Values in Play

Interactional Life with the Sims

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To my mother and to the memory of my father

ABSTRACT

This study arises from pedagogical discussion about learning potential with computer games – more precisely, that one game genre called open-ended (sandbox) games can make players explore the game content in such a way that they learn about a specific content or phenomenon while playing. These arguments are strong in the constructionist tradition but are seldom backed up by empirical results. This study scrutinizes the social activity of game play with OESG. Video recordings of 19 play sessions in home environments generated the empirical data. The study comprises 39 players in groups of two or three, aged 10 to 14, as they were playing *The Sims* or *The Sims 2* for one hour. The theoretical tools in the analysis were assembled within a sociocultural perspective on learning and communication, and also by using Vygotsky's ideas on fantasy and creativity and Goffman's ideas on social interaction. Drawing from analyses of the video-recorded play activities, this study gives an account of how meaning and values are negotiated during actual game play. Whereas previous research indicates that this particular game genre might hold progressive potential, insofar as it challenges the players' prevailing values and norms, this empirical study brings forth a counterargument by showing how the "freedom" in the computer game assists instead in reproducing prevailing values and norms. This is because the players proved to be using their sociocultural experiences – what they already know – as a resource in their interactions. This suggests that the educational potential of games might not be in exploring, but rather in the fact that rule-based activities make participants orientate themselves to specific topics. Hence, open-ended exploration within immersive game worlds might not be an appropriate way to challenge young people's preconceptions and stereotypes. These findings suggest that if a concept of challenged stereotypes is desired in video games, the design must present more of a contest to prevailing norms, accentuating alternative subject positions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> Mom:
> - What did you learn from playing that computer game?
> Son:
> - Nothing! Oh yes, you get better at playing computer games.

The dialogue above took place between my son and me on April 17, 2003. At the time my son had just turned eleven. I know this for sure because, since he had been a little boy, I had made a practice of jotting down all the funny things a child can say or do that appeal to a loving mother. This is one of them[1], and reading this note after more than seven years, I also find myself humming a song by the American folk singer Tom Paxton: "What did you learn in school today, dear little boy of mine?"

In a way, the essence of the two questions is the same. Most adults like having children reflect on their learning, and maybe they hope to find some evidence of development and knowledge. These adults might also argue that my son had not reflected on his own learning process enough to formulate a reasonable answer. The same adults may favor toys, games, and play if they are found to have some learning potential. So being a parent in the era of edutainment[2] games, I thought this kind of answer was quite amusing.

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[1] The dialogue is translated to English and my son has read and given his consent to use this as an example.

[2] "Edutainment games" is a term often used to refer to commercial games designed especially to be both entertaining and educational for children at different ages (stages). For an elaborated discussion of these types of software, see: *Engineering play: A cultural history of children's software* by Mizuko Ito (2009). For a discussion of the educational use of different generations of games, see Egenfeldt-Nielsen (2006, 2007) .

In extension, it reflected the fact that the reason for playing computer games could be because they are playable. Computer games might be played just for entertainment, and not for education. Computer games might be played in their own right – just for fun. In that way, players can have other frameworks of game play than to learn something. My question may reflect the rhetoric of *Play as progress,* as described by the play theorist Brian Sutton-Smith (2001) in his influential work *The ambiguity of play*:

> This belief in play as progress is something that most Westerners cherish, but its relevance to play has been more often assumed than demonstrated. Most educators over the past two hundred years seem to have so needed to represent playful imitation as a form of children's socialization and moral, social, and cognitive growth that they have seen play as being primarily about development rather than enjoyment. (Sutton-Smith, 2001, p. 9ff)

The progress rhetoric, often applied to child's play (and to animal's play, but not adult's play), is challenged by Sutton-Smith throughout his book when contrasting the seven rhetorics identified by the author. "Although the progress rhetoric appears to serve adult needs rather than the needs of children, the phenomena of play and learning are not completely foreign to each other" (Sutton-Smith, 2001, p. 42). But what Sutton-Smith so beautifully argues in his book is that the elusiveness, the complexity, and the ambiguity of play cannot easily be described by one set of ideas and beliefs. Given this background, and in writing the opening for this chapter, I have also come to take my son's statement seriously. It could be said that my son's dismissive remark about learning anything from playing a computer game (except being a better game player), stands in glaring contrast to a current trend in game studies, as will be sketched in this chapter. A trend among some game scholars and other stakeholders emphasizes the power of computer games for learning, no matter whether they are played for leisure or educational purposes.

This study has its starting point in discussion about the educational potential of computer games. To be more specific, the ideas that a specific genre of digital games, so called "open-ended simulation games (or sandbox games)" (Squire, 2008, p. 170), can make a player/learner explore and thereby learn about different topics or phenomena while playing. The thesis shows that constructionist arguments about the potential of interactive media need to be examined in the light of empirical studies. From a perspective of interaction analysis,

this study focuses on the activity of playing with digital *open-ended sandbox games* (hereafter abbreviated OESG) like *The Sims* (Maxis, 2000) and *The Sims 2* (Maxis, 2004). This genre of digital games is known for their open-ended character where there is no single right or wrong pathway in the game; instead they open up for multiple pathways and a wide range of creative player expressions (see, Juul, 2007; Squire, 2008). Squire (2008), for example, argues that this particular category of games can be seen as "possibility spaces" and functioning as such they can also be regarded in at least two ways: "(1) as *intellectual* play spaces where players can explore the interplay of historical ideas /…/" (p. 179), and "(2) as *identity* play spaces where players develop new identities as game players /…/" (p. 179). This makes it interesting to see what players bring to the activity of game play. Furthermore, Squire argues that:

> As learning contexts these sandbox games function as design *possibility spaces* for people, spaces wherein they can develop along trajectories of experience into new ways of knowing, learning and being in the world. (Squire, 2008, p. 172).

Even though OESG most often are designed as single-player games, it is interesting to see what players bring to the *social activity* of *collaborative play*. Playing games is often a social activity (e.g. Lenhart, 2008; Squire, 2008), but "[t]here are surprisingly few studies of how such social interactions function within single-player games" (Squire, 2008, p. 195). This raises the question of how the experience is framed in such an activity. For example, how are divergent interests, approaches, and pathways taken, negotiated and mediated by the players in a social activity of collaborative play with an OESG like *The Sims*? How do the players make creative expressions and roles taken visible to each other in the play activity?

GAMES AND LEARNING

We are living in a media-intensive era in which computer games constitute one of the fastest expanding cultural expressions. Game playing has become a tremendously popular leisure activity, and video games have become a billion-dollar industry. That statement may provoke some readers to consider the relational aspects between the game market and its consumers. Even though this kind of perspective is outside the scope of this study, the growing economic impact is worth illustrating by figures from the industry. As an example, *The Entertainment*

Software Association (ESA, 2009b) announced[3] that computer and video games sales reached $11.7 billion in 2008. This means that video game software sales have more than quadrupled since 1996 (ESA, 2009a). Expressed in units sold, approximately 297.6 million US games were sold across all platforms in 2008 (ESA, 2009b). Large-scale survey data from a social and cultural viewpoint are more difficult to obtain. From a growing body of game studies, social and cultural aspects of video game playing have been in focus in a variety of ways. Many of these studies are built on smaller samples of data, and there is a growing demand by some game researchers to fill this gap. In line with these demands, a recent national American survey (Lenhart, 2008) was set up by the *Pew Internet & American Life Project* to "examine the relationship between specific gaming experiences and teens' civic activities and commitments" (p. i). The study is nationally representative and reveals that almost all American teens (97%, both genders) play some sort of video game[4] and that "for most teens, gaming is a social activity and a major component of their overall social experience" (Lenhart, 2008, p. iii). These results destroy some of the myths surrounding young people's video game play. The myth describes teens' experiences of game play as an activity in isolation and a video game player as a teenage boy sitting alone in his room instead of training his social skills. However, children and teens' experiences of game play are not always like the myth. Instead, other researchers have pointed out the many hours of involvement, fascination, and motivation that young people may invest in the social activities that constitute game play for leisure (Facer, 2003; FAS, 2006b; Kirriemuir & McFarlane, 2004; Linderoth & Bennerstedt, 2007; Yee, 2006). Considering this, it may not come as a surprise that there is a growing interest in trying to *harness* these motivational aspects of game playing to reinforce learning (e.g. de Freitas, 2006; ELSPA, 2006; Facer, 2003; FAS, 2006a, 2006b; Kirriemuir & McFarlane, 2004; Mitchell & Savill-Smith, 2004). There are many widespread ideas about why computer games can foster new ways of learning in a variety of settings. There are also many spokespeople spreading these ideas. The interest in why and how computer games would be the *vehicle* for learning is not something that is exclusive to researchers. Rieber (2005, p. 550) claims that it is interesting to see "how the computer software business has competed for the opportunity to have children use their products in the education and gaming markets". Marketing in education, says Rieber (2005), is aimed at educators, while gaming is

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[3] "According to data compiled by the NPD Group, a global market research company, and released by the ESA in January 2009" (ESA, 2009b).
[4] Video game in this thesis is used in a very general way, covering all sorts of computer and video game software played on different platforms. Sometimes video games refer to digital games played with a video game console (e.g. software brands like *X-box*, *Playstation*, *NintendoDS*, *Nintendo Wii*). When referring to these kinds of console games in the text, it will be made explicit.

aimed at children. The quotation that follows shows that it is not only in aggressive marketing that educators are in the center of attraction. Here, *The Entertainment Software Association* (ESA) turns its attention to one of its areas of interests — video games and education:

> Educators are increasingly recognizing the impact of entertainment software and utilizing games as a teaching device in a growing number of classrooms and business settings. In doing so, they are embracing the cultural and technological shifts of the 21st century and expanding the use of a favorite leisure activity, computer and video games, into a critical and still-emerging educational resource. More than just play, entertainment software is now being used to impart knowledge, develop life skills and reinforce positive habits in students of all ages. (ESA, 2008c, p. 1)

It may be worth exploring how the argument goes in the quotation above. The focus taken is not a matter of differentiation between information and persuasion in the text. Rather the focus is on what way the ESA website writes about computer and video games in educational settings. At a first glimpse, the tone of the text may seem quite informative rather than personal – factual rather than emotional. But considering that ESA (2008b) consists of members from 23 companies in the game industry, it is striking how their collective voice is coincident with their business interests. They use their website to portray pioneer educators in the 21st century as people who are cultivating the interests of their students by embracing games for successful teaching and learning. The argument used is similar to ideas where information plays a role in marketing to "gain access to new markets" (Rowley, 2002) and build new customer relationships. Looking at the quotation above through the logic of marketing, the learners are put in a position of consumers, and the educators are put in roles of providers of consumers' needs. Education is the new market where prospective consumers may be found. This indicates that strong market forces are at work to push the educational system to change, and this may be of interest for future research. A possible counter-argument is that "computer games are global and expensive merchandise" (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, 2007, p. 277). Furthermore, ESA (2008a) shows a philanthropic interest by funding "positive programs and opportunities that will make a difference in the quality of life, health, and welfare of America's youth" (p. 32). The purpose is to "harness the collective power of game industry" (Ibid., p. 32) for the benefit of the community. This raises issues of how the philanthropic strategy taken relates to corporate marketing. For example, in what way will corporate philanthropic strategies taken influence the corporate identity, how it is valued by

its consumers, and its effect on consumer preferences and the like? It also makes me wonder if a "long-term" profit for the game industry lies in how digital games, in a general sense, are valued and rated by the members of society (such as parents, educators, policy makers). It is the power of the game industry that intense technique development, design, and a competitive market have led to the new generation of commercial computer games, sophisticated games with convincing graphics and impressive sound effects. And as argued by Egenfeldt-Nielsen (2007), it is the power of commercial games that motivates players to spend hours in game worlds, and if this power of computer games is to be harnessed for educational purposes, then:

> [t]o make it a viable business that attracts entrepreneurs we have to find ways for educational computer games to become without just being about spelling and math. /…/ We do not have to see the same quality as commercial computer games but we have to get considerable closer than today. This challenge requires a true alliance between researchers, policy-makers and developers to identify the best starting point for such endeavors. (Ibid., p. 277)

Egenfeldt-Nielsen is not alone with these ideas. Researchers and stakeholders from the computer game industry and education form projects, interest groups, and laboratories to explore how computer games can be used in educational settings and training. As an example, "the Federation of American Scientist, the Entertainment Software Association, and the National Science Foundation convened a National Summit on Educational Games" (FAS, 2006b). The *National Summit on Educational Games* attracted participants such as "executives and developers from the video game industry and educational software publishers, researchers and experts on technology and pedagogy, representatives of user communities such as teachers and the U.S. military, R&D funders [Research and Development, my comment], and government policy makers" (FAS, 2006b, p. 4). An interpretation of the *National Summit on Educational Games* may be expressed as an invitation to different stakeholders for the purpose of gathering experience and resources for new collaborations for their mission. Sometimes such collaborations between academic, industrial, and government agencies to develop new games for learning are called the *serious games movement* (de Freitas, 2006). The purpose is the same, to get educational communities and development designers "to crack the problem of how to create effective serious games applications" (Ibid, p. 52). How to solve this problem was also in focus at the *National*

Summit on Educational Games (FAS, 2006b), where there was a consensus that games for education are not the same as "commercial off-the-shelf" (hereafter abbreviated as COTS) games. Games must have a desired learning outcome to be suitable for education and training. This was considered to be something for developers and designers to target and strive for. It is furthermore reported that "educational games must be built on the science of learning" (Ibid, p. 5). The results of the *National Summit on Educational Games* are documented as a part in a research and development plan, or "a roadmap" as it also is called (FAS, 2006a). The rhetoric used is how game technology may foster new ways of learning in education and training to meet the needs of a rapidly changing knowledge society. In their conclusion, traditional teaching and learning with textbooks and teacher lectures is identified as a problem and the game technology as the driving force for development:

> Yet, despite the promise game technology holds for improving learning performance to meet the needs of the new economy, textbooks and teacher lectures remain the mainstay of teaching and learning. The Summit on Educational Games held in October 2005 identified ways to address this problem and accelerate the development, commercialization, and deployment of new generation games for learning. This roadmap identifies key R&D needs to ensure we harness the power of games for the purpose of learning. To make progress, these R&D activities need to be acted upon and organized, and will require an interdisciplinary enterprise that brings together various groups, both within and across industry and academia. (FAS, 2006a, p. 11)

The quotation can be read as a mark for technological determinism. When we take a closer look at FAS' recommendations for further research, motivational aspects are in focus and taken as the premises for the successful design and development of educational games. Motivation is located in the interaction between the player and the game, and structural conditions are generally not taken into consideration. The motivational aspects of computer game playing are never related to the social and cultural circumstances of a wider game culture, that is, the game player is never placed in her or his overall social experience, as the *PEW Internet & American Life Project* report (Lenhart, 2008) pointed out. Furthermore, the integration of games in classrooms and formal learning environments is rarely discussed in relation to the educational system in which it is embedded[5]. This is not an attempt to endorse

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[5] There are of course exceptions; see for example Kurt Squire's (2004) dissertation: *Replaying history*: *Learning world history through playing Civilization III*.

social determinism instead of technological determinism, nor is it a discussion of whether computer games should be implemented in educational settings or not. It is a discussion based on previous research that has shown that the introduction of technology in a practice changes the terms and conditions for participation (e.g. Eklund, Mäkitalo, & Säljö, 2010; Ivarsson, Linderoth, & Säljö, 2009; Lantz-Andersson, 2009; Lindwall, 2008; Nilsen, 2009; Säljö, 2010). Therefore, (game) technology cannot be seen as just a tool; it is part of and plays a role in the way we communicate, interact, participate in, and orchestrate a practice. As such, interesting issues for future research arise (B. Lindström, personal communication, November 12, 2008): How do we evaluate the learners' changing ways of participation and what instruments are at hand in the contemporary educational system to do this?

It seems that later reports and literature reviews on games and learning give evidence to the trend where different stakeholders and researchers from different fields converge to answer the question of how to make learning and teaching more *effective* by using computer games. It can be fruitful to look for how computer games and learning are defined and ascribed in all these documents. The discourse used to describe the potential of computer games for learning is done in a variety of ways. In the documents and reports made by ELSPA (2006), ESA (ESA, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c), and FAS (FAS, 2006a, 2006b) the following generic terms can be found: "learning tool"; "learning technology"; "new generation games"; "game-based learning"; "good games"; "serious games"; "epic games". It is as if computer games are seen to have an inherent power to change the way we learn in the future. The discourses are also invoked in most of the literature reviews on games and learning (as will be scrutinized in Chapter 2), but the concepts of "game-based learning" and "learning tools" occur more frequently in the reviews than do the others. Some of these concepts are also associated with game researchers such as James Paul Gee (e.g. Gee, 2007a, 2007b, 2008) who often uses the concept of "good video games and good learning"; and David Williamson Shaffer (e.g. Shaffer, 2006) with the concept of "epistemic games". In another report, *Unlimited learning: Computer and videogames in the learning landscape* (ELSPA, 2006), digital games are claimed to hold the potential of a "fully personalized, responsive, and enjoyable learning experience" (Ibid, p. 5); of "making learning fun" (Ibid, p. 14); "as stimuli for learning" (Ibid, p. 17); to "support basic skills, to engage students in learning, support information retrieval, encourage social learning and support multi-disciplinary skills" (Ibid, p. 17); of "reaching students who have difficulty learning in traditional classroom context" (Ibid, p. 19); to break down barriers to learning "through interactive experiences" (Ibid, p. 19); to "be motivational

and accessible /.../ stimulate and simulate, educate and entertain /.../ to promote skills which extend beyond the acquisition of ICT /.../ encouraging learners to consider conceptual problems and objective solutions/.../ supports learning in a way that allows users to make choices which are relevant to their unique learning needs" (Ibid, p. 19). This lineup of affirmatives could be continued, hence, computer and video games seem to be a quick fix for all the learning obstacles that have kept researchers in learning sciences busy for years. The report is conducted by ELSPA (2006) and it is said to be a step towards building fruitful partnership between industry and education. ELSPA is the acronym for the *Entertainment & Leisure Software Publishers Association* and was established in 1989 to give the UK games industry a collective identity. And as a collective, they aim for a fruitful relationship by taking the position as the animator of all the voices of good experiences with computer games in education. Thus, it is of great importance to discover from which perspective learning is discussed in relation to computer game playing when reading these kinds of documents. This is not only to identify perspectives of different stakeholders, but also which learning theories are emphasized.

CONSTRUCTIVIST IDEAS ABOUT LEARNING AND ICT

There are some ideas in the pedagogical discussion around computer games that can be traced to specific theories of learning. For example, digital environments have been said to have a potential for exploratory learning (Rieber, 2005), meaning that the users can experiment with the content of a microworld, simulation program, or a digital game in such a way that they understand some scientific principle, or alter their concept of cultural phenomenon. This line of reasoning is strong in the constructionist tradition, where for example the potential of microworlds and Logo programming (Papert, 1980) has been explored in educational settings. The language of Logo is developed from constructivist ideas derived from Piaget's theories. Papert's pedagogical ideas concern how technology could be used to develop the logical thinking of the learner[6]. "One of the main tenets of constructionism is that learners actively construct and reconstruct knowledge out of their experiences in the world" (Kafai & Resnick, 1996, p. 2). This view is something constructionism shares with constructivism, but compared to other learning theories, and as argued by Kafai and Resnick (1996), "constructionism sees an important role for affect", and "also emphasizes diversity" (p. 2). This reflects Papert's ideas that children learn better, and are more engaged, if they construct something that is

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[6] These pedagogical ideas and underlying theories will be further examined in Chapter 2.

meaningful to them, and also his ideas expressing that the learners use different styles of thinking and different styles of learning when constructing new knowledge. Papert's ideas were applied by using the *Logo* microworld as a representative example, and as also introduced in *Mindstorms* (Papert, 1980), and further explored in *The children's machine* (Papert, 1993). Thus, *Logo* has provided one of the most well-known exploratory learning environments, e.g. microworlds, used in educational settings. But *Logo* is not the only microworld there is. Without any intention to do a fair presentation of all microworlds that exist, *StarLogo* (Resnick, 1999) and *SimCalc* (Roschelle, 2000) can also be mentioned.

Microworlds, simulations, and games as digital learning environments

According to Rieber (2005), microworlds, simulations, and games involve both similarities and differences. In contrast to other digital media, games, simulations, and microworlds are interactive (Rieber, 2005). As such, they are based on *experience* by the users' control of dynamic elements. The semiotic material in the digital environment can be seen as the "just-in-time information" that functions as the supporting *explanation*. This distinction of experience and explanation is used by Rieber (2005, p. 550) to show the difference between instructional and constructivist perspectives in education. This is also the basis of much software design, according to the author. As Rieber has pointed out, research on games, simulations, and microworlds are diverse and carried out by different pedagogical and philosophical theoretical underpinnings:

> Microworlds were born out of constructivist thinking (Rieber 2003), whereas simulation
> and gaming have long been aligned with more traditional instructional uses of educational
> software (Gredler, 1996, 2003). (Rieber, 2005, p. 550)

In other contexts, Rieber has argued that more instructional type of software is "based on the paradigm of 'explain, practice, and test' " (Rieber, 2004, p. 583), while the small group of software called microworlds is based on the principles "of invention, play, and discovery" (Ibid., p. 583). In this way, and as Rieber (2004) concludes, microworlds can be seen both as a particular type of software, as well as a particular kind of learning style (Ibid., p. 599). This is important since it shows that the same type of learning environments (in a physical sense) can function according to different types of learning styles. Microworlds are most often described as an environment for exploratory learning in accordance with constructionist thinking. But as

also pointed out by Rieber (2004), one way to distinguish microworlds "from other kinds of exploratory learning environments by their focus on immersive learning and their sensitive tuning to a person's cognitive and motivational states" (p. 587).

Games as exploratory environments and immersion as the potential for learning

As Rieber has argued, even though games, simulation, and microworlds have similarities, they are not the same. But constructionist ideas and emphasis on the learners' experiences and active engagement when working with a learning environment, such as a microworld, seem to have spilled over to games. Themes like "games as exploratory environments" and "immersion as a potential learning" are recurrent themes in the pedagogical discussion around the particular types of games which are referred to as OESG in this study. And with these themes follow the concepts of "exploratory learning" and the idea of "immersive learning". For example, in the *Learning in immersive worlds* report, undertaken to inform practitioners, the authors identify different games used in learning practices and categorize them as "different modes of use" (de Freitas, 2006, p. 25). One of these identified modes is:

> Games or simulations as microworlds
>
> Using games or simulations as microworlds where open-ended experimentation can take place is becoming more commonplace in educational contexts, as techniques more often associated with training for professional life are adapted. This technique, like role play and the use of narratives, may prepare individuals for exploring a range of different skills and activities within a cohesive and safe environment that may or may not be transferred to real life contexts. (de Freitas, 2006, p. 25)

There are also games that are designed so that the concept of immersion is combined with the pedagogical idea of learning by doing. In the *WolfQuest* game, developed and hosted by the Minnesota Zoo with funding from the National Science Foundation, the players are supposed to learn about wolf behavior and ecology. A central premise is that immersion motivates the player to learn (7th space Interactive, n.d., p. 35). As seen here, motivation and immersion are found to be interrelated. This interrelationship is also something noted by FAS, which identifies one of the challenges for research as being to understand "the impact of immersion and engagement on learner motivation" (FAS, 2006a, p. 4).

A similar approach to games to that in the previous example is taken by the *Uncharted Depths* project. This project is a collaboration between a commercial game company and researchers who worked together to create, as they say, "a complex immerse 3D world within which players experience what it is like to be an active researcher exploring a new environment and conducting a variety of field work and experiments to try to understand it" (ELSPA, 2006, p. 35). The project claims that their games allow players to enter an environment that is impossible in another way. The learning outcome of playing the game is expressed like this: "Students walk away from the game with solid personal experiences upon which to base future learning about research practices and the field of science at large" (Ibid, p. 35).

It is not always clear what is meant by the concepts of *exploring* and *immersion* in the reports. But as already pointed out by Rieber (2004) above, it appears that the concept of immersion is related to immersive learning in microworlds, and "their sensitive tuning to a person's cognitive and motivational states" (p. 587). Yet the pedagogical and theoretical underpinnings are not always highlighted in all research and the ideas of exploring and immersion are often mixed independently in the theoretical framework from which they are derived. For example, in the report made by ELSPA (2006) there is a section about what games can teach and one of the things mentioned is:

> Engaging in computer games and adhering to their rules means that users have a framework in which to explore, probe, hypothesise and test. This active discovery places the learner as co-producer of knowledge, an important aspect in the personalised learning paradigm. (ELSPA, 2006, p. 14)

The idea that a game has something to teach is a focus often taken in perspectives of traditional instruction. In Papert's idea of constructionism, it is the player who teaches the computer. The first sentence above resembles the instructional principles Rieber called "explain, practice, and test" (Rieber, 2004, p. 583). The second sentence resembles the principles "of invention, play, and discovery" (Ibid., p. 583). The learner is described here from the constructivistic thinking viewpoint. The concept of exploring and immersion in OESG and the pedagogical and philosophical theoretical underpinnings will be further scrutinized in Chapter 2.

ASSUMPTIONS AND EVIDENCE IS NOT THE SAME THING

There are many assumptions about the qualities of using games for educational purposes. The motivational aspects are perhaps the most represented in the different literature reviews and documents. Motivation and related concepts are considered to be the driving forces for the player to explore and experiment in new learning environments. There has been a great interest in exploring how games can be used for learning. As an example, simulation games have been used for a long time in training such as *America's Army*. Another example of a simulation is made for training in the nuclear sector. One drawback of using a simulation game for this kind of training (Kirriemuir & McFarlane, 2004, p. 23) has to do with the fact that a simulation program can never compensate for real world training, something that was found as essential in case of emergency in the nuclear industry. There are also many examples of research conducted by different laboratories, where computer games have been explored in educational settings. Yet even though the different stakeholders' expectations of computer games surface as the new learning technology in educational settings, "it is fairly clear from the breadth of research on the subject, that video games do affect learning" (Dondlinger, 2007, p. 28). And learning in this context has to do with the expected learning outcome.

> It can certainly be said that video games facilitate learning, but the evidence for saying any more than this is weak. /../ Results showing that students learn from video games are not sufficient backing for the educational use of video games. (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, 2006, p. 190)

As we can see in the quote above, the relationship between games and learning is difficult to support in empirical evidence. "Although the literature on games and simulations is accumulating day by day, the issue of whether games influence students' learning in a positive way is still vague" (Kaplan Akilli, 2007, p. 5). It is not hard to find positive aspects of computer game playing. Kirriemuir and McFairline (2004) have suggested that it "may be necessary to distinguish more clearly the nature of gaming and the nature of learning and the learner" (p. 2) if we want to understand how games may contribute to learning. But Egenfeldt-Nielsen argues the need of understanding how games may contribute to education:

> We need to examine whether video games are worth the initial efforts in learning the interface, setting up computers, and other problems (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, 2004). The question is: what is it that video games offer that sets them apart from existing

educational practice? The different prevailing learning theories each have their own approach to answering this question. (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, 2006, p. 190)

Egenfeldt-Nielsen points out the structural terms and conditions in which the educational system is embedded. Empirical evidence to support this is a study done by Squire. He examined learning world history through playing *Civilization III* in three learning environments. His focus was the players' engagement in the game, how social interaction occurred, how understanding emerged and what role game play had for the students' understandings. The study highlights the unsolved challenges in implementing such a complex game within education. It was found that engagement was a very complex process that directed how the students explored world history. This means that gaming can have very different meanings for participants, depending upon how they frame the activity (Linderoth, 2004). Linderoth studied children playing games outside school, and one major finding in Linderoth's (2004) work is that players tend to make sense of representations in accordance with their local function in the game context, something which means they tend to focus less on what is being represented. This is a result that contradicts many of the rhetorical statements made about the educational possibilities with computer games and the immersive nature of virtual environments.

The examples described above are designed/modified and developed for educational purposes. But the *Teaching with Games* project, conducted in the UK, has explored the student's use of and attitudes towards COTS games in schools. It was found that 3% of the teachers had used COTS games in educational settings and 59% thought of using them in the future (Sandford, Ulicsak, Facer, & Rudd, 2006). In one of the *Futurelabs* projects, three different COTS games were used in school settings. One of these games was *The Sims 2*, which the teachers particularly considered to be a good vehicle for handling anti-social behavior (Sandford et al., 2006). "However while simulations are regarded as acceptable training tools, games due their association with violence and leisure time activities have been more widely resisted by tutors and parents alike" (de Freitas, 2006, p. 5).

Still, in relation to the tremendous popularity of digital games, we know very little of how learning, socialization, and sense making happens in these environments. As a cultural phenomenon, games differ a lot from each other, not only in their themes and aesthetics (like movies) but also in their interactive structure, their rules. It is not unlikely that different game

genres support different kinds of socialization. Thus, there is a need for a careful and close mapping of how we interact with different games and how different game structures support different kinds of learning and socialization.

OPEN-ENDED SANDBOX GAMES[7]

> According to a widespread theory, video games are goal-oriented, rule-based activities,
> where players find enjoyment in working towards the game goal. (Juul, 2007, p. 1)

The quotation above is the introduction to an essay where the author sketches what he calls the *complete theory of video games* (Juul, 2007, p. 2), to show the theory's limitations if it is applied to computer games without goals. Among other things, the broad theory explains the importance of game goals, followed by the argument that there is no well-defined challenge for the player without a goal. According to this theory you might say that the players are defined depending on what kind of goal within the computer game the player is trying to achieve. In a way, this could be seen as taking a kind of designer's perspective when describing different types of computer games, and it is reasonable to assume that different genres direct the player in specific directions. Thus games differ a lot, not only in their themes and aesthetics (like movies) but also in their interactive structures, their rules. There are "things" as Juul (2007) puts it, that are described as games that have no stated goals and an example of such "things" are "open and expressive games" like *The Sims*. Juul's concept of "open and expressive games" is what Squire refers to as OESG. So what happens when playing an OESG without any clear goals and where the player decides when to end? Does the freedom in the game allow players to explore and feel immersed in their game play? This is what I have studied in relation to *The Sims*.

The Sims

The idea that digital environments can become a space for exploration and experimentation has been adopted by the designer of the games in the *Sims* series. One of the most famous

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[7] *The Sims* series is often said to belong to a genre of open-ended simulation games. The reason for using Squire's (2007) genre of *open-ended sandbox games* is to make a distinction between this genre where many commercial off-the-shelf games can be found, and open-ended simulation games that are designed specifically for the purpose of learning. My aim has been to sharply distinguish this study from research within the field of simulation, even if the results may be of interest for other research domains as well.

games in this series is *The Sims*, which became the world's most sold computer game in 2004. The game, and its follow-ups and several expansions, appear to appeal to many different types of players and the game has sold equally to both genders (Flanagan, 2003b). The game has been described as a digital dollhouse where the playing arena consists of a society that can be depicted as the dream of the Western world's suburban life. It has been suggested elsewhere (Atkins, 2006) that *The Sims* can be considered a software toy instead of a game, while another author (Björk, 2007) has proposed that it can be considered a game, as the players set the game goal. This could be considered in compliance with Juul's (2007) concept of "open and expressive games", which gives the players the possibility of choosing their own path in the game, "playing styles and personal agendas".

The literature on *The Sims* thus involves two parallel discourses – one where game technology is seen in the light of educational possibilities and where *The Sims* might challenge stereotypical norms and values, and another which expresses anxieties about how games contribute to the cultural reproduction. Both lines of reasoning have one thing in common; they describe computer games as having inherent power to affect their players for better or for worse. There seems to be a divergence in the game, which on one hand can be seen as an open and free environment for social exploration, but on the other hand has constraints which are loaded with values from a capitalist culture (Flanagan, 2003b; Nutt & Railton, 2003; Sicart, 2003). Jenkins and Squire (2002) mean that the game becomes an arena for "testing alternative social strategies for coping with everyday conflicts and tensions." Sicart (2003, p. 7) claims that, "The Sims is a very progressive simulation of societies, as it is normal to play with gay couples that have all the rights they may lack in some real societies". Nonetheless he ends up in the conclusion that *The Sims* can be seen as a "subtle system for spreading the ideology of corporative late capitalism" (Ibid, p. 11). Flanagan (2003b) points to the fact that even if the game is claimed by its designers to be neutral it encourages players to become household consumers, which is a gendered feminine role. Nevertheless the game has potential to alter the player's view of the world since the inherent game goal, according to Flanagan, can be subverted in the fan culture surrounding the game.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

There is a body of argumentation in studies that credits the possibilities of games as offering rich open virtual environments as learning resources. The players', or learners', motivation to learn is the focus of attention and is clearly related to game play as exploration and immersion. When computer games and learning are discussed, the literature reveals that learning is often discussed in terms of learning outcomes in educational settings. Rarely is learning discussed as a process. Furthermore, the argumentation in these studies is divided and seldom based on results from empirical studies, and far from all claims in these studies have been confirmed. There are studies pointing in another direction, that games might not even have these qualifications, as will be shown in Chapter 2. Game play is a very diversified practice and how it is experienced depends on how the experience is organized or *framed*[8], using Goffman's (1986) concept. This implies that there is a need for further scrutiny of what actually happens when children play these games. It is important to understand game play before we utilize it in education, and that we understand the conditions of such an activity before we can use it for educational purposes (Linderoth, 2004).

Taking a perspective by looking at the activity of the players actually playing an open-ended game, you could simply ask how this is done. In such a perspective the unit of analysis is the players' communication and interaction (Säljö & Mäkitalo, 2002). The focus in this study is on such interaction and communication in a focused encounter (Goffman, 1961), where players in groups of two play an OESG for an hour. How is experience organized or framed by the players in the focused encounter while playing *The Sims* or *The Sims 2*? This thesis involves issues about learning and socialization about computer game playing with OESG. The focus of this empirical study is on the gaming activity, where children and young people play *The Sims*, and *The Sims 2*. The purpose is to map the interaction, especially with an aim to discussing its results in relation to the pedagogical discussion of the *exploring* and *immersion* concepts. In this way, this study mainly focuses on two themes – exploring and immersion – by analyzing the players' interaction and communication, concentrating on to what extent players choose their own paths in the game, "playing styles and personal agendas", as Juul (2007) described it. For instance, in what way do players set their own game goals while playing the game, as Björk (2007) proposed? In what way do players explore and

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[8] What Goffman's framing concept implies for this study will be further elaborated on in Chapters 3 and 4.

experiment with the game content, and how do they make visible to themselves and each other how they engage in these activities?

THESIS OUTLINE

Chapter 1

This chapter has provided an introduction to this study and its overall purposes. Thus by taking the starting point in the discussion about the educational potential with OESG, it has primarily looked into the arguments about exploring and learning.

Chapter 2

This chapter aims at placing this study in relation to previous research. The chapter will first offer an overview of the research field of digital games and learning. Second, it will examine some of the literature reviews made on digital games and learning. As argued in this chapter, it is of importance to see what learning theories are emphasized in the discussion of the learning potential with OESG. Third, to identify different research that is carried out by different pedagogical and philosophical theoretical underpinnings, the chapter aims at taking a closer look at constructionism as presented by Papert, and the underlying epistemology derived from Piaget. These are not the theoretical underpinnings taken in this study, which explains why it is placed in this chapter. Finally, the chapter aims at presenting some empirical studies focusing on the social activity of play.

Chapter 3

This chapter discusses the theoretical approach taken in this study. The theoretical underpinnings that are used in this study are presented. The theoretical concepts used in this study as analytical tools are also presented and discussed.

Chapter 4

This chapter discusses the methodological approach taken in this study. The empirical context, method, and analytical procedures will also be presented and discussed.

Chapter 5

This is the first chapter of three presenting the findings. By using Vygotsky's ideas of creativity and imagination, this chapter aims at exploring how this can be expressed in an OESG.

Chapter 6

The chapter will focus on the players' articulation of player plans in the activity with *The Sims 2*. Two different versions of the way they articulated and negotiated their plans in the activity will be contrasted.

Chapter 7

The chapter focuses on a single play session where the players expressed their creativity and imagination by letting their characters take the roles of gays. By using Goffman's concept of role distance, the analysis shows how the players distanced themselves from the roles given to their characters.

Chapter 8

This chapter concludes by discussing the results in relation to my research questions and to previous research.

CHAPTER 2

THE ACADEMIC STUDY OF DIGITAL GAMES:

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

DIGITAL GAMES AND RELATED PHENOMENA AS A FIELD FOR RESEARCH

1962 is often cited as "the year when the first video game [*Spacewar*[9]] was produced". Instead of seeing this production as a result of a brilliant inventor's work, Malliet and de Meyer (2005, p. 460) draw attention to what they call "the prehistory of the computer game" (Ibid., p. 23). The authors describe three of its forerunners, before the readers can continue their journey in *The history of the video game* chapter. The point Malliet and de Meyer want to make is to encourage the reader to "remember that a number of cultural and scientific traditions had already prepared the ground for the development of the video game" (Ibid., p. 23). The authors' point is well taken[10] in attempts to understand digital games and related phenomena as a field for research. As will be seen in this chapter, the research field of digital games constitutes on the one hand a focus on *technology*, and on the other hand a focus on *social activities*; here researchers can take their starting point in either side to explore the relation between the player(s) and the specific technology. So digital games and related phenomena as a field for research may be described and interpreted differently, depending on our chosen perspective. This study addresses social and cultural aspects of the activity of play.

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[9] Chiefly created by MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) student Steve Russell (Malliet & de Meyer, 2005)

[10] I also come to think of Vygotsky (2004): "Every inventor, even a genius, is also a product of his time and his environment. His creations arise from needs that were created before him and rest on capacities that also exist outside of him. This is why we emphasize that there is a strict sequence in the historical development of science and technology. No invention or scientific discovery can occur before the material and psychological conditions necessary for it to occur have appeared. Creation is a historical, cumulative process where every succeeding manifestation was determined by the preceding one" (p. 30).

Even though it will not focus on design, development, or game analyses of a specific game per se, it is designed to say something about what people can do with that technology in a specific setting. This is not to say that the representational content and the play mechanics that constitute a game have no place in this study, but rather how the players enact them in the social activity of collaborative play. Activities of play, games, and simulations have been subjects for analysis long before they went digital. Different social and cultural aspects of play and "playthings" have been written about in more established research traditions, such as psychology (Vygotsky, 2004), education (Sutton-Smith, 2001), cultural history (Huizinga, 2002), anthropology (Bateson, 2000), and sociology (Caillois, 2001; Erving Goffman, 1961). This "classical" work has inspired a lot of game researchers, and as an example, some parts of this early work have been included in *The Game Design Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology*, edited by the game designers Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman (2006). In that way, the "classical" works might be seen as a kind of "forerunners" of some of the methodological and theoretical ideas that have been explored in studies of digital games and play. Other topics that have been explored in research of digital games have focused more on the technological and the artistic aspects of games. By treating games as objects and not as social or cultural phenomena, these studies explore the "uniqueness" of digital games. In other words, they explore what makes digital games unique in comparison to other technologies or (multi)media. Common to all game research are issues about how digital games can be understood; they deal with issues of play. Another common understanding among game researchers is that in order to understand all aspects of digital games, a game researcher must have personal experiences of play (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, Heide Smith, & Pajares Tosca, 2008, p. 11).

Related fields

There is also relevant research to be found in the closely related simulation community, which today revolves around the *Simulation & Gaming* journal and the *International Simulation and Gaming Association* (ISAGA) and its fellow associations. Research on simulations started in the mid-1950s (Gros, 2007). The simulation and gaming association emerged in the 1960s and 1970s (for an overview, see Klabbers, 2009) and ISAGA held its first conference in 1970 in Bad Godesburg in Germany (www.isaga.info). "Until the last decade, this area [the business area, my comment] became increasingly dominant, with a strong emphasis on simulations and less focus on games" (Gros, 2007, p. 24). Researchers and practitioners

within this community are interested in "developing and using simulation, gaming, and related methodologies" (www.isaga.info) used in a range of areas such as university, industry, government, and business. Note that the interest in activities like simulations, role-play, and gaming does not have to be based on information technology.

A MULTIDISCIPLINARY AND/OR INTERDISCIPLINARY FIELD?

The academic study of digital games, or game play, is relatively recent. Some of the earliest work addressing the relationship between the player and the digital games has followed in the wake of the first arcade and console games in the late 1970s and 1980s. Much has happened in the technological development of games since then, and the knowledge production that has followed covers a wide spectrum that characterizes a multidisciplinary field. Researchers with different backgrounds and scientific traditions have raised questions about digital games and related phenomena in disciplinary domains such as humanities and social sciences, as well as in computer science and medicine (Bryce & Rutter, 2006b; Raessens & Goldstein, 2005; Salen & Zimmerman, 2006). Some of the most fundamental assumptions in research focusing on digital games and related phenomena can be traced to traditions within a range of these established research fields and perspectives. For example, research literature has been published in the fields of communication studies, cultural studies, film and literature, media studies, children and youth studies, and computer science, to mention some but not all of them. Even if digital games can be defined as a multidisciplinary field, more interdisciplinary perspectives are called for. This is seen as beneficial not only to its primary field, but also to the field as a whole. Researchers call for different grades of cross-disciplinary research depending on whether the researchers are arguing from their primary disciplines, or working from a more interdisciplinary approach. Interdisciplinary approaches also compel the researchers to be experts in more than one field. This means that the study of digital games is not a uniform research practice, and it is therefore not unproblematic to talk about the practice as a *single* research field. This results in an area of knowledge that is very difficult to grasp. The lack of homogeneity in the field of knowledge of digital games leads to research studies that are difficult to locate and interpret. A remedy for this scattered research area, an important element in the organization of the knowledge production, has therefore been the establishment of the *Digital Games Research Association* (DIGRA). The association gathers academics and professional practitioners whose research focuses on digital games and related phenomena. The first DIGRA conference was held in Utrecht, Netherlands in 2003, almost

thirty years later than the first ISAGA conference. According to the DIGRA website, the association is "dedicated to advance the study of digital games and to foster the development of research practices and standards within the field" (www.digra.org). The community of researchers gathered around DIGRA and journals like *Game Studies* and *Games and Culture* represents what is sometimes referred to as "game studies" (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2008, p. 11). Collaboration and communication between the simulation community and the game studies community have been limited (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2008). The simulation community is often seen as well established, yet diversified (see Klabbers, 2009), while the game studies community is not yet seen as well established. Researchers in the field of game studies have been reported to struggle for "acceptance and academic credibility" (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2008, p. 8; Gros, 2007, p. 24), and as added by Gros, they show "a lack of common research language, and few basic and theoretical discussions; and funding for research is scarce" (Gros, 2007, p. 24). Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. (2008) use the concepts of "formalist group" and "situationist group" to describe two main approaches taken within the games studies community. The formalist group tends to focus on game analysis or ontological analyses. "They represent a humanistic approach to media and focus on the works themselves or philosophical questions related to the nature or use of these works" (Ibid., p. 11). The authors also identify two primary subgroups within the formalist group, the one that focuses on the representations and the one that focuses on the rules. These two subgroups, also known as "narratologists" and "ludologists", "have so far instigated the most intense paradigm clashes of the field" (Ibid., p. 11). Before proceeding with further description of the situationist group, let us take a closer look at the discussion among researchers on whether or not to unify research on digital games into a new discipline. Bryce and Rutter (2006a) summarize the discussion as two lines of argumentation. On the one hand, the interactivity with digital games positions them as something unique and different compared to other media such as film, TV, or non-digital games, simulations, or sports:

> Some researchers have argued that research on digital games has the power to cause paradigmatic shifts within a range of academic disciplines and that existing disciplines lack the tools, theory or application to fully address the research needs of understanding digital games. These writers have argued for the establishment of something that might be called 'computer game studies' (Raessens and Goldstein, 2005), 'video game theory' (Wolf and Perron, 2003) or 'games studies' (Aarseth, 2001), but which exists outside the established disciplines of academic research. (Bryce & Rutter, 2006a, p. 10)

On the other hand, Bryce and Rutter (2006a) argue that the body of work from different disciplines, as the chapter contributions in their book, can be seen as a resource for the development of dynamic research on games, that "the work from their own areas [enables] them to answer different questions about the same phenomenon" (Ibid., p. 10). If there is an ambition strong enough to integrate disciplines to form something "new" – that is, if the accumulation of knowledge will be on a sufficiently high level – is still early to say. Therefore, we return to the other group pointed out by Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al. (2008), the situationist group. They are described as:

> generally interested in analysis of game players or the culture at large. They are not interested in all-encompassing statements that do not take context and variation into account. They search less for general patterns or laws and more for analysis and descriptions of specific event or social practices. (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2008, p. 11)

As will be seen in this chapter, "many fields can contribute to the study of games and game researchers are an eclectic bunch with a multidisciplinary background" (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2008, p. 8). The authors identify humanist scholars with backgrounds in film or literature as the largest single group. Furthermore, the DIGRA conferences attract social scientists where sociologists are pointed out, as well as designers. The attendance of both scholars and practitioners is seen as important (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2008). This might signal that there is an effort to achieve a common research language between researchers and designers.

LEARNING AND DIGITAL GAMES AS AN AREA FOR ACADEMIC WORK

As shown in Chapter 1, there has been a great interest in recent years among scholars, researchers, and other stakeholders outside academia in exploring how computer games can be used in order to enhance learning. This study uses that discussion as a starting point. More specifically, it is based on the discussion of a particular kind of game, *open-ended sandbox games* (OESG) (Squire, 2008), where the player/learner may explore and thereby learn about different topics or phenomena while playing. Searching for literature reviews on games and learning seemed a good way to start.

Scanning some of the literature reviews on games and learning

A number of literature reviews related to games and learning have been conducted since 2000. The reviews cited here (Cox et al., 2004; de Freitas, 2006; Dondlinger, 2007; Egenfeldt-Nielsen, 2006; Kebritchi & Hirumi, 2008; Kirriemuir & McFarlane, 2004; Leemkuil, de Jong, & Ootes, 2000; Linderoth, Lantz-Andersson, & Lindström, 2002; Mitchell & Savill-Smith, 2004; Pivec & Pivec, 2008; Sauvé, Renaud, Kaufman, & Marquis, 2007; Sefton-Green, 2004; Wegerif, 2002; Wilson et al., 2009) strengthen the study of games and learning as an interdisciplinary field. Most of the reviews display a complex, diverse academic field scattered over several disciplines with sometimes contradictory results. Depending on the underlying purposes for conducting the reviews, the analytical focus shifts somewhat. The literature reviews differ on what kind of research questions to focus, what audiences the reviews are directed at, and what kind of literature to include as the body of analyses. Not all reviews are based exclusively on research literature, and there are reviews that have included texts outside academia. Representing all the game-related research on games and learning, as in the format of a literature review, has also been described to challenge the author to locate relevant research in the different fields "to overcome the sometimes confusing overlap and difference in terminology used in respect of games across these different fields" (Kirriemuir & McFarlane, 2004). The major obstacles to overcome when conducting a review seem to have to do with: 1) *locating* relevant research on games and learning, and 2) *interpreting* relevant research on games and learning. The work a literature review is supposed to do ultimately depends on under which conditions, or within which frameworks, the review is conducted. This might also reflect upon how the ideas of games and learning are discussed, and how the concepts of "learning" and "games" are defined. Hence trying to place the different reviews in a research context could be beneficial to shed light on how the field of games and learning stands out in these literature reviews.

Mapping the contextual terrain of the conducted literature reviews

The purpose for doing the somewhat condensed presentation that follows is to map the contextual terrain of the literature reviews on games and learning. Only four out of fourteen reviews reported here were published in peer-reviewed international research journals. This will give an idea of how the knowledge production on digital games and learning sometimes is produced outside academia. Literature conducted by independent organizations is

sometimes referred to as the "grey literature[11]" (e.g. Auger, 1994) which makes the scientific procedural process (that guides, for example, traditional peer-reviewed research journals) harder to assess.

EU-funded project within the IST (Fifth Framework Programme)
Some reviews have been conducted as a part of a EU-funded project within the IST12 Fifth framework program (Leemkuil et al., 2000; Mitchell & Savill-Smith, 2004). Leemkuil et al. (Leemkuil et al., 2000) report

> examine[s] the theoretical analyses and empirical results from research in the area of instructional use of games and simulations. It mainly focuses on approaches taken in designing game(-like) learning environments and distils a list of characteristics of games from the instructional theory. (Ibid., p. 2)

A second analysis concerned ill-structured problems, and the authors introduced an instructional design model for handling these problems. Both analyses set out the "requirements for the KITS learning environment" (Ibid., p. 2). The review conducted by Mitchell et al. focused on published literature on computer games and video games used for learning as a part of the *m-learning project*.

Reports
Other documents examined include reports conducted within the *ISFE-EUN Partnership work plan[13]* – *Games in schools* (Pivec & Pivec, 2008), or prepared for the *JISC e-learning*

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[11] In 2000 *The International Journal on Grey Literature* was launched to serve as a forum for discussions about different aspects of the grey literature and their implications for research and practice. Only four issues were published before the journal ceased publication. There is also a website called *GreyNet International* which is hosted by the *The Grey Literature Network Service* (founded in 1992). The goal of GreyNet is to facilitate dialog, research, and communication between persons and organizations in the field of grey literature. GreyNet further seeks to identify and distribute information on and about grey literature in networked environments (http://www.greynet.org).

[12] IST is an acronym for *Information Society Technologies Programme,* and the IST fifth program revolves around the theme of creating a user-friendly information society. Their object is to "To realize the benefits of the information society for Europe both by accelerating its emergence and by ensuring that the needs of individuals and enterprises are met. The program's inter-related research objectives both focus on the technology developments of the information society and enable the close articulation between research and policy needed for a coherent and inclusive information society" (http://cordis.europa.eu/fp5/src/t-2.htm).
[13] *Games in school* is a project where the "European Schoolnet is undertaking a major study sponsored by the Interactive Software Federation of Europe on the use of games in schools in Europe, including video games, computer games, online games that run on consoles, computers, handhelds or mobile phones (http://games.eun.org/about/)" .

programme[14] (de Freitas, 2006). The four reviews have in common that they have been conducted as a part of a funded project. The purpose of the literature review was therefore to inform the funded projects' other research activities. The research activities can roughly be described to take an interest in the design of models, the design of learning materials, or the guidance for design of learning environments for educational purposes. There are also reports in the *Futurelab series* (Kirriemuir & McFarlane, 2004; Sefton-Green, 2004; Wegerif, 2002). According to the Futurelab[15] website, these are "reviews commissioned from outstanding academic researchers to offer a route map through the vast body of research into education and technology" (www.futurelab.org.uk). Not all of these reviews focus explicitly on games and learning. In Sefton-Green's review, games are positioned as one of several information and communication technologies (ICT) used by children and young people outside school. In Wegerif's review, games and simulations are also positioned along with other kinds of ICTs. This is also the case in a report produced by *Becta for the Department of Education and Skills* (Cox et al., 2004). Whereas Wegerif takes an interest in thinking skills in relation to ICT, Cox et al. focus on pedagogical issues in relation to ICT.

Peer-reviewed on-line journals

There are also reviews that focus "on publications addressing educational video game design, seeking to identify elements of game design that promote learning as well as the learning theories that conceptualize how video games foster learning". This review was published in the *Journal of Applied Educational Technology* (Dondlinger, 2007), a peer-reviewed online journal. According to the journal's website, JAET is intended for "an audience of teachers, professors, and educational administrators who deal with technology in K-20 environment" and "publishes articles focusing on classroom uses of technology and research in the field" (http://www.eduquery.com/jaet/). Egenfeldt-Nielsen's (2006) review on educational use of computer games is published in the scientific journal *Nordic Journal of Digital Literacy*. The journal is published by the Norwegian Network for IT research and Competence in Education (ITU), in collaboration with *Universitetsforlaget*, Oslo.

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[14] JISC is an abbreviation for *Joint Information Systems Committee*, which "is an independent advisory body that works with further and higher education by providing strategic guidance, advice and opportunities to use ICT to support learning, teaching, research and administration" "The JISC e-learning programme enables the development and effective use of digital technologies to support learning and teaching in universities and colleges, so that staff benefit from e-learning and students enjoy a more flexible learning experience" (http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/elearning.aspx).
[15] "Futurelab is an independent not-for-profit organization that is dedicated to transforming teaching and learning, making it more relevant and engaging to 21st century learners through the use of innovative practice and technology" (www.futurelab.org.uk).

Peer-reviewed international research journals

Only a few literature reviews were published in peer-reviewed international research journals. Linderoth, Lantz-Andersson and Lindström's review (2002) discusses computer games as a part of childhood, and uses five discrete units of analysis to sketch a map of the different research traditions of computer games in relation to childhood. Their article is published in the *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood* journal. Kebritchi and Hirumis's (2008) review was conducted to examine the pedagogical foundations of 24 educational games and was published in the *Computers & Education* journal. The authors take an instructional approach and suggest their analysis may "guide future research and development of educational games" (Ibid., p. 1729). The authors Sauve, Renaud, Kaufman, and Marquis (2007) set a good example by providing a context for their review and position themselves within the *Simulation and Advanced Gaming Environments* (SAGE) *for Learning* network. The authors' systematic review on the distinction between games and simulations is published in the *Educational Technology & Society* journal. The main interest in Wilson, Bedwell, Lazzara, Salas, Burke, Estock, Orvis and Conkey's (2009) review is in game components (e.g. game attributes) and their relation to learning outcomes. The authors also "provide conceptually based links between specific gaming characteristics with learning outcomes and propositions for future research" (Ibid., p. 259). This article is published in the *Simulation & Gaming* journal.

To sum up, research is identified that can be used to address and possibly solve problems that have to do with issues of the educational use of computer games. Several of the reviews have focused on design (here used in a broader sense), that is producing guidelines or requirements about how to design educational games or learning material – how to design learning environments with games. In that sense, this research may be seen as a step towards answering the rhetorical question presented in Chapter 1: *How can we harness games for learning?* And as games and learning in most reviews are positioned in relation to an educational setting of some kind, an interest in how technology such as games can be used to influence and predict learning in school is obvious. There is only one review that breaks this image. Linderoth, Lantz-Andersson, and Lindström (2002) sketch a map over the research traditions and knowledge scattered over the field. By using "units of analysis" (UOA) as the rationale for their categorization, approaches and traditions of games and the phenomena of "learning" in empirical studies reflect what Linderoth et al. identify as positive effects within

the category of *The Analysis of Gaming Effects*. A further discussion on this topic will be presented under the next heading. But it can be noted that the authors see normative judgments within effect studies a problem, and suggest a change in their UOA "from focus on effects to a focus on actual activities" (Ibid., p. 245).

Summary

In one way, the literature reviews can be seen as one source from which to present the field of digital games and learning, although, as argued above, it can be a straddle for the reader to sort out the myriad of arguments about digital games and learning. This may have to do with how the game studies field looks as a whole, and as presented in the introduction, how the knowledge production covers a wide spectrum that characterizes a multidisciplinary field. Critical issues in the literature reviews that challenge the reader can roughly be summarized thus:

- The format of a review representing all research there is on digital games and learning often takes its toll on depth in the discussion of theoretical and methodological issues in educational research;
- The context in which the literature review has been conducted, and what kind of work it is supposed to do;
- To a large extent, the object for reviewing research was related to the type of audience the literature review was directed at, and there are mixed audiences among scholars, designers, and educators;
- The mixed type of literature and resources that is used as the body for analysis, were sometimes blended. This makes it hard for the reader to separate between knowledge from practice and knowledge from research;
- There is an emphasis on exploring how games can be used for instructional purposes, which share some common theoretical starting points about learning that is not always discussed and explicated;
- There is a clear interest in the development of games for education.

Kirriemuir et al. (2004, p. 4) define two key themes in relation to the development of games for education:

1. The desire to harness the motivational power of games in order to make learning fun.
2. A belief that "learning through doing" in games such as simulations offers a powerful learning tool.

These two key themes found by Kirriemuir et al. are interesting since it creates tension between more cognitivist/constructivist approaches taken within instructional technology and more situated/pragmatic/social approaches within constructivism and sociocultural theory. This is also reflected in the literature reviews by the way the authors make use of citations. *Games, motivation, and learning* is a recurrent theme in literature reviews with citations to authors like Garris (2002), Malone (1981), who develops a theory of intrinsically motivating instruction by using the categories challenge, fantasy, and curiosity, and Csikszentmihalyi (1990), who coined the concept of *flow*, which is a concept that has been used in game studies to describe a certain stance of player experience. Researchers taking a more sociocultural approach in the literature reviews are the game researchers Gee (2007b) and Squire (2004). Gee and Squire are included in the reference lists in the literature reviews as much as Prensky. An interesting finding in relation to the above is reported by Cox et al. (2004) in their literature review:

> Research suggests that there is a gap between the types of use at home and at school. One survey (Mumtaz, 2001) of pupils in years 3 and 5 (ages 7-8 and 9-10) found that the most frequent activity at school was word processing (which the pupils found boring), while the most popular activity at home was playing games. As a result, the author suggested that schools should learn from what works at home and allow people to work on activities that they find valuable, motivating and worthwhile. (Ibid., p. 13)

The term "informal" is often used in the reviews to discuss learning outside school, whereas the term "formal" is used in educational settings. Informal activities involve *how young people use* games in their leisure time activities, while formal contexts concern *how games can be used or are used* in educational settings. This is often followed by a discussion of the importance of distinguishing between games used for entertainment or recreational purposes and games used for educational purposes. Games for entertainment are referred to as leisure games, mainstream games, or commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) games. Games for educational purposes are also referred to as serious games or epic games. As it has been

noticed in research that educational games have been perceived as boring by young people (Pivec & Pivec, 2008), attempts to use COTS games, sometimes by modeling parts of the game for the purpose of education, have also been done in educational settings.

There are some recurrent obstacles in game research that are highlighted in the reviews:

- There is no evidence of learning in the research and more empirical studies are called for;
- There was deficient methodology (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, 2006; Pivec & Pivec, 2008), where some problems in methodology were found to be the lack of control groups and comparison with other teaching and learning alternatives;
- There is no standard categorization of games, which is has been regarded as confusing when educators select games for use in education, and when researchers identify different research studies that could be explanatory;
- "[Carrying] out rigorous research without making conscious or accidental assumptions in this field will require researchers to develop a good – and updated – working knowledge of games, learning and education (all rapidly evolving fields)" (Kirriemuir & McFarlane, 2004, p. 25).

Most of the reviews report that despite the potential for using games for learning, there is a lack of empirical evidence to back up these claims. Some of the defaults in empirical studies are explained to depend on a deficient methodology, lack of theoretical discussion on learning theories, and a lack of distinction between different games and therefore arguments for taxonomies. Some researchers argue that is not possible due to the fast development of digital games, and that it illustrates how COTS games can fall under more than one genre.

Ideas of how technology can be used in school or education are not new. In a classic article *Paradigm shifts and instructional technology*, Koschmann (1996) describes the research in instructional technology by categorizing the research into four different paradigms, building on Kuhn's concept. The paradigms described by Koschmann (1996) are as follows: Computer-Assisted-Instruction (CAI); Intelligent Tutoring System (ITS); Logo-as-Latin paradigm, and Computer Supported Collaborative Learning (CSCL). Even though the paradigms can be discussed, and have been revisited by the author (Koschmann, 2001) to re-evaluate the evidence for these paradigms, I find Koschmann's work useful when trying to

conceptualize different research approaches in the research field of digital games and learning. Although many of the learning theories behind Koschmann's (1996) categories can be identified in Egenfeldt-Nielsen's (2006) review where he examines "the viability of the different learning theories in the field" (p. 184) of the research on the use of educational games, I will neither use Koschmann's conceptual framework to try to identifying shifts in game research, nor will I sketch a new emerging paradigm. I will not even use the term "paradigm". In later work, Egenfeldt-Nielsen (2007) uses the concept of *first, second, and third generation* of games in order to describe the perspectives when games are used in education. But I do not aim to focus on the development of educational games. Instead, the aim is to identify in the core elements of different approaches of game research. I do this not only in an effort to approach the epistemological and methodological frame, but also to identify the different views on the practice of research in the different approaches. What I find strong in Koschmann's papers, I found here to be weakly explicated in research of digital games. Koschmann addresses four research questions that guide his analysis of what constitutes the different research traditions (paradigms). The first two are more theoretically oriented, and the second two are more practically oriented (derived after Koschmann, 1996, p. 4):

1 The implicit theory of learning.
2 The theory of pedagogy. An important interest here according to Koschmann is the role of technology.
3 Questions exploring the research methodology, "i.e How are claims warranted? What counts as scientific evidence? What are the methods by which this evidence is gathered?" (Koschmann, 1996, p. 4)
4 The important research questions that the paradigm attempts to address. This question relates to what Kuhn meant by "legitimate" research problems, according to Koschmann.

The last two practically oriented questions are not explicated in most of the reviews. There might be one exception and that is Linderoth et al.'s (2002) review as they work with the concept of units of analysis (UOA) to sketch different research traditions. I believe that following Koschmann's questions would be beneficial not only for researchers in the field of games and learning in how to sharpen their questions and arguments, but also beneficial for researchers in the area of games and learning to locate and interpret research that has an explanatory framework of relevance (Säljö, 2009). Koschmann's paradigms and research

questions may help us find the explanatory framework used in studies working with open-ended, or "sandbox", simulation games. Looking upon games as learning environments, the resemblance between simulations and microworlds has been noticed in literature reviews (de Freitas, 2006; Leemkuil et al., 2000) and this will be explicated further on in this chapter.

POINTS OF DEPARTURE

Microworlds

As mentioned in Chapter 1, digital environments have been said to have a potential for exploratory learning (2005), meaning that the users can experiment with the content of a microworld, simulation program, or a digital game in such a way that they understand some scientific principle or alter their concept of a cultural phenomenon. This line of reasoning is strong in the constructionist tradition, where the potential of constructionist learning environments has been explored in educational settings (See for example Harel & Papert, 1991; Kafai & Resnick, 1996). But already in the 1960s a research project was initiated by Papert and his colleagues at *Massachusetts Institute of Technology* (MIT) with an interest in how technologies could enhance children's thinking and learning (Kafai & Resnick, 1996, p. 1). The group at MIT developed the Logo programming language in the 1970, designed as a tool for learning. In his controversial book *Mindstorms*, Papert (1980) shared his vision of what role the computer could play in rethinking education. His image of children working with a microworld is seen as an alternative learning environment to the traditional classroom setting (Rieber, 2004, p. 143) and "goes in the opposite direction" (Papert, 1980, p. 5) of what was common in the school at the time. The term "microworld" was coined by the mathematician and AI researcher Seymour Papert to describe explorative learning environments such as the software program provided by the language of Logo programming. These environments have often been of an open-ended nature and a holistic view of the learner is taken, emphasizing the learner's own interest, engagement and motivation. A microworld is described as "a computer-based interactive learning environment where the prerequisites are built into the system and where learners can become the active, constructing architects of their own learning" (Papert, 1980, p. 122). Papert presented his ideas of the computer as the power of educational change using Logo programming to exemplify how to promote general higher mental functions. In *Mindstorms* it becomes clear that Papert reacted toward not only schools, but also the previous educational technologies; he saw computer-

aided-instruction as being designed with the intention of the computer teaching the child. In contrast with previous software based on the principles of instruction, Papert's pedagogical ideas were based on the principles of "invention, play, and discovery" (Rieber, 2004, p. 583). Papert envisioned the computer as constituting a learning environment, or a *microworld*, in which the learner becomes the teacher and the computer the tutee. The underlying learning theory behind the applications that constitute a microworld is built on Piaget's genetic epistemology, which is often known as a constructivism. From his constructivistic model, Papert saw learning as a subjective construction, where the work of programming is seen as, apart from learning to program, having cognitive effects in a series of domains. In that way, Papert's "message has influenced not only teachers interested in computer-supported learning, but also many others interested in educational change in general" (Lilja & Lindström, 2002, p. 33, my translation).

The implicit theory of learning

The underlying theory of learning in Papert's work is influenced by Piaget's genetic epistemology. Both Piaget and Papert are developmentalists (Ackermann, 2001) and share the idea that learning must be understood in a genetic or process perspective.

> It must refer to the genesis of knowledge. What an individual can learn, and how he learns it, depends on what models he has available. This raises, recursively, the question of how he learned these models. (Papert, 1980, p. vii)

One of the basic ideas in constructivism is that the learner constructs knowledge by interacting with the environment, that is, knowledge is not something that can passively be received by the learner. The individual is seen as an active agent where taking action in the world is primary. The learner is driven by a need to explore and master the natural environment and the basic mechanism is how the individual adapts to the environment. Piaget explained this by a process of assimilation and accommodation. The learner is using previous knowledge and assimilates new experiences to previous cognitive models. Learning is something that happens when the learner reflects on these new experiences. Building knowledge is seen as a cumulative process ranging from the concrete to the abstract. Approaches in constructivism have often involved in problem-solving, meta-cognition, and scaffolding.

Although Piaget's project was to build a theory of the genesis of knowledge, Papert used his ideas to elaborate what he says in *Mindstorms* can be seen as an "applied genetic epistemology" (Papert, 1980, p. vii). For Papert, Piaget's view of learning was given, but he added the aspect of the affective. Papert did not think that Piaget had regarded the concept of the context. He tried to take constructivism a little bit further, and considered that students learn better if they could construct something meaningful to them. In later work, Papert (1991) coined the concept of constructionism:

> Constructio*n*ism – the N word as opposed to the V word – shares constructivism's connotation of learning as "building knowledge structures" irrespective of the circumstances of the learning. (Ibid., p. 1)

The quotation above shows the relationship with constructivism and might reflect Papert's work with Piaget in Geneva in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Ackermann, 2001), and what influence it came to have. In the book *Constructionism* Papert (1991, p. 1) suggests that one can think of constructionism as "learning-by-making". Similarly, in the introductory chapter to *Constructionism in practice*, Kafai and Resnick (1996) point to the constructivist ideas of the active child and claim that "[c]hildren don't *get* ideas; they *make* ideas" (p. 1). This is something the authors believe is easier when the child is engaged in an activity of making some kind of artifact. In that way, they see that "constructionism involves two intertwined types of construction: the construction of knowledge in the context of building personally meaningful artifacts" (Ibid.).

The theory of pedagogy – the implicit model of instruction

But constructionism is not only seen as a theory of learning, it is also seen as a "strategy for education" (Kafai & Resnick, 1996, p. 1). In contrast with previous software based on the principles of instruction, Papert's pedagogical idea was based on the principles of "invention, play, and discovery" (Rieber, 2004), where the active learner constructs and re-constructs new knowledge while working with the tool. This set aside more traditional ideas of traditional teaching as often known as instruction. Teaching is something best done "in such a way as to produce the most learning for the least teaching" (Papert, 1993, p. 139). Papert argues that this is not to say that constructionists do not see the value in instruction as such. Instead Papert (1993) introduces the concept of *instructionism* as the antagonist to *constructionism*. This is

the ideology stating that there is one way to teach and to make decisions on what the child needs them to teach. Instead, Papert (1993) argues:

> Constructionism is built on the assumption that children will do best by finding ("fishing") for themselves the specific knowledge they need; organized or informal education can help most by making sure they are supported morally, psychologically, materially, and intellectually in their efforts. (Ibid., p. 139)

The key to learning seems not to be what is taught or instructed, but how the learner actively engages with what is being learned. This is also expressed in the chapter where Papert introduce "mathetic" as a word for learning. By sharing his own experiences learning the names of flowers, he experienced when a year had passed in his study how "learning explodes when you stay with it" (Papert, 1993, p. 103). Papert describes this experience as being closer to connectionism than to constructivism. This is also one of the things Ackermann (2001) highlights as one of the difference between Papert and Piaget:

> His contribution is to remind us that intelligence should be defined and studied *in-situ*; alas, that being intelligent means being situated, connected, and sensitive to variations in the environment. In contrast to Piaget, Papert draws our attention to the fact that "diving into" situations rather than looking at them from a distance, that connectedness rather than separation, are powerful means of gaining understanding. (Ibid., p. 8)

Research methodology

"Following in the tradition of classic Piagetian research, much of Papert's work with Logo has tended to consist of case studies designed to document children's achievements while working with the computer" (Koschmann, 1996, p. 10). According to Koschmann (Koschmann, 2001), Papert argued "that the effects of using computers in schools were multiple and that they could neither be studied in isolation nor be studied exhaustively (p. 20, n. 4).

What are the important research questions?

According to Ackermann (2001):

> Papert's research focuses on how knowledge is formed and transformed within specific contexts, shaped and expressed through different media, and processed in different

people's minds. While Piaget liked to describe the genesis of internal mental stability in terms of successive plateaus of equilibrium, Papert is interested in the dynamics of change. He stresses the fragility of thought during transitional periods. He is concerned with how different people think once their convictions break down, once alternative views sink in, once adjusting, stretching, and expanding their current view of the world becomes necessary. Papert always points toward this fragility, contextuality, and flexibility of knowledge under construction. (Ackermann, 2001, p. 8)

Critique

The researcher Roy Pea and his colleagues worked on a project examining different cognitive aspects of Logo programming in the 1980s. One study reports on the examination of cognitive abilities and programming skills of novice learners in programming Logo. The participants were 79 high school students attending a six-week summer program. The program was set up to improve math skills and to introduce programming. Every day, 90 minutes were spent in a Logo-programming course. The classes were small, and the students worked in pairs on each computer. The program was reported to have a constructivistic approach. It was noted that even though the instructors had created a detailed curriculum for the learning experiences, the style in the classroom was influenced "by the discovery-learning model advocated by Papert (1980)" (Kurland, Clement, Mawby, & Pea, 1987). It is further reported that the instructors saw it as their primary role to influence students toward positive attitudes towards mathematics and programming. Given this approach, it was found that the student only learned the most basic programming skills. The students did not succeed in developing enough understanding to attain high-level thinking skills. Furthermore it was found that some programming could be performed without making use of any formal systematic approaches. The authors argue that even if programming can promote high-level thinking skills, such skills are not necessary for the novice programmer to generate desired effects on the screen. The authors report that educators and parents who have read *Mindstorms* (Papert, 1980) are surprised that programming has to be taught at all. The authors conclude that unguided, free exploration does not develop a deeper understanding among the students. In another study in Logo classrooms, Pea and Kurland (1984) argue against the discovery learning model and make the point that "programming is not taught by computers or by programming languages but by teachers, with the aid of the supports of a programming environment" (Pea & Kurland, 1984, p. 149). Papert answered the critique in the article *Information Technology and Education: Computer Criticism vs. Technocentric Thinking* (Papert, 1987).

THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF GAMES, SIMULATIONS AND MICROWORLD

Different categorizations – different genres

As noted in the literature reviews, there is no standardization of how to categorize games and simulations. Several researchers have seen that the distinction between games and simulation is often blurred in discussions of learning environments (Leemkuil et al., 2000). A common distinction is between games made for recreation or entertainment and games made for education or training. This shows the interrelationship between the game as a designed artifact and the game as mediated in human practices. Understanding or exploring this interrelationship has been seen as important not only for knowing how to better design games, but also for designing learning environment with games (Gee, 2008). As pointed out, games and simulations are not new phenomena. A similar division between non-digital games was made by the authors Cruickshank and Telfer (1980), when they used the term "non-academic games" to describe games played for fun, and "academic games" as the term for games played for learning. Furthermore, they claim that academic games can be divided into "non-simulation games" and "simulation games" dependent on the kind of learning experience that is supposed to take place (Cruickshank & Telfer, 1980). Non-simulation games refers to more goal-oriented objectives, like solving a problem in subject matter, whereas simulation games are seen as a learning environment that is intended to provide the player with insights of a process or "real world" event simulated. Similar arguments can be found by the authors O'Neill, Wainess and Baker (2005), who find the terminology of games in literature reviews to be a problematic area. They identify "games", "simulation", and "simulation games" as commonly used terms in the literature, but also note that there is little consensus in education about how these terms should be defined. As the features and goal structure are seen to differ between games (linear goal structure), simulations (non-linear goal structure), and simulation games, they argue that "it is important when examining the potential effects of the two media – games and simulations – to be clear about which one is being examined" (O'Neil et al., 2005, p. 459). Sauvé et al. similarly argue (2007) that the "inconclusive research results with regard to the impact of games and simulations are linked to the absence of clear concept definitions" (p. 247).

Table 2.1

An Example of Categorizations of Games, Simulation and Microworlds

Categorizations of games and simulations by three authors:		
Cruickshank et al. (1980, p. 76)	O'Neil et al. (2005, p. 460) as stated by Gredler	Rieber (2005, p. 563)
Term used for games in education		
Academic games: Non-simulation games (non-digital)	Games	Educational games
Games in which players use principles of a subject or discipline and solve related problems, as in math or spelling. E.g. Anagrams Scrabble	'games consist of rules that describe allowable player moves, game constraints and privileges (such as ways of earning extra turns) and penalties for illegal (non-permissible) actions. Further, the rules may be imaginative in that they need not relate to real-world events' (Gredler, 1996, p. 523). Goal of winning. Linear goal-structure	Competitive rule-based activities involving one or more players with an expressed goal of performing or meeting a goal at a superior level (i.e. winning) either in relation to a previous performance level (one player game) or in relation to performance levels of other players. Success in the activity requires use of subject matter in some way.
Terms used for simulation		
Academic games: Simulation games	Simulation	Educational simulation
Games in which players are given a simulated environment in which to play, giving them an insight into the object system or process simulated	'a dynamic set of relationships among several variables that (1) change over time and (2) reflect authentic causal processes' (Gredler, 1996, p. 523). A goal of discovering causal relationships. Non-linear goal structure	A computer program that models some phenomenon or activity and is designed to have participants learn about the phenomenon or activity through interaction with it. Participants usually have a defined role in the simulation.
Term used for blended modes		
-	Simulation games or gaming	Microworld

	simulations	
-	A blend of the features of the two interactive media, games and simulations	An interactive, exploratory learning environment of a small subset of domain that is immediately understandable by a user and also intrinsically motivating to the user. A microworld can be changed and modified by the user in order to explore the domain and to test hypotheses about the domain.

As shown, the definitions of games, simulations, and the examples of blended modes are based on ideas about their use in education. Issues of how the potential of different games can be utilized in education are common topics for discussion in areas of research in instructional design, game-based learning, the serious games movement, and the epic games movement. Here games, simulations and microworlds are examples of instructional technology, and as such they are seen as "products" used in education to meet some learning objectives (Rieber, 2005). Learning within these approaches is thus something pre-defined, and a common position taken is that learning with these interactive environments "is not effective when no instructional measures or support is added" (Leemkuil et al., 2000). Leemkuil et al. (2000) give examples of different kinds of support such as: "implementing model progression, prompting, assignments, feedback, additional information, monitoring facilities, reflection, debriefing, explication, and different problem formats".

While some researchers stress the importance of distinguishing between games and suggest different taxonomies to make this easier (Sauvé et al., 2007), taxonomies are found in other studies to be somewhat problematic since different stakeholders (game industry, academia, player communities) use different taxonomies for different purposes (Kirriemuir & McFarlane, 2004). Due to the fast development of digital games, there are current games that can fall under more than one genre and we have not yet seen the games in the future development of games. A more complicated picture arises when games designed for entertainment have been used in schools. "Thus, attempts to generalize the effects of games or gaming may be unhelpful" (Kirriemuir & McFarlane, 2004, p. 2). It has been reported that students are generally critical of educational games, as they lack the features of COTS games

(Pivec & Pivec, 2008). They also report that when parts of games have been modeled for use in education, it has often been COTS games.

GAMES, LEARNING AND EDUCATION

When games have been discussed in relation to learning and education in the literature, a myriad of arguments can be found. One way to try to sort out this argumentation can be by focusing on *what is supposed to be learned by playing games*. There is also a trend that ascribes more student-centered approaches in research according to constructivism. Common themes that arise in the literature will be discussed under *Games, simulations, and microworld*.

What is supposed to be learned by playing games

Games implemented in an educational setting are often supposed to meet some kind of educational objective. These arguments have been seen as claims made about games that yet have to be strengthened by empirical results. What is supposed to be learned here is categorized as practical skills, cognitive skills, affective objectives, and social skills

Games, learning and practical skills

There are studies discussing objectives of what the learner is to perform. Learning to play a computer game is such an objective; here the player has to learn how to operate equipment in order to be able to play the game. Looking at the performances of how to learn to play a game also opens up to other social and cultural aspects. This can include playing games in order to learn more general skills of using information technology. Examples of research can be found in the area of digital literacy or media literacy. Claims have also been made that digital production could benefit digital literacy.

Games, learning, and cognitive skills

Studies in this area often focus on the players' intellectual capacity. It is frequently claimed that games may assist in developing thinking skills. There are ideas that games provide environments to enhance reasoning, problem solving, scaffolding, etc.

Games, intrinsic motivation, and learning

Arguments that people learn better if they are intrinsically motivated and engaged in the activity have inspired researchers to examine what makes games so captivating. Malone (1981) takes the starting point by reviewing theories on intrinsic motivation to describe studies on highly motivating games. These are studies, according to Malone (1981), that take an interest in what makes learning fun. The role of motivation in learning is something Malone believes is neglected in most recent work. Motivation is ascribed to more cognitive oriented theories and refers to the work of Bruner and Piaget, who according to Malone (1981) argue "the importance of intrinsically motivated play-like activities for many kinds of deep learning" (p. 335). He describes an intrinsically motivating activity as an activity someone does for "its own sake". Malone summarizes adjectives such as "fun", "interesting", "captivating", "appealing", and "intrinsically motivating" to describe such activities (Ibid., p. 335). He develops an intrinsically motivating instruction that is based on the categories of challenge, fantasy, and curiosity. All these are seen as important aspects of motivation. Challenges refer to goals with uncertain outcomes. Malone notes that fantasy is "claimed to have both cognitive and emotional advantages in designing instructional environments" (p. 333). A distinction is also made between intrinsic fantasy and extrinsic fantasy. Curiosity is the last category, which is "separated into sensory and cognitive components, and it is suggested that cognitive curiosity can be aroused by making learners believe their knowledge structures are incomplete, inconsistent, or unparsimonious" (Ibid., p. 333).

Games, learning and affective objectives

Ideas about how games and simulation can provide virtual worlds that can lead to new experiences are common in the literature on games and learning. As reported by Bredemeier and Greenblat (1981), the potential of using simulation games for affective learning has been widely endorsed. The authors (Bredemeier & Greenblat, 1981, pp. 322-324) provide examples of studies with contradicting results on *attitude change*. They claim that the available evidence suggests that "under certain circumstances and for some students, simulation-gaming can be more effective than traditional methods of instruction in facilitating positive attitude change toward the subject and its purposes (Bredemeier & Greenblat, 1981, p. 324).

Games, learning and social skills

Social skills in the literature are often related to collaboration with other participants in the setting or other players in a virtual environment where many players are connected (see for example, Hromek & Roffey, 2009). Collaboration can be seen as a social transformation, where participation includes learning of communication, discussion. It can also be taking part in role-play of different kinds, where taking a role can influence the identity among the learners.

GAMES, SIMULATIONS AS MICROWORLD

Games as exploratory environments

The argument of games being playgrounds for experimentation or exploration also has roots in constructivism. Constructivism sees the learner as an active agent where taking action is primary. Learning is not something that is just a passive act of receiving knowledge. Learning is driven by the need to explore and master the surrounding environment. The learner uses previous knowledge to construct new knowledge, from concrete to abstract – looking at the learner as a thinker (LAT), as Bruner has expressed it. These ideas of how learning takes place show in argumentations of what games teach. Here is an example:

> Engaging in computer games and adhering to their rules means that users have a framework in which to explore, probe, hypothesise and test. This active discovery places the learner as co-producer of knowledge, an important aspect in the personalised learning paradigm. (ELSPA, 2006, p. 14)

Similar arguments have been used by Amory, Naicker, Vincent, & Adams (1999) who claim that "Playing games is an important part of our social and mental development" (p. 8). It is the game space that constitutes motivations for play, exploration, challenges and engagement. These assumptions are based on ideas from constructivism, where the learner is driven by an intrinsic motivation to explore and master the environment. Different literature reviews made on computer games and learning have found that the concept of "playful learning" is often through the research literature:

The notion of playful learning emphasizes experiences such as experimentation, exploration, trial and error, imagination, role play, and simulation of experience suggesting that it might be possible to develop environments for learning based on these activities. (Kirriemuir & McFarlane, 2004, p. 18).

Maybe one such example is the MIT – University of Wisconsin's re-work of *Neverwinter Nights*. The modified game of *Revolution* was made to facilitate teaching of the history of American Revolution (de Freitas, 2006, p. 42). Studies have later been undertaken by Francis (Francis, in press) to explore the educational potential and "the study focused upon story telling as the basis for experiential learning" (de Freitas, p. 42). Experiential learning is defined as the model defined by Kolb (1984), influenced by Lewin's learning cycle. According to de Freitas (2006, p. 43) Kolb built his model on previous work by Piaget and Dewey and "constructivist notions that learning builds upon meaning construction". In a comparison with exploratory learning where learning happens:

Learning through exploring environments, realia, lived and virtual experiences with tutorial and peer-based support. This notion of learning is based upon the notion that learning patterns can be helpfully transferred to dissimilar situations through meta reflection. Unlike Kolb's experimental learning this process is not always circular (although it may be), and does not rely upon lived experience. Rather the approach acknowledges the cognitive process that helps individuals to use their imagination and creativity to draw out lessons from interactions as well as extracting meaning from data. This process can be complicated and happen on different levels of understanding. That is, learning can be supported through different media, and through multimedia, interactions and textual engagement. (de Freitas, 2006, p. 69)

Immersion as a potential for learning

As already mentioned, the players' motivation is taken as the driving force for learning. This is often taken as the point from which to explore how the motivational power of computer game playing can be used in training and educational settings. Motivation is brought up in the literature reviews and is documented in different ways. For instance, reviews of the literature of games and learning have reported that computer games:

motivate via fun /…/, via challenge and via instant, visual feedback within a complete, interactive virtual playing environment, whereby ambience information creates an immersive experience, sustaining interest in the game. (Mitchell & Savill-Smith, 2004, p. 58)

The quotation highlights common beliefs that the game offer an environment that makes the player/learner feel and experience certain things which are taken as the premises for learning. But they make also claims of how to act when playing a game and that games can

put learners in the role of decision-maker, pushing them through ever harder challenges, engaging the player in experimenting with different ways of learning and thinking. (Mitchell & Savill-Smith, 2004, p. 58)

As we can see, there are several themes covering the motivational aspects, and one of these themes is the concept of immersion. In some documents, motivation and immersion are found to be interrelated (FAS, 2006a) and this when the player is engaged in the game. "Immersion is defined as the experience of feeling a part of the synthetic experience (Stanney, 2002). Csikszentmihalyi (1990) refers to immersion as *flow*" (Ibid, p. 4). What is worth noticing is how the concept of immersion is often used to highlight the ability of games to make the player/learner enter another realm. De Freitas (2006, p. 24) considers immersion to be a part, together with fidelity of the representation of the game. Some studies define the concept of immersion a little bit differently:

When the player feels in control of their role, they fully immerse themselves in the narrative. This immersion is the key to the player investing effort in the mastery of the game, and it is in this investment of effort that the opportunities for deep learning exist. (Leyland, 1996, p. 3)

This author discusses the feeling or the experience of being immersed, and as the next quote will illustrate, it is a kind of holistic view of learning that is reflected when the body, mind and emotions are working together.

However, perhaps the most important criteria for learning in games is sustained imaginative immersion of the player. This immersion allows the player to invest something of themselves in a game or learning experience as they fully engage with the

role. This personal investment is a critical factor in achieving deep learning, as learners will then mediate their own learning experiences. (Leyland, 1996, p. 4)

There are also games that are designed so that the concept of immersion is combined with the pedagogical idea of learning by doing. In the *WolfQuest* game, developed and hosted by the Minnesota Zoo with funding from the National Science Foundation, the players are supposed to learn about wolf behavior and ecology. A central premise is that immersion motivates the player to learn (7th space Interactive, n.d., p. 35). A similar approach is taken by the Uncharted Depths project, where a commercial game company has worked together with researchers to create, as they say, "a complex immerse 3D world within which players experience what it is like to be an active researcher exploring a new environment and conducting a variety of field work and experiments to try to understand it" (ELSPA, 2006, p. 35). The project claims that their games allow the players to enter an environment that is impossible in any other way. The learning outcome of having played the game is expressed thus: "Students walk away from the game with solid personal experiences upon which to base future learning about research practices and the field of science at large" (Ibid).

GAMES AND PLAY IN EMPIRICAL STUDIES

Learning world history through a simulation in an educational setting

The purpose of Squires' (2004) study was to explore what would happen when taking a commercial, complex simulation game to an educational setting. The study focused on how *Civilization III* mediated the players' understanding of world history. In three naturalistic case studies, Squire examined the players' engagement with the game – how social interaction occurred, how understanding emerged, and what role game play had for the students' understanding. The study took a sociocultural approach on learning and utilized activity theory as a lens to understand the learning environments. Engagement with the game is described as a "complex process of appropriation and resistance, whereby the *purposes* of game play was negotiated among students' identities, classroom goals, and the affordances of *Civilization III*" (Squire, 2004, abstract). The study revealed that the students engaged in game play in unique ways that influenced how questions were raised and how world history was explored. Squire found multiple modes of play that varied from time to time and between students. More successful students developed a conceptual understanding of geography and

history, but a richer understanding of these concepts was harder to find. The author suggests that game play should be studied as a social phenomenon, rather that human-computer interaction with the game (Squire, 2004, p. 336). To succeed in implementing games in education, considerations of how the game is locally situated must be taken. The study highlights these unsolved challenges of implementing such a complex game within education.

Game play as embedded in the everyday after-school clubs

In Ito's (2009) study, games and game play are understood in broader contexts of culture, history, and institution. She takes an interest in the development and marketing of edutainment software for children that bloomed in the late 1980s and 1990s, and how it relates to children's media use in their everyday lives. She does a genre analysis by utilizing the concepts of media genres and participation genres "that cuts across various points in the circuit of culture" (Ito, 2009, p. 14) – production, distribution, and consumption. Development and marketing of games are seen as linked but external to the site of reception. By drawing on multi-sited ethnographic material, Ito observes children's game play in after-school clubs, interviews with designers and developers within the industry, and advertising and industry material. These after-school centers are providing children with opportunities to participate in a setting were they can work with edutainment games with their peers and adults (undergraduate students). The interactions with the games and the social interactions with peers and undergraduate students around the screen were videotaped. Video analysis was used to explore the different ways the children interacted with the games.

Computer and video games in family life

In Aarsand's study, computer activities in children's everyday life is explored (Aarsand, 2007). Data consists of video recordings, interviews, and field notes. Two of the chapters focus around activities with games. One of them focuses on the placement of game consoles in home settings. It was found that only a few of the children (8-12 years) had access to the game console in their bedrooms. Instead, the game consoles were placed in communal spaces as part of family politics. It is argued that "the distinction between communal/private was also actualized in the participants' negotiations about access to game consoles as well as negotiations about what to play, when, and for how long" (Aarsand, 2007, abstract). The chapter presents two strategies that were used "for appropriating communal places for

computer game activities. The other study focuses on gaming in family life. It draws on a large-scale data set of video recording in middle class families. "[I]ntersubjective negotiations in relation to game technology" (Aarsand, 2007, p. 53) were documented and the question of "Where is the action taking place – in the virtual world or 'real' world, that is, are the participants actually playing or are they merely talking about gaming or planning to play?" (Ibid., p. 53) was addressed. The study utilizes Goffman's concept of response cries for the analysis. It was found that in gaming between children, "response cries co-occurred with their animations of game characters and with sound making, singing along, and code switching in ways that formed something of an *action aesthetic*" (Ibid., p. 145), most seen among equals (in this case children). It was also found that response cries were rare during the planning phases where the participants were engaged in setting up or adjusting the game (see also Aarsand & Aronsson, 2009).

The players' meaning of the activity of play

By using game play as the unit of analysis, Linderoth (2004) explored children's experiences of interaction with different computer games. Video technology was used to generate data and generated a total of 23.5 hours of video data of game playing sessions in a home environment. Participants in the study were aged 6-11 years. The purpose of the study was to "identify and depict structures in the meaning" that emerged during the players' interaction with the games. Different computer games were used in the game play sessions, but one major finding in Linderoth's study was that players could have very different experiences of their game play when the same game was used, depending on their focus in the game and how the players framed the activity. Linderoth (2004) identified three different interaction patterns based on the players' focus in the game:

- *Rule-focus framework* was the most common framework and describes patterns of interaction where the players focused on what could be done in the game, and not what they represented.
- *Theme-focus framework* identified interaction pattern where the players tended to see the game as representation and utilized their previous experience of the game in two different ways to make meaning. The theme of the game could either be used as a resource for short moments of socio-dramatic play, or the theme was used to draw assumptions and figuring out how the rules of the game worked.

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- *Aesthetics-focused framework* describes patterns of interaction where the players tended to focus on and make comments about the representational content, such as sounds or images, within the game. There were also instances in the video material when players used the aesthetics as their agenda for design activities in their game play. In these examples, the players focus more on what they thought looked nice, ugly, or "cool" than on the functionality within the game.

The framework should not be seen as fixed, but rather as something negotiated by the players when interacting with the game (Linderoth, 2004). But the frameworks are seldom met. Linderoth concludes that the most significant finding is that players tended to make sense of the rules in accordance with their local function in the game, something which means that they tended to focus less on what was being represented. This result contradicts many of the rhetorical statements made about the educational possibilities of computer games and the immersive nature of virtual environments.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL APPROACHES

This chapter starts by briefly presenting some of the theoretical underpinnings that have guided how the game play activity in this study is understood. As will be shown in this chapter, the theoretical underpinnings for this study are based on a situated view of learning and cognition. To be more specific, this study adapts a sociocultural approach towards learning that proceeds from Vygotsky's (1978, 1986) work, and explores some of the ideas which he regarded as fantasy and creativity (Vygotsky, 2004). Finally, some of Goffman's ideas on social interaction and its character, verbal as well as nonverbal, are presented. "[Goffman's] concern over the years has been to promote acceptance of this face-to-face domain as an analytically viable one – a domain which might be titled, for want of any happy name, the interaction order – a domain whose preferred method of study is microanalysis" (Goffman, 1983b, p. 2). I have deliberately chosen to limit my presentation of theory to concepts and arguments that I actually use in my analyses. In some cases, though, it has been necessary to provide some context for a specific concept or a theoretical approach.

THE SITUATIVE/PRAGMATIST-SOCIOHISTORIC VIEW

As highlighted in Roger Säljö's (2009) article *Learning, theories of learning, and units of analysis in research*, "learning" is described as an elusive term. This is something that the two previous chapters have illustrated. Chapter 1 gave examples of how an everyday understanding of the term learning is expressed in the argumentation for the qualities of digital games as learning environments. Chapter 2 illustrated how game-related research on

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games and learning are scattered over several disciplines, with sometimes confusing and contradictory results. Within the field of learning sciences, learning and cognition are understood very differently, depending on the epistemological beliefs in different theoretical traditions (Greeno, Collins, & Resnick, 1996; Säljö, 2009). As argued by Säljö, these different theoretical underpinnings will unavoidably effect what we see as the most important unit of analysis. They include what questions we find interesting, what we do to answer them, and what we regard as reasonable results (as will be further explored in Chapter 4). The perspectives identified by Greeno, Collins and Resnick correspond to what they consider "three general views of knowing and learning in European and North American thought" and what they refer to as the "behaviorist/empiricist", "cognitive/rationalist", and "situative/pragmatist-sociohistoric" perspectives. These perspectives were briefly discussed in Chapter 2 in relation to the previous research on games and learning. In this chapter, the third perspective will be further illuminated as the theoretical approaches taken in this study share some of the epistemologies that could be placed in the family of the situative/pragmatist-sociohistoric view. What pragmatism, as formulated by Dewey and Mead, share with sociohistoricism, as formulated by Vygotsky, is that they "emphasize that knowledge is constructed in practical activities of groups of people as they interact with each other and their material environments" (Greeno et al., 1996, p. 16). Furthermore, the situative perspective are seen as sharing the analytical "focus on processes of interaction of individuals with other people and with physical and technological system" (Ibid., p. 17). Ethnography, ecological psychology, and situation theory are research traditions included in the situative perspective. In this way, the sociocultural approaches and the ideas on interaction derived from Goffman share the same analytical focus.

Socio-cultural-historical approaches

This study uses Vygotsky's view of creativity as an analytical approach. This view is grounded in socio-cultural-historical approaches towards learning that were employed already in the 1920s-1930s. This presentation starts with an overview of the "Vygotskian school" before it specifically discusses Vygotsky's view of fantasy and creativity.

As mentioned, the theoretical underpinnings for socio-cultural-historical approaches originate from the ideas of the Russian psychologist Lev S. Vygotsky (1896-1934). Together with his students and collaborators such as Alexei N. Leont'ev and Alexander R. Luria, he developed

what is often known as a cultural-historical theory on human development and learning. The theory was grounded in the idea that all human activities are embedded in "cultural contexts, are mediated by language and other symbol systems, and can be best understood when investigated in their historical development" (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 191). This view on human development was a pioneering one, and challenged behaviorist and subjectivist positions in psychology at the time (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Wertsch, 1985a). Instead of focusing exclusively on the external (e.g. concepts of stimuli and response) or the internal (e.g. through introspection), the focus on "[t]he [dynamic] interdependence of individual-internal and social-external processes in learning and development is the cornerstone of Vygotsky's theory /…/" (Mahn, 2003, p. 128). Central in Vygotsky's thinking was to overcome a dualism that separated the individual from the practices s/he takes part in, and "[i]n this way he rejected the Cartesian dichotomy between the internal and the external" (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 192). It is suggested that one way to understand Vygotsky's approach to psychology is to consider its emergence in the wake of the Russian Revolution. Vygotsky and his collaborators were committed to reformulating an alternative to psychology, rooted in the philosophical tradition of Marxism (dialectical and historical materialism), that could better assist society in the emerging Soviet Union (Wertsch, 1985a; Wertsch, del Río, & Alvarez, 1995). Wertsch et al. (1995) point out that "/…/ Vygotsky himself seldom, if ever, used the term "sociocultural."" (Ibid., p. 6) and it is suggested that the terms "sociohistorical" or "cultural-historical" were most often used when referring to their work. Even though the intellectual milieu only lasted for about two decades, the theoretical foundation had a great impact on Soviet psychology. After Vygotsky's "premature death in 1934 his works were banned and erased from the history of Soviet psychology" (Bakhurst, 2005, p. 174) and more than twenty years passed before his works gradually began to be published again in the USSR. During the time Vygotsky's work was suppressed, his thinking was carried forward by his collaborators "largely within an oral culture which itself was influenced greatly by changing social and political circumstances" (Bakhurst, 2005, p. 174). Many general concepts and ideas have been proposed in Vygotsky's work, but not all of them were fully developed and integrated in a systematic theory (Bakhurst, 2005; Daniels, 2005; van Oers, 2004). Some of the concepts that originate in Vygotsky's work have been further developed by his collaborators or discussed by other Soviet scholars after his death. An example of this is the concept of "activity" which is recurrent in Vygotsky´s writings and was further developed especially by Leont'ev in the theory of activity (Wertsch, 1981). But there has also been an interest in the West in understanding Vygotsky's ideas. Especially since "they really became

known in the West in the 1970s" (Daniels, 2005, p. 2). Leont'ev (1997) points out two aspects of Vygotsky's creative work in order to understand "the exceptionality of his scientific fate" (p. 9). On the one hand, there are the concrete facts, methods, and hypotheses that have been confirmed and developed by contemporary psychologists, Leont'ev argues. The elaborated methods and the facts found in Vygotsky's work are now considered classics, he continues. On the other hand, there is a theoretical methodological aspect that Leont'ev points out:

> Being one of the greatest theoretical psychologists of the 20th century, he was truly decades ahead of his time. And the topicality of Vygotsky's work lies in the theoretical methodological plane. That is why we should not speak about his conceptions as if they were somehow completed. His concrete investigations were just the first stage in the realization of his theoretical methodological program. (Leont'ev, 1997, p. 9ff)

Neo-Vygotskian streams of thinking

The growing interest in different socio-cultural-historical aspects rooted in Vygotsky's ideas has influenced different streams of thinking and interpretations in the West. These take an interest in different aspects of the socio-cultural-historical human nature, sharing a common past, but have sometimes been developed in isolation from each other (Cole, 1995). Michael Cole (1995), a contemporary scholar, identifies cultural-historical, sociocultural, activity-based conceptions on human nature (p. 190) and what term to use has been considered important. For some time discussions of what term to use is something that have been noted by several contemporary scholars in the West (Cole, 1995; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Wertsch et al., 1995). Jim Wertsch, another contemporary scholar, has proposed the use of the term "sociocultural" to "signify a general approach in the human sciences" (Wertsch et al., 1995, p. 3). In the sociocultural tradition, the meditational role of language and dialogue is often emphasized in Vygotsky's writings. Contemporary researchers who emphasize the role of dialogue in situated sociocultural practices include Jane Lave, Barbara Rogoff, Roger Säljö, Etienne Wenger, and Jim Wertsch. Michael Cole, on the other hand, argues that a change to the sociocultural term "does a disservice to the historical record and fails to add conceptual clarity, since cultural-historical phenomena are also necessarily social" (Cole, 1995, p. 212ff). Instead he uses the term "cultural-historical" or "cultural-historical activity theory". Within this stream of thinking, the significance of culture and history is emphasized and the meditational role of artifacts in human activities is explored. The related school of

Activity Theory can also be mentioned. Koschmann (1996) refers to the Russian researcher Leont'ev and notes how "Activity Theory takes, as its unit of analysis, human goal-directed activity in its cultural context" and "[i]t focuses, therefore, on signs, symbols, rules, methods, instruments, and other artifacts that serve to mediate this activity" (p. 12). The different streams of thinking are all related, share some tenets in the same past, but are heterogeneous (Cole, 1995; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Wertsch et al., 1995). Although, and as argued by Cole (1995), it would be unfortunate if the work in the different streams of thinking should continue to develop their work in isolation from each other:

> It is time for those who come to question about the socio-cultural-historical constitution of human nature to join in a cooperative search for their common past and to initiate cooperative efforts to address the difficult intellectual issues and staggering national and international problems facing humanity on the post-Cold War era. (Cole, 1995, p. 189ff)

This shows that the theoretical discussion is living and indicates that the socio-cultural-historical enterprises sharing some common tenets originated in Vygotsky's ideas. In this way, the game studies conducted by Mizuko Ito (2009), Jonas Linderoth (2004), and Kurt Squire (2004), and as presented in the previous chapter, can be seen as representing approaches of cultural-historical, sociocultural, and activity theory. The different approaches taken in these three studies have influenced not only what has been focused on, the sociocultural settings in which they were carried out, and what games have been used. This study has similarities and differences with all three of them. This study is more congenial with the dialogic tradition put forward within sociocultural approaches (Säljö, 2000; Wertsch, 1991; Wertsch et al., 1995).

Sociocultural approaches towards learning

By leaning on Burmenskaya's work from 1992, Daniels (2005) highlights that sometimes interpretations of Vygotsky's work "have been marked more by enthusiasm for Western pedagogical preoccupations than by concern to understand the range and depth of his arguments" (p. 2). And there is no doubt that sociocultural approaches towards learning have become an influential and competing paradigm in contemporary educational research. But according to Kozulin (2003), a specially designed learning activity is distinguished from learning in a generic sense within this approach:

> Learning in a generic sense is a part of many human activities, such as play, practical activity, and interpersonal interaction. Although an important component of these activities, learning, however, does not constitute their goal. What distinguishes learning as a special kind of activity is its focus on changes produced in the learner. The goal of the learning activity is to make the individual a competent learner /…/. (Kozulin, 2003, p. 33)

This is how learning is relevant for a study like this where collaborative computer game play is studied in a home setting. Säljö (2005) also argues that it is a problem when learning is confused with ideas of teaching, instruction, tutoring, and the like in pedagogical discussions. If teaching is understood as constituting a variety of methods to foster learning, there is a risk of seeing teaching as the cause of learning. Säljö's (Ibid., p. 15) point is that teaching should not be confused with learning, nor should teaching be seen as the cause of learning. This is not to minimize the important role teachers have for their students within educational contexts, but to emphasize that learning should be understood in a much broader perspective. Furthermore, Säljö highlights that learning has often been seen as having positive connotations, when this might make the term empty and shallow. He reminds us that all learning within a society is not always for the better; learning can also be something dangerous or unwanted by the collective or the individual. That is how the term learning is understood in this study. Wertsch (1991, 1985b) has proposed three themes that run through Vygotsky's theoretical work: 1) the genetic, or developmental, analysis; 2) the social origins; and 3) that actions are mediated by tools and signs. The purpose here is to provide an introduction to the sociocultural theory and to sketch some of the core ideas and concepts.

In Vygotsky's conceptual framework, the culture and the social environment that surround the individual are essential. If the word "social" is interpreted in its broadest meaning, Vygotsky argued, one could say "that everything cultural is social" (Wertsch, 1981, p. 164). Culture can therefore be seen as "the product of social life and human social activity" (Ibid., p. 164). Vygotsky was critical of a dualistic approach that separates the human and the surrounding social environment and instead points to the individual participation in a system of interplay (Cole, 1985, p. 148). Vygotsky formulated what is known as the genetic law of cultural development:

Each function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first between people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapsychological). (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57)

This is to be seen as humans' cognitive and social development working with each other. This means that within a sociocultural perspective, the individuals and activities in the physical environment are seen as mutually constituting each other. A sociocultural perspective involves a non-dualistic approach and points to the relations between language, artifacts, and social action. The idea of "internalization" has been seen as conflicting, as it creates a dualistic stance between the external and the internal (Säljö, 2000; Wertsch, 1998). Instead, the term "appropriation" has been found to have a more neutral approach and be more dynamic, in line with Vygotsky's thinking (Rogoff, 1995; Säljö, 2000), with a focus on what happens when people appropriate an expertise of an intellectual or more manual nature. Both "[c]ognitivist and sociocultural theories share an interest in thinking, but they conceive of cognitive processes and their genesis very differently. In the traditional cognitivist perspective, cognitive processes were understood as an issue of how information is processed" (Säljö, 2009, p. 207).

According to Vygotsky it is important to analyze activity from the perspective of how it is mediated (Wertsch, 1981; Wertsch et al., 1995). Mediation is a concept that was introduced as a critique of the "stimulus and response" metaphor. Within a sociocultural perspective, mediation includes cultural tools (such as language) and artifacts, and how they are implemented in different social activities. According to Vygotsky (1978) a mediated activity describes the structure when people use language or another sign system to understand and interpret the surrounding world. He suggested that this provides opportunities to actively answer or modify the experiences made together with other participants in a specific sociocultural situation. Vygotsky claimed "that human social and psychological processes are fundamentally shaped by the 'meditational means,' especially language, they employ" (Wertsch, 1995, p. 136). Language as a mediating (intellectual) tool has a central role in sociocultural theories and, according to Wertsch (1981, p. 159), plays a crucial part for people's social relations and cultural performance.

Acts of meaning or meaning-making practices /…/ require a different unit of analysis where the dynamics of the semiotics of human uses of signs are attended to, and here the

notion of mediated action plays a fundamental role as a unit of analysis /…/. (Säljö, 2009, p. 207)

To elaborate on how language plays a role in mediated action, Wertsch (1995) suggests how Bakhtin's ideas about dialogicality and multivoicedness can extend Vygotsky's claims. He notes how Bakhtin focused on the utterance as the unit of analysis of communication, and that his starting point was that:

… speech can exist in reality only in the form of concrete utterances of individual speaking people, speech subjects. Speech is always cast in the form of an utterance belonging to a particular speaking subject, and outside this form it cannot exist. (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 71 cited in Wertsch, 1995, p. 139)

By pointing at the situated character of speech, Wertsch relates the sociocultural setting to the mediated action.

Vygotsky's view on creativity

As shown in previous chapters, when learning is discussed in relation to games of a more open-ended type, learning from a more general type is seen as a learning outcome. Creativity is often seen as one of these positive effects. The phenomena of creativity have been a focus for the field of psychology where the viewpoint has been from an individual perspective. In Vygotsky's definition, creativity is any human act that rises to something new. As has also been shown in the previous chapters when creativity has been discussed in the knowledge domain of games, creativity has often been related to constructivistic learning environments. These have often been open-ended in character as in microworlds, simulation games, or as open-ended sandbox games (OESG). Constructivistic learning environments have often been rooted in theories of psychology, as is the phenomena of creativity. The phenomena of creativity have been found to be a complex matter for researchers to explore. Creativity as a field of psychology has most often been explored as an individual accomplishment.

Any human act that gives rise to something new is referred to as a creative act, regardless of whether what is created is a physical object or some mental or emotional construct that lives within the person who created it and is known only to him. (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 7)

A quotation like this reveals that the phenomenon of creativity as a unit for analysis in research is of a complex and difficult nature. The first question that might be raised is: New to whom, the individual or the collective? What is considered new to the collective might be revealed by studying the creative acts that are enacted in practice as embedded within a cultural historical perspective, which was also one of Vygotsky's interests. But as the quotation goes, it is more likely that Vygotsky's focus concerns what is new to the person who performs the act. *Imagination and creativity in childhood* (Vygotsky, 2004) is a text reflecting Vygotsky's ideas in developmental psychology, and it is also from that perspective the text is usually read. Here it is of importance to highlight a note made by Cole and Scribner (Vygotsky, 1978) in the introduction to another of Vygotsky's writings: "when Vygotsky speaks of his approach as 'developmental,' this is not to be confused with a theory of child development" (Ibid., p. 7). If taking a perspective rooted in sociocultural traditions as presented above, some of this can never be revealed. For example, "what lives within the person /…/ only known to him" is not attainable for a researcher taking a sociocultural approach. What had been considered as new to the person would have been communicated in one way or another and not studied in interaction. In what other way can we know that, for example, an act in a social activity of collaborate play is something new, something never done before? Thus when I have used Vygotsky's ideas of creativity and imagination as an analytical tool in this study, I have focused on what the individual player has communicated as new and never done before.

Vygotsky discusses two different types of activities in human behavior; they can be either "reproductive", or "combinatorial". It is the combinatorial activities Vygotsky refers to as creative activity. The reproductive behavior is described as "/…/ a person's reproducing or repeating previously developed and mastered behavioral patterns or resurrecting traces of earlier impressions" (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 7). This is something Vygotsky closely links to memory:

> In exactly the same way, when I draw from life, write or do something following a specific model, I am merely reproducing what exists in front of me or what I have mastered and developed earlier. What is common to all these instances is the fact that my actions do not create anything new, but rather are based on a more or less accurate repetition of something that already exists. (Vygotsky, 2004, pp. 7-8)

The combinatorial, or creative, activity is something Vygotsky describes as occurring when activities result "in the creation of new images or actions" (Ibid., p. 9). This creative ability of combining elements is called imagination and fantasy in psychology, he claims. Fantasy is a word with different meanings depending on whether it is used in our daily talk or used as a term in science, according to Vygotsky. In this way, he distinguishes between an *everyday understanding* and a *scientific understanding* of fantasy, and creativity. In our everyday lives, fantasy or imagination is often referred to as "what is not actually true, what does not correspond to reality, and what, thus, could not have any serious practical significance" (Ibid., p. 9). But if imagination is seen as the basis of all creative activity, as Vygotsky (2004) suggests, it is:

> an important component of all aspects of cultural life, enabling artistic, scientific and technical creation alike. In this sense, absolutely everything around us that was created by the hand of man, the entire world of human culture, as distinct from the world of nature, all this is the product of human imagination and of creation based on this imagination. (p. 9ff)

In the same way as the word "learning" is used in everyday talk to communicate our daily experiences (Säljö, 2009), Vygotsky draws our attention to the everyday understanding of the creativity.

As such, Vygotsky claims, it is often referred to "a few selected individuals, geniuses, talented people, who produce great works of art, are responsible for major scientific discoveries or invent some technological advances" (Ibid., p. 10). What Vygotsky points out is that it is often easy to recognize the creativity of extremely talented persons, but not something we usually ascribe to our own accomplishments. This is an incorrect way of looking upon it, he argues. Of course, the highest expression of creativity is to be found among our geniuses, but is also present in our everyday accomplishments. No matter how small, this could rather be seen as a rule than an exception, Vygotsky claims. Seen in this way, it is not hard to see how creative processes manifest themselves in children's play. Vygotsky provides some examples, like the boy who uses a stick to symbolize a horse in his pretend play of riding a horse, or the girl who pretends to be the mother of her doll. Children's enjoyment of drawing and making up stories is another example of imagination and play. Vygotsky considers that even though children

imitate what they have heard or seen the adults do, it is not reproduced in exactly the same way as it occurred in reality.

> A child's play is not simply a reproduction of what he has experienced, but a creative reworking of the impressions he has acquired. He combines them and uses them to construct a new reality, one that conforms to his own needs and desires. (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 11ff)

These kinds of creative combinatory activities develop slowly and evolve gradually, according to Vygotsky. Here Vygotsky shows that he is a developmentalist as he writes: "each stage of development has its own expression, each stage of childhood has its own characteristic form of creation" (Ibid., p. 12). This indicates that it is an extremely complex activity. To analyze such activities from a psychological perspective, Vygotsky argues that it is important to confront the question about how this creative combinatory activity arises. He raises questions such as: "Where does it come from, what causes it, and what laws does it follow as it proceeds?" (Ibid., p. 12). In considering the usefulness of these questions for this study, I might analyze what discourses are in use by the players in their collaborative play. How are they communicated and what are they doing at the time in their game play? Within a psychological perspective, Vygotsky argues that in order to understand the psychological mechanism underlying imagination and the creative acts associated with it, it is important to elucidate the relationship between fantasy and reality in human behavior. This is something Vygotsky sees as associations, or links, between fantasy and reality. Vygotsky describes four types of associations or links (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 13):

The first type has to do with Vygotsky considering that all imagination is always based on elements from reality, from our previous experience:

> Only religious and mystic ideas about human nature could claim that products of the imagination originate not out of our previous experience, but from some external, supernatural force. (Ibid., p. 13)

Even images farthest from reality are constructions that build on impressions from reality. Vygotsky formulates the first and most important law as follows:

[T]he creative activity of the imagination depends directly on the richness and variety of a person's previous experience because this experience provides the material from which the products of fantasy are constructed. The richer a person's experience, the richer is the material his imagination has access to. This is why a child has less rich imagination than an adult, because his experience has not been as rich. (Ibid., pp. 14-15)

The second type of linkage between fantasy and reality is, according to Vygotsky, more complex than the first one. Vygotsky argues that there is a link between the final product of imagination and some complex real phenomenon to which it corresponds. Here, the question can be raised of what can be considered as the final product in computer game play. Vygotsky takes an example of the process of constructing a picture of the French Revolution, or the desert. To be able to do this even though someone has not been there (the past, and the future), he argues, the actor must have developed some understanding or historic concepts of the French Revolution in the first case, or about the desert – concepts like the sand, enormous spaces, lack of water, and the animals that live there. In this way, "[t]hese products of the imagination also consist of transformed and reworked elements of reality and a large store of experience is required to create these images out of these elements" (Ibid., p. 16). According to Vygotsky, "[t]he dependence of imagination on previous experience is exceptionally clearly manifest in this context", but is also something new, something that distinguishes them from the example of the fairy tale (Ibid., p. 16). Both are imaginary constructs that build on combining elements from reality. "But the product of the imagination, /.../ is in one case unreal (a fairy tale) and in the other the association of these elements, the product of imagination itself, not just its elements, corresponds to some real phenomenon" (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 16). Vygotsky also describes how this is made possible by the "virtue of the experience of someone else or so-called social experience" (Ibid., p. 17). Vygotsky summarizes this by stating that the first type is based on experience, and in the second type the experience is in itself based on imagination (Ibid., p. 17).

The third type of association functioning between imagination and reality is an emotional one. According to Vygotsky, it manifests itself in two ways: feelings and emotions seek images that correspond to them. In this way, a feeling has a capacity to select thoughts, impressions and images that resonate with its mood. This is not something that my study can reveal. What I can look for is how the participants say or express emotions, on a social emotional level, and how this relates to what they do in the activity. In psychology, feelings

are often noted as internal, as well as external, and constitute a phenomenon that has been called "the dual expression of feeling" (Ibid., p. 18), Vygotsky claims. According to this theory, people learn to express their internal states through external expressions. External expression can be both physical and manifested in people's actions, such as how they dress, and what they create, such as music and images "/…/ so do the images of imagination serve as an internal expression of our feelings" (Ibid., p. 18). Examples of this are colors in our culture, like wearing black when are in mourning. This is what Vygotsky might consider as belonging to the "law of the general emotional sign" where the essence is described as follows:

> [I]mpressions or images have a common emotional sign, that is, produce similar emotional effect in us, have a tendency to cluster together, despite the fact that there is no association among them either based on external similarity of contiguity. (Ibid., p. 18)

Vygotsky cites Ribot when he claims that "[a]ll forms of creative imagination include affective elements" (Ibid., p. 19). Thus Vygotsky argues "that every construct of the imagination has an effect on our feelings, and if this construct does not in itself correspond to reality, nonetheless the feelings it evokes are real feelings, feelings a person truly experiences (Ibid., pp. 19-20). Constructs of imagination can, according to Vygotsky, have a strong emotional effect on us. "The passions and fates of imaginary characters, their joys and sorrows move, disturb, and excite us, despite the fact that we know these are not real events, but rather the products of fantasy" (Ibid., p. 20). This may be used as another way to explain the relationship between the character in a computer game and the player. It gives another way to look upon the alignment between the player and the character that is not explained by identity and notions of the character as the alter ego. This offers a psychological explanation.

The fourth and last type is on the one hand considered by Vygotsky to be intimately associated with the third type, yet very different from it (Ibid., p. 20). The essence in Vygotsky's thinking is that the "construct of imagination may represent something new, never encountered before in human experience and without correspondence to any object that actually exists in reality" (Ibid., p. 20). But once it has been materialized as an object, it becomes something real that exists in our real world, and in that way "returned as a new active force with the potential to alter that reality" (Ibid., p. 21). This is, according to Vygotsky, when "imagination becomes reality" (Ibid., p. 20) and gives examples of these

kinds of objects like any technical device, machine, or instrument. Today, computer games can be considered to be an example of such objects. This is how Vygotsky explains development in the shape of a circular form. But Vygotsky argues that it is not only in the area of technology that imagination is able to complete the full cycle, "[s]uch a circle can also be found in the area of emotional imagination where it is not difficult to trace" (Ibid., p. 21). Vygotsky argues that the two factors found when we confront the full circle of imagination, intellectual (thoughts), and emotional (feelings), "are equally necessary for an act of creativity" (Ibid., p. 21). Artistic works like a poem, or a tale, can be seen as a product of the imagination. Even though the tale might have no relationship with reality, the construct springs from reality and affects the same reality, Vygotsky claims.

> It is just that this reality is not external, but internal—the world of human thoughts, concepts, and feelings. /…/ This is why Pushkin is correct when he says that poetry can impact the heart with mysterious power and why, in another poem, he says of the reality of an emotional experience evoked by fiction: "Fiction makes people weep". (Vygotsky, 2004, pp. 22-23)

As seen, and argued by Vygotsky, "imagination is an extremely complex process" (Ibid., p. 25) and he proposed a psychological analysis to meet these requirements. But as earlier emphasized, even though I am not doing a psychological analysis, some ideas from Vygotsky´s theory can be used as analytic tools in this study. Instead, fantasy and creativity are understood within the sociocultural perspectives of learning, as described above. Fantasy and creativity have often been seen as important elements in human play. According to Vygotsky (2004), play can be described as a social process where the cognitive and social processes interact. He discussed how language becomes an important tool to both determine culture and to participate in culture. Vygotsky claimed that fantasy and creativity are important ingredients in children's play. He did not consider creativity a special ability used only in artistic work, but a capability we use in everyday life. Aesthetic creation is thus not separated from other forms of production. Culture is the outcome of our human creativity. To create something, in this perspective, is to combine different previous experiences in a way that something new is created. Creativity is thus always based on our previous knowledge. Our ability to be creative is therefore dependent upon the fertility and diversity of our previous experiences. Hence, Vygotsky (2004) claims that adults have more fantasy than children since adults'

experiences are richer than the children's. Therefore, there is no mystical creative source buried deep in our minds. This view has not only far-reaching implications for aesthetic processes, but this theory also raises a number of critical questions concerning some fundamental assumptions about exploratory learning. If our creativity is guided by our experiences, is it then possible to explore new subject positions in an open-ended game environment?

Goffman's view on social interaction

If the sociocultural perspective grounded in Vygotsky's work focuses on the meditational means in human activities, then Goffman's focus is on the interactional means in social situations.

The Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman (1922-1982) is considered to be one of the most inspirational thinkers in 20th century American sociology (Jacobsen, 2010; Smith, 2006). He turned his sociological interest on everyday social life at a time "/…/ when studies of the everyday, social interaction and social occasions were generally regarded with great suspicion /…/" (Jacobsen, 2010, p. 16). Goffman coined the term "the interaction order" and spent his career exploring it. During his career, he was interested in the *face-to-face* social interaction and its implications of *self*. Matters such as "the self, social interaction, social order, deviance, social inequality, calculation, morality" (Branaman, 1997) are taken up in Goffman's writings. This is how the scholar Michael Hviid Jacobsen describes his experience of reading Goffman's work:

> When reading the work of Erving Goffman one, as a reader, is not merely stepping through the frame of a marvelous conceptual and analytical mirror of the everyday – one is simultaneously also reflected in the mirror he is holding up for his readers. The reader catches a glimpse of himself or herself. All those minuscule things everybody engage in whenever in company of others become magnified and crystallized through his poignant and provocative elaboration of the intimate doings and interactive details of his fellow homunculus. /…/ First, as mentioned, not only does one enter another almost magical world when reading Goffman's perceptive work on the episodic situations and occasions of everyday life, one is also asked to confront oneself as a human being engaged in his universe of endless self-presentations, rituals, dramas and games. (Jacobsen, 2010, p. 2)

The quote above might reflect Goffman's unique, descriptive style of writing, which has not always been found easy to interpret (Smith, 2006). His work has been criticized for its lack of an explicit methodology, and for his neglect of conventional sociological themes (Jacobsen, 2010). Jacobsen, on the other hand, proposed that there "is no one right way of reading, approaching or appreciating Goffman and there is no one correct or authoritative interpretation of his work" (Jacobsen, 2010, p. 15). He claims that he is taking a perspectival or even relativistic view of Goffman's legacy, and stresses "that Goffman did not – and did not aspire to – provide sociology with a systematic 'theory', a 'method' or a 'paradigm' " (Ibid., p. 15). This is how Goffman's perspective can be seen as providing the discipline [sociology, my comment] with a "multitude of important theoretical, methodological and conceptual insights into a variety of aspects of social life as well as into how to investigate it" (Ibid., p. 15), Jacobsen suggests. Jacobsen finds the cornerstone of this insight summarized by the scholar Javier Treviño. In the introduction to *Goffman's Legacy*, Treviño (2003, p. 2) outlines what he sees Goffman has bequeathed to us:

1. His close attention to the routine and seemingly trivial social behaviors.
2. His rich array of metaphors, rhetorical techniques and conceptual schemes.
3. His powerful, if largely unarticulated, qualitative research methodology.
4. His work of an exquisite interaction order, based on ritual an morality

The purpose here is not to give a complete presentation of Goffman's legacy. Goffman's work has been used in this study as an inspirational source, where some concepts and ideas have been used to illuminate some of the analysis. First, the Interaction Order will be presented. In this the core of Goffman's research interest is presented. Second, the *Felicity's condition* essay will be sketched. In this essay, Goffman's work took a linguistic turn and wrote about the social organization of talk. Third, some of the metaphors will be presented.

Interaction order

The core of Goffman's research interest is presented in the presidential address called *The Interaction Order* (1983b). Goffman's focus is to argue for his interest in the social interaction face-to-face and the implications on the self. Yet his primary interest is the social

organization, and according to Manning (2010, p. 114), Goffman's point was that order is only made visible in interaction. In that way, Goffman does not place the individual in the first position, "It's just [his] piece of the whole – the whole being social organization" (Verhoeven, 2000, p. 217). Social interaction is defined as co-presence in social situations.

> Once individuals – for whatever reason – come into another's immediate presence, a fundamental condition of social life becomes enormously pronounced, namely, its promissory, evidential character. It is not only that our appearance and manners provide evidence of our statuses and relationships. It is also the line of our visual regard, the intensity of our involvement, and the shape of our initial actions, allow others to glean our immediate intent and purpose, and all this whether or not we are engaged in talk with them at the time. Correspondingly, we are constantly in a position to facilitate this revealment, or block it, or even misdirect our viewers. The gleaned character of these observations is itself facilitated and complicated by a central process yet to be systematically studied – social ritualization – that is, the standardization of bodily and vocal behavior through socialization, affording such behavior – such gestures, if you will, a specialized communicative function in the stream of behavior. (Goffman, 1983b, p. 3)

The participants' engrossment and involvement in these kinds of social situations is something Goffman regards as critical, as they cannot be sustained for an extended period of time.

Goffman's linguistic turn

Late in his career, Goffman became interested in sociolinguistics. In his last essay, *Felicity's condition* (Goffman, 1983a) "/…/ Goffman proposes that it is necessary to add sociological considerations about the situated character of talk if we want to make any inroads into the analysis of the taken for granted. The relevant sociological concerns are footings, relationships, joint biographies, membership categories ('locaters') as well as turns at talk (1983b:48)"(Smith, 2006, p. 66).

> To utter something and to not disconfirm that we are sane requires that our saying be heard to draw appropriately on one array of presuppositions-that sustained by our hearers-and avoid being heard to make others – those which are not, although they may be by persons not present. Responding to another's words, we must find a phrasing that answers not merely to the other's words but to the other's mind – so the other can draw

both from the local scene and from the distal, wider worlds of her or his experience. (Goffman, 1983a, p. 48)

Goffman's concept of role-distance

One way of looking at Goffman's work is that it emphasizes how individuals are socialized. Goffman states that the basic unit for socialization is through the roles the individual performs. But to be socialized includes other important concepts such as society, culture, and the notion of self. Goffman's fascination in human encounters places his studies on a micro-analytic level (Goffman, 1983). The structure or frame is placed on a social and cultural context. According to Goffman (1983) an individual in interaction with others brings experiences from previous encounters, or at least cultural norms and values and expectations the individual is expected to share, something Goffman terms "joint biographies". One interpretation of Goffman's work is that people bring knowledge and experiences that are culturally and socially contingent in their encounters with other people and their artifacts. In this way, there is compatibility with a sociocultural perspective on learning, as already described above, that focuses on how people shape and are shaped by language, technology, and culture. Knowledge is understood as being connected to peoples' dialogues and actions in social situations.

In our daily social life, we are allowed to mirror our *selves* through the roles we are given and perform. The *self* is seen by Goffman as the product of our performances. A role is the basic unit for socialization (Goffman, 1961, p. 87). A basic assumption in role analysis is that an individual accepts different roles in different social contexts (Goffman, 1961, p. 90). As a result, an individual will have several selves and Goffman is interested in how these are related. Goffman (1961, p. 90-91) describes how a role can be slumbering until the individual is in a context where it is of use – at the right moment, with the right audience. If the role is then performed for the wrong audience or on the wrong occasion, the result might produce an embarrassment or a hesitation. A situation like that, is according to Goffman (1961, p. 91) a characteristic of a *role conflict*. But there are also other dilemmas that have to do with how a role is expressed. Goffman (1961, p. 99) notes that roles not only can be *played*, they can also be *played at*. He illustrates situations where the child, the entertainer, or other jokers imitate a role with just the purpose of imitating and gaining recognition, maybe in the form of laughter. To be able to grasp the difference, Goffman (1961, p. 100) shows that this is

not the case when a film star plays the role of a doctor; the star is not in the role of a doctor, but in the role of an actor. Despite the fact that an individual plays or plays at a role and stays in the role as long as s/he is in the arena where it is performed, the individual can go outside the role when s/he thinks that no one sees her/him (Goffman, 1961, p. 100-101). Goffman (1961) defines three matters he thinks are involved in situations where our roles are performed: "an admitted or expressed attachment to the role; a demonstration of qualifications and capacities for performing it; an active *engagement* or spontaneous involvement in the role activity at hand, that is, a visible investment of attention and muscular effort" (Ibid., p. 106). Goffman uses the term *embracement* when all three features are present:

> To embrace a role is to disappear completely into the virtual self available in the situation, to be fully seen in terms of the image, and to confirm expressively one's acceptance of it. (Erving Goffman, 1961, p. 106)

But a person can also pretend to embrace a role in order to conceal the lack of attachment to the role, according to Goffman. Similarly, a person can be attached to a role, but fail to embrace it, and he illustrates this with the child who lacks a ticket for the merry-go-round (Goffman, 1961, p. 107). Sometimes people can feel a tension when a role they do not like is imposed on them. In situations like this, the individual can try to actively manipulate the situation. This process is termed *role distance* by Goffman. There are two different ways to establish role distance, according to Goffman:

> In one case the individual tries to isolate himself as much as possible from the contamination of the situation /…/ In the other case the individual cooperatively projects a childish self, meeting the situation more than halfway, but then withdraws from this castoff self by a little gesture signifying that the joking has gone far enough. (Goffman, 1961, p. 110)

According to Goffman, the concept of role distance can be used as a tool to deal with a type of "divergence between the obligation and the actual performance". (Goffman, 1961, p. 115)

A MOVE FROM GAMES TO THE ACTIVITY OF GAME PLAY

As already noted above, the theoretical starting point in the current study is in sociocultural perspectives of learning. Central within this perspective is that the individual's thinking cannot be separated from the social and material environment in which the individual acts. However the material world cannot be directly perceived, but is always mediated by language and other symbol systems and the artifacts that are used in an activity. Within this perspective, learning is regarded as a very social process, and is not reserved just for school environments. Learning is seen as part of social activities. Culture and history are build-in artifacts, and when players interact with a computer game they also interact with culture, history, and ideology (Säljö, 2000). A point of departure in this study is that learning can be understood in relation to the communicative practices in which the players take part. These practices are not something that can be understood as pre-defined, but rather as something those participating constantly re-create through their interactions. We do not copy previous situations to know how to interact; we continually determine the condition and situation in order to contribute to the interaction. Yet the very center of the interactional life is the cognitive relationships we have with those present before us, without which relationships our activity, both behavioral and verbal, could not be meaningfully organized (Goffman, 1983b, p. 4). This is something that makes a socio-historical change possible. If we apply this to computer games and game playing, the artifacts and related practices cannot show a pre-defined meaning. Meaning is something that is created and given its play content by the players in an activity (Goffman, 1961; Goffman, 1986). How activities such as game play are experienced depends on how the experience is organized or "framed", using Goffman's (1986) concept. Framing can be seen as the process of "making sense", and it is important to emphasize that framing is not interpreted as a fixed term. In this study, the participants' activity of framing and re-framing should also be seen as ongoing in the interaction and not as a fixed term. The participants' dialogue as well as their displays of "[e]motion, mood, cognition, bodily orientation, and muscular effort are intrinsically involved" (Goffman, 1983b, p. 3) to show their positioning and alignment in the activity.

CHAPTER 4

THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

This study involves a qualitative exploration of collaborative play with an open-ended type of computer game. The empirical body of data for the analysis in this study is based on video recordings. Before presenting the findings in the three following chapters, there is a need to give further details of how the theoretical underpinnings, research questions, and previous research on games have contributed to the methodological approach chosen for this study. This chapter will examine the *Interaction Analytic* approach used in this study to illuminate its central question of how players display their understanding, interpretation, and mediation with an open-ended type of computer game. The chapter is organized in four parts. The first part deals with methodological considerations. In the second part, the procedural considerations, which describe the design and setting of the study, will be presented. In the third part, the methods for collecting data will be given. The fourth part describes the procedures that have informed my analytical work.

THE EMPIRICAL MATERIAL

The primary interest in this study has been to explore the social activity of collaborative game play with an OESG. The empirical material in this study consists of video recordings of collaborative game play with an open-ended sandbox game (OESG). This study builds partly on previously collected data[16], and consists of video recordings of collaborative game play

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[16] The previous collected data that this study partly builds on was generated for my Master's thesis (co-written with Anna Munters), entitled *Du är väl ingen hemmafru heller: Om maskuliniteter i digital dockhuslek* [You're

with *The Sims*. This data was supplemented for the purpose of this study with new video recordings of collaborative game play with *The Sims 2*. Altogether, the video-recorded play sessions that provide the basis for analysis in current study will be treated as one empirical collection.

The collection of data involves 39 players grouped in pairs or (as in one case) threes, as they were playing *The Sims* or *The Sims 2*, during the course of about one hour. Video recordings of 19 play sessions generated 19 hours of video data. Each player also answered a brief questionnaire at the time of the video recordings to provide background information, and that data will be presented later in this chapter.

Table 4.1

An Overview of the Empirical Material

	Involved players	Video-recorded play sessions	Brief questionnaires
The Sims	18	9	16 (2 dropouts)
The Sims 2	21	10	21
Total:	39	19	37 (2 dropouts)

not a housewife, are you? Masculinities in the dollhouse of virtual game playing] (Peterson & Munters, 2004). In the Master's thesis, my co-writer and I took an interest in exploring the question of what happens in boys' encounters with a *toy* whose form (computer game) is traditionally associated with boys' ways of playing, yet whose *theme* (dollhouse play) is clearly related to conventions of girls' play. The initial collection of video data comprised 18 boys, grouped in pairs, as they were playing *The Sims* during the course of on hour. Video recordings of nine play sessions generated nine hours of video data which were later transcribed and analyzed by means of Interaction Analysis (Jordan & Henderson, 1995). Just a small part has been analyzed and was done from a gender perspective in order to fulfill the aims of the Master's thesis, that is, the acquisition and production of knowledge of boys' computer game play with *The Sims*. Consequently, extensive empirical material remains to be analyzed. Since the type of video-recorded interaction data and the empirical setting suited the purpose of this study, it was considered that this video-recorded interaction data could be used for the purpose of this study. Nevertheless, the nine hours of video recordings was supplemented with new interaction data generated specifically for the purpose of the current study. The latter collection of data comprises 21 boys and girls, grouped in pairs or (as in one case) threes, as they were playing *The Sims 2* during the course of one hour. Video recordings of 10 play sessions generated 10 hours of video data. All together, 19 hours of video recordings will be treated as one empirical collection in this study.

The empirical setting – a home setting

It is suggested that "[c]hildren's computer activities in their everyday lives have to be studied in places where they usually spend time" (Aarsand, 2007, p. 31). In this study, this has been done in home settings. The main reason for conducting the video recordings in a home setting was because a premise in this study has been that it is important to understand the activity of game play before we can utilize it in education. In other words, the focus in this study is to understand the activity of computer game play in a non-institutionalized setting, and *not* how it is embedded in school practice. It was therefore considered that the selection of an empirical setting outside school, a home environment, was preferable.

The studied situations – the video-recorded play sessions

A primary interest in this study has been to explore what players actually do when playing an open-ended type of game. This involves study of social interaction in an activity of play where the focus has been on the activity as such. The activity of game play is in this study understood as a *focused encounter* (Goffman, 1961) where the players have agreed upon a joint activity for an hour. By treating the play sessions as an example of a focused encounter, each play session was video-recorded at a single point in time. Each play session was scheduled in agreement with the participants and their parents. In this way, I did not have to trouble the families in their homes for a long amount of time waiting for relevant situations to video record. Of course, this strategy excludes more ethnographic approaches exploring the activity as embedded in the players' everyday life. It also excludes a longitudinal approach where issues of how play develops over time could have been explored. Instead, the collection of video-recorded play sessions will altogether constitute a similar situation in a similar setting, a focused encounter of computer game play in a home setting. Due to the time frame of the studied situations of one hour in relation to the much longer estimated play time for the games in *The Sims* series, the play sessions might also be thought of as a "snapshot" of casual play with an open-ended computer game.

Participants

The population in this study used a purposive sample of 39 players (30 boys, 9 girls) with an age range of 10-14 at the time of the video recordings. The participants were recruited from five different municipalities of Sweden, scattered geographically within a distance of about

250 kilometers and covering urban as well as rural areas[17]. Except for one play session (which was arranged by me), all participants chose with whom to play with and all of them chose to play with a friend. The groups constituted dyads, or triads (in one play session) of the same gender, as well as mixed genders (for details, see Appendix 1).

Table 4.2

The Participants in the Video-recorded Play Sessions

	The Sims	*The Sims 2*	*Participants in*
	9 play sessions	*10 play sessions*	*all sessions*
Girls	--	9	9
Boys	18	12	30
Participants:	18	21	39

To make sure that my analysis would not be compromised by the lack of background information, I decided to let the participants answer a brief questionnaire at the time of the video recording with a couple of follow-up questions after the play session. I stress that the interest in this study has *not* been to identify "cause and effect" relations between some information about the participants' sociocultural background and the activity of play in the video-recorded play sessions. The questionnaire was set up to provide some background information on the participants' ages, to what extent they had access to a computer and their computer habits, the purposes for which they used the computer, the estimated time for game playing and their previous game play experiences of *The Sims* and/or *The Sims 2*. The

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[17] The 18 participants involved in the play sessions with *The Sims* were recruited from two schools located in two different municipalities. Sixteen of *The Sims* players were recruited from two parallel classes in a school located in a small town in Sweden and were selected because of their availability, e.g. they volunteered. The participants were divided into pairs based on their own choices, and all of these players chose to play with someone who was a friend even outside of school. Two of *The Sims* players were classmates from an urban area, and usually did not spend time with each other outside school. They were asked if they would like to play together, and in that way the group was arranged by me. The 21 participants involved in the play sessions with *The Sims 2* were recruited from five different municipalities in, or close to, an urban area. All of *The Sims 2* players were chosen on the basis of whom could be studied most easily and was guided by time and resources, e.g. a purposive sample. The participants were recruited from my circle of contacts at work as well as in my private life. Some of the participants were recruited through other participants and the recruitment of these participants could be seen as a *snowball sample* (Bryman, 2001[2004]).

participants involved in the play sessions with *The Sims 2* were also asked about their game preferences[18]. Although the group of recruited participants for this study is small, the results of the answers given in the questionnaire reveal that the group consisted of novice as well as more experienced players. A more detailed presentation of the answers given in the questionnaire is provided in the next paragraph.

Questionnaires

In total, 37 questionnaires (out of 39; 2 dropouts) were answered by the participants at the times of the video recordings (see Appendix 2 for a summary).

Access to a personal computer (PC) at home
The result shows that all of the participants had answered that they had access to a computer at home.

Access to some kind of game console
Two of the participants had answered they did not have access to any kind of game console, where one of them had answered "not anymore". The other participants had answered that they had access to one or more consoles. In total, the group of participants stated that they had access to some kind of game console without specifying what brand; they had simply answered "yes" (8). Other answers given are as follows: *Game Boy* (14), *Game Boy Advance* (2), *Game Boy Color* (2), *Game Cube* (2), *Nintendo* (3), *Nintendo 64* (11), *Play Station* (12), *Play Station 2* (4), *Sega* (1), *Super Nintendo* (1), *Xbox* (4), and *Xbox 360* (1).

Estimated time for using the computer or game playing
The participants were also asked to estimate how many hours per day they spent on game playing. By checking boxes in the questionnaire, the respondents were expected to answer with one of these four alternatives: "less than an hour", "one hour or more, but less than two hours", "two hours or more, but less than three hours", or "three hours or more". The participants' answers of their estimated times for game play per day varied. Fifteen of the participants estimated that "less than an hour" was spent in game play. Eleven of the participants estimated their game play as "one hour or more, but less than two hours". On two of these answers the participants added notes saying, "I do not play every day, only when I

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[18] The question of whether the participants had a favorite game was only raised to the participants who played *The Sims 2*.

have time to kill" and "When I play", respectively. Six participants estimated their game play as "two hours or more, but less than three hours". Two participants estimated their play to involve "three hours or more", but one of them added a note saying, "only on weekends". Three participants did not confine themselves to selecting just one of the four alternatives. Two of the participants added a note saying, "varies" and they had checked three alternatives and two alternatives, respectively. The third participant added a note on each of two selected two alternatives. "Less" was noted at the box for the "one hour or more, but less than two hours" alternative. On the "two hours or more, but less than three hours" alternative, a note said, "(sometimes) a lot". All the notes and the selection of more than one alternative indicate that game play varies over weeks and time among the participants in the sample. It is also reasonable to believe that the questions on estimated time spent for play per day and the design of the questionnaire using the "check the box" style with four alternatives given were considered too broad to describe their play habits.

The computer used for other things than play
The participants were also asked if they used the computer for other things than game play. Some of the participants responded with a simple "yes" (9) or "no" (1), while 27 participants gave examples or other ways to use the computer, such as "checking images on Google" (1), "different home pages" (1), "e-mail" (1), "film" (3), "homework" (7), "Photoshop" (1), "info" (1), "Internet" (18), "MSN" (5) "music (2), "paint" (3), and word processing (4). As can be seen, the Internet had been given as the most frequent reason for using the computer, other than for game play. But for what purposes Internet was used cannot be revealed by these answers. Some hints are given in some answers, as the Internet has to be in use in order to send an e-mail, using MSN for chatting online, or looking for images by using Google. This may be similar to the "different home pages" and "info" answers if they are referring to surfing on the web. But it could also refer to creating different web pages and info stored on the hard disk. From the answers given, it was not revealed either if the film and music were watched and listened to online and/or offline or created.

Previous experience of *The Sims*
Twenty-five of the participants answered that they had played one of *The Sims* games before, while two of them stated that they had mostly played *The Sims 2*. Three participants had seen someone else playing it. Eight participants had never played *The Sims* or *The Sims 2* before

and one participant did not think s/he had. The participants were asked to estimate the time spent for game play with one of *The Sims* games. I was curious to see how experienced Sims players had been recruited for this study. The answers varied. Four participants focused on the ownership of the game to indicate their estimated time spent for game play, these by answers like "I have the game." What this meant in hours of experienced game play for these respondents was not revealed; just having the game does not mean that they necessarily have to play the game on a regular basis. Other answers expressed just an introduction to the game, by answers like "tested" (1), and "borrowed it and played" (1). Other participants expressed their estimated time of game play on a more general level by using words like "a little" (1), "not much" or "not so much" (5), "pretty much (1), and "a lot" (2). Some of the participants added a note on the frequency of game play in answers like: "from time to time, not so much" (1), "not so much (5 times)" (1), and "10 times" (1). One of the answers revealed both an indication of the amount of time spent at every play sessions, and the frequency of the play sessions: "for a while I played 2 hours every other day, but currently, maybe, an hour twice a week" (1). Some expressions used in the answers indicated game play in a longer time frame: "started a year ago but don't play so much" (1), "I played some 3-4 years ago" (1), and "several years" (2), where the latter is interpreted as one of the more experienced players with *The Sims*. Other answers indicating more experience of game play with *The Sims* could be: "for hours and hours" (1), and "every day" (1).

Games usually played by *The Sims 2* players

An additional question given to the participants involved in the play sessions with *The Sims 2*, concerned if the participants had a game they usually played. I was curious about the recruited participants' game preferences. The games noted by the respondents are as follows: *World of Warcraft* (3), *The Sims* (2), *The Sims 2* (5), *Age of Empires* (1), *Guild Wars* (1), *FIFA* (1), *FIFA 07* (1), *FIFA 08* (1), war games (1), sports games (1), *Sing Star* (1), *Brain Train* (1), and games for video game consoles (1). The results show that the games usually played vary among the participants recruited for the play sessions with *The Sims 2*. The games above represent different genres, played on different platforms. Seven of the participants usually played one of *The Sims* games.

Reflections made after the play session

Based on the participants' answers in the follow-up questions after the play session, only one participant answered that the play session had been experienced as "so-so". The other answers

expressed a positive experience where the respondents had used words like: "fine" (5), "really fine" (1), "pretty much fun" (2), "fun" (21), "really fun" (2) "great fun" (1), and "super" (2) to describe the play session. Three of the participants pointed out the social aspects of the activity of game play: "We had fun together" (2), and "It was fun to be two players" (1). Some players had written it was fun simply because the game was fun (4), others gave reasons for the fun such as: "Almost like learning domestic science" (1), "It was fun to play a game I seldom play" (1), and "It was real" (1). Most of the respondents had written it was fun and game examples of different sequences (or modes) in the game they had thought was enjoyable. Some focused on the creation of a family: "It was fun to create a family" (1). It was not only the creation of the characters, e.g. the Sims, that had been considered as fun, but also what could be done with them: "we created funny characters and made them do funny things" (1), and "To create a family and let them do weird things" (1). Managing, controlling, or helping the families were reasons given in the answer to why they thought it had been fun (5). Managing a family was also considered by one participant as something "real". Other reasons given for the fun was: "to see how it turns out for the family" (2). One answer may reflect an enjoyment of having the role of a spectator: "it was exciting to see the Sims' reactions. Other sequences in the game that were referred to as fun was the build mode as they had answered that the "building" (2) was fun. Similarly, one player referred to the buy mode, since the "designing and furnishing" (1) was noted as fun. One player referred to a specific place in the game as fun: "Fun to go downtown" (1). Even though most of the participants had thought the play session with *The Sims* or *The Sims 2* was fun, some critical aspects were also reflected in the answers. Four of them were referring to the one hour they had at their disposal: "We didn't have time for much. One hour is not enough to get started with the game" (1), "Took a long time to create the family and design the house so we didn't have so much time for play" (1), and "But it took a rather long time to create the characters before you could start to play" (1) . The first two answers were given by participants who had stated that the play session had been fun "as usual" and had set their game preferences to *The Sims 2*. Other criticisms that had been made by the participants were that they thought the game was difficult: "It was hard to figure out the game", and "It was hard to figure out how the game worked". These two participants were involved in the same play session. As a final comment on the questionnaires, the answers given by the participants involved in a same play session were similar.

Choosing the games

The games used in this study were selected to meet the purpose of this study. As presented in Chapter 1, this study takes an interest in the open-ended type of games, of which potentials for learning have been widely discussed among researchers in the field of games studies as well as in education. Some criteria have guided the choice of what open-ended game to use in this study; they should be:

- A game that has been characterized as an open-ended game in research
- A game that has been used in a school setting
- A game that is popular to play for both genders in the age group focused on in this study (this was also seen as making it easier to recruit participants)
- Games that had been rated in the system used by the Pan-European Game Information (PEGI) suitable for the age group focused on in this study.

As shown in Chapter 2, even though there are no clear-cut characteristics of an open-ended type of game, *The Sims* games series are considered to fall under this genre of games. Due to the chosen setting, e.g., the home setting, *The Sims* games were selected to make it easier to involve players willing to take part in this study. In that case, games with an educational content were disregarded in favor of commercial off-the-shelves games (COTS games). At the time, there are some games that could have been chosen for the purpose of this study, for example, the games in the *RollerCoaster Tycoon* series, games in *The Sims* series entitled *Civilisation*, *Sim City*. Games in *The Sims* series were chosen for several reasons. The PEGI for *The Sims* and *Sims 2* is 7 years and most of the expansion packs have been rated by PEGI and assessed to be suitable for players over the age of 12. Due to the age of the participants in this study, it was found likely that the parents would let their children play a game without violence or inappropriate content. The games have ranked high in sales figures and they topped the sales figures lists and therefore may have made it easier to attract players willing to participate in the study. *The Sims* games have the kind of sandbox mode which has nurtured the same type of arguments as in constructionist research. There is an increasing body of game research that has focused on *The Sims*, that forms a basis of the knowledge of the core of the game (design and rethoric), but very few are empirical research that have studied the player or the play practices of the game. Finally, the initial collection of data was made by using *The Sims*, and at the time of the second data collection, *The Sims 2* has reached the top lists. I was curious to see if the new game would provide different kinds of interactional data.

Of course, it can be discussed what this study might lose by not letting the participants choose which game they would like to play in the study. A study like that might tell more about the play preferences, and games as embedded in the everyday lives of players. But the focus in this study is not on game practice as embedded in the players' everyday lives, but rather on what players do with these games when played. Letting the participants choose what games to play could also resent a risk that the chosen games would not fall under what is defined here as an open OESG. It would also have put me as a researcher in a position of having to become expert in the variety of games used in the activity, and then including the unique game characteristics in the variety of games would have put more variables to consider in the analysis and the presentation of the results in this study. The games chosen and used in this study are:

- *The Sims*. In the different play sessions, the expansion packs *Living it Up, Hot Date,* and *Unleashed*.
- *The Sims 2*. In the different play sessions, the *Pets* and *Bon Voyage* expansion packs were used.

A summary of the sampling frame

The selection of the empirical setting, the studied situations, the participants, and the material used for collecting data was guided by a mix of *purposive sampling* and *theoretical sampling* (Silverman, 2004). According to Silverman (2004) these two strategies are often treated as identical, but the difference between them lies in "when the 'purpose' behind 'purposive' sampling is not theoretically defined" (p. 105). The link between the sampling and theory lies in the considerations of how to fulfill the aims of this study. The selection of the studied situations, the group of participants, and the type of game chosen is selected on the basis of their relevance to answer the research questions and the theoretical position taken in this study. The research questions and theoretical position taken in this study provide some terms for the design and setting. This means I do not see that I could have studied the situations of game play by using any method or type of game, nor could I have studied any group of players. But when these terms are met, the selection of empirical setting, the play sessions, participants, and games chosen were guided by time and resources, i.e. purposive sampling (Silverman, 2004). The selection of type of game was made in relation to the nature of the

interest of knowledge. The sample criteria considered the geographic location of the participants, gender, and age.

Due to the fact that previously collected data was from boys between 10-13 who had been recruited to play *The Sims*, I attempted to recruit participants for the play sessions with *The Sims 2* that could generate a balance in age and gender in the "total collection". The sample criteria were therefore extended, and I attempted to generate a variety in age (in the range 10-16), gender (to recruit more female participants to balance the first collection of male participants), and to some extent, the geographic areas in which the participants lived at the time of the video recordings. My attempts were only successful to a certain degree.

PROCEDURES OF COLLECTING DATA

In both collections of data, I have parallel to the recruitment process started to play the games used in this study. I have not played enough to be called an experienced player, but enough to know how to play the game. To compensate the lack in my experience, different kinds of player forums were sought for more information about *The Sims* games and *The Sims* players (especially in the analytical process). As discussed earlier, the recruitment process of the participants differed in the previously collected data (the play sessions with *The Sims*) and collected data generated specifically for the purpose of this study. To give an idea of how the strategy differed, a brief presentation will be given even though the video recordings of the play sessions with *The Sims* was not generated in the time frame of this study. In *The Sims* collection, contact was made with two compulsory schools (classes 4-6). Two participants were recruited from the school, which was situated in the urban area. In the other school, situated in a small town, contact was made with the teachers in two parallel classes. It resulted in a short visit to each class to inform the students of our work and explain that we sought boys who were willing to be video-recorded while playing *The Sims*. It was stressed that participation was voluntarily and interested boys were provided with a letter of consent to take home to their parents. The play sessions with *The Sims* were scheduled with those children who had their parents' written consent to participate in the study. Nine play sessions were scheduled during March 2003. In the video recordings of the play sessions with *The Sims 2*, data were collected specifically for the purpose of this study. When contact had been made with a potential participant from my circle of contacts at work and in private life, information about this study was given both verbally and written. Video recordings were

scheduled as soon as participants had agreed to volunteer and had their parents' permission. A written consent was also collected, but not necessarily at the time for scheduling the play session. Ten play sessions were scheduled from January 2007 to October 2007.

Introducing the play session

Prior to introducing the play session, I considered it important to make sure that the players participated in the study of their own free will and that they knew they could withdraw their participation if they chose to do so. For ethical reasons, I would not risk having players who participated in the study only because their parents had given their consent, or because they had been persuaded by a friend. The instructions given to the players before the recordings of the play sessions differed somewhat from those given to the players in the play sessions with *The Sims* and in the play sessions with *The Sims 2*. All players were asked to play the game for one hour. In that way, the task can be seen as consisting of computer game play with an open-ended game. The players in the play sessions with *The Sims* were asked not to use any cheat codes to gain more money during game play. Given my experience from my Master's thesis, I was curious to explore what would happen in the interaction when these constraints were not given to the players. Therefore, the participants in the play sessions with *The Sims 2* were asked to create at least one character and to deposit some time to play with the character(s). Other than that, no constraints were given. In those cases where one of the participants made an inquiry if they were allowed to use cheat codes, they were told that they could.

Collecting the interactional data – the video-recorded play sessions

The empirical material in this study consists of video recordings of the players working in pairs or in threes (in one session) with a computer game, *The Sims* or *The Sims 2*. The play activity was conducted in the home environment. In the play sessions with *The Sims*, all video recordings were done in either my home or my co-writer's home. In the play sessions with *The Sims 2*, the participants, in negotiation with their parents, had the opportunity to choose whether the video recordings were to take place in one of the players' homes or in mine. This was offered to minimize the risk of losing a potential participant because of feelings of discomfort about, or impracticality of either inviting me to their homes, or visiting mine. Five groups of players chose to visit my home for the video recordings. Any accompanying parents

were invited to stay during the video recordings. I also attempted to be sensitive to whether any of the participants expressed discomfort or insecurity in some way. Since these video recordings were done in my home, I had the possibility to choose the optimal place for the recordings. I was also able to put all equipment used (camera(s), tripod, microphone, computer, games, mirror) in place where the recordings should take place. I also had the time to check the equipment and the conditions for light and sound in a stress-free way. This resulted in a setting that was all prepared for the video recordings before the participants arrived. This was not possible when the other five groups were video-recorded at one of the players' homes. According to ethical guidelines, it is important to show respect to people used in your research. I attempted to be sensitive to the members of the household, knowing that I had been invited in my role as a researcher. No background information of the participants' everyday life noticed outside the procedures for the collection of data (questionnaires and video-recorded interaction data) has been used in my analysis. Being invited to someone's home in their everyday life for your collection of video data, the setting cannot be prepared ahead of time. The video recordings were done in places assigned by one of the household members. The environment for the play sessions challenges the researcher to handle issues including too much light or noise in the room, where to plug in the computer and the video camera(s), and space issues when there is not space enough to position the camera at the optional distance from the players. Through these experiences, I found that many problems can be solved by bringing my own mirror, an extra power cube and cable extension, and a piece of cloth. In this way, the environment raises methodological issues of what to video record. From a methodological point of view, it is crucial to capture what happens on the screen in the game world in order to fully understand the interaction and communication in the game play. But it is also crucial to grasp what is going on in the social interaction between the participants, like facial expressions, eye gaze, pauses, laughs, body movements, and so on. That is why I chose a video camera positioned on a tripod behind the players, focusing on the computer screen. A mirror was placed behind the computer screen to pick up non-verbal communication like facial expressions. A good external microphone is also ideal to secure the quality of sound such as speech. In some play sessions, I used clip-on microphones on the players' clothes. As later seen in the video-recorded material, these clip-on microphones occasionally prevented the players from moving freely, as when they shifted places in taking turns to control the computer mouse and the keyboard. The ideal would have been to use a wireless external microphone placed on the desk, which in that way did not intervene in the players' activity. I chose not to be present in the room during the play sessions, but in an

adjacent room. This way, the participant could call for me if needed, but the players could avoid unease or discomfort. No parents were present in the room during the recordings either. Experience from my Master's thesis had taught me that players on some occasions leaned forward and blocked the computer screen from the camera view. To avoid losing potential interesting interaction data, my intention was to use two cameras in the video records of the play sessions with The Sims 2. When it worked, the second camera was used together with a screen capture tool to capture what happened on the computer screen. This was not doable for practical reasons in two play sessions. In one play session the problem was solved by pointing the second camera directly at the screen (a closeup). In the other play session, I had to be satisfied by using just one camera in the video recordings. The image below (Figure 4.1) illustrates one sort of data collection where one video camera is positioned on a tripod, and a mirror was used. This is probably the easiest way to get both screen and facial expressions.

Figure 4.1. Camera Angle for the Play Sessions (Peterson & Munters, 2004)

Treatment of the video films

After each video-recorded play session, the tapes were marked with their content, session number, and the date of the recording. As recommended (Jordan & Henderson, 1995), a list of the content in the different video films was also created. All video tapes were later transformed to a digital format. In those cases where two cameras had been used in the play session, the second camera had been connected to a *Screen Capturing Converter*. The films

from the second camera were also transformed to a digital format. By using an editing program the two films from the same play session were synchronized in time and edited so they could be watched simultaneously. This made it easier to follow what happened in the game world and to notice details. Furthermore, it made it easier to see what a player pointed at, or if one of the players blocked the screen view by leaning forward. The limitations might be that it takes more time for the researcher to arrange the setting before the video recording can take place. It also demands more editing time afterwards.

DATA ANALYTICAL PROCEDURES

Analyzing interaction

There has been an increasing interest in analyzing interaction in research since the 1960s. There has been development of different approaches, of traditions such as "ethnography, sociolinguistics, ethnomethodology, conversation analysis, kinesics, proxemics, and ethology" (Jordan & Henderson, 1995, p. 1). The work of Goffman and his interest in face-to-face interaction could also be included. Analysts observing interaction share the assumption that knowledge and action are social phenomena, situated in social and material ecologies. Just as in a sociocultural perspective, many researchers interested in interaction analysis state that knowledge is not localized in each individual's head, but is seen as in the interaction between participants of specific communities. These sets of theoretical ideas have methodological consequences for how to gain access to the ideas, according to the authors. No method is without theoretical assumptions, as further argued, and these are seen as a kind of framework of assumptions. It is further argued that a clear formulation of this assumption framework did not exist, or most likely was an issue for disagreements, when Jordan and Henderson's article was written in 1995. Video technology has been of vital importance in establishing Interaction Analysis (IA) as an interdisciplinary method for empirical studies of humans' interactions with each other and other artifacts in their surroundings. The aim of Interaction Analysis, according to these writers (Jordan & Henderson, 1995), is to identify regularities and depict mechanism in how people interact and handle their affairs. Interaction Analysis is done with the use of video data that the researcher transforms into detailed transcripts. Theories of learning and communication are then used as analytical tools to examine what the meanings of the participants' communication and actions are in the analyzed session.

Limitations and advantages of using video

Even though the production and work with video data in Interaction Analysis is seen as "time-consuming" and "labor-intensive" by Jordan and Henderson (1995), they argue that the method is the optimal choice for certain kinds of research. Examples of objects for study are given, mentioning especially "learning activities and work practices in complex real world settings" (Jordan & Henderson, 1995, p. 12). Seeing learning as an ongoing process in interaction has methodological consequences in an interest "in what 'really' happened rather than in *accounts* of what happened" (Jordan & Henderson, 1995, p. 13). In this way, video recordings are seen as the optimal method for data collecting, according to these authors, to overcome eventual gaps between what people say they do and what they actually do. Video data become verifiable in the sense that the researcher can observe, and also share and make visible, what actually happens in the observed event compared to many other forms of re-constructed and re-presented data. Even though most type of collected data can be seen as re-constructed and re-presented in the sense that they are "transforming and reducing reality" (Jordan & Henderson, 1995, p. 13), the "video recordings replace the bias of the researcher with the bias at the machine" (Ibid.). Nevertheless, video recordings are seen as producing data closer to the event compared to other types of data. A benefit of using video technology for the collection of data is that it captures details in interaction that can never be obtained by using other forms of data collection, as for example taking field notes. This makes it possible to watch the same sequence of the re-presented event over and over again. It is also possible to watch video tapes at different speeds. Altogether, using video technology for the collection of data makes it possible for the researcher to watch the rich re-presented episode of interaction without having to bring any pre-defined categories or theoretical underpinnings into the initial analysis of the video tapes. This makes it possible to focus on different things in the rich re-presentation and see things that initially were "unseen" or unknown. Video tapes can also be shared with other researchers and in this way video data becomes verifiable compared to, for example, a researcher's notes from the field. Limitations reported by Jordan and Henderson (1995) include the loss of information in the transformation of the actual events to the tape which may lead to a risk of misinterpretation. They also point out researchers arguing the contrary, that the loss is smaller by using video technology compared to other data collection methods. Another issue for the researchers using video for their collection of data is how the camera is managed. This includes camera position, what and

when to record, and the use of zooming in, where less valid decisions made by the researcher risk the loss of important information. Naturally, researchers using video technology will also lack variables like heat, cold, and odors on account of restraints in the technology. Jordan and Henderson (1995) also discuss the question of how participants are influenced by the presence of the camera in the way they act and talk in the filmed event. They say, "This is, above all, an empirical question that cannot be decided in principle but must be investigated on each occasion of camera work" (Jordan & Henderson, 1995, p. 17). This means that the researcher looks for evidence of where the participants orient towards the camera in the way they interact or talk. But the experience of the authors is that people surprisingly quickly get used to the presence of the camera when there is no operator behind it. When people are deeply engaged in what they are doing in an activity, they tend to show less attention to the camera.

> Gestures and body positioning are difficult to manipulate and control for any length of time, and micro-behaviours such as gaze and head turns are usually out-of-awareness. In talk, people make greater attempts to modify *what* they say than *how* they say it. (Jordan & Henderson, 1995, p. 17)

Analyzing the video films

Given the experience from the analytical process at the time of my Master's thesis, I wanted to use another strategy to start the analytical process in this study. In the Master's thesis I had started by roughly transcribing the video-recorded material. This gave an extensive material to work with. When nine hours of video data had been roughly transcribed, a total of 227 written pages with 5362 speech turns had been produced. Those rough transcripts worked as the foundation for an overview of the video material. But sequences that I initially found interesting, characteristic, or significant were, in an initial phase of the analytic process, chosen by reading the transcripts. Small sequences were chosen from the transcripts and compared to the video data. In this study I thought it was important to work closer to the video data, and I wanted to work the other way around. I started the analyzing process by looking through the 19 video-recorded play sessions used as the empirical basis for the analysis in this study. After a series of discrete observations I started to make content logs of sequences that I wanted to highlight further. Instead of choosing sequences from transcripts, sequences from the video data were seen and discussed with other researchers in different types of settings (supervising meetings, workshop etc.). Sequences of video data shared in

workshops had been roughly transcribed before viewing. Sequences in the film at hand can be viewed over and over again in order to see what actually happens in the interaction, and group work was a good way to reveal my "preconceived notions" and penchant for looking for things that I was "conditioned to see" in the interaction (Jordan & Henderson, 1995, p. 6). Group work has also developed my understanding of working with interaction data, as well as ideas of how interaction data can be structured and represented. In addition, participating in group work with other video data than my own has also reminded me that the video recordings are just a representation of the researcher's selected piece of interaction in a human practice, and not a full replica of the practice itself.

Advantages of group work put forward by Jordan and Henderson (1995) include that "a large number of hypothesis and observations are produced /…/ for later review and more extensive (or intensive) analysis by the owner" (p. 6). When certain sequences were found important and interesting for the purpose of this study, the log was extended to detailed transcripts.

Transcription of the video films

Transcriptions can be more or less detailed, depending on the researchers' interest in the analysis. My transcriptions have been done in two different ways and used for two different purposes. The first transcription is done by using a transcription method in a columnar model, as also used by Linderoth (2004). The transcription has been done in Swedish and where the columns have been used for the time, the alias name of the participant, speech, what happens in the room, and finally, what happens on the screen. Non-verbal communication like eye gaze, gestures, and pointing have also been transcribed. I have found this five-columnar method useful when navigating in the transcript in an initial phase of the analysis. The second transcription model is the same as presented in this thesis. I have been inspired by transcription convention common in CA studies, but using a modified version to make them as "reader-friendly" as possible to those not familiar with Conversation Analysis. The transcription notation used is based on Gail Jefferson's work as presented in *Structures of Social Interaction* (Heritage, 1984) (see Appendix 3). When transcribing social interaction, it is necessary to capture talk in interaction as close to reality as possible. I have also elaborated with a way to represent non-verbal communication and what happens on the screen by testing different methods on readers of my work. It is also at this point that the transcription has been translated to English. Through the writing process of this final product, I have also gone back

and forth between the video recordings and the transcription where there seemed to be gaps in the transcription.

Translation of everyday speech

Some of the transcript translations have triggered some thinking about the best way to represent what the respondents are saying in their mother language. From a methodological perspective, this can be seen as a problem when a transcript is translated into another language. Social and cultural factors are brought into the context, which makes a fair translation of the language per se not possible. In this context, the analyses are done in the respondents' spoken language, and therefore, the translations in the study are just there to represent examples of what I as an analyst have found interesting. This means that sometimes a translation of the players' expressions that is closer to an expression in American English has been chosen, instead of a word-for-word translation; the exact meaning of what has been said may have been lost in the process. A translation of speech from Swedish to English will be found in Appendix 4. The reason for this is that this study does not analytically focus on spoken language per se, and that kind of analysis is not present in this study. (Even though there is a rich body of examples in the empirical data to do this kind of analysis, they have not been focused upon.) This results in the fact that transcriptions that do not exactly represent intonations, emphasis, and so on, thus are expressed in brackets [ ] to help the reader get a picture of how things are said and what it means in the spoken example.

Selection and representing data

Themes that are explored and analyzed in the following chapters are:

Following the rules or being creative

Showing involvement by making plans

Showing role distance.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In conducting a study where people's interaction in a focused encounter is video-recorded, there are several ethical issues that need careful consideration. Ethical issues are a part of the whole research process, e.g. setting up the study, collecting the data, handling the video-

recorded material, and how the collected interaction data is analyzed and represented in transcripts and used in the researchers' work such as scientific publication. Before collecting the data, ethical clearance was sought from the participants as well as from their parents. This was done by openly informing participants about the research both verbally and in a letter of intent. Information was given on what the research aimed at, what computer games were being used, procedures of the data collecting phase, and how the video-recorded material would be used. When conducting a study on children, it is important that the participants as well as their parents give their consent to participate in the study. It was emphasized that all participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from participation in the study without further explanation. A document with a written consent signed by their parents was also collected. It were considered important that the play session should be experienced as something positive, so the participants were given the possibility to choose with whom they played, while fulfilling the above conditions.

As doing research in peoples' homes may feel like an intrusion in peoples' everyday lives, the participants involved in the play sessions with *The Sims 2* were given the opportunity to decide in which home environment the video recordings should take place (at one of the participants' or in mine). It is important to show respect to people who participate in your research. During the collection phase, this means that I have tried to be sensitive to the participants' expressions of uneasiness when visiting their homes, or when they visited mine. When visiting the participants' homes, the video recordings have been done in the place assigned by the parents. Prior to the video recordings, it was considered important to repeat the purpose of the study and make sure that the players participated voluntarily and that they knew they could withdraw their participation.

When transcribing the material, it is important to stay close to the video-recorded play sessions. The basic principle is to focus on the players' agency in relation to the activity, and not on individuals' personal characteristics. Furthermore, the participants' personal data has been secured by changing their names, and no geographical information has been given. When their talk contains other names, these have also been changed. The collected data have only been used in research-related activities. Permission to use the video material in seminars, conferences, and teaching has been asked for. The research has followed the ethical guidelines for good research practice given by the *Swedish Research Council*.

CHAPTER 5

THE SIMS AS A PLACE FOR EXPLORING

As shown in Chapters 1 and 2, different kinds of simulation games have been claimed for a long time to be a suitable arena for exploring and learning, meaning that the player can experiment with the content of a microworld, a simulation program, or a digital game in such a way that they understand some scientific principle or alter their ideas of a cultural phenomenon. A similar argument can also be found in the current discussion of digital games. As an example, the idea that certain types of games can become spaces for exploration, experimentation, and creative player expression has been ascribed to open-ended sandbox games (OESG) like *The Sims*. Following this discussion, this study was set up to scrutinize collaborative game play in such an activity. This is the first chapter reporting on the empirical results. By using Vygotsky's (2004) theories of imagination and creativity in childhood as an analytical tool, this chapter aims at exploring how the players interact and talk about narratives of family life while playing. But before presenting the results, there is a need to elaborate what there is to be explored in The Sims. Then a brief overview of the examples used will be given.

WHAT IS THERE TO BE EXPLORED IN THE SIMS?

The introductory chapter reveals that the concept of "exploring" in relation to games and learning has very different meanings, depending on in which type of text it is used (scientific or policy documents). The word "exploring" is very broad in its meaning and the various connotations can lead to confusion. Furthermore, considering previous research, exploring is

found to be a slippery concept, and it is hard to find a unified and all-encompassing definition. One reason might be that exploring is also a word used in everyday talk, and when taking a closer look at the dictionaries, "explore" as a transitive verb is commonly given three meanings. The following example is from Merriam-Webster's[19] online dictionary:

1. a) To investigate, study, or analyze, b) To become familiar with by testing or experimenting
2. To travel over (new territory) for adventure or discovery
3. To examine especially for diagnostic purposes

"To investigate, study, or analyze" (1a) is referring to "looking into" something as in Merriam-Webster's given example: "explore the relationship between social class and learning ability" (M-W, web resource). The dictionary also maintains that it sometimes can "be used with indirect questions" (M-W, web resource), for instance, if you "explore where ethical issues arise /…/". The similar definition of the word to that in the above example (1) is sometimes used in studies of simulation and gaming, where a user is working with a simulation game that is designed to explore a relationship or a concept and where learning is an expected outcome. *The Sims* is not designed according to those principles, and it is not argued that exploring an OESG like *The Sims* means the same as something like exploring a simulation game designed for lab work in the science of education. Following a line of reasoning that playing a computer game demands a certain degree from the player, a certain amount of exploring ought to be expected, at least to explore the virtual environment. Thus, you could ask what is to be explored by the players in *The Sims,* and under what premises is this done?

> Sim domestic space cannot be separated for domestic ideals culled from the popular imaginary, and the last century's classic domestic setting has been in/is tided to the icon of the suburb. (Flanagan, 2003b, para. 11)

In the above quotation, *The Sims* is described as an arena for domestic and family life. Flanagan (2003a) emphasizes how symbolic resources in *The Sims* computer game can attract users to play in a way that either projects the actual world as the player knows it, or to play the game on its own conditions, meaning as an arena for experimenting and exploring. But

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[19] http://www.merriam-webster.com

what does it really mean for the players to explore and experiment with a game content in OESG like *The Sims*?

Do the participants act out fantasies/narratives about family life? Do they explore alternate subject positions and challenge their notions about family life? In trying to find out, the analysis in this chapter is guided by the players' orientation towards the game in their focused encounters (Goffman, 1961). As illustrated in Chapter 6, the game directs the activity in a certain direction. This means that the game structure presents the game content for the players in a certain order, where the players have to respond to what is happening on the screen to be able to continue their play. This way, and as the empirical material will show, the game works as a structuring resource for the players as the game unfolds: 1) the create-a-family screen, 2) the build-and-buy mode, and 3) the play mode. Each of these modes, or "segments" (Jordan & Henderson, 1995), within the game content represents a cultural material where different types of activities are offered to the players. By following the game structure logic of how the players display shifts in the activity, what they are oriented towards, and what might influence their player actions, the aim is to study in what way the players experiment with the game content and explore narratives about family life. The game content can be seen as the cultural material these players can use as their play material for their fantasies and creative expressions. As stated in Chapter 3, according to Vygotsky (2004) creativity is not just a special ability used in artistic work, but a capability we use in everyday life. Aesthetic creation is thus not separated from other forms of production. Culture is the outcome of our human creativity. To create something, in this perspective is to *combine different previous experiences in a way that something new is created* (see Chapter 3 for an elaborated discussion of what this mean in a sociocultural framework). Creativity is thus always based on our previous knowledge. Our ability to be creative is therefore dependent on the fertility and the diversity of our previous experiences. This chapter presents strips of interaction documenting how this is made visible in the players' communication and interaction.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THIS CHAPTER

All excerpts chosen as representative examples are video recordings from the interaction data with *The Sims*. As presented in Chapter 4, the video recordings were done in a home environment (in either my or my co-worker's home). The players were told not to use any cheat codes to gain more money in the game, and the camera was started as soon as the

players were ready to start to play *The Sims*. The excerpts have been organized under the following three themes, which also correlate with the three different phases in the game: 1) create-a-family screen, 2) build-and-buy mode, 3) play mode.

Filling the household with characters

The *Family Ring* will be presented in the first two excerpts. The purpose is to illustrate different narrative themes that are actualized when the players design their characters, which is frequently in the empirical material.

Becoming a household consumer

The excerpts are chosen to illustrate what the players are oriented towards in the build-and-buy mode.

Dealing with Sims performances and family life

The excerpts are chosen to illustrate what the players are oriented towards in the play mode.

PRESENTING THE EXAMPLES

Filling the household with characters

Designing characters in *The Sims* does not mean that the players are creatively free to design any character (Sim), rather that they are free to choose:

- Family name (a family can consist of up to eight characters)
- Gender (male, female)
- Age (adult or a child)
- Skin tone (light, medium, and dark skin colors)
- Appearance (the choice of head and clothes)
- Predefined personality traits (neat, outgoing, active, playful, nice) who have straightforward and measurable needs (hunger, comfort, hygiene, bladder, energy, fun, social, and room)

The players start in the neighborhood area either by playing with one of the pre-made characters, or by creating a family of their own. None of the players in this study selected a pre-made family on the select-a-family screen. Every pair of players clicked on the create-a-family button to create a family of their own choice. Before the design of the characters can take place, the players must name their Sims family by typing the last name in a text field displayed on the create-a-Sim screen.

The family name – Picking the team

Three excerpts are chosen to illustrate what the players were oriented towards when they chose their names. The reason is to illustrate what the players face when they start to interact with the game. I will argue that it shows how their initial framing of the activity was made and how this may influence their choices and interaction later on as the activity unfolds. The players are free to type whatever the keyboard allows them to do at the last name prompt. Common Swedish family names were chosen to represent the players' Sim families to a greater degree than using fantasy names.

Excerpt 5.1, The Sims, Session 8

Dag and Knut are both 12 years old and are sitting in front of the computer, ready to start playing the game. In the questionnaire Dag has stated that he has played *The Sims* before, while Knut has not. The game has just started and Knut is in control of the mouse and the keyboard. Before this sequence, Knut has asked Dag to show him what to do. Dag instructed him to start by clicking on the create-a-family button, if they didn't want to choose one of the pre-made characters.

*	[*The screen displays the text: "Last name" next to an empty text field*]
00:13	**Dag:** `What should we call it?`
00:14	**Knut:** `E:::-`
00:15	**Dag:** `You decide` [*Knut turns his head towards Dag*]
00:16	**Knut:** `Okay!(.)`[*Knut looks at the keyboard*] `Svensson`
00:18	**Dag:** `Svensson(.)`[*Knut sits up straight and places his hand on the keyboard*] `then you can type that-`
00:19	**Knut:** `Mm` [*Knut types the name*]

The question (00:13) is direct and calls for a response. The response can either be made by suggesting a name or not. Knut is not giving any suggestion, instead he responds with a wordless sound: `Eeee`. Knut has the possibility to answer with an utterance revealing a glimpse of his alignment to the task at hand. Statements like "Doesn't matter"; "It has to be something common/crazy/fun"; "Couldn't care less"; "I don't know" would have accomplished that. Knut has also the possibility to open up for negotiation or a dialogue on the topic of their Sim family. This could easily be done by countering with a question like "What do you think"; "What kind of family are we going to create". To be able to produce responses like this, the player has to have an idea of what is going on in the activity and what is expected of him in the situation. Since Knut has never played The Sims before, it is reasonable that the wordless sound is used to make it apparent that Knut does not know how to respond in a way that he believes Dag expects. As seen in (0:16) Knut knows how to suggest a family name, and yet he waits until Dag makes it clear that it is Knut's decision to make. When Knut accepts the assignment of naming the family he comes up with a suggestion. Knut chooses a common Swedish family name: `Svensson`. Dag repeats the family name, and says what Knut can do: `then you can type that` (00:18). Knut displays both verbally and by his action that he has understood what to do. Dag is taking the role here of the more experienced and Knut is taking the role as the novice. This is recurring through the session, but most of the time it is Knut who formulates the questions of what to do in their game play. This framing of player positions as "the instructor/the instructed" influenced the players to focus on the object for instruction, and that is how to play the game. The players' focus is to respond to what happens on the screen, and not so much to negotiate possibilities and make up joint player plans, which this excerpt illustrates. Knut's suggestion of the common Swedish family name `Svensson` (00:18) can therefore be seen as a response to the last name prompt on the screen as a result of the players' framing of player positions.

Excerpt 5.2, The Sims, Session 9

Albin and Oliver are 10 and 11years old at the time of the recording. Both players have stated in the questionnaire that they have previous experience of *The Sims*, although the amount of time spent with the game differs. Oliver has noted that he has played the game a lot, while Albin has not. This pair of players handles this imbalance in their play experiences a little bit differently than it was handled in the previous example. In this sequence, it is the more experienced player, Oliver, who is in control of the computer mouse and the keyboard. *The Sims* has just been launched and the tape from the video recordings shows that the players are

in the create-a-family screen while the data collector is still in the room checking the camera. The players talk about what to name their family and Oliver suggests: **The Hobo** (Swe: Luffar'n) in a quiet voice.

*		[*The create-a-family screen displays a text field for the last name*]
00:31	**Albin:**	**What shall we call it? (.) The hobo?**
00:34	**Oliver:**	[*Starts typing and then turns his head towards the video camera and the data collector*]
*		[*The screen is displaying the letters "The Hoboes[20]" in the text field*]
00:41	**Albin:**	**The Hoboes** [*Said in a low tone of voice while gazing at the screen. Oliver turn his head towards the data collector*]
00:43	**D.C.**	**I'm gonna take off** [*Said with a smiling voice and the data collector leaves the room while observed by Albin. Oliver turns his head towards the screen again.*]
00:44	**A & O**	**he he** [*Giggle*]
*		[*The create-a-Sim screen*]
00:49	**Albin:**	**Yeah, okay** (.) **First name** (.) **that can be me then** [*Points towards the screen*] **and I want to look like that**
00:52	**Albin:**	**Glas**[**ses** [*Oliver starts typing*]
00:53	**Oliver:**	[**ne he he he** [*Rippling laugh, Albin's name is displayed in the text field* **No you can check everyone first** [*smilingly*]
00:57	**Albin:**	**Yeah, yeah** (.) **but I'd like to look sort of intelligent**

Albin indicates on what to focus by asking how to name their family (00:31) and Oliver responds by typing. In turn 00:41, Albin shows that he has read what Oliver has typed in the **text field by reading it out loud, and the players giggle when the data collector leaves the** room. When Oliver has clicked the button to confirm the last name, the create-a-Sim screen is displayed. Albin immediately responds: **Yes okay, first name (.) that one can be me then and I want to look like that.** Oliver shows that he accepts by starting to type, and as seen in turn 00:53, the first character is named Albin. Albin refers to his character as "I" and "me", and suggests the looks of his character. He suggests glasses for his character, which Oliver finds funny. He laughs (00:53) and says that Albin can see what appearances are offered in the game before he makes up his mind. Glasses is something that Oliver does not find reasonable, but something that Albin connects with creating an intelligent look.

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[20] This is a translation of the Swedish word: "Luffarna" which was displayed on the screen.

Excerpt 5.3, The Sims, Session 7

In this sequence, Patrick is the more experienced player of the two and has stated in the questionnaire that he has played the game. Dennis has never played the game before, though, and has no previous experiences of *The Sims*. Patrick is in control of the mouse and the keyboard in this sequence.

*		[*The create-a-family screen displays a text field for the last name*]
00:19	**Patrick:**	`What shall we call it then (.) the family?`
00:21	**Dennis:**	`The family (.)the "Tuttan" family` [*Patrick turns his face towards Dennis*] [*Dennis turns his face towards Patrick. The players giggle*]
00:23	**Patrick:**	`No:heh!` [*smiling talk. Turns his head towards the screen*] `No, but a normal name` [*Both players are smiling*]
00:26	**Dennis:**	`Okay` [*smiling talk. Turns his head towards the screen*]
00:27	**Patrick:**	[*leans forward. Gazes at the keyboard*] `Hansson no:`
00:28	**Dennis:**	`No!`
00:30	**Patrick:**	`E::hh-`
00:31	**Dennis:**	`Eriksson`
00:32	**Patrick:**	`Yeah` [*starts typing*]

The question (00:19) is similar to that in excerpt 5.1 but in this example the problem is raised by the player who is in control of the keyboard. In that sense, Patrick has the possibility to just type a name he finds suitable as in excerpt 5.2, but he chooses to let Dennis have a say in the decision. In this way, he manages to show his framing of the activity as a collaborative project and opens up for a dialogue on the topic. Dennis immediately responds by suggesting the nonsense word `Tuttan` (00:21). Following Vygotsky's (2004) theory on creativity, the nonsense word could be regarded as a fantasy name as a result of the player's use of previous experience in creating something new. One could speculate if the name is created by playing with the Swedish word for titties (Swe: tuttar) or playing with the name of the Egyptian king Tutankhamon. Analytically, neither of these interpretations can be strengthened by the strip of interaction, and is known only by the player (Vygotsky, 2004), but that is not the point here. The point is that it shows that the activity opens up for fantasy and creativity to explore something new. When Dennis has made his suggestion, the players seek eye contact and giggle and in this way the utterance can be seen as an attempt by Dennis to initiate a play

frame (Goffman, 1986). The initiation is however rejected, which is shown by Patrick's response (00:23). It shows that, for Patrick, the fantasy name is the opposite of a `normal name` (00:23) Dennis's smiling response (00:26) indicates that he has no hard feelings about the rejection and agrees to choose another name. Patrick suggests a common Swedish family name, but finishes off with a `no` (00:27). Dennis's response is also `no` (00:28) which shows that he agrees with Patrick's rejection of the family name `Hansson`, and it also shows that he leaves the turn to Patrick. The wordless sound: `Ehh` (00:30) is enough to show Dennis that he should propose a `normal name`. Dennis suggests the common Swedish family name: `Eriksson` (00:31), which is accepted with a `yeah` (00:32) by Patrick. This shows that the norm of what can be considered as normal family names for these players is equal to common Swedish ones and what they find appropriate names to use. The strip of interaction is followed by a frame break (Goffman, 1986) where the players' focus shifts from the screen to the keyboard, where all keys are not functioning properly. The problem with the keyboard results in a difficulty in typing the name: `Eriksson` in the text field. After having tried a couple of times, these players have to change their family name to `Ring`. The excerpt is a good example of how small cues and signals made by the players in their interaction make visible to themselves and to each other how to frame the activity. These players frame the activity as a playful collaborative project. Even though these players open up for a playful and open atmosphere, the activity can not be just a lot of "blah-blah" which the following excerpts from this session also reveals.

The excerpts have shown that when deciding and entering the last name for the family, the players do just that. With a few exceptions, the names are mostly common Swedish family names. Even if the activity opens up for talking about what kind of family to create and for making up some player plans for their family, this kind of dialogue is missing in the present sessions. The players just respond to the game, and do what they are asked to in order to be able to continue in the activity.

Presenting the Ring Family
The excerpts below illustrate the process of Dennis and Patrick's creation of the Ring family. A family created by the players may consist of a maximum of eight characters. Dennis and Patrick choose to create three characters, which they give the roles of a dad, a mom, and a child – a traditional nuclear family. In the first two examples, the strips of interaction are quite

long. The purpose is to highlight what kind of themes are displayed on the screen and what kind of issues are manifest through the players' dialogue and interaction with the game.

Excerpt 5.4, The Sims, Session 7

Dennis and Patrick are in the create-a-new Sim mode. Before this sequence they have made two choices. The two buttons with the icon for adult and the icon for male have been pressed.

*		[*the* create-a-character screen]
*		[*see Figure 5.1 below*]
01:47	**Patrick:**	**Hchm** [*Giggles*] **(.)** [*Dennis leans towards the screen*] **that's a real oldie** [*laughingly*]
01:50	**Patrick:**	**(Inaudible) Hcm** [*giggles*]
*		[*see Figure 7.2 below*]
01:56	**D & P:**	**HE he he heh** [*both players laugh out loud, Dennis turns his face towards Patrick*]
01:57	**Patrick:**	**He has a beer belly you know** [*laughingly*]
01:59	**Dennis:**	**Yeah** [*laughing talk*] **huh huh** [*laughs*]
02:00	**Patrick:**	**He's not skinny** [*laughingly*]
02:01	**Dennis:**	**No** [*smiles*]
*		[*see Figure 7.3 below*]
02:03	**Patrick:**	**Wow! The piano player** [*smilingly*]
02:05	**Dennis:**	°**Mm**° [*quietly, smiles*]
*		[*The character is wearing gray pants and a sweater*]
02:06	**Dennis:**	**THAT'll be good!** [*Increased tempo*]
02:07	**Patrick:**	**Yeah, that's good** [*moves the cursor to the arrow for selecting head*]
02:08	**Dennis:**	°**Mm**° [*low tone of voice*]
02:09	**Patrick:**	**Actually, he can have that head (.) >Don't you think?<** [*increased tempo*] **He can be- he can be black** [*said while moving the cursor in a distinct direction to the dark-hand icon and clicks on it*]
*		[*the Sim is represented with the darkest shade of skin color*]
02:14	**Patrick:**	[*shoots a hasty glance at Dennis who is looking at the screen with a straight face*]
02:15	**Patrick:**	**Ffh >"he has green hair"<** [*said in a high-pitched squeaky voice while moving the cursor to the character's head*] **(.) >"so damn ugly"<** [*said in a high-pitched voice. Dennis giggles*]
02:18	**Patrick:**	**Try this one then (.)** [*said while moving the cursor in a distinct directio*

		to the medium-hand icon, smiling talk] **medium** [*Patrick clicks on the medium-hand icon while Dennis is smiling*]
*		[*the Sim is represented with the medium shade of skin color*]
02:20	**Patrick:**	**"purple hair!"** [*said in a high-pitched voice*]**(.) no** [*Patrick clicks on the light-hand icon while Dennis is smiling*]
*		[*the Sim is represented with the lightest shade of skin color*]
02:22	**Patrick:**	**he can have ordinary hair**
02:24	**Dennis:**	**Mm**

Figure 5.1[21]. "Hchm, that's a real oldie"

Figure 5.2. "He has a beer belly you know"

Figure 5.3. "Wow! The piano player"

Screen shots reproduced with permission from Electronic Arts Inc.

The excerpt above is an example of what the game has to offer in this mode: aesthetics such as style for clothing, bodies, heads with different haircuts and colors, and skin color. Patrick and Dennis use their shared visual field to comment on the images of the characters as soon as they take shape on the screen. Their laughter indicates a playful framing of their task, and is also used to clarify what is considered as a norm for their male Sim. A male character in a suit (Figure 5.1) is interpreted as a man from the adult world and is given the epithet **a real oldie**. The somewhat overweight character in his underwear (Figure 5.2) makes them laugh and is commented on as a **beer belly**. The image of the Sim wearing a tuxedo (Figure 5.3) is identified as **the piano player**. This shows that the game content offers the players a chance to create characters which by their comments and their laughter are taking the shape of different stereotypes. According to Goffman (1961), a role can also be *played at*, and this may be when a person mimics a role "for the avowed purpose of make-believe" (p. 100). This could be a reasonable description of what happens in this strip of interaction. Laughter is

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[21] Figure 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3 are screen shots reproduced with permission from Electronic Arts Inc.

frequent and indicates that the boys are playing with gender symbols, in these cases male stereotypes, which according to Connell (1987) are a common amusement for boys of this age. They horse around and are playing with the roles that are given to the different images to have a good laugh. That way, a distance is marked to a given identity, which allows them to joke about their actions. They take turns at the playful framing (2:09-2:24). In turn (2:09), Patrick draws attention to the character's head and skin color. He is making a suggestion of using the dark color and says: `he can be a black.` He clicks on the dark-hand icon and as soon as the Sim character appears on the screen with a dark skin color, Patrick takes a quick glance at Dennis. As seen in turn (2:15), Dennis responds by focusing on the screen with a straight face. Patrick turns his focus towards the screen again and comments on the character's hair color: `Damn ugly`. Patrick changes the skin color again by clicking on the medium-hand-icon, and for the second time he comments on the character's hair color. Patrick's comments on the hair color are accompanied by Dennis smiling. Finally, when Patrick has chosen the lightest shade of the skin color with the argument: `he can have ordinary hair`, Dennis responds with a: `Mm.` Instead of commenting on the character's skin color, which was the object of their focus in the first place (2:09), the verbal response made by Patrick refers to the color of the character's hair. It is not possible to say if these players would have chosen a character in the darkest shade of skin color with an ordinary hair color, but it is possible to say that the character is created to look what they claim to be ordinary (Swe: vanligt).

Mom as Barbie

The next excerpt illustrates some of the variables that have to be dealt with when creating a Sim. Apart from strengthening what are considered as male and female domains, there are examples in the empirical material of how the boys accentuate norms for appearance. This way, the players display and are exposed to themes such as gender, age, ethnicity, and class when creating the characters.

Excerpt 5.5, The Sims, Session 7

The excerpt is preceded by Patrick and Dennis' creation of a male Sim when one of the players says: "there's the dad**",** pauses, and continues: "now we must have a mom as well".

*   [*The create-a-family screen*]

03:23	**Patrick:**	**We need to have a mom as well** [*clicks on the symbol for female*]
*		[*see Figure 5.4 below*]
03:28	**P & D:**	[*the players are laughing out loud*]
03:29	**Dennis:**	**She can't look like that-**
03:30	**Patrick:**	**"I am Miss United States"** [*Said in English, the players laugh out loud*]
*		[*see Figure 5.5 below*]
03:34	**Patrick:**	**No that's ugly** [*laughingly*]
*		[*see Figure 5.6 below*]
03:36	**Dennis:**	**That'll be good! Oh, no:h! heh** [*laughingly, while clicking on different alternatives*]
03:38	**Patrick:**	**Damn, now you can see that thing**
03:40	**D & P:**	**Hchhem** [*the players giggle*]
*		[*The female Sim is dressed in a white shirt, dark vest, and brown pants*]
03:43	**Patrick:**	**ROBIN HOOD!** [*in a loud voice*]
03:44	**Patrick:**	[*while clicking on different alternatives*] **no (.) no (.) no (.) chhem**
*		[*the female Sim is wearing the same clothes as in Figure 5.7*]
03:51	**Dennis:**	**That's good!**
03:52	**Patrick:**	**Yeah, that's good (.)**
03:54	**Patrick:**	**No, another head (.)**
03:55	**Dennis:**	**Yeah** [*In a low voice*]
03:59	**Patrick:**	**There are different haircuts** [*in a low voice while clicking at the arrow to the right of the Sim's head to change the head*]
*		[*see Figure 5.7 below*]
04:01	**Dennis:**	**It can be like that**
04:02	**Patrick:**	[*clicks on the arrow to the right of the head to change the Sim's head*] **Yes, that's really nice (.)** [*while moving the cursor to the left side of the Sim's head*] **We move back** [*clicks on the left arrow*]
*		[*see Figure 5.7 below*]
04:05	**Patrick:**	**So! (.) That's nice [*Dennis: nm*] We see if – see what a black looks like** [*Said in a low voice while moving the cursor to the darkest hand icon and clicks on it*]
*		[*the Sim is represented with the darkest shade of skin color*]
04:08	**Dennis:**	[*Patrick starts moving the cursor to the left*] **>No no no<** [*rapidly*]
04:09	**Patrick:**	**No it didn't look good (.)** [*clicks on the left hand icon*] **No, we'll take this one**
*		[*see Figure 5.7 below*]

04:11	**Patrick:**	`What shall we name her? eh`
04:13	**Dennis:**	`Mhm:`
04:15	**Patrick:**	`Elin! It works`

Figure 5.4. "I am Miss United States"

Figure 5.5. "No, that's ugly"
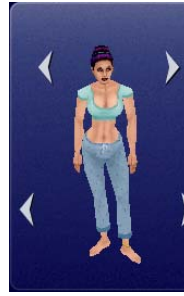
Figure 5.6. "Damn, now you can see that thing"
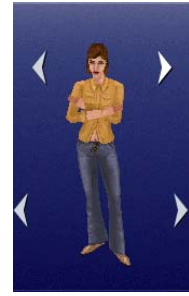
Figure 5.7. "Elin"

Screen shots reproduced with permission from Electronic Arts Inc.

Already in turn 3:23, Patrick is setting the rules for the role of their character. For these boys, creating an adult, female Sim for the dad (Swe: farsa) created in the previous excerpt will be a mom (Swe: morsa). The boys relate the dad and mom to each other and no alternative notion of a family dynamic is given. In several turns, we can observe that the boys have a problem deciding about their mom's appearance. As an example, in turn 3:29 Dennis says: **She can't look like that**. In relation to Blakemores' (2003) results it can be said that the boys find themselves in a situation colored by gender norms and values. They parody the characters' appearances as the utterance where Patrick voices the character and says: **"I am Miss United States"** (03:30). They are playing with the gender symbols to have some fun, but as can be seen in the sequence, the boys handle this kind of play activity where they are going to shape the appearance of their female Sims by giving her clothing and hairdo that they find appropriate. The video shows how the boys focus on their task and use cultural resources that they relate to aesthetics, the style of dressing and design for their characters. They explore what the game can offer them to create an appearance for their character. The boys find the female characters' appearance important – she will be good-looking. The mom for their Sim family should not be too dressed up, too ugly, showing her belly button, or dark-colored.

Excerpt 5.6, The Sims, Session 7

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Previous to this strip of interaction, Patrick and Dennis have finished the male and the female character.

05:23 **Patrick:** **Shall we have anyone more? (.) Shall we have a kid?**
05:25 **Dennis:** **Yes we'll have thre- f[f** [*fading speech*]
05:28 **Patrick:** **[fi[ve**
05:28 **Dennis:** **[FIVE!** [*the players have eye contact*]
children yes! [*smiling talk, looks at the screen*]
05:29 **Patrick:** **No!** [*looks at the screen*] **No, but it's enough with one** [*while clicking on add-new-Sim button*] **It's hard work when they are goir to school all the time(.) It's really boring. Shall we have a boy** [*click on the child icon*] **or a girl? Boy**
05:36 **Dennis:** **Boy (.) I want a boy** [*Leans towards the screen.*]

As we can see in the first turn (05:23), the first question opens up the possibility of creating another Sim character, the second question specifies what age may come into consideration. Dennis immediately says yes, and at first he suggests three children, but interrupts himself and changes the number of children to five (05:28). The explanation that follows does not leave any room for comment. Instead it is followed by the next question about which gender to choose. In his answer: **I want a boy** (05:36), Dennis makes it clear that he has accepted Patrick's account, whereupon the activity can continue.

Dennis is open to the idea of creating a family with many children, which by Swedish standards is above the average family size[22]. However, it is not possible to set the family relations in *The Sims*, and when these players categorize the first of two characters to be a dad and a mom and the following as a child, they do this within narrative frameworks. They use their knowledge of families as a resource to create their Sim family, which can be said to represent the nuclear family. This shows that *The Sims* opens up for exploring and experimenting with alternative family constellations where the narrative may support socio-dramatic play. But Patrick is pointing to a frame of rules (Linderoth, 2004) when he says it is

[22] The *Statistics Sweden* agency has provided official statistics of the population and household census 1960-1990. The average number of children per household with children, was 1.72 in 1990. The birth rate was 1.9 children per woman in 2010:. http://www.scb.se

hard work with five children going to school. He expresses that it just goes on and on. His explanation points forward to the play activity where they are going to interact with their Sims. Therefore it is reasonable to say that Patrick wants their play experience to be as positive as possible. This kind of reasoning is also illustrated in Chapter 6, and a couple of examples were also found in the interaction data with *The Sims*. In (*The Sims*) *Session 8*, that was also the reason given when Knut and Dag "only" created two characters. In similar ways, the narrative of two children living in a house made by Lars was not supported by Magnus (*The Sims Session 1*). The reason given was: "Yeah, but it's very hard if you don't have parents, 'cause it's not easy". There are also examples of when a narrative frame is used to explain why choosing a male adult Sim together with a child Sim: "He's divorced".

Reasoning when customizing the Sims' personality

In the excerpt that follows, three instances from Patrick and Dennis's play session are chosen as an example of how the players could reason when customizing the Sims' personalities. The character's personality in *The Sims* is represented by five pre-defined personality traits: neat, outgoing, active, playful, and nice. Each of them runs on a 1-10 personality scale, and it is up to the player to assign 25 personality points between these traits. The character will then be given a zodiac sign that is closest to the chosen personality for the Sim. The characters' zodiac signs will not only have an impact on what the characters like to do later on in the game mode, but will also have an impact on their relationship. The reason for choosing the three instances is to illustrate how the players' reasoning about how to divide the points shifts, depending on what role that had been given to the character by the players. There are more examples of this kind of reasoning in the interaction data with *The Sims*, but the three instances in *Session 7* provide a possibility for a comparison.

Excerpt 5.7, The Sims, Session 7

Patrick and Dennis reason a little bit differently depending on to which character the personality traits are assigned – the dad, the mom, or the child. To facilitate a comparison of how these players managed this task on each character, the utterances are presented consecutively.

The dad

02:50   **Patrick:**   `Ehh:e (.) We need very nice here (.) He can be a normal`
         `playful (.) he is like an adult (.) He can be active too`

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```
                    (.) a little neat too (.) a little outgoing (.) E:h
                    Let's take a little less on (.) neat (.) So! That's good
03:17   Dennis:     Mm


The mom
05:09   Patrick:    She has to be a little- most on neat (.) She is the lady
                    of the house [Dennis seeks eye contact]
05:13   Dennis:     Yeah [the players are smiling]


The child
06:15   Patrick:    mm: (.) He should be very playful (.) Not so much
                    outgoing He has to be active too and he has to be nice
                    (.) and sort of neat and one more on outgoing (.) That's
                    good, isn't it?
06:33   Dennis:     Mm
```

The sequences above show the most valued personal trait for the different characters and their roles as a dad, mom and a child. Patrick says that the dad has to be very nice (02:50), but just playful enough and active as he is an adult. The least valued personal trait for the dad is neat as opposite to their mom where neat (05:09) is the most valued one. Playful (06:15) is the most valued one for the child.

These player actions are meaningful if they are related to given assumptions that moms are neat, dads are nice, a bit active and just playful enough, and the children very playful, active, and nice. These players mirror stereotype cultural norms of what personality traits an adult and a child should have. It is also clear that it is the nuclear family that constitutes the model of the Sim family that the players create in this session. As an example, even though the first character is an adult male Sim, and the family relations are not to be set in *The Sims*, it comes naturally for these players to call their character a dad.

In similar ways, other players have used the distribution of personality traits points for each category to make characters more playful (sessions 4, and 7) or nice (session 4) if the character is a child; a football player is made more active (session 5), female adults more neat (sessions 3, and 7) or nice (session 4). The male character, named James Bond by the players,

received personality traits points equally distributed in each category because it is good for an adult (session 6). Other strategies used by the players were to use their knowledge of zodiac signs as a resource to distribute the personality trait points "automatically". The zodiac signs used were the same as the players' or of other people in their surroundings (sessions 1, 2, 3, and 9). This alternative was used in most cases to fill the role with attributes when they created a character named as "I" or other people that served as a model for the character.

The excerpts have shown that the freedom to explore made the players use their previous experiences as a resource for acting out narratives about family life. These narratives rather fossilized old stereotypical norms and values, instead of being an arena for exploring.

Becoming a house hold consumer

The players who are playing *The Sims* are asked not to (with the exception of the players in session 1) use any cheat codes to attract more money in the game.

The currency in *The Sims* is called Simoleons and is hereafter marked as §. The players started with § 20 000 and most of them chose to move into a house they could afford. No matter what kind of narrative the players previously added to their creation of their characters, in this activity type, the players' focus was on furnishing within the limits of their budget. Common words used in their communication are related to economic discourse: money, buy, cheap, expensive, afford, price, how much, cost, bill, bad economy, sell, broke. These excerpts are chosen to display examples of when the players are oriented to the rules within the game, yet they add their previous everyday life experiences.

Moving in
Excerpt 5.8, The Sims, Session 1
This excerpt is preceded by Lars and Magnus having finished their two characters.

*		[*the create-a-character screen*]
06:20	**Lars:**	How much money do we have?
06:21	**Magnus:**	Twenty thousand you ALWAYS start with
06:25	**Lars:**	How come?

06:26   **Magnus:** `Well, it's like that.`

As seen in turns 06:20 and 06:21, the players' first orientation is towards the amount of money the players have for disposal on the Sims account. This is the only exception where the players missed the information not to use any cheat codes. When these players found out what small houses they could afford, they immediately gained some more money by using cheats. Soon they chose the more expensive alternative of building a house from scratch.

Excerpt 5.9, The Sims, Session 3

Here is another pair of players in the same segment of the game, Arne and Mats.

06:25   **Mats:**   `Ah, it's tough that you have to start building a house too`

06:27   **Arne:**   `It doesn't take such a long time`

06:29   **Mats:**   `No, but we have so little money(.) move out (.) is ther any good lot?`

Mats complains that is so tough to start building a house, while Arne says: `It doesn't take such a long time` (06:27). Arne assumes that Mats is referring to the time it will take them to build a house, and does not see this is a problem. This is a misinterpretation as seen in turn 06:29 when Mats makes their tight budget a reason for why it is so tough to build a new house. This is a correct interpretation of the game rules since it is more expensive to build a house from scratch than it is to choose one of the small pre-created houses.

Excerpt 5.10, The Sims, Session 8

Before this sequence, Dag and Knut have created two characters – a male and a female adult Sim. The size of the family is chosen with the argument that it is tough (Swe: tjatigt) with children and the players are now ready for the next phase. The next excerpt is an example of how the economical logic within the rules of the game steered the players to choose one of the small pre-made houses, rather than to build a new one. Knut places the cursor at the button and asks:

*   [*the select-a-family screen*]

04:03   **Knut:**   `That one? (.) Move in the family` [*clicks on the button*]

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*		[*the neighborhood screen*]
04:06	**Dag:**	**Now we've got to find a nice house for a good price (.)**
		remember that you only have 20 000

Dag, who took the role as an instructor, responds to Knut's question: **That one?** (04:03) in an informative way when he refers to their economy as an issue for the decision of what house to choose. A couple of houses were rejected as they were considered too expensive. Dag suggests that Knut look for a house that is small. After this sequence, the players selected a house on which they commented: "That was pretty cheap". These players focused on the price when they were to choose their house. No other properties of the house, such as aesthetics, location, or the Sims who would live there were discussed by the players. This reveals that the frame for choosing an appropriate house was to meet the game rules, and the resources the players had at their disposal. The economic constraints were commented on by most pairs of players in this phase of the game, which the next excerpt also illustrates.

Excerpt 5.11, The Sims, Session 7
Before this sequence, Patrick, who is in control of the mouse and the keyboard, has just moved the family into the neighborhood to find them a house. He has just declared "I know this game".

14:02	**Patrick:**	°°**They are such damn small houses**°° [*Quietly*] **I'm used to**
		building like lux- luxury houses, (.) on mine you know,
		°**cause I know like codes,but**° **Hrm** [*Clears his throat*] **we're not**
		supposed to use those (.) Bad

Patrick shows that he does not like the small houses by saying: **such damn small houses** (14:02). He is used to building luxury houses by using cheat codes to gain more money. By using the word **bad,** as in the last utterance, it becomes clear that he would have chosen something different if the players were allowed to use cheats. These players are forced to explore the logic of economy within the game by following the game rules.

Excerpt 5.12, The Sims, Session 9

This pair of players takes the opportunity instead of dreaming a little about the more expensive houses. Previous to this sequence, Albin has pointed out their lack of money, and asked if Oliver knows "the cheat".

*		[*the neighborhood screen*]
04:50	**Oliver:**	**I'd like to live in that one:he** [*Laughing talk, points with the cursor at a lot with a big house and a swimming pool*]
04:52	**Albin:**	**Yeah! that would be cool** [*Smiling talk*] **(.) with a swimming pool and all**
04:55	**Oliver:**	**But you could build one** [*Looks at Albin*]
04:56	**Albin:**	**I know (5s.) but it costs some**
05:03	**Oliver:**	**It** [*Points with the cursor at the house*] **costs fifty thousand (.)** [*Turns his face towards Albin*] **and you start with twenty thousand**

A luxury house with a swimming pool is considered to be something cool, as seen in turn 04:52. They see that it is possible to build houses like that in the game, but Oliver points out the unfeasibility of building such a house within frameworks of the economical rules in *The Sims*.

To sum up, the excerpts illustrate that the economical rules within the game steer the players to make certain choices that they might not have done otherwise. Big luxury houses are considered as something good and cool, which reflects some knowledge about the ideas of consumption as a lifestyle in the Western world – the ideas of the dream society of wealth.

Furnishing and interior design

To manage the domestic setting in the virtual environment, *The Sims*' players have much shopping to do. With their tight budget, most players focused throughout this part of the game on finding objects as cheaply as possible. Many players also took needs under consideration, theirs as well as their characters'.

Excerpt 5.13, The Sims, Session 4

Olle and Putte are in the buy mode and have started their shopping.

16:15	**Olle:**	**There can't be any unnecessary things**
16:18	**Putte:**	**That one (.) water c-**
16:20	**Olle:**	**°(it's a)° toilet (.)** [*points at the screen*] **take a toilet there**
16:23	**Putte:**	**two hundred fifty-nine**
16:25	**Olle:**	**Ya (.) "brusefåtölj"** [*imitating a Norwegian accent*] **(.) There** [*Olle points at the screen, Putte says:* **there] Mm (.) They don't have to wash their hands**
16:37	**Putte:**	**Oh yeah, they have to**
16:38	**Olle:**	**No, don't bother, it only costs money. They never do it anyway**

These players are trying to find the cheapest in every purchase they make. Olle considers that even a wash basin is an unnecessary cost, since the Sims do not wash their hands anyway. What Olle does not understand is that Sims wash their hands after a visit to the toilet following a player command. The Sims also has needs that have to be fulfilled by the player to be happy. Olle does not know that the hygiene bar is filled when taking a shower, bath, or washing hands after a Sim has used the toilet. Some players in other play sessions were oriented toward meeting their Sims' needs, even in this part of the game.

Excerpt 5.14, The Sims Session 5

These players are in the decision process of choosing a computer as one of their first purchases. A computer in *The Sims* is not only used for entertainment by the character, it is also used for finding a job. Philip has suggested that they should take the simplest computer, but Anders has another opinion and wants them to take the best computer.

24:04	**Anders:**	**But take that** [*points at the screen*]
24:05	**Philip:**	**How much is that one? (.) Ou:ch! six thousand, no that's too [(much)** [*Parallel speech*]
24:08	**Anders:**	**[We cannot even afford that (.) see**
24:11	**Philip:**	**>Shall we take [that?<** [*Rapidly*]
24:11	**Anders:**	**[Yeah that one is cheap**

Ouch! (24:05) is used as a blurted response (Goffman, 1981) to the price of the computer and what it means for these players to **take** (24:05) a computer for six thousand in their situation. He clarifies by saying: **no that's too much**. Based on the corpus of empirical

data used in Chapter 6, it is likely that the price would never have been an issue if these players were "allowed" to use cheat codes in their play. Anders shows that he understands that it is not the necessity of a computer or the price they have to consider, it is what they can afford. Anders agrees with Philip's suggestion of choosing another computer with the argument that it is cheap. This shows that these players are oriented towards a framework of game rules. The more expensive products are, the better they are considered by the players to be, while the cheaper are considered simpler. This is recurrent in the body of empirical data and the following excerpt is an example of this.

Excerpt 5.15, The Sims, Session 9
Albin and Oliver's purchases are done at minimum cost.

11:09	**Albin:**	`Take an ordinary simple stove`
11:13	**Oliver:**	`(Inaudible) Yeah, we have to think of our money` [*laughing talk*]
11:15	**Albin:**	`Yeah, exactly`
11:16	**Oliver:**	`But we can get more money if we work here, you know so we can buy some new thing later`

The logic of the game rules guides these players in their player actions. An ordinary stove at the low cost is considered simple and something that has to be replaced when the household starts to have an income.

Excerpt 5.16, The Sims Session 9
(Continuous with previous excerpt.) Albin and Oliver continue their purchases for the kitchen.

11:21	**Albin:**	`Refrigerator also >we can take the cheapest<`
11:24	**Oliver:**	`Yeah (.) this is cheap (.) HA! HA-ah!` [*laughs*]
11:28	**Albin:**	`Poor! Tshe` [*giggles*] `(.) that's why we're called the Hoboes`
11:32	**Oliver:**	`Mmm (.) we ta::ke a dishwasher that is poor too` [*Low tone of voice*] `HA HA-ah!` [*laughs*]

The refrigerator is also bought at the lowest cost. Oliver says: `Yeah, this is cheap` (11:24), and laughs. Albin responds by saying it is: `poor`, which explains the name of the

Hoboes (Swe: Luffare). Hoboes is the last name of their family and cheap is related with poor and hoboes, which displays the issue of class in their dialogue.

Excerpt 5.17, The Sims, Session 7

Patrick and Dennis are having a dialogue about the necessity for the Sims to have a TV.

21:15	**Patrick:**	`<A::nd we: need> (.) we don't have to have a TV (.) we don't need that`
21:19	**Dennis:**	`Oh yes, we have a TV and a sofa otherwise they aren't a goo::d family`
21:24	**Patrick:**	`Okay then-` [*low tone of voice*]
21:25	**Dennis:**	`All families have a TV!`
21:26	**Patrick:**	`No:eh "I haven't!" >Oh yes<` [*smiling talk*]
21:28	**Dennis:**	`hehe` [*giggles*]
21:29	**Patrick:**	`I have five sets` [*smiling talk, Dennis laughs*]
21:32	**Dennis:**	`We ha:::ve (3 s.)`[*while looking up towards the ceiling*] `three TVs`
21:39	**Patrick:**	`They can have that TV then` [*Dennis says something inaudible in parallel*]
21:41	**Dennis:**	`I have a 28" in my room and we have a small one downstairs and a (.) 32" in the living room` [*Patrick starts to troll while Dennis is speaking*]

Patrick is in turn (21:15) arguing they do not need a TV. Dennis, on the other hand, defines a **good family** in terms of having a **sofa and a TV** (21:19). The players start to talk about how many TV sets they have at home and that they are according to their own norms defined as good families.

Excerpt 5.18, The Sims, Session 8

Symbols and objects are also compared to their physical homes, as in the following excerpt. When Dag and Knut decided they had to start furnishing up their house and stated: **We just have 5000 kronor**, this made the player prioritize what was most needed within the budget. Their choices were guided by the question: **What else do we need?** as well as the price. After some purchases they decided they needed a chair, even if they realized they only had 1000 left. They also needed a bed and a toilet before they were broke and they "could start". They chose a toilet with a "good bladder" and placed it on the first floor.

11:54	**Dag:**	`That was an odd toilet heheh` [*giggles*]
11:56	**Knut:**	`Mm` [*smiles*]
11:58	**Dag:**	`That isn't something you have at home`
11:59	**Knut:**	`No, it isn't`

The toilet they chose is considered odd and Dag says: `that isn't something you have at home` (11:58). The `odd toilet` (11:54) is something that these players accept within their game encounter, but not at home. The focus for these players is on the game rules here, and choosing a toilet with a good bladder makes their player experience easier.

Excerpt 5.19, The Sims, Session 2

All players continue to orient towards economical issues throughout this part of the game, and the Sim account is balanced from time to time, as the following excerpt is an example of.

13:04	**Jon:**	`Where does it say how much money there is?`
13:06	**Sune:**	`There it says` [*Points at the screen*]
13:07	**Jon:**	`Wow, that wasn't so much`

The game steers the players to check the account. Jon comments on the sum: `that wasn't so much` (13:07). This is similar to the pair of players in play session 4 who commented on the sum they had left to spend with the words: "We don't exactly have a fortune".

To sum up, the excerpts illustrate that the players are strongly oriented towards the economic rules of the game in this part of it. Even if the game opens up for narratives or socio-dramatic play, meeting the game rules is prioritized. In a way, it could be said that success in meeting the game rules forces the players to explore notions of consumption. At this state, the game is not a free and open environment for these players in this part of the game.

Dealing with Sims performances and family life

The game activity in The Sims is constituted of a planning phase and a playing phase. Similarly to some of the players in Chapter 6, these players make the shifts in activity from pre-play to play activity visible by using comments such as: "Let's start", "let's play". What it

means is that the players get ready to make their characters interact with symbols, objects, and other characters in the game; thus, this is the phase where the players control their characters in their daily routines in the virtual domestic space.

You are not a housewife are you

Excerpt 5.20, The Sims, Session 9

In the next sequence, where Albin and Oliver are playing, a difference appears in the players' "ideas" of what their playing aims at. Looking at the session as a whole, Albin engages in more narrative interpretations of the game content than Oliver. This is accentuated during the play session when Oliver sees other possibilities of playing the game and consequently acts against Albin's suggestions.

The following excerpt is preceded by an instance where Oliver and Albin's house is completed and Albin is waiting to go downtown to check out the girls. Albin has suggested that Oliver's character could go downtown for a while. This is something Oliver agreed with, but he checks the needs of his character and decides that his character has to go to the toilet first. While Oliver's character is washing his hands after the visit in the toilet, Oliver says:

44:52	**Oliver:**	**So now I'll do some watering** [*Clicks on the flowerbed outside the house, selects watering flowers*]
*		[*Watering flowers is added to the action queue*]
44:59	**Albin:**	**No:but are you going to water, are you** °**Jeez**° [*Smilingly*] [*Swe: för tusan*] **You're not a housewife are you?**
45:03	**Oliver:**	**But you can order a maid to clean for you.** [*Turns his face towards Albin*] **(we can do that later)**
45:07	**Albin:**	**But do that then!**

Albin's expectation makes him think that Oliver's actions are irrational, as indicated by his choice of words; **Jeez**, and his laughter. By accentuating his distance towards the actions, in turn 44:59 he teases Oliver by asking him if he is a housewife. Oliver's statement in turn 45:03 may show that he has perceived that Albin made Oliver's coming action inappropriate. He says: **But you can order a maid to clean for you**, and this is perhaps a way for him to recover the balance in their interaction by giving proof of his knowledge of the

computer game. A Sim with nice and neat surroundings is a happy character and in that sense better for the player. The excerpt illustrates how Albin uses his previous experiences of what belongs to a female domain (watering flowers) as a resource for his interactions during the play activity.

But old ladies want me

Albin, who already in the planning phase declared that he wanted to have an intelligent look continues throughout play session 9 to build on the role that he has given his character. He is using cultural experience as a resource for his fantasy creation. Gradually (Vygotsky, 2004) the image appears of a professor who lives with his son (Oliver's character) and who gladly goes downtown to pick up girls. He is constantly using the pronouns "I" and "me" when he is referring to his character and there is support in the empirical data to claim that Albin establishes his identity in the play activity by exploring a male role which is colored by stereotyped norms and values. This could be described as Albin embracing the role, using Goffman's (1961) term.

Excerpt 5.21, The Sims, Session 9

Before this excerpt, the car has just picked up Albin's character for his second day of work. Oliver's character is in the kitchen when Albin says:

43:01	**Albin:**	**But-eh I want to go downtown** [*Looks around in the physical room*]
43:03	**Oliver:**	**But you can't do that now**
43:05	**Albin:**	**No, no but when I come back I want to go out to (.)** **"check out the girls he,he, heey"** [*smiles*]
43:11	**Oliver:**	**I don't think anyone will have you** [*In a low voice*]
43:12	**Albin:**	**What?**
43:13	**Oliver:**	**I don't think any young people[want you** [*Smiling voice, in a low voice. Turns his head towards Albin*]
43:14	**Albin:**	[*Turns his head towards Oliver*] [**Yeah, but old ladies want me** [*smiles*]
43:17	**Oliver:**	**There aren't any old ladies with big** [*Seeks eye contact, forms hi hands in the shape of a sphere, places his hands flat on his chest*]
43:20	**Albin:**	[*Gazes at Oliver's hands*] **No but (.)** [*Oliver smiles and straightens himself up*] **go to a restaurant, go to the library**

Albin has not given up the thought of going downtown to check out the girls. It seems that just the thought of going out to pick up girls makes him exhilarated, which his laughter may indicate. In turn 43:11, we can see that Oliver does not consider such an event likely to happen. When Oliver is forced to repeat himself he says: `I don't think any young people want you` (43:13), Albin counters: `but old ladies want me` (43:14). Albin's statement might be interpreted as an expression of his realization that he has to take up the role Oliver imposes, that his character symbolizes an old man, and as an old man he has to pick up ladies of the same age. Oliver's utterance in turn 43:17 seems to carry yet another age stereotype, that it is not possible to pick up old ladies. Albin embroiders on his narrative in 43:20, by suggesting that the characters can go to a restaurant or go to the library. Thus, Albin provides a stereotyped image of the old man's interest that might be in line with Oliver's age-stereotyped image of what elderly do and do not do when it comes to picking up girls. The sequence above shows how the players establish the game as an arena for exploring issues of gender and age where the players' creation of narratives constitutes the starting point for their game actions.

SUMMARY

To sum up, the examples have illustrated interactions where the players use cultural experience as a resource to fill the roles they are giving their characters with their fantasy. Still, the players' use of knowledge outside their focused encounter is to a high degree colored by stereotyped norms and values to create their narrative frame. Even though there are possibilities of exploring and establish counter-positions of gender, ethnicity, and age in their stories, the children choose to reproduce stereotype patterns. As soon as the players went to the design phase of the house, the players started to focus on the soft rules within the game, i.e., keeping the budget. This was also the players' focus in the play phase where the players let their characters interact with other characters and the virtual environment. Their possibilities to be free in the game were constrained in two ways: 1) The players filled the roles of the characters with their previous knowledge, which was loaded with stereotypical norms and values of gender, age, ethnicity etc. and 2) The players prioritized the rules of the game before their own suggestions and socio-dramatic play was initiated. As presented in the method chapter, the players in the play sessions with *The Sim*s were told not to use any cheat codes. This might have influenced the players to focus and prioritize the rules within the

game. If so, a question can be raised of whether the players would have played the same if they were allowed to use cheat codes.

CHAPTER 6

THE ROLE OF PRE-PLAY IN GAMES WITHOUT GOALS

Although *The Sims* has the potential to allow new ways of playing, the empirical material in Chapter 5 showed that it was not often done. As earlier stated, the players tended to refer to values and norms that reflect stereotyped patterns. The players' playing constituted an arena for the establishment of traditional norms and values to a larger extent than an arena for exploring counter-culture positions. This raises the question of why we cannot see that *The Sims* enabled multiple creative player expressions when playing and multiple paths in the game. The players in Chapter 5 were told not to use any cheat codes in the game, something that influenced the players to orient towards the 'soft' rules in the game. In this chapter, the players are free to use cheat codes if they choose to do so. How will this influence the way the players organize their play? Chapter 6 takes an interest in the question of *how goals and plans are expressed by the players in their collaborative play with a game that lacks a stated or explicit game goal*.

Play and creativity are not only based on previous knowledge, but also on what cultural materials are on hand to play with. One of the constraints for the players in this was caused by the players having been told not to use any cheat codes, which led the players to follow the logic of economic rules in the game. This stopped them from buying things they wanted, or building the surroundings they wanted. This raises the question of what players would do when they are allowed to use cheat codes in the game to gain more money, and can thus build the environment they want. This is what is going to be explored in the next chapter, but by using a different way to do the analysis.

Working from the premise drawn from Goffman's (1961) work and as shown in Chapter 4, the play session, i.e. the setting in this study, is seen as a *focused encounter*. Even though *The Sims* is a single-player game, playing it with a friend is a highly social activity where the players have agreed to sustain a joint single focus of collaborative play. The object for these players can be said to be playing *The Sims*, or *The Sims 2* for an hour. To be able to do this, they have to take some action for play to reach their object. Constructivism sees the learner/player as an active agent where taking action is primary, but what does taking action really mean in social activities with open-ended sandbox games (OESG)? For instance, how do the players approach the game and what will they make of the activity? Collaborative play is a very diversified practice and how it is experienced depends on how the experience is organized or framed, using Goffman's (1986) concept. Taking a perspective by looking at the process of framing where the players are actually playing an OESG, you could simply ask how this is done. As presented in the previous chapter, this was what guided the initial analysis where the videos were seen in their entirety. When following the players moment by moment in the ongoing flow as the game encounter unfolds in *The Sims 2*, two different interaction patterns emerged. In the first one the players made up some plans for what to do in their activity and seemed to be working towards a goal. In the other, these kinds of player plans could not be found. These preliminary findings were found interesting in relation to previous research about *genre, situated plans, and (inter)action within a focused encounter*. As shown in Chapter 2, there seems to be a growing interest in research in exploring how different game genres steer the player in certain directions. Some studies here departed from game theories to explore the question of how goals in games related to and shaped player behavior (Heide-Smith, 2006). Taking a kind of designer's perspective, video games within this widely known theory, video games are seen as "goal-oriented, rule-based activities, where players find enjoyment in working towards the game goal" (Juul, 2007, p. 1). This kind of view reveals an interest in trying to predict player behavior on what type of goal or plan the player is trying to master. It is as though goals within games are kinds of instructions that the players have to act upon, and the perspective reveals differentiation between "the plan" and "the action" (Suchman, 2007). Moving to perspectives oriented toward social interaction (Chapter 3), the most influential work of situated plans is written by Suchman as a critique to *artificial intelligence* (AI). Plans cannot be determined, according to Suchman; they are accomplished. Other researchers including Juul (2007) have pointed out the limitations of the same game theory if games without explicit game goals are not included (Chapter 1). Based on his own game play, he coined the term *Open and Expressive Games* to describe games

without any explicit game goals which can allow the player "to play according to personal, aesthetic, and social considerations" (Juul, 2007, p. 15). This term refers to the same types of games as those I refer to as OESG. In Ito's (2009) study they are referred to as "construction" games. She (Ito, 2009) made use of the concept of genre to see how different types of games (media genre) played out in, for example, situated play (participation genre). But as argued by the author:

> /…/ [The] game's design has a structuring but not determining effect on how the game will be marketed or played, just as existing practices of gaming or education have a structuring but not a determining effect on what kinds of games will be created. (Ito, 2009, p. 12)

From a social interactional perspective, there is no point in trying to classify games for understanding the social activity without seeing how the games are positioned in social arrangements. There is no instruction to follow point by point when playing an OESG like *The Sims*. The players are left to decide to follow the "soft" rules or not and to decide when to stop playing the game. The design of *The Sims* allows the outcome of game play to be uncertain. As an example, *The Sims* allows the player to do things like setting fire to the Sim house, killing the characters, and still carry on with the play, a point also made by Juul (2007).

Given this, in what way do players set their game goal and make their player plans visible in a collaborative game play activity with an OESG? This chapter focuses on two different interaction patterns found in the initial analysis of the play sessions with *The Sims 2*. In five sessions out of ten, the players articulated some kind of goal for their play. No similar articulation of any player plan could be found in the other five sessions. Four analytical categories were developed to guide the analysis. The plans made up in what in this study is called *pre-play* influenced what the players did in the *play activity*. The aim of the analysis in this chapter is to describe and contrast the two interaction patterns.

First, before presenting the empirical examples in this chapter, the conceptual model and underlying four analytical categories used in this chapter will be presented. Second, illustrative empirical examples are presented where the four analytical categories have been used to structure the presentation.

THE CONCEPTUAL MODEL

From an analytical point of view, being able to claim that some players articulated some kind of goal for their play is possible only if the play session is seen as a whole. It is only when observing the players collaboratively pursuing their goal that it becomes *clearly articulated* and can be identified. Taking a closer look at these articulations of player goals, they had some things in common:

- All of them were very early in the play session;
- all of them articulated what kind of character/s to create and what to do with it/them;
- all of the goals were strived for.

For the players to be able to decide what kind of characters to create and what to do with them requires knowledge about how the game system in *The Sims 2* is structured. It indicates that the players are thinking ahead by pointing out the different types of player activities within the game. There is a design phase (what characters to create "here and now") and a play phase (what to do with the characters "later on"). This is what represents the first interaction pattern and has been categorized as: *Articulated player plans*

This is not to say that the other pair of players lacks knowledge about the game structure, or did not have a plan or a goal for their play. It means that they do not clearly articulate a goal according to the above criteria and therefore a clearly articulated goal could not be identified in the analysis. It also means that the other pair of players have knowledge about the game structure, except for in one play session where none of the players have played *The Sims 2* before. This is what in its initial state represents the second pattern and has been categorized as: *No articulated player plans.*

As already hinted at, when interacting with *The Sims 2*, the play session can easily be divided, depending on the type of activity the players use, into the design phase and the play phase. The design phase is characterized by activities such as design of the characters, the Sims (in some extensions even the design of pets), and design of the house these characters afterwards move into. The play phase is defined as the activities where the players are able to control and manage their Sims to interact with other Sims and objects in the virtual environment. This is something that can be done in *The Sims 2* only after the player has pressed the live-mode

button. An event similar to the players' focused encounter is segmented in some way (Jordan & Henderson, 1995). This means that "they have an internal structure that is recognized and maintained by the participants" and as an analyst, one focus of interest is how players make this structure visible (Ibid, p. 59), or framed as Goffman might have said, to themselves and to each others. The transitions in segments were easily recognized in the empirical material, not only by shifts in activity between the two phases, but also by the players' comments such as: "Shall we start?", "Shall we begin?", "Let's play!". (This was also shown in the interaction data with *The Sims*, see Chapter 5). These utterances in the middle or in the end of an activity like the play sessions studied could be seen as a kind of play signals that highlight what is to come – some sort of play activity. In this way, the design phase came to be seen as a phase when the players have prepared for something else to happen and that "something else" is when the players are able to manage and control their characters. In that way, the design phase can be seen as setting the stage for play and the play phase can be seen as acting out a play. Therefore, the categories used to represent the play activity in the design phase and in the play phase are: *Pre-Play* and *Play Activity*.

	Articulated Player Plans	No Articulated Player Plans
Pre-Play	Excerpt 6.1- 6.5, Session 10	Excerpt 6.6-6.9, Session 3
Play Activity	Excerpt 6.10-6.11, Session 10	Excerpt 6.12-6.13, Session 3

Figure 6.1. A model of the analytical categories

The four categories presented in Figure 6.1 (pre-play, play activity, articulated player plans, no articulated player plans) will serve as analytical categories and work as a conceptual framework to guide the researcher's analysis of the empirical data. (It is important to emphasize that the categories are not words that the players used during their focused encounter.) The purpose of doing this is to show examples of how (in what way) the articulation of a game goal projected its course in pre-play and influenced what the players did in the play activity. Illustrative examples will be given where the articulation of a goal

could not be found. The attention in the analysis is on how the arrangement of activities in pre-play projects its course and influences the play activity. Thus, there is an analytical interest in looking into the relationship between the activities in pre-play and the activities in the play activity. In this way, the two interaction patterns can also be contrasted. Therefore, you could say that in a sense, the four analytical categories that structure this chapter could be seen retrospectively as a result of the initial analysis.

The excerpts below are chosen to illustrate and contrast the two different interaction patterns that emerged in the total body of the empirical data where the players played *The Sims 2*. The representative examples of each interaction pattern are chosen from two play sessions (3, 10) to describe the interpretative work the players do in their focused encounters. As I will illustrate below, one interaction pattern (session 10) describes how these players work toward the game goal that they articulated in *pre-play*. The other interaction pattern describes the players' interpretative work where no articulation of a goal could be found.

SOME INTERACTIONS FROM PRE-PLAY

Two pairs of players have been chosen as representative examples of two different ways of organizing the activity. First, the players who articulate a game goal will be presented, followed by a presentation of the players where an articulated game goal could not be found.

Articulated player plans

	Articulated Player Plans	**No Articulated Player Plans**
Pre-Play	Excerpt 6.1- 6.5, Session 10	Excerpt 6.6-6.9, Session 3
Play Activity	Excerpt 6.10-6.11, Session 10	Excerpt 6.12-6.13, Session 3

Figure 6.2. Excerpts chosen from play session 10 in pre-play

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Excerpts 6.1-6.5 from play session 10 have been chosen as representative examples of the players' interpretative work during the pre-play process. The first examples are from the time in pre-play when the players cannot interact with the game, i.e., when the game or an application is loading.

Excerpt 6.1, The Sims 2, Session 10

Previous to this sequence, the two players (both aged 14) asked the researcher: `Is it ok if we cheat, sort of?` The researcher replied affirmatively, whereupon the researcher left the room.

*		[*The screen shows that The Sims 2, Bon Voyage is loading*]
02:23	**Irma:**	`Ehhe` [*Laughing while looking at the screen*]
02:24	**Leon:**	`Hey, look!`
02:25	**Irma:**	`>Bon Voyage, I've never played that<` [*Rapidly*]
02:26	**Irma:**	`>We create the richest guy in the world<` [*Rapidly*] `so he can travel around the world!`
02:48	**Leon:**	`Yeah, sure`
02:49	**Irma:**	`'Cause I want to see how it looks like when they're travelling.`
02:51	**Leon:**	`Yeah`
02:51	**Irma:**	`It's totally fun`
02:52	**Leon:**	`Wonder if you (.) sort of can be on the plane and so and walk around` [*Laughing voice*]
02:55	**Irma:**	`Yeah, that's right. I haven't even thought of that`
*		[*The choose-neighborhood-to-play screen appears*]
02:57	**Irma:**	[*Leans toward the computer*]
02:59	**Irma:**	`Hch` [*Laughs*] `Okay! (.) We take Pleasantview`

This illustrates how these players use the loading time to reveal to themselves and to each other how to frame their focused encounter and how to approach the task of playing *The Sims 2, Bon Voyage* for an hour.

As seen in the sequence, Irma focuses on the screen and laughs as soon as it shows that *Bon Voyage* is loading. Since there are no possibilities to interact with the game while it is loading, the laughter may indicate expectations that something fun is going to happen. The laughter

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has also drawn Leon's attention to the screen. This is made apparent by the response: `Hey look` (02:24), an utterance which supports the positive framing of the players' focused encounter and encourages Irma to continue. Even though the utterances make explicit that the player has never played *Bon Voyage* before, Irma almost immediately suggests what they can do: `We create the richest guy in the world so that he can travel around the world` (02:26). This plan of action suggests not only what kind of character they can create in pre-play, it also suggests what to do with their Sim in the play activity. By the suggestion in (02:26) and the use of the first person pronoun "we", Irma makes it apparent that their focused encounter is considered a joint project which needs an answer, something that Leon agrees to. Irma has interpreted the expansion correctly, that it is about travel. However, not knowing that the travel activities within *The Sims 2* are limited to three vacation destinations, Irma expresses expectations of travelling around the world. The players' previous experiences of playing *The Sims 2* give them the knowledge that things cost money in Sims' lives, just as they do in our real human lives. To travel around the world is an activity that is possible for someone who can afford it – `the richest guy in the world`. But as seen in the introduction to this excerpt, money is no object in their game play, as they are allowed to use cheats. These two things, cheats and the theme of *Bon Voyage*, combine to help Irma articulate a game goal within a narrative frame. In a way, you might also say that the narrative frame is their plan of action. It is interesting to see how Irma takes the active role when revealing suggestions, involvement, and expectations of their shared activity. By using the pronoun "we", Irma manages to frame their activity as a "to have fun" activity. Leon makes this possible by taking a supportive role, which is made visible and unfolds during this strip of interaction.

The excerpt also shows that the players make the internal structure of the computer game visible. In turn (02:57), Irma changes the frame of interaction by leaning towards the computer when the screen changes and the choose-a-neighborhood-to-play screen appears, laughs and says: `Okay!,` pauses and says: `We take Pleasantview`. The bodily as well as the verbal actions help Irma to show what to orient towards, and shows "transitions in segmentations" (Jordan & Henderson, 1995) which are indicated by shifts in activity. This is recurrent in almost every session in the total body of the empirical data (playing *The Sims 2*) by using utterances like "Okay!", or other sound-making and response cries (Goffman, 1981) such as "Uh!", "Shh!", "Hm!" and "Ooops!"

The game drives the activity further; even if it opens up for conversations about what is possible to do in the game, or what the players have to do next, the focus on interacting with *The Sims 2* is never lost. The excerpts have shown how these players use the time where an application in the game is loading to talk about what they can do in the play session. Almost all players who articulated some kind of player plan or game goals use the loading time to discuss what kind of Sims to create in pre-play and what to do with them in the *Play Activity*. It is important to emphasize that in these sequences, the player plans always pointed forward to the Play Activity. This is not something that the players are "forced" to do, to be able to continue playing *The Sims 2*; it is something they choose to do. They are framing their decisions as they are taking control of the game.

The players in play session 10 are representative of all those sessions where the players played *The Sims 2*, and the players in play session 10 continue to talk about things that matter when they are setting the stage for play. The following excerpt is another example of how this interpretative work unfolds, where the players are framing their decisions as they are taking control of the game. As soon as the players chose the *Pleasantview*[23] neighborhood for their play, the players find themselves waiting for another application to load (Pleasantview). This time, they use the loading time to talk about what kind of decisions they have to make for the creation of their characters. Creating a family is something that these players consider a part of the game and something they have to do before they start traveling. The conversation is distinguished by many laughs and giggles, when the appearances of their characters are the topic.

Excerpt 6.2, The Sims 2, Session 10
Previous to this sequence, Irma has suggested that they can create their characters alternately, whereupon Leon responds with a question and asks how many characters they should create.

03:23	**Irma:**	**We'll make three I think**
03:25	**Leon:**	**Yea (Inaudible)**
03:27	**Irma:**	**Or (.) it's enough with two, it's a hassle playing with more** [*Seeks eye-contact*]

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[23] Pleasantview is one of the three pre-made neighborhoods in *The Sims 2* (the base game). Pleasantview is said to be based on the neighborhood from the original *The Sims*, adapted to be 25 years later (http://sims.wikia.com/wiki/Pleasantview). The two new neighborhoods added in *The Sims 2* are Strangetown and Veronaville.

03:29	**Leon:**	`Yea (.)` [*Looks at Irma and pauses*] `'cause then we'll just have`
		`to "euh euh euh"` [*Funny sound making accompanied with a funny face and*
		gesture]

At first, Irma suggests they could create three Sims, but regrets doing it and changes the number of character to two since it is too much work playing with more than that. There are no limits given by the researcher on how many characters they are allowed to create in the play session, nor is there any limitation according to the rule system in *The Sims 2*. The argument that it is too much work to play with more than two Sims is pointing forward to the play activity where the players can control their Sims to interact with other Sims and objects. Therefore, Irma takes the upcoming play activities into consideration. This is something that Leon agrees upon as we can see in the last turn (03:29). In this way, the players take the action of not choosing too many characters as it will influence their play experience in the play activity. Interacting with their Sims should be easy, according to these players, and it is reasonable to suggest that keeping many Sims happy in the play activity might prevent them from traveling. This also makes it explicit that their previously articulated plans of creating the richest man on the world to make him a globetrotter is slightly transformed to account for two Sim characters. The players stop talking when the "Pleasantview" has loaded and the screen is showing the neighborhood. This is yet another example of the players' focus and attention to the screen and on what they have to do next.

Excerpt 6.3, The Sims 2, Session 10

Previous to this sequence, the players leaned forward toward the screen and zoomed in on the neighborhood and zoomed out again. Ready to choose a house for their two Sims, Leon pointed at a big house represented on the screen and said: "We'll go for the biggest (.) biggest (.) biggest". As seen by Leon's repeated requests, Irma rejects the suggestion and comments on his choice of house by saying it is a really tough (Swe: jättejobbigt) house to manage, and promises to find a good one.

04:30	**Irma:**	`(We can take that)`
04:31	**Irma:**	`But this is awesome!` [*While pointing with the cursor between two of the*
		pre-made houses in the house panel] `(.)This is huge!` [*While pointing with*
		the cursor at another house in the house panel]
04:33	**Leon:**	`Yes`

04:34	**Irma:**	**This is good** [*While pointing with the cursor at one of the houses that had been referred to as "awesome"*]
00:35	**Leon:**	**>Okay<**
00:35	**Irma:**	**It's kind of small, but it's okay. For two it will be awesome.** [*Drags the house from the house panel and places it on a lot in the neighborhood.*]

As seen in the sequence above, Irma guides Leon in what kind of houses can be considered as good choices for their game play. The small houses are the ones that are referred to as: **awesome** (04:31). This can be seen as Irma takes the position of being the more experienced player of the two. Irma gives no priority to properties such as luxury and aesthetics when the choice of the house is to be made. The house is chosen to suit two Sims, and not to represent a luxury house for the richest man on the world. Knowing that, as these players work out their player plans, the choice of house is reasonable if one prioritizes the upcoming game experiences in the play activity instead of building on the narrative frame to design the characters' environment – the house. A big house takes a longer time for the players to design and furnish, and it is not worth the work according to this logic. It is something that takes time from their player plans – to travel around the world.

Excerpt 6.4, The Sims 2, Session 10

The players have designed two characters, one of each gender. The preferences for the choices made when the female character was designed were to create someone who looked as feminine as possible. The female Sim was commented on by the players as: **glamorous** and **drop-dead gorgeous** and someone **who must be rich**. The male Sim on the other hand was created to be a funny-looking guy with a bare upper body, wearing a Hawaiian grass skirt. This was commented on by the players as someone who: **has to love Hawaii**. These adjectives given to their characters are not anything supplied by *The Sims 2*. When the players discussed their characters, costumes, and props they always did it in relation to their player plans. In this way, they fill the narrative frame with details. In this strip of interaction, the design is all set, and the players are waiting to move them into the neighborhood when Leon says:

| * | | [*The screen shows that the family is loading*] |
| 29:30 | **Leon:** | **I don't know how to make them rich** |

29:32	**Irma:**	`Well, but I'll fix that (.) 'cause I know the cheats`
29:35	**Leon:**	`'cause they have to travel`
29:36	**Irma:**	`Yes`

The players move their avatars to the house they have previously chosen for their characters and are laughing at the family name chosen for their Sims. The player conversation continues.

30:19	**Leon:**	`Wonder if you can sort of (.) travel around the world.`
30:21	**Irma:**	`I don't know (.) Anyhow, you can travel`
30:22	**Leon:**	`Yes (they have to take a) vacation on Hawaii`
30:24	**Irma:**	`Yes (or something like that they can go to anyway)`
30:27	**Leon:**	`Or don't they have any real places?`
30:30	**Irma:**	`There is sort of` [*Stops talking and focuses on the screen*]

The excerpts above show how the players use the loading time of an application to talk about what they are going to do in the play activity and what kind of player possibilities may be inbuilt in the design of *The Sims 2*. In the last turn (30:30), Irma stops talking in the middle of a sentence and focuses on the screen. The players are watching their Sims arrival with a taxi at their chosen house. About a minute is devoted by the players to laughing and joking about their characters' appearances and their body postures. Then Irma says: `motherload` while writing in a white field displayed on the screen. This is something that tells that the players are using cheats in order to gain more money to spend in their game play. Once more, using cheats and the theme of *Bon Voyage* are put together:

Excerpt 6.5, The Sims 2, Session 10

31:10	**Irma:**	`E:hm (.) I don't know how you travel (but it'll be great`
		`you can sure take the paper as usual, or something`
31:15	**Leon:**	`Yeah (Inaudible)`

The next things to do for the players are to furnish and re-design their house. Even though the players have used cheats to gain some more money, the design of the house is not a priority for them. The players' priorities are getting their house done, so their avatars can travel. The criteria for the furniture are to: `take some simple stuff,` and aesthetic considerations

are not an issue for them. Yet, the kitchen and the bathroom equipment are exchanged for, as they say: `better stuff`. A computer and music instruments are also part in their furnishing.

Play session 10 is an example of one of the patterns that recurs in the empirical data – where the players articulate their player plans in pre-play. A distinguishing characteristic of these utterances is that the player plans point at the two parts in *The Sims 2 – pre-play* and *play activity*. The excerpts from this session are representative examples of the pattern found where the players take action in every task in the game to prepare for play. In other words, this can be seen as the players setting the stage for play. This pattern will now be contrasted to other ways of playing:

No articulated player plans

	Articulated Player Plans	**No Articulated Player Plans**
Pre-Play	Excerpt 6.1- 6.5, Session 10	Excerpt 6.6-6.9, Session 3
Play Activity	Excerpt 6.10-6.11, Session 10	Excerpt 6.12-6.13, Session 3

Figure 6.3. Excerpts chosen from play session 3 in pre-play

The excerpts below are chosen with the purpose of contrasting one pattern (articulation of player plans) with another (no articulation of player plans). This is something easier said than done. It was unproblematic in play session 10 where the players Irma and Leon constantly worked against their player plans, but it is more complicated to show something that is not there. For that reason, the first excerpt below is relatively long, to contrast the different types of subjects for the players' communication of the two patterns. The two players from play session 3 act as an example of what the interaction and communication looked like in the sessions (5 sessions out of 10) where an articulated game goal could not be found.

Excerpt 6.6, The Sims 2, Session 3

Before this sequence, the two players Bea and Clara (aged 13 and 14) waited for *The Sims 2*, *Pets* to load. They did not say a word to each other during the loading time of 17 seconds. Bea broke the silence with a short: **Okay**, when the neighborhood panel was displayed on the screen. Here the players can choose one of the three ready-to-play neighborhoods from the panel by clicking on it, or go to the next panel and create one of their own. The utterance **Okay** drew Clara's attention towards the screen, followed by the response: **Aah, doesn't matter**. Bea responded **Pick one**, whereupon Clara pointed at the screen on the Pleasantview icon. Bea clicked on the icon. Even though, according to Clara, it did not matter what neighborhood the players chose to start in, one choice had to be made to proceed along the sequential logic of the game. In *The Sims 2* you need to be in the neighborhood mode to access the create-a-family tool.

04:17	**Bea:**	[*The screen shows that the game is loading create-a-family*]
04:23	**Bea:**	**Can you have pets now?** [*Looks at Clara and smiles*]
04:26	**Clara:**	**Pets?** [*Bea:* **Yes**] **Yes, this is Pets, you know**
04:28	**Bea:**	**But I've never played this**
04:29	**Clara:**	**Haven't [you?** [*Raises the ton of the voice a little*]
04:29	**Bea:**	**[Na** [*Overlapping speech*]
04:30	**Bea:**	**I've just got the usual**
04:32	**Clara:**	**Sims 2**
04:33	**Bea:**	**Mm**
04:34	**Clara:**	**I had to buy Pets, 'cause I had lost the usual (.) so (.) I borrowed** [*The genitive form of a name*] **to install Pets so I can use it**
04:42	**Bea:**	**Did you get a new one right away (.) or was the CD missing (.) or what (.) ha ha** [*Laughs*]
04:45	**Clara:**	[*Smiles*] **Na, but no such (.) code**
04:48	**Bea:**	**Aha!**
04:49	**Clara:**	**The code (.) for the installation**
*		[*The create- a-Sim screen requests the players to give a family name*]
04:50	**Clara:**	**Aa!**
04:52	**Bea:**	**Shall (I) write**
04:53	**Clara:**	**Yes, you have the keyboard**
04:54	**Bea:**	**Shall we pick the dad first, or-**

This shows that the two players discuss what can be considered to be related to their previous experiences of playing *The Sims*. The empirical video material showed that talking and sharing previous play experiences with each other was very common very early in the play session, while the game or an application within the game was loading, regardless of whether the players had articulated any player plans or not.

The excerpt above is also a representative example of the pattern found in the empirical data where the players did not articulate a game goal. The last utterance may be interpreted as a goal of creating a family where a dad is one of its members. Bea says: **first** (04:54), which indicates there are more characters to be created next. How many characters are to be created is not revealed in the utterance. But the sequence lacks any indications of what to do with this dad or the family in the play activity. The players' suggestion of creating a dad is made very locally in the part of the game and does not reveal any player plans, which is a recurrent pattern in the sessions where the players do not articulate any game goal.

The two players create a new family with four members. As the excerpt above showed, the role they give to their first character is that of a dad. But it is a role that the players do not embroider on during the creation of the "dad". The players respond to the symbols and objects offered in *The Sims 2*, and the following excerpt is representative of the communication and interaction while the players created their Sims.

Excerpt 6.7, The Sims 2, Session 3
The players are trying out a suitable hair style for the male Sim, when Clara says:

| 06:27 | **Clara:** | **Say stop if you see a hairstyle you like** |
| 06:30 | **Clara:** | **The ordinary ones are here** [*The cursor is moving in circles around the displayed options of different hair styles*] |

As seen above, the players' focus is on the symbols and objects on the screen. The next example is from when they create their female character.

Excerpt 6.8, The Sims 2, Session 3
The two players keep responding to what they see on the screen, which is something the next excerpt illustrates.

11:55	**Clara:**	`Tell me if you see something` [*The players are looking for a hairstyle for the female Sim*]
11:56	**Bea:**	`Yeah, yeah` [*Clara is clicking on the different hairstyles*]
/…/		[*Clara keeps clicking*]
12:25	**Bea:**	`Let's see how it looks with pigtails` [*Clara is still clicking on th different hairstyles*]
12:27	**Clara:**	`Where are the pigtails? (.) A:h, there` [*Clara finds the icon for pigtails and clicks on it*]

This shows that the players keep on responding to what is being displayed on the screen. They see what the game has to offer (12:25), and try it out (12:27). This is not something that is unique to this session. Nor is it even unique to the sessions where an articulated game goal could not be found. This is something that every player playing *The Sims 2* has to deal with. The difference lies in how the player relates to the game content, that is, if an object in the game is seen as an affordance related to their player plans or not.

The players playing *The Sims 2* have to, semiotically loosely speaking, identify and interpret the symbols, the icons and the signs displayed in the game and what to do with them. When the players choose to create a Sim, they deal with characteristics such as gender, age, skin tone, and fitness in order to make choices to continue their creation. This means that the players can choose a pre-created head for their Sims or try to mould it in a way they wish. The players choose hair and faces for their Sim and other characteristics such as makeup, facial hair, and glasses. They also have to respond to all the different clothing choices offered by the game for different occasions. The last step is to set all the important parameters for the Sims' personalities and aspirations. This is something that all players in the total body of empirical data went through, but when the players' communication and interactions were analyzed, they did it in different ways. As seen in the examples above, the players in the sessions where no game goal could be found tended to respond to the semiotic material displayed by either accepting or rejecting it. There was no communication in these sessions revealing any player plans of any kind. That is, there were no indications of what to do with the characters in the Play Activity. This pattern continued during the pre-play, as the next excerpt illustrates.

Excerpt 6.9, The Sims 2, Session 3

The players are done with their family and have set the family relations so the family corresponds to what can be called a nuclear family. Next thing to do for these players is to move the family into a house in the neighborhood. The players used the loading time to talk about things they had been doing lately outside the play session. When Clara chooses one of the pre-made houses in the neighborhood, Bea commented that it was rather small. The response by Clara was a suggestion to extend the house. As we enter the excerpt it is time for the players to arrange the house.

32:19	**Clara:**	**Okay, how do we do this?**
32:22	**Clara:**	**Should we expand (the house), or what?**
32:23	**Bea:**	**Yea, we can do that (.) 'cause it's too small**
32:27	**Clara:**	[*Moving the cursor to see the house from all angles*]
32:33	**Clara:**	**Let's see what it looks like on the upper floor, OK?** [*Zooms in on the ground floor*] **The living room can be here** [*Points with the cursor at the room on the ground floor*]
32:35	**Bea:**	**Mm, it can be there** [*Nods*]
32:36	**Clara:**	**That can be the kitchen** [*Points with the cursor*] **and the bathroom** [*Points with the cursor*]
32:38	**Clara:**	**Where are they going to eat?** [*There is no room for a dinner table and chairs in the kitchen*]

In the first utterance (32:19), Clara asks how to get going and if they are going to expand the house or not. Bea agrees, since the house is too small, but no other reason is given. Clara uses the mouse cursor to point at different areas on the ground floor and suggests what they can be used for. As the excerpt illustrates, the two players keep on responding to what they see on the screen, and their communication is related to what is going on in the specific moment. For these players it is arranging the house.

Play session 3 has been used here as an example where the players do not articulate a game goal. In contrast to the other sessions, pre-play is characterized by the players responding to what they see on the screen in the specific moment. The loading time is never used by the players to embroider on the roles they have given their characters. In fact, no player plans are revealed. Thus, none of the players' communication refers to what kind of interaction they plan for their Sims later on – in play activity. The pattern of pre-play for these players does

not consist of setting the stage for play in accordance with a game goal. Pre-play consists of the arrangement of play material.

SOME INTERACTIONS FROM THE PLAY ACTIVITY

Articulated player plans

	Articulated Player Plans	**No Articulated Player Plans**
Pre-Play	Excerpt 6.1- 6.5, Session 10	Excerpt 6.6-6.9, Session 3
Play Activity	Excerpt 6.10-6.11, Session 10	Excerpt 6.12-6.13, Session 3

Figure 6.4. Excerpts chosen from play session 10 in play activity

Let's return to play session 10 where the two players Irma and Leon have articulated a game goal, namely to create the richest man in the world, and let him travel around the world. But as mentioned, earlier in this chapter, the players' articulation of a game goal cannot be defined, if the session is not seen as a whole. Earlier we followed the two players in pre-play when they were setting the stage for play in relation to their game goal. Now it is time to see if they act out that play in the part of *The Sims 2* that in this paper is called play activity.

Excerpt 6.10, The Sims 2, Session 10
The players have been working on the modification of the pre-created house they have chosen for their characters. After a period of furnishing and retexturing walls and floors, Irma says: `Well, I think we have it all`. Leon agrees with a: `Yes`, and it is now time for the players to let their Sims live their Sims life by controlling the characters to interact with other Sims and objects in the game. This is made possible in *The Sims 2* by clicking on the live-mode button in the universal-control panel (UCP) and this is exactly what Irma does when Leon has agreed. Almost immediately, Irma clicks on the computer placed on a desk in one of

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the rooms in the house. The interaction-menu displays in what way the selected Sim (here, the male Sim) might use the object.

36:52	**Irma:**	**Vacation! (.)** [*Clicks on the vacation button and two more options are displayed in the interaction menu*] **>Book vacation<** [*Clicks on the button with the book-vacation button*] **It has to be the first [thing he does**
36:55	**Leon:**	**[Yes** [*Overlapping speech*]
36:58	**Leon:**	**"Ljuba:h!"** [*Imitates the Sims talking*]
36:59	**Irma:**	**Tsshe** [*Giggles at their Sims interaction. The female Sim is shouting at the male Sim, who eventually leaves*]
37:02	**Irma:**	**Let's go a little faster** [*Uses the game-speed meter to speed up the game*]

As the sequence shows, the two players have not forgotten their player plans. In *The Sims 2* "the newspaper" and "the computer" are objects used by the players to control their Sims in a lot of ways, i.e. finding them a new job, having their adult and elder Sims move out of the house and so on. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that Irma's previous experiences of playing *The Sims 2* are used to check the interaction menu for ways in which the Sims can interact with the object. When the vacation option is displayed, Irma immediately states: **It has to be the first thing he does** (36:52). Even though the utterance is not phrased as a question, as something negotiable, Leon responds with a: **yes** in overlapping speech. To send their Sims on vacation is something that is already understood by the players and nothing they have to negotiate. The utterances in the next two turns are characterized by a playful imitation (36:58) and giggles (36:59). For a short moment, the two players are put in a situation where they are spectators of what is happening on the screen. But not for long, as Irma suggests that they can speed up the game.

The two players succeed in booking their vacation through the computer object in *The Sims 2*. After 13 seconds, they get access to the trip-planning menu and the options. When the trip-planning menu is displayed, Irma immediately responds with a: **Wow!** They book their vacation for the Sims by choosing between the options of when to leave, for how long to be away, and whom to take with them. They decide to go as soon as possible, stay as long as they can, and that it is enough to send the male Sim for a vacation to the most expensive place

in Hawaii. Although the female Sim has already been chosen as a travel companion when Irma confirms the travel arrangements, it is interesting to notice that none of the players comment on this as their game play continues.

Excerpt 6.11, The Sims 2, Session 10

38:51	**Irma:**	**OH! >They're going there now<** [*Rapidly*]
*		[*A car honking sound from the game*]
38:53	**Irma:**	**Oh, shit! They have the-**
*		[*The male Sim is walking with a suitcase in his hand towards a taxi waiting outside the house*]
38:55	**Irma:**	**This will be so darn fun**
*		[*The female character is inside the house playing the drums*]
38:56	**Leon:**	**Why doesn't she jump in?**
*		[*The female Sim is now selected and walks towards the taxi wearing a fur coat and carrying a suitcase*]
38:58	**Leon:**	**Check out the coat she's wearing**
*		[*The Taxi drives away with its passengers*]
39:05	**Irma:**	**>Oh, shit! They're leaving now<** [*Rapidly*]
*		[*The screen shows that Twiikii Island is loading*]
39:09	**Irma:**	**Twiikii Island** [*Leon says something inaudible in parallel,*]
39:10	**Irma:**	**Wonder if you see when they are onboard the plane, or not (.) I don't think so**
39:12	**Leon:**	**I don't think so either**
39:14	**Irma:**	**I think they had (.) They don't want to bother**
39:16	**Leon:**	**Na (just bla)**
39:17	**Irma:**	**It's pretty unnecessary anyway**
39:18	**Leon:**	**Ya**

The sequence illustrates how these players are waiting for their plan of actions made in pre-play to be realized. It is interesting to notice that their player plan has a narrative structure that these players have filled with detail in the pre-play activity. In making their story real, they have described their characters and given them proper outfits for their performance in the play activity. Now it is time to bring their characters to life, and as we can see in the excerpt, the players have positioned themselves as spectators.

No articulated player plans

	Articulated Player Plans	No Articulated Player Plans
Pre-Play	Excerpt 6.1- 6.5, Session 10	Excerpt 6.6-6.9, Session 3
Play Activity	Excerpt 6.10-6.11, Session 10	Excerpt 6.12-6.13, Session 3

Figure 6.5. Excerpts chosen from play session 3 in play activity

Let's go back to play session 3, where the two players Bea and Clara in the pre-play phase did not articulate any player plans for what to do in the play activity. The reasons for illustrating some empirical data from session 3 are threefold. First, as argued earlier, the players' articulation of a game goal cannot be defined, if the session is not seen as a whole. Taking this as a starting point, the intention was to trace even non-articulated game goals – that is, game goals that are implicit and understood by the players, something which may at first be invisible to the researcher. Second, this study aims at illustrating how the pre-play activity has effects on the play activity. Third, one part of the analysis consists of contrasting the two different patterns found in the total body of data. Earlier we followed the players in play session 3 where they made the arrangement of the play material in the pre-play.

Excerpt 6.12, The Sims 2, Session 3

The two players have laid the last hand on their house and placed a refrigerator in the kitchen when Bea says:

56:23	**Bea:**	`So!`
56:23	**Clara:**	`Mm`
56:24	**Bea:**	`Well, is this all?`
56:26	**Clara:**	[*Says something inaudible and navigates by using the control-panel to circle around the house*] `Yeah, I guess it is`

56:29	**Bea:**	**Okay!**
56:30	**Clara:**	**Should we start?**
56:31	**Bea:**	**Yep!**
56:31	**Clara:**	[*Changes the view and zooms out. Clara presses the live-mode button*]
*		[*The screen displays a car parked outside the house*]
56:32	**Clara:**	**(I) wonder if you can do anything with the car**

As in play session 10, after a period of furnishing, retexturing walls, floors etc., these players comment on their work, this time with the question: **Well, is this all?** (56:24). The players agree that there is nothing more they need for their house and Clara asks if they should start (56:30). That kind of question is also found in the sessions where the players did not articulate a game goal. It could manifest as "should we play", "should we begin", "let's play" and that may be because the players never talked about what to do in the play session. Everything is taken in the order *The Sims 2* serves it to them, of which the last utterance (56:32) is an example. Once again Clara responds to what is displayed on the screen and wonders about the interaction options with the car. As we will see in the next excerpt, this is something that rules their play in the play activity.

Excerpt 6.13, The Sims 2, Session 3
Clara clicks on the car as the teenager is selected. The options of interaction with the object are displayed, and Clara chooses to have a car alarm installed. This is done in *The Sims 2* by taking the car to a car specialist, and it will take about an hour. The two players are now waiting to see what will happen:

*		**[***The screen displays a teenage Sim walking to the car***]**
56:56	**Bea:**	**>But he can't do that, can he?<** [*Rapidly. Pointing at the teenage Sim who is walking towards the car parked outside the house*]
56:57	**Clara:**	**Looks like he could**
56:58	**Bea:**	**A**
56:59	**Clara:**	**He can-**
57:07	**Clara:**	**(I) wonder if he can drive**
57:10	**Bea:**	**Hhhhe heh** [*Giggles*] **Na**
*		**[***The screen shows the teenage Sim driving away***]**
57:13	**Bea:**	**Ya**

Bea doubts that the teenager can take the car to the car specialist. This might have to do with the fact that you have to be 18 years old to have a driving license in many of the European countries. But it is one thing to sit in the driver's seat and another to actually drive the car, and Clara wonders if he can drive. The two players are put in spectator positions when they are watching the teenage Sim driving away to the car alarm specialist.

SUMMARY

The objectives for the players have been to play *The Sims 2* for an hour, agreeing with Suchman (2007) that plans are not something that can be decided on beforehand and carried out by themselves. Plans are situated in an activity and therefore are something accomplished by the players. This study has shown that the play varies depending on whether the players articulate any player plans or not. There seems to be a difference in trying to take control of forthcoming game events, rather than responding to the flow of game events. The players' activity was dependent on the pre-play phase and how they framed their focused encounter. Depending on to what degree they articulated specific game goals, the informants produced very different interaction patterns.

Chapter 5 has shown that in the freedom to explore, players use previous experience as a resource to act out narratives about family life. They are often reinforced by stereotypical norms and values about gender, age, sexuality, family, and so on. These sessions had a setup that in a way was not representative of how *The Sims* is played, as cheating was not allowed. In Chapter 6 it was allowed, but as the examples illustrate, the children's game play seems to be carried out in relation to whether they make plans or not. Chapter 6 has showed that there are players who set up their player plans pointing forward to the play activity.

In the next chapter we will follow two players who try alternative subject positions by creating a gay person. They also make up player plans for their characters in the play activity very early in the pre-play phase. The play session will be followed to see how the players organize their play. In Chapter 7 excerpts with a specific quality are reported. In some cases the children actually entered an activity which for a bystander seemed to involve qualities of exploration of norms and values. The children experimented with a homosexual family and alternative family constructions. This was an activity which on the surface resembled what Flanagan (2003a) labels subversive play. As will be shown in the next chapter, these cases,

when thoroughly analyzed, might not be all that exploratory, and whether or not they actually challenge norms and values can be questioned.

CHAPTER 7

ABOUT ROLE DISTANCE AND IMMERSION

This chapter is based on studies where the argumentation includes the possibilities of games offering rich virtual environments as learning resources. The virtual environments are suggested to have the potential to motivate players to engage in play in such a way that the players feel immersed. The concept of immersion is often related to experiences of game play and allows the players to fully engage in a narrative, either imaginary or playing a role that would not have been possible without the virtual environment. *The Sims* can be considered to be such an open environment; it lets the players engage in the creation of characters and then play with the characters as they wish in a virtual environment. In that sense it is reasonable to find similarities to children's sociodramatic, or as it sometimes called, free play. It is often the openness within the game is said to hold a progressive potential (Amory et al., 1999). But as previously argued in this study, game play is a very diversified practice, and how it is experienced depends on how it is organized or framed, using Goffman's (1986) concept. The idea that game experience should be based on immersion in a way that "the player identifies herself with the avatar" has also "been criticized in the literature about computer games (Linderoth, 2005). Building on Goffman's line of reasoning, Linderoth (Ibid.) focuses on computer game play and explores the player-avatar relationship. Drawing on empirical observation, Linderoth shows that the meanings of avatars depend upon how they are framed by the player, and identifies at least three functions:

- A fictive character that you can pretend to be, a *role*

- A piece of equipment, a *tool* which extends the players' agency in the game activity

- A part of the player's setting, *props* which can be used as a part of the players' presentation of self.

In this chapter we are going to follow two 14-year-old players who stretch boundaries of gender and sexuality in their game play activity by making up player plans in which a homosexual couple is to be married. The excerpts chosen for this chapter show how culture, socialization, and norms become a part of how the game play activity is framed (pre-play) and how it changes during the course of play (play activity). The overall analytical focus is on the players' talk and body gestures in their interaction with each other and with the game, with a special focus on how the players use different kinds of interactional resources such as smiling, laughing, response cries, shutting eyes, and turning heads away from the screen to show each other and themselves the player-avatar relationship. This is also how the presentation of the examples is organized in this chapter.

ESTABLISHMENT OF A PLAY FRAME

The first two examples are taken from pre-play while the game is loading and the players make up player plans for the activity (for more examples about player plans, see Chapter 6). The following analysis aims at showing how these two players establish meaning in the game-play activity by at first positioning themselves as *WoW* players, and then framing the game play activity with *The Sims 2* in a play frame. The examples show how the establishment of a play frame is introduced by a frame shift from a serious to a play frame. The two examples also show how these players collaborate to maintain it. The players use humor as a resource to show each other what should be taken as play. The theoretical basis for the analysis of a play frame is taken from Coates (2007), who follows Bateson's line of argument in assuming that in everyday conversations between friends, the situation is framed as serious or as *not* serious – as play. She argues that conversational humor involves the establishment of a play frame and humor is discussed in a broad sense.

Excerpt 7.1, The Sims 2, Session 1
The first two utterances are examples of a frame shift from a serious to a play frame. This can be seen by the rest of the utterances, where the play frame is maintained by both players. Previous to this sequence, the two 14-year-old boys, Andy and Billy, are waiting for *The Sims*

2, *Pets* to load. Initially, the players use the loading time to talk about their newly created *Night Elves* (a playable race in the on-line game *World of Warcraft*[24]) and their player plan to leveling them. However, their dialogue about *WoW* is interrupted when the computer game at hand draws their attention. The game is displaying the neighborhood screen and Andy asks what to do. Billy responds: "You can create a family" and suggests a name whereupon Andy replies: "Yes, that's our name!" They are preparing to create a Sim family and deciding what to call it when the next application, create-a-family, starts loading. While waiting for the application finish loading, the players start doing some playful dance moves in time with the music, even though the music within the game has earlier been commented on as: "damn what 80s music".

*		[*The screen shows that the create-a-family application is loading*]
06:23	**Andy:**	**Hey, we create two guys then**
06:24	**Billy:**	**Two fags!** [*Smiling voice*] **Ehe** [*Brief laugh*]
06:25	**Andy:**	**Yeah-heh** [*Brief laugh*] **and then I propose to you!** [*Said while seeking eye contact, laughing voice. Billy is smiling and glancing at the screen*]
06:27	**Billy:**	**Yeah** [*Smiling voice*]
06:28	**Andy:**	[*Laughing, looking at the screen*]

Andy suggests that the creation of two guys should constitute their new Sim family. He calls for Billy's attention with a simple **Hey** (06:23), and by talking in his ordinary voice and ordinary facial expression the suggestion is framed as: *this is serious*. A Sim family is created out of the players' choice, whereupon Andy's suggestion can be considered as valid as any. **Two guys** living together in the same family, is used by Billy to extend the family theme and the characters' relationship by suggesting that they be **two fags**. Billy's uptake is quick and indicates responsiveness (Goffman, 1981, p. 180) to the task at hand. It is cued by a smiling voice and a brief laugh. Since the players cannot interact with the game while it is loading, it is clear that the smiling is not a response to what happens on the screen. It is a reference to what is said in this particular situation. Thus, the meta-message Billy establishes, cued by his facial expression and smiling voice is: *this is play*. Andy is now put in a situation where he has to respond to Billy's shift of frame and the effort of initiating a new topic. Andy's uptake comes very quickly with a confirmation and a brief laugh as though Billy has said something

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[24] *World of Warcraft* (WoW) is a game played online together with other online players. The game belongs to a game genre called *Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game* (MMORPG) and in October 2008 it had more than 11 million subscribers (www.blizzard.com)

funny. The response (06:25) makes it visible that he chooses to join Billy's talk within a play frame (Coates, 2007) by confirming topicality (Goffman, 1983a) and using the new topic to play with the roles of their prospective Sims. Andy is using the personal pronoun "I" when he says: **Yeah, and then I propose to** you. Empirical findings in Linderoth's (2004) study have shown that using personal pronouns such as "I" and "me" are special in computer game playing since they can be interpreted in different kinds of frameworks. In a theme-oriented framework, "I" was found to represent a role the player assigns. This is something that previous research has shown could be a risky way for a teenage boy to enact a role where he is showing his player-avatar relation by making them both attached to the roles. By using the topic as a resource in the players' talk, Andy is using a type of talking-through in which he can speak in the voice of his character (Tannen, 2005). But the manner in which he takes up the topic is cued by seeking eye contact and a laughing voice which can be seen as laying the groundwork for a laugh. So when Andy uses a type of talking-through in which he can speak in the voice of his character (Tannen, 2005), he uses humor to sketch a comical scene which should not be taken literally. At the same time as this shows that there is a discrepancy between the sense of "I" and the virtual self, it may constitute the foundation for what is seen as humorous. The play frame is sustained and shown by both players when Billy immediately agrees with a smiling voice (06:27) and Andy starts laughing (06:28). By focusing on the screen, waiting for the next thing to happen in the game, the players confirm that they have made up some player plans or agreed on a game goal: *A gay couple to be married*.

In the excerpt above, the notion of the term "family" is dealt with by the two players in such a way that could be considered as stretching normative discourses about the heterosexual nuclear family in Western society. Sim characters living in the same household share the same family name, which is something that on the one hand can be seen as an idea of maintaining traditional family structures rooted in an idea of a patriarchal culture, but on the other hand is better understood as "team" names (Consalvo, 2003b, p. 13). This is because a Sim family is created out of players' choices and does not have to have a "father" (or a mother or child for that matter), and Sim characters can be traded back and forth during game play. When this happens, the Sim character automatically takes the family name of the household. Given this, there are no restraints set up by the game rules preventing players to choose two adult men as family members for their family. The family relations are not set when designing the

characters for a Sim family, which is something the players add to their play experience[25] .
Thus, the players in this example have the option of letting their two men represent two
students, brothers, a father with his adult son, and so forth, who might be living together.
Instead they choose to link the characters' gender to sexual orientation. This is something that
previous research has shown (Connell, 1987, 1995; Pascoe, 2007) could be a very conflicting
thing to do for most teenagers, but is something they manage to do within a play frame. All
the smiling and laughing in this excerpt indicates that the talk should not be taken seriously.
They use humor as a resource to play with what is often taboo amongst most teenagers, but at
the same time points to what they take for granted – society's normative definitions about
family, gender, and sexual orientation.

Finally, when we see that these players' initial talk about their previous and near future game
experiences with *World of Warcraft* could be seen as they positioned themselves as "WoW
gamers", an additional interpretation appears – the possibility that the players are making fun
of the game play activity of *The Sims 2*. This can be seen as their *playing at* (Goffman, 1961)
the role of acting like "Sims players" for an hour. In this way, it becomes a way for the
players to distance themselves from the player-avatar relationship.

Excerpt 7.2, The Sims 2, Session 1
The previous excerpt showed an example of the establishment of a play frame. But a play
frame must be sustained and involve all participants (Coates, 2007). The next sequence
immediately follows the previous excerpt, and illustrates another way that these players show
their player-avatar relationship. This is the only such example found in the empirical material
in this session.

06:29	**Billy:**	"**Kommen schnell** [*Seeks eye contact*] **zu** [*Left arm and hand move forward in a distinct direction*] **zuzabet!"** [*All said with a different voice. It sounds like a mix of German and Simlish.*]
06:31	**Andy:**	"**Ohh!"** [*Said in a squeaky voice with a high pitch while placing his palms together and slowly dropping his head to the left, with his eyes closed and a frozen smile on his face*] **so damn gay** [*Changes to an upright body position, ordinary voice and face expression*]

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[25] In *The Sims 2* there is a family relationships button to do this, but this possibility is missing
in *The Sims*.

Billy's utterance is not understandable in the players' native language, and has therefore not been translated to English in the transcript above. Even though Billy's utterance (06:29) at first sounds like gibberish, it makes sense to Andy who immediately responds (06:31) without any hesitation. Billy's imperative request is said in a different voice and sounds like a mixture of German: **Kommen schnell**, and Simlish[26]: **zu zuzabet.** Backed up and strengthened by the nonverbal arm and hand gesture, this expresses power. A plausible translation of Billy's utterance in English would be: "Come quick, zu zuzabet!". Andy immediately plays along by voicing the other character and exclaims: **Oh!** The manner in which he takes up on Billy's utterance is made in a squeaky, high-pitched voice, while placing his palms together and slowly dropping his head to the left. The enactment finishes with closed eyes and a frozen smile on the face. In contrast with Billy's quite powerful expression, Andy manage to express a quite submissive role where the gestures and tone of voice strengthen the response cries (Goffman, 1981). But than he takes a step backwards and makes a meta-comment about his previously made response. Something he comments on as: **so damn gay** (06:31).

Previous research has shown that trying out characters' voices is very common in children's pre-play. The voices are often changed when they talk in their roles (Åm, 1993) and can be a way to show that what is said should not be interpreted literally (Linderoth, 2004). This is something that is also noticed in family talk (Tannen, 2005) where "family members communicate with each other by speaking to, through, or as nonverbal children or pets" (p. 206). Tannen also states that this can be a way to distance oneself from what is said. When Billy turns towards Andy and changes his voice, his utterance can be understood as if he is voicing his future *Sim* character. This makes sense to Andy, as he immediate responds by trying out the other character's role, using physical as well as verbal cues. The *Sim* characters use a nonsense language when they talk, and this is understood by the players interpreting the *Sim* characters' tones of voice, body language, and icons put in small callouts above the

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[26] "Simlish is a fictional language, inspired by real languages like Ukrainian, Tagalog, and Navajo, and specifically created for *The Sims*. Simlish was designed to be "understood" by a speaker of any language, and therefore it uses the human voice to express the Sims' emotions through the tone of voice and other paralinguistic cues. In *The Sims*, Simlish can be heard from television or stereo systems, or when the Sims converse. Simlish has also inspired many players to interpret or create encyclopaedic recollections of it" (Sihvonen, 2009, p. 3). In a community of *The Sims 2* hosted by EA-games, a member whose ID is Nils877 posted under the subject "The big Simlish dictionary" different expressions made by the Sims and suggested possible means. One of them is "Comen schnala" and it is suggested that it could mean "Hi" (http://bbs.thesims2.ea.com/community/bbs/). This example is close to "Kommen schnell" as in the example above, so it could be Simlish that the player Billy was trying to mimic.

characters showing what the characters are thinking about (Linderoth, 2004). This brings a level of abstraction into the game play, which sometimes influences the players in Linderoth's study to interaction oriented by mimicry. This is not the case here, as the player's screen is displaying that the game is still loading and the players do not interact with the game. In this way it becomes clear that the players use their previous knowledge about the game and about how the *Sim* characters sound and interact as a resource to act out a role play as though they *were* the characters. Linderoth (2004, p. 183) has also shown that the children can embrace shorter moments of sociodramatic play. "The children's previous experiences which are associated with the theme are thus a central resource to constitute these frameworks (Ibid., p. 183, my translation). Only one episode was found in Linderoth's empirical material where the children/players talked to each other in several turns in the roles of their characters. Thus, other resources than the players' previous knowledge about The *Sims* might have been used in the performed role play. Billy's and Andy's utterances are said within a play frame where the two players have decided what kind of characters to create and what to do with them in the *play activity* (which is also illustrated in Chapter 6). Considering that the *Sim* characters have been given the role of being `fags` (see excerpt 7.1), a balance of power is expressed in their role play. Billy's character is in power, while Andy's character takes a submissive role. When they try out their character's voices and roles, they speak and act as though they were *Sim* characters. This kind of interaction is used to maintain the note of fun, and should not be taken seriously. The distance from the role is also emphasized by Andy's meta-comment in (06:31), where he comments his role performance by describing his character as: `damn gay`. This is something that can be understood as his pointing out norms about gender. The high-pitched voice and submissive behavior can be referred to stereotypical norms from a female arena, and a man/character who acts feminine is considered gay.

The two examples above have shown that the establishment of a play frame constitutes talk, smiles, and laughter where the two players decided what kind of characters to create and what to do with them in the play activity. (Players talk about what to do in *pre-play,* and how it influences the *play activity* is also described in Chapter 6). By using humor as a resource, the players can pick a subject that is rather taboo among many teenagers and give their characters the roles of `fags`. The play frame itself helps them to show each other that it is nothing they consider to be serious. The last example shows how the play frame is maintained and expressed in a slightly different way. They show their player-avatar alignment by assuming the roles of their characters. But the play frame also works as a way for them to distance

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themselves from the roles by showing it is something that lies outside them. Here it is the players' previous knowledge about how the Sims interact with each other and how they sound that constitutes a resource for a little role play where the role that Billy has given his character expresses a superior position, while the role that Andy has given his character expresses a subordinate position. It is also this subordinate position that is the target of Andy's meta-comment. He shows that he distances himself from the role by referring to it as: `so damn gay` (06:31). He makes it known that the role is nothing he identifies with. The examples also show how well-tuned the players are to one another and how well they pick up signals of how to frame their activity as a joint project.

LAUGHING ONE'S HEAD OFF

As we saw in the previous excerpt, these players established a play frame and decided to create a male homosexual couple. It is not possible to set the characters' sexual preferences in *The Sims 2*. It is something that the players have to add to their play experience. To be able to do this, one aim for these players becomes the creation of two male characters representing as they say: `two fags` (excerpt 7.1). Creating characters is done in the *pre-play* phase when the players are in the create-a-character screen, where the players respond to aesthetics such as clothing, skin color, hairdo, age, and so on. In that way, it becomes interesting to study how these responses are made. In this session (*The Sims 2*, *Session 1*) the players' interaction in this part of the game is characterized by a lot of laughter. In the examples below, the players use language markers as a resource to make visible their player-avatar relation. The use of pronouns such as "he" and "mine" is overrepresented in the examples.

Excerpt 7.3, The Sims 2, Session 1
At this point in the activity, the players are supposed to create their first character. Andy is in control of the mouse and keyboard and has followed the first step to customize the Sim characteristics. General characteristics[27] such as name, gender, age, skin tone, and fitness are represented by icons in the Sim-design panel. Andy has already typed the name for the Sim and chosen male, adult, and now it is time to choose one of the four available skin tones. The players' faces are turned towards the screen during the strip of interaction.

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[27] There is also a possibility to write brief biographies of the Sims designed by the players, which none of them do. In fact, none of the players playing *The Sims 2* in this study chose to do this.

*		[*The screen shows an adult male Sim in the light shade of skin tone*]
07:15	**Andy:**	`He will be a black [`*Chooses the darkest shade for the Sim*]
07:16	**Billy:**	`Yeah, mine will be a black too [`*Laughingly. Andy is laughing*]
07:18	**Andy:**	`Black, shit, that sounds terrible` [*Tempo increased. Smilingly*]
07:19	**Billy:**	`Ya` [*Smilingly*]
07:20	**Andy:**	`We can be tubbies [too` [*Laughingly*]
07:21	**Billy:**	`[Yeah, sure [`*Parallel speech, Andy is laughing while clicking on one of the two icons for fitness*]

By using the pronoun "he", Andy refers to the character as being a part of the players' setting (Linderoth, 2005) and not as a role he assumes. Four different colors are offered to the players, from lighter to darker, and the word "black" is not given by the game. The eligible colors are offered to the player to affect the character' appearance, and have no real influence on game play. Yet Andy says that his character: `will be a black` (07:15), and clicks on the darkest shade. He gives an expression of interpreting the colors as "racially diverse"[28] (Consalvo, 2003b), but it is cued by smiling talk. Both players focus on the screen, and when a dark Sim is displayed, Billy immediately responds to the appearance of the character and says that his character: `will be a black too` (07:16). Issues of race or cultural differences are something that a player can add to the play experience, as in this example, but are not given by the game. The players' dialogue is cued with smiling and laughing talk, and together with Andy's laughing in (07:16) the players framing is playful. This is nothing they take seriously. So when Andy makes his meta-comment he comments on the sound of using the word: `black` (07:18), which he finds terrible. The meta-comment can therefore be seen as a "corrective restatement" (Goffman, 1981, p. 216) for Andy to show the impropriety of using the word, not a comment for choosing the darkest skin color. Billy immediately agrees and their focus goes to the next icon of the Sims' general characteristics in the Sim-design panel, which is fitness. There are two available icons for fitness in the panel. The icons capture the silhouettes of the body, where one is straighter and the other more oval. It is most likely that Andy's suggestion is a reference to the oval icon on the screen. He acts within the frames of

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[28] Consalvo (2003, Februari) has conducted textual and content analyses of *The Sims* (the original version), and argues that there are "no 'race' options" (p. 13) in *The Sims* but the colors "may be read as racially diverse, but have no real impact on gameplay". The three shades of color (light, medium, and dark) offered in The Sims can be interpreted to correspond to the large ethnic groups living in the US today; Caucasian, Hispanic/Asian, and African-American if "read as racial 'coding'" (p. 14).

what the game has to offer and says: `We can be tubbies too` (07:20). By changing to a first person pronoun, Andy's response also shows that he changes his player-avatar relation to a fictive character he can pretend to be. The suggestion is cued by a laughing talk which signals a frame of play that Billy shows that he participates in by his immediate response.

When these players are going to fill the roles of their characters with attributes, they proceed from what the game has to offer them. As an example, in different guides of how to play *The Sims 2*, the icons for fitness are said to represent *slim* or *fat*; *normal* or *fat*[29]. Even though these adjectives are not given to the player within the game, the word "fitness", as used for one of the categories of general characteristics within *The Sims 2*, is in itself a word loaded with positive connotations in contemporary Western society. In this way, the players' interpretations or "readings" as Consalvo (2003b), may have used, of the icons and images within the game may correspond to normative discourses of what is considered to be a positive appearance or not. So by using attributes such as skin color and body shape as in this example, the players are also dealing with and negotiating norms of attractiveness according to normative discourses. By following the opposite of the predominant norms and having a laugh about it, these players show each other that they are mocking (Goffman, 1961) the actions of play, and manage to take an ironic stance. This becomes a way for the players to distance themselves from the roles they give to their characters and allows them to continue in the spirit of fun. The play frame also helps them to show each other that the roles are something outside of themselves and nothing that they identify with. But homosexuality has no properties and when these players are giving their characters attributes, they are not aiming to create a character like any ordinary man. They are exaggerating and playing with symbols and tools within the game. As an example, when modeling the characters' face, they are playing around with features within the game to have the face look as funny as possible. The players respond to what they think looks funny, and often use comments like "ugly" or "gay". This is not to say that this is the same thing according to these players, as will be presented by following examples. This is also something that gives them several big laughs. There are at least 15 instances of roars of laughter in the *pre-play*. Even the dog is created in accordance with what they consider to be "rather gay". They choose a miniature poodle where the coat is groomed in a continental clip[30], except from some modification of the ears. When they are

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[29] Note that in some guides "slim" has been changed to "normal".
[30] A continental clip means "with the rear half of the body shaved, bracelets left around the ankles and pom-poms left on the tails and hips" (http://www.dog-dog-doggone.com/dog-breeds/?breed=miniature-poodle)

going to choose a color for their pet, Andy clicks on a shade of brown. Billy immediately exclaims: "Yes, it can be black too", but changes his mind and says: "No, it can be totally white, sort of". Having a dialogue about a virtual dog being gay and discussing the coat in terms of black or white can only be done within a play frame, where the goal is to create something as far from reality as possible. The next excerpt illustrates this.

Excerpt 7.4, The Sims 2, Session 1
Andy is modelling his character's face.

08:35	**Andy:**	**We- (.) should we make them real fat?**
08:37	**Billy:**	**Ya**
*		[*The character's cheeks are round and plump as apples*]
08:38	**Billy:**	**Hmfh HAHAHAah!** [*Billy is laughing out loud. Andy joins in*]
*		[*The shape of the character's face changes, the apple cheeks remain*]
08:47	**Billy:**	**HAAH! >TAKE THAT! HAVE THAT!<** [*Laughingly, tempo increased. Andy is laughing*] [*Billy laughs out loud and leans slightly back*]
08:49	**Andy:**	**Looks like a damn potato head**[31] [*Laughingly*]

Andy is asking if they should make the characters: **real fat** (08:35), and is referring to the tool within the game that allows the player to mold different parts of the character's face. When Andy has changed his character's cheeks to be round and plump as an apple, Billy responds to the image of the character's face by bursting into laughter, which Andy joins. Andy changes the character's face again, this time by increasing the distance between the forehead and the rest of the face. Billy responds to the character's appearance with a brief laugh and an urgent request: **TAKE THAT! HAVE THAT!** (08:47). His request, laughing talk and increased tempo show how Andy's character would look – not like an ordinary man, but like someone they can laugh at.

They continue for four-five minutes to mold the face of the first character and the more cartoonish it looks, the more they laugh. The players keep on responding to things in the game they found laughable. There are at least 15 instances in play session 1 where they laugh out loud as a response to the characters' appearances in pre-play. Except for this excerpt, they laugh out loud at cartoonish-looking jaws, noses, forehead, ears, eyes, mouths, hairdos, and so

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[31] The shape of the characters' faces looks like "Mr. Potato Head", a classic toy from the 1950s who was given a role and debuted in the Disney/Pixar animated film *Toy Story* from 1995. [My interpretation] Mr. Potato Head was invented by George Learner and the toy made its debut in 1952 when it was manufactured and distributed by the *Hasbro* toy company (Walsh, 2005).

forth. As an example, when a huge nose is formed, it gets the epithet: "potato nose". When the eyes are placed deep-set in the character's face and the eye color is changed to blue, they laugh out loud and refer to it as: "slant-eyed". Over-dimensioned ears are called: "cauliflower ears". The goal is to create an ugly "moron" that they can laugh at. This is according to Vygotsky's (2004) view on imagination and creativity in childhood where children often exaggerate the things that are amusing. Fairy tales for children are a good example of that. And like the images in the fairy tales for children, the more they exaggerate the character's appearance, the more they laugh. It is not possible to create an ordinary-looking homosexual couple, due to the lack of properties. By commenting on the appearance of the character as ugly, moron, gross, etc., the accompanying laughter, and urgent requests such as: "have that, take that", they show that they are creating characters they do not identify themselves with. All is done within a framing of play, and nothing should be considered seriously. They keep on following the opposite to the norm of appearance as attractive.

Transcript 7.5, The Sims 2, Session 1

The next excerpt shows that they accentuate norms of how their gay couple should look by responding to what they see on the screen and commenting that it is gay.

*		[*The screen displays a Sim with red-dyed hair*]
08:20	**Billy:**	`Hahaha! So damn ugly` [*Smiling talk*]
*		[*The screen displays a Sim with bleached hair*]
08:24	**Billy:**	`Yeah that's real gay, take that (.) (Inaudible)`[*Billy points towards the character with bleached hair*]

Some of the symbols in the game are referred to as gay. In the example above, Andy is trying out different hair styles and hair colors for his avatar. This is done in a random order where the players respond to what they see on the screen. As seen in the example, Andy's character has red-dyed hair. Even though it is Andy who is in control of the game when he is creating his avatar, Billy is showing that he is taking part in the process. He is doing this in a very direct way by laughing at the character with red hair, by commenting on it as: `real gay` and by pointing at the hair when he shows Andy which hairdo he should choose. Andy continues his random clicking on the different hairdos where the character with bleached hair is also commented on as: `real gay`, while a character in dreadlocks (rasta hairdo) is commented on as: `not as gay.` It is interesting to notice that it is colored or dyed hair that is commented on as gay. This may indicate normative discourses saying a man should not be concerned with

his hair color. This can be understood as referring dyed or bleached hair to a female domain. This is something that becomes clearer in the next example.

Excerpt 7.6, The Sims 2, Session 1
The players keep accentuating the norms for how a gay couple should look. Almost immediately, Billy responds to the makeup palette in the game.

*		[*The makeup palette is displayed*]
11:40	**Billy:**	**What's this?**
11:41	**Andy:**	**Makeup** [*Smilingly*]
11:45	**Billy:**	**Haha! Take that (.) (like a) damn girl (.)** [*said with a laughter in his voice, he pauses*] **>Check it out, it's really gay with Those<** [*Rapidly*] **(.)(such) red** [*pointing back and forth on character's cheek*]

In the last utterance (11:45) Billy shows that he is referring to makeup as a female domain. A man with makeup is something that he relates to gays. It is reasonable to say that Billy is using his cultural knowledge as a resource in their game play. When Billy is pointing back and forth on the character's cheek he has no name for rouge and therefore describes what his pointing is referring to: **such red** (11:45). Billy expresses a gender stereotypical norm and putting rouge on the male character adds feminine properties and is something he can laugh at. Billy and Andy are playing with gender symbols to have some fun, which previous research (see for example,Connell, 1987; Pascoe, 2007) has shown as a common activity for boys in their teens. And as in the previous excerpt, he explicitly expresses what he thinks that Andy should choose. Billy's laughter, his appealing to Andy by using the words: **take that**, makes it visible that he does not frame the activity as something serious and works as a reminder of their player plans. This also makes it visible that they share an understanding of how to frame the activity and that is in order to continue in the same way; by using makeup on the character, they add properties they can refer to as gay.

Excerpt 7.7, The Sims 2, Session 1
Neither of the players is talking while Andy continues trying out different alternatives in the makeup palette. The silence is broken when the next response shows that they have been sharing the visual field by focusing on the screen.

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*		[*The selection menu for makeup is displayed*]
12:05	**Billy:**	`Hf: Gay` [*Smilingly*]
*		[*The character has big lips in a cerise color*]
12:13	**B & A**	`HA HA HA HA` [*Billy and Andy laugh until they choke*]
*		[*The character has big lips in a pale pink color*]
12:18	**B & A**	[*Billy and Andy are laughing out loud and are seeking eye contact*]
12:22	**Billy**:	`Damn he's so ugly (.) seriously` [*Laughingly*]
12:25	**Billy:**	`"Tycep Xyel"` [*Imitating an American accent, Billy is pointing at the screen towards a smiling character with big lips in pale pink*]
*		[*The selection menu for glasses is displayed*]
12:31	**Andy:**	`No he can't have those`
12:34	**Billy:**	`No, it isn't as much fun`

The transcript above is one of many examples where the players are playing around with what the game offers them. Andy's clicking at the different symbols on the makeup palette eventually resulted in a character with red cheeks and lipstick in a pale pink color. Almost immediately the players respond to the image by bursting out laughing and it is as if the character Andy is making has found his ultimate form when Billy says the character's name with an American accent (12:25). No other makeup is tested on the character's face. The players have full control when they create their Sims which allows them to try out and respond to different looks. It is also something that they easily can change. This is shown in the last two utterances (12:31-12:34), where Andy has tried to put a pair of glasses on the character. This is something they reject because: `it isn't as much fun` (12:34). The boys' framing is to have fun, not to create a character that can look like any ordinary man and they have to take seriously. Andy is cheered on by Billy's laughter and urgent requests of what to choose when the character takes shape. The next excerpt is an explicit example of how this is done.

Excerpt 7.8, The Sims 2, Session1
The players continue with the character, and the same kinds of responses are used when the character's clothes are picked.

* [*The character has jeans, a belt, a top in an apricot color and a handbag hanging*

13:58		*diagonally over the chest*]
13:59	**Billy:**	**YES!** [*Andy*: **OH!** *Andy laughs*] >**yeah yeah yeah**< [*Rapidly*] **I beg you! Have it like that! Please!**

Andy interrupts with a laugh and explains that he has to try some alternatives. The players respond to the different alternatives by commenting on what looks nice and what can be considered gay. The character eventually ends up with the same clothes as in the example above, but in different colors. The graphics like the clothing and accessories, like glasses and makeup in *The Sims,* is not a game unit that the player can use to manipulate with the rule system in different ways. Clothing, accessories, even the looks of the avatar are just representations that do not affect the rule system (Linderoth, 2004, p. 145). This means that the things the players choose for their avatars have no function in the play activity. The things they choose have only aesthetic properties for the players, since not even a "nicer" pair of pants, glasses, shirt, or any such items have an effect on the Sim's wellbeing (in contrast to, for an example, what a nice peace of furniture or a lamp for the house can do to affect the Sim's wellbeing). Despite that, these players choose an outfit for every social event that the Sims can possible take part in. This might have to do with they way they fill the roles given to their characters with properties that are in line with their play frame and ultimately with their player plans.

When it is time to choose the preferences for the first character, Billy says: "Make him turn on my guy[32] then". In *The Sims 2* (Nightlife[33]), the player can assign their characters to turn ons and turn off in the create-a-family screen. This is done to make the Sims' relationships easier or harder to accomplish. In order to assign the characters turn ons and turn off, Andy needs to know how Billy's character will look. Billy shares his plans of making his Sim strong, chubby, and wearing some makeup, but changes his mind and chooses facial hair instead. All these attributes are selected as turn ons for Andy's character. They are using the rules of the game to make it easier to accomplish their characters relationship later on in the *play activity*. But they might have misinterpreted how this is done in the game. Later on when Billy assigns his characters turn ons, Andy points to a bottle of perfume and asks what it is.

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[32] He uses the word "gubbe" in Swedish, which is often used to describe an old man. But Swedish video game players often use the word for avatars such as the characters made to serve as their playing agent in the game. The word is also used whether the character is represented as a female or a male (Linderoth, 2004). You could also use the word "gubbe" as a slang for a dynamite cap
[33] See for example the guide provided for *The Sims 2*, *Nightlife* on the web site: http://guides.ign.com/guides/739565/page_5.html

Billy connects the bottle of perfume with preferences the character will have and asks how one can know if a character has perfume. But the bottle of perfume in *The Sims* is only a symbol for charisma.

Excerpt 7.9, The Sims 2, Session 1

When the Xyel family is finally ready the players are watching the result on the screen while the game is loading. It is interesting to notice that they used the pronouns only initially, for example: **I, we,** and **you** to describe the player-avatar relation. During the design of the Sims their use of the pronouns such as: **he**, **my Sim**, **yours** and so on was overrepresented. The players are now put in a position as spectators as they are looking at the result while their family is loading.

Figure 7.1. The *Xyel* family with their pet.
Screen shot reproduced with permission from Electronic Arts Inc.

29:14		[*The players are laughing. Andy points towards the screen*]
29:18	**Andy:**	°**Damn that's ugly**° [*Quietly, laughs*]
29:19	**Billy:**	**Eh (.) that's me, isn't it?** [*while pointing at the character he has created, smiling voice*]
29:20	**Andy:**	**Yes** [*The players are smiling*]
29:21	**Billy:**	**Damn, we're really ugly** [*Laughing and leaning backwards. The player.*

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look at the screen with a big smiles]

Andy laughs and expresses how ugly he thinks their characters are. The laugh indicates that the ugliness is in order and invites Billy to joke about which character he is. There seems to be a discrepancy between the different roles that can be given to the character, which is something they find humorous. Billy's pointing at the character might be seen as pointing at his player-avatar unit, something that can be used as a *tool* to extend the player's agency in the *play activity*. But going back to using pronouns such as: **me** (29:19) and **we** (29:21) when he comments how ugly the characters look can also be seen as his showing that they are attached to the roles given to their characters. They talk about the characters as though they were the characters looking into a mirror commenting on their appearance. Through smiling and laughter Billy signals that this is nothing that should be taken seriously. Yet in the excerpt above it is obvious that the visual or the aesthetics are used as a resource for the characters that the players create. However the aesthetics are used to embellish the role they have given to their characters. By playing at and using stereotypical norms about gender, race, sexual orientation, and appearance of the body and the face as a resource in their creative process, they manage to create characters that become something they can laugh at. They show an interest in stretching boundaries, and the characters are created as strong visual expressions in which the players enjoy their characters' roughness. They make a parody of the: **fag** (excerpt 7.1). The subject matter: **two fags,** is never lost, but the style is changed to create an absurd effect. In the process of designing the characters, the players shift mostly between two of Linderoth's (2004) three defined frame works: 1) The aesthetics of the game and 2) the theme of the game. The smiling and laughing reveal that the play frame is maintained during the activity.

SMILES AND A LOT OF GIGGLES

The examples below are from the *play activity* when the players can let their characters interact with objects and other Sim characters in the virtual environment. In this part of the game, the players lose some control over the characters, which can be seen as the outburst of laughs vanishes in the players' interaction.

Excerpt 7.10, The Sims 2, Session 1

Andy is now in control of the mouse and the keyboard and when the characters have moved into a house, Billy reminds them of what to do. He says: "You have to talk", and is referring to the fact that the characters have to talk to each other, and adds that the characters: "have to be going steady". Any interaction between two or more Sims is called a social interaction. Depending on what interaction a player chooses, the Sims relationships improve or deteriorate. There are different kinds of interactions: friendly, flirting, hugging, kissing, and proposing. When a Sims relationship meter increases, more interaction options become available for the player. Andy's character is active and he starts by clicking on the interaction option "Talk". The characters are standing in the toilet on the bottom floor, laughing and talking Simlish, as Sims do. Andy tries different options of interactions for the Sims and manages to have their Sims hug. The players are now waiting for the Sims to respond to another player command Andy made previously.

32:39   **Andy:**   **Oh! He liked him (.)** [*The players indicate a smile*] **so damn gay**

32:41   **Billy:**   **Time to get together (Inaudible)**

Compared to previous excerpts, the word "gay" is not used this time as a referent to the looks of the characters or other objects in the virtual environment. Instead, it is a referent to the Sim characters' performances. As seen in the sequence above, Andy uses the pronouns: **he** and **him** (32:39) when he talks about the characters and in that way he makes explicit his player-avatar relation. When one of the male characters likes the other male character, it is referred to as: **so damn gay**. He made their character play a role of being gay, but at the same time he distances himself from the role and the act by using the pronouns **he** and **him** and a swearword. Billy's immediate response makes it visible that the Sims performance is according to their player plans. **Time to get together** (32:41) can be interpreted as him talking to the characters, but it works like an instruction to Andy on what kind of player actions they have to do.

Excerpt 7.11, The Sims 2, Session 1

Then the game is paused for about eight minutes while Andy is in the buy mode and buys things for their Sim house. The players have a little trouble finding what they are looking for and room in the house for placing it. They end up picking just a few things for their house, for

instance a red sofa shaped like lips ("The lips loveseat[34]") which is also commented on as: **so gay**. When the players are back to the play mode, the Sims are still standing in the toilet talking and laughing together. Andy clicks on the interactions which are waiting in the action queue. Billy is commenting on the chosen interactions for their Sims and says: **He isn't going to agree to that**, when Andy replies: **Let's see**. The players are now put in a position as spectators and are watching what will happen to the Sims on the screen. The characters keep on laughing and talking Simlish. Billy smiles, takes a quick glance at Andy and looks at the screen again, still smiling. Andy, whose face is towards the screen, makes a low giggling sound. Andy's character suddenly leans forward and kisses Billy's character on the mouth. Billy is still smiling, while Andy gives a giggle when this happens:

42:23	**Andy:**	[*Andy turns his head towards Billy*] **O:[o:u:hh!** [*A mixture of groans and laughter*] **HOHOHO** [*Laughs with high-pitched tone of voice*]
	Billy:	[**O:::uh!** [*Parallel speech, smiling*]
42:25	**Andy:**	[**O::::uhu:h** [*Laughs*] **E:h:ffh:** [*Face towards the screen*]
	Billy:	[**Oh:Euweheh O::::h** [*A mixture of groans and laughter, face towards the screen*]
42:29	**Billy:**	**>Eh: Go on, go on<** [*Increased tempo, smiling talk. Andy smiles*]
*		[*The cursor is moving to one of the interactions, which is selected by Andy*]
42:32	**Andy:**	°**Shit**° [*Said with a smile and a quiet voice. Andy shakes his head and clicks on another option for interaction*]
42.34	**Andy:**	°(**Damn**)° [*Quietly. Billy giggles*]
*		[*One of the characters throws back his head and laughs out loud*]
42:38	**Andy:**	**Ohh!** [*Smiles, wrinkles his nose, shakes his head and closes his eyes. Billy smiles*]
42:39	**Andy:**	**Damn!** [*Smilingly. The two players are smiling*]
*		[*The interactions-panel*]
42:41	**Andy:**	**Okay** (.) **it is (Inaudible)** [*Andy clicks on interaction*]
42:46	**Billy:**	**He is in love** (.) **my Sim** [*Billy keeps smiling*]

In this strip of interaction, the players spend their first five seconds showing their response to the characters' kiss. Instead of responding to the characters' appearance, they respond to the characters' actions. Even though it was just one fleeting kiss, the players emit a mixture of

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[34] Missed items in the store of newly launched *The Sims 3* are discussed in a forum for Sims 3 players. One of these items is the Lips sofa, where a participant has also uploaded an image of "the lips of loveseat". See http://forum.thesims3.com/jforum/posts/list/137887.page#1651633

groaning and laughter for quite some time and express that they do not accept (Goffman, 1961) their characters' actions. They manage to show that there some detachment from the role as Sims players and the roles that their characters play. This is also made visible when Andy shakes his head as he chooses a new option for Sim interaction (42:32). Even though he can be held accountable for the Sims interactions by controlling the mouse, he shows that he does not embrace the role. When one of the characters throws back his head and laughs out loud, Andy responds with a response cry: `Ohh!` (42:38) as he smiles, wrinkles his nose, shakes his head, and closes his eyes.

TURN AWAY ONE'S FACE

The excerpts below are chosen to illustrate how these players show role distance to preserve an "I" different from the virtual self (the identification of the role).

Excerpt 7.12, The Sims 2, Session 1
Prior to this sequence, the characters had been directed to the pool to take a dip. Now they are waiting for the characters to act out the interaction waiting in the queue. During this strip of interaction, the players are put in a position of spectators waiting for the characters to take action.

*		[*Andy's character is moving towards Billy's character, who is waiting outside the house, still wearing his swimming trunks*]
44:47	**Andy:**	°**This is so damn gay, you know**° [*Smiling voice, low tone of voice.*] [*Both players with wry smiles*]
*		[*The characters are standing in front of each other outside the house. Suddenly Andy's character places his hands on the other character's shoulder, and they lean towards each other to meet in a kiss.*]
44:51	**Billy:**	**Oho::h** [*Groans. Wry smile*]
*		[*Billy's character faces the other character and wraps his arm around him*]
44:53	**Andy:**	[*Still smiling, Andy closes his eyes, turns his face to the side, and looks towards the screen again.*]

The fact that one of the Sims is still wearing his swimming trunks when he is standing outside the house waiting for the other character may have something to do with the tension that is built up when Andy says: **This is so damn gay, you know** (44:47). His response is

cued by a smiling, low tone of voice. The players are waiting for the Sims' interactions and when one character places his hand on the other's shoulder, and the Sims meet in a kiss, Billy's response is immediate. He groans and gives a wry smile, which signals that he distances himself from their characters' performance. The Sims interactions escalate, and Billy's character embraces Andy's character by wrapping his arm around his hip. Andy shows his response to these interactions by isolating himself (Goffman, 1961) from the Sims interactions by closing his eyes and turning his face away from the screen, blocking out what Goffman describes as what contaminates the situation. For these players, the characters are created to represent a gay couple, but their kissing and hugging are not actions these players embrace.

Excerpt 7.13, The Sims 2, Session 1

The characters are on the second floor and have been directed to the red sofa. As in the previous excerpt, even the sofa has been commented on as: **So damn gay**. The players have ordinary facial expressions, meaning there is no trace of a smile, irritation, playfulness or anything. Billy has just suggested that they could choose the interaction option "cuddle[35]" (Swe: mys) as an option for their characters' social interactions.

*		[*The screen is showing the two characters taking a seat in the sofa. The interaction menu is displayed*]
51:10	**Billy:**	**Cuddle, choose that**
51:14	**Billy:**	**Check it out, they're kissing** [*The players keep straight faces*]
51:16	**Billy:**	**Choose cuddle** [*Andy clicks on the interaction panel*]
51:20	**Andy:**	**I'm trying**
*		[*The characters are cuddling in the sofa*] [*Andy clicks on the interaction panel*]
51:28	**Andy:**	**Ohc!** [*Andy smiles a little and shakes his head. Billy smiles*]
51:35	**Andy:**	°**No, damn**° [*Silently, smiles*]
51:36	**Billy:**	**"Mmmm"** [*Smiles*] [**"Mmmm"**
51:37	**Andy:**	[*Laughs*] [**"Mmmm"**
51:41	**Andy:**	**God, disgusting** [*Smilingly, low tone of voice. Andy clicks on the interaction*
51:58	**Andy:**	**Ohch** [*Andy groans, looks down and closes his eyes. Billy is smiling a wry smile*]
51:59	**Andy:**	**O:::h! So damn gay** [*In a low voice. The characters are cuddling. Andy*

[35] He is saying "mys" in Swedish and a translation in English is cozy. Yet, "cozy" is not a social interaction in the English version of the game, so my use of the word "cuddle" is just a reasonable guess.

> *leans his forehead in his hand, covers his eyes with his hand and bends his head down, takes a quick glance at the screen, bends his head down again. Billy is smiling*]

52:02 **Billy:** **Aren't they going to get together, or what?** [*Said with laught in his voice. Andy looks up leans back and starts to laugh. Billy is smiling*]

The sequence shows that the players have not forgotten their game goal: to create a gay couple who will marry. The strip of interaction shows that this is not as easy as in the pre-play phase. They have managed to get their characters to kiss and cuddle in the sofa. Their strategy is to advance the relationship by choosing cuddle as an option for interaction. Andy has some problems, and the two players are forced to look at the characters cuddling in the sofa, which is in the middle of the strip of interaction commented by talking-through (Tannen, 2005) their characters, giving them voices to express: Mmmm (51:36-51:37). This can be a way for the players to introduce some humor to ease tension (Coates, 2007). The more the characters cuddle in the sofa, the more serious the players become. They express their dislike by using wry smiles, groaning emphatically, shaking their heads, and closing their eyes. Andy uses stronger bodily cues to show his player-avatar relationship than Billy does. In view of the fact that Andy is in control of the mouse and the keyboard, he is in one sense held accountable for the characters' performance, and therefore has to display a stronger stance of dislike to the characters' performances. Billy's utterance in turn 52:02 is said with laughter in his voice, which works as a way to ease the tension the players express while watching their characters' social interactions on the screen. The utterance is a clear reminder of the play frame these players have established and the player plans to which they are committed, if they want to succeed in having their characters marry. The strip of interaction is also an example when the theme is used to understand how the game rule works.

Using Goffman's (1961) lines of reasoning it could be said that these players have shown that they are *attached* to the roles in the sense that they are willing to play them. It can also be said they are *committed* to their role play of having their characters marry. The dialogue above shows several examples where the players refuse to embrace the social interactions taken for their characters. According to Goffman (1961) you can be attached and committed to a role without embracing it by fully and actively being involved in playing the role. This happens when a person wants to distance him/herself from the identification of a role, or from whatever is disturbing in the situation. Goffman calls this role distance and it can be used as a

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concept to describe the players' distancing and expression of what they consider serious. When the matter of what should be considered serious is brought into the interaction, it becomes harder for the players to maintain the play frame.

Excerpt 7.14, The Sims 2, Session 1

But even places in the virtual environment for their characters' game actions seem to matter. In the next excerpt the characters have jumped into their pajamas and been directed to the bed.

54:18	**Billy:**	**Ohh!** [*Groans*]
*		[*The screen is displaying two characters half-sitting in a bed and hugging.*]
54:31	**B & A:**	**Ohh! Chch!** [*The players are groaning. Billy wrinkles his forehead and quickly shakes his head. Andy smiles and closes his eyes*]
54:39	**Andy:**	**F::phhhhoh!** [*Andy groans. He covers his head with his hand and leans his head forward. The characters continue their cuddling*]
54:41	**Andy:**	**This is damn hard** [*Smiles*]
54:43	**Andy:**	**Damn (Inaudible)**
*		[*The screen is displaying characters cuddling*]
54:50	**Andy:**	**Ouhh!** [*Andy groans. Billy lifts his arm and puts it around his head*]
54:51	**Andy:**	**Damn, why can't they just get married?**
54:56	**Andy:**	**Nay, this was too disgusting** [*Andy zooms out*]

The players have placed themselves in spectator positions, although with them as directors. This may give the players a feeling of accountability for what happens on the screen. The sequence above is full of response cries like: **Ohh!, Chh!, Hhhhh!** combined with facial expressions, body gestures as a resource to show that there is a divergence between themselves and the roles given to their characters. The players also use explicit verbal expressions to comment on their characters' actual performance in the virtual environment. When the game play activity gets too serious it is not fun anymore; the role of the character cannot be sustained and it becomes hard for them to maintain the play frame. According to Goffman, there is a risk that a play or game breaks down when it becomes too serious. This is a reasonable explanation of what happens in the last turn where Andy finds the Sims' performances **too disgusting** (55:01) and zooms out.

Excerpt 7.15, The Sims 2, Session 1

After Andy has zoomed out and the view of the house is from a distance, the players actively attempt to see to it that the game play activity breaks down. The characters are directed from the bed and stand talking for a while until Andy sees to that one of the characters goes to the toilet on the bottom floor.

57:19	**Andy:**	`Have to play some WoW`
57:21	**Billy:**	`How long have we been playing? It's been an hour soon,`
		`hasn't it?`

Andy's comment (57:19) is a reminder of what is going to happen after the play session with *The Sims 2*. This utterance makes sense to Billy, as he picks up their initial talk about *WoW*, which these players had while they were waiting for *The Sims 2, Pets* to load (see excerpt 7.1, this chapter). In this way, Andy changes the play frame by position himself as a *WoW* player. Billy's response also makes it explicit that playing *The Sims 2* is an activity they have done within the limits of an hour and indicates that it is time to do something else. In this way, the players distance themselves from what has been disturbing them in their game play when the play frame could not be maintained.

Transcript 7.16, The Sims 2, Session 1
One of the characters picks up the phone to make a call, and soon the players can see and hear a fire truck. A firefighter walks into the virtual house. An argument takes place between the firefighter and their Sim characters, whereupon the firefighter leaves the house. Andy's explanation for what they just watched on the screen is that one Sim called the fire department even though there was no fire. But the narrative works as a resource for Andy's game actions.

59:11	**Andy:**	`Wait (.) I'll buy a log fire (.) and so I'll shut them`
		`in (.) and so everything burns up`
59:17	**Billy:**	`Yes, do that (.) Shut them in` [*Smilingly*]

After a couple of minutes of trying to torch the characters as well as the house without succeedin they say:

| 62:17 | **Billy:** | `I don't think it can start burning` |
| 62:19 | **Andy:** | `Yes it will` |

62:21   **Billy:**   `Run it forward a lot then (.) You can fast forward`

This can be seen as the ultimate expression of a game play activity breaking down without the players becoming "enemies", or one of the players for some reason leaves the room. The players do everything in their power to destroy everything they have created in the game. The characters, the pet, and the virtual house the characters live in are going to be extinguished from the face of the "virtual world". When the players do not succeed in setting the house on fire, Billy suggests fast-forwarding. This refers to the option within *The Sims 2* where the players can use a button to decide how fast time will pass in the game. By pressing the game-speed meter button to play at ultra-speed, these players may think they will have time to see when the house starts burning. This gives the idea that these players have adapted their play within the time frame of one hour. It is also suggesting that these players have not taken their game play seriously; it is not anything they want to keep to be able to play with later on. It is an expression of deleting all evidence that the game play activity has even taken place. The players are ready for new play experiences with *World of Warcraft*. A reasonable interpretation is therefore that these players have been playing around with and mocking the role of enacting like *Sims* players for an hour. This is something that they have agreed upon, but have framed the activity within a play frame where they dare to stretch boundaries of gender and sexual orientation of what is considered as rather taboo among many teens. However, unexpected character performances that they cannot control force them to distance themselves from the roles.

SUMMARY

The analysis has shown that choosing to create characters representing `two fags` in *pre-play* and have them get married in *play activity* obligates the players to take certain actions. In this sense, the players can be said to be stretching some boundaries of gender and sexual orientation. Even though nearly succeeding at their game goal, the empirical data shows that playing with characters as a gay couple is not anything that is done easily. But it is nonetheless done with solidarity and close cooperation in maintaining a framing of play for almost an hour (Coates, 2007). By using a combination of jokes, humor, smiles, laughter, gestures like shaking heads, pointing and so forth, as well as the tone of voice and tempo, they show each other what should be taken as *serious* and what should be taken as *play*.

The analysis shows that the player-avatar relationship shifts as the play session progresses. Initially, the players show their player-avatar relationship by planning for *fictive characters they can pretend to be,* which are given the roles of `fags` (see excerpt 7.1, 7.2, this chapter). But this is made possible within the establishment and maintenance of the framing of play. It is also made quite clear that the Sim characters become a part of the setting, "props which can be used as a part of the players' presentation of self" (Linderoth, 2005, p. 9). Yet it seems to be a salient feature in the process of creating the characters. Excerpts 7.3-7.9 show how the game play in pre-play becomes an arena where the players act on symbols, icons, and tools within the game to fill the roles of their characters with attributes. Homosexuality is not an "option" when creating characters in *The Sims 2* and therefore has no properties.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

In Chapter 1, it was argued that the current discussion about the educational potential of *open-ended sandbox games* (OESG) called for detailed study of collaborative play as a social activity. This study was set up to answer that call, aimed at a detailed scrutiny of players' communication and interaction in such focused encounters. Having accounted for the analysis, the time has come to pull everything together. This chapter will present the most important findings of the study, and discuss them in relation to research questions, previous research, theory, and methodology. Some of its implications will also be discussed, and implications for practice will be suggested. The chapter is structured so that I first discuss the limitations and methodology of the study. This is followed by a discussion of the core of the findings. I conclude the chapter with some final remarks about the study's implications.

DISCUSSIONS OF THE STUDY

Limitation in methodology, design, and theory

The chosen games – The Sims and The Sims 2

When considering how my discussion of results of the idea of using open-ended simulation "sandbox" games as an arena for exploring is simplified, one line of criticism might be that I have used commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) games to explore. This criticism could then follow the line of research arguing that games for learning used in educational settings should be designed for the purpose of learning (FAS, 2006b). This refers to games that are designed

to have a desired learning outcome. Furthermore, the National Summit on Educational Games proposed that games have to be built on the science of learning. I have used games from *The Sims* series in my study, as they are neither designed for the purpose of education, nor are they built, to my knowledge, on the science of learning. They are designed for the purpose of entertaining. This statement can of course be argued against and has been done so by other researchers, who argue that COTS games can be used in education (e.g. Squire, 2008). Some authors argue that the purpose of education is not only to have measurable results of scientific knowledge. Education can also have a role of fostering and stimulating even skills that are hard to measure, such as social skills, creativity, and imagination in subjects like arts and drama, which foster a deliberative democratic dialogue (Gutmann, 1999).

However, my point is that this study is not designed to evaluate the content of the game, nor how the game would fit into an educational setting or into curricula. The purpose has not been to "compare the game to other teaching methods or activities" (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, 2007, p. 272), as suggested by the author. Studies without the suggested "comparing component" are something Egenfeldt-Nielsen sees as a methodological flaw. One might assume that could even include this study. This is something that can be argued, as the design for this study has taken a sociocultural approach where the situated activity is stressed. This means that learning is seen as mediated in the social activity. This study has been designed to explore what players do in a focused encounter of computer game play. Furthermore, the term learning is within a sociocultural approach understood in a broader sense, and issues of learning and issues of teaching are not confused. The content in *The Sims* can be seen as containing cultural material with which the players interact. A general focus is what the players are oriented towards in their interaction, both when the players' orientation is towards the social interaction, or towards the content in the game. It has been interesting to see how the players make this visible and manageable in the social interaction. The empirical examples have illustrated what the players have articulated can be done while interacting with the open-ended game, and how the social framing has been used as a resource in how they defined the appropriate way to play. The framing could sometimes support, and sometimes limit possible ways to interact with the game. Whether working with a game designed specifically for education or not, the social framing will always be present in a social activity, no matter whether it is in an educational setting or not. But due to the fast development of games, game researchers always seem to follow the waves of new technology design. As an example, during the time of my PhD residency, *The Sims 2* was marketed and topped the charts of

sales, just in time to prepare for the third follow-up, *The Sims 3*. Already a year before the introduction of *The Sims 3* on the market, *The Sims 3* website was published by Electronic Art (EA). At the time of this writing, the game has already been introduced on the market. This raises the question of in what way the findings in this study can be valid for the new game as well.

The focused encounter – the play sessions

By regarding the play sessions as a focused encounter, I justified why I have no ethnographic data in my study. A limitation with such a narrow scope is that the players are never related to the social and cultural circumstances of the wider game culture. Nor are the players positioned in her/his overall social experience as the PEW/Internet (Lenhart, 2008) indicated. Furthermore, the integration of games in the home environment cannot be discussed in relation to the players' leisure time and/or the family in which it is embedded. This study is also more congenial with the dialogic tradition within sociocultural approaches, although it takes an interest in the meaning of the artifact. But for methodological reasons such as the design and setting of this study, it was not possible to follow the historical and cultural tenets as Ito's (2009) studies indicated. Nor is the activity of play regarded as embedded within a structural system, as Squire's (2004) study indicated. Except for other theoretical underpinnings, the design would in that case have to be changed and follow the players for a longer time.

This study in relation to childhood, play, and gender

In Linderoth, Andersson-Lantz and Lindström's (2002) literature review, and as presented in Chapter 2, computer games were understood and discussed as a part of childhood. In this study, the participants have been seen as computer game players. Even though the participants in my study are children aged 10-14, I have chosen not to use the concept of "childhood" in this study. It would have involved a variety of theoretical ideas about childhood that would then have been necessary to deal with, but this does not mean that these theoretical perspectives are not useful when issues are specifically directed at topics concerning childhood, tweenies, or teens. For example, the empirical material has shed light on issues that could be analyzed within the perspective of childhood. For example, the chapters have illustrated how the players negotiated norms and values, age, ethnicity, consumption, and so forth that could be interesting to illuminate by using theoretical underpinnings of childhood.

There are also empirical data not presented in this study where the players explicitly position themselves from a perspective of child or teenager. This could also be a subject for further analysis and research.

As already mentioned, the empirical findings illustrate how the players negotiate norms and values regarding gender (age, ethnicity, class) that make them relevant for studies taking a gender perspective. The findings can be related to Thorne's (1993) ideas about gender play. Gender and "doing gender" are negotiated and done differently in different situations, but the position taken is never fixed. There are openings for attitudes and negotiations of "gender crossing".

FINDINGS AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

As presented in Chapter 1, this study was set up around the broad question of what happens in collaborative computer game play with an OESG. From a perspective of Interaction Analysis, this study focused on how young players (aged 10-14), in pairs, played an OESG like *The Sims* or *The Sims 2*. The primary interest as described in Chapter 1 was in questions including:

- In what way do players explore and experiment with the game content?
- How are the players' divergent interests, approaches, and pathways taken shown, negotiated, and mediated by the players in the social activity of play with the OESG?
- How do players make creative expressions and roles taken visible to each other in the focused encounter?

The results of my study showed how some constructionist arguments of media can be questioned. From an educational perspective, this study suggests that open and free exploration of media content might not be the most fruitful way of teaching norms and values. The following conclusions can be made: A) The freedom to explore made players use their previous experience as a resource for acting out narratives about family life. The narratives thus reflected stereotypical norms and values (about issues such as gender, age, ethnicity, sexuality, and consumption), instead of being an arena for exploring. B) The players' activity was dependent on a pre-playing phase and on how their game playing was framed. Depending on the degree to which they articulated any specific player plans, the players produced very different interaction patterns. C) To act out non-stereotypical narratives about family life did

not mean that the players identified themselves with the roles, or saw things from the role perspective. Instead they distanced themselves and established counter-positions. This can be described by referring to Goffman's (1961) concept of role-distance. Thus, the potential of games might not be in exploring, but rather in the fact that rule-based activities make participants orient themselves to specific topics.

Freedom is not the same as exploring

Playful learning is often referred to in the literature, and has long been claimed to be a suitable arena for exploring. It is argued that this is done by challenging and motivating the players to explore and master the game environment. Common arguments in the literature (see for example Chapter 2) is that the game environment provides the play material (rich semiotic resources) needed for playful learning. The game designer Wright's idea was to create a digital dollhouse, a dollhouse that on one hand can be seen to be loaded with values from a capitalist culture, but on the other hand has the progressive potential to challenge stereotyped patterns (Sicart, 2003). This empirical study brings forth a counterargument by showing how the "freedom" in the computer game rather assists in reproducing stereotyped norms and values. Even though the game opens up for exploring, the children used their previous experiences as a resource for their narratives of family rather than exploring. For instance, the create-a-character screen opens up for the players to have a dialogue and negotiate the definition of the term "family", and how to create the ultimate one (Consalvo, 2003). However, the players presented in Chapter 5 never talked ahead of time about what kind of families to create, instead the players tended to deal with it when something on the screen called for their attention. This might have to do with the fact that their focused encounters were limited to one hour, and therefore an aspect of planning with the respect of the time frame might have influenced their way of playing. A game like *The Sims* is estimated to have far more hours of play for completion than just one hour. As an example, Squire has estimated that the time it takes for an OESG like *Civilization*, and *Sim City* to be completed demands "100-200 hours played over multiple months" (Squire, 2008, p. 172). When a player invests that amount of time in playing a specific game, the design of the character(s) and families might be carefully planned. The players did not share any ideas of what kind of families to create; for these players it is not likely that they are picking their "team members" (Consalvo, 2003) for their Sim family. The characters were created as a response to what input the game called for, and appear to be performed randomly or as a response to objects

and themes within the game. These instances were often colored by prevalent social and cultural norms. Chapter 5 presents strips of interaction where the players open up for crossing boundaries in their play. Yet, this potential boundary-crossing activity tended to fade. The empirical data shows that the players learned to joke about and navigate between stereotyped gender-, class-, age-, ethnicity-, and sexuality-related patterns they have access to and knowledge about. The joking and irony is also a way to show each other an awareness of what counts as the prevailing norms. Knowledge retrieved from their physical lives and which pursued the message: do what you want to do, become what you want to become, and look like you want to look, only if you choose the right way and look correct (Elvin-Nowak & Thomsson, 2003, my translation). These findings point to the social aspects within the encounter that influence how the players define what is the appropriate way to play the game, even though they are playing a game that "allows" different playing styles and playing agendas. A similar pattern has been shown by Heide-Smith, who found that the players' attempt to meet the objective game goal in order to win was "subjugated" by social norms defining the appropriate way to play. "Outside the gamespace itself, the players mitigate and modify their 'rational' behaviour to satisfy other priorities" (Heide-Smith, 2006, p. 242). However, the players in this study played a game belonging to the genre of OESG, where there is no objective game goal in order to "win" the game. Thus, it cannot be said that the freedom in the game is the same as exploring alternative counter-positions in the game. It is more a social matter of deciding whether to continue playing the game or not.

The open character of the game, including its rich possibilities and relatively high level of abstraction (symbols as well as talk), ended up in a play characterized by cultural concepts used by the children to design their characters as a starting point for their play. The open character of the game was lost when the logic of the economics within the game rules influenced the players to explore and experiment with economic issues. In that sense, it seems that following the rules, as in Chapter 5, contradicts creative player expressions (Juul, 2007; Squire, 2008) like socio-dramatic play. In a comparison with the empirical data in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7, the corpus of the empirical material for this chapter revealed a difference in how to treat the implicit rules in *The Sims*. The players in Chapter 5 tended to respond to the visual feedback in the design phase of the character(s). But as soon as the players were in the "build-and-buy mode", they tended to orient more towards the rules. Even if the players in this chapter mirrored different notions and criticism of consumption, this was not brought up as "a subject" and was commented upon very briefly by the players. It was mainly brought up

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in the players' dialogue as a result of following the suggestion of not using any cheat codes to gain more money in the game. The "players work[ed] to build and maintain a consumer-driven everyday suburban family" (Flanagan, 2003a), but this was done very locally in the game space (mainly in the "build-and-buy mode") and was to a large extent referring to meeting the game rules.

The role of pre-playing in OESG

As concluded by Juul (2007), games without enforced goals open up for a wide range of new player experiences. In Chapter 6 this "wide range of new player experiences" has been scrutinized by focusing on how the players' experience was organized or framed in their focused encounter (Goffman, 1961). In the initial analysis of the total empirical data in Chapter 6, two different patterns emerged. In five sessions out of ten, during *pre-play*, the players articulated some kind of player plan for their Sims in the *play activity*. This was defined as the players' articulation of player plans. In the other five sessions, the same kind of articulation made by the players during the *pre-play* could not be found. The analysis in Chapter 6 has illustrated and contrasted how the two different interaction patterns were framed differently by the players in the *pre-play* and how this had implications in the *play activity*. In this chapter it was shown that even though the computer game worked as a structural resource for the players in the play session, the player experience could be very different depending on how the activity was framed.

As suggested by Jordan and Henderson (1995), an event is always segmented in some way and the empirical data shows that these "transitions from one segment of an event to another" were not only indicated by shifts in activity from the *pre-play* to the *play activity*. When the players articulated player plans in pre-play, this was often done in one specific segment of the internal structure – when the game or an application within the game was loading and the players could not interact with the computer game. The players used this loading time to talk about and negotiate what kind of character(s) they should create in pre-play and what to do with them in play activity. It was found that all these sessions (5 out of 10) had the articulation of player plans in the pre-play always pointing forward to the play activity, usually when the players could manage and control their Sims to interact with other Sims or objects in the game. To be able to set up these kinds of player plans, the players needed to reveal or make visible to themselves and each other how they framed their engagement in the

activity. In *The Sims 2 session 10*, illustrated in Chapter 6, the players continue to use the loading time to plan for their player experience. This included talking about how to arrange and design the play materials, embroider on the roles given to their characters, how to achieve their game goal, and what kind of activities and objects in *The Sims 2* should be considered as fun-boring, good-bad, demanding-easy and so forth. The play session was framed as a shared project where the players in one sense took control of the game to plan for their play experience as something fun. When considering the argument that there is no well-defined challenge for the players without a[-n enforced] goal; you might say that these players define their challenge by articulating their own player plans (and goals).

However, far from all players articulated their player plans, and there are examples of players who did not use the loading time to reveal or make any player plans visible to themselves and each other. In most cases during these loading times, the players' interactions were reduced to silence, waiting for the next application to start, or talk about things in their everyday lives outside the focused encounter. As the transitions of segments from one segment to another (Jordan & Henderson, 1995) in the play session were indicated by shifts in activity, the manipulation and discussion of new objects were handled in the same temporal order as they were introduced. This could be interpreted as the players meeting the game with an expectation that the game would tell them what they could do or not. Thus, they were waiting for what kind of challenges *The Sims 2* would offer them. These players seemed to be more rule-oriented in a way that is more common in classic games with explicit rules.

Given this, a question can be raised of whether another form of gaming skill or competence is needed to open up for the kind of subversive play that Flanagan (2003b) suggested. No matter if you are designing an OESG using these kinds of games for educational purposes, or simply trying to understand gaming from a game-culture perspective, you have to be aware that players will have different approaches and experiences that will influence their play. In OESG the players are allowed to make their own player plans, but they are also allowed not to make any plans at all. Maybe it is only when we are talking from a kind of designers' perspective that we can talk about OESGs as games without enforced goals. In Chapter 6 it was shown that a players' perspective opens up for talk about player plans (goals) in another way. From an educational perspective this makes the use of OESG a risky business. What kind of learning processes the player will be in will likely vary a lot depending on their attitudes when taking on these games. From the perspective that a curriculum should offer students/pupils

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some specific content, something they should learn from the course/lesson at hand, the freedom in OESG becomes problematic. It would be very difficult to foresee what content the students are offered.

No new combinations to alternative subject positions

As we could see, the designing phase was an arena where the players had more control to explore what the game offered them to design as characters. In a way it could be said that they explored the content in their game, but they did not explore alternative subject positions. Instead they used their previous knowledge about norms of gender, ethnicity, age, sexuality etc. Following Vygotsky's (2004) theory of creativity, it would not matter if the game was completely free, that is, it would not matter if we created an open-ended digital environment where everything was possible, the main source of creativity will always be what we already know. Flanagan (2003b) suggests that there might be a potential to challenge stereotypes by a subversion of the game where players challenge the built-in values. If we follow Vygotsky's line of reasoning this subversive play will only be available for those who already have access to alternative notions of roles. If media are to challenge stereotypes, open-ended exploration might not be an appropriate way. In line with my results one could argue that if a concept of challenged stereotypes is desired in video games, the design must present more of a challenge to prevailing norms, accentuating alternative subject positions.

Role-distance when acting out non-stereotypical narratives

The game play activity is seen as a social activity within a situated activity system (Goffman, 1961). This means that the rules that exist in the player's ordinary life exist in the game play activity as well. The analysis shows a divergence between the *obligation* of letting their avatars take on roles as gays, and their characters *performing* in the *play activity*. This can be described by using the concept of *role-distance* coined by Goffman (1961) when focusing on the player-avatar relation. The two players presented in Chapter 7 tried to follow their goal to get their two characters to marry, while the players acted in ways to show each other that they distanced themselves from the roles they had given their characters. Role-distance became a way for the two players to show each other their player-avatar relationship and their *presentation of* themselves as heterosexual. Using Goffman's ideas about the different roles, we can be attached as well as committed to a role, but do not have to be able to be fully and

actively involved in the role. Thus the identification of a role can be denied by showing role-distance, whereupon the sense of "I" is detached from the virtual self. This is what happens in the play session analyzed in Chapter 7. The empirical data support previous research showing that the idea of immersion where a player identifies her-/himself with a role within a virtual environment is to be challenged (Linderoth, 2005). The empirical material in Chapter 7 has shown that even when an OESG opens up for exploring a new alternative role:

- Playing a role is not the same as fully embracing it. It is something that can be done in a dissociated way.
- Acting a certain narrative did not mean that the players identified themselves with the roles or saw things from the role perspective. Instead they distanced themselves from the roles given to their characters and established counter-positions.

The analysis supports previous research that has shown that the player can have or show different player-avatar relations depending on how the activity is framed by the player (Linderoth, 2005). Creating characters representing a gay couple is something they added to their play experience and was not something the game gave them. Within the framing of play, the players were working with the Sims' appearances in a manner where they pointed out the divergent, but by doing this they were also pointing out what they considered to be normal. They were mocking the looks of their characters, and created two characters with near-absurd effects. By maintaining the framing of play, the players showed each other that the role given to their characters was not something they fully embraced.

In the *play activity*, the players mostly acted on game events where their Sims interacted with each other, and where the players lacked some of their previous control. It is one thing to give the characters the role of a gay couple and another thing to let these characters interact with each other and objects in the virtual environment. When they do, they are "forced" to watch their characters' performances in the virtual environment to be able to continue their play activity. Even though Linderoth (2005) acknowledges the possibility for the player to use the avatars as a part of the player's presentation of self, he emphasizes that a connection between the player and the avatar is not something that can be easily done. Linderoth opens up for the possibility that a player can be attached as well as detached. If *The Sims 2* is seen as an "intellectual play space" as suggested by Squire (2008, p. 179), it can be said that the game opened up as an arena to explore race and sexuality in this play session. But it cannot be said that the players included in Chapter 7 thought through these issues in the same way as the

GTA players in Squire's example. If *The Sims 2* is seen as an "identity play space" as suggested by Squire (2008, p. 179), it included identities as *WoW* players and their social roles as two players playing with gender symbols to have some fun.

SUGGESTING IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Even though learning is understood in broader terms within a sociocultural perspective, meaning that issues of learning and issues of pedagogy are not confused, it does not mean that there is nothing that can be said for practice. The findings suggest that the activity is very diversified when playing with an OESG. This makes it more difficult to use within a specifically designed learning activity with a certain goal. As this suggests, it is of uttermost importance how players *frame* the gaming situation. If games are to be used in schools, educators have an important role to help students approach the OESG as a learning activity with specific goals. For a practitioner it is important to raise the question of what learning possibilities a game play activity brings that cannot be fulfilled in other ways.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study points out that players' interaction varies depending on their approach to game play. How they frame their activity will influence their behavior as players and thus their learning opportunities. In order to make sustainable claims about games and learning, this study points to the importance of mapping how game play is influenced by things like gaming context, players' attitudes, game genre, and game mechanics. As the analysis of game play in this study contradicts some of the popular arguments made about games and learning, it seems to be important that further research about games and learning is grounded in qualitative studies with *game play* as the unit of analysis. In such studies a focus that builds on this study could be to specifically study pre-play activities.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Building and playing with castles of sand, families of dolls, houses of Lego, and collections of cards provide images of activities which are well rooted in contemporary cultures and which plausibly enter into learning processes that go beyond specific narrow skills. I do not believe that anyone fully understands what gives these activities their

quality of "learning-richness." But this does not prevent one from taking them as models
in benefiting from the presence of new technologies to expand the scope of activities with
that quality".

(Papert, 1991, p. 6).

In the quotation above the constructionist scholar Seymour Papert illustrates different kinds of open-ended learning environments and suggests that they could function as models for new technology because of their "learning-richness." Implementing these kinds of models in new technology such as computer games might result in a design that is found in many games today. These include games where the player has the freedom to explore the gaming world, that is, s/he can solve problems in the game in different ways in which different solutions can reflect different ethical positions. Unlike traditional media, the games are designed so that the game events (within certain limits) are characterized by the players' choices. Papert's idea might suggest computer games functioning as construction-oriented activities, offering the player and learner multiple pathways to learning. In this way, it is not unlikely that what in this study has been referred to as *open-ended sandbox games*, *The Sims* could fall under such a description. In fact, Lauwaert (2009) has described *The Sims* as a toy for *construction*, and Ito (2009) refers to *The Sims* belonging to the *construction genre* of edutainment games. Games in this genre allow "/…/ kids to author, construct, and manipulate digital media; they appeal to identities of technical mastery and empowerment and are marked based on their ability to provide tools for creativity and self-expression" (Ito, 2009, p. 27). Given this, one might consider some of the arguments to be overlapping one of the rhetorics coined by Brian Sutton-Smith (2001), as presented in Chapter 1: *play as progress*. Both views reflect moral aspects of play in the sense that they stress learning and personal growth. But what is it that could be characterized as "learning richness" by playing a game like *The Sims*? To start with, every computer game is placed within a historical and cultural context (Ito, 2009; Lauwaert, 2009). We could also say as Vygotsky (2004) said, that children are always children of their time. Children's and young people's leisure time activities are to a great extent guided by sociocultural possibilities and limitations. Media socialization is almost inevitable in a global world (Sutton-Smith, 2004) and few would oppose the arguments of media's influence in the shaping of our cultural identity, social norms, and values. This is something that media research has shown for decades – children and youth studies paid great attention to moral and educational concerns. This study has provided empirical data where many cultural norms have been accentuated by the players in their collaborative play. The study has shown that the

game opened up for crossing boundaries of prevailing norms and opened up for alternative subject positions, but these tended to fade. Even in Chapter 7, where the game opened up to explore issues of ethnicity and sexuality this was done by making a parody of their characters. The concept of role-distance was used in the analysis to show the complexity of the players distancing themselves from their characters. In a way, you could say that the players author, construct, and manipulate the game content in a way they find appealing, and it is *The Sims* that provide the tools for this creativity and player-expression (Ito, 2009). But the character of satire, parody, tragic and comic narrative workings would probably not fall under the rhetoric *play as progress* to which many adults are oriented. The character of the players' orientation might be "displaying a fascination with irrational fantasy that [Brian Sutton-Smith] calls *phantasmagoria,* /…/ that adults continuously work to suppress" (Ito, 2009, p. 89).

> It seems that the history of the imagination in childhood is a history of ever greater suppression and rationalization of the irrational. Paradoxically children, who are supposed to be the players among us, are allowed much less freedom for irrational, wild, dark or deep play in Western culture that are adults, who are thought not to play at all. Studies of child fantasy are largely about the control, domestication, and direction of childhood. (Sutton-Smith, 2001, p. 151ff)

What Sutton-Smith establishes in the chapter "is that children have their own distinctive forms of phantasmagorical play" (Sutton-Smith, 2001, p. 171), and this is something that research should be paying more attention to. What qualities and ambiguities this kind of play withholds is not yet fully explored. It also shows that the elusiveness, the complexity, and ambiguity of play cannot easily be described by one set of ideas and beliefs, as argued by Sutton-Smith (2001). However, as playing an OESG like *The Sims* allows multiple pathways according to the players' choices, it also allows different ways to learn alternate ways to solve problems and reflect different ethical positions. Thus is it not true that what is learned may not be the same for all players? This means that all attempts to work with children's and young people's attitudes about issues including gender, age, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and consumption will be a reflection of what they already know from their physical lives. Of course, this also includes what they know from their previous media experiences, such as computer games, movies, television and so forth. When the knowledge the student is supposed to gain is no longer fixed, that raises the question of what can be considered as valid knowledge today, and in the future. If the educational goal is shaking up a person's norms and

values, a medium that carries certain values and takes sides may be needed. Might not values and norms be a pedagogical knowledge content that is best suited for exploratory open-ended learning environments? Could it be that these educational goals are better reached with the aid of traditional non-exploratory media?

VALUES IN PLAY – INTERACTIONAL LIFE WITH THE SIMS

SWEDISH SUMMARY

BAKGRUND OCH SYFTE

Denna studie tar avstamp i diskussionen om datorspelens pedagogiska potential. Mer specifikt utgår studien från en av flera argumentationslinjer kring spel och lärande; idén om att öppna spel utan specifika mål leder till en form av "utforskande" där spelaren kan lära sig ett specifikt kunskapsinnehåll. Dessa så kallade "open-ended simulation (sandbox) games" (Squire, 2008, p. 170). Kännetecknas av en öppen karaktär där det inte finns någon absolut rätt eller fel väg i spelet (härefter används akronymen OESG). Spelen öppnar upp för spelaren att välja alternativa spelvägar efter egna intressen, något som möjliggör för spelarna att spela efter egna uppsatta mål och välja sin egen väg genom spelet. Denna egenskap hos spelen har ansetts ha en potential för utforskande (Rieber, 2005) i den mening att den lärande kan experimentera med innehållet i en mikrovärld, simuleringsprogram digitalt spel och liknande på ett sätt som gör att den lärande förstår någon vetenskaplig princip eller utvecklar begreppsförståelse av något kulturellt fenomen. Det här sättet att resonera är starkt i den *konstruktionistiska* traditionen. I denna tradition betonas spelarens (den lärandes) egna intressen, motivation och engagemang att ta kontroll och följa sina egna vägar till lärande (Harel & Papert, 1991; Kafai & Resnick, 1996; Papert, 1980, 1993, 1998). Squire (2008, p. 179) föreslår att OESG kan ses som "possibility spaces" och som sådana kan de fungera på minst två sätt: 1) som *intellektuella* spelmiljöer där spelarna kan utforska samspelet mellan olika historiska idéer, 2) som spelmiljöer där nya *identiteter* kan skapas och utvecklas av spelarna i spelaktiviteten. Vidare hävdar Squire att sett som en miljö för lärande, kan dessa spel även fungera som utrymmen för design och skapande där spelarna kan få nya

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erfarenheter, samt utvecklar nya sätt att lära sig och få kunskap om världen. Avhandlingen tar sin utgångspunkt i att de konstruktionistiska argumenten som beskriver potentialen hos dessa öppna interaktiva digitala miljöer behöver granskas i ljuset av empiriska studier.

Utifrån ett interaktionsanalytiskt perspektiv, fokuserar denna studie på den sociala datorspelsaktiviteten med OESG som *The Sims* (Maxis, 2000) och *The Sims 2* (Maxis, 2004). Studien analyserar hur olika intressen förhandlas och medieras, vilka strategier och spelvägar spelare väljer i en social aktivitet med ett öppet spel som *The Sims*, vilka kreativa uttryck spelarna visar och hur de olika rollerna som tas av spelarna synliggörs i spelaktiviteten. Som exempel har antytts att ett OESG som *The Sims* kan ha en progressiv potential i det att det kan utmana stereotypa mönster (se t.ex. Consalvo, 2003a; Curlew, 2005; Sicart, 2003). I sådana studier är spelarnas motivation i centrum och relateras här till begrepp som *exploring* och *immersion*. Det finns dock studier som pekar i en helt annan riktning, där spel inte beskrivs ha dessa kvalitéer (Linderoth, 2004).

Det finns således behov av att ytterligare studera vad som egentligen sker vid själva spelaktiviteten. Det är viktigt att förstå denna typ av spel och villkoren för en sådan spelaktivitet innan vi använder det i undervisningen (Linderoth, 2004). I ett sådant perspektiv blir analysenheten spelarnas kommunikation och samspel (Säljö & Mäkitalo, 2002). Fokus i denna studie är den interaktion och kommunikation som sker när spelare i grupper om två (eller tre) spelar *The Sims* och *The Sims 2* under en timme. Syftet är att kartlägga samspelet, och att studera hur spelaktiviteten organiseras med särskilt syfte att diskutera dess resultat i relation till den pedagogiska diskussionen kring OESG. Studien är främst fokuserad på två teman – exploring och immersion. Genom att analysera spelarnas interaktion och kommunikation med fokus på i vilken utsträckning spelarna väljer sina egna vägar i spelet, spelstilar och personliga agendor (Juul, 2007). Det som studeras är exempelvis på vilket sätt spelare gör upp egna planer och mål i ett spel som saknar explicita spelmål (jmf. Björk, 2007), på vilket sätt spelarna väljer att utforska och experimentera med spelets innehåll samt hur de gör detta synligt för varandra.

Studien tar sig an följande frågor:
- På vilket sätt utforskar och experimenterar spelarna med innehållet i spelet?
- Hur visas och förhandlas spelarnas olika intressen och möjliga spelvägar?
- Hur görs spelarnas kreativa uttryck och roller synliga i spelaktiviteten?

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TEORETISKA UTGÅNGSPUNKTER

Studien tar sin teoretiska utgångspunkt i ett sociokulturellt perspektiv på lärande med avstamp i Vygotsky's (1978, 1986) arbete. Några av hans idéer kring fantasi och kreativitet (Vygotsky, 2004) undersöks, samt skissar några av Goffmans idéer kring social interaktion.

Sociokulturella perspektiv

Sociokulturella perspektiv på lärande har kommit att bli betydande inom samtida utbildningsvetenskaplig forskning. Med avstamp i Vygotskys (1978, 1986) arbeten och något om dess ursprung och uppkomst, diskuteras det sociokulturella perspektiv i teorikapitlet. teorikapitlet. Vygotskys arbeten har influerat många olika strömningar av socio-historiskt-kulturellt tänkande. Dessa har som gemensam nämnare att de ser kulturen och den sociala miljön som omger människan som väsentlig. I teorikapitlet skissas också Vygotskys syn på kreativitet. Enligt Vygotskys definition är kreativitet de mänskliga handlingar som ger uppkomst till något nytt.

Steget mellan spel och spelaktivitet

Centralt i inom det sociokulturella perspektivet är att individens tänkande inte kan separeras från den sociala och materiella miljö inom vilken individen handlar. Den materiella miljön kan inte direkt uppfattas, utan är alltid medierad genom språk och andra symbolsystem och artefakter som används i en aktivitet. Inom sociokulturella perspektiv ses lärande som en social process som inte bara är reserverad för utbildningssammanhang. Lärande ses som en del av sociala aktiviteter. Kultur och historia är inbyggt i artefakter, och när spelare spelar ett datorspel interagerar de också med kultur, ideologi och historia (Säljö, 2000). Lärande kan då förstås i relation till de kommunikativa praktiker som deltagarna tar del i. Dessa praktiker, som i denna studies datorspelsaktiviteter, kan inte förstås på förhand, utan som något deltagarna hela tiden återskapar genom sina interaktioner i aktiviteten. Vi kopierar inte tidigare situationer för att veta hur vi ska samspela, utan vi tolkar och bedömer situationen för att veta hur vi ska bidra i samspelet. Men i centrum av vårt interaktionella liv är dock de kognitiva relationer vi har med dem före oss, utan vars relationer vi inte skulle kunna socialt ordna vårt samspel på ett meningsfullt sätt, varken verbalt eller icke-verbalt (Goffman, 1983b, p. 4). Det är detta som gör en sociohistorisk förändring möjlig. Om vi tillämpar detta på

datorspel och spelande kan artefakter och relaterade praktiker inte visa en fördefinierad mening. Mening är således något som spelarna skapar och ger innehåll i spelaktiviteten (Goffman, 1961; Goffman, 1983a, 1983b) Hur aktiviteter som datorspelande upplevs beror på hur erfarenheterna organiseras, eller om man ska låna Goffmans begrepp *framing* (Goffman, 1986). Spelarna definierar situationen *som något*. Det är viktigt att understryka att denna definition inte ska ses som något statiskt, utan det är något som hela tiden pågår i en situation, vilket kan ses som en process att skapa mening. Deltagarnas *dialog* och hur de visar *rörelse*, *humör*, *kognition*, *kroppslig orientering* och *muskelarbete* är också en del i hur de visar att de positionerar sig i förhållande till varandra (Goffman, 1983a, 1983b).

METODOLOGISKA UTGÅNGSPUNKTER

I denna kvalitativa studie undersöks spelaktiviteter med datorspel tillhörande genren som i denna studie definieras som OESG. Det empiriska materialet i den här studien består av videoinspelningar där spelare spelar i par, eller om tre, ett datorspel av tillhörande genren OESG, *The Sims* och *The Sims 2*. Studien bygger på delvis tidigare insamlat datamaterial som består av videoinspelningar av datorspelsaktiviteter med *The Sims*. Videomaterialet har kompletterats med nya videoinspelningar av datorspelsaktiviteter med *The Sims 2*. Tillsammans utgör det basen för analyserna i den här studien och behandlas som ett empiriskt material. Materialet involverar 39 spelare som grupperades i par, eller (som i ett fall) tre, medan de spelade *The Sims*, eller *The Sims 2*, under loppet av en timme. Varje spelare svarade också på ett kort frågeformulär i samband med videoinspelningarna, vilket utgör bakgrundsinformation.

Tabell 4.1

En översikt av det empiriska materialet

	Involverade spelare	*Videoinspelade spelsessioner*	*Kort frågeformulär*
The Sims	18	9	16 (2 bortfall)
The Sims 2	21	10	21
Totalt:	39	19	37 (2 bortfall)

Videoinspelningarna genomfördes i hemmiljö. I de flesta fall användes en kamera som placerades bakom spelarna för att fånga vad som hände på skärmen. En spegel placerades

också framför spelarna för att fånga deras ansiktsuttryck. I några spelsessioner användes två kameror.

SAMMANFATTNING AV RESULTATKAPITLEN

Resultaten visar att vissa konstruktionistiska argument kring interaktiva media kan problematiseras. Utifrån ett pedagogiskt perspektiv visar studien att öppen och fri utforskning av medieinnehållet kanske inte är det optimala för att undervisa kring normer och värderingar. Analyserna i de tre resultatkapitlen 5, 6, och 7 har haft olika fokus. I kapitel 5 har intresset varit att studera hur spelarnas utforskande av spelet kan se ut. Fokus i analyserna i kapitel 6 har varit att illustrera och kontrastera två olika interaktionsmönster. Kapitel 7 har fokuserat två spelare som vid en första anblick agerade ut icke-stereotypa berättelser om familjelivet då de gav sina karaktärer rollerna som "gays". Följande slutsatser kan göras: A) När spelarna är fria att utforska använder de sina tidigare erfarenheter som en resurs för att agera ut berättelser om familjelivet. Berättelserna återspeglar i högre grad rådande normer och värderingar (kring exempelvis kön, ålder, etnicitet, sexualitet, konsumtion etc) än att vara en arena för att utforska alternativa värderingar kring familjelivet. B) Spelarnas aktivitet påverkas i hög grad av en pre-play fas. Beroende på om spelarna artikulerar några planer eller mål för sin spelaktivitet eller inte, utarbetar spelarna olika interaktionsmönster med spelet. C) Vid utagerande av icke-stereotypa berättelser om familjelivet, medförde inte att spelarna identifierar sig med de roller de gav sina karaktärer, eller antar ett roll-perspektiv. I stället distanserar sig spelarna och etablerar motsatta positioner. Detta kan beskrivas genom Goffmans (1961) begrepp *role distance*. Således kan den potential som tillskrivs öppna och fria spel diskuteras. Resultatet i denna studie pekar snarare på det faktum att regelbaserade aktiviteter gör att deltagarna orienterar sig mot specifika ämnen.

DISKUSSION OCH AVSLUTANDE KOMMENTARER

Frihet är inte det samma som att utforska

Den virtuella miljön i spel har ofta förknippats med "lekfullt lärande" (*playful learning*) och har ansetts utgöra en lämplig arena för att utforska. Det har hävdats att detta görs genom att utmana och motivera spelarna att utforska och bemästra spelmiljön. I avhandlingen (se kapitel 2) diskuteras vanliga argument som tas upp i litteraturen som exempelvis att spelmiljön genom sina rika semiotiska resurser tillhandahåller det material som krävs för ett lekfullt

lärande. Speldesignern Will Wrights idé till *The Sims* var att skapa ett digitalt dockhus, ett dockhus som å ena sidan reflekterar värden hämtade från en västerländsk kapitalistisk kultur, men å andra sidan har ansetts ha en progressiv potential i det att den kan utmana stereotypa mönster (se t.ex. Consalvo, 2003a; Curlew, 2005; Sicart, 2003). Denna studie ifrågasätter detta resonemang genom att visa hur "frihet" i spelet snarare stöder reproduktionen av rådande normer och värderingar. Även om spelet öppnar upp för att utforska, använder spelarna sina tidigare erfarenheter som en resurs för sina berättelser kring den familj de skapar snarare än att utforska. Exempelvis öppnar den del i spelet där de ska skapa en familj (create-a-character screen) upp för spelarna att ha en dialog och förhandla vad som ingår i begreppet "familj" och hur man ska skapa den mest ultimata familjen (Consalvo, 2003a). Spelarna som presenteras i kapitel 5 pratar aldrig i förväg om vilken typ av familjer de ska skapa, utan tender i stället att ta itu med det som presenteras på skärmen och som påkallar deras uppmärksamhet. Karaktärerna skapas som en respons på vilken "input" spelet efterfrågar, och tenderar att utföras slumpmässigt eller som en respons på teman eller objekt i den virtuella miljön. Detta kan ha att göra med det faktum att deras fokuserade spelaktivitet är begränsad till en timme och därmed kan tidsaspekten varit något de tar under beaktande och som påverkar deras sätt att spela. För ett spel som *The Sims* beräknas spelare allokera många fler speltimmar än bara en timme. Squire (2008) menar att speltiden för ett OESG som exempelvis *Civilization* eller *Sim City* beräknas ligga mellan 100-200 timmar, upp till flera månader (p. 172). När en spelare investerar den tiden i ett spel kan designen av karaktärerna och familjerna som skapas planeras mer noggrant. Spelsekvenser, då karaktärerna designas är ofta färgade av rådande sociala och kulturella normer. I kapitel 5 presenteras också sekvenser av interaktion där spelarna öppnar upp för gränsöverskridande av dessa normer och värderingar men de tenderade att ebba ut (Thorne, 1993). Det empiriska materialet visar att spelarna lär sig att skämta och navigera mellan olika stereotypa teman som exempelvis kön, klass, ålder, etnicitet, sexualitet som de har tillgång till och kunskap om.

Genom att skämta och parodiera, visar spelarna också varandra att de är medvetna om vad som räknas som den rådande normen. De kunskaper, som de använder i detta sammanhang, hämtas från deras fysiska liv och som innehåller meddelandet att det är okej att göra vad de vill, t.ex. låta karaktärerna bli vad de vill och se ut som de vill, bara de gör det på rätt sätt (Elvin-Nowak & Thomsson, 2003). Dessa resultat pekar på att de sociala aspekterna i spelaktiviteten också inverkar på hur spelarna definierar vad som är det mest lämpliga sättet att spela, trots att de spelar ett spel som "tillåter" olika spelstilar och spelagendor. Ett liknande mönster har visats av Heide Smith (2006) som fann att spelarnas försök att möta spelets

objektiva spelmål för att vinna var underordnat spelarnas sociala normer som definierade hur spelet skulle spelas på mest lämpliga sätt. Spelarna förmildrade och ändrade sitt rationella agerande utanför den virtuella spelmiljön för att tillfredställa andra prioriteringar (Ibid. , p. 242). Men spelarna i denna studie spelar ett spel där det fanns ett objektivt spelmål för att "vinna" spelet, det vill säga ett spel som inte karaktäriserar ett OESG. Således kan man inte säga att friheten i spelet är detsamma som att utforska alternativa positioner i spelet. Det är mer av en social natur där det handlar om man ska fortsätta spela eller inte.

Den öppna karaktären i spelet, inklusive dess rika möjligheter och relativt höga abstraktionsnivå (symboler, såväl som tal), visar sig leda till en spelaktivitet som karaktäriseras av spelarnas användning av kulturella koncept som de redan känner till. Dessa tas som utgångspunkt när karaktärerna för spelet utformas. Den öppna karaktären i spelet förloras när spelreglernas ekonomiska logik influerar spelarna att utforska och experimentera i köp-och-bygg läget. Denna logik stärks också eftersom spelarna har ombetts att inte använda någon så kallad "fusk-kod" för att generera mer pengar i spelet. Kapitel 5 visar på så sätt att spelets regler som styr ekonomiska aspekter i spelet motarbetar spelarnas kreativa uttryck (Juul, 2007; Squire, 2008) som socio-dramatisk lek. Vid en jämförelse med det empiriska materialet som ligger till grund för kapitel 6 och 7, kan en skillnad i hur spelarna i kapitel 5 förhåller sig till de underförstådda reglerna i *The Sims* iakttas. Spelarna i kapitel 5 tenderar att svara på visuell feedback i designfasen av karaktärerna, men så fort spelarna är i bygg-och-köp läget orienterar de sig i högre grad mot de underförstådda ekonomiska reglerna. Även om spelarna i detta kapitel speglar olika uppfattningar och kritik rörande konsumtion eller avsaknaden av konsumtion, tas inte detta upp som ett specifikt ämne i spelarnas dialog, utan det var något som endast kortfattat kommenterades av spelarna. Främst tas det upp i spelarnas dialog som ett resultat av att de hade ombetts att inte använda "fusk-koder" i spelet. Spelarna arbetar i huvudsak med att bygga och underhålla en "consumer-driven everyday suburban family" som Flanagan (2003a, p. 2) föreslagit.

Betydelsen av en pre-play fas i ett OESG

Som konkluderat av Juul (2007), öppnar spel utan "tvingande" spelmål upp för en rad av nya spelupplevelser för spelaren. I kapitel 6 undersöks denna bredd av möjliga spelupplevelser genom att fokusera på hur spelarnas spelaktivitet organiseras eller genomförs (Goffman, 1961). I den initiala analysen av videodata där spelarna spelar *The Sims 2* framträder två olika

interaktionsmönster. I fem sessioner av tio, redan under det att karaktärerna designas, artikulerar spelarna någon form av plan eller mål för spelfasen, det vill säga den del av spelet när spelarna kan interagera med sina karaktärer och andra objekt i spelmiljön. Denna tidiga del i spelet när planer, eller mål artikuleras har därför i denna studie kommit att kallas för *pre-play phase* ("före spel" fasen). I de övriga fem sessionerna kan inte samma artikulation av spelplaner hittas. Analysen i kapitel 6 består därför av att illustrera och kontrastera dessa två interaktionsmönster genom att exemplifiera spelares interaktion i pre-play fasen och vilka implikationer den har för interaktion i spelfasen. Kapitel 6 visar att trots att datorspelet fungerar som en strukturell resurs för spelarna i spelsessionen, kan spelerfarenheterna bli mycket olika beroende på hur aktiviteten ramas in. De spelare, som artikulerar spelplaner i pre-play, gör ofta detta i ett visst "segment" i spelets interna struktur – när spelet eller en applikation i spelet höll på att laddas och spelarna inte kan interagera med spelet. Spelarna använder denna "laddningstid" för att samtala om vilka karaktärer de skulle skapa i pre-play fasen och vad de skulle göra med dem i spelfasen. För att kunna göra upp spelplaner av detta slaget, måste spelarna avslöja, eller göra synligt för sig själva och varandra hur de ramar in sitt engagemang i spelaktiviteten. Detta görs genom att spelarna fortsätter att använda laddningstiden för att planera sina kommande interaktioner med spelet. Detta inkluderar hur de talar om hur man arrangerar och utformar "lekmaterialet", dvs. de objekt de kan interagera med i spelet, hur de broderar ut de roller som de givit sina karaktärer, hur man uppnår sitt artikulerade spelmål, samt vilken typ av spelaktiviteter i spelmiljön som bör betraktas som kul-tråkig, god-dålig, jobbig-lätt och så vidare. Spelsessionen, där spelarna artikulerar ett spelmål, ramas in som ett gemensamt projekt där spelarna i en mening tog kontroll över spelet för att planera sin spelaktivitet som något roligt. Om man överväger de argument i tidigare litteratur som menar att det inte finns någon väldefinierad utmaning för spelare i ett spel utan objektiva spelmål, skulle man kunna säga att dessa spelare definierar sin egen utmaning genom de planer och mål som de artikulerar och sedan underhåller och förhandlar om genom spelaktiviteten. Långt ifrån alla spelare artikulerar planer eller mål med spelaktiviteten och det finns exempel på spelare som inte använder laddningstiden för att avslöja några planer. I väntan på att spelet, eller nästa applikation skulle starta fokuserar spelarna i de flesta fall på skärmen under tystnad, eller med prat om saker utanför spelaktiviteten. Detta kan tolkas som att spelarnas möte med spelet karaktäriseras av spelarnas förväntningar på att spelet skulle presentera för dem vad de kunde göra eller inte. Sålunda väntar de på vad *The Sims 2* kan erbjuda dem för utmaningar. Dessa spelare tenderar att agera mer regel-orienterat på ett sätt som är vanligare i spelaktiviteter med klassiska spel som har tydligare spelregler.

Givet detta reser sig frågan om en annan spelskicklighet eller kompetens krävs för att öppna upp för den typ av *subversive play* som Flanagan (2003a, 2003b) föreslagit. Oavsett om man designar ett OESG, använder denna typ av spel i utbildningssyfte, eller helt enkelt försöker förstå spel från perspektivet av en spelkultur, måste man vara medveten om att spelare har olika tillvägagångssätt och erfarenheter som kommer att samspela i spelaktiviteten. I ett OESG har spelarna möjlighet att göra upp sina egna spelplaner, men det är också tillåtet att inte göra upp några planer alls. Kanske är det först när vi talar från ett design-perspektiv som vi kan tala om OESG som spel utan objektiva, eller "tvingande" mål. Kapitel 6 visar att ett spelar-perspektiv öppnar upp för att kunna tala om spelares planer eller mål på ett annat sätt. Utifrån ett pedagogiskt perspektiv blir användningen av ett OESG till en osäker aktivitet. Vilka lärandeprocesser som spelarna kommer att vara i, kommer sannolikt att variera mycket beroende på deras attityder när de spelar denna typ av spel. Sett utifrån perspektivet vad en läroplan/kursplan bör erbjuda sina elever/studenter för specifikt kunskapsinnehåll och kunskapsmål blir denna frihet i ett OESG problematisk. Det skulle vara mycket svårt att förutse vilket innehåll som eleverna erbjuds och orienterar sig emot.

Rolldistans när icke-stereotypa narrativ utövas

Goffmans teorier har i denna studie inneburit att datorspelande har setts som en situerad aktivitet där spelarna etablerar sin identitet genom de roller de erbjuds och antar i det fokuserade mötet (Goffman, 1961). Datorspelsaktiviteten blir en social arena i vilken vi bär med oss våra tidigare kunskaper och kulturella erfarenheter i samspelet ansikte-mot-ansikte (Goffman, 1983b). Detta innebär att de regler som existerar i spelarens vanliga, fysiska liv också existerar i spelaktiviteten. I kapitel 7 studeras två spelare som ger sina karaktärer rollerna "gays" i pre-play fasen och genast sätter upp spelmålet att få dem att gifta sig i spelfasen. Analyserna i kapitel 7 visar en skillnad i spelarnas "förpliktelser" som det innebär att ge sina karaktärer rollerna som ett homosexuellt par i pre-play och de handlingar som karaktärerna presterar i spelaktiviteten. Detta kan beskrivas med hjälp av begreppet *role distance* (Goffman, 1961) genom att fokusera på spelarens relation till sin karaktär (player-avatar relation, Linderoth, 2005). När de två spelarna i kapitel 7 försöker fullfölja sina mål att få sina karaktärer att gifta sig i spelfasen, agerar spelarna på ett sätt som visar varandra att de tar avstånd från de roller som de hade givit sina karaktärer. Att utöva rolldistans blev ett sätt för dessa spelare att isolera sig så mycket som möjligt från det som "besmittar" situationen

(Goffman, 1961) i spelmiljön och för att visa varandra den relation de intog till sina karaktärer och på så sätt presentera sig själva som heterosexuella. Enligt Goffmans idéer om roller, kan man visa att man blivit fäst vid en roll, eller till och med ämnar fullfölja en roll, men man behöver inte fullt ut och aktivt vara involverad i rollen. Således kan en identifikation med rollen nekas genom att visa rolldistans, varpå känslan av ett "jag" blir skilt från det "det virtuella jaget" (Goffman, 1961). Det är detta som händer i spelsessionen som analyseras i kapitel 7. Det empiriska materialet stödjer tidigare forskning som menar att idén om *immersion* (nedsänkt, omsluten), där en spelare identifierar sig med en roll i en virtuell miljö, kan utmanas (Linderoth, 2005). Analyserna av det empiriska materialet i kapitel 7 har också visat att även om ett OESG öppnar upp för att utforska en alternativ roll, karaktäriseras relationen till en roll av:

- Att spela en roll är inte detsamma som att fullt ut omfamna den. Det är något som kan göras på ett distanserat sätt.
- Att agera ut en viss narrativ betyder inte att spelarna identifierar sig med de rollerna, eller ser saker ur ett rollperspektiv. I stället tar spelarna avstånd från de roller de givit sina karaktärer och etablerar motsatta subjekts positioner.

Analyserna stödjer tidigare forskning som visar att spelare kan ha, eller visa, olika relationer till sina karaktärer (player-avatar relations, se Linderoth, 2005) beroende på hur spelaktiviteten ramas in av spelaren. Att skapa karaktärer och låta dem representera ett homosexuellt par är något spelarna adderade till sin spelaktivitet och inte något som spelet ger dem. Genom att rama in sin aktivitet som "lek" eller att "ha roligt" skapar spelarna utseenden på sina karaktärer som pekar ut det avvikande, men genom att göra detta pekas även det som anses normalt ut. Spelarna parodierar och förlöjligar utseendet på sina karaktärer och skapar på så sätt två karaktärer med en, nästan, absurd effekt. Genom att underhålla inramningen av lek och ha roligt, visar spelarna varandra att de roller de gett sina karaktärer inte var något som de fullt ut omfamnar och tar på allvar.

I spelaktiviteten agerar spelarna mestadels på spelhändelser där deras karaktärer, *simmar*, interagerar med varandra och där spelarna saknar något av den kontroll över spelet som de hade i designfasen. Det är en sak att ge karaktärerna rollen av ett homosexuellt par, och en annan sak att låta dessa karaktärer interagera med varandra och andra föremål i den virtuella miljön. I spelfasen blir spelarna mer eller mindre "tvingade" att titta på hur deras karaktärer utför sina prestationer i den virtuella miljön för att kunna fortsätta sin spelaktivitet. Även om

Linderoth (2005) pekar på möjligheten för en spelare att använda sin karaktär (*avatar*) som en del av sin presentation av sig själv, understryker han att en relation mellan spelaren och dess karaktär inte görs så enkelt. Likaväl som en spelare kan vara fäst (*attached*) vid en karaktär, likaväl kan de isolera sig (*detached*) från sin karaktär. Genom att använda Goffmans idéer om rolldistans, har analyserna i kapitel 7 visat att detta är otroligt komplext fenomen. Vidare skulle man kunna säga att *The Sims 2* utgör en "intellectual play space" som Squire (2008, p. 179) föreslagit då spelarna i den spelsession som analyseras i kapitel 7 kan sägas utforska etnicitet och sexualitet. Men det kan inte sägas att spelarna i den här sessionen tar samma kritiska perspektiv som de GTA-spelare (*Grand Theft Auto*) Squire presenterade i sitt material. Om *The Sims 2* i kapitel 7 ses som en "identity play space" som Squire (2008, p. 179) också föreslagit, ingår också spelarnas identiteter som WoW-spelare (*World of Warcraft*) och deras sociala roller som två spelare (vänner) som leker med genus-symboler för att ha roligt under en timme.

Tidigare erfarenheter dominerar

Som visas i resultatkapitlen, utgör designfasen en arena där spelarna har mer kontroll och kan utforska vad spelet kan erbjuda dem att skapa, som exempelvis designen av karaktärerna. På ett sätt skulle man kunna säga att utforskar innehållet i spelet, men det betyder inte att de nödvändigtvis utforskar alternativa positioner. I stället tenderar spelarna att använda sina tidigare kunskaper om normer för kön, etnicitet, ålder, klass, sexualitet, konsumtion och liknande. I enlighet med Vygotskys (2004) teorier om fantasi och kreativitet skulle det inte spelat någon roll om spelet har en obegränsad frihet. Med andra ord, det skulle inte spela någon roll om vi skapr en öppen, icke-linjär spelmiljö där allt är möjligt. Vår huvudsakliga källa för kreativitet kommer alltid att vara det vi redan har kunskap om. Flanagan (Flanagan, 2003a, 2003b) föreslår att det kan finnas en potential att utmana stereotyper i spel genom att spelarna omkullkastar inbyggda värderingar, något som hon på engelska kallar *subversive play*. Om vi följer Vygotskys resonemang kan denna subversiva spelstil endast vara tillgänglig för de spelare som har kunskap om alternativa idéer om exempelvis roller. Om interaktiva media ska utmana (stereotypa) värderingar och normer, kanske inte ett öppet och icke-linjärt utforskande är det mest optimala. I linje med resultaten i den här studien skulle man kunna hävda att om man önskar utmana stereotypier i datorspel, måste dess design presentera mer av en utmaning gentemot rådande värderingar och normer och lyfta fram alternativa positioner.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

And overview of the video data

Alias names	OESG played	Group: size	Group: gender	Group: age	Name of the play session	Excerpts used in
Lars Magnus	The Sims	2 players	male/male	11/11	TS session 1	
Jon Sune	The Sims	2 players	male/male	11/10	TS session 2	
Arne Mats	The Sims	2 players	male/male	12/13	TS session 3	
Putte Olle	The Sims	2 players	male/male	11/11	TS session 4	
Anders Philip	The Sims	2 player	male/male	10/10	TS session 5	
Peter Sebbe	The Sims	2 players	male/male	11/11	TS session 6	
Dennis Patrick	The Sims	2 players	male/male	11/11	TS session 7	Chap 5
Knut Dag	The Sims	2 players	male/male	12/12	TS session 8	Chap 5
Albin Oliver	The Sims	2 players	male/male	10/11	TS session 9	Chap 5
Andy Billy	The Sims 2	2 players	male/male	14/14	TS2 session 1	Chap 7
Carl Alice	The Sims 2	2 players	male/female	11/11	TS2 session 2	
Bea Clara	The Sims 2	2 players	female/female	13/14	TS2 session 3	Chap 6
Dante Eric	The Sims 2	2 players	male/male	14/14	TS2 session 4	
Felix Diana	The Sims 2	2 players	male/female	12/11	TS2 session 5	
Ella Fanny	The Sims 2	2 players	female/female	14/14	TS2 session 6	
Grim Hugo Igor	The Sims 2	3 players	male/male/male	13/12/12	TS2 session 7	
John Kurt	The Sims 2	2 players	male/male	12/13	TS2 session 8	
Greta Hilda	The Sims 2	2 players	female/female	14/14	TS2 session 9	
Leon Irma	The Sims 2	2 players	male/female	13/14	TS2 session 10	Chap 6
Total:	open-ended games played: 2	Players: 39	males: 30 females: 9	10 year: 4 11 year: 13 12 year: 7 13 year: 5 14 year: 10	play sessions: 19	

APPENDIX 2

A summary of the answers in the questionnaires

Alias names	Q1 PC at home	Q2 Game console	Q3 X= Est. play per day	Q4 Use of the PC for:	Q5 Pr. Exp. With TS-series	Q6 Est. play with TS-series	Q7 Game pref.	Q8 Refl. after play	Q9 Justific.
Lars	-	-	-	-	-	-		-	
Magnus	-	-	-	-	-	-		-	
Jon	Yes	GB, N64	$1 \leq x < 2$	Internet, Word processing	No	-		So, so	-
Sune	Yes	GB, PS, Sega	$2 \leq x < 3$	Internet	Yes	Everyday		fun	Managing and controlling a family
Arne	Yes	GB, N64	$x < 1$	home work, Internet	Yes	I have the game		great fun	To manage a family
Mats	Yes	GB, N64	$1 \leq x < 2$	home work, Internet,	Yes	I have the game		Fun	To manage a family. It is real
Putte	Yes	GB, GBc, PS	$1 \leq x < 2$	Internet, word processing	Yes	Tested		Fun	To create a family and let them do weird things
Olle	Yes	GB, GBa, N64, PS	$x < 1$	Internet	Yes	A little		Super!	Creating and managing a family
Anders	Yes	GB, XB	$x < 1$	Internet	Little, seen it	-		Super	Controlling a family, building
Philip	Yes	N64	$x < 1$	Internet, word processing	Seen it	-		Fun	Building
Peter	Yes	GB, N64	$x < 1$	Internet, paint	No	-		Fun	Controlling and helping the family
Sebbe	Yes	PS2	$1 \leq x < 2$	Internet, paint	Yes	Borrowed it and played		Fun	Helping the Sims with their lives
Dennis	Yes	GB, N64, XB	$x < 1$	Internet	No	-		Fun	It was real
Patrick	Yes	GB, N64	$x < 1$	Internet	Yes	Have the game		Fun	Almost like learning domestic science
Knut	Yes	No	$x < 1$	home work	No	-		Pretty much fun	To see how it turns out for the family
Dag	Yes	GBc, GC, SN, N64,	$2 \leq x < 3$	home work, Internet, word processing	Yes	I have the game		Fun	To see how it turns out for the family
Albin	Yes	GB, PS	$x < 1$	home work, Internet	Seen it once	Not much		Fun	Fun to go downtown
Oliver	Yes	GB, PS2	$x < 1$	e-mail, home work, image editing, Internet, paint,	Yes	A lot		Pretty much fun	Furnishing & designing
Andy	Yes	PS2	$x \geq 3$ on week-ends	Yes	Yes	-	WoW	-	-
Billy	Yes	Not any		home work	Don't	Not so	WoW	-	-

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		longer			think so	much			
Carl	Yes	Yes	$2 \leq x < 3$	film	Yes	For hours and hours	TS2	Fine	It's fun
Alice	Yes	Yes	$1 \leq x < 2$	Yes	Yes	A lot	TS2	Fine	fun
Bea	Yes	PS	$x < 1$	Yes	Yes	From time to time, not so much	TS	Fine.	But it took a rather long time to create the characters before you could start to play.
Clara	Yes	N, PS	$x < 1$	Yes	Yes	Started a year ago but don't play so much	TS	Fun.	Took a long time to create the family and design the house so we didn't have so much time for play
Dante	Yes	GB, N, PS	$x < 1$	film, music, etc.	Yes	Not so much	I change games all the time	It was fun	It was exciting to see the sims' reactions
Eric	Yes	Yes	$x < 1$	film, music	Yes	I played some 3-4 years ago	Age of Empires	It was fun to play a game I seldom play	It was fun to be two players
Felix	Yes	Yes	$1 \leq x < 2$	Yes	Yes	Not so much (5 times)	Guildwars	It was fun but a little bit difficult	It was hard to figure out how the game worked
Diana	Yes	Yes	$x \geq 3$	Yes	Yes	10 times	Yes	Fun	It was hard to figure out the game.
Ella	Yes	Yes	$2 \leq x < 3$	MSN, different home pages	Both, but mostly TS2	-	TS2	I thought as usual. Fun!	We didn't have time for much. 1 hour is not enough to get started with the game.
Fanny	Yes	Yes	$1 \leq x < 2$ When I play	Internet, MSN,	Yes, mostly TS2	-	TS2	It was as usual. FUN	Not enough time to create sims, a house and play
Grim	Yes	PS	$1 \leq x < 2$	Yes	No	-	FIFA, Wargames	The game was fine	
Hugo	Yes	PS	$2 \leq x < 3$	Yes	No	-	FIFA08	It was really fun to play the game	It was fun to create a family.
Igor	Yes	PS	$2 \leq x < 3$	Checking images on Google	No	-	FIFA07	The game was really fine	-
John	Yes	PS2	Varies: $x < 1$ $1 \leq x < 2$	Internet, MSN	Yes	Pretty much	NHL07, FIFA	It was fun to play	Because Sims is fun
Kurt	Yes	GC, N64, PS, XB, XB360	Varies: $x < 1$ $1 \leq x < 2$ $2 \leq x < 3$	No	No	-	Mostly sports-games	It was fun and it went well	Because I think Sims was fun
Greta	Yes	GB, N, XB	$x < 1$	MSN, Info	Yes	Several years	Brain Train	It was fine and fun	We had fun together
Hilda	Yes	PS	$1 \leq x < 2$	MSN	Yes	Several years	Singstar (PS)	It was really fun	We had fun together
Leon	Yes	Yes	$1 \leq x < 2$	Yes	Yes	Not so	WoW	Fun	We created

									funny characters and made them do funny things
			less x ≥ 3 (sometimes) a lot			much			
Irma	Yes	GBa	1 ≤ x < 2 I do not play everyday, only when I have time to kill	Internet	Yes	For a while I played 2 hours every other day, but currently, maybe, an hour twice a week	Sometimes TS2	It was fun, nice to try an extension I had never played before	-

GB = GameBoy, GBa= GameBoy advanced, GBc= GameBoy color, GC= Game Cube, N = Nintendo, N64 = Nintendo 64, PS = Play Station, PS2 = Play Station2, SN= Super Nintendo, XB = Xbox, XB360 = Xbox 360

APPENDIX 3

Transcript conventions

The transcription convention used in this study is a modified version of what have been used in Conversation Analysis and influenced by Gail Jefferson's transcripts notation as presented in *Structures of Social Interaction* (Heritage, 1984).

Symbol	Meaning
?	Inquiring intonation
(.)	Micro paus, A brief pause, usually less than .2 seconds
(10 s.)	Very long paus in seconds
:::	Colon or colons indicate prolongation of vowel
N[o [word	Left bracket indicate the onset of overlapping speech
[*comments*]	Comments made by the researcher is bracketed and written in italics
"different voice"	Citation marks enclose impersonations of other speakers (voices)
(inaudible)	Unhearable speech
(words)	Speech which is unclear or in doubt in the transcript
°sotto voce°	Quiet speech
ALL CAPS	Indicates shouted or increased volume in speech
>quicker<	Indicates that the enclosed speech was delivered more rapidly than usual for the speaker.
<slower>	Indicates that the enclosed speech was delivered more slowly than usual for the speaker.
-	Indicates interrupted talk

APPENDIX 4

Translation of speech: Swe-Eng

Chapter 5

Excerpt 5.1, The Sims, Session 8

Dag: **Vad ska den heta?**

         What should we call it?

Knut: **E:::-**

         E:::-

Dag: **Det bestämmer du**

         You decide

Knut: **Okej, Svensson**

         Okay, Svensson

Dag: **Svensson då kan du skriva de'-**

         Svensson, then you can type that-

Knut: **Mm**

         Mm

Excerpt 5.2, The Sims, Session 9

Albin: **Vad ska den heta då? (.) Luffar'n?**

         What shall we call it? (.) The hobo?

Albin: **Luffarna**

         The Hoboes

D.C.   **Nu går jag**

         I'm gonna take off

A & O   **He he**

         He he

Albin: **Ja okej (.) Förnamn (.) det kan va' jag då (.) å så där vill jag se ut då**

         Yea, okay (.) First name (.) that can be me then and I want to look like that

Albin: **Glas[ögon**

         Glas[ses

Oliver: **[nä he he he**

             [ne he he he

Nä du kan ju kolla alla först

No, you can check everyone first

Albin: **Ja, ja (.) men jag vill gärna se lite intelligent ut**

Yea, yea (.) but I'd like to look sort of intelligent

Excerpt 5.3, The Sims, Session 7

Patrick: **Va' ska den heta då (.) familjen?**

What shall we call it then (.) the family?

Dennis: **Familjen (.) familjen "Tuttan"**

The family (.)the "Tuttan" family

Patrick: **Nä:heh! Nej, men ett normalt namn**

No:heh! No, but a normal name

Dennis: **Okej**

Okay

Patrick: **Hansson ne:j**

Hansson no:

Dennis: **Nej!**

No!

Patrick: **E::hh-**

E::hh-

Dennis: **Eriksson**

Eriksson

Patrick: **Jah**

Yea

Excerpt 5.4, The Sims, Session 7

Patrick: **Hchm (.) det va' mig en riktig gamling**

Hchm (.) that's a real oldie

Patrick: **(ohörbart) Hcm**

(Inaudible) Hcm

D & P: **HE he he heh**

HE he he heh

Patrick: **Han har ölmage vet du**

He has a beer belly you know

Dennis: **Jah höh höh**

Yea huh huh

Patrick:	**Han va' inte smal**
	He's not skinny
Dennis:	**Näe**
	No
Patrick:	**Ojojoj! Pianospelar'n**
	Wow! The piano player
Dennis:	°**Mm**°
	°Mm°
Dennis:	**DEN blir bra!**
	THAT'll be good!
Patrick:	**Ja, den va' bra**
	Yea, that's good
Dennis:	°**Mm**°
	°Mm°
Patrick:	**Han kan ha det huv'et faktiskt (.) >eller hur< han kan va'- han kan va' neger**
	Actually, he can have that head (.) >Right< He can be- he can be black
Patrick:	**Ffh >"han har grönt hår"< (.) >"fan va' fult"<**
	Ffh >"he has green hair"< (.) >" damn ugly"<
Patrick:	**Testar det här då (.) mellan**
	Try this one then (.) medium
Patrick:	**"lila hår" (.) nä**
	"purple hair!" no
Patrick:	**Vanligt hår ska han ha**
	he can have ordinary hair
Dennis:	°**Mm**°
	°Mm°

Excerpt 5.5, The Sims, Session 7

Patrick:	**Måste vi ha en morsa också**
	We need to have a mom as well
Dennis:	**Så kan hon inte se ut-**
	She can't look like that-
Patrick:	**"I am miss United States"**
	"I am Miss United States"
Patrick:	**Nä så ful då**
	No, that's ugly

Dennis:	**Den blir bra! Nä då! Heh**
	That'll be good! Oh, no:h! heh
Patrick:	**Fan, nu syns ju den där grejen**
	Damn, now you can see that thing
D & P:	**Hchhem**
	Hchhem
Patrick:	**ROBIN HOOD!**
	ROBIN HOOD!
Patrick:	**Nä (.) nä (.) nä (.) chhem**
	No (.) no (.) no (.) chhem
Dennis:	**Den blir bra!**
	That's good!
Patrick:	**Ja, den va' bra**
	Yea, that's good (.)
Patrick:	**Nej, ett annat huv'e (.)**
	No, another head (.)
Dennis:	**Ja**
	Yea
Patrick:	**Det e' olika frisyrer**
	There are different haircuts
Dennis:	**Så kan den va'**
	It can be like that
Patrick:	**Ja, det var snyggt faktiskt (.) Vi flyttar tillbak's**
	Yes, that's really nice (.) We move back
Patrick:	**Så! Det va' bra [Dennis: nm] Vi ser- tittar hur neger ser ut**
	So! (.) That's nice [Dennis: nm] We see if – see what a black looks like
Dennis:	**>Nej nej nej<**
	>No no no<
Patrick:	**Nä, det va' inge' snyggt (.) nä den här tar vi**
	No it didn't look good (.) No, we'll
	take this one
Patrick:	**Vad ska hon heta då? Eh**
	What shall we name her? Eh
Dennis:	**Mhm:**
	Mhm:
Patrick:	**Elin! Det går**

Elin! It works

Excerpt 5.6, The Sims, Session 7

Patrick: **Ska vi ha nå'n mer (.) ska vi ha nå't barn?**

Shall we have anyone else? (.) Shall we have a kid?

Dennis: **Ja! vi har tre- (.) f[f**

Yes! we'll have thre- f[f

Patrick: **[fe[m**

[fi[ve

Dennis: **[FEM barn ja!**

[FIVE children yes!

Patrick: **Nej! Nä, men det räcker med ett (.) Det är så jobbigt när dom ska till skolan hela tiden**

(.) Det e' rätt tjötigt. Ska vi ha en kille eller tjej? Kille

No! Ne, but it's enough with one (.) It's hard work when they are going to school all the

time (.) It's really boring. Shall we have a boy or a girl? Boy

Dennis: **Kille (.) Jag vill ha en kille**

Boy (.) I want a boy

Excerpt 5.7, The Sims, Session 7

The dad

Patrick: **Ehh:e (.) Här behövs mycke' trevlig (.) Han kan va' normalt lekfull (.) han är ju vuxen**

(.) Aktiv får han ju va me' (.) lite ordning också (.) lite utåtriktad (.) E:h vi tar lite

mindre på (.) ordning (.) Så! Det blir bra

Ehh:e (.) We need very nice here (.) He can be a normal playful (.) he is like an adult (.) He

can be active too (.) a little neat too (.) a little outgoing (.) E:h let's take a little less on (.)

neat (.) So! that's good

Dennis: **Mm**

Mm

The mum

Patrick: **Hon få' va' lite- mest ordning här (.) hon e' ju tanten i huset**

She has to be a little- most on neat (.) She's the lady of the house

Dennis: **Ja**

Yea

The child

Patrick: **Mm: (.) Han ska va' mycke' lekfull (.) Han ska inte va' så mycket utåtriktad, han**

måste va' aktiv också och så måste han va' trevli' (.) å' så lite ordning och så en till på

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utåtriktad (.) Det blir bra va'?

mm: (.) He should be very playful (.) Not so much outgoing, he has to be active too and he

has to be nice (.) and sort of neat and one more on outgoing (.) That's good, isn't it?

Dennis: **Mm**

Mm

Excerpt 5.8, The Sims, Session 1

Lars: **Hur mycke' pengar har vi?**

How much money do we have?

Magnus: **Tjugetusen börjar man ALLTID med**

Twenty thousand you ALWAYS start with

Lars: **Varför då?**

How come?

Magnus: **Jo, de e' så**

Well, it's like that

Excerpt 5.9, The Sims, Session 3

Mats: **Ah, det är jobbigt att man måste börja bygga hus också**

Ah, it's tough that you have to start building a house too

Arne: **Det tar inte lång tid**

It doesn't take such a long time

Mats: **Nä, men vi har så lite pengar (.) flytta ut (.) finns det nå'n bra tomt?**

No, but we have so little money (.) move out (.) is there any good lot?

Excerpt 5.10, The Sims, Session 8

Knut: **Den? (.) Flytta in familjen**

That one? (.) Move the family in

Dag: **Nu måste vi hitta ett bra hus till ett bra pris (.) Tänk på att du bara har tjugetusen**

Now we've got to find a nice house for a good price (.) Remember that you only have

twenty thousand

Excerpt 5.11, The Sims, Session 7

Patrick: °°**De e' så jädra små hus**°° **Du vet, jag e' van å bygga såna där lyx- lyxvillor (.)** °**på min**

för jag kan ju koder, men° **Hrm det fick man tydligtvis inte göra (.) dåligt**

°°They're such damn small houses°° I'm used to building like lux- luxury houses, (.) on mine

you know, °cause I know like codes, but° Hrm we're not supposed to use those (.) Bad

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Excerpt 5.12, The Sims, Session 9

Oliver: **Jag skulle vilja bo i de:he**

I'd like to live in that one:he

Albin: **Jah! det skulle va lite cool (.) med swimming-pool å allting**

Yea! that would be cool (.) with a swimming pool and all

Oliver: **Men man kan bygga egen**

But you could build one

Albin: **Jag vet (5 s.) men det kostar ju lite**

I know (5s.) but it costs some

Oliver: **Det kostar femtitusen (.) å man har tjugitusen från början**

It costs fifty thousand (.) and you start with twenty thousand

Excerpt 5.13, The Sims, Session 4

Olle: **Det får inte vara nå'ra onödiga saker**

There can't be any unnecessary things

Putte: **Den (.) vattenk-**

That one, water c-

Olle: **°(de e')° toa (.) ta en toa där**

°(it's a)° toilet (.) take a toilet there

Putte: **tvåhundrafemtinie**

two hundred fifty nine

Olle: **Jah (.) "brusefåtölj" (.) Där ja, [Putte: där] Mm (.) dom ska inte tvätta händerna**

Ya (.) "brusefåtölj" (.) There [Putte: there] Mm (.) They don't have to wash their hands

Putte: **Jo, det måste dom**

Oh yea, they have to

Olle: **Nej, skit i det, det kostar bara pengar. Dom gör aldrig det ändå**

No, don't bother, it only costs money. They never do it anyway

Excerpt 5.14, The Sims, Session 5

Anders: **Men ta den**

But take that

Philip: **Hur mycke' kostar den då? (.) O::ch! Sex tusen, nej det var för [(mycke')**

How much does that one cost ? (.) O::ch! six thousand, no that's too [(much)

Anders: **[Det har vi inte ens**

råd med (.) ser du

	[We can't even afford
	that (.) see
Philip:	**>Ska vi ta [den?<**
	>Shall we take [that?<
Anders:	**[Ja, den e' billigast**
	[Yea, that one is the cheapest

Excerpt 5.15, The Sims, Session 9

Albin:	**Ta en vanli simpel spis**
	Take an ordinary simple stove
Oliver:	**(ohörbart) ja, vi måste tänka på våra pengar**
	(Inaudible) Yea, we have to think of our money
Albin:	**Ja, exakt**
	Yea, exactly
Oliver:	**Men du vet om vi jobbar här kan vi få mer pengar så kan vi köpa nån ny grej sen**
	But we can get more money if we work here, you know, so we can buy some new thing
	later

Excerpt 5.16, The Sims, Session 9

Albin:	**Kylskåp också >vi kan ta det billigaste då<**
	Refrigerator also >we can take the cheapest <
Oliver:	**Ja (.) de e billigt (.) HA! HA-ah!**
	Yes (.) this is cheap (.) HA! HA-ah!
Albin:	**Fattigt! Tshe (.) det är därför vi heter luffarna**
	Poor! Tshe (.) that's why we're called the Hoboes
Oliver:	**Mm (.) vi ta::r diskmaskin den e fattig också HA HA-ah!**
	Mm (.) we ta::ke dishwasher that's poor too HA HA-ah!

Excerpt 5.17, The Sims, Session 7

Patrick:	**<Å:: vi: måste ha> (.) vi måste inte ha en TV (.) vi behöver inte det**
	<A::nd we: need> (.) we don't have to have a TV (.) we don't need that
Dennis:	**Jo vi har TV och soffa annars är dom ingen bra:: familj**
	Oh yes, we have a TV and a sofa otherwise they aren't a goo::d family
Patrick:	**Okej då-**
	Okay then-
Dennis:	**Alla familjer har en TV!**

	All families have a TV!
Patrick:	**Nä:eh, "inte ja'" >jo då<**
	No:eh "I haven't!" >Oh yes<
Dennis:	**hehe**
	hehe
Patrick:	**Jag har fem stycken**
	I have five sets
Dennis:	**Vi ha:::r (3 s.) tre TV**
	We ha:::ve (3 s.) three TVs
Patrick:	**Den TV:n får dom ha då**
	They can have that TV then
Dennis:	**Jag har en tjugoåtta tum på mitt rum och så har vi en liten nere och så har vi en (.) trettitvå tums i vardagsrummet**
	I have a 28" in my room and we have a small one downstairs and a (.) 32" in the living room

Excerpt 5.18, The Sims, Session 8

Dag:	**Det va' ett konstigt dass heheh**
	That was an odd toilet heheh
Knut:	**Mm**
	Mm
Dag:	**Så'nt brukar man inte ha hemma**
	That isn't something you have at home
Knut:	**Nej, det brukar man inte**
	No, it isn't

Excerpt 5.19, The Sims, Session 2

Jon:	**Vart står hur mycke' pengar man har?**
	Where does it say how much money there is?
Sune:	**Där står det**
	There it says
Jon:	**Oj, det var inte så mycket**
	Wow, that wasn't so much

Excerpt 5.20, The Sims, Session 9

Oliver:	**Nu så ska jag vattna lite**

So now I'll do some watering

Albin: **Näh:men ska du vattna du e väl °för tusan° ingen hemmafru heller?**

No:but are you going to water, are you °Jeez° You're not a housewife are you?

Oliver: **Men man kan beställa hembiträde som städar åt en (det kan vi göra sen)**

But you can order a maid to clean for you (we can do that later)

Albin: **Ja gör det då!**

But do that then!

Excerpt 5.21, The Sims, Session 9

Albin: **Men-he jag vill åka ut till stan**

But-eh I want to go downtown

Oliver: **Men det får du inte göra nu**

But you can't do that now

Albin: **Ne:j, nä men när jag kommer tillbaka då vill jag åka ut å (.) "ragga lite ha, ha, ha:i"**

No, no but when I come back I want to go out to (.) "check out the girls he,he, heey"

Oliver: **Jag tror ingen vill ha dig**

I don't think anyone will have you

Albin: **Va?**

What?

Oliver: **Jag tror ingen ungdom [(vill ha dig)**

I don't think any young people [want you-

Albin: **[ja men gamla tanter vill väl ha mig**

                                  [Yea, but old ladies want me

Oliver: **Men det går aldrig med gamla tanter med stora**

There aren't any old ladies with big

Albin: **Nä men (.) gå ut på restaurang, gå ut å titta lite i bibliotek**

No but (.) [*Oliver smiles and straightens himself up*] go to a restaurant, go to the library

Chapter 6

Excerpt 6.1, The Sims 2, Session 10

Irma: **Ehhe**

Ehhe

Leon: **Hey, kolla!**

Hey, look!

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Irma:	**>Jorden runt, jag har aldrig spelat det<**
	>Bon Voyage, I've never played that<
Irma:	**>Vi skapar världens rikaste gubbe< så han kan åka jorden runt!**
	> We create the richest guy in the world< so he can travel around the world!
Leon:	**Ja, lätt**
	Yea, sure
Irma:	**För ja' vill se hur det ser ut när dom reser**
	'Cause I want to see how it looks like when they're travelling.
Leon:	**Jah**
	Yea
Irma:	**Det är sjukt roligt**
	It's totally fun
Leon:	**Undrar om man får va' (.) typ på flygplanet så (.) å gå omkring**
	Wonder if you (.) sort of can be on the plane and so (.) and walk around
Irma:	**Ja, just det! Det har inte ja' ens tänkt på**
	Yea, that's right. I haven't even thought of that
Irma:	**Hch Okay! (.) Vi tar Skönköping**
	Hch Okay! (.) We take Pleasantview

Excerpt 6.2, The Sims 2, Session 10

Irma:	**Vi gör tre: tycker ja'**
	We'll make three: I think
Leon:	**Jah**
	Yea (Inaudible)
Irma:	**Eller (.) det räcker med två, de' e' så jobbigt å spela med fler**
	Or (.) it's enough with two, it's a hassle playing with more
Leon:	**Jah (.) för då måste man bara "euh euh euh"**
	Yea (.) [Looks at Irma and pauses] 'cause then we'll just have to "euh euh euh"

Excerpt 6.3, The Sims 2, Session 10

Irma:	(**Vi kan ta de'**)
	(We can take that)
Irma:	**De' här e' asbra! (.) de' e' jättestort!**
	But this is awesome! (.) This is huge!
Leon:	**Ja**
	Yes

Irma:	**De' här e' bra**
	This is good
Leon:	**>Okej<**
	>Okay<
Irma:	**De' e typ ganska litet, men det e' okej. För två blir det asbra**
	It's like kind of small, but it's okay. For two it'll be awesome.

Excerpt 6.4, The Sims 2, Session 10

Leon:	**Jag vet inte hur man gör så de blir rika**
	I don't know how to make them rich
Irma:	**Nä, men det fixar jag (.) för jag kan dom [fusken i huv'et**
	Well, but I'll fix that (.) 'cause I know [the cheats
Leon:	**[För dom måste resa**
	['cause they have to travel
Irma:	**Ja**
	Yes
/…/	
Leon:	**Undra om man kan ha typ (.) resa jorden runt**
	Wonder if one can like (.) travel around the world
Irma:	**Ja' vet inte (.) man kan resa i alla fall**
	I don't know (.) Anyhow, you can travel
Leon:	**Ja (dom måste kunna ta) en semester på Hawaii**
	Yes (they have to take a) vacation on Hawaii
Irma:	**Ja (eller nå't liknande kan dom åka till i alla fall)**
	Yes (or something like that they can go to anyway)
Leon:	**Eller har dom inga riktiga ställen?**
	Or don't they have any real places?
Irma:	**Det finns så'na här typ-**
	There is sort of-

Excerpt 6.5, The Sims 2, Session 10

Irma:	**E:hm (.) Nu vet ja' inte hur man reser i å för sig (men det blir nog jättebra) man tar säkert tidningen som vanligt, eller nå't**
	E:hm (.) I don't know how you travel (but it'll be great) you can sure take the paper as usual, or something
Leon:	**Jah (ohörbart)**

Yea (Inaudible)

Excerpt 6.6, The Sims 2, Session 3

Bea: **Kan man ha djur nu?**

           Can one have pets now?

Clara: **Djur?** [Bea: **Yes**] **Ja, det e' ju djurliv**

           Pets? [Bea: Yes] Yes, this is Pets, you know

Bea: **Men jag har aldrig spelat detta**

           But I've never played this

Clara: **Har du [inte?**

           Haven't [you?

Bea: **[Nä**

                    [Na

Bea: **Jag har bara den vanliga**

           I've just got the usual

Clara: **Sims 2**

           Sims 2

Bea: **Mm**

           Mm

Clara: **Jag var tvungen att köpa djurliv för jag hade tappat bort det här vanliga (.) så (.)**
           fick jag låna [genitiv av ett personnamn] för att kunna installera djurliv så kan jag
           använda det

           I had to buy Pets, 'cause I'd lost the usual (.) so (.) I borrowed [The genitive form of a
           name] to install Pets so I can use it

Bea: **Fick du nytt med en gång (.) eller var det ingen skiva i (.) eller vad då (.) ha ha**

           Did you get a new one right away (.) or was the CD missing (.) or what (.) ha ha

Clara: **Nä, men ingen sån där (.) kod**

           Na, but no such a (.) code

Bea: **Aaha!**

           Aaha!

Clara: **Koden (.) för att installera**

           The code (.) for the installation

Clara: **Aa!**

           Aa!

Bea: **Ska (ja') skriva**

           Shall (I) write

Clara:	**Ja, du har tangentbordet**
	Yes, you have the keyboard
Bea:	**Ska vi ta pappa först, eller-**
	Shall we pick the dad first, or-

Excerpt 6.7, The Sims 2, Session 3

Clara:	**Säg stopp när du ser nån frisyr du gillar**
	Say stop if you see a hairstyle you like
Clara:	**Här e dom vanliga**
	The ordinary ones are here

Excerpt 6.8, The Sims 2, Session 3

Clara:	**Asså säg till om du ser nånting**
	Tell me if you see something
Bea:	**Ja ja**
	Yea, yea
Bea:	**(kan) vi ser hur det ser ut med flätor**
	Let's see how it looks with pigtails
Clara:	**Va e' flätorna? (.) a:h där**
	Where are the pigtails? (.) A:h, there

Excerpt 6.9, The Sims 2, Session 3

Clara:	**Okej, hur ska vi göra?**
	Okay, how do we do this?
Clara:	**Skulle vi bygga ut eller?**
	Should we expand (the house), or what?
Bea:	**Ja det kan vi göra (.) °För det var lite litet°**
	Yea, we can do that (.)° 'cause it's too small°
Clara:	**Ska vi se hur det ser ut på övervåningen? Här kan vardagsrummet va' då**
	Let's see what it looks like on the upper floor, OK? The living room can be here
Bea:	**Mm, det kan det va'**
	Mm, it can be there
Clara:	**Kan det va' kök där å' så badrum**
	That can be the kitchen and the bathroom
Clara:	**Var ska dom äta?**
	Where are they going to eat?

Excerpt 6.10, The Sims 2, Session 10

Irma: **Semester! (.) >(Åk) på semester< Det måste va' det första [han gör**

          Vacation! (.) >(Go on) a vacation< It has to be the first [thing he does

Leon: **[Ja**

                                                                                   [Yes

Leon: **"Ljuba:h!"**

          "Ljuba:h!"

Irma: **Tsshe**

          Tsshe

Irma: **Vi kör lite snabbare**

          Let's go a little faster

Excerpt 6.11, The Sims 2, Session 10

Irma: **ÅH! >Dom kommer åka dit nu<**

          OH! >They're going there now<

Irma: **Åh, shit! Dom har värsta-**

          Oh, shit! They have the-

Irma: **Det här kommer å bli så jäkla kul**

          This will be so darn fun

Leon: **Varför går hon inte in?**

          Why doesn't she jump in?

Leon: **Hon har typ på sig värsta kappan**

          Check out the coat she's wearing

Irma: **>Åh, shit! Nu åker dom<**

          > Oh, shit! They're leaving now <

Irma: **Twiikii Island**

          Twiikii Island

Irma: **Undra om man får se när dom e' på planet, eller inte (.) Ja' tror inte man får det**

          Wonder if you see when they are onboard the plane, or not (.) I don't think so

Leon: **Jag tror inte heller det**

          I don't think so either

Irma: **Det känns som om de hade (.) det orkar dom inte göra**

          I think they had (.) They don't want to bother

Leon: **Nä (bara bla)**

          Na (just bla)

Irma:	**Det e' ju ganska onödigt också**
	It's pretty unnecessary anyway
Leon:	**Jah**
	Yea

Excerpt 6.12, The Sims 2, Session 3

Bea:	**Så!**
	So!
Clara:	**Mm**
	Mm
Bea:	**E' de' allt nu?**
	Well, is this all?
Clara:	**(ohörbart) Ja de' e' de väl**
	(Inaudible) Yea, I guess it is
Bea:	**Okej!**
	Okay!
Clara:	**Ska vi starta?**
	Should we start?
Bea:	**Japp!**
	Yep!
Clara:	**Undra om man kan göra nånting med bilen**
	(I) wonder if you can do anything with the car

Excerpt 6.13, The Sims 2, Session 3

Bea:	**Men det kan väl inte han göra va?**
	But he can't do that, can he?
Clara:	**Han kunde tydligen det**
	Looks like he could
Bea:	**A**
	A
Clara:	**Han kan ju-**
	He can-
Clara:	**Undrar om han kan köra**
	(I) wonder if he can drive
Bea:	**Hhhhe heh (.) Nä**
	Hhhhe heh (.) Na

Bea: **Jo**
            Ya

Chapter 7

Excerpt 7.1, The Sims 2, Session 1

Andy: **Hey, vi gör två killar då**
            Hey, we create two guys then

Billy: **Två bögar! Ehe**
            Two fags! Ehe

Andy: **Ja-hah så friar jag till dig då**
            Yea-heh and then I propose to you!

Billy: **Ja**
            Yea

Excerpt 7.2, The Sims 2, Session 1

Billy: **"Kommen schnell zu zuzabet!"**
            "Kommen schnell zu zuzabet!"

Andy: **"Ohh!" så jäkla gay-t-t**
            "Ohh!" so damn gay

Excerpt 7.3, The Sims 2, Session 1

Andy: **Han får va' en neger**
            He will be a black

Billy: **Ja, min får också va' en neger**
            Yea, mine will be a black too

Andy: **Neger, fy fan vad det låter**
            Black, shit, that sounds terrible

Billy: **A:**
            Ya

Andy: **Tjockisar få vi va [också**
            We can be tubbies [too

Billy: **[Ja, det e vi lätt**
                            [Yea, sure

Excerpt 7.4, The Sims 2, Session 1

Andy:	**Vi- (.) ska vi göra rå-tjockisar?**
	We- (.) should we make them real fat?
Billy:	**Ja**
	Ya
Billy:	**Hmfh HAHAHAah!**
	Hmfh HAHAHAah!
Billy:	**HAAH! >TA SÅ! HA SÅ!<**
	HAAH! >TAKE THAT! HAVE THAT!<
Andy:	**Ser ut som en jäkla potatis-skalle**
	Looks like a damn potato head

Transcript 7.5, The Sims 2, Session 1

Billy:	**Hahaha! Fy fan va' fult**
	Hahaha! So damn ugly
Billy:	**Ja de' e' äkta gay, ta det (.) (ohörbart)**
	Yea that's real gay, take that (.) (Inaudible)

Excerpt 7.6, The Sims 2, Session 1

Billy:	**Vad e' detta?**
	What's this?
Andy:	**Smink**
	Makeup
Billy:	**Haha! Ta det (.) (som en) jävla tjej (.) >kolla det e' äkta gay med dom också< (.)**
	(såna) röda
	Haha! Take that (.) (like a) damn girl (.) >Check it out, it's really gay with those< (.)
	(such) red

Excerpt 7.7, The Sims 2, Session 1

Billy:	**Hf: Gay**
	Hf: Gay
B & A:	**HA HA HA HA**
	HA HA HA HA
Billy:	**Fy fan va ful han e' (.) seriöst**
	Damn he's so ugly (.) seriously
Billy:	**"Tycep Xyel"**
	"Tycep Xyel"

Andy: **Nä han får inte ha såna**
            No he can't have those

Billy: **Näe, det blir inte lika kul**
            No, it isn't as much fun

Excerpt 7.8, The Sims 2, Session1

Billy: **JA:H! [Oliver: ÅH!] >ja ja ja< Jag ber dig! Ha så! Snälla!**
            YES! [Andy: OH!] >yea yea yea< I beg you! Have it like that! Please!

Excerpt 7.9, The Sims 2, Session 1

Andy: **°Fy fan va' fult°**
            °Damn that's ugly°

Billy: **Eh (.) de' e' ja' va'**
            Eh (.) that's me, isn't it?

Andy: **Ja**
            Yes

Billy: **Fy fan va' fula vi e'**
            Damn we're really ugly

Excerpt 7.10, The Sims 2 Session 1

Andy: **Åh, han gilla honom (.) Fan va gay**
            Oh! He liked him (.) so damn gay

Billy: **Dags å' bli ihop (ohörbart)**
            Time to get together (Inaudible)

Excerpt 7.11, The Sims 2 Session 1

Andy: **Å:[å:u:hh! HOHOHO**
            O:[o:u:hh! HOHOHO

Billy: **[Å:::uh!**
                [O:::uh!

Andy: **[Å::::uhu:h E:h:ffh:**
            [O::::uhu:h E:h:ffh:

Billy: **[Åh:Euweheh Å::::h**
            [Oh:Euweheh O::::h

Billy: **>Eh: Fortsätt, fortsätt<**

>Eh: Go on, go on<

Andy:	°**Shit**°
	°Shit°
Andy:	°**(jävlar)**°
	°(Goddamn)°
Andy:	**Åhh!**
	Ohh!
Andy:	**Fy fan!**
	Damn!
Andy:	**Okej, det är (ohörbart)**
	Okay (.) it's (Inaudible)
Billy:	**Han e' kär nu (.) min gubbe**
	He's in love now (.) my Sim

Excerpt 7.12, The Sims 2, Session 1

Andy:	°**De' här e' ju fan gay**°
	°This is so damn gay°
Billy:	**Åhå::h**
	Ohoo:h

Excerpt 7.13, The Sims 2, Session 1

Billy:	**Mys, ta det**
	Cuddle, choose that
Billy:	**Kolla dom pussas**
	Check it out, they're kissing
Billy:	**Ta mys**
	Choose cuddle
Andy:	**Jag försöker**
	I'm trying
Andy:	**Åhc!**
	Ohc!
Andy:	°**Nä,fy fan**°
	°No, damn°
Billy:	**"Mmmm" ["Mmmm"**
	"Mmmm" ["Mmmm"

Andy:	[**"Mmmm"**
	["Mmmm"
Andy:	**Fan vidrigt**
	Damn disgusting
Andy:	**Åhch**
	Ohch
Andy:	**Å:::h! Fy fan va' gay**
	O:::h! So damn gay
Billy:	**Blir dom aldri' ihop eller**
	Aren't they going to get together, or what?

Excerpt 7.14, The Sims 2, Session 1

Billy:	**Åhh!**
	Ohh!
B & A:	**Åhh! Chch!**
	Ohh! Chch!
Andy:	**F::phhhhoh!**
	Fffphhhhoh!
Andy:	**Det e' ju fan jobbigt**
	This is damn hard
Andy:	**Fan**
	Damn
Andy:	**Ouhh!**
	Ouhh!
Andy:	**Fan, (varför) kan dom bara inte gifta sig?**
	Damn, why can't they just get married?
Andy:	**Nä, det var för vidrigt**
	Nay, this was too disgusting

Excerpt 7.15, The Sims 2, Session 1

Andy:	**Måste lira lite WoW**
	Have to play some WoW
Billy:	**Hur länge har vi lirat? Det har gått en timme snart va?**
	How long have we been playing? It's been an hour soon, hasn't it?

Transcript 7.16, The Sims 2, Session 1

Andy: **Vänta, jag köper en brasa (.) å så stänger jag in dom (.) å så brinner allting upp**

Wait (.) I'll buy a log fire (.) and so I'll shut them in (.) and so everything burns up

Billy: **Ja, gör det (.) stäng in dom**

Yes, do that (.) Shut them in

/…/

Billy: **Jag tror inte det kan börja brinna**

I don't think it can start burning

Andy: **Jo det går**

Yes it will

Billy: **Spola fram as mycke då (.) du kan snabbspola framåt**

Run it forward a lot then (.) You can fast forward

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