**Gaming versus Playing: To what extent have computer games replaced traditional social play pursuits in 8-10 year old children?**

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Note: This proposal is for a grant currently being prepared for submission to the Wenner-Gren Foundation. It was advised that I seek IRB approval prior to submitting the grant. I will resubmit a final version of the research protocol to the IRB before carrying out any research, should my grant application be successful. The deadline for the grant submission is May 1st 2009.

1. This study seeks to analyze play behavior in modern children in the United States using interviews. Thus, the study population is intended to be elementary school children aged 8-10 years. This population is relevant for three reasons: [1] 8-10 year olds represent a key period in physical activity play behavior, [2] children of this age are usually computer literate, [3] younger children (below 8 years) are generally deemed unsuitable for standard interview techniques. Study participants will be children from local Texas elementary schools whose parents have signed a consent form (see attached). Participation is voluntary. The data used for analyzes will be data derived from the interviews, plus the child’s age, sex, and GPA. GPA (or equivalent measure of classroom performance) will be provided by the child’s classroom teacher.

2. I am currently seeking permissions from local school districts to contact local elementary schools. Once these have been obtained, I intend to contact the schools and acquaint myself with the appropriate classroom teachers. I will explain the study to them, and try to elicit their assistance with my research. I hope to actually visit the teachers and perhaps also their classes, to talk briefly about play behavior and what it means to the children. Hopefully, this will give the children an opportunity to become familiar with me. Additionally, meeting with the teachers will provide information about the standard school day, start times, end times, recess times and duration, class size, etc. I will provide letters (consent form) to be given to the child’s parents seeking permission for their child to participate. Once these permissions have been collected (after approximately 2-3 weeks) I will commence interviews at the school with the assistance of the classroom teachers. Only children whose parents sign the consent form will be permitted to participate in the study.

3. I will arrange mutually convenient times to visit with each school or class. I will give a short presentation and introduce myself to the class so that they know what is expected of them and so that they might gain some familiarity with me. Each child participating in the study needs to provide signed permission from their parent or guardian. These signed letters will be returned in the first instance to the child’s teacher. I will also mail letters to the children’s parents, if the school is willing to assist in providing addresses. Ideally, I would additionally mail reminder postcards too, to attempt to increase participation (sample size). I will work with the teacher to ensure that only children with written permission participate. Children whose parents have provided permission to participate will be interviewed in a separate room from their class. I anticipate children’s class work continuing during the interview periods. Separation is deemed appropriate so that the child is focused and not influenced by their peers in making responses. I will however leave the interview room door open so that there is no perceived breach of appropriateness between myself, my assistant, and the child. The teacher is the best person to decide the order in which the children participate. Each child will be escorted to and from their classroom. When the child is collected from their classroom and taken to the interview room, I will record the child’s first name, age in months (How old are you? What month is your birthday?); the teacher will provide me with their GPA after the child has been interviewed to avoid any interviewer bias. These data will be entered into an SPSS spreadsheet along with transcribed information from their interview. Names will be deleted from the spreadsheet once all of the interviews have been transcribed to ensure confidentiality. The child will be asked a short series of questions about their play with other children and with computer or video games (see sample questions attached). The child’s responses will be recorded using standard audio equipment. A graduate student assistant will be responsible for the recording, and I will lead the interviews. The recorded interviews will be later transcribed, and the relevant data inputted into an SPSS spreadsheet. Interviews are expected to last between 10-15 minutes. The child will be escorted back to their classroom, and the next child will be brought in to the interview room. It is hoped that the short duration will provide as little disruption as possible to their school day. I will return to the school on sufficient occasions to obtain interviews from all the children signed up for the study. At this point, sample sizes are unknown, but I hope to interview somewhere in the region of 100 children (or more).

4. I think the risks to the children are minimal. The children’s participation is voluntary, and risks will be further assessed by their parents, who must sign permission for their child to participate. If they are unwilling or unable to participate, I will simply thank them for their time, and take them back to their classroom. There are no physical risks involved, since they will be asked only to talk to me. The questions and indeed the purpose of the study are not sensitive in nature. There is arguably some psychosocial risk for children who are shy, or uncomfortable with strangers. I hope that by introducing myself to the class and talking to them about my research ahead of time, that they will be sufficiently familiar with me to minimize these risks. There is arguably some risk that they will miss class material while they are in the interview room. However, since the interview is short, and the teachers have agreed to assist me, it is unlikely that they will miss anything substantive. I chose to interview the children because it is the most appropriate and non-invasive way to obtain my data. Another option would be written questionnaires, but for children of this age, interviews seem a more appropriate way of understanding how and why children play – it is usually easier for a child to express himself or herself verbally. To comply with normal rules of appropriateness with minors, I will leave the interview room door open during interviews.

5. I will initially introduce myself to the class to minimize shyness through unfamiliarity. This way, the children will also be clear of what is expected of them in the interviews that will follow. In the interview room, I will again introduce myself to the child, and explain that I am about to ask them some questions, and that they should just try to answer as honestly as possible. The interviews will be kept short (10-15 minutes) to minimize disruption from their class work. All children require parental permission in order to participate. I will check each child in and out of their classroom with their permission slip, and with the assistance of the teacher to ensure that only children with permission participate. The child’s information will be known only to the teacher, myself and my graduate assistant. We will not share any information with anyone else. No names will ever be published, and indeed once the interviews have been transcribed, I will remove the child’s name from the spreadsheet so as to ensure ongoing confidentiality. Once the results of the study have been published, all personal information will be deleted.

6. The child will not benefit substantially from the study, although compensation in the form of a small gift will be provided. I think being aware of what play behavior is, can be a positive thing for children. Also, having a direct contact with a local university professor can provide a sense of community. Some children and their parents may also feel satisfied with their child participating in a scientific study. The benefits to society may be slightly greater. There are a lot of rumors and perceptions and perhaps misconceptions about the role of play in modern children. I have no a priori expectations as to what I will find, but I am interested broadly in whether computer games have replaced more traditional forms of play behavior in children, and what affect this may or may not have. Computer games are both blamed and praised as modern toys for children. I simply want to analyze the relationships further. The results may have implications for child psychology, physical activity, spatial awareness, ADHD and obesity research, among others.

7. It has been suggested that schools are unwilling to participate in research studies unless there is something in it for the child. I agree with this sentiment, and for this reason, I would like to provide a small gift to each child who participates. On the consent form (attached) I have given parents the option of either an age appropriate book on play behavior, or a Texas State University t-shirt. The book arguably provides a relevant educational support of my research; and the t-shirt contributes to local community identity.

8. The risks of this study to the child are very small, and potential benefits to society in understanding the current state of play behavior in children may be larger.

9. I am currently seeking permission from local school districts, who equally want to know that this research meets IRB compliance. Thus I understand the potential circularity in this application. I would like to know whether the IRB would approve this research in theory (i.e. contingent upon school approval). I will resubmit a complete proposal with school names, class sizes, dates, etc. if specific schools are willing to co-operate with me on this project. I understand that this is necessary before full approval can be granted.

10. I am not a student. I am faculty, and this is my proposed project. I will however use a graduate assistant. At such a point when the research may proceed, I will provide names and vita for that student to the IRB for approval.

11. This is not a thesis project.

12. This proposal research is not currently under review for any other IRB committee.

13. The only personnel who will have access to the data are myself and the graduate assistant. It is hoped that the study will be published in a peer-reviewed journal. All participant information will remain confidential and no names will be published or submitted with any manuscript.