Video games and young children’s evolving sense of identity: a qualitative study

# Keywords

* Socialization
* Mediation
* Parenting
* Online media
* Consumerism
* video games

# Details

## Year

2016

## DOI

10.1108/yc-08-2015-00551

## Issued

2016

## Language

English

## Volume

17

## Issue

2

## Start Page

## End Page

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## Type

Journal article

## Journal

Young Consumers

## Publisher

Emerald

## Topics

Risks and harms

## Sample

A convenience sample consisting of 22 children of both genders aged 6-12 years, parents and video
games company executives in the southwest of the UK

## Implications For Parents About

# Abstract

Purpose
This paper aims to investigate children’s experience as consumers of video games and associated digital communication technology, and the role this experience may play in their evolving senses of identity.

Design/methodology/approach
Qualitative depth interviews and discussions were conducted in a convenience sample consisting of 22 children of both genders aged 6-12 years, parents and video games company executives in the southwest of the UK. The fully transcribed data sets amounting to some 27,000 words were analysed using discourse analysis.

Findings
The findings revealed the heightened importance that the knowledge of video games plays in children’s strategies for negotiating their nascent sense of identity with regard to peer groups, family relationships and gender identity. Video games were not only a leisure activity but also a shared cultural resource that mediated personal and family relationships.

Research limitations/implications
The study is based on an interpretive analysis of data sets from a small convenience sample, and is therefore not statistically generalisable.

Practical implications
This study has suggested that there may be positive benefits to children’s video game playing related to aspects of socialisation, emotional development and economic decision-making. An important caveat is that these benefits arise in the context of games as part of a loving and ordered family life with a balance of activities.

Social implications
The study hints at the extent to which access to video games and associated digital communications technology has changed children’s experience of childhood and integrated them into the adult world in both positive and negative ways that were not available to previous generations.

Originality/value
This research addresses a gap in the field and adds to an understanding of the impact of video games on children’s development by drawing on children’s own expression of their subjective experience of games to engage with wider issues of relationships and self-identity.

# Outcome

"The children’s comments suggested that video games opened up a world of identification that
was both alluring and empowering... [A]ccess to video games and the associated mobile digital communications may be narrowing the distance in certain forms of knowledge and attitudes
between children and adults (Goldberg et al., 2003), possibly accentuating the tendency for
today’s children to seem “older, younger” (Sutherland and Thompson, 2003)...Video games were
used as a means of extending and deepening bonds within the children’s existing social
circles. Thus, it seems that power is negotiated rather than structurally imposed within family dynamics,
and video games are one currency for this negotiation. This may not preclude the possibility
that, in some families in which the adults have no interest in video games, the children’s facility
with games might act to widen rather than narrow the generational gap (Tufte and Rasmussen,
2010), creating a very different identity dynamic within family socialisation. Also video games
are suggested to be one of children’s means of deploying power within the family context, as
they are utilized as a source of family socialisation or withdrawal from it." ( Bassiouni and Hackley, 2016: 137-8).