined by place. Video games, specifically the online ones, have provided children with new means of socialisation beyond the family. Thus, they provide a virtual playground for children to interact, play and socialise with friends. Importantly, this virtual socialisation can be seen as a continuation of traditional socialisation rather than a substitute for it.

8.15.4 The variation in accounts of the children interviewed suggested that they were negotiating an ideological dilemma. On the one hand, they enjoy video games tremendously and are very enthusiastic about them. On the other hand, they are acutely aware of the negative stereotypes around video games and are keen to distance themselves from them to avoid accusations that they might be 'addicted'.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Eight has brought to a conclusion the discourse analytic findings by discussing the final two interpretive repertoires, ‘Video Games, Children’s Development and Socialisation’, and ‘Negotiating the Ideological Dilemma of Video Games in Popular Culture’ and the various elements of which they are composed. Having now elaborated in detail on the findings, Chapter Nine will link back to the research literature in Chapter Two to establish the theoretical contribution of the thesis.

Chapter Nine

Discussion

Chapter Outline

Chapter Nine reviews the empirical findings in the light of the earlier literature review, in order to establish the theoretical contribution of the research. Major themes emerging from the study which connect to the earlier research reviewed include identity, learning, socialisation and power. The findings, structured in the five interpretive repertoires, suggest that video games have had a major impact on children's lives, but not necessarily in as negative way as is sometimes assumed. It is suggested that playing video games has become a major currency for the negotiation of identity, gender, family roles and social status for children, and also, in certain respects, a source of learning.

9.16.0 Outline of the Research Problematic

In this chapter an evaluative discussion is put forward given the issues that opened up in the empirical phase of the study. There is a need to re-state the research problematic as well as return to many issues that were opened up in the literature review. The aim is to explore how the empirical findings gathered in this study have addressed the research problematic as well as how they have engaged with the issues raised in the literature review. Relatively little empirical research has tackled the experience of children with video games, and consequently this study is conceived as exploratory, with the broad research aim of exploring the role of video games in children's lives, as reflected in their lived experiences, focusing particularly on issues of development, socialisation and identity. The research questions were as follows:

1. What is the impact of video games and digital interaction on children, socially, emotionally, and cognitively?
2. Is children's environment today a harmful one because of their deep engagement with video games and communications technology?
3. What are the implications of video games on children's senses of identity and membership in social reference groups?

4. What are the implications of video games and technology on children as consumers?
5. How does the children's access to online gaming and communication affect their socialisation and social development?
6. What are the children's motives for engaging in online gaming? Are they seeking fantasy, escape and fun or autonomy, authenticity, social positioning?

These research questions helped structure the literature review and guided the interview protocols, and the subsequent analysis. However, since they drew on a wide range of published research in a number of different disciplines in social, health, addiction and children's studies, the present chapter will be organised around the major themes raised in the literature and with which the findings connect.

9.0.1 Background to the Study

It is acknowledged that today's children are somehow different as consumers from other generations due to the increased availability of digital technology, and the changes in children's modes of socialisation this has brought about. In addition, consumption in general, and of video games in particular, is tied up with apparent changes in family dynamics around decision making and the negotiation of power with respect to children and their autonomy within the family. This relationship between Generation Z children and technology is said to have been formed "at birth" (Beastall, 2008). Some researchers say that those children are rather "born with a chip" due to their early exposure and access to digital technology in their homes (Berk, 2009; Abram and Luther, 2004). Thus it is argued that a major factor that sets this generation of children apart from previous generations is growing up surrounded by electronic media and playing video games from infancy (Beck and Wade, 2004; Carstens and Beck, 2005; Shaffer et al., 2005). This argument has credence in the sense that these children have access to advanced technology and exciting hi-tech games that frame new forms of relating and socialisation. Whether children are happier or better equipped to face the life ahead of them is difficult to say. The widespread assumption that video games are a new technology that has negative influences on children can, it appears from the data, be poorly supported and is the result, perhaps, of a fear or suspicion of new technology. This can be the case with

new technological innovations, as fears were raised over the effect of, for example, cars, radios and TVs on peoples' health and wellbeing when they first appeared. In the light of this, there is a need to explore the subjective experience of children with this technology and to generate insights into the effect of this early exposure and access to video gaming technology on the children and how it frames their outlook on life, relationships and social, cognitive and emotional development. The study adopted a social constructionist ontological perspective in an attempt to understand the social construction of reality for the children. This understanding is influenced by Berger and Luckmann's (1966) view that it is through social practice and discourse that social reality is constructed. Furthermore, Elliott (1997) argues that the social constructionist ontology tends to explore marketing from a cultural perspective. And culture in itself is more of a major constitutive element in the children's development rather than just an external variable to which they are exposed (De La Ville and Tartas, 2010). Thus if we are to study the subjective experience of children with video games then we need to explore their lived culture and note the meanings they give to their social reality. The methodological framework adopted in this research is discourse analysis and falls within the interpretive research paradigm.

9.17.0 Discussion of the Empirical Findings of the study

The discourse analysis of the transcribed data gathered in this research resulted in five interpretive repertoires. These were entitled as follows:

1. "Digital Savviness and Group membership"
2. "Video Games, Children's Age and Gender"
3. "Video Games as a source of empowerment for Children"
4. "Video Games, Children's Development and Socialisation"
5. "Negotiating the Ideological Dilemma of video games in popular culture"

These repertoires emerged from the data sets as a whole, including the focus groups with children, and depth interviews with children, parent and two senior practitioners, amounting to some twenty seven thousand words of transcribed data sets. Analysing the data from these three different perspectives, and also taking into account informal data from the pilot study and informal conversations and observation with adult gamers and children, helped in triangulating the findings not in the positivistic sense

of finding definitive truths but in the sense of balancing the various viewpoints in terms of each other. The chapter will now look at the findings in the light of the major themes emerging from the multi-disciplinary literature review, beginning with identity.

9.18.0 Children's Social Identity

Children today are said to constitute a digi-modern generation in the sense that their worlds are defined substantially by their engagement with online media and virtual experiences. Being born surrounded by all forms of technological advances, children now have a greater access to information that resulted in becoming more knowledgeable compared to previous generations. Some researchers as Goldberg et al. (2003) argue that being submerged in a life full of technological advances and with the explosion of information, the differences in knowledge, attitudes and behaviour that set children apart from adults have diminished. Sutherland and Thompson (2003) called this phenomenon "Kids Getting Older Younger" or the adultification of children. However, it seems that children are not necessarily more knowledgeable but rather they are more familiar with the technological advances of their time than their parents. The way that access to video games has re-textured family relationships needs to be considered as more nuanced than before, because there are indeed ways in which the gap has narrowed between children and adults through access to the very same entertainments- for example, young boys play video games with their Dads. On the other hand, this should not be thought to have obliterated the structural power of adults, since this is clearly not what emerges from the data sets. Hegarty (2004) argues that video games have actually provided the children with a valuable platform for communication, identity positioning and experimentation. This is plausible as witnessed in this research. Identity and gender ideologies in particular have been mobilised by the engagement in such mediated experience with online and offline video games. Some researchers consider today's children to be living in a hyper-reality based on symbolic acts and expression given their digi-modern environment (Hegarty, 2004). However, this digital environment including video games, does not only help bring reality to the children but also recreates, enhances and multiplies this reality, evincing Baudrillard's (2002) hyper-reality. Hence, there has never been a "realer" world for the children to live in and to establish their presence, identity and

create meaning for their lives than now (Hegarty, 2004:9). In the following sections, we will explore several identity sub themes that appeared in this study.

9.2.1 Video Games and Identity Narratives

Many researchers have tried to understand identity and whether it is an internal psychological mechanism that is both stable and permanent (Erikson, 1966) or an external dynamic process that is somehow shaped by the surrounding environment (Mead, 1963). In the middle between these two stances, lies Jenkins' (2008) argument that identity is, rather, a dialectical process involving both internal and external aspects in interaction. This research adopts Jenkins' (2008) stance on identity since it is believed that identity is an on-going and simultaneous synthesis of 'internal' self definition and the 'external' definitions of oneself that are socially constructed through socialisation and the on-going interaction with the surrounding environment (Jenkins, 2008: 40). Video games have become an integral part of children's environment and are used as tools for socialisation, power negotiation and identity formulation. Traditionally, aspects of life such as religion, mythology, etc. were considered "great narratives" that are used as the source for the identity building process (Paramentier and Rolland, 2009). However, with time these great narratives have been marginalised and replaced by contemporary aspects of life that provide seemingly more relevant meaning. In such case, video games can be considered a great narrative for today's children since they occupy a central part of children's social lives. Paramentier and Rolland (2009) argue that individuals no longer merely search for utility or pleasure through their consumption, but they rather desire to experience a new self, an alter ego. This experience is said to give them a richer opportunity to position themselves within society by experimenting and building their own identity. This resonates with the idea of video gaming, as players, especially children, are provided with a platform for identity experimentation and self-building through a dynamic process of socialisation with their friends and family members who share the same interest, especially when games are played online.

Video games have, then, become a source of children's empowerment and identity realisation as they get a chance to try things they might not necessarily encounter in real life, and to some extent they are free to set their own rules by re-interpreting the

games. In this sense, video games can be understood as a technological advance on traditional children's playground games, which might have been previously considered a source of identity narratives, but which have been largely superseded by video games. It needs to be highlighted that, video games are not the only great narrative to which today's children resort to but rather one aspect of modern life from which they construct meaning.

9.2.2 Techno-Futurism and Post Modernist Views on Video games and Identity

Researchers identified with the techno-futurism of the 1960s, such as Philip K. Dick and Marshall McLuhan, believe that video games and virtuality in general helps free people radically, immersing their lives in dreams and fantasies and extending space while removing the need for a body (Hegarty, 2004:106). Even though post-modernist writers such as Baudrillard (2002) argue that with all the technological advancements, there has never been a more "real" world for children to live in, he is scornful of the idea that digital media provides man with a space for freedom and self-discovery (Baudrillard cited in Hegarty, 2004). In his book 'Screened Out' (2002), Baudrillard's argument is based on the observation that digital media actually traps humans and adds further constraints to their identity, and as he puts it "we become terminals in a creeping virtualisation" (Hegarty, 2004: 129). This is particularly apt considering today's children who are born surrounded with various types of digital communications media. As we have witnessed in several elements of this research, when the researcher claimed ignorance of knowing how to play video games because she does not have them, some of the children were quite shocked. They could not imagine how anyone would grow up without having video games. This is the trap that Baudrillard mentions, for those kids have in a sense become "terminals" in an excessively digi-modern environment. The question of whether video games are a liberating force for children's identity, or a limiting one, remains open, but there can be little doubt that they have attained huge significance in framing children's experience of their identity as they have become a forceful cultural trend to self realisation. For the children in this research, video games formed an intimate part of their reality and merged seamlessly with their other, offline experiences. The way the children integrated video games and digital communications technology into their lives occurred with an ease that adults can barely grasp, because they have not

experienced this phenomenon in the same way. At the same time, adults have a better developed critical sense, and the children's subjective feeling of being empowered through their access to and expertise in video games is not matched by their understanding of the workings of the games industry. The children feel that they use video games in their lives to achieve ends that make sense to them, but they may not be fully aware of the extent to which their interaction with video games frames their experience.

This point connects to some extent with Giddens's (1984) theory of structuration (see paragraph 2.12.4) in the sense that the subjective feelings of power and autonomy the children feel through their engagement with video games may be a matter of them internalising structural social forces. Video games are designed to make the user feel excited and empowered, and the games industry has been hugely successful in turning children from children into consumers. At the same time, the children who participated in this study used games as a part of their lives within a wide range of social and physical activities. It should be noted though, the participating children seemed to be bright children from loving and relatively affluent families, and therefore are not representative of all demographic groups in the UK. They may be better equipped emotionally and intellectually to integrate video games constructively into their lives than some other, less privileged children. As Baudrillard's (2002) pessimistic picture of hyper-reality suggests, the reality some children experience might be constrained rather than liberated through digital communications and video games.

9.2.3 Brand Associations and Consumption Symbolism

It has been suggested that today's children are ahead in their development of self brand connections than previous generations, and that they view brands as self-representative products, which embody their self-concept, personality and ensure their reference group affiliation (Achenreiner and John, 2003). This argument was reaffirmed in the findings of this research as has been highlighted in the first repertoire: "Digital savviness and group membership". It is suggested by this research that children associate meaning and status to the playing of specific games and the ownership of certain consoles. Not only is the ownership of specific consoles

important for status but they are also considered a gateway for group membership and acceptance, i.e. being “cool”. Based on the literature, several previous researches have suggested that now children as young as 8 years old realise that having the right brands are the quickest way to acceptance by reference groups (Kantrowitz and Wingert, 1999; Chaplin and John, 2005; Achenreiner and John, 2003; Nairn, 2010). This seems to be the case when it comes to the ownership and playing of video games. In fact it has been noticed that within every age group, particularly with boys, there seems to be a number of games that can be called the “in games” or the accepted games to be played. Thus it can be argued that these children are actually using video games for impression formation and identity management. In fact, in previous researches (Jamison, 1996; Achenreiner and John, 2003; Nairn, 2010), it was highlighted that children are now purchasing products for the image associated with them rather than their functional features. So, children’s ideologies for social status, group membership, identity representation and self-actualisation are to a certain extent shaped by their ownership and consumption of video games. From the findings of this research, there are three factors children believe affect their social status among their counterparts. One is the consoles they own (the more consoles they have, the better). The second is the games they play (ability to play adult rated games makes them “cooler”). Thirdly, their mastery or skill level in playing the games (reaching a level of mastery in video games and helping others confers authority and therefore power within the peer group).

9.2.4 Not only are ownership and consumption important in social status and identity among child peer groups, but also displaying expert knowledge in video games and voicing adult-like opinions are also quite significant. Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998) state that identity is constructed through the consumption of brand symbolism. A number of research studies have noted that this trend is quite popular among children. For example in their research, Elliott and Leonard (2004) suggested that children construct symbolic meaning of goods from their peers and thus consumption has become a tool for social symbolism and self- identity formulation. In the present study, video games seem to fulfil this purpose. Children have always used some sort of reference to impress their peers and make claims about identity and status. This might be through showcasing their sporting prowess or their

literary knowledge, or some other activity. Today's children have video games as a resource for this identity positioning. Video games are not an exclusive discursive resource for acceptance and claiming identity and status, but rather another activity that children would resort to along with the traditional activities. The children participating in this research showed their engagement and interest in various traditional activities alongside their interest in video games. Accordingly, it seems that video games are simply another tool for children to express their status and identity and gain acceptance among peers but not the only tool.

9.2.5 Collective Identity

As a shared interest among many children today, video games can be considered a tool for the development of collective identity. Friedman and McAdam (1992) state that children tend to create an informal social group, which is based on shared interest and voluntary membership. Children playing video games tend to develop a strong and meaningful collective identity with their friends who share the same interest. Video games seem to be a vital gateway for group member affiliation. Some of the children participating in this research suggested that they started to play video games so as not to feel "left out", hence video games constituted a shared interest and a resource for collective identity. Griffiths et al (2003) suggest that children tend to play video games with new acquaintances, but this research suggested that games are played much more often with friends and family who are already within the child's immediate social circle.

9.2.6 From the findings of this research, some parents seem to exercise some degree of control over their children when it comes to playing online video games. Playing with strangers is not allowed and rules are enforced to ensure the safety of children. Thus, according to the children participating in this research, they are not allowed to play with strangers, they actually play with their friends who they know from school, club or even neighbourhood, they sometimes play with family members, but, they claim, never with strangers. So it can be argued that these informal social groups the children play their video games in are based largely within their network of physically proximate acquaintances who share this common interest. This explains why some children feel the need to play video games just in order to fit in. Children who play

video games tend to formulate a culture for themselves and a localised sense of identity through the interaction and the common social norms instantiated through their mutual interest in these electronically mediated games and thus develop a sense of we-ness in the group.

9.19.0 Gender and Age Ideologies

Video games are a shared interest among children, but the genres of games favoured by children of different age and gender differ. Several previous research studies have noted such gender differences but few noted age differences, as emerged from this research. When it comes to gender, previous research studies observed that males tend to play and master video games significantly more than females (Griffiths, 1996; 1999). The present study did suggest that the enthusiasm of boys for video games was greater than that of girls, when the girls' focus group played down the role of video games in their lives, claiming that they just played them when they were bored. Several reasons have been put forward to explain why males play more video games than females. Gutman (1982) in his categorisation model of consumers argued that most video games are designed by males for males. Griffiths (1996) supported this noting that the content of the games themselves are more masculine oriented and contain limited images that are visually appealing to females. However, neither argument seems well-supported from this research since there seem to be a wide variety of games' genres that cater for both males and females. Video games are no longer limited to just action and shoot-em-ups games but there is, rather, a huge variety of lifestyle games and brain training games that would appeal to female preferences.

9.3.1 Griffiths (1996) suggests that women/girls in general have been socialised not to be comfortable with expressing aggressive behaviour, even in play, through combat and war games. He argues that girls play video games for less time due to the lack of more whimsical, less demanding genre of games which they would rather prefer. However, this genre of games seems to have been recently gaining share with newer, more female-oriented genres being described by the research participants. Thus it seems that the video gaming industry have realised this social and cultural challenge of girls not preferring aggressive games, hence expanding their offerings to more

lifestyle oriented games that would appeal to not only the girls sector but also young children of both genders. Some studies have denoted how males on average excel more at visual and spatial skills that require depth perception and image solving more than females (Griffiths, 1996; Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974). These skills are said to facilitate the eye-hand coordination and the timely processing of spatial relationships, which the majority of action oriented games require, hence this is postulated as another reason why there are gender differences in game genre preferences.

9.3.2 Not only is it a matter of gender differences, but age also dictated the consumption patterns of video games. In this research, it was observed that boys within different age ranges tend to vary in their video games consumption. Older boys seem to play longer hours than younger ones. Girls seemed to play much less than boys in general, as noted above. Gender and age both influence differences in genres of games being played. At a young age, gender differences in video game preferences are negligible as boys and girls tend to play almost the same games. But as they grow older, preferences start diverging as cultural and social predispositions start dictating gender specificities. Thus with younger age, the boys tend to prefer adventure and lifestyle games, like girls, rather than shoot-em-up or fighting and action games. But as boys grow older their preference takes on more of a masculine ideology with violent or sport-oriented games. This is when they try to dissociate themselves from the games played by the younger boys. Those elder boys are at a liminal stage, as will be discussed in the next section. They are at a stage where they start understanding the cultural ideologies of what defines masculinity, hence, they view that playing more masculine games (usually action and shoot-em-up games) would lend them a more adult-like identity.

9.20.0 Childhood and Liminality

Developmental psychology and theories of socialisation have noted that children at the threshold of adolescence experience a stage of transition in which they need to redefine and develop their own identity (James and Prout, 1990). Anthropologist Victor Turner (1967) identifies this liminal phase as a state of being “betwixt and between” (Turner, 1995). At this liminal stage a child/ tween experiences a gap between the self they are and the self they long to be. From the previous section, we

noted how this liminal phase is quite apparent in elder children, and particularly boys, with respect to their consumption of video games. We have witnessed in this research that almost all the older children who participated in this research bragged about or aspired to play adult video games, in the process of seeking social approval from their counterparts. This phenomenon resonates with the idea of liminality as the children can be seen to enter a liminal zone when they play adult games that are deemed as inappropriate for their age. It can be argued that those boys are experiencing a state of being outside formal social structure within the space of video game-play in which they are in a transition stage, neither child nor adolescent. Thus, through video games they become liminals experimenting with future identities. Since older boys are at this stage pre-occupied with their social standing and public transformation to teenagerhood, playing adult video games seems to be a site for such transformation. This may be why they try to dissociate themselves from other games popular among younger boys and girls. This is attributed to the possibility that those boys started to understand the cultural and social ideologies of what defines adulthood and masculinity. Furthermore, in playing adult games, those children experience a temporary status reversal, in terms of Turner's (1995) argument, in which "the structurally inferior aspires to symbolic structural superiority". The boys, as children, feel their lack of power and authority in the world, but in the liminal zone of game playing the games give them a sense of authority and control over the hyper-real adult world of the video game, thus reversing the role of their actual social status. Thus it seems that those children tend to play those adult games in an attempt to channel their energy, their aspirations of adulthood and imagination.

9.21.0 Learning Implications

It has been acknowledged that video games are important for the identity realisation process and group affiliations in today's children. But whether video games help children learn or rather have a detrimental effect on their academic performance is an argument that many studies tried to settle. Some researchers such as Roberts et al. (2005) and Bacigalupa (2005) suggest that children who are highly exposed to media and video games get lower grades than those who spend less time engaged in such a mediated experience. However, other researchers such as Dill and Dill (1998) suggest that the new interactive nature of video games can actually provide an excellent

model for learning and become exemplary teachers. This thought lends itself to the “social theory of learning” developed by Lave and Wenger (1991) that adopts situation learning theory (Buckingham and Green, 2003). Unlike social theorists such as Bernstein (1990) and Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) who argue that for children to learn, they must be exposed to “official educational knowledge”, the situational learning theory views video games as an informal learning experience (Buckingham and Green, 2003). Accordingly video games are considered as a practising outlet for the children and an “apprenticeship” opportunity to become competent social beings. This was observed in this research as children mentioned three attributes of video games’ usefulness according to their belief. The first attribute is not related to the learning experience but rather to physical fitness, which is usually associated with new sports games. The second attribute of video games according to the children is that they are exemplary teachers for real life situations. Some video games might actually be teaching children some things that are advanced for their age, and may amount to constructive and useful knowledge. Thus video games seem to be one of the sources from which children tend to pick up knowledge about the world, of which some might be beneficial, and some potentially harmful. As for the third attribute that was expressed, it is also related to learning or “brain training”. It needs to be noted that IQ can be improved through practice at IQ-style questions and puzzles, and some games are designed and marketed with this in mind. Children who play such video games tend to pick up this aspect, without necessarily understanding what cognitive skills development may mean. Moreover, as we observed from the interview with the mother of three, some parents actually encourage their children to play certain video games that aid in enhancing their children’s capabilities in problem solving and other learning skills. These games seem to incorporate knowledge and skills similar to those found in school curriculums, thus their learning implications are sensed. Accordingly, video games seem to help children in their learning process whether through learning by doing as they experience advanced situations from which they construct knowledge that might be advanced to their age, or through learning by enhancing their mental capabilities in problem solving and other learning skills.

9.22.0 Socialisation Issues

The second theme that was apparent in this study concerns children's varying modes of socialisation and how they are affected by video games consumption. Ekström (2007) argues that children today have a different form of socialisation to previous generations. She notes that the children's experience of life and their responses to it are somehow different from earlier generations since their behaviours are framed within a social and technological environment, which is, in some ways, distinctive to this generation (Ekström, 2007). Researchers have been divided between two views when it comes to video games and children's socialisation. Some argued that playing video games inhibit social skills in children (Bacigalupa, 2005), while other studies suggest that they are actually the core of social activities for today's children and that they enhance social interaction and promote growth and enhance problem solving (Olson et al. 2008; Griffiths, 1996). In this research the latter argument seems supported based on the children's subjective experience with video games. In the following sections we will look at the sub-themes that arose from analysing the socialisation theme by comparing the findings of this study with previous research that was highlighted in the literature review.

9.6.1 Are today's Children Really "Less" Social?

Given the digi-modern environment and the extensive exposure to mediated experience, a widely invoked argument is that children's social interaction styles are impeded by such digitisation and virtualisation. This argument stems from a common belief that had credence long time ago when these technological advances first appeared. In 1984, Selnow regarded computers as 'electronic friends' and argued that children playing video games engage in an unhealthy relationship with the computer (Griffiths, 1996). However, this suggestion seems inconsistent with the current concept of video games. It is true that some parents who are not quite familiar with video games might believe that their children are "less" social since they spend quite a lot of time playing their video games rather than socialising with other individuals whether at home or outside. Yet those parents seem to fail to realise that video games today are often based on social interaction. Video games now enable chatting and conversing with other players online since they no longer play against the computer but rather against their friends. Friendship, as we have witnessed in this research, is

no longer quite so bound by place, since those kids play video games together and help each other in game levels while each is at his home. Thus video games are no longer designed as a passive form of activity that would eventually inhibit social skills, but they are rather designed to produce meaning and pleasure in a social interactive context. Buckingham and Green (2003) also note this in their research and highlight the fact that video games provide a pretext for friendship negotiations beyond game-playing in other school and social contexts. In addition, video games are a medium for competition, in the sense that children are competitive and tend to showcase successes and prowess in playing games. We highlighted earlier that video games are actually the gateway for group affiliations and having the right consoles and playing certain games would render a child “cool” among his peers. Thus, video games seem to provide a ticket for friendship negotiations and a platform for claiming power and social status. Furthermore, concerning the common accusation that video games impede children’s social skills, Bacigalupa (2005) has identified some attributes for measuring the development of social skills, some of which are friendliness, helpfulness, cooperation, confidence, belongingness and security. Based on the observations made in this research and from the accounts given by the children, these attributes are at the core of many video games that those children play. Some boys even showcase helping their friends passing certain levels and forming teams and cooperating to reach the next level, as we’ve mentioned in the fourth repertoire “video games and empowerment”. The collective identity that results from sharing a common interest among peers is also another indication of how these video games help in developing children’s social skills. As the children play these games together, it is argued that they are subjected to a form of healthy competition and they tend to develop co-operation skills, which are a vital component in social interaction skills (Olson et al. 2008). Since most of today’s video games promote cooperation and teamwork, especially on their online extensions, the argument that video games impede children’s social interaction skills needs to be carefully qualified based on the findings of this research. Like any other activity, excessive video game playing in isolation might be thought to either inhibit social skills or to reflect an already underdeveloped sense of sociality. However, in this regard, video games seem to have no intrinsic anti-social character, any more than any other children’s activity.

9.6.2 Retroactive Socialisation

As has been noted in the previous sections, it is argued that children today are getting older, younger, and that the generation gap between them and their parents is diminishing with regard to technology and leisure pursuits. This is attributed to the belief that the differences in knowledge, behaviour and attitude that sets adults apart from children are shrinking given the influx of information the children are exposed to from various mediated technological advances including video games. Riesman and Roseborough (1955) defined this process of children being socialised by peers and media and then socialising their parents as “retroactive socialisation” (Ekström, 2007). In this research, several of the participating children noted that they usually tell their parents, especially Dads, about new games that they saw or heard about from their friends. Thus, to some extent children are socialising their parents into the new trends and new games. Mead (1970) noted this process of children socialising their parents and suggested that the society has developed into a pre-figurative culture where adults are socialised not only by adults but also by their children (Ekström, 2010). This has always been the case to some extent even with traditional game play. However some researchers argue that this phenomenon is more prominent today as children are socialising the parents by passing on to them their knowledge and skills when it comes to innovation and technology (Ekström, 2007; Thomson et al, 2007). This argument only holds credence with elder parents who are not quite familiar with these innovations and technology, as we have observed in this research. Most of the participating children, had parents or at least one parent who is more or less familiar with all the technological advancements. According to the children’s accounts, most parents had smart phones, laptops and even game consoles that children used for access to games and sometimes to spend quality time with parents playing those games. Thus children are in a constant process of reverse socialisation (Ward, 1974) whether with media and peers or with parents. Looking at it from the video gaming perspective, on one hand some parents are socialising their children by exposing them to such technological advances at a young age. This was witnessed in the interview with the mother of three, she stated that she had her youngest boy play with unplugged wii controllers at the age of three and soon enough he was able to play as proficiently as his elder siblings. Another piece of evidence for parents’ socialisation of children in the sense that they have the resources to provide the technology to

children is the children's account of using their parents' laptops and smartphones for gaming access to new games. At the same time, on the other hand, the children are also socialising the parents with the new trends and new games that they encounter whether through media or with their friends. Thus children and parents seem to influence and learn from each other about consumption especially when in the technological and social realms since they often have different experiences and interest (Ekström, 2010). Accordingly, this continuous state of reverse socialisation seems significant in the development of the children's identity and social abilities.

9.23.0 Family Socialisation

As we have seen, the complaint that some parents make, that their children have become "less" social, may apply mainly to parents who are not familiar with the social aspects of the technological environment children inhabit, judging from the admittedly very small sample in the present study (in addition to the parent formally interviewed some other parents were engaged with in informal conversation). Judging from the technology we are surrounded with today, it seems quite rare for affluent Western families not to be familiar with at least some of those technological advancements. Thus children not spending time with their parents does not necessarily mean that they are less social but rather that they have developed a different form of sociability of which some parents are unaware. In the above section, it was suggested that the generation gap between children and their parents is diminishing in regard to technology and related leisure activities. Yet several researchers have fostered a contradictory idea, arguing that video games have actually widened the generation gap between parents and children (Howe and Strauss, 2000; Fromme, 2003; Weir et al., 2006; Tufte and Rasmussen, 2010). For example, Fromme (2003) argues that as children become more dedicated to their online activities, the parents become more alienated and it becomes hard to keep up with the rapid changes in the children's technological and virtual world. Tufte and Rasmussen (2010) argue that children today are adopting those technological advances quite quickly leaving their parents behind trying to keep up with them and defend traditional culture and norms. Weir et al. (2006) further suggests that parents are often too busy working to make time to interact and play with their children, while children are less likely to play with other children in their neighbourhood or to join social clubs because of the

perception that playing out of doors carries a security risk. As a consequence, Weir et al. (2006) suggest that, children resort to playing video games.

9.7.1. Howe and Strauss (2000) further explain this arguing that children feel disconnected from their parents and find them not interested in their gaming culture, thus they tend to socialise virtually with other individuals who would share the same interest. However, these studies, especially the latter, are now some years old and the admittedly limited viewpoint of adults accessed in this study suggest a more laissez faire attitude from adult carers toward children playing video games. In young affluent Western families at least, the present study suggested that playing video games can be one of the activities at the core of family socialisation. In addition, it is suggested that in these families, video games have actually somehow diminished the generation gap between the children and their parents since it has provided them with a shared interest. It has been noted that parents who played video games themselves when they were growing up tend to be comfortable playing video games with their children. Those parents may be driven by nostalgia to play video games with their children. Hence, as been highlighted, in these households, video games become a means for family socialisation and bonding, mediated by age and gender preferences. As noted above, older boys who prefer adult games sometimes play them with their Dads, while mothers who are familiar with video games tend to play with their daughters and younger sons. This differentiation has been facilitated by the development of a variety of new game genres that cater to the various preferences and capabilities.

9.7.2. Based on the accounts of the participating children, some of them consider video games an activity that is an opportunity to spend some time with their busy parents. Children tend to play video games with either parent who would share their interest. However, as they grow older, boys in particular tend to play video games with their father rather than the mother due to the gender preferences for games genres that fit a more masculine gender ideology. Accordingly, it is suggested that father-son relationships have evolved from playing sports to playing video games as well. Again, this seems applicable only to younger parents in relatively affluent Western families, as they tend to be more familiar with video games and other

technical gadgets. It could be added that in the UK at least, anecdotally, video games seem to be within the financial means of most socio-economic groups. It also needs to be noted that just as some children resort to video games to spend some quality time with their parents, some use video games as a gateway for having some space away from social interaction with the family. Thus it goes both ways. Hence, it is noted that not all families are familiar with video games and not all would consider it a family bonding activity. However, those who are familiar with it, tend to utilise it as means for family socialisation. It can be argued that playing video games is similar to any other traditional activity that a family can either be familiar with or not. For example some families are not into sports and having children involved in sports, as a natural part of their upbringing has not alienated the parents from their children. As a natural course of their development, children are socialised not only by their parents but also by media and peers. They become involved in different activities and just because the parents do not share the activity it does not mean that those parents become alienated from their children. So, just as sports or reading or chess can be activities that bring the family together, video games is another activity that can contribute to family socialisation.

9.24.0 Peer and Siblings Socialisation and Cultural Capital

It is widely argued that children today have fewer opportunities than previous generations to spend time with their friends given the degree of home confinement due to safety reasons, time-tied working parents, weather conditions, road safety and more. However, with the proliferation of video games as a shared interest among children and the upsurge of Internet and online games, children have found a new way of socialisation. Video games tend to resolve the issue of home confinement since they are a shared activity with friends that is not confined by place. Online video games can be seen as virtual playgrounds for children to interact, play and socialise with their friends. In this study this virtual socialisation is conceptualised as a continuation of traditional socialisation rather than a substitute for it. As noted earlier, children tend to play those video games with friends and family members rather than absolute strangers, at least according to the focus group and depth interview data. Accordingly, it is suggested that video games offer children a virtual gateway for socialising with their friends in addition to physical socialisation. As we noted earlier,

playing video games seems to be a pre-requisite for peer group affiliations for the children involved in this study. Thus, children tend to play video games in order to “fit in” among their friends. Moreover, video games seem to be one of the activities necessary for peer socialisation since it has become one of the great narratives contemporary children resort to.

9.8.1. It can also be argued that video games are a form of “cultural capital” for today’s children. Willis (1990) argued in his book “Common Culture” that advertising is a form of cultural capital for children (O’Donohoe, 1994). His argument was based on the observation that advertising promotes social interaction among children and is considered a sort of social agent. However, that was before the upsurge of the gaming phenomenon, as this thought lends itself as much to video gaming as advertising. As Buckingham and Green (2003) noted, video games today are often based on social interaction and they promote cooperation and teamwork. Cultural capital is revealed as children show off their knowledge and expertise in video games. Olson et al. (2008) noted another feature of cultural capital that appears in children playing video games, as they tend to engage in a healthy competition that develops their cooperation skills. These two arguments are supported by the findings of this research as it was apparent from the participating children how video games tend to bring them together and foster a sense of cooperation as they help each other to reach certain levels. Moreover, the sense of belongingness those children shared with each other helps define their identity.

9.8.2. Another observation that needs to be highlighted is that even though video games are at the core of children’s socialisation with their friends, they do not necessarily act as a site of bonding between siblings. This was apparent in the fourth repertoire, “Video Games, children’s development and socialisation”, as accounts given by the children participating in the study, noted that they rarely play video games with their siblings. It was even noted by the mother of three who was interviewed that she bought a trampoline for her children so as to try to bring them together since video games fail to do so. She highlighted that her children do not play together and that each would sit alone and play their own preferred video games. This phenomenon could be attributed to differences in age and gender, which are translated

into differences in game genre preferences. However, video games seem to be at the core of friends' socialisation since friends are normally within the same age range and same gender, thus preferences tend to be similar. Accordingly it is suggested that video games are now offering children means of virtual socialisation with their friends rather than restricting their socialisation within the house with their siblings who might have different preferences.

9.25.0 Video Games as Social Agent

It has been noted that children have developed a new, virtually enabled form of sociability that is more suitable to their digi-modern environment. This new form of sociability is not restricted by place but is rather based on virtual interaction. This research has supported this argument, however a further addition to it is that this virtual interaction is rather a supplementary form of interaction that extends out of traditional physical means of interaction among children. Jenkins (1998) suggested that online video games should be regarded as a "virtual play space" for today's children. Buckingham and Green (2003) supported this suggestion, as they believed that these games generate almost the same entertainment and pleasure that preceding generations had from outdoor play, because video games entail having a goal driven activity, exploring new space, mastery of activities, male bonding, and a degree of self-control rather than parental control. They added that video games make up for the increasing confinement of children to their homes (Buckingham and Green, 2003). The suggestion from the present study, however, is that virtual play has not replaced physical play in the lives of the participants, but is, rather, a continuation of physical play and an extension of traditional forms of social life for children. Video games are one of the various forms of activities that today's children engage in and are deeply involved with to construct their identity and socialise with their peers and family members who share the same interest.

9.9.1. Moreover, as noted earlier, video games have become a social agent for the children alongside traditional physical activities, forming a source of cultural capital among them. Children playing video games engage in a competition that may develop their skills of co-operation and they tend to showcase their prowess and knowledge of video games to gain power and status among peers. Some researchers have suggested

that video games actually provide children with material to converse about with each other. Thus, they argue that video games act as a “social agent” between children, and especially for boys, since video games tend to be a major topic of their daily conversations (Berk, 2009; Howe and Strauss, 2000; Bacigalupa, 2005). The children interviewed for this research were extremely happy to talk about video games to the researcher, and they made the importance of games to their lives very clear. Thus, it could be inferred that there was some talk of video games in their social lives. It was clear from the focus groups that knowledge of games was a form of cultural capital for the children, therefore it could be inferred that this extended to their talk and interaction outside the focus groups in their normal social lives.

9.9.2. Snyder (2000) has argued that video games are this generation’s TV, since they have become an integral part of their daily life. This argument is based on Griffiths’ (1996) assumption that children prefer video games over TV since it provides them with a certain degree of control (Griffiths, 1996, Greenfield, 1984). However, as we have noted, the data sets suggested that children saw watching TV as a different category of activity to playing computer games. TV still appeared to be popular, although there is evidence that media consumption patterns generally have changed with Internet activity substituting for TV viewing to some extent. This is attributed to the nature of most video games that require the active engagement of the child/player while the nature of TV is that it is more of a passive relaxing engagement. After a long day at school, children tend to find TV more appealing than video games based on the participating children’s accounts. Thus they would play video games for a certain limit but then they still enjoy watching TV. Accordingly, it is suggested that video games are another activity that children practice and enjoy but not the sole activity on which they base their life and social interactions.

9.26.0 Video Games as a Tool of Power Negotiation

The third theme that appeared in this research examines how video games can be a tool for the negotiation of power between parents and children today. As Gunter et al. (2005) observed, children today have a great access to Internet and are exposed to a considerable volume of information from online and offline adult media. With this upsurge of digitisation and information, profound cultural shifts are seen around the

conduct and experience of today's children. As we have noted earlier in the identity and socialisation sections, video games have become a form of grand narrative in children's lives, a requirement for peer affiliations and one of the tools for family socialisation as well. Ekström (2007) noted that the marketing industry is now targeting children since it is believed that they have a higher degree of autonomy as consumers than previous generations. Many researchers have noted that children now have a considerable influence on family consumer decision-making (Thomson et al, 2007; Tinson and Nancarrow, 2005). Not only do children influence family decision making, but also based on the findings of this research, children today also have primary purchasing power. Based on the accounts of almost all children participating in this research, children tend to save up money in order to buy what they want. It is true that some adult supervision is administered to set parameters for what the children buy, but those children often use their own money, saved from pocket money, birthday and Christmas gifts or income from doing chores, for purchasing gaming gadgets along with other toys and technical devices (such as mobile phones, ipods, and even computers). This is argued to be a form of economic socialisation, as the parents engage the children in an early economic education through the introduction of pocket money and the idea of saving accompanied by regular discussions and monitoring (Lévy, 2010). Thus children tend to develop as economic actors "in a complex cultural system that both enables and constrains their consumption activities" (Marshall, 2010:10). This form of economic socialisation was reported by almost all the children participating in this research.

9.10.1. Even though the children today have more autonomy in buying, it is argued that they have less autonomy than previous generations to play away from adult supervision because of safety concerns (Weir et al, 2006). Accordingly, Burdette and Whitaker (2005) argue that children today spend more time in their home playing video games and watching TV or communicating with their friends via mobile devices as their gateway for socialisation. From this research, it appeared that children had a variety of outdoor activities, in addition to the time they spent playing video games. Several of the children participating in this research listed a variety of outdoor activities that they are engaged in that include sports, scouts, dancing studios to name a few. Thus, video games are more of an entertaining daily activity to some children,

yet not the sole activity they are engaged in. It is true that they might sometimes spend more time on it and that they sometimes resort to it to fill their spare time or when they are bored, since being outdoors can be inconvenient at times. However, playing video games for too long has also been reported to be quite boring in itself, as the children participating in this research noted.

9.10.2. Having a greater autonomy in purchasing and possibly less autonomy in playing outdoors, children today are said to have greater power within households. Many researchers have argued that given today's digitisation phenomenon and the early exposure of children to information and digital media, cultural shifts in households are being witnessed (Tinson and Nancarrow, 2005). It is said that these changes in the environment brought about by technology have given children a constitutive power that undermines the structural power of parents (McDermott, 2006; Ekström, 2007). In the following sections, we will be presenting the different perspectives that showcase how video games seem to be quite an important site for the negotiation and struggle for power within family dynamics in recent years.

9.27.0 Changes in Parenting Typologies

One of the main explanations given for the argument that today's children have a constitutive power that undermines the structural power of their parents, is that the parenting typologies have changed. Stueve and Pleck (2001) highlight that parents' roles have changed and this in turn has brought about changes to children's roles within the family through a new style of parenting. This new style of parenting is said to have given children more autonomy from their parents in some respects. However, from this research this seems to be a qualitative change rather than one of degree, reflecting a change in communication patterns between the parents and children. It is observed that parents have given room for debating and explaining matters to their children rather than merely dictating rules and regulations. This could be attributed to the fact that the parents are aware of the highly mediated environment in which their children live in and the dangers they might be subjected to. Thus, there is a need to warn children of the dangers of the world and to protect them from their own lack of experience, but instead of merely dictating without explaining, as parents of earlier generations might, these parents explain, justify and engage in reasoning with the

children in the expectation that the children will not merely obey instructions but understand the reasons for them. This is why some parents try to explain the rationale behind setting certain rules and controls to their children and highlight the consequences and dangers of not abiding to those rules. If we consider McDermott et al.'s (2006) parenting approaches, it can be said that parents are adopting a 'consensual approach' of parenting, where a high degree of care and control is exerted along with debate in the attempt to reach consensus. Stueve and Pleck (2001) characterise contemporary parenting style as a 'pluralistic approach', in which debating is a necessary communication pattern within the family and control is rarely imposed. But given the technological advancements and the fear that come along with virtualisation, this research suggests that this pluralism is a matter of communication style rather than genuinely pluralistic decision making.

9.11.1. Tinson and Nancarrow (2005) stated that with earlier generations, parents adopted an 'authoritarian' parenting style through which they exercised a restrictive, punitive parenting attitude and the children were expected to obey the rules without arguing. However, the 'authoritative' parenting style, where verbal give and take is allowed, is now the norm in many families, especially as developmental psychology activists started condemning the 'authoritarian' style of parenting. This view is also supported by Sutherland and Thompson (2003) who argue that children today have a motto that is "speak with me and not at me". This research supports those arguments as it has been witnessed in the focus groups that debate is the common communication pattern within the family, as issues are explained and debated in order to reach a middle ground so control is imposed by reasoning rather than by dictate. Looking at video games, parents seem to explain to their children the harms of prolonged playing and the danger of playing with strangers, before they set rules to govern their consumption. Thus children seem to understand why they should not play with strangers and the consequences of playing for long hours for example. Moreover, it seems that some of those children were adopting their parents' position as regards to video games in an attempt to sound more adult-like. Some variation was evident in accounts as children were very positive about video games, claiming that they played games 'more than anyone', but at other times they could be negative

about games. It appeared that at those times those weren't the children's words but rather reflected those of their parents'.

9.11.2. Several researchers have noted the shift in the communication structure in families from the socio-oriented communication, where children are expected to conform to parents authority and not argue or 'answer back', to the concept-oriented communication structure where children are encouraged to debate and develop their own ideas to a certain extent (Moschis and Moore, 1979; McDermott, 2006; Ekström, 2007). This was witnessed in this research, as it appeared from the children's accounts how issues around their game playing and connected matters appeared to be debated within the family, even purchases. Children expressed how it is agreed that they buy their own games and that in regular shopping visits they are only allowed to take a look at what is new in order to save for it from their own money. Thus apparently, it seems that a prevailing ideology of parenting with the participants of this research was to exercise parental authority by reasoning to try to earn acquiescence through consensus. In the parent-child relationship, power seemed to be negotiated rather than structurally imposed within households and video games acted as the currency for this negotiation.

9.28.0 Six Pockets and the Rise of Multi-Generational Families

Another factor that seems to be a reason why it is believed that today's children have more autonomy than children of previous generations is the rise of the multi-generational families. Nowadays grandparents tend to live longer and they tend to be younger than the traditional grandparents, and have more financial power since some of them might be even still working. As we have witnessed in this research, several of the participating children noted that their grandparents bought them video gaming consoles and games at Christmas and on their birthday. Also, the mother of three who was interviewed, highlighted that she never buys brand new video games for her children, but, her mother, the children's grandmother, does. Thus, her children usually get the first hand games from their grandmother, who was even the one who bought them three DSi s (a handheld video gaming console). Grandparents are, for the participants' families at least, playing a bigger role in providing resources to children, and as a consequence the children have more economic power. It has been suggested

that this is a wider cultural trend in affluent Western contexts, called “six pocket children” (Foot and Stoffman, 1998; Sutherland and Thomson, 2003).

9.29.0 Filiarchy and Curling Parents

“Filiarchy” is a term put forward by Acuff (1999) who noticed how changes in the family model have resulted in parents ceding power to children in order to assuage feelings of guilt over their shortcomings as parents. With the appearance of dual income families, single parent families and blended families, it is argued that a lot of power is ceded to the children by their parents in order to compensate for inadequate parenting (Acuff, 1999; Sutherland and Thomson, 2003). This would include not spending enough quality time with the children, or the loss/lack of a second parent through divorce, or the introduction of a new step parent and maybe in some instances step siblings. It was noted in the family socialisation section that, in some families, video games are used as a tool for spending some quality time with the parents. Several children participating in this research have reported accounts of father-son quality time spent playing video games. Some children even explicitly noted how busy their parents are and that playing video games with them on a weekday for half an hour before going to bed is the only time they get to spend with them. Thus it is suggested that those busy parents tend to try to compensate, by, for example, buying their children different consoles and sometimes allowing them to play adult games or to stay up late to play games, in order to make up for their shortcomings. Some parents even seem to let their children play adult games unsupervised, treating the children as quasi adults. It has been noted, based on the children’s accounts, that as they grow older they tend to attempt to extricate themselves bit by bit from their parents’ power whether through exceeding the time limit their parents set them for playing, or by playing adult video games at their friends’ houses. They may even use video games as a gateway for having some space away from social interaction with the family. Just as some children find video games a way of spending time with their parents, some find video games as a way of zoning out from family interaction. Thus it can be argued that video games are children’s means of deploying power within the family context.

9.13.1. Ekström (2007) refers to Hougaard (2005) a Danish psychologist, who uses another term for this trend instead of “Filiarchy”; that is “curling parents”. Hougaard (2005) notes that some parents tend to do everything to make their children’s lives as easy as possible (Ekström, 2007). What has been noted in this research is that children are aware that they have this form of constitutive power, and they are not above exploiting it to get what they want. A very good example of the curling parents trend is when a ten year old participating in the focus group noted that he is an only child and explicitly said that he is “spoilt” since his parents get him whatever he wants. So, perhaps this boy’s parents are trying to make it up to him for not having any siblings by ceding to his requests, hence the curling effect. According to this boy’s account, he has all types of gaming consoles and he plays adult games unsupervised, but this does not stop at video games: he also has many pets and is involved in many different activities, more so than his peers. The curling parents trend is a wider cultural phenomenon that may be attributable to other socio-economic factors, such as the breakdown of more families, longer working hours and a different, more affectionate and participative ideology of family life. Video games are not a cause of this but a currency or resource that features in the ways this cultural phenomenon is played out.

9.30.0 Emotional versus Rational/ Empowering versus Protective

In the previous section, we highlighted how parents yield some power to their children in an attempt to make up for their guilt at the shortcomings of their parenting. It is suggested that a mixture of emotions, such as love, sympathy, sacrifice, altruism, fear, and guilt seem to be the drivers for this parental behaviour. Park et al. (1991) would support this suggestion, as they believe that family research studies have paid little attention to the fact that in certain instances the emotional factor dominates the parents’ decisions rather than rationality. Hamilton and Catterall (2006) provide an explanation for “Filiarchy” or parents’ ceding to their children’s requests, noting the fear of potential stigmatisation such as other children bullying their own children. In the present study, one parent noted that she introduced her children to video games, especially her elder son, in order to help him make friends and be part of a group. The mother was aware that his friends played video games. In another of the focus groups one of the boys noted that he only started to play video games so as not to feel left out. Thus it seems that some parents may condone and support the playing of video

games in order to protect their own children from possible social ostracisation. As a consequence of this, parents' authority may be undermined in other spheres, since children are sensitive to the balance of power in their relationship with their parent or carer.

9.14.1. It could be suggested that parents do not have less power over their children but it is rather a shift of power from structural to constitutive and negotiated, or perhaps it is more of 'soft' power. The shift from authoritarian parental power to soft power leaves open the way for children to exercise their own power through negotiation or coercion in the form of 'pester power' or the power of nagging, since the children understand that parents are vulnerable to emotional manipulation. So on one hand, as we mentioned the example of the only child, children are aware of the soft power they have over their parents and know exactly how to exploit it, reflecting the 'curling' parenting trend. On the other hand, the parents yield to their children's pester power as a result of their latent guilt because of their perception that they have let their children down. Thus in a sense, emotion overpowers reason as the need to feel less guilty, to express love, to nurture and to protect the children results in parents indulging the children by ceding to their requests. One particular example of this is noted from the interview with the mother of three. She introduced video games to her children as we highlighted earlier not only to ensure that they fit in among their peers but also because her eldest son has a condition of ADHD and she had heard of the therapeutic uses of video games. She bought her children a Wii console, and her son an Xbox which he was allowed to have in his room so he can play whenever he wants. She even allowed him to play adult games. This mother seem to have ceded a lot of power to her son because she wanted him to get better and she was seeing an improvement in not only his social skills but also his motor skills.

9.14.2. Griffiths (1996) noted this therapeutic use of video games, as he argued that video games give children a sense of confidence along with increasing their computer skills and problem solving strategies as well as improving hand-eye coordination. Even though a lot of power is apparently ceded to her son, this is laced with control as the mother forbids playing online with strangers to ensure his safety. Thus as it has been witnessed in this research and accounted for not only by the mother of three but

also by the participating children, the parents still wield authority especially when the safety and wellbeing of their children is at stake. So what most parents of these children are doing is trying to balance a degree of empowerment for their children while retaining some control for the children's protection. One way that this protective power is exercised is by setting boundaries to the children's daily video gaming consumption. Thus parents retain a degree of power by controlling when their children play, for how long and who with, even if in many cases the children may re-negotiate these boundaries. As we highlighted earlier, some Dads play adult games with their sons, achieving a degree of monitoring as well as bonding. This falls in line with Buckingham and Green's (2003) suggestion that even though societies claim to adopt an empowering approach with children in order to enable them to be competent and autonomic, what is actually being espoused is a protectionist approach, in which the segregation of children from unfamiliar situations that are assumed to cause harm, is practised (Buckingham and Green, 2003). Thus it can be seen that power within families is continually contested and re-negotiated within shifting cultural norms, and video games are one currency for this negotiation.

9.31.0 Gender Roles and Coalition Negotiation Strategies

We have noted that 'soft' power seems to prevail in the parenting styles of these children, and this can be exploited by children to get what they want. Several researchers have noted that as well, since it has been acknowledged that emotion and bargaining strategies are two of the main strategies used by children to influence their parents' decision making (Palan and Wilkes, 1997; McDermott et al, 2006; Lee and Collins, 2000; Thomson et al, 2007). Another strategy that seems to be utilised by today's children as witnessed in this research is having a cross-generational coalition. It is argued that children resort to this form of coalition since they realised that it strengthens their position and thus yields a greater influence as they are taken more seriously since their request is supported by another family member (Filiatrault and Ritchie, 1980). It was observed in this research that boys tend to refer to their father or any other male figure within the family who would be familiar with video games to either play with them or for advice on new games. This might be attributed to the belief that a male figure would relate more to them as they would understand and accept their preferences. It was also observed that boys seemed aware that men would

be more liberal in their attitude towards adult certificated games than women and mothers. This would accordingly facilitate the process of getting what they want without having to go through lengthy negotiations, which they reckon to encounter with their mothers due to the stereotypical belief among children that mothers are against video games. From this research, it seems that children especially boys view mothers as generally anti-video games, while fathers tend to be more positive. This common sentiment among children brings about some arguments in the negotiation of power among boys and specifically their mothers. This is another example of how video games tend to shape the negotiation of power among parents and children and also signifies how this power is very much negotiated within gender ideologies.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Nine has reviewed the findings in the light of the theories highlighted in the literature review in Chapter Two, in order to elaborate on the theoretical contribution of this study. Theories of children's identity, socialisation and power within the family are inflected by the findings, while overall the study suggests that the impact of video games on children's lives has been powerful yet not necessarily negative. Video games have become a cultural currency for negotiating the world for children, and the way this plays out reflect wider cultural shifts. Chapter Ten will conclude the thesis by reviewing the study and elaborating its implications.

Chapter Ten

Reflections on this Study, Evaluation of Findings and Research Implications

Chapter Outline

Chapter Ten concludes the thesis by reviewing the findings in the light of the initial research questions, reflecting on the conduct of the study and suggesting implications for policy, practice and future research in the area. The chapter opens with brief re-iteration of the research problem, followed by a re-iteration of the key findings in relation to the research questions.

10.13.0 Re-iteration of the Key Research Issues

Digitisation in general, and the rise of video games in particular, are important cultural movements deserving of greater study, especially with the respect to their impact on children's lives. As Griffiths et al. (2003) note, relatively little research has been conducted in this area despite the upsurge of video games as a leisure activity. There are several reasons that make this topic quite an important topic for research. Ondrejka (2006) noted that the rise of the Internet and digital games have resulted in complex interactions that create an unprecedented social landscape for children fostering a high level of experience, exploration and experimentation. This provides an almost limitless source of research material. Bartle (2005) argues that what also makes video games a rather interesting topic to study is that video games are "displacing" other media as a mainstream leisure activity. However, in this research it was noted that video games do not necessarily displace other media activity in terms of consumption patterns, but rather act alongside as a different category of activity requiring the full engagement of the player, in contrast to the passive nature of consumption of analogue broadcast media. It is acknowledged that video games have become an integral part in the lives of many people with a particular impact on the lives of children, hence the rationale for this study. Not only has relatively little research tackled video games as a topic, much less has focused on the subjective experience of those at the very centre of these effects- Generation Z children. As Marshall (2010) argues there is a need to look at the children as agentive consumers and consider the extent to which they are actively engaged in this commercial world

as buyers, users, and recipients of consumer goods. Thus children's voice needs to be heard. Yet it is noted that consumer research that looks into the children's perspective is rather infrequent (Davis, 2010). This could be partly attributed to the difficulty of access to children that would be considered an ethical as well as a methodological limitation to such research. Another inhibition to this topic may be the need to approach it as a cross-disciplinary study, since it embraces diverse subject areas such as children's development, consumer studies, family social studies, health and addiction, marketing and more. In the sections below the main findings of this research are evaluated against the research objectives. In addition to that, we will be highlighting the ethical considerations and limitations as well as the practical implications of the research results.

10.13.1 Summary of Findings

Looking at children and video games in 2012, the games are no longer novel to children or their parents. It can be seen from the interviews conducted in this research with relatively affluent children from middle class Western families, that video games now form a routine part of their lives and their parents' lives, but not necessarily a negative one. Once the novelty and unfamiliarity of the technology ceases to be new or difficult, it tends to be absorbed into daily life in a matter-of-fact-way. Based on this research, video games are not necessarily a negative thing for children's intellectual, physical, social, and moral development. Video games do not simply do things to children as is often assumed, but rather children are seen as active agents in the way video games are being incorporated into their cultural and family life. This is important because of the widespread assumption, echoed in quite a lot of common literature, that video games are a new technology, which has only negative influences on children. This fear might be seen, rather, as a fear of new technology.

At the beginning of the research process, six research questions were put forward to help guide the investigation of the topic. The findings of the research were guided by those questions and offered valuable insights in the understanding of the phenomenon from the subjective experience of children with video games. Each of these questions is evaluated against the findings of the research below in an attempt to provide a holistic conclusion that highlights the overall contribution of the research conducted.

10.1.0 What is the impact of video games and digital interaction on children, socially, emotionally, and cognitively?

Video games seem to be the social currency for friendship and peer acceptance, especially among boys. Not only are the ownership and consumption of video games the social currency for popularity among peers, but also skills in playing such games are important in establishing social status and authority among peers. This in turn results in improving the social skills of children, especially for the ones who have trouble in fitting into peer groups, as owning the right video games is considered their ticket for group member affiliations, and this group affirmation enhances their social confidence.

10.1.1 On an emotional level, one of the main reasons why children play video games is the sense of achievement it provides. This sense of achievement is attained upon reaching advanced levels, scoring high points and helping peers with their games, thus mastering the game. Accordingly, a great sense of emotional gratification is attained from achieving mastery in the games. This feeds into the children's ideology of social status, since deeper knowledge of games confers social status within the peer group. In addition to that, children with low self-esteem tend to be motivated to play more frequently, which in turn lead to more mastery, and therefore higher self-esteem. Thus playing video games endows a sense of mastery and control, which is translated into higher self-esteem and emotional gratification in children.

10.1.2 As for the impact of video games on children's cognitive development, some video games have an educational aspect to them and act as one source of children's knowledge about the world. With the expansion of the video gaming industry and the development of a variety of genres to cater to different tastes and preferences, some games have been designed to improve IQ levels. These games tend to incorporate knowledge and skills similar to those found in school curriculums and aim to improve the IQ through practicing at IQ-style questions and puzzles. As witnessed in this research, some parents encourage their children to play these video games for they witnessed a development in their children's problem solving capabilities and other learning skills. Children, too, noted that they play the "brain training games" with their parents and said it was good for them without necessarily understanding in what

way were those games beneficial, since the children do not necessarily understand what cognitive skills development may mean. Furthermore, video games seem to leverage children's world skills. Children seem to formulate their knowledge about the outside world through video games to some extent and pick up skills and information from the video games they play that might be advanced for their age, and may amount to constructive and useful knowledge. Thus, these video games are somehow exemplary teachers for real life situations that children might not encounter in reality at such an early age. It is argued that there is hardly any other medium than video games that provide such breadth and depth of experience, combining the real and the virtual in a social landscape while encouraging exploration, experimentation and discovery. Hence, the term "edu-tainment media" that is suggested by Griffiths (1999) lends itself quite well to video games for they aid in the cognitive development of children by setting goals, raising self-esteem, increasing interactivity and engagement while providing knowledge about the world in an entertaining context.

10.1.3 Overall, the study suggested that, in this small convenience sample of children, the impact of video games has been profound as it contours their sense of their social world, their sense of self and their closest relationships. Video games provide a shared interest and a source of cultural capital within the peer group. We saw evidence that video games also had an effect on social, emotional and cognitive development, particularly in the example of the mother who obtained games for her son's ADHD and was convinced that playing them had helped him win friends at school, become part of the group, increase his confidence and also enhance his cognitive skills. This was only one example but is a striking one and it dovetails with some recent research that has emphasised the positive effect of playing video games of different kinds on children's development. The online element of playing video games is also especially profound in children's lives as it reflects and also enhances a cultural shift away from playing in the street to a virtual form of interaction with peers online.

10.2.0 Is children's environment today a harmful one because of their deep engagement with video games and communications technology?

The length of time some children spend playing games could well fall into a category that some might regard as an addiction, which would be regarded as a negative thing. However, based on the results of this research, this belief might be overstated. From this investigation of the subjective lived experience of children, it has been noted that playing video games is an activity children are engaged in to fill their spare time or when they are bored. However, playing video games for too long has also been reported to be quite boring in itself. Thus the children who participated in this study seemed to have a sense of perspective and balance in their lives, and while video games were very popular they did not dominate the children's lives. In addition to that, video games do not necessarily eat away from the time spent in other activities, for children reported their engagement in sports activities, scouts, clubs, as well as spending time watching their favourite shows on TV. Children also reported that they usually play after they finish their schoolwork. So it is suggested that video games did not appear to take place at the expense of children's other leisure activities, social integration and school performance. Clearly, this depends very much on the nature of family life and parental supervision, and the children who participated in this study seemed to be from loving and caring homes. In the absence of such care, children might have a less well-balanced range of activities.

10.2.1 Other research suggests that the digital world has become a primary medium not only for playing games but also as a social place where new types of lives and human relationships are formed (Whang and Chang, 2004). In the present study, children tended to play video games with already established friends from school, neighbourhood, or other activities. Thus video games are seen to supplement rather than replace social play activities, and act as an extension of non-digital life rather than as a radically new kind of life. In addition, the findings from the present study suggested that the intensity of concentration required to play video games was not necessarily a reason why other activities were reduced, in fact it is one of the reasons why children choose other activities, such as TV, after a busy long day engaged in school and other activities (clubs, sports practice,.. etc.). Another aspect that was noted in this research is the children's belief that playing video games is a temporary

phase in their lives and that they will either grow out of it or replace it with other activities that would be more appropriate to their age. This belief might be reflecting the liminal character of video games, since they are 'games' so by definition children view them as things of childhood, even though some people (men in particular) play these games well into middle age. Yet children do not quite realise that for they believe that the lives of grown-ups tends to lend itself to work and family life rather than playing of video-games, as they reflect on the lives of their parents and other grown-ups they encounter. Accordingly, this research suggests that video games do not necessarily have a harmful effect on children's environment. The present study suggested that, played in the context of a caring and varied family life, video games are a supplement for children's other activities that are seen to have a positive impact on their development and socialisation.

10.2.2 Overall, the study suggested that the outcomes of the major role video games play in children's lives are not entirely negative. Indeed, many positive outcomes were suggested by this small sample, including providing enhanced social relationships, providing deepened family bonding through playing the games (usually but not exclusively with Dad), positive learning aspects including increased general knowledge and computer and digital communication skills, and physical benefits to, for example, hand-eye co-ordination and concentration. It seems clear that there are potentially negative outcomes from excessive playing or neglecting other activities, but from this small sample of well cared-for children from loving families these negative issues were not evident and the children themselves were aware of the risks and negative issues and they monitored those risks and managed the negative issues.

10.3.0 What are the implications of video games on children's senses of identity and membership in social reference groups?

In the process of exploring the subjective experience of children with video games, it was realised that video games play quite an important role in the course of identity representation and self-actualisation in children. As noted with reference to the first research question, video games are considered a currency for negotiating peer acceptance and affiliation. It is suggested that there are three main factors that children today consider important for establishing social status among their

counterparts. The first factor is the ownership of gaming consoles. The more consoles a child has, the “cooler” that child is considered among his peers. The second factor is the games they play, since playing specific games tend to be the ticket to the group’s acceptance. The third is the level of advanced skill the child possesses in playing the games.

10.3.1 Video games in general constitute a shared interest among all the children who participated in this research, but different age and gender ideologies dictate preference to different game genres. As children grow older, cultural and social predispositions start dictating gender specificities, and alongside this, preferences for games start diverging. When they are younger, the boys and girls tend to prefer and play adventure games. However, as boys grow older, their preference becomes more stereotypically masculine and they start playing more violent ‘adult’ games such as ‘shoot-em-ups’ and strategy games. Not only this, but they try to distance themselves from the games they used to play as kids, by denying they play them any more. This can be attributed to the possibility that those boys have begun to understand the cultural ideologies of what defines masculinity within the peer group. And accordingly those boys tend to link the genre of games being played to the level of masculinity of the player. Thus, access to adult games at a young age is a way to claim authority within a group whilst also a gendered subject position.

10.3.2 The mastery or skill level in playing the games is also important, since achieving mastery in video games is considered an integral part of the children’s ideology of social status. In this research it was quite apparent that displaying expert knowledge in video games and voicing adult-like opinions are important in establishing social status and identity among child peer groups. Thus it is suggested that children’s ideologies for social status, group membership, identity representation and self-actualisation are to a certain extent shaped by their ownership and consumption of video games. The discursive function of showcasing game knowledge is to make a claim for social status and authority within the group. However, it is important to note that children are not using games as the only resource they have to draw upon to make claims about identity and status. Children have always done this by drawing upon their sporting prowess or their literary knowledge and other

activities and commodities to similarly impress their peers and make claims about status and identity. Children participating in this study have been an example of that since they did not solely claim superiority or status through video games but also through sports activities, trips, pets and other activities that they believe sets them apart among their peers. Hence, video games should be considered another discursive resource that helps in the process of identity representation in contemporary children.

10.4.0 What are the implications of video games and technology on children as consumers?

Children's power as consumers has long been recognised in terms of their indirect power in influencing family purchases. As we have noted in the previous research questions, one way in which children today claim social status and attain group membership affiliation is through ownership of video games. Children tend to associate meaning and status to the ownership of consoles and to playing specific games. Within every age group questioned, there seems to be a number of games that can be called the "in games" or the accepted games to be played. With changing family dynamics and parenting typologies, parents are now seen to yield to their children's requests for purchases to a higher degree than previous generations. This, and the additional resources children can command from extended families, gives them greater autonomy as primary consumers.

10.4.1 The economic power that children have within families does not preclude parental control. Rather, there is a shift of power from structural to constitutive and negotiated, or perhaps from hard to 'soft' power. Parents may be trying to make-up for their perceived shortcomings as parents that result from working long hours (time-tied parents), 'broken' or single parent families and/or from the introduction of stepparents and sometimes stepsiblings as well. These factors relating to the need to show love and the feeling of parental guilt that their children's childhood is somehow less happy than it ought be can be part of the reason parents cede more willingly to their children's economic requests. However, even though that some parents seem to grant their children some degree of economic power in the form of independence in their toys' purchasing or game playing, yet it is not entirely free from monitoring. Parents do set rules, such as forbidding children to play games online with strangers,

and the children are aware of them, and of the reasons for forbidding such practices. In this way, power seems to be negotiated rather than structurally imposed, and video games act as one currency for this negotiation. So it can be argued that there is a form of conditional independence around the purchase and consumption of video games. Older children, as one might expect, attempt to extricate themselves bit by bit from their parents' control. This was noted as the participating children shared their frustrations, either explicitly or subtly, with their parents' authority as regards in rules and regulations imposed around their video games consumption. One way they opposed this authority was by either ignoring or bargaining to reshape or going around the rules. It was also noted that as those children gained confidence in playing games, they felt more able to resist traditional authority, relying on fellow gamers for support and understanding.

10.4.2 Another example of how video games tend to shape the negotiation of power among parents and children comes about when children, especially boys, tend to refer to their fathers or any other male figure within the family as partners on buying, playing or discussing new video games. It seems that children, especially boys, view mothers as generally anti-video games, particularly regarding violent games, while fathers tend to be more relaxed about playing violent and age-restricted games. This stereotypical belief among children brings about some arguments in the negotiation of power among boys and their mothers. It is suggested that boys sense that men would relate more to them as they would understand and accept their preferences, unlike women. Thus they can get what they want without having to go through the negotiation process, which they reckon to encounter with their mothers due to difference in preference. This in turn signifies how power is very much negotiated within gender ideologies. Video games seem to be quite an important site for this negotiation and struggle for power within family dynamics in recent years.

10.4.3 Video games are at the centre of a cultural change as children move from being secondary influencers to primary consumers. Alongside this empowerment as consumers, children are assuming greater empowerment within the family unit. Video games are to some extent a currency in bridging the generational gap between children and adult carers, since both can understand and sometimes enjoy the games.

Indeed, there is an element of reverse socialisation in which children become the experts and adults the learners. As a result, children are assuming greater power within the family generally and this is manifesting in greater autonomy as consumers.

10.5.0 How does the children's access to video gaming and online communication affect their socialisation and social development?

Children's socialisation and social development are two other aspects that have been influenced by children's consumption of video games. In some families, video games tend to offer an opportunity for family socialisation and bonding. Those families usually have at least one parent who played video games growing up, thus tend to be comfortable playing video games with their children. In these households, video games become a means for family socialisation and bonding, mediated by age and gender preferences. It has been noted that mothers who are familiar with video games tend to play adventure, lifestyle and puzzle games with their younger children. On the other hand, older boys who prefer 'adult' (violent, war and strategy) games sometimes play them with their fathers. One of the things suggested in this research is that father-son relationships have evolved from playing sports together to playing video games. This is probably true with those young parents who belong to affluent Western families and who were exposed to video games at certain stage while growing up. Accordingly it is argued that some children and some parents resort to video games as an activity to spend some quality time together. Yet it has also been noted that some use games to "zone out" from family interaction and escape family demands. Thus it can be argued that video games are children's means of deploying power within family context as they are utilised as a source of family interaction or withdrawal from it.

10.5.1 Video games might be considered means for family socialisation and bonding, but the research suggests that they are not likely to enhance siblings' socialisation. Different age and gender preferences tend to dictate different tastes and preferences when it comes to games. This in turn explains why video games are at the core of children's socialisation with their friends, since they are of the same age and gender and thus have similar preferences. It is not unusual that children tend to share more common activities with their friends than their siblings. What is different now is that

video games are offering children means of virtual socialisation with their friends. This is turn meant that children are no longer bound by place and they do not have to socialise as much with their siblings. Accordingly it is suggested in this study that video games are playing a role in the evolution of family social dynamics as well as with siblings and friends.

10.5.2 There may be a negative aspect to the influence of video games in children's socialisation. As noted above, peer groups seemed to value knowledge of video games very highly indeed, to the extent that it conferred membership to and status within the peer group. There is a potentially negative aspect to this in the sense that children without the interest in video games or who do not have the resources to obtain them could be left out of the peer group and suffer from stigmatisation or even bullying. In this regard, video games can be seen as part of a culturally forceful trend to self-realisation through consumption. Without possession and knowledge of the games, children may find it difficult to establish their identity within the peer group. Hence, although the implications of video games in the lives of the participating children seemed generally benign, there remains a question about the role of video games in children's lives as one part of an overarching ideology of consumption.

10.6.0 What are the children's motives for engaging in online gaming? Are they seeking fantasy, escape and fun or autonomy, authenticity, social positioning?

Video games seem to have become an integral part in the daily lives of children today. Even though it was originally targeting adults when they were first introduced, now video games have become a common interest among children. With the introduction of new games genres, video games have become more appealing to a lot of children with different tastes. Studying the subjective experience of children with video games, it is important to explore the motivation behind playing video games and what makes this activity so appealing to them. One of the main reasons why children find video games quite an enjoyable activity is that "video games are fun". The construction of fun needs to be examined more closely, since there is a social element to this- they are fun because peer groups agree that they are fun, in fact to some extent they are compulsory fun. There is also an element of mastery over the technology that children find compelling. Children attain some emotional gratification from playing video

games that stems from the challenging nature of those games. They also obtain gratification from mastering new technical elements of game play. The participating children in this research were highly articulate about aspects of the game that function well, glitches and the visual elements that draw them to the game. Children tend to use some of the jargon used by technical specialists when talking about games. It was noted that even though they were quite articulate about those aspects, yet they lacked critical understanding of the socio-cultural aspects behind the storylines of those games. What seems to matter most to them is the novelty of game themes and, especially, the visual aspects since once games became repetitive, they tended to lose interest in them. This behaviour is common among children and does not necessarily lend itself solely to video games, since children have a tendency to lose interest in other toys once they become out-dated and repetitive. It is suggested that children of both genders find video games a diverting supplementary activity to engage in when they have some free time, yet too much can be boring.

10.6.1 A major element that draws children to video games is the social interaction around the games. Children today may have fewer opportunities than in previous decades to spend face-to-face time with their friends. However, with the proliferation of video games as a shared interest among children that is not confined by place, children have found a new way of socialisation. Children are no longer bound by place since they can play with their friends and neighbours while each is at his/her home. Video games, especially the online ones have become virtual playgrounds for children to interact, play and socialise with their friends. Yet it needs to be highlighted that there was no evidence from this study that children were substituting traditional friendships with online ones. It was apparent that video games do offer children a virtual gateway for socialising with their already established friends and thus it is an extension of and complementary to their traditional physical socialisation that takes place in schools, clubs, activities and neighbourhoods. Finally, the fact that video games have become a source for children's empowerment and identity realisation should not be ignored as a main motivation for children to play video games. Games give them the opportunity to play with their identities, to try things they might not encounter in real life, and to set their own rules. In this sense, video

games can be understood as a technological advance on traditional children's playground games.

10.7.0 Evaluation of the research objectives

Overall, the research questions were effective in guiding the research, although the findings that subsequently emerged went well beyond the initial research questions in important respects. The flexible research method employed allowed participants to express their experiences without limit, and as a consequence the findings did reach beyond the initial questions. In particular, findings on gender issues, the dynamic of family socialisation and children's empowerment not only as consumers but also as autonomous individuals emerged strongly. The role of video games as a currency that children used to negotiate wider cultural shifts in family life, parenting models, children's social development and the perceived risks of playing outside the house seemed particularly powerful.

10.8.0 Ethical Issues

Unlike other research on video games, this research studies the phenomenon from the subjective experience of children as expressed by them. One of the main reasons why this take on the phenomenon is not very common in social research is the ethical concern related to research with children as the participants. Conducting research on children and, especially, getting access to them in a research context, is quite a cumbersome process due to the various UK controls. Having ethical consent does not necessarily mean that the process becomes easier, as it was experienced in this research. After acquiring the ethical approval of the university and the department, further consents had to be acquired from the club that was approached. Yet even with recommendation from university contacts and support from one of the board members of the club, it took two months of negotiation and bureaucracy to finally be allowed to go to the club and conduct the focus groups. Further individual consents were obtained from the parents of each child who were to be involved. Yet with all those consents, the researcher was highly scrutinised by the club manager who remained worried about conducting research on the children in the club. The club manager even recited a number of rules to be followed in the conduct of the focus groups that made the process a bit problematic as it was highlighted in chapter five. However, ethical

issues were more perceived than actual- the children were perfectly safe during the research process; they enjoyed talking about the role of video games as they experienced it in their lives, and the confidentiality of their responses is assured.

10.9.0 The Interpretive Research Process

This research falls broadly under Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) as it views children as “interpretive agents” rather than “passive dupes” and video games are considered elements for generating meaning and culture in the lives of those children. CCT (Arnould and Thompson, 2005) emphasises the cultural aspect of consumption and the experience of consumers. This study contributes to CCT by focusing on the subjective experience of children of a major consumer cultural phenomenon, namely video games and the role it plays in their reality construction and individual and group narrative. Social constructionist theorists have noted that knowledge is created by subjects thus is a normative subject centred enterprise rather than a phenomenon based on unbiased process of truth discovery (Hirschman, 1985; Derrida, 1973; Szmigin and Foxall, 2000:192). Thus it is recognised that the knowledge gathered in this research is constructed through the interaction between researcher and participants. Different understandings and insights are possible since all research is constructed and different ways of knowing exist. This essentially follows Banister et al.’s (1994) dictum that “completely valid research, which captures and represents an unchallengeable ‘truthful’ view of reality, is not possible” (pp. 157). In-keeping with this view, this research put forward the insights gathered as a way of understanding video games from the perspective of some children and does not claim that the interpretations offered are the only ones possible, nor that the insights generated have universal validity. The research takes a relativist ontological stance/ approach that notes, “truth can vary from place to place and from time to time” (Collins, 1983: 88). Accordingly, the interpretations made in this research on the video gaming phenomenon are socially constructed interpretations that are time and context bound since they rely on the understanding of the meanings, motives, experience of some children at a particular place and time (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988).

10.9.1 Another aspect that needs to be noted is that the researcher adopted the position of a “participant as observer” rather than a “complete observer” (Denzin,

1978:164). One of the main reasons why the researcher could not adopt a more involved role of complete observer is that it would have been impossible for her to become a ten-year-old child again. This was the same situation that was noted by Ritson and Elliott (1999) in their research as they adopted the participant as observer role since they could not become high school adolescents again and take the role of a complete observer. Being a participant observer suited the exploration of children's experience and behaviour with video games. Once the children noted that the researcher was not negatively judging their video game activity but, rather, was interested in knowing about it without judging, they were more willing to share their expertise. The researcher even faked ignorance in order to get the children to elaborate more on their game play and observe the interaction among the group. All this helped in shaping a form of understanding of the phenomenon under study. As DuBois (1983) frames it "the knower is part of the matrix of what is known" (DuBois, 1983: 111).

10.10.0 Limitations

One of the main limitations of this research is that it relies heavily on self-reporting and therefore on the children's subjective perceptions and claims of their own abilities and experiences. This is an inherent limitation of interpretive studies using small samples. The researcher has to apply judgment to assess the integrity and meanings of the participants' talk. A second inherent limitation concerns the use of a small, convenience sample, as discussed above, which means that the findings cannot be claimed as universally valid. The participants were children from relatively affluent families in one part of the UK, so their experience cannot be taken as necessarily representative of all generation Z children in the UK. Another limitation of this research is that it focused mainly on the males/boys experience with video games and did not investigate girls' experience in the same depth, since only one focus group and one in-depth interview were conducted with girls in comparison to four focus groups and two in-depth interviews with boys. This is acknowledged, however one reason for it was that, as suggested by previous research, video games play a much more powerful role in the lives of male children, and the findings from this study did support that.

10.11.0 Practical Implications

For several decades since their appearance, video games have been attacked by popular media and surrounded by suppositions and presumptions about their allegedly harmful effects on players, especially children. Media labels such as “keyboard junkies” have been used, denoting children’s high consumption of video games (Griffiths, 1996). However, some research studies suggested that video games are not necessarily as damaging to players as was thought, and that fear of technology might play a part in this panic. In this research some of the more positive aspects of video game playing for children emerged. For example, games have a therapeutic benefit and can be used in comprehensive programmes to help develop social and spatial ability skills in children and adolescents with severe learning disability or other developmental problems including autism and with impulsive and attention deficit disorders (Griffiths 2005). This study has supported this suggestion, and has gone further in suggesting that there may be positive benefits to socialisation, emotional development and economic decision-making from video games. An important caveat is that these benefits arise in the context of games as a part of a loving and ordered family life with a balance of activities. Importantly, the suggestion is that it is not necessary for commentators to assume that video games in and of themselves are necessarily ‘bad’ for children. As with many things, it is the wider context of children’s socialisation that is decisive.

10.12.0 Future Research Directions

More research is needed that would take into consideration larger samples, different children from different areas and social classes, and different gender balances in order to formulate a more robust perspective on the phenomenon. It should also be noted that future research needs to tackle this phenomenon noting the proliferation of tablets such as iPads which have made gaming a more common activity among both genders. As noted earlier, the terrain of video gaming has changed in the three years since this study began, with two main trends emerging: 1. Games on a wider variety of consoles and 2. A greater number of games oriented towards females, and greater numbers of females of all ages playing video games. Although the games and consoles featured in Chapter three remain very popular, new research would have to take account the rapidly shifting video game terrain. Another suggestion is to have a more comparative

study between boys' experience versus girls' experience with video games and tablets, exploring the meanings they attach to their consumption and preferences. This could go into greater depth as regards the role of video games in gender identity realisation and experimentation. The issues around children's cognitive and emotional development deserve individual attention in research studies on their own account, as do the issues around family and economic socialisation. In the present study, these issues arose as aspects of the wider cultural shifts that impinged on the research questions, but other methods, especially ethnographic approaches, could generate much more robust insights into these areas. Finally, longitudinal studies would be highly relevant. In the present study, insights have been generated from a 'snapshot' of children's experiences in one time. It would be highly instructive to have follow-up studies to explore how children's attitudes evolve over time.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Ten has reviewed the conduct of the study as a whole, including reviewing the main findings in conjunction with the research questions. It is concluded that the study effectively investigated the research questions and generated some powerful insights. These were facilitated by the flexible and open data gathering and analysis methodology which allowed issues to arise that were beyond the scope of the research questions. In particular, the role of video games in the children's lives appeared part of wider cultural shifts, both resulting from those shifts and facilitating them. The precise relationship between the wider cultural shifts (in family dynamics, children's autonomy as consumers, children's power in family and peer groups, children's modes of learning and cognitive development) and the role of video games in different socio-demographic contexts needs to be elaborated in future research studies.

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Appendix A

Parents' Consent Letter



Dina.Bassiouni.2010@live.rhul.ac.uk

School of Management

Egham, Surrey

TW20 0EX

+44 (1784) 443857

Mobile: +44 (7576) 763075

03rd May 2011

Dear Parents

My name is Dina Bassiouni, I am a Management PhD student studying at Royal Holloway University of London. I am seeking your permission to undertake research using a straightforward question and answer technique with the children on the topic of computer games.

The aim of this research is to understand the lived experience of children with online computer and video games and how this new phenomenon is shaping their view of the world. With the upsurge in the digitization of several aspects in the environment, it should be acknowledged that children's social and material life is quite different today than in the past. Children today are born surrounded by digital gadgets and digital media provided by computers, video games, and mobile phones to name a few. In this study, the aim is to explore the quality of the experience of online computer and video games from the children's viewpoint as well as their caregivers/parents if possible.

It is acknowledged that the age of the subjects of this study is considered ethically sensitive and requires permissions on several levels. On one level, the study has been granted an ethical permission from the Management Department at Royal Holloway University of London. On the other level, your consent is quite crucial for proceeding with this study.

Questioning will focus around children's experience of the virtual world through online computer and video gaming (see last page for a sample of the questions). Their participation is not mandatory and they can end the interview whenever they like. Moreover, they will be asked whether they would prefer to stay anonymous or disclose their names in the study. Documents created from this study will not bear names of any participant; instead, aliases will be used if required.

In terms of data security, there will be only one copy of the recorded file on my computer (with a backup on my external hard drive) and that no other person has

access to it. Furthermore, to confirm the accuracy of their contribution, the transcripts of the interviews can be requested.

Essentially this exercise will be a simple and informal face to face discussion about the way the children perceive the influence of video games on their life on several levels.

The finding from the research will be available to you before the final write up, if you would like to receive a copy of the findings please contact me at the details above.

For further inquiries or concerns, please feel free to contact me at dina.bassiouni.2010@live.rhul.ac.uk or my supervisor, Professor Chris Hackley at chris.hackley@rhul.ac.uk.

✂-----✂-----✂

I _____ (parent/guardian) consent to _____ (name of child) participating in this research activity.

Signed _____

Relationship to child _____

Sample of interview questions:

- Who plays video-games?
- What games do you play?
- What gaming consoles do you have? (psp, Xbox, wii, Ds, ps...etc)
- What's your favourite game?
- Who do you play with?
- Around how many hours do you play every day?
- Do you play sports?
- Which do you prefer video games or sports?
- What other activities do you do?
- What do you like the most about video games?
- Do you compare trophies and scores with your friends?
- How do you know about the new games? and which games to buy?
- Who usually buy you these games?

Appendix B Transcripts

Transcription conventions adapted from Potter and Wetherell (1987).

=	Indicates the absence of a discernible gap between speakers
(.)	A pause of less than 1 second
(1), (2)	A pause of 1 second, 2 seconds and so on
(...)	Some transcript has been deliberately omitted
[ABH laughs]	Material in square brackets is clarifying information
<u>They</u>	A word or phrase underlined indicates additional emphasis
[as you can	Left square brackets indicates overlapping speech.

Introduction:

This is how the researcher introduced herself and her study to the participants:

DB: Hello my name is Dina, I'm studying at Royal Holloway. What am I studying?
Well I'm studying video games and your experience with it. So this should be fun. I wanted to hear about video games from you guys since you know about them and use them. Sadly I don't, I don't even know how to play them so I wanted to hear about it from you, maybe I will take it up afterwards.

Transcript #1:

Date: June 2nd 2011

Location: Gap Club, Old Windsor

Duration: 45 min

Participants: J.T.(10 years), O.K. (11 years), J.S. (10 years), J.L.(7 years)

Interview:

DB: So do you guys play computer games and video games?

JT, OK, JS, JL: [ah yes

JL: I play DS and wii

JT: I play my DS and my Playstation 3

DB: oh! Playstation 3

JT: [JS laughs] yes

OK: I play (1) wii and ps

JS: I play my Wii, my DS and my Xbox

DB: Okkk, so you all have wiis, and =

JT: = xbox

DB: yes xbox and ps 3s and do you play on the computer as well, as in online games=

JS: =yeah=

OK: =sometimes=

JS: =yeah sometimes=

DB: so what games do you play?

JS: (.) I plaaaay on my DS dragon quest knightttt

DB: Dragon quest?=

JS: Dragon quest knight (.) and (2) pokemon, power rangers and transformers

DB: What are these games like?

JS: (2) eh-hm (.) they are kinda fighting games
 DB: fighting games?=
 JS: =yeah
 DB: not adventure=
 JS: yeah that's for dragon quest knight (1) but transformers and power rangers are just fighting.
 DB: So transformers and power rangers are just fighting=
 JS: =yup (.) yeah
 DB: you said you play online as well on computers=
 JS: =yeah (.) eh-hh=
 DB: what games do=
 JS: I don't go play on the computer anymore=
 DB: = ok (3) why not?
 JS: mmm (2) because most of the games don't work anymore (.)
 DB: don't work?
 OK: yeah
 JS: yeah, (.) some games don't work and most of (.) most of the new games don't really work
 DB: how come they don't work?
 JS: I think because you need to go on with a special password or something or download something (.) mmm like mmm (.) website (.) like you download something like (.) Flash
 DB: Ah ok! And you don't=
 JS: =you don't want something like that (.) well then you can't play it and so I don't go on the Internet anymore.
 DB: oh! okay (.) what about you?
 JT: I play on my DS (.) I got stuff like (.) mmm harry potter which is adventures (.) and then I've got fifa which is sports (1)
 DB: okay=
 JT: And I play on my mac (.) I got a macbook (.) sooo I got my itunes, my yahoo=
 DB: =so what games do you play?
 JT: I don't go on games really, I just check my emails and stuff
 DB: Oh! You check your emails and stuff [smiling] ok that's really interesting (2) so what about you?
 OK: I usually just play sports games (.) em
 DB: ok=
 OK: = Football=
 DB: =Fifa=
 OK: =yeah Fifa and all that
 DB: ok, and do you (2) just sports, you are not interested in the other=
 OK: =emm (2) I don't really play all the shoot-em-ups and everything [look of disgust and dismay]
 DB: yeah=
 OK: = it's only really sport games that I play
 DB: you said that you have a wii, right?
 OK: yeah
 DB: so do you have wii sport or wii fit?
 JS: I've got a wii fit
 OK: yeah I got the wii sport and the wii fit and everything yeah

JT: I got wii resort (.) I got wii resort, it needs a special ...or it doesn't work (1) I think it's a game system (.....)

DB: okay! Well what about you?

JL: I play games like pokemon and (.) things like that

DB: and these are adventure games=

JL: =adventure and fighting games

DB: okay (.) mmm I forgot to ask you do you have brothers or sisters?

[yesssss...]

JL: I have a little sister

JS: I have a little sister

OK: I have got a big sister

JT: yeah big sister

DB: ok so two little sisters and two big sisters

[all laugh...]

And do you play together? Do they play with you or=

[no, sometimes, no, normally we don't.....]

DB: ok, then who do you play with?

JL: I normally get my imagination started and then try to build something

DB: in video games you mean? [JL not following] who do you play video games with?

JL: I usually play with myself (.) and sometimes cross with other people=

DB: like online=

JL: =no like on my ds you could do that to get (.) ehh you can connect to eachother (.)

DB: friends you mean?

JL: not really, we just play together (2)

DB: i don't get it, you just meet up and play or you connect online on the network of the game?

OK: Nah, it's like (.) one person got the game (.) the other person (.) emm the person's got the game sends the other person so that they can download the game so that they play with eachother =

DB: =but then they have to know eachother?

OK: yeah

JT: you have to know eachother or you are playing with someone else (3) you could be playing with somebody else you don't know (.) you have to know them

JS: yeah

JL: and sometimes you play with people you don't really know (2) emmm

DB: so you go online and play=

JT: well i don't really play on the Internet, i only play with someone i would know on my DS

DB: Okay, and what about you Jay (JS)?

JS: I don't really go online, I just play on my own

DB: you just play on your own?

JS: yeah

OK: I haven't signed up to the whole sharing games and everything yet, so i just play on my own

DB: you don't play with your friends?

OK: emmm (.) sometimes my friends come over and we play but not often cuz my friends live far away=

DB: =oh ok=
OK: =so it's a bit hard for them to come over and stuff
JL: sometimes my friends ask me to help them with their games
DB: you mean to reach a higher level
JL: yes the advanced levels
DB: so you are the expert here, you tell them what to do
JL: [giggling] yeah
DB: ok so (.) how do you know about these games?
JT: I saw them on TV and I thought it was quite good (.) so (.) I got it for my birthday (.) so I told my mom and dad about it and then for other games (.) I saw em in shops and i thought they are good
DB: So you go into =
JT: Shops But the tradition is that mom and dad get them (.) I think mom and dad got them over the Internet.
DB: mmmm (.) what about you Jay?
JS: I got football games because I like football (.) and harry potter I got because I like the movies
DB: oh ! ok so you liked the movie and you thought ok let's try the game and=
JS: yeah
DB: and did you like the game?
JS: em yeahhh
OK: well my birthday is coming up this week so I just see if there's anything football or sports and ask my parents to get it for me (.) anything sporty I don't have
DB: so you love sports and football?=
OK: =yeahhh
JL: I ask my dad to get me the game and he got me it and (.) I saw a new game on the TV (.) and my birthday was coming up and I said (.) "dad can I have this and that and the other" and he got me it.
DB: So basically it's when your birthday is coming this is when you can get your games
OK: yes
DB: And what about Christmas gifts?=
[yeaaaahhhhhhh.....that too...
DB: so whenever there's a season, you just go to=
OK: [laughing] yeahhh
JT: yup
DB: your parents and ask for it (.) so you look it up first or you told me you just tell them I want this game and I'll be happy
Ok: yeah
JL: I don't really buy things
OK: yeah if there's something that I have seen advertised on TV I would specify that and ask for that (.) but if it's just nothing, I would ask them to get me football or something sporty.
DB: Jonas you were saying?
JL: I don't really go with my parents to buy stuff, I'm not really allowed to buy things (.) emm without permission (2)
DB: so you tell your parents=
JL: yeah (2) they don't really want me to buy anything that could be quite expensive and I don't know and they would be spending a lot of money

DB: So you get to know about the game from the TV you told me=
 JS: yeah, I sorta wanted the game for two years (3)
 [ohhhhh...
 DB: okay, did you look up the harry potter game that you told your parents about?
 JS: yeah (.) emm I sorta looked at how it is and then I say if I want it or not.
 DB: okay (2) So do you talk about the games with your friends and stuff, comparing levels and so on or=
 JT: oh yeahhhh (3) we do it a little bit
 OK: a little bit
 DB: yeah, so it's not that big of an issue=
 OK: All my friends got different games with machine guns and everything (.) my mom doesn't let me to have all those because they are all 18 rated and stuff
 JT: yeah like call of duty =
 OK: =yeah=
 JT: yeah like halo (.) halo and call of duty
 OK, JL, JS: [yeah
 DB: you don't play these games, right?
 [Nooo...
 JT: no, they are just really really really really violent
 OK: yeah very gore
 JT: yeah people's brains go bufffffffffffffffffff
 [ohhhhhhh...
 Really bad
 DB: ok, so you were telling me that advice your friends on the levels and share together which level you are on if playing the same game
 JS: well yeah (.) I sorta have an account which shows which level you are on compared to your friends.

 DB: and you tell them what moves you used and the cheats
 [yeah
 JL: yeah all of these things
 DB: so you reach this level and you can't go further, do you go online and look up for cheats
 JL: I don't (.) I (.) I
 OK: I don't go online, because I haven't signed up to anything
 JT: you need to like pay something=
 OK: =yeah something like 3 pounds a month or something (2) but I don't really go on it, I just guess
 DB: ok but what about the Internet do you use it in general?
 OK: I don't really look up cheats on it
 JL: yeah
 OK: I think the cheating (.) it takes the fun out of the games
 [yeahhhh
 JL: if just buy a game=
 JT: = if you just buy a game and you go in there to know the cheats, it won't be much fun (.) no it won't be that fun
 DB: yeah of course (.) so what do you like about games?
 JL: I like the adventure of the game
 DB: adventure?
 JL: yeah

JT: quite a few games I like the graphics
 [yeah the graphics...
 JT: yeah the graphics and some look very amazing
 DB: in terms of what amazing?
 JT: like (.) like (.) when you're in a bit where (1) you finished a bit and then you
 get to see (.) like something that looks am (.) amazing
 DB: ok (.) you reach a castle or something=
 OK: yeah
 JT: yeah, you reach somewhere and then (.) some tells you what to do or go
 somewhere, like a quest or something
 DB: ok
 JT: you go on quests (.) and you have to go a long long way to get there
 DB: hmmm ok (.) and Oscar you play sports games=
 OK: =yeah=
 DB: tell me about it
 OK: on the wii and everything because it (.) it makes you (.) it keeps you fit as
 well
 JT: yeah sports fitness
 OK: yeah that and eh (3)
 DB: Do you play sports otherwise?
 OK: yes
 DB: ok so, what sports do you do?
 OK: I do football and (.) swimming

 DB: so you play with your team and then come back home and play a little bit
 more
 OK: [laughing] yeahh
 DB: what about you Jay?
 JS: I play football for two teams
 DB: ah ha, and what about the games? What do you like about the games?
 JS: it's just the graphics and (2) the new DS makes really good graphics and it
 get really exciting (2)
 JT: I've just seen someone else playing it so I don't really know
 DB: Ok (.) so do you play in your rooms or where do you play?
 JL: sometimes in my room and sometimes when I'm out
 OK: I tend to play in my room
 JT: I play most of the time in my room or anywhere quite (.) anywhere quite
 DB: oh really! Does it have to be quite?
 JT: well you can't (3) emm (1) sometimes you (.) sometimes it gets annoying of
 everyone shouting trying to read something
 DB: read something?
 JT: yeah when someone asks questions and everyone is answering and shouting
 DB: okay (2) so how many hours do you play a day?
 JL: Hours
 OK: I normally play an hour, or half an hour
 DB: everyday?
 OK: normally twice a week, (.) half an hour twice a week or something (.) so
 about an hour a week maybe

JT: I'm allowed any day a week (.) I used to have a rule but I (.) I'm always breaking the rule now (.) of having half an hour of tv a day (.) half an hour but I always break it, I go an hour =

DB: okay so you have half an hour of TV and half an hour video games=

JT: yeah but I always break that rule (.) I'm normally having like (.) hour and a half, two hours or something

DB: Okay. What about you Jay?

JS: play for half an hour on my DS (.) I'm allowed like (.) mm I'm allowed my DS and stuff on weekends

DB: so you can't play it on schoolday?

JS: yeah

DB: and you Oscar? You told me=

OK: about half an hour (.) like every two days I would play it for about half an hour

DB: okay and you Jonas? You are the expert here

JL: I think I play around an hour a day

DB: (3) so what else about video games, tell me stuff

JT: Ahhhhhh (2) I can't think of anything

[silence for 10 secs]

DB: so you ask your parents to get the games for you? Do you ask your friends about new games? And see if they are cool and =

JT: = yeah I ask my friends if they got the game=

JL: = my friend Neil, he's like got tons of games=

DB: = okay=

JL: =he's got like more than 25 wii games (.) he's got a whole box of them but he (.) when I come around to his house (1) he teaches me how to play some games

DB: is he your age?

JL: yeah he's about my age, he's one year ahead of me

DB: oh okay

JL: he's gonna be 8 this year

.....

DB: So if you are allowed one hour a day to watch tv, play video games,=

JL: =sometimes I'm allowed 3 hours

DB: no no I am asking you an assumption, I want you to tell me what is your preference (.) so like if for example you say you are allowed one hour today to do whatever activity you want to do, what would you choose?

OK: Swimming (.) I'd spend it swimming (.) I wouldn't spend it on computer games

DB: really?

OK: no

DB: okay, what about you?

JT: About half of it on football and half of it on (2) games

DB: really?

JT: yeah

DB: ok cool, Jay?

JS: going on my bike with my friends

DB: all the time?

JS: yeah

DB: okay, what about =

JL: = I think I would have (.) if it was the whole day, I think I would have football for half a day and then a mix between TV and (.) DS

DB: okay (.) what do you watch on TV?

JL: I normally watch quite a few (1) I normally watch programs

DB: like what?

JL: (5) emmmmm , titv (4) emmmm pop

OK: cartoons basically [laughing]

DB: okay

JL: some of them cartoons and some of them are soaps I watch

DB: is there anything else you want to share with me? You are experienced enough to know more about them than me

OK: [laughing] I don't play them enough to be experienced in them

DB: okay (.) but do you like playing them?

OK: certain amount of it yes but if you plan to play it for an hour=

JT: = yeah you get sick of it=

Ok: =yeah, boring=

JT: =you get like oh man!! I gotta do this=

OK: =you get a bit frustrated really

DB: you see elder guys playing A LOT of video games, do you think you are gonna be like that?

OK: No

JL: No, I think I'm gonna be playing football instead of sitting on the computer

DB: what about you?

JS: I only go (.) don't really play computer games nowadays, I used to play alot though when I was young but I don't .

DB: So you think you are gonna grow out of it

JS: yeah!!

JT,JL, OK: yeah

DB: Why? Is it boring?

JL: once you've played it for way too long, it gets quite boring

JT: and like when you complete the whole thing, it gets boring

OK: it (.) It kinda depends on what new technology comes out (.) and if there's nothing new (.) then no point, it's all been there done that sort of thing

JL: yeah if you buy too much technology, then what's the point in getting it?! Because there's always gonna be new technology and you are just wasting your money (.) you just (.) you need just a small amount like a wii or DS or like two gadgets

DB: to fill in your free time or=

OK: = yeah

JL: yeah not like ps3 or xbox360, wii (.) did I say wii twice?

DB: you wanted to say something?

JS: ehhhh I'm about to sell my playstation cuz nobody plays on it anymore and I don't play on it

DB: really?

JS: yeah

OK: a good way of gaining money as well (.) selling old game consoles and games, you get 50 to 100 quit for

JL: yeah and you just don't play it and it is just a waste of money, why would you have lots lots of games (.) you are just getting lots and lots of games and then (.) you wasted it (.) you've just wasted it all

DB: but then these games you said you can sell them?
 [yeah..
 DB: do you buy newer games?
 JL: you can sell them online like on amazon or ebay
 DB: but then do you take (.) do you tell your parents I want to sell the =
 JL: no I don't think=
 JT: I would give it back to the store
 DB: so you give it back to the store and buy a new game?
 JL: no you just get your money back
 DB: ok, so when you finish a game and you don't want to play it anymore , you
 sell it as long as =
 OK: =yeah=
 DB: as long as the cost=
 JL: =I haven't finished, I don't think I'm gonna sell any of my games (.) I think
 I'm gonna keep on playing it until I finish it about two times and I'm gonna
 keep on going and going and going=
 DB: so you like games?
 [yeah..
 OK: you might as well keep the consoles for like ages and when you are 80 and
 want to sell them [laughing] they'll be antique
 DB: [laughing] ok that would make a lot of money
 OK: then you make a lot of money
 DB: just like the cars
 JL: when you get cheats it's not that much fun=
 OK: =No=
 JT: =no not at all
 DB: so you say that you are gonna grow out of the games anyway
 JL: I think I'm gonna play football for quite a while and I think I'm gonna come
 back to it
 DB: so you'd rather be outside (.) so now playing games is just =
 JL: =some of the games are (1) are quite rubbish, they are just a waste of money
 DB: so why do you play them?
 OK: just in small doses (.) if you play for like half an hour a day sort of thing it's
 okay
 JL: yeah it wouldn't =
 OK: = it will eventually get boring
 DB: even with new games =?
 JT: well there's one company that brought out 5 shooting games but they are all
 the same!
 DB: really?
 JT: yeah
 DB: do you know the names of these games?
 OK: they are all the call of duties and =
 JT: =you just get (.) they are just shooting
 OK: yeah, it's not fun (1) I thought it was pretty cool when the first one came out
 but then as the others come out, it's the same, it's BANG
 [Bang, Bang,.....
 [laughing]

DB: but then Jay was telling us, you like movies like harry potter and the transformers, so if you like a movie or a nice movie comes out and they have a game of it =

JL: I think I'm gonna get sick of it

JT: I like ipads

DB: so is the games consoles growing out of fashion and it's all about the ipads

OK: well it's been over-ruled by ipads and everything, gaming which isn't a bad thing but not particularly a good thing either because ipads are probably just as bad if not worse than computer games

DB: really! Why do you say so?

OK: because (1) you can download so many games for free and (.) they'll all be so addicting you can't stop people playing them

JL: I got an ipad and I can't stop playing

JS: my dad's got an ipod touch and start playing on it

.....

DB: so you say that these games are addictive?

JL: they are good but some of them are a waste of money

DB: why are they good then?

JL: some of them are brilliant but then some of them are no(.) no

DB: what about angry birds, I see everyone angry birds

JL: angry birds is a good game=

OK: = it's addicting=

JS: =I like angry birds=

OK: = it is addicting obviously=

JT: = it is one of those things, you either love it or you hate it

DB: you obviously hate it?

JL: I like games, and I like sports but I haven't made up my mind

DB: well you still have a lot of years to decide that

JT: before angry birds came out, I was not into games=

JL: I was into games before angry birds

DB: so you like these kinda of games, and you said you play on your dad's ipod

JL: my dad's ipad has lots and lots of games on it

DB: so now you are leaving all the consoles and the computers=

OK and JT: yeah

JL: no I'm not gonna leave it, I'm gonna play some sports and then come back to it

JS: I'm only gonna play on my DS if I have to go on a console, I don't want any other=

JL: =I like playing on anything when I feel like it

.....

JL: games are actually quite good, but if you play it for too long, it really damages your eyes, your eyes go (.) ehh

DB: oh, yeah , Oscar, you play wii fit, right?

OK: yeah

JL: wii is good, wii fit is good but ipads, DS you can't play it for too long, your eyes go oh nooooo

DB: your eyes hurt

JL: yeah

DB: Oscar, did you ever hurt yourself or anything while playing wii fit?

OK: only when I was playing with my sister

DB: ohhh, what happened?
OK: we were playing a tennis game and we were all a bit too close to each other and =
JL: =your sister went on whammm!!
DB: ouch, it must have hurt
OK: yes it did
DB: what about your hands do they hurt when you play?
OK: it depends on which console you are playing really, if you have a big square thing and you are trying to get your figures up to a bottom there , then =
JL: yeah it's quite easy on DS, it got really small buttons and they are close together
DB: but then the xbox and the ps
OK: yeah that's a bit harder
JL: yeah cuz you gotta get [mimicking the finger movements on the joysticks and showing difficulty]
JT: you gotta teach your hands where all the buttons are
DB: how long have you been playing? When did you start playing?
JT: that must been a very long time ago cuz I don't rememeber, I think it was about 6
JL: I think I was 5, I was playing wii but then this year I got my DS and I started playing DS
OK: I haven't been playing it that long, it's probably (.) last year or the year before when all the console came out and everything and everyone started talking about it (1) yeah I kinda felt a bit left out so I had to have it to be part of the group and everything
DB: so before that you were just into sports=
OK: =sports and everything
DB: so it's the cool thing to have a gadget right?
[yeaaaahhhh...
.....
JT: I got 4 TVs
[4 TVs...
JT: yeah, I got one TV for my xbox, one TV for my wii, on TV=
DB: =but can't you connect them all to one TV
[yeah?
JT: yeah I could but the problem is, I live in separate houses
.....
OK: I do have a TV in my room but I don't use it for games consoles, I just use it for watching TV.
DB: I would like to know more about you guys, so Oscar, what activities do you like doing?
OK: anything sporty really, football, swimming , anything
DB: what about you Jay?
JS: ummmm (2) basically the same as Oscar, I like playing on xbox as well
JT: I like football, table tennis and cricket
DB: do you like reading?
OK: I read occasionally yeah
JS: I read a lot, I read all the harry potter and all the Narnia books
OK: if there's a good book and I'm really into it and everything then I put my mind to reading it but I'm not usually a book person

JL: what about a pokemon book, I would say who can get that [laughing] (2) I agree if there's a good book I would say would you buy that for me

DB: what is a good book then?

OK: adventurous, murder and mystery

[yeah.....

JL: yeah and have exciting things

DB: but isn't Narnia and harry potter this sort of books

OK: yeah they are really good

JS: yeah but really long, like 700 pages, it took me days n days to finish reading it

.....

Ending the interview

Transcript #4:

Date: June 3rd 2011

Location: Gap Club, Old Windsor

Duration: 49 min

Participants: J.T. (10 years), C.T. (10 years), B.R. (11 years), J.G. (11 years)

Interview:

Introduction....

DB: I'm studying computer games and your experience of it since you are the experts right?

[a sweeping agreement from all participants : yes we play more than anyone!

ANYONE]

BR: I help all these guys (.) I help Callum (.) I help Joshua (.) Joseph=

JT: =hey hey no you don't, I help you

CT: ok ok you don't help me with my games at home

BR: I sometimes have to take the games at home

JT: no you don't

JG: guys don't argue

DB: ok guys first of all I want to ask you the obvious question, do you play video games?

[yessssss with a big roar from all participants]

CT: ask him if we have a video games marathon today

JT: that's the only reason I came in today

BR: same

DB: do you like video games?

[yes]

JT: well some of them (.) some are boring

BR: yeah some are boring

DB: I want each one of you to tell me what games do you play

CT: I play lots

JT: I have three favourites (.) I have quite a few consoles at home

DB: xbox,=

JT: xbox, wii, DS, Nintendo 64=

BR: =this is cool=

JT: yeah I know they are cool (.) and a computer (.) and I have games on every single one of them

DB: yeah and you play on all of them?

JT: well I haven't played the wii or Nintendo 64 for a while

DB: ok so what games do you play?

BR: he plays black ops [laughing]

JT: I play lego stars 3

BR: lucky

JT: yeah I got it (.....) lego star wars, halo, club plus nine, Mario, sonic, dawn of war

DB: so is it more like shoot-em-up games or are they adventure games

JT: I like (.) I like strategy , shoot-em-up and =

BR: adventure
JT: adventure (.) they are all pretty good (2) ah and action
CT: I have (.) let me go through my games consoles first =
JT: =all of them
CT: 2 DSs, a gameboy, an xbox with kinect, a Nintendo wii and I think an old Atari I'm not sure
JG: Atari??
BR: that's the first game console
CT: an ipad
DB: so what games do you play?
CT: call of duty black ops, halo, assassins' creed, robin hood, call of duty modern warfare 2, gears of war
DB: they are all shoot-em-ups? And there's a lot of blood and all these things right?
CT: yeah
BR: you also play grand quest nine
JT: we all play it
CT: I also like strategy games but I prefer shoot-em-ups
DB: what about you bene?
BR: well the thing is I only have two (.) well more (.) I have an ipod nano on which I play some games (.) I have a computer, a wii and a DS and I mostly play my DS because you can like connect with your friends
CT: like we did today
BR: we all got pokemon and we play (.) connect to a portal and battle (.) the games I've got are like (.) cuz I've got a little brother Neil, we've also got younger games
JT: the annoying games
BR: and a sister (.) so I've got crash of the titans (.) Mario and the Olympic games, sonic rings, sonic and the black knights (.) Pokemon (1) we all love pokemon
JG: I have the latest one
JT: I don't play it much anymore
BR: yeah but you traded it (.) you traded it with me
JT: yeah I traded it today
CT: you outcast!!
DB: well what kind of games do you prefer?
BR: well I mostly enjoy (....) since all the shooting games are like rated so my mom's a bit worried, she doesn't let me play those but I'm normally into those ye but when I am 12 I will play them
JT: I play with my dad
BR: my mom is a bit worried about me getting those shooting games but my dad doesn't mind so I just get shooting games with my dad mainly
(.....)
BR: we all like adventures games oh except for Callum
CT: I like adventures games
JT: no you don't, you love strategy
CT: [laughing]
(.....)
JT: I play online (.) I play online with people I don't even know (.) I also play with my brother (.) he's six

DB: and your friends
 JT: I play with my friends online on xbox not that often because some of their games are broken (.) my friend who I play with, his game is broken so I can't play with him and I used to play with him all the time
 DB: and so this is why you play online with other people
 JT: yeah yeah and I play with my dad
 CT: I was gonna play online and the second my mom was paying for these things, the second she was just about to press enter the news came on the TV and it was saying that these things just got hacked
 JT: that was ps3 though
 CT: yeah I know but my mom got worried in case xbox got hacked as well so she didn't press the enter button and she deleted everything so I was a bit annoyed
 DB: so who do you play with?
 CT: I play on multiplayer when my friends come around my house (1) I can also be playing alone and then call for a friend's help to finish the game (.) for example bene here I would be playing a game and then I would call to arms and he would fly into my game and help me battle
 JT: I didn't know you can do that!!
 DB: ok do you have any brothers or sisters?
 CT: no(.) only child (.) and I'm happpyyy (.) I'm spoilt [laughing]
 DB: what about you bene?
 BR: I have a DS
 DB: who do you play with?
 BR: I am an only child as well so (3) so I play them when my friends come around as well
 DB: ok what about you Joush?
 JG: well I'm not an only child (.) the thing is we have quite a lot of wii games and all my family enjoy the wii except for my mom obviously so my dad plays games with me and so like yesterday we were playing (.) I also like sports games so I was playing NBA 09 with my dad (.) and I play with my brother obviously and my sister has two games which is like a dog island and she has a pig so sometimes I like have to help her with the game (.) and I don't (.) well the thing is I had ...bay blades and I played it online with people and I got on miniclip (.) we all have club penguin and moshy monsters
 JT: Nooo
 CT: not moshy monsters
 JG: not moshy monsters but we've all got club penguin
 BR: no not anymore
 JT: not anymore
 BR: and even moshy monsters, I'm kinda getting off them now

 DB: from what you guys are saying I get the impression that you are playing a lot of hours and you are always connected=
 [Noo Noooo
 CT: I'm not addicted
 BR: well neither am I

 BR: I would play with my hamster

DB: I just want to know how many hours do you play a day?
 JT: it depends (.) on Sundays I barely play at all (.) I would play for about half an hour or something
 DB: what do you do instead?
 JT: no (.) ah because we havemornings on that day, so I get to go to games workshop and when I'm back I might do my homework or play a little bit
 DB: yeah
 JT: on schooldays I sometimes play before school or tidy my room and then at night I usually do my homework or go to scouts or something like that and sometimes I play with my dad
 DB: ok
 JT: on Saturdays I go running in the morning for about an hour and then (.) I sometimes go outside and sometimes I don't so I stay and play games
 DB: ok so what is the max no of hours do you play ?
 JT: in a day?
 DB: yeah
 JT: I have played for 4 hours straight
 BR: what??!!!!
 JT: well 5 hours (.) I didn't realize how long I was playing on it (.) sometimes my (.) because online my games it takes about 10 minutes to get everyone to your party and then (.) each game depends on how long it is and what version do you play
 CT: we need to connect on materoid later
 JT: yeah we probably will
 BR: noooo
 CT: it's sort of a spaceship game that we play

DB: ok what about you Callum?
 CT: well the longest time I've ever played was 7 hours straight
 BR: oh my God!!
 DB: what made you do that? Or what made you stop then!
 CT: [laughing]
 BR: tea time [jokingly]
 CT: noo, I started at 12 and it was a brand new video game (.) it's about last year now
 JT: I think my parents exaggerate how long I play (.) well sometimes I might only play 3 hours and my parents would come and say ohhh you've been playing for 4 hours you need to go outside and something like that
 DB: okay
 CT: so I started at 12 and ended at 7 (.) well I playing a new game and I was like so addicted to it I just kept on playing it
 BR: [whispering] addict
 CT: so that was my (.) it was call of duty
 DB: and when you stopped you stopped because you were tired or you got bored?
 CT: actually No (.) If I play for too long when I close my eyelids it gets really hurt (.) ummm that's when (.) when that starts to happen I just go off
 DB: okay (.) how did you go for 7 hours without going to the bathroom or eating or anything?
 CT: I didn't realize it (.) I kept on
 JT: I always go to the toilet

CT: I didn't need to go to the toilet
BR: yeah he get sucked and didn't realize how long he was playing
CT: in a way you sometimes you imagine you are the person in the game
JT: I like rpg actually
CT: that's an explosive!
JT: no that's role playing games or rocket pole grenade but that's a big difference [laughing]
DB: okay so back to bene, what about you?
BR: the longest time I've played straight was about 2 hours (.) but after one hour I swap my game so I'm not really addicted to the game
JT: I usually switch games or something like that
CT: I didn't switch the game
DB: bene so you switched the game?
BR: yeah so I normally get bored and I always want to swap with another one
JT: you can also talk to other people but that's on xbox
DB: Joseph!! Bene is talking hold that thought
BR: it takes me about 5 min to swap games (...) so I'd play 1 hr 55 min usually not that much
DB: okay, now joseph tell me your thought before you forget it
JT: okay, on xbox if you have friends and you can send requests and then if they are online you can talk to them either through a microphone or through your kinect (.) so yesterday my friend he wasn't actually playing he just turned the xbox on and turned the tv off so he was just walking around his house talking to me and I was playing and he wasn't actually doing anything he was just eating breakfast
CT: how did he get the wireless on?
JT: you can get the wireless control
.....
DB: okay then what about you Joush?
JG: well the thing is it's not really that much for me cause I've got (.) I can't believe I'm saying this (.) but I got a really strict teacher and she gives us piles and piles of homework so like I do my homework first and then I like get ready for bed and ummm since I'm older than my brother, I don't go straight to bed I go like (.) I have time with my dad (.) cause he's at work and my mom's at work but my mom can't really do these like games so I do it with my dad for about 30 min or an hour and the longest I've played is when I first got pokemon in Christmas and I played for at least 2 or 3 hours
CT: I've beaten everyone here (.) I'm the addict (.) I know a person who played 12 hours straight
[No wayyyy
BR: oh my God!
JT: he must be realllllly sad!! [pathetically tone]
[laughing]
DB: okay so what other activities do you guys do?
CT: I do rugby 3 times a week, cricket 2 times a week, I do fencing 3 hours a week (.) ummm and I do swimming and I also do running apart from my video games
BR: I do quite a few activities I do my piano, my guitar, my swimming, my scout, my horse riding
JT: you do horse riding?! Cool!

BR: yes

JT: I do running for about an hour a week, I play judo, guitar, scout (.) I might be starting boxing and I go to gap club after school (2) and I also go to games workshop

DB: what is that?

[all start explaining it at the same time: 24:30]

DB: so are these board games or computer games

[Board games they have a few computer games but we don't play them]

JT: I play dawn of war and fire warrior

DB: okay what about you Joush?

JG: [laughing] I go to pineapple to Sunday

JT: pineapple?

JG: studios in London

CT: yeah in London he dances for chico

JG: I do scouts (.) the only really sports I do is only pineapple and at school I play football and I do running around

DB: I have a question for you guys if you have a day where you are completely free what are you going to do in it?

JT: I would probably try to get a day out with my friends (.) I would probably try to go to my friend's house and play video games or I would go to games workshop

DB: okay divide your day

JT: I would go to games workshop then come home and (.) I don't know I would probably go to my friend's house cause that's what I want to do

DB: and play games?

JT: not necessarily video games but we could go outside

BR: me me me

DB: ok bene what about you?

BR: what I would do, I have a friend who lives close (.) ummm and I have this massive like a field of green which like a park near it and a tennis court (.) so what I would do I would a football, a tennis racket and a basketball and I would do a bit of basketball, a bit of football and a bit of tennis and then I would go to my friend's house and then I play with the dog (4) and then I would play for an hour or half an hour on xbox or something

JG: on weekends I have to go to my nan cause we have no granddad anymore so we have to look after her (2) but if it's a holiday and it's through the week then I have got to be at my house so I'd probably like maybe play some video games with my dad cause I've got a free day (.) maybe if my friend is free I'd go to their house (.) I'd maybe go on my bike (.) cause in egham people love their bikes and skateboards and stuff like that

DB: what about you Callum?

CT: First I'd probably sleep in then I would phone my friend and go to his house for a bit and then come back

DB: what are you gonna do with your friend

CT: just hang around the house a bit (.) then play with my lizard a bit

JT: you have a lizard

CT: yeah a genie pig, horse, and 12 fish (.) that would take a long time (.) then I would probably go to play in my tree house a bit (.) then I would get some new video games and then I'd probably get the entire collection of the army or something

JT: you won't be able to get the entire collection of the army cuz probably the next day they are gonna bring out loads of new stuff.

CT: but they would keep on mailing it to me, wouldn't they

JT: no they don't mail it to you

DB: ok so how do you know about new games?

CT: oh when they say like the call of duty (.) umm I remember seeing this (2) it'd say 27th of May get it now or you'll

DB: where did you see that?

CT: on the TV and that's the game I played for 7 hours

JT: I see them on TV and sometimes on youtube or something (.) it says it in a big banner or something (.) or on the side (.) cause this morning I was on a games website and it had a big banner down on the side of it for war of warlocks which is a game

CT: is it good?

BR: yeah

DB: so Joush how do you know about the games?

JG: when I go out I just see them (.) sometimes I don't even know about them

DB: then how do you buy them?

JG: when I go into the shop I'd be like when did this come out , I don't know about this like pirates of the caribbean I never knew it was coming out then one day I just walked

DB: so you guys know about them through online or TV or even when walking to the store

JT: sometimes you find them at the back of a book

DB: do you read?

JT: yeah I read A LOT

CT: I read

BR: I read loads

DB: ok before we go into that, did you have something to say?

CT: well when I read magazines sometimes on the back I can see different games

JT: there's xbox magazine and it tells you every new game, tips

JG: I also see lots of adverts sometimes when my mom's shopping and after she's finished maybe as a treat not that I would get one but as a treat I could look inside and see what I can save up with and so I would go into game or game station and have a look and go ohh what's this and see if it's good enough to save for it and I see them on bus stops and I also get inspired by my friends that's how I got to play pokemon cause I've seen them playing it and I was like ohhh what's this, what's pokemon it's coming out in Christmas I might get that so we could play with eachother

JT: my dad sometimes tells me and when I go to my friend's house they've got a new game and I'm like what's that and they'd say it's a new game and sometimes I play around w theirs and then I'd be WOOOOOOOOOOOOW cool game THIS IS AMAZING

DB: okay and then you go to your dad and say you want this game

JT: yeah that's what I did (.) I was playing at my friend's house and when I got back I went to my dad and said do you that game at my friend's house (.) weeeelllllllllll can I get it?

CT: sometimes I get stuck on games and I have this thing that I plug-in and then it comes out with thousands of cheats

JT: Cheaaatttttyyyyyyyyyyy man!!

.....

BR: I don't like cheats, they make it too easy

JT: I don't use cheats!

DB: okay, you said that you go to your dad and ask him to get you the game right?

JT: well I don't ask I say can I (.) am I allowed to this game and he says well yeah you have to save up your money so I do and then eventually they'll bring out a new game and then I'd change my mind (.) ohhhhhhhh nooooo they just brought out this one and it's about 20 pounds more expensive

DB: okay so how do you get your games?

CT: I wait till they are not very new and then [smiling]

DB: you get it, but with your own money or you ask your parents?

CT: I ask my parents (.) well it comes to nagging really (.) PLEAAAAAAAAAAAAAAASE (.) 5 min later FINEEE

DB: what about you?

BR: I normally save up from my own money (.) I do lots of chores (.....) I'd wash my dad's car and I get 5 pounds for it

JT: he gets 70 pounds a week for doing nothing [referring to CT]

CT: [laughing] well I used to but then I stopped it

.....

DB: so you guys have to save up to get your games

JT: it depends if I have almost enough money then my parents might tip in a little bit of money

DB: joush?

JG: well sometimes I save up, sometimes I use my Christmas money or bday money

BR: sometimes my parents get for me in Christmas

JG: or get in Christmas like that or anybody in my family get it and sometimes it's just a treat for like being good for the whole year

JT: that's never gonna happeni go on hot uk deals and find a good deal for a game or amazon or something

CT: is it a website?

JT: hot uk deals? Yeah where you can find really cheap games and stuff like that

.....

DB: do you guys exchange games?

JT: oh yeah sometimes (.) sometimes (.) you don't actually have to buy games (.) sometimes you can swap games

CT: I did that in one game (.) I swapped one game and they gave me discounted money of it

JT: or sometimes they might give you a game that's just as good as this game like give you an offer or something

DB: where is that?

[games store ...

CT: I wanted to say I like call of duty I mean paint ball sorry cause it's like actually really like the paint ball game I know it stings a little bit when you get hit but I really like it because of the adrenaline (.)(.) it's really good fun cause adults and children can do it

.....

CT: paint ball is like call of duty but it's not a video game

JT: you know what I don't understand about video games

DB: what?

JT: you can't have 18+ games with all the shooting but you can join the army at 16 and shoot real people and use real guns (.) it doesn't really make any sense

CT: yes! THANK YOU! I'm telling that to my mom

JT: cause if you can get an 18+ game then basically there's no point for rating cause you use real guns when you are 16

DB: joush you wanted to say something

JG: yes (.) there's a point to play call of duty when you are 18 and go to war at 16 cuz the thing is if you go at 16 to the army and someone shoots you, you die but in video games you don't die

DB: when you go the the army you don't go to war

JT: yeah but there are real guns there cuz you have to train

DB: but training is not always with guns

JT: yeah I know but

CT: some people been in the army for 6 years and they've never even held a gun

DB: ok guys so what do you like the most about video games then?

JT: I just don't know

JG: if you are bored then you could like play them

CT: I know why they are so addictive

JT: why? Because they are amazing

CT: you keep on playing and then you die and die die die die die die and die again you just get even more motivated to complete it

JT: and then you get better and better

CT: sometimes I got soo annoyed at the computer once I picked up the keyboard and slammed it on the floor

DB: oh my god

BR: how long have we been here for

DB: well 45 min

[Wowwww

JT: see I didn't know that that was this long

BR: I thought we've been here for like 10 mins

JT: cuz it's all about video games

DB: really?

[yeahhhhhhhhhh

JT: if my playing online a game for 15 min I think I've been playing for like 2 mins

JG: yeahhhh

JT: it's because we are talking about video games

DB: is it that much fun?

[yessss

JT: yes it is

JG: video games are quite fun

JT: oh after this I think I need to play some

[yeeaaaaaaaaahhhh

CT: now can we watch Joush dancing

DB: before we do that, you guys told me that you read stuff

BR: I love reading, I just recently finished the third one of eragon

JT: I read the whole of the northern knight series, I read vampire diary,
goosebumps (.) and I read loads of magazines (.) I read Simpsons books
sometimes

DB: so you guys like reading then

BR: I love reading

JT: I love readinggggggggggggggggggggg

DB: which do you love more reading or video games?
[video gamesssssss

CT: but I love video games and I read the text bring out to you because I'm
dyslectic so I find it easier to have things that read the text out

DB: ok so if can divide your time between reading and video games what would
you do?

BR: I'll make them equal

JT: reading in bed

CT: reading $\frac{3}{4}$ and video games $\frac{1}{4}$

JT: reading in bed that's what I do (.) I go to bed about 8 and then I keep reading
till about 10 (.) so like I read for two hours and then I go to sleep cuz my
parents tell me off for reading too long

[laughing

JT: it depends with video games and reading is before bed

CT: I'd go reading first and video games second so like get your homework and
reading done and then you get on to the fun stuff for the end of the day

Ending Interview

Interview with Mother M. (mother of J.M.-12 year-old-boy, L.M.- 9 year-old girl and L.G.- 5 year-old boy):

Mother M.: so how were they

Dina: well they were different; L.M. is different from J.M. (.) you told me earlier that L.M. in more into social games and J.M. is more into the boyish games

Mother M.: yup

Dina: and since L.G. is still young, he doesn't like the games that J.M. plays and he plays with L.M. instead

Mother M.: yeah the more girly ones

.....

Mother M.: J.M. didn't like computer games to start with because he's got attention deficit hyper activity disorder and with that comes his difficulty to do motor movements with his fingers so but there are also aspects of his ability with social interaction (.) cuz he finds it more difficult to make friends (.) so as his friends were all playing computer games we made the decision just to buy every console so we bought the xbox, we bought the wii and we bought DSi s and that was the first they had any exposure to it and he had to keep up with that because of friendships (.) but what it do (.) it improved his motor skills in his fingers (.) so his writing has improved because the muscles that he uses have actually improved his writing (.) so as he got better at writing and playing games, his confidence also built up as well (.) as for L.M., she just held the remote control and could do it, you can see that she was really quick and L.G. is even faster, well since he's been (.) obviously the other two are older and when L.G. was even a tiny toddler he would sit on the couch and we give him a nun chuck from the wii (.) it wasn't plugged in or anything and he would pretend to play so he knew how it felt to hold the equipment and he was visually learning what the other two were doing so when he first realized it was plugged in for him he was actually able to play and he knew about direction and number games, he already understood the sequencing of numbers because I play Sudoku (.) even though he's not able to do the sequencing he understands that you can only have one number (.) say one number 2 in a box so he understood the concept of everything the other children were doing

Dina: at a very young age at this age?

Mother M.: yeah when he was very young, so that's the difference between them so J.M. likes to play fighting games

Dina: he told me that he started playing two years ago from his cousins

Mother M.: yes, he watched his cousins

Dina: I'm astonished (.) you said he had ADHD and it actually improved it

Mother M.: improved motor skills in his hands (.) also improved his concentration span (.) because that something that comes ADHD joe finds it very difficult to sit down and do a task (.) but when he found he was getting better at games (.) he would sit for longer

Dina: did you find he improved academically or was it the same?

Mother M.: I'm not sure it was down to the computer games (.) I think it's bound to age because boys develop a little bit later but this is the first year that his academic ability (.) he's at standard in 7 out of 10 of the subjects but it

kinda comes in line with him getting better at games (.) I'm not sure whether it is related or not but I think that the motor movements was the big thing because to be able to write fast is necessary to be able to learn and concentrate to be able to learn (.) I do think that there was (.) and sticking at a task (.) J.M. would never stick at a task but to learn how to play the computer games with his friends he had to sit at night on his own and be able to be as good as them (.) so it made his concentration maybe a little better

Dina: and this is why he told me it's the challenge

Mother M.: yes it is a challenge to him (.) whereas L.G. doesn't need anything academically he's the top of the class in everything but would happily sit for 7 hours on computer

Dina: really?

Mother M.: yeah laptop particularly

Dina: so L.G. plays on the computer

Mother M.: L.G. plays on my laptop

Dina: what does he play?

Mother M.: he goes on to Cbb website and plays word games

Dina: word games?

Mother M.: word games (.) it's all learning games (.) he doesn't do any fighting games or anything and that how he's been getting the number sequencing as well (.) so it's about school learning and related to school kinda curriculums

Dina: he can log into the computer

Mother M.: open the laptop , log in with my password, sign in to cbeebies and he can tell me when he needs the charger plugged in, I don't let him do that (.) he can do it all by himself (.) he can also get into my iphone, put in my pin number and go on to games

Dina: okay well you have to start taking care

Mother M.: well I have locks on my phone that they can't get into certain things but he can into my phone and he knows what text messages are he knows what an email is so if my mom is sending in pictures he'd say I'm just gonna go into your emails and he would do that

Dina: okay that's very interesting

Mother M.: he's quite a character

Dina: yeah he is (.) you told me when we were outside about the trampoline (.) you got it =

Mother M.: I bought it because I felt that the children have such different ages that they don't have common interests and I want them to be able to play together (.) because years ago we were able to go out and play on the street and you can't do that now so I bought them the trampoline so that they weren't gonna be watching TV and they spend hours on the trampoline (.) we started the wii on every single day and it's maybe twice or 3 times a week now

Dina: so the trampoline actually took=

Mother M.: =it's taking over from the computer games

Dina: ok I was talking to L.G. and I told him which do you prefer video games or the trampoline and he said video games because they are cooler

Mother M.: [laughing] yeah that's his social status, he's more advanced than children of his own age, bec at gap club all the children can't get through

levels that he's able to do at home so he shows them and at the gap club they come and say to me that L.G. has to show the bigger children again how to defeat something on level 43 (.) I don't understand it (.) so he understands social hierarchy and he likes that

Dina: do you limit the time for them to play or

Mother M.: when they come in from school L.M. and L.G. get 45 mins each on the wii and they fight over who goes first and who goes second and it's probably the second person might get a bit of extra time cuz I'm still cooking dinner [laughing] and J.M. his xbox is in his bedroom so I don't limit him but he generally would play no more than an hour and a half at a time

Dina: does it affect his sleep?

Mother M.: J.M. doesn't really sleep anyway (.) never has (.) he didn't sleep for the first 5 years of his life (.) it's true (.) 15 min at a time every since he was a newborn (.) now he goes to sleep about 10o'clock (.) he doesn't play computer games after half seven in the evening, nobody does in the house (.) but he would happily be awake till 2 or 3 in the morning

Dina: did you try to play with them?

Mother M.: the computer, oh yeah I do I am able to play all the games with them (.) I don't like J.M.'s games because I don't like the blood and I don't like the mortal combat where you fight (.) I actually feel tense inside when playing it I'm like oh my god I'm gonna be killed (.) and I see him playing the batman game and he would jump up and down and I'd be like [holding her breathe] I feel the tense inside (.) but I loved animal crossing (.) I love playing that with L.M. (.) I've even got my own profile so we have L.M. J.M. and mom as my profile so I send them letters and I give the money to upgrade the house and pay the mortgage

Dina: do you buy them the games or they buy them on their own?

Mother M.: they get them as presents in Christmas and bdays and we do go to Game in staines and buy second hand games (.) I wouldn't buy a new game (.) the only one I said to J.M. I will buy is the new batman arch asylum coming out in October and he's already put it in my calendar on the phone (.) I have promised him faithfully that he will definitely get that bec he's done well at school this year but otherwise I don't buy games unless they are second hand but my mom does (.) my mom buys them games (.) she bought them all their DSi s as well

Dina: you said that it affected their sociability right? Especially with J.M.

Mother M.: it does affect communication bec they sit silently (.) it's not like they are playing games where they are playing together and interacting as siblings (.) they play by themselves solo games

Dina: and the xbox live, they play also with strangers?

Mother M.: I don't allow it (.) not yet (.) I'm not ready to take that leap (.) I think they are too young (.) I think there's far too much given access to children on those live games and that's actually no for me (.) we have wi-fi throughout the house and they could have access but we just blocked it completely (.) same thing J.M. has a facebook page but I have all his log in details so although I allow him to interact I have his login and I would go into his page check his messages and check what they are doing

J.M.: you are checking my messages?

Mother M.: I always check your messages [back to me] that's an absolute no for me being able to play with people we don't know about (.) I don't want my 12 year old play with a 50 year old (.) it's just an absolute no for me

J.M.: I play with ayman

Mother M.: ayman is your uncle (.) I mean playing online live with people that could be adults that you don't know that's an absolute no (.) and for L.M. and L.G. it's just a no no

J.M.: George is getting facebook

Mother M.: George is their cousin he's the same age as L.M. (.) L.M. is not getting a facebook (.) when she's about 12

Ending the interview

Transcript # 0 in depth interview with Practitioner:

Date: May 18th 2010

Duration: 38 min

Participant: M.M., Sr. Director Commercial Sales and Marketing - EMEA at Microsoft, Director of Business Development - Xbox Live at Microsoft

Interview:

DB: so we realized that children are now all into games and it is said that they spend (.) games are now generation z TV=

MM: =Okay [affirming tone]

DB: since they spend so much time on it (2) this is a pretty new thing to me (.) for me games are Mario and super Mario and that's it (.) so this is a new field to me which is good because I can be objective

MM: yeah right you will see it as a anything else that is supposed to happen (.) fresh perspective (.) sure

DB: exactly (.) I need to understand when it comes to design for example Microsoft they designed the xbox and so on (.) so do you do research before designing those games?

MM: yeah absolutely (.) I mean (.) I think that there's a (.) if we step back I think the way it is if I were in your shoes I would look at the different mechanism at which people play games

DB: okay

MM: so there's the pc games where people are playing on a computer and that used to be the only way you can play games before there were game consoles (.) at least video games not obviously the board games (.) and over time what happened is that those games have evolved and there's a whole new category of games inspired by the Sims that have evolved on things like facebook (.) things like Farmville which are about acquiring things, some of those games are about collecting groups of people, some are about competing and some of those games are about actually presenting yourself so things like second life or fantasy games where you are a character like world of warcraft (.) those are games that people play

DB: okay

MM: then on the console on the television there are console games and there is more and more mobile games whether it's on the DS or phone (.) Now when any of those games is designed they are typically around a story or around an intellectual challenge (.) so games like tetris and bejeweled are about intellectual challenges (.) other games are about fantasy or adventure and accomplishment so Mario is about getting to certain levels other have stories so there's an interactive part but then there's a hero, there's a villain, an objective and then games play evolved with that (.) and other games are fact reality such as sport games

DB: okay

MM: and whenever you are defining, depending on which category of games you are interested in you will do research (.) you will look at games people play today on the pc, on tv or on the phone or on a board game such as monopoly

(.) and then there's an element of creativity (.) so the designer would say I wanna do something like this but with a different approach so for example I want to make aliens but I want to make it a game (.) I want to make a puzzle game like or a crossword puzzle that would be shapes not words and something like that (.)

DB: okay

MM: so when Microsoft takes the approach, they look at okay what is the (.) what genre of games are people playing so right now a lot of people are playing music games such as guitar hero so they'll say well that's a category that's growing so there's an opportunity there then they'll look at the types of games in that category and say well is there an innovation that we can create is there a better story to tell or is there better graphics to show or better artificial intelligence that we can create and they'll look to innovate in some way and then they'll build a prototype so they'll build a game and then someone will come in and play a little bit with it and they'll say that's fun that's not fun that's good that's bad they'll play a little bit more, they'll develop a little bit more (.) so it's an iterative process by which people have an overview of what they want to achieve, they know who it's going to appeal to and what kind of game dynamics it's going to have and then overtime they refine it and game development can take anywhere from 2 days to 2 and a half years depending on the depth of the game, the complexity, the richness of the graphics and the artificial intelligence designed

DB: okay (.) I have a question concerning the fact that some people are (.) actually most of the research accused video games since the kids physical play has turned into virtual play and this is when Nintendo introduced the wii fit and as far as I know Microsoft is going to be launching something similar soon

[MM nodding]

DB: so did you study that as in okay children are now spending more time on=

MM: =you know I'd like to say that yes we research that and so forth (.) I actually think that Nintendo (.) the answer is there's some research that's done and whether it is implemented is a completely different story (.) but often what we find is games (.) the games that are successful are the ones that the first time they come out they attract an audience but then the people who developed them pay very close attention to how people interact and the second time they get it right (.) so Nintendo I think to their credit if you look at what they did, they looked at what we call "the megatrends", they looked at things like mobility, where they had the DS (.) they looked at aging, they looked at health as something important, they looked at the cocooning of the family, as families coming and staying at home more and these were trends that globalization and a whole a lot of other things have brought about (.) and with the wii DS, they very quickly when you saw the DS in advertising at least in the UK, they were showing older couples, they would show elderly people playing brain age, and they had a they were tapping into people wanting to stay home and cook so with cooking programs so they really said that toy that everyone would say that's kids game but now you find more parents playing with their kids brain age and suduko and a whole number of other things (.) so they studied the trends in aging and the interest in health and self improvement and I think they saw the same thing on their game

console, they said people are tired of just doing this [mimicking the controller movement] and we want them to stand up and have fun (.) and I think they saw that appetite and interest, they saw that people were playing with guitars and now input devices are no longer just the controller and left to the thumbs but now they are for everybody and whether it was karaoke or guitar or now with the wii the people didn't want to be static (.) they wanted to now move around and have fun in front of the screen (.) so yes I think they studied megatrends and then they also studied trends in the way games were being developed and how people were interacting with games (.) screens are getting bigger, wireless is getting more capable the demographics (.) you know I started playing video games when they just started and now I am in my 40s so I've been playing for almost 30 years so (.) but I can't do this [mimicking thumb controller movement] and I do want to play with my kids so I think they said wow that whole group is now grown and if they are buying the console are now different and they'll care about these things and by the way the decision maker isn't always the kid, it's mom and she wants to be able to say oh I got a console for the kids but I use it for wii fit too (.) where the dad says oh yeah I got a ds for the kids but I use it for brain age so it's always a way to feel good about the fact that you just got a games system (.) so I do think that people research that but this is an interesting space because I do think that it's the combination of market evolution behaviour so that normally nobody would've known that a company like zanga which produces Farmville would be worth 400 million dollars but they identified that people spend time on facebook, they wanted to interact , they wanted to engage with other people and they wanted to rise in status so they use the phenomenal of social networking , the technology of micro-transactions and they brought those two things together (.) now you would've know that yes social network is growing and people are doing micro-transactions but it took somebody (.) sometimes it's the right place at the right time(.) to do that and all of a sudden it's a phenomena (.) guitar hero same things (.) if anybody had said we are going to give you a piece of plastic that you are going to play guitar on and you are going to stand in front of the TV and you are going to play , you would be like no thank you that's not the least interesting (.) but then somebody does it well and all of a sudden you say of course this is great fantastic give me the drums and give me the microphone (.) so there are market trends, there are creative people, and there's technology, they all kinda come together and it's how to predict that you are gonna have a hit is very hard to do (.) everybody no matter what game they've done has done research in some way shape or form, everybody has had a great idea that has never been done before, everyone probably got market research to see if there's an opportunity or to see the capability or innovation (.) but sometimes these two come together or none of them come together but when they all come together you get a hit (.)

- DB: exactly (.) okay there's a game called call of duty (.) it's an 18+ certified game but however most of the people playing it are kids (.) like 10 year olds
- MM: not most (.) there's a number but not most
- DB: so some of them
- MM: yes
- DB: so what do you think about that?

MM: I think that people are responsible for what their children buy and I think (.) it's no different than books or music or anything else (.) so my feeling on that is I think that we as an industry, and the government has a role to play but I think that the industry is the most responsible, needs to have consistent and effective rating systems, they need to make sure that those rating systems are enforced to the best of their ability so whether the government enforces that or the retailers would enforce that or if it's the industry themselves who enforce them (.) and then ultimately the decision needs to be managed at home (.) it's like television or music that within appropriate lyrics (.) I get free games at home I have a nephew who's 17, he's not allowed to play 18 over games and I don't give him 18 over games (.) and then I have my daughters and they are 12 and under, they are not even allowed to watch 15 and over games but that's because I enforce that but I do know people who they are a 17 year old brother and a 12 and they play call of duty and so on and so forth (.) we as Microsoft actively support the rating system, actively support the retailers to enforce it (.) make sure that they enforce it cuz the retailer just like cigarettes or anything else you could sell it and we have actually put an age rating system in our console so if I indicate as a parent that no game rated 18 or over can be played on this console and my son decides to sneak in his friend's game the console won't allow it to play (.) so there's parental control to make sure that in those situations where you are enforcing the rules, you have a clear rating system, and then still somebody tries to sneak something (.) you know, mom and dad can still make sure it doesn't happen (.) but there are still a number of people who (.) maybe don't police it nor do they enforce the parental control

DB: would you know in terms of percentage of games, parents buying versus children buying?

MM: a great question (.) god I wish I had (.) I have to say I think it is 50 50

DB: really?

MM: yeah (.) I mean if you go to any game store (.) go to a game store on a weekend just to watch the dynamics and the demographics (.) I think you will see as many parents and kids in there if not more than you do than kids going in alone (.) now i tend to see kids going in and browsing a bit more and then the parents are in there to buy (.) but I do think that when you talk about the Nintendo games, clearly it's the parents because the kids are younger and they typically fall for the xbox and the playstation games as they tend to be more to the kids (.) and not just the kids we are talking about our average age for our consoles moves towards 30 rather than 20 (.) so you see I buy it for my kids but I may be playing it and that happens quite a bit more now because you've got this generation of people who've grown up with video games who are now comfortable with that so they'll enjoy a sports game or a certain category like a shooter game such as call of duty for example that they want to play

DB: okay, let's forget that you are from Microsoft for a bit and talk to me as someone who's been playing games (.) you are generation x and so you say you grew up playing games (.) do you think there are many people like you?

MM: ummm yeah I do I do (.) now where they are (.) well my wife she plays miss pacman right but she hasn't played console games so she grew up playing a video game, miss pacman or santa pied or whatever it was the old arcades we had grown up to (.) so I think there are a lot of people who have played video

games (.) and it would be hard press to find, there may be an entire market that was not exposed but in the US it was pretty prevalent and in Europe (.) but in china it was probably not as prevalent, Japan it was very prevalent so I think the answer is it depends on the market and in most cases the answer is yes in some way shape or form (.) we have a segmentation in Microsoft but just in general but I don't consider myself a gamer though (.) I play games occasionally, it's not what I have a passion to do, if I have some time and it's raining or I can play with my kids something interesting then we'll play it but I say less than an hour a week and on weekends maybe 2 hours on a rainy cold dark weekend (.) but there are people who that's their passion, you know they'll buy ten games a month, that's what they do on the weekends, that's what they do late at night and then we have people who, we call them lapsed gamers, they played at one point in their life and they might have played certain types of games and they are not interested anymore, whatever the case may be (.) so I think there's a lot of people who have been touched by and experienced games but the number of people who are active is relatively a small number even for people who have game consoles (.) now are they more active with those than television or movies, well I still think that the experience of games is intense, it requires your attention where there's still a lot to be done to be entertained, just sit back and watch a movie or watch a television show and just passively enjoy that (.) so I do think that there's a you know if people work all day and they have some other activity doing, studying or otherwise then they decide they are going to play games, that's a high level of commitment so I don't think there's a lot of people who do that for long period of time (.) but I certainly feel like you'd be surprised the number of times that you might touch a game over a course of a month, you know somebody might give you solitaire to play on this, they might get you to sing karaoke on a game console and they might get you to join Farmville and before you know it you spend two hours playing games and not even realizing it

DB: okay that's an interesting point, the pricing, when you come to price your games, do you base it as well on the rating or not really?

MM: hmmm no not really (.) I think pricing is a function of a few things, it's a function of market, the value, the amount of time so if we built a game that is 40 hours of game play, it's a bit of you say 40 hours of game play that's a looong time, if you pick 2 hours to watch a movie, high production value but 2 hours of entertainment you pay 15 pounds and maybe 20 and 12 pounds for a dvd so we say 40 hours of entertainment that's worthy of a certain amount so we go okay there's a value in the amount of entertainment and the quality of the entertainment that we provide (.) then there's the (.) so that's one factor and then there's the cost it takes to deliver it (.) so there's a value to the customer and the cost to deliver that, those two things typically are aligned, meaning to create 40 hours cost certain amount and then there's the (.) so those are probably the primary two factors and then from there there's a whole variety of interesting things that create the ultimate pricing, it might be the model is not about the price of the game but the transaction within the game so certain games are not about what you pay for them but micro-transactions, other games might be advertising so it's a function of advertising (.) so they are free so the games that you see there are typically like the difference between a movie and a tv show and the cheaper the TV

show, that's called reality TV, depending on the audience you get you can make more or less money that costs zero to the consumer but it's something to the advertiser to get that specific customer (.) so you get advertising, micro-transactions which is about (.) the pricing would be (.) we've sold, on our xbox live which is our online service, we've sold over 2 million dollars in the first day Christmas gear, digital Christmas wear for our avatars, so digital people getting a Christmas hat, getting a Christmas shirt, getting a rain deer nose whatever, 2 million dollars people paid for digital clothing for their character on TV that's on one day so we've got (.) and now we do fat, we do designer clothing, and a whole bunch of other things (.) now is that gaming? Could be, it's kinda like a fantasy gaming, it's digital dress-up and you interact and you get to show who you are and so it's like second life and these other fantasy games but it's a little bit more reality but those are micro-transactions and then there's obviously the games that we create and I do think that pricing is (.) you'll find that the Nintendo games are cheaper because the quality is a little lower and it costs even less to make, the xbox and playstation games high quality, multiple user development, talented people to pull it together both developers and story tellers so it tends to be on the high end (.) and like all things, they have a value, a shelf life, so slum dog millionaire, an expensive game when you launch it, 3 months later it's cheaper, 6 months later you can get it for 5 pounds, 2 years later you can get for 2 pounds

DB: okay, the reason why I asked you this is that this generation, besides being an influence on their parents, kids now have their own money

MM: yes they do

DB: and they have a lot of money, it's even more than the previous generations

MM: yes true

DB: so they go and buy themselves. So this is why I was asking do you try to make it a bit affordable to them or you don't take that into consideration?

MM: no I don't think we take it into consideration which is why some interesting things are happening in the industry like second hand games (.) so what happens is somebody buys a game and they'll play it very actively for two days, finish it and then they'll sell it back and get and it's traded in and still has its value so they resell it (.) so it's interesting because we price our games at premium let's say 50 pounds, you can buy it 3 days later slightly used for 40 pounds or 30 pounds (.) now that's great because the company, the retailer selling it bought only one copy but they get to sell it for a total of 80 pounds (.) right (.) and for us as a game develop publisher that's not so good (.) we sold it for 40 to get 50 and we only get 40 even though they did two transactions (.) now that's the business side (.) from a consumer side, yeah the kids go in and they'll either share games, we see that happen a lot, or they will buy used games (.) but some of them save up, I think what happens is that they care about certain games so it'll be like I just got my graduation money, I really want this game and that's the one I want and they'll go out and they'll buy it (.) and they'll know that they can either trade it in as long as it's still got value or lend it to a friend for another game (.) so there's a very active second hand market that's out there for the kids who earn a lot

DB: what makes these games so interesting for the kids?

MM: the kids (.) I think it's fantasy (.) I mean you can be tiger woods (.) you can play your favourite football team (.) so there's fantasy and escapism (.)

there's accomplishment and competitiveness (.) so it might be a competitive game or it might be finishing a level, some of them are puzzle games (.) so it's fantasy, accomplishment or adventure or competition I think are at the core (.) and underlying is the level or escapism and you will see it now if you play call of duty, people will turn off the lights, turn up the sound and they want to be in that experience and I've done that for games that xbox has like halo (.) you just wanna immerse yourself in that world and it's kinda (.) let's say that's the fun part about it (.) it can be scary, it can be intense, but it's entertaining (.) yeah and I think those are the elements (.) the interesting thing is those are the games that I think when we say kids I almost immediately got in my mind 14 to 20 year old boys, right (.) it's not anymore, now we are talking about 12 to 30 year old boys and girls so I think when you think of that you think of the wii, what are you doing, there's still some competition, there's still a bit of fantasy, but then it's interaction, it's enjoyment, whether it's karaoke, or whatever it is, I think there's an element of social that are happening either with games live, Nintendo or Microsoft new xbox you'll be able to do that (.) and I think also there's an element of multiple connecting with people online now (.) so I can just decide, hey I want to do this with a son of a friend and he and I connect online and play the games together, so I was watching the kids and his dad is travelling in the US and he's like hey do you wanna play a game so we did (.) so yeah there's a social aspect that I think is growing because it used to be the dark room fantasy and escapism and now it's more kids on the couch, more kids standing up and playing karaoke parties (.) you know we have a game called sina which is just a trivia game that we play and that's a party game so there's 8 people around playing that game so that's a growing category

DB: is there anything else you want to say?

MM: well I guess, im interested in understanding what's your (.) thesis, what are you trying to prove?

DB: first of all I'm just starting so I just came in feb so it's still in the process of discovering the areas and I was gonna study generation Z in general but then we found the gaming part and the main thing that I want to look at is how it affects their identity, and their socialisation with their parents which you mentioned and is very important (.) from the research that is done, most parents don't understand the games and are not interested in what the kids are playing and the kids are moving away too fast

MM: they can't keep up with them

DB: exactly and when the kids find their parents not interested in what they are doing, they try to find online friends who share the same interest and then the parents are going to come and say that the kids are not social even though they are very social

MM: they are social; they've got a network of friends who they're connected to (.) sure

DB: so there's a socialisation gap and there's also the bit where the kids are socialising their parents where they are teaching them about tech things (.) so all this and how it will affect the market (.) I'm also looking at the phenomena of kids playing games not for their age

MM: how are they different from those who play age appropriate games (.) that would be very interesting

DB: another thing that has caught my attention is that most of the children they play the games on their parents consoles or elder siblings (.) what they do is that they don't play the game for reaching the next level but rather they try to manoeuvre the game like for example they want to die in a different way or a very cool way to die or do these crazy stunts and they are very interested in these things and they actually take videos of it

MM: yeah yeah absolutely, video captures and postings

DB: yeah posting on youtube and instructions on all that and they are 10 and 12 years old so this is like

MM: yeah yeah it's a new way of self expression (.) we have some people who are kids like 17 and 18, they basically created a film using a halo character so what they did was they took the game and they had these two characters and they played with them in the game and they did voice over (.) so they basically used them as characters and they did funny scenes and this kind of thing and they would post them on the Internet and then there was a series of movies called red versus blue so if you go up to youtube you'd see red versus blue and the characters in the game two people are doing voice over and doing funny scenes so (.) it's become a way of self expression, self definition for sure , a way for status so where you sit we have a gamer points which shows how many games you played how far you've gotten in each of the games and you get badges as you go further so there's people who will not give up their character or id because it's got all of their accumulated score (.) and I'll tell you that the avatars very interesting, all my kids have avatars now, so it's gone from being okay not only just I have a name and I have a whole bunch of statistics, but now I dress them, I have them say things, so there is a self actualization and self representation thing is happening (.) using video games for some people is essentially (.) it would equivalent to an 8 mm camera instead of having you know (.) instead of making a movie with soldiers and characters they can do it with their thumbs and like that (.) well that sounds really interesting (.) I think you'll find, there are some really great resources on the Internet now, there are game development companies all around this part of the UK, here in Strodes' college there's a group of students working on game development and they are 15-16it's a universal language now, they play the same games, they post the same things, ...

Ending Interview ...