

# Computer Games Content Research: Final Report

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## Executive Summary

This report summarises insights from a series of in-person and online discussion groups held in Sydney, Melbourne, Wagga Wagga and Ballarat in late June 2018. The discussions focussed on key issues in computer games identified by the Department of Communications and the Arts (the Department), seeking to understand community perceptions around the following four areas:

- Loot boxes
- Simulated gambling
- Online interactivity
- Strong themes.

## The gaming context

Over the past decade, gaming has become increasingly mainstream and the majority of Australians now own some form of gaming device in their home.<sup>1</sup> Two-thirds (67%) of Australians play computer games and the average time spent playing per day is 77 minutes for females and 98 minutes for males.<sup>2</sup>

Games and the gaming environment have developed rapidly. Participants noted the realistic, immersive depictions of fantasy situations that are now possible and common. For most across our groups, this was not an area of worry, but was instead an aspect to celebrate; however some parents were worried about the influence of increasingly graphic violence and sexualisation in games, and the potential influences of this on young people's broader attitudes.

Participants also noted that gaming is now a major industry, and increasingly driven by monetisation of gameplay. Some forms of ongoing monetisation can be frustrating for gamers, especially those used to more traditional models free of in-game purchases.

## Key findings

On the whole, participants across our groups felt that there was a role for classification and/or other regulatory measures in addressing the issues covered in the study. Below is a summary of the key findings of this study.

### Microtransactions and loot boxes

In-game *microtransactions* were noted as pervasive across all computer game formats. Some parents of gamers were concerned about the large sums of money being spent by their young people, however gamers and young people alike saw microtransactions as an inseparable part of the in-game experience that can offer good value for money.

This meant few saw microtransactions *per se* as an area into which the government could or should further intervene. Parents of younger gamers noted that in-app purchases were clearly signalled in the app permissions upon installation, and were expected. However, they were surprised when a game bought in store for a significant sum (e.g. \$60-\$90) also included microtransactions, and felt this should be more clearly labelled.

Among non-gamers and parents, the specific forms of microtransaction known as *loot boxes* were less well known, and were poorly understood. Among gamers the discussions were far more informed and nuanced, with participants often exploring the subject thoroughly without requiring any prompting.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.igea.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Digital-Australia-2018-DA18-Final-1.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Based on examples and information provided in the discussion groups (and for some, prior knowledge) most participants considered some forms of loot box as akin to gambling. However, almost none saw all the examples as potentially harmful for young people.

During discussions with gamers, the following features tended to influence the perceived proximity of loot boxes to gambling:

- The purchase mechanic... An overarching factor - if loot boxes can be purchased with real money, which includes in-game currency that can be purchased with real money, then most saw this as a form of gambling.
- The tradability of items... If the items in loot boxes can be traded - either within the game or via a third party website - for other game goods, or sold or converted to real money or equivalent, this was seen to be akin to gambling, due to the items then being akin to currency.
- The gameplay outcomes... If loot box contents potentially confer substantial in-game advantages, people were more likely to see this as a form of gambling, due to the perceived value of these advantages to players; there was less concern about loot boxes offering less valuable cosmetic enhancements.

However, where loot boxes were earned only through gameplay or for participation (or even watching ads), few saw these as harmful, or indeed much different to standard game mechanics.

### Simulated gambling

Simulated gambling games that are an obvious and interactive replica of casino games were seen as potentially harmful, potentially leading to problem gambling later in life. Parents and adult gamers called for restrictions to be placed on games that depict casino games in their exact form.

Community members felt that games that included casino like imagery or possessed some mechanics that may also be found in gambling, but did not entirely replicate casino games, were less harmful and not in need of restriction.

### Online interactivity

'Online interactivity' is used in consumer advice to cover a range of different practices and technologies related to, and within game play, including user created content, links to or exchange of information with external or third-party websites, or user-to-user communication (audio or video chat, or texting) via social media and networks.

This term was seen as too vague and ineffective at communicating the full range and scope of issues and interactions that this might cover. Of particular concern was the ability to chat with others online, due not only to concerns about stalking and predatory behaviour by paedophiles, but also exposure to bullying and harassment by other players.

### Strong themes, content

Participants noted that certain forms of violence are completely normalised in gaming. Parents were more concerned about depictions of sensitive social issues and mature themes than violence in games.

Computer games were seen by most gamers as a very different medium due to their interactivity and deserving of their own approach to classification.

Several participants noted that it was easy for young people to access mature media online, including games that had a restricted rating (MA 15+ or R 18+), and that it was commonplace for children to access such games.

Not all parents adhere to classifications applied to games, and some appear to assume that computer games, even with restricted ratings, will be fairly benign.

## Background and approach

The Classification Branch of the Department of Communications and the Arts is tasked with providing support and advice to the Australian Classification Board, which classifies films and computer games as well as some publications and online content. Regulating the computer games industry can be particularly challenging; the industry is fast-paced and innovative, with regulations often needing to 'catch-up' to industry developments.

## Background

### Microtransactions and loot boxes

Microtransactions involve spending small amounts of real money on in-game items. Purchases can be for items with purely superficial value (such as in-game character clothing), or for items and features with utility, such as increases to character attributes.

"Loot boxes" are a type of microtransaction involving the purchase of a virtual box containing random items. Loot boxes (sometimes called loot crates or prize crates) are included in many modern games, in a variety of different formats. The loot box mechanic allows players to spend in-game currency (either earned through gameplay or purchased) to buy a random selection of game goods - the contents of the loot box are unknown before the player purchases it. Loot boxes can include both common, low value items that allow customisation options for a game character, and rare, high value items that confer substantial in-game advantages. It has been suggested that the nature of this reward system (variable-ratio reinforcement) is the same on which many forms of gambling operate.<sup>3</sup> Concerns have also been raised that loot boxes may lead younger people to high in-game spending and expose them to gambling related activity.

Loot boxes have become widely used in the industry, existing in both flagship gaming titles and lower budget mobile games. Analysts have estimated the global loot box market to be worth over \$35 billion AUD.<sup>4</sup> Loot boxes have received a great deal of negative media coverage, especially following the initial loot box implementation in *Star Wars Battlefront II* in late 2017. Since then, some of the larger games developers have said they will remove paid loot boxes from future iterations of their games, replacing them with boxes earned by in-game achievements.<sup>5</sup>

### Simulated Gambling

Simulated gambling imitates real-world gambling through the look, feel, sounds and actions within the game.<sup>6</sup> The difference between real-world gambling and simulated gambling is that there is no exchange of money, however the gamer may receive in-game tokens or coins which they can use to extend their play. However, these free initial tokens can run out, which means players need to pay for more tokens. The most popular forms of simulated gambling replicate casino-style games such as blackjack, Texas hold-em' poker or poker machines. Games with an element of simulated gambling may contain only this form of content or may incorporate it into a broader game with other elements. Simulated gambling is rapidly growing within the gaming sector and numerous real-life gambling companies have begun to invest in, or merge with, online simulated gambling companies.<sup>7,8,9</sup>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-018-0360-1>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/2018/04/17/video-gamers-will-spending-50-billion-gambling-like-loot-box/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.usgamer.net/articles/star-wars-battlefront-2-will-completely-remove-paid-loot-crates-and-star-cards>

<sup>6</sup> Dickins, M., & Thomas, A. (2016). Is it gambling or a game? Simulated gambling games: Their use and regulation (AGRC Discussion Paper No. 5). Melbourne: Australian Gambling Research Centre, Australian Institute of Family Studies.

<sup>7</sup> Gainsbury, S. M., Hing, N., Delfabbro, P. H., & King, D. L. (2014a). A taxonomy of gambling and casino games via social media and online technologies. *International Gambling Studies*, 14, 196-213.

<sup>8</sup> Schneider, S. (2012). Social gaming and online gambling. *Gaming Law Review and Economics*, 16(12), 711-712. doi:10.1089/glr.2012.16123

<sup>9</sup> Sapsted, T. (2013). *Social casino gaming: Opportunities for 2013 and beyond*. London: FC Business Intelligence

There has been little research into the effects of simulated gambling, however research to date has linked simulated gambling with increased likelihood to engage in real life gambling<sup>10</sup> as players become accustomed to in-game rules and gaming-like experiences. One study showed that adults who had previously never played simulated gambling games were 26% more likely to move to monetary gambling after playing simulated gambling games for six months.<sup>11</sup>

A recent study by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (2016) highlighted that people who play simulated gambling games are more likely to gamble commercially and report gambling problems, but the correlation is not fully understood. Evidence to date suggests there are various reasons for movement between simulated and commercial gambling and that it is bi-directional.<sup>12</sup> It is also important to note that there has been some anecdotal evidence by problem gamblers that simulated gambling provides a positive alternative to real gambling, acting as a proxy or substitute that gives them the in-game experience they crave without the negative effects.<sup>13</sup>

### Online Interactivity

Online interactivity is a broad term used by the Classification Board in consumer advice that encompasses a range of different practices and technologies related to in-game content. These can include user created content, links to or exchange of information with external or third-party websites, or user-to-user communication (audio or video chat, or texting) via social media and networks.<sup>14</sup>

User created content allows players to create worlds or games within a larger game system that is then made publicly available on that system (e.g. *Roblox*, *Second Life*). User to user communication also provides players with the ability to speak with like-minded people providing a new sense of community. These are often positive experiences for player who can share tips, tricks and other strategies for games. They can also team up with others from around the globe to enter into quests, duals or other in-game experiences in teams. However, there are also numerous reports of concerning behaviour online with players, including children, being targeted by online harassment in the form of bullying, grooming, or other untoward behaviour.

### Depictions of strong themes

Certain computer games' depictions of violence, sex, drugs and other strong themes have been the subject of controversy. While not alone in their depictions of strong themes, computer games differ from other media forms such as TV and film in that the consumer often has control over some of the events which occur in the story.

## Objectives

This project aimed to understand community perceptions in relation to various aspects of computer games, including:

- awareness, understanding and perceived impacts of/concern about 'loot boxes'
- conceptions of simulated gambling in computer games – defining features of simulated gambling and perceived suitable audiences for games with simulated gambling
- perceived effectiveness of the consumer advice of 'Online interactivity' currently applied to a range of features of online games

<sup>10</sup> Sévigny, S., Cloutier, M., Pelletier, M. F., & Ladouceur, R. (2005). Internet gambling: Misleading payout rates during the "demo" period. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 21(1), 153-158. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2004.02.017

<sup>11</sup> Kim, H. S., Wohl, M. J. A., Salmon, M., Gupta, R., & Derevensky, J. (2014). Do social casino gamers migrate to online gambling? An assessment of migration rate and potential predictors. *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 31(4), 1819-1831. doi:10.1007/s10899-014-9511-0

<sup>12</sup> <https://aifs.gov.au/agrc/sites/default/files/agrc-dp5-simulated-gambling-paper.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Gainsbury, S., Hing, N., Delfabbro, P., Dewar, G., & King, D. (2015). An exploratory study of interrelationships between social casino gaming, gambling, and problem gambling. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 13(1), 136-153. DOI: 10.1007/s11469-014-9526-x

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.classification.gov.au/Industry/Journey/Documents/attachment-three--online-interactivity.pdf>

- parental understanding and awareness of the gameplay experience and perceptions regarding the range of content to be found in computer games, including strong themes and other mature content, and how this compares with their approach to children's viewing (film and TV)
- expectations regarding government functions such as classification in dealing with microtransactions, loot boxes, simulated gambling, and other forms of computer game content that may be perceived as problematic.

## Methodology

A qualitative research approach was used for this study. It consisted of 10 group discussions and two online forums. To ensure an informed discussion, particularly regarding the emerging issue of loot boxes, six group discussions and both online forums involved regular gamers, whose views could then be compared with the remaining four groups comprising occasional and non-gamers and parents of young gamers.

### Group discussions

The group discussions included 7-8 participants in each session and were approximately 90 minutes long. A detailed recruitment screener was used and groups were held in a range of locations to ensure a broad cross section of participants was recruited. No participants had previously taken part in any classification research, and steps were also taken to ensure that no participants aged less than 18 years were exposed to R 18+ content.

All participants were asked to complete a few questions (about themselves and their engagement with movies and games) prior to attending the group discussions to give them the opportunity to reflect on their gaming behaviour and experiences before the sessions.

### Online forums

Two online forums were held with gamers: 16-18 year olds; 18-31 year olds. There were 12 participants in the young gamers forum, and 17 participants in the adult gamers forum. Both forums proved effective in understanding different perspectives between the age brackets, but also produced insights around which perceptions were consistent among these gamers.

### Stimulus

A range of video clips were used as a basis for conversation in the group discussions and online forums. For a detailed outline and description of each clip, refer to Appendix 1.

### Discussion flow

In both the group discussions and online forums, the discussion started with a broad contextual discussion before drilling down to specific research questions in a natural, participant-led way (see appendix for discussion guide).

For many groups, particularly gamers and parents, these discussions opened up a wealth of knowledge into the relevant issues. This often included perceived issues with loot boxes and links to gambling, online interactivity and safety concerns, as well as gaming addiction and the effects of strong themes. Some groups were naturally able to cover off each of the key issues identified by the Department without additional moderator prompting, indicating that these are issues are top of mind amongst those engaged with the industry.

From here conversations delved deeper into each of the key issues including loot boxes and other simulated gambling, online interactivity and finally, strong themes. Each theme was introduced by showing a range of clips depicting key elements for discussion (see appendix for clip rotation). The selection of clips allowed a range of game mechanic and visual representations to be examined in detail.



These clips provided a starting off point for discussion, in which the moderator prompted for awareness, understanding, experience within game, as well as the perceived need for government intervention as an educator or regulator.

All group sessions concluded with a summary of the content covered in the discussion, where participants were asked which issues they thought were the most important or pressing. Participants were also encouraged to contact the researchers if they experienced any discomfort about the themes discussed.

## Sample

The following sample frame was the basis for our group discussions and online forums.

Group #	Method	Audience	Gender	Age	SES	Ethnicity	Location
1	Group	Adult Gamers	M	18-30	Mid-high	1 in 4 CALD	Melbourne
2	Group	Adult Gamers	F	31-50	Low-mid	1 in 4 CALD	Melbourne
3	Group	Adult Gamers	M	18-30	Mid-high	1 in 4 CALD	Wagga
4	Group	Adult Non-Gamers	F	51+	Mid-high	1 in 4 CALD	Sydney
5	Group	Parents/Guardians of Gamers	M	As falls	Mid-high	1 in 4 CALD	Melbourne
6	Group	Parents/Guardians of Gamers	F	As falls	Low-mid	1 in 4 CALD	Ballarat
7	Group	Young Gamers	M	16-18	Low-mid	1 in 4 CALD	Sydney
8	Group	Young Gamers	F	16-18	Mid-high	1 in 4 CALD	Melbourne
9	Group	Young Gamers	M	16-18	Low-mid	1 in 4 CALD	Wagga
10	Group	Young Non-Gamers	F	16-18	Mid-high	1 in 4 CALD	Sydney
11	Online Forum	Young Gamers	Mixed	16-18	Mixed	1 in 4 CALD	Online – national
12	Online Forum	Adult Gamers	Mixed	18-31	Mixed	1 in 4 CALD	Online - national



## Key issues in gaming

The focus of this social research project was to gauge community perceptions about specific issues in computer games - microtransactions and loot boxes, simulated gambling, online interactivity, and strong themes. This section of the report focusses on these key issues.

### The gaming context

As a key point of context, participants in our discussions talked about how society's approach to gaming has changed over the last decade - it has become mainstream, and something that almost everyone does to varying degrees. Computer and console games are in almost every household, and mobile games are on almost every phone. The social acceptability of being a 'gamer' has also changed, and participants noted across the groups that people now make a living out of playing games professionally, or uploading videos of their gameplay to YouTube.



*"The way society as a whole approaches games has definitely changed. In the past 5-10 years, as game technology has rapidly improved, society has moved from seeing gaming as a niche hobby for 'nerds' to a mainstream and socially accepted form of entertainment." Young gamer, Sydney*

*"Gaming demographics have diversified - the stereotypical male 18-24 isn't the norm anymore." Adult gamer, online*

*"I think there's a much wider audience for gaming now than there was probably around 5-10 years ago." Young gamer, Bendigo*

Although there are clearly still blockbuster games with broad appeal, there are hundreds of thousands of titles available across a multitude of genres, and so it is also a market with many niches. People in every group discussion talked about games and even genres that many others in the group had not heard of. There was also mention of thousands of 're-skinned' titles being produced that may have minor changes to the look and feel, with the underlying engine and gameplay remaining the same. For those not spending a lot of time in the gaming world - in our groups these tended to be parents - much of this is invisible. For those aware, the diversity is overwhelming, and they tend to restrict themselves to a limited set of genres or franchises.

Games and the gaming environment have also developed rapidly - and continue to do so. Participants noted the realistic depictions and immersive environments that are now common in gaming. Related to this, participants also noted the steadily improving quality of storytelling and gameplay in modern games, with developers constantly pushing to better themselves and provide a deeper, more immersive experience for gamers.

For most across our groups, this was not an area of worry, but was instead an aspect to celebrate, allowing games to explore complex and taboo topics in a way that other media cannot, providing social discourse and commentary. But for some, this was concerning, with young people potentially being exposed to themes and graphic scenes that they may not be developmentally ready for.



*"I think games are becoming so real, graphics are so life like and story lines can change our differences and perspectives of reality." Young gamer, online*

*"Games can tackle complex ideas through the media, and even 'taboo' subjects; such as mental illness. But perhaps not only controversial topics, but highly complex theories while weaving in a story or gameplay that is captivating... Nonetheless, the gaming industry has developed into more than just a past-time; it can bring light to sensitive topics, awareness, philosophy, and reality check" Young gamer, online*



*"When my little sister watches us play, she can't tell the difference between the game and real life" Young gamer, Sydney.*

*"Obviously, with advancements in technology, graphics quality has improved along with the complexity and length of games. This has led to more story based, and open ended games. In the past games would often only have one path and one ending, whereas nowadays there are often multiple endings based on ingame choices" Young adult gamer, online*

Participants also noted the way that games are both influenced by and influence broader cultural and social norms, trends and artefacts. For example, parents and young people talked about those who socialise through gaming - often via the gaming platform (e.g. : online chat or voice) - and how these social interactions are in turn influenced by violent gameplay and abusive language to create a potentially unhealthy culture online. Others spoke about the level and ubiquity of realistic violence in modern computer games and were concerned that this influences real-world behaviours, through either exposure or desensitisation to violence.

Certain very popular games, such as *Angry Birds* or *Minecraft* reach a level of cultural influence to rival popular movies and TV series. Further, parents noted that games developers are constantly developing and marketing games based on or related to movies, television series or toys - that is, they borrow from popular culture - in order to appeal to young people. But where the direction of this cultural influence was historically strictly from other media to games, the reverse relationship is now prevalent, with movies like *Pixels*, *Pac Man*, and *Tomb Raider* based on computer games.





## Microtransactions and Loot boxes

Groups of all ages and levels of experience brought up conversations about microtransactions in games. As an increasingly dominant part of the gaming landscape, microtransactions were seen as a topical issue and raised across many groups. This section focuses on community perceptions of microtransactions and loot boxes.

### Summary


Microtransactions and loot boxes are pervasive across all computer game formats. Many parents were concerned about the large sums of money being spent by their young people. However, gamers and young people alike saw microtransactions as an integral part of the game that allows developers to expand the in-game experience.

Loot boxes were seen as gambling when real-world money can be used to purchase them, or prize items can be traded online or when they conferred in game advantages (as these were considered to have significant value to gamers). Loot boxes that include these elements were therefore seen to require a more restrictive rating, to send a clear message to parents that these are not for minors.

### Community perceptions of microtransactions and in-game currency


Microtransactions were often a top-of-mind computer games issue for those participating in discussion groups. Parents especially noted that microtransactions can quickly add up to significant sums and can be a trap for unwary young people and their parents. Gamers and parents also told us that some games now require both significant upfront investment (\$60-\$80) but also offer ongoing in-game purchases to extend gameplay or content. Other games are free to play initially, but progress is slow unless in-game purchases (including, in some cases, loot boxes, discussed below) are made. Most games now include DLC (downloadable content purchased after the initial purchase), which many participants noted often provide good value, extending the game considerably. But some noted that games developers can use this to make a substandard or shortened initial release, and make players purchase multiple additional components to play the game.

Participants across our gamer groups spoke of expenditures running into the hundreds of dollars - far more, they felt, than would be spent on gaming in the past. This included older adult gamers playing mobile games, to young people paying for 'skins'. Some recognised that the increased spend allowed developers to continue adding features, depth and breadth to their games, but also that that they have spent significant sums - sometimes on games they no longer play.



*"I've spent probably \$600 playing [mobile game] - I was playing so much, I was part of a clan and working with people all over the world... they keep pushing you to spend more to advance the clan... I was going through a time in my life at the time and I realise now it was an escape." Parent of gamer, Sydney*

*"My daughter's friend racked-up \$800 without even knowing...until her parents got the bill" Parent of gamer, Melbourne*



*"I think it's the free ones myself. Some kids think I've got it for free. What if I spent an extra \$20-\$30 bucks just to get things done? And then when it gets to the next level you spend another \$20-30 to get something, then by the time you've done a few more levels you've actually spent more than if you'd bought the game" Parent of gamer, Melbourne*

*"I don't mind DLC if they're adding content, but a few times it seems like they're putting in half the effort to make a game and then you've got to pay for the rest of it" Young gamer, Sydney*

Participants were largely accepting of microtransactions, which they felt mostly struck a good balance between expenditure and value, but several participants across our groups remarked they felt tricked into spending more money than they had anticipated. However, this was not generally seen as fault of the developers, or even a real problem. Among gamers, they were largely seen as enabling legitimate business models that provide them with better experiences, for easily manageable expenditure.

Concern about these microtransactions was mainly expressed by parents and non-gamers - groups who are less likely to believe that gamers are getting value for their expenditure. Parents were more likely to say they felt gaming environments can manipulate young people into spending lots of real money on worthless digital tokens. However, they also felt it was their own responsibility to educate their children about the nature of these transactions and control their children's expenditure.

Few saw in-game microtransactions *per se* as an area into which the government could or should further intervene. Parents noted that in-app purchases were expected, and were noted in the app permissions upon installation. They had usually evolved ways of either preventing their young children from purchasing in-game goods, or purchasing these goods for their children at appropriate times. Where a game bought in a store included in-game purchases, parents felt this should be clearly labelled on the box.

For experienced gamers, microtransactions were seen as an intrinsic part of the gaming experience, and they had developed ways - some of them from a young age - of managing the mix between gameplay and expenditure to suit their lifestyles.

In-game currencies are used extensively in modern games, and enable microtransactions ranging from less than one cent to many hundreds or even thousands of dollars. Often users will be able to earn the currency through gameplay, but also purchase it using real money. A key issue raised was the way that real-world currencies convert to in-game currencies, and the way these currencies convert to in-game goods. It was noted that the conversion rates are not simple ratios e.g. 1,000 VBucks for *Fortnite* is \$14.95AUD, while 1,250 gold in the *Wargaming* universe is \$8.43AUD. In addition, conversion ratios change depending on the amount purchased, making it difficult to determine which packs are better value. Finally, when making in-game purchases, it was reported that these were always in the in-game currency (e.g.: 350 VBucks, 7 Gold), making it difficult to determine how much was actually being paid.



*"So it's \$37 for 2,500 VBucks, but one legendary skin is 2,000 VBucks - you don't necessarily realise that means it's like over \$30 at the time"* Young gamer, Wagga Wagga

*"I'll pay for extra content, but if I can earn the money in the game I will earn the money in the game. I don't spend time on online games because it just annoys me"* Young adult gamer, Sydney

## Community perceptions of loot boxes

Participants in every gamer group specifically noted the prevalence of loot boxes in modern games. In non-gamer groups few had exposure to the term 'loot boxes', however some (especially parents) were aware of their existence in games, even if they didn't know the specific details. The discussions with community members, including gamers, parents of gamers and non-gamers showed that broadly, the community do consider certain forms of loot box as akin to gambling. However, there are important nuances that mean the issue is not entirely clear-cut.

Participants noted that, in their simplest form, loot boxes that offer a random in-game good are essentially a repackaging of very standard game reward mechanics that have existed since the earliest computer games played in their childhood. So rather than being a discrete invention of the last decade, loot boxes represent

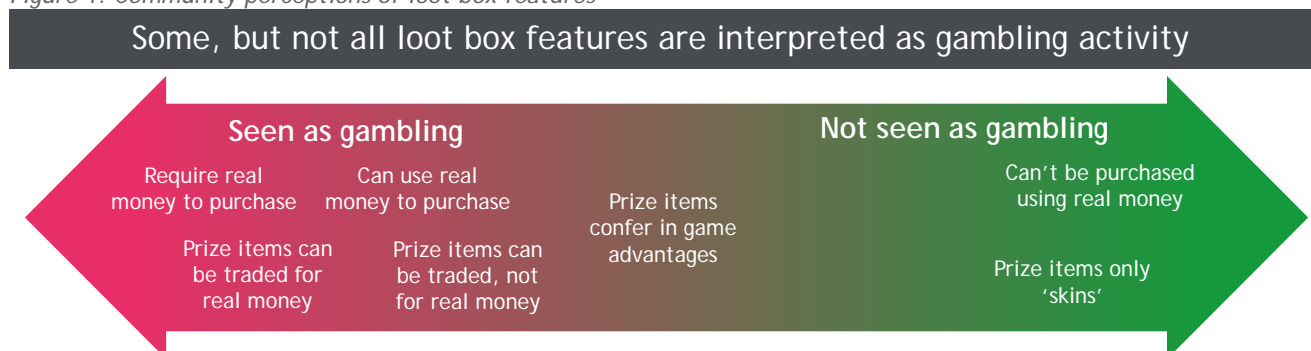
an evolution of these characteristics. However, many gamers told us this form has been taken to extremes in some games, and the value and validity of the various loot box mechanics was debated across the discussion groups.

Across these debates among more interested gamers, a consensus emerged around the particular factors that they would use to determine whether a particular loot box constitutes gambling activity. In summary, these were:

- **The purchase mechanic...** An overarching factor - if loot boxes can be purchased with real money, which includes in-game currency that can be purchased with real money, then most saw this as a form of gambling.
- **The tradability of items...** If the items in loot boxes can be traded - either within the game or via a third party website - for other game goods, or sold or converted to real money or equivalent, this was seen to be akin to gambling.
- **The gameplay outcomes...** If loot box contents potentially confer substantial in-game advantages, people were more a little more likely to see this as a form of gambling, whereas if they only offer cosmetic items to customise appearance, participants were less concerned.

Noting that these features are not mutually exclusive, for example, one could use real money to purchase loot boxes that potentially confer in-game advantages, the diagram in Figure 1 summarises the balance of community opinion about loot box features.

Figure 1: Community perceptions of loot box features



Participants across our groups tended to see these loot box features as potentially harmful to minors and felt that they should be restricted to older people - and many felt they should carry an R 18+ classification.

Beyond age restrictions, more experienced gamer groups tended to concur that 'loot tables' clearly articulating the odds of winning items contained within loot boxes should be made available by games developers, regardless of the purchase mechanic. Many also felt that the value of the loot box should be clearer - in terms of how much real-world currency it costs - at time of purchase.

Some believed that certain developers are moving away from the mechanic, emphasising more transparent monetisation strategies, which means that to some degree the issue may be resolved by industry and market forces. Despite this, most across our discussions felt there is a need for a clearer signal for parents and young people on games that potentially include gambling-related activity, to at least allow them to be aware of the potential harms.

We examine the factors that contributed to this broad consensus below.

### Purchase mechanic

The purchase mechanic was the primary determinant of whether a loot box system was understood to be gambling or not. Some loot box systems can be purchased with in-game currency that can be earned slowly through substantial time spent on gameplay, or else purchased with real money. Most gamers across our sample had experience of these kinds of loot boxes and had mixed feelings about the value of the mechanism. Many had had good experiences, but then reflected that they had spent more than they wanted or anticipated, and with hindsight they questioned the value of their expenditure.



"It's gambling but without the regulation" Young gamer, Melbourne

"The reason I didn't buy this game is because they took the micro-transaction thing to another level" Adult gamer, Melbourne

"You know I reckon it's just like gambling. You may as well just give your kids a credit card and go to the pokies because it's the same sort of thing. The game's supposed to keep you indulged and encouraged to keep on playing, playing and playing. So it's a form of manipulation to keep you on as long as possible, take money off you, with these micro transactions." Adult gamer, Melbourne

Other games offer loot boxes as part of normal gameplay, for example: on levelling-up or as a daily participation prize. Where loot boxes cannot be purchased using real money, they tend to be understood as a legitimate form of interactivity in line with standard game mechanics, and the randomisation akin to rolling dice as one would in a standard board game. Gamers did not believe this form of loot box should be restricted or regulated.

However, the ability to use real money to purchase loot boxes swayed community perceptions towards them being seen as a form of gambling that should be more tightly restricted. Across our groups, participants felt that if young people are using real money to purchase the chance of winning a particular item, then they may not be capable of understanding the risks and could be easily manipulated into spending excessive amounts by games developers.

This meant that - with few exceptions across our groups - loot boxes requiring purchase using in-game or real-world currency were seen as gambling that should only be available to those over 18 years of age. Where loot boxes can be purchased using real-world money, but can also be earned through in-game activity, there was more debate as to whether this constitutes gambling activity. However the balance of opinion across the groups was that this form should also be restricted to those over 18.

### Tradability of items

Some games allow the ability to trade items won in loot boxes either within the game or on third party websites. *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive (CS:GO)* offers loot boxes that provide skins, such as customised weapons. These can have substantial value and can be traded to create a US dollar value on an online marketplace that can, in turn, be used to purchase other games.





*"I've got a knife that's worth about \$120... like a legendary dragon maul in perfect condition is worth \$1,200... people can spend thousands of dollars trying to get it on the platform or just go out and buy it [from someone else]... it's quite hard but you can make profit from buying and selling bulk skins" Young gamer, Wagga Wagga*

*"It's not really a problem when you're over the age of 18, but when you're younger you want to be respected... you don't realise it but you're trading money for respect... it's validation... it's like the rims I bought for my car." Young gamer, Wagga Wagga*

Among groups aware of this, the prevailing view was that tradability of items won in loot boxes, and the ability to convert their value into real-world currency or equivalent (e.g. currency that can be used for purchasing thousands of titles) turns these loot boxes into a form of gambling that should be restricted to those over 18 years of age.

Importantly, one of the groups that brought up this discussion around tradability was a young gamer group, where participants were 17-18 years old. Even participants in this group, who had been trading loot box items for some time, with hindsight felt that stronger restrictions were necessary to help young people avoid the pitfall of spending too much on the chance to win certain digital goods, of highly questionable long-term value. This was seen as not easy to understand as a 13 or 14 year old focussed on gaining status among their peers. The tradability of items makes their apparent value much higher, and this encourages players to take more risks, as they know they can trade items they don't want or need later.

### Gameplay outcome

Loot boxes that offer the chance to win substantive in-game advantages were strongly criticised across most groups that had experience with them. Disparaged as 'pay-to-win', they were seen as anathema to the central expectations of fairness and meritocracy that the gaming community prides itself on.

There was a sense among our group discussions that some games developers are making game levels require thousands of hours of gameplay in an effort to sell loot boxes and season passes that dramatically speed up play and help players avoid the frustration and time commitment to 'grinding' through repetitive levels and missions. Our discussion groups highlighted some players will spend the money to avoid having to play for so long, while others will put the time in - which can come at a cost to their social, psychological and physical health.

This highlights the division between the Pay to Win players and the purists who prefer to play the 'honourable' way. Those who 'pay to win' get better value from their experience, while those who don't feel disadvantaged and frustrated having to spend tens, hundreds or thousands more hours for the same rate of advancement in the game, without paying. However, almost universally across our discussion groups, when a game was designated 'pay to win', that is, when payment provides significant advantages to gameplay in multiplayer environments, this was seen as an overwhelming negative that destroyed the expectations of a fair game.

Where the loot boxes do not confer in-game advantages, that is, they only provide customisation options for a player's character or other cosmetic items, they were less likely to be seen as outright gambling and more likely to be considered as a legitimate purchase in line with standard downloadable content.



*"The games that I play pretty much you can only buy like cosmetics and I'm totally cool with that...I had like \$15 left on my card for my TAFE money and like spent it all on loot boxes, it was so worth it, but I don't like to pay for things to get ahead in games because it feels like cheating" Young gamer, Ballarat*

*"The cosmetic ones I don't have a problem with, but pay to win games where you pay for a premium currency that you can't get by grinding is what we have a problem with" Young gamer, Sydney*

However, loot boxes that offer the chance to win items or advancements that have a real-world value (including hours of gameplay) or significant in-game value, were more likely to be seen as gambling that should potentially be restricted to those over 18, as the stakes were considered high. Concerns were compounded by a belief that young people aren't necessarily mature enough to judge the value of digital goods and may therefore spend excessively on them.



*"Pokies are in pubs, you have to be a certain age to enter a pub, but anyone can access the internet. The fact that a kid can go online and do the same thing and they don't have a sense of monetary value..." Young gamer, Sydney*



*"You do have a broadcasting standards authority and all of that but the gambling thing, the Loot Box thing...it just completely goes under the radar" Adult gamer, Melbourne*

Exactly what constitutes pay to win, however, was a matter of debate. Groups tended to suggest that it was beyond the scope of the government to properly regulate this dimension of modern gameplay, and instead rely on market forces to drive developers to create better value games. In the groups that discussed 'pay to win' in detail, it tended to be seen as the developer's responsibility to create an environment that is fair for everyone.

### Related point – concerns about ‘gaming addiction’

While outside the scope of this study, addiction to gaming was commonly mentioned as a concern among gamer groups. Participants were worried about others disconnecting from the real-world and placing too high a priority on gameplay.

They worried about the long term effects of excessive game play on developing minds, and their ability to form relationships in the real-world.

Some, including parents, believed that games developers are building addictive qualities into games, which they believed resembled those found in poker machines. These included:

- games with no pre-defined end – one of the central features of Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGs), the lack of defined end means a player can continue playing the game for years
- games that continue to evolve even when the player is not online or playing, meaning characters are potentially left behind when the player is not online
- rewards systems tied to levelling up – each successive level takes an increasing amount of time and effort to achieve, which means that the player needs to spend more time and effort to get the same reward they previously got in minutes
- rewards systems tied to a variable schedule – when players don’t know how long it will take to get the reward they are chasing – whether it be the next attempt or in 15 attempts – this encourages players to keep trying
- socialised rewards systems – players gaining social status through in-game achievements are likely to be driven to play longer
- competitive environments with real-world rewards.

While these mechanics were observed to be ubiquitous across the gaming landscape, and not automatically harmful, there was concern about games that combined these mechanics with loot boxes, which were said to resemble those found in poker machines.



*“I believe people get addicted to it, I mean you see young men play video games, you can’t get them out of the house, they won’t socialise, they use it as a way to escape, to withdraw from society, they just sort of stay in their own little video game world...”*: Young gamer, Wagga Wagga



*“Personally, I think it’s got a lot to do with your background, I mean some people have a really addictive personality, others have a drive to get out there and do things...”* Young gamer, Wagga Wagga



*“As technology has progressed, the gaming environment has slowly integrated into everyday life, games have started to unite strangers online, but slowly separate from real people, and I find that as a small problem to gaming.”* Young gamer

## Simulated gambling

This study was also tasked with examining community perceptions of games incorporating some form of simulated gambling and understanding community expectations about how various forms of this content should be dealt with in classification.

### Summary

Simulated gambling games that are an exact replica of casino game were seen as potentially harmful, preparing children for gambling addiction later in life. Parents and adult gamers called for restrictions to be placed on games that depict casino games in their exact form.

Community members felt that games that included casino like imagery or underlying gambling mechanics without exact replication of casino games were less harmful and not in need of restriction.



### Community perceptions of simulated gambling

Some of the example clips depicting simulated gambling presented to our groups were seen as potentially harmful for children by potentially inculcating gambling behaviours and grooming young people for future uptake of gambling.

Participants noted that almost all video (and even board) games include some elements of randomisation or luck, and that the presence of randomisation is not, in itself, enough to mean that playing a game is harmful activity. Instead, as they told us, a combination of other factors is required for a game to be seen as gambling, and carry the potential of gambling-related harms that mean it should be restricted to more mature audiences.

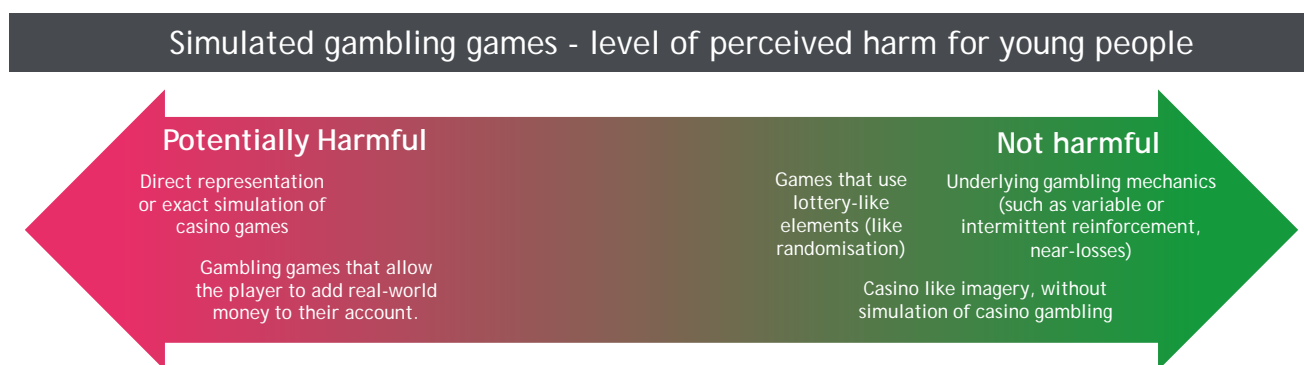


This meant the examples presented to group participants were met with varying levels of concern as to their suitability for children and young people. Particularly:

- Direct representation or exact simulation of casino games (e.g. *Slotomania*) and gambling games that allow payment in real-world currency were seen as potentially harmful to children, and the broad consensus across our groups was that these should be given an R 18+ rating to send a clear signal to parents
- Indirect representation was seen as less harmful (and completely benign to some) and therefore not in need of restriction, indirect representation includes:
  - Casino-like imagery, without simulation of casino gambling (e.g. *Sonic*)
  - Games that use underlying gambling mechanics (such as variable or intermittent reinforcement, near-losses)
  - Games that use lottery-like elements (like randomisation) that do not allow the player to add real-world money to their account.

The diagram below summarises community perceptions of the potential for harm across different simulated gambling features found in games which were tested in our groups.

Figure 2: Simulated gambling game elements and community perceptions of harm



### Direct parallels to real-world gambling (*Slotomania*)

One of the stimulus clips was a simulated poker machine with four reels of cartoon representations of farm animals, vegetables and barns. Participants across our groups felt the nature of the imagery and audio in this example indicated that it was targeted at children and young people, rather than adults. They felt this kind of simulated gambling would increase the likelihood that children who played it would end up playing real-world poker machines, and the balance of opinion across the groups was firmly on the side that these kinds of games should be restricted to those legally allowed to gamble – those over 18.



*"You know those casino slot games, you put real money and it gets turned into gold and you don't realise you're spending money" Adult gamer, Sydney*

*"This is really just gambling disguised as a game to get anyone and everyone hooked on playing. It starts you off with a set amount of coinage for free, usually a fair bit and urges you to play and play." Young gamer, online*

*"This is just gambling disguised to look like a kids' game in my opinion. I believe it could be quite addictive, it does not seem to promote good values to children." Young gamer, online*

As a counterpoint, a few non-gamers felt that there were no real harms in playing this type of game - a few remarked that the game actually looked like something they might like to play.



*"The noise relaxes me, it is satisfying, makes you want to play more" Young non-gamer, Sydney*

Participants told us that ultimately, they themselves needed to take responsibility for the kinds of content their children were engaging with. Both parents and adult gamers told us that a more restrictive rating - many felt an R 18+ classification appropriate (with note about being a simulated gambling game) would provide a clear signal for parents that this type of content is not designed for minors.

#### Related point - interpretation and use of classification in games

Across our groups, the classification system was often framed by participants as a guide to their decision making about the appropriateness of the content for young people, rather than a restriction that meant the content was not legally allowed to be sold to minors. Parents valued the classification system as a signal, but it was clear across the groups that some parents assume - regardless of the rating - that all computer games are for young people, and an R 18+ rating merely means that it's not for very young teens or children.

Consistent with the discussion around strong themes and graphic content, a number of people across the groups felt that young people would be able to access and play these games - even if restricted. To those in both parents' and gamers' discussion groups, this meant that there was a clear need to raise awareness that such content can be found in games and clear guidance about its suitability for children. Some younger gamers thought that warnings akin to those found on cigarette packaging or poker machines (about gambling) should be applied on games that closely resemble gambling.



*"It would give you an idea of how much money you're going to have to put in...You also get an idea of how much an item is worth" Young gamer, online*

#### Games with gambling characteristics (*Candy crush*)

Popular mobile games such as *Candy Crush* have been criticised for using gambling-like elements, including near-misses<sup>15</sup>, being visually similar to slot machines and an intermittent reinforcement schedule that has been shown to be a key addictive quality of gambling. Players can spend money to overcome lockout schedules when they run out of lives.

However, potentially due to its near ubiquity - most across our groups had some familiarity with *Candy Crush* - the vast majority felt there was no real harm in it for young people. It was not generally felt to resemble gambling activity - there is no payout, and players do not wager bets. Although the game allows players to make payments to advance, these advancements are not randomised, but instead are seen as concrete purchases of in-game goods. With no cash payout, real-world reward, or multiplayer advantage, participants felt it would be a stretch too far to label this as gambling.

Across our groups, nobody felt that it was necessary to further regulate this or similar games.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5445157/>

### Lottery-like randomisation within a game of skill (Flip diving)

The flip-diving game shown to participants showed a young man using a lottery to win additional in-game experiences (additional levels and flip styles). Most across our group saw this as harmless, but several parents saw the game as encouraging gambling. The main concern was that children would learn to like the lottery mechanic and the colourful elements of the game and therefore relate this pleasure to real-world gambling - which has similar aesthetics and mechanics - later in life.



*"Like that kid was addicted, see the way he was spinning the ball until he got the ball he wanted...it numbs their senses as to what really goes on" Parent of gamer, Melbourne*

However, the fact that it was included in a normal game of skill and there was no option of being able to purchase additional credits to keep spinning (although users can watch advertisements for additional credits) meant that it was not generally considered to be harmful. With a few rare exceptions, most felt this sort of game was not in need of any further regulation.

### Games with gambling - related scenery (Sonic Forces)

The clip shown to participants was a casino-themed level of *Sonic Forces* called 'Casino Forest' and contained slot-machine-like mini in-game challenges, casino imagery and gambling references.

Across our groups, nobody felt there was likely to be any significant harm arising from children playing this game, despite the clear references to casinos and gambling activities. The casino references were seen as largely innocuous background as they were not the main focus of the game, rather an 'obstacle' or 'extra' within the game that is a much broader - and unlikely to influence children to take up real-world gambling.



*"I'm sure Sonic has always been harmless, so it can't really be that bad if there's a slot machine in the game because it looks like it's just there for decoration" Young gamer, online*

*"As others have said, this is evidently a pinball machine with a slot machine inside it. The slot machine seems to give you powerups each time you use it, so it doesn't appear to be like an actual microtransaction. It's obviously a small distraction from the norm within this game and seems fine to me." Adult gamer, online*

## Online interactivity

Currently, games that allow communications (via text, audio or video chat) between players, links to external websites, exchange of personal information or user-generated content are labelled with 'Online interactivity' consumer advice in Australia. In addition, games that are classified by the International Age Rating Coalition tool (IARC) for Australian storefronts are given this consumer advice when they have loot boxes. Thus a wide range of different interactions are covered by this term, and this study was tasked with understanding whether the community believes this is appropriate.

### Summary

The term "Online interactivity" was seen as too vague and ineffective at communicating the full range and scope of issues and interactions that this might cover. Parents expect children to be exposed to potential threats while interacting online, however feel they are unable to effectively police or monitor their young people's online interactions. Young people are concerned with the ubiquity of bullying, harassment, and trolling online and many reported the online environment as a misogynistic atmosphere unhealthy for women and girls.

### Community perceptions of online interactivity

The social aspect of gaming was consistently mentioned as an overall positive, enabling families and friends to interact and spend quality time - both when together and separated. However, both parents and young people noted several concerns about this aspect of online interactivity.



### Parent perspectives

Parents talked about their lack of visibility over what happens in-game, and their inability to effectively protect their children from content and interactions that are potentially harmful. Parents of young people told us they couldn't necessarily control what their children access and what they are exposed to in games and in the broader online environment. They could never watch every interaction in the game. This lack of control - knowing that they cannot guarantee the protection of their children from strangers online - was worrying for many.



For most parents, the idea that their child was talking to seemingly random strangers online sparked fears of the potential for predatory behaviour within games. Some parents had stories of either their own children or neighbourhood children being approached by paedophilic predators after accidentally giving out information online.



*"We ended up involving the police and changing all of their online profiles" Parent of gamer, Ballarat*

Some parents saw online gaming as an environment in which they expected their child would (but hoped wouldn't) be approached by predators. Given this assumption, these parents felt it was their responsibility to educate their child so that they could either protect themselves or (for children) alert their parents when they felt uncomfortable. Some took an even more proactive approach, by having their child's online chat (as in *Roblox*) sent to their own mobile so that they could keep an eye out for anything untoward.



*"Have seen it with my own children being targeted online, especially in that game, they will come in and say 'Mum this weird person is asking for my home address'" Parent of gamer, Ballarat*

Even with the potential risks of allowing their children to interact online, a few parents found that online chat provided an important part of their child's socialisation, with children on the autistic spectrum or with poor socialisation skills able to practice within the comfort and security of their own home. For these parents, the benefits outweighed the risks, as they felt they had educated their children enough to monitor their own safety.

For other parents, the discussion sparked interest in a different way - they hadn't really thought too much about it. As discussion evolved, they became more aware of the risks and were seeking guidance and good, evidence supported, easy-to-action advice that would help them protect their children online.

### Young people's perspective

Endemic to online socialising, bullying and trolling was a serious concern among younger groups. Many online games involve communications by either voice or text chat. Bullying - such as players engaging in strong verbal abuse of team-mates seen to be making gameplay errors - was reported as common. There was mention of this bullying even spilling out into the real-world, with IP addresses being used to track down and threaten people. So, while the anonymity of the online environment allows and enables behaviour that few would engage in face-to-face, this anonymity is to some degree an illusion.



*"When I was 15 I used to think it was awesome to completely ruin someone's day" Young gamer, Wagga Wagga*

*"People swearing at each other, I've seen it get really serious...it gets ugly, I've seen people track down where people live. A guy had a business and people were leaving negative feedback on his Google page... the matrix was broken!" Young gamer, Wagga Wagga*

Young gamers and young adult gamers also tended to have a clearer understanding of the risks of user generated content for younger people (compared to many parents) but were not sure how these risks could be effectively mitigated. They spoke of Minecraft servers where users had created structures that may be inappropriate for young people to be exposed to, or user-created videos discussing inappropriate themes or using strong language. In comparison to other areas, parents were often naïve about these issues.

*"There's Minecraft servers where people just make enormous penises - you know for a kid's game it's not that appropriate" Young gamer, Wagga Wagga*

Most people, including gamers, non-gamers, in our groups told us that online gaming environments can be particularly toxic for women and girls, including harassment and threatened sexual violence. Males who call out this behaviour are labelled 'white knights' and themselves bullied and harassed, reducing their willingness to stand up for what they see as wrong. There were suggestions that these online environments reflect a broader misogyny in the gaming industry. Female participants seemed resigned to the fact that when interacting with strangers, their online experience will - at some time - include some form of abuse and sexism.



*"The gaming environment is really horrible for girls" Young adult gamer, Wagga Wagga*

*"You can get some really creepy, filthy guys online. When they find out you're a girl, the stuff they'll say to you is unbelievable" Young gamer, Melbourne*

Young gamers and young adult gamers across our groups clearly recognised many of the potential dangers of these kinds of online interactivity. Young people tended to emphasise the bullying and harassment noted above, but they often had stories of them or their friends interacting with strangers of uncertain background online. Young people usually felt their parents were lacking in awareness and therefore unable to educate or protect their children from these dangers.



*"My friend was talking to this guy online for like years and when she went over to the US to meet him, it turned out he was like 40!" Young Gamer, Sydney*

*"Yeah online interactivity, my mum would look at that and say 'all games have online interactivity don't they' - it's not enough to let her know what might be going on..." Young gamer, Sydney*

### Implications

Across all groups, there was a sense that the term 'Online Interactivity' is an insufficient and almost meaningless descriptor in terms of enabling parents and gamers to be fully cognisant of the risks involved.

While very few felt more restriction was necessary - or could even be effective, parents and gamers alike were broadly supportive of greater efforts to educate parents and provide them with more detailed, useful information. This would include labelling that specifically mentions:

- "Can communicate with strangers",
- "Can potentially see inappropriate content created by users",
- "Possible to share personal details" and
- "Contains links to external, third party websites".

It was broadly felt that parents need to be triggered to educate, inform and empower their children to make good and safe choices online, and that better labelling of online interactivity elements would be a reasonably effective way to do so. Some felt this was not enough, and that there should be an effective, up-to-date online resource where parents can check on the games their children are playing, but calls for this sort of resource were somewhat tempered by the understanding that it would be a nearly impossible task to keep up with the rapid pace of the games industry.

Overall, only a few felt that games that offer online interactivity need to be differently classified, but most felt that parents would benefit from clearer labelling that highlights the risks, better availability of information about game contents, and resources to help them communicate effectively with their children.

## Strong themes

Currently, games depicting strong or high impact themes can be classified as MA 15+ or R 18+ in Australia.

### Summary

Participants noted that certain forms of violence are completely normalised in gaming. Parents showed less concern about these forms of violence but were more concerned about sensitive social issues – in this study, depictions of domestic violence. Young people felt the current ratings for the domestic violence shown in *Detroit Become Human* clips shown in the group were correct whereas parents and adult gamers felt it should be rated R 18+.

Computer games were seen by most gamers as a very different type of media with more interactivity to TV and film and deserving of their own approach to classification.

Several participants noted that it was easy for young people to access mature media online, including games that had a restricted rating (MA 15+ or R 18+), and that it was commonplace for children to access such games.

### Community perceptions of strong themes and content in computer games

Parents groups consistently mentioned that many games include increasingly strong themes as games developers seek to push boundaries, to do something new, to shock, to engage and to invite an emotional response among desensitised gamers already used to excessive depictions of blood and gore. *Grand Theft Auto V* (GTA V) was the key exemplar of this movement across the groups, with gamers noting it allows the user to kill, take drugs and have sex with prostitutes as part of the gameplay. Mothers of gamers also told us they felt that women are highly sexualised or degraded in games, and they worried about the implicit and explicit messages that games send to young people.

Parents worried that this was affecting young people who, they felt, can't necessarily distinguish between the fantasy of gameplay and real life. They were also concerned that games that depict violence and sex desensitise players, and a few speculated that the increased levels of sexual assault and domestic violence are related to gaming culture.



*"It normalises sex and violence and brings it into the living room"* Parent of gamer  
Sydney

*"It sort of validates that what that person is good at is killing people"* Parent of  
gamer Sydney

*"They'll just be killing people and talking about their day..."* Parent of gamer,  
Sydney

*"Violence and sex content is always something that we need to monitor but it is  
different to a movie and so I think the ratings need to reflect that. In a game you  
are submerged into the world and the characters unlike movies where you can skim  
over the surface."* Young gamer, Online

Some parents we spoke to were vigilant and engaged with what their children were exposed to, using the current rating system to decide on whether a game or movie was appropriate. These parents felt that the current rating system was enough of a signal, and that it was their responsibility to monitor what their children were exposed to through media.

A counterpoint to this is the comparison of the experience of the accessibility of content for underage consumers. Across our groups of young gamers, most were playing R 18+ games well before they turned 18.

Online distribution channels have made it relatively easy for young people to bypass age restrictions on content, but young people also use other means, such as playing at more permissive parents' houses or asking an adult to buy the game. Those under 18 readily admitted to accessing inappropriate content from a young age, and shared anecdotes of kids playing MA 15+ or R 18+ rated games - like *GTA V* from even younger ages including childhood and early adolescence. Further, for many young people an R 18+ rating only serves to make the game more desirable.



*"People like to do stuff they can't" Adult gamer, Melbourne*

*"I used to just get the check-out page then get gran in to pop her credit card details in" Young gamer Wagga Wagga*

*"Everyone got GTA V before they were 18 - I was 15 when I got it, but there's these kids down the road, the older one's about 12 but the younger ones are like 6 or 7 and they all play GTA... some of the [stuff] they say is very inappropriate" Young gamer Wagga Wagga*

*"It's a lot easier for young people to get games they shouldn't, you just get on Steam and say that you're 18..." Young gamer Wagga Wagga*

These young people felt their parents were lacking in good information about the game's content, and unable to easily relate or understand their interactions online. They felt their parents didn't really understand what they were doing online or the difference between film and computer games in terms of the level of immersion and freedom to act. Some in the young gamer groups wondered what their parents would think if they knew the full scope and detail of games like *GTA V*, and just what it allows the player to do.

Our discussions showed that while some parents understand how an R 18+ game might influence their child with strong themes, other parents, assume a lower standard, reasoning that if it's a video game, then it must be designed for young people.

But some parents may need to be persuaded to take games classification more seriously, and there may be a role for communications about the value of the classification as it applies directly to computer games, and the provision of better information for parents to base their decisions.

### Community perceptions of differences between film and computer games

Computer games were seen by most across our groups as a very different type of media to TV and film and deserving of their own classification. The level of personal involvement and decision-making sets games apart from other media - users are more in control of the particulars of the story, and the immersive experience is understood to be more impactful than passive forms, such as film and television. The moral decisions are seen as more interactive than just watching a movie - the decisions you make can affect whether people live or die. Some felt it was important not to glorify certain activities within games.



*"If you shoot someone in a game...obviously we've been doing that for years, that's fine, but if you had to like, molest a kid, obviously that's not fine" Adult gamer, Melbourne*

*"I feel that games need to be regulated and yes, I think they need to be regulated differently to other sorts of media and entertainment. They are a unique entity - which is why they are so fun to play, but because of their ability to draw you into on screen activity they need to be monitored and regulated." Older gamer, online*



*"It's so much more interactive now. It's so realistic... they are almost living it"*  
Parent of Gamer, Sydney

*"A movie you watch once. Games you play all of the time".* Parent of gamer,  
Melbourne

Participants generally felt that strong content in computer games doesn't necessarily affect people's behaviour - the context of the game is often far removed from daily life - but instead tended to be more circumspect, noting there will always be some people in society who turn out to be deviant or violent. Some felt that violent games may be a catalyst for people who are already maladjusted, but could not be a 'root cause' of violence.



*"I don't think that you could turn a completely docile person into a super violent person through computer games but I feel like if that person already has a couple of small violent tendencies that it could grow"* Young gamer, Sydney

Parents were accepting and appreciative of the role of the classification system, and feel it helps them make good decisions about content for their children. However, comments revealed that parents often referenced experiences with film and games in their own youth (perhaps sneaking in to see a R 18+ horror film, watching a R 18+ film at a friend's house or playing early (80s/90s) 'adult' games themselves) to understand how the classification system might apply to their children's games, rather than direct experience of modern games. They were not thinking about the how immersive aspects of gameplay, the decisions that players make, the range of potential situations offered, and the contact with strangers all interact, and did not appear to be making their decisions with a full understanding of the nature of the games their children could be or were playing.

This again suggests a role for communications aimed at getting parents to educate themselves about the games their children are playing and requesting, and understand the full range of content they include.

### Response to specific stimuli

Beyond understanding parents' concerns more generally about strong themes, this study was tasked with understanding audience perspectives of strong themes in computer games through the use of two stimulus clips:

1. The first was from *Detroit Become Human* and depicted a father smoking drugs and getting angry before hitting his child in front of the android player character.
2. The second clip was from *Battlefield Hardline* and depicted a drug bust in which the player plays the role of a police character. The action becomes violent and people get shot.

The two clips garnered markedly different reactions.

The *Detroit Become Human* clip was widely seen as much more distressing and potentially unsuitable for younger people. Parents were mostly shocked that this kind of content would be available in a game rated for teens, and across our sample, were largely unaware that this kind of content could be included in a MA 15+ rated game.

Some young adult gamers and most parents told us that while the action could be suitable for some 15 year-olds, they felt it could potentially influence more impressionable 15 year-olds in harmful ways. They feared it may normalise this kind of violence in real life. In the game, the player has the choice of watching the abuse happen or stopping it. Many across our groups of adults felt this means it should have a higher rating.

However, some felt that domestic violence is a part of life, and that media should not shy away from depicting it. In this respect some saw the clip as educational, potentially highlighting a key issue in society.



Young gamers across our groups (aged 16-18) were often comfortable with the content, and felt it was appropriately rated as suitable for 15 year-olds. They felt the content we showed them was fairly mild compared to things they'd seen in general film and television, it wasn't seen as particularly gory or gruesome or even particularly violent. They'd tell us kids get hit all the time, so why couldn't a video game reference this? This is an understandable reaction - the question is about their rights, as youth, to see it, and few would vote against their own rights.

This acceptance of strong themes among younger gamers is part of a broader culture within the gaming community. Not only did young gamers tend to reject R 18+ ratings, many adult and younger gamers believed themselves to be capable of making decisions about the content they should be able to consume, disagreeing the notion that certain games should be made unavailable to adults. As discussed earlier, given the ease with which R 18+ content was accessed by gamers, and the lack of consequence for doing so, ratings were broadly interpreted as a guide rather than a legal restriction. This illustrates a gap between the intended and actual usage of these classifications.



*"Family violence isn't a game. It isn't something you should encourage" Parent of gamer, Melbourne*

*"My first instinct was that I want to play that" Adult gamer, Melbourne*

*"Some kids can watch scary things, and some can't" Adult gamer, Melbourne*

*"With a game like what you showed us you know completely what you're getting into" Young gamer, Sydney*

However, most parents felt this kind of content should have an R 18+ rating - if not to provide a legal restriction then at least as a signal for them about the content it includes - so they could avoid letting their children play the game. Across our adult gamer groups, there was stronger debate about whether it should have a higher rating than MA 15+, with the groups often split between it being suitable for 15 year-olds or whether it necessitated a higher rating. On balance therefore, among adults, the sense was the community felt this sort of material should have an R 18+ rating.



*"There is lot of variation in 15 year-olds - some are quite mature, but others really have no idea" Young adult gamer, Wagga Wagga*

*"I wouldn't want my 15 year old seeing that" Parent of gamer, Sydney*

*"I've seen far worse in normal TV shows like Handmaid's Tale" Young gamer, Sydney*

In comparison, the *Battlefield Hardline* clip featuring a drug bust and gun violence was broadly seen as acceptable for people over the age of 15. Only older parents and grandparents were likely to see it as overly violent for a 15 year old to play.

The young gamer and young adult gamer groups felt it was consistent with the violence in most of the games they have played and been exposed to, and was unremarkable in this respect. Young people play First-person shooter (FPS) games - even those like *CS:GO* rated MA 15+ or *Fortnite* rated M - from their late childhood and early adolescence, and they broadly indicated that this kind of computer game violence has become quite normalised.

Older parents groups on the other hand were a little aghast as they described their sons' or grandsons' social life involving killing people with friends as they chat about their day online together. But they also accepted the broad norm of violence in computer games, and noted that, although graphic, it was similar in some ways to 'cops and robbers' style games from their youth.



*"Yep, that's just like Call of Duty or almost any other game, can't see any problem with it" Young gamer, Sydney*

*"That's just like CSI on TV - my [teenage] kids watch that all the time!" Parent of Gamer, Sydney*

This meant that no one across our groups felt this example of strong themes was outside what 15 year olds are exposed to in other media or in a broad range of gaming environments, and that a MA 15+ rating is appropriate.

## Positive perspectives

Although this study was tasked with examining the community's position on specific issues, as a counterpoint, participants raised a range of positive aspects to gaming. These included:

**Social...** Games help bring people together and families together around a shared past-time. They help social connections grow and flourish, both locally, and when family and friends are overseas.

*"My son plays games with his sons - they'll all be gathered around the TV at home enjoying each other's company" Parent of gamer, Sydney*

**Problem solving...** Games often involve complex problem solving skills, rewarding creativity, lateral thinking and teamwork. The novel environments present different challenges to overcome, and can build confidence in other areas of life.

**Educational...** Some noted that games can be educational, teaching new skills or developing their understanding about issues. Games can also help people develop deeper or different perspectives on issues and provide exposure to diverse thinking and ideas.

**Building hand-eye co-ordination...** games often require players to develop reflexes and hand-eye co-ordination, which although relatively specialised, is generally seen as a good thing.

**A relatively healthy escape...** Games are seen by parents to be a lot better, and healthier, than many other activities their young people could be involved in.



*"It's better than alcohol or drugs" Parent of gamer, Sydney*



## Conclusions

This study aimed to understand community sentiment to various aspects of computer games including specific focus on microtransactions and loot boxes, simulated gambling, online interactivity, and strong themes.

Due to the large numbers of people playing computer games and having computer games in their homes, there is a high-level baseline awareness of the issues affecting the gaming community today, and each of the specific issues of interest to the Department were brought up spontaneously in most groups. This high-level awareness made for interesting and thought provoking conversations with members of the general public including gamers, non-gamers and parents of gamers.

Microtransactions and loot boxes are a hot topic within the gaming community. In this project, participants felt that loot boxes containing items that confer in-game advantages did not constitute harmful gambling activity, so long as they: could not be purchased with real-world money, or be traded either within or outside the game for real money. Loot boxes that can be purchased using real-world currency or traded for real currency equivalent were deemed by most to be gambling activity that should be restricted to those over 18 years of age.

Simulated gambling games that include or focus on a direct simulation of casino games were seen as potentially harmful for children and young people. There was a fear that exposure to this type of gaming would normalise habitual poker-machine playing and lower the barrier to potentially harmful gambling behaviours later in life. However, participants emphasised a need for education around the potential harms of simulated gambling for young people and parents as well as restricting this kind of material to those legally allowed to gamble.

In contrast, games with casino like imagery only (as opposed to interactive elements) were seen as relatively benign as the central focus of the game was not gambling, and these were seen to be unlikely to encourage uptake of gambling later in life. Similarly, games that merely use gambling-like mechanics, such as variable reinforcement schedules, were not seen as particularly problematic, despite fairly widespread concern about gaming addiction.

The term 'online interactivity' was almost universally deemed too vague and meaningless to be used as a parental warning by the gamers, non-gamers and parents we spoke to. Anecdotal stories of online bullying and harassment were commonly raised in our young gamer groups, and participants they felt the term did nothing to alert parents of the potential harms. Overall, only a few felt that games that offer online interactivity need to be classified differently, but most felt that parents would benefit from clearer labelling that highlights the risks, and better availability of information about game contents. Most across the sample felt that education of parents and children about the potential dangers of online interactivity is the best way to mitigate potential harms.

Currently, games depicting strong or high impact themes can be classified as MA 15+ or R 18+ in Australia. While certain types of violence – especially that found in FPS games such as *Fortnite* or *CS:GO* – are essentially normalised for even primary-school aged children, other forms of content – in this study a depiction of domestic violence, were seen as more problematic, with our sample split on whether the *Detroit Become Human* scene shown was appropriate for 15 year-olds whether it should be classified R 18+.

Computer games were seen by most as deserving of their own approach to classification, due to their immersive and interactive nature, in which players ultimately become part of the story. However, parents are not necessarily aware of the range of socially sensitive material that computer games can include, and there were indications that parents use restrictive ratings on games more as a guide than a legal restriction, assuming that all games are designed for young people.







## Appendix 1

<p><b>Loot Boxes</b></p>	<p><b>Fortnite (console)</b></p> <p>Rating: M (Mature) Consumer advice: Violence, online interactivity</p> <p>Loot box (Piñata): <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7KI9JmaVt5Q">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7KI9JmaVt5Q</a> (0:00 - 1:17)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the “Save the World” mode, you can buy loot piñatas with V-Bucks which contain random in-game items (you don’t know the value of the contents until it opens).</li> <li>• V Bucks are purchased with real money (sold in packs ranging from \$10 to \$100) or can be earned by completing specific quests.</li> <li>• Content of loot boxes has gameplay altering effects.</li> <li>• V-Bucks can be earned in small amounts without spending money, but only if you’ve bought the “Save the World” campaign (note Battle Royale is free to download but Save the World is not).</li> <li>• No upper limit on in-game purchases.</li> </ul> <p>Battle Pass: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=frSLfB3ibvg">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=frSLfB3ibvg</a> (1:05 - 1:35)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Battle Pass costs \$10 and players can buy them every 10 weeks.</li> <li>• The Battle Pass gives players access to 100 different tasks and a coin is received on completion. You also get three skins, three gliders, three weapons, and three back packs - then the prizes you win are rarer items and are randomised. The contents don’t give in-game advantages however.</li> <li>• There is also the \$25 Premium Battle Pass.</li> <li>• The randomisation of rarer prizes could be argued as a form of gambling, however, some may argue that you get your money back from the tasks and items that you receive.</li> <li>• You can download and play Battle Royale for free, without purchasing the Battle Pass, but the play experience is limited in that you don’t get the extra challenges (or the cosmetic upgrades).</li> </ul>
	<p><b>FIFA 18 (Console)</b></p> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y56nbYJE_Xs">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y56nbYJE_Xs</a> (0:00 - 0:30) (whole clip)</p> <p>Rating: G (General) Consumer advice: General, online interactivity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Game progression can be purchased (or rarely, earned) via “player packs” (basically loot boxes) that contain various grades of players and sometimes, in-game advantages (you don’t know the value until the pack opens).</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You can get more loot boxes if you win more games, but you need better players to win more games, and you need to buy loot boxes to get better players.</li> <li>Player packs are purchased with coins (earned by winning matches) or a premium currency called "FIFA Points", which come in packs ranging from \$1 for 100 points to \$100 for 12,000 points, though slightly cheaper if the player is subscribed to the EA Access or Origin Access programs.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Star Wars Battlefront II (Console)</b></p> <p>Rating: M (Mature) Consumer advice: Science fiction violence, online interactivity</p> <p>(Allegiance crate) <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZRT0ZTFIPY4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZRT0ZTFIPY4</a> (2:04 - 2:26)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cheap, minor downloadable content with no randomisation.</li> <li>No upper limit on in-game purchases.</li> <li>Originally, <i>Star Wars Battlefront II</i> planned to have loot boxes (buyable with real money) that contain "Star Cards" conferring in-game advantages.</li> <li>Loot boxes unlocking the ability to play as iconic series characters like Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader required upwards of 40 hours of grinding per character - or just paying for the credits.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Forza Motorsport 7 (Console)</b></p> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Ti6PEgA0Uw">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Ti6PEgA0Uw</a> (0:00 - 2:20)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prize Crates include a random selection of items that can be cars, mods, driver gear and/or badges.</li> <li>Players do not know the content value of a Prize Crate until it is purchased.</li> <li>Cosmetic items and "mods" can be used in races to change the gameplay and to receive more Credits and Prize Crates.</li> <li>Players receive better items for purchasing more expensive Prize Crates that can also include Super Rare or Legendary items (that confer greater advantages).</li> <li>Players also receive Basic Prize Crates as Loyalty Rewards.</li> <li>The VIP Membership includes three VIP Crates.</li> <li>Previous versions awarded extra credits for choosing more challenging modes of gameplay (which you would put towards getting better cars etc.) but this option is no longer available and there is greater emphasis on prize crates as a mechanism for getting better cars and other in-game enhancements (e.g. mods like better corner handling).</li> </ul>
Other Simulated Gambling	Flip Diving (app)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TLjkTTk7hvE> (0:12 - 1:30)

- Free app.
- Access to divers, more complex dives and locations can be purchased in the app.
- A bingo style game that allows the player to do a daily “spin for free stuff” with the chance of winning prizes, such as skilled divers, stunt dives and locations. Spinning wheel looks like a lotto cage. Overall animation style is colourful and simple.
- Other apps are also advertised in the app and can be easily purchased
- Additional coins are offered to watch more adverts.

### Candy Crush (app)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d5Rf0An-jEg> (0:00 - 1:30)

- Randomised items in the game.
- Visually similar to slot machines.
- Engineered to have addictive elements similar to slot machines, e.g. Intermittent reinforcement schedule.
- In-app purchases to continue playing to overcome lockout periods when you run out of lives.

### Sonic Forces (console or app)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltx1PtMhAOE> (0:11 - 1:10)

- Casino themed level called “Casino Forest” with slot machine-like mini in-game challenges.
- Casino imagery.
- Gambling references.

### Slotomania Casino: Farm Fortune Seeker (app)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BWq\\_pCCQpZU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BWq_pCCQpZU) (0:00 - 1:00)

- Slot machine look and a simulated casino game- e.g. of social gaming app.
- It is ‘simulated gambling’ because you can’t win real money from playing.
- Free app. Starts with free bonus coins to bet, but after these run out, you need to purchase coins with real money (see below) to continue playing.
- Colourful, simple graphics.

#### General information about *Slotomania*

- In-app purchase of coins can range from \$1.99 to \$99.99 and “special offers” of discounted purchase price which expires in a few minutes.

<p><b>Online Interactivity</b></p>	<p><b>Roblox (console or app)</b></p> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a78ilfDJFoM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a78ilfDJFoM</a> (1:00 – 2:00)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Roblox</i> is an example of a computer game that includes online interactivity, as it allows users to create user-generated content and includes voice and text chat.</li> <li>• <i>Roblox</i> is targeted at children and there are concerns about children's online safety when interacting with strangers via voice and text chat.</li> </ul> <p>According to the Classification Board, Online interactivity is defined as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• User-to-user communication (e.g.: texting, or audio or video chat), and media sharing, via social media and networks.</li> <li>• User-generated content.</li> <li>• Links to external or third party websites.</li> <li>• Exchange or collection of personal information (e.g.: email address) with or by third parties.</li> <li>• Such other opportunities to expand any aspect of the gaming experience to include third party interactions.</li> </ul> <p>A game with any of these characteristics currently receives the consumer advice "online interactivity".</p>
<p><b>Strong Themes</b></p>	<p><b>Detroit Become Human (MA 15+) (console)</b></p> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0aoHlwS0i0I">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0aoHlwS0i0I</a> (1:34:40 – 1:37:43)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An interactive science fiction game set in Detroit in 2038, where a growing population of rogue androids, known as "deviants", are beginning to experience human emotions.</li> <li>• The game contains online interactivity in the form of shared playing paths. One path involves playing android Kara (see below) the others involve playing other android characters in different storylines.</li> <li>• The scene involves a house maid android 'Kara' who is serving dinner to Todd and his daughter Alice, when Todd becomes violent under the influence of a drug called "Red Ice" and the implicitly hits Alice. Kara must decide whether to deviate from her programming to save Alice.</li> <li>• The game play clip involves high level themes (child abuse/domestic violence), coarse language and drug use/references.</li> </ul> <p><b>Battlefield Hardline (MA 15+) (console)</b></p> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4JvNa6UnpE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4JvNa6UnpE</a> (4:50 – 6:10)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Battlefield Hardline</i> is set against the contemporary backdrop of the war on crime and the battle between police and criminals. The aim of the game is for the player to investigate drug-related crimes and murders in order to dismantle a large scale criminal drug ring.</li> <li>• The clip of gameplay involves coarse language, drug references and violence.</li> </ul>

## Appendix 2

### Discussion Guide

Introductions, cover privacy etc. Set 'rules' ... something that people come to with all different experiences and points of view. It's important to respect these — in fact it's often interesting to find out how other people come at topics and issues.

In this conversation we are going to be covering some big topics rapidly, so there is no right or wrong and often what is most useful is what comes to mind straight away. Everyone comes with different ideas and backgrounds, so we don't need to reach consensus.

Intros .... Name, family make up, favourite type of film/computer game

[The role of the opening conversation is to get people talking comfortably to each other for groups and also to set the right tone and context for the conversation — in the case a positive conversation that is designed to understand what people think and feel about content in computer games, classification of games, and monetization of games through microtransactions]

### Part 1: Unprompted awareness of issues in gaming

Reference pre-task

We want to start off by talking about the state of computer games today. What are your thoughts about how gaming has changed in the last 5-10 years and how it is evolving? Are there any issues or concerns you have about the way the industry is going? As a brainstorm- let's come up with what kind of content can be problematic in gaming these days.

[write up brainstorm/mind map as a group]

OK, so now that we have identified the issues that are most important to us in gaming, I'd like to show you a range of clips of gaming. You've been given a form to fill in for each clip- and I just want you to note down a couple of quick points or words about the clips you see- whatever pops into your head.

### Part 2: Clip Rotation

[rotate sections based on rotation guide]

### Loot Boxes

We are going to have a look at transactions in games. Transactions happen when you are asked to pay for something to unlock certain areas, tokens, characters or other items in a game to help you progress.

- What are your general thoughts about transactions in a game setting?
- Have you ever paid an additional cost in a game besides what you initially paid to purchase the game? What did that look like?

*[show 4 clips as per rotation - microtransactions - 1A or E, then 1B, 1C, 1D]*

- Tell us about the 4 clips we just watched - is there anything that stands out in particular?
- Have you ever seen anything like this in a game experience?
- How did it make you feel about the game during, looking back now?

**For parents:** Has your child ever asked for money to play a game they've purchased? Or how about a credit card bill where you see they've been buying extras in games?

People can end up spending a lot of money in these type of transactions

- Do we need to be regulating this type of game interaction?
- If so, who should step in and how should they step in? [probe for time of, education, consumer advice, warning signs.]
- Do we need to treat games differently if we know children are playing them? Should there be different regulations if children are playing these games? Whose responsibility is it?



## Other Simulated Gambling

The next lot of clips we are going to watch, show something a little different  
[show 3 clips as per rotation- 2A or 2B, 2C, 2D]

- Tell us about the three different clips, what stood out in each of these?
- Do any feel particularly troubling, why is that- do you have a name for what these games represent?
  - [Probe on gambling without priming]
- Can you put them in order of the most problematic to least problematic? What would this look like?
- How about for young children, do we have a different order if we were thinking about children playing these games?
- Do you think they would affect people in the long term? Do we need to be conscious of this when deciding on if or how to regulate games?
- How about when you see gambling content in films, do you feel it is the same as when you see it or play it in a game context?
- Does that change how you feel about how the government shouldn't respond? Do there need to be different regulations for gaming? What is the best way of doing this [probe on education material, laws, warnings, etc.]

## Online Interactivity

People play games for all types of reasons, but increasingly, there is the ability to interact with others while playing online. Have you heard of particular games in which you can interact with others online? How do you interact with them? [brainstorm ways in which people interact in games online]

OK, so now we are going to show a clip of a pretty common way in which people interact online  
[show clip 3A-Roblox]

When you see this, does it raise any concerns or issues for you? Do you know who you are talking to when interacting through games? Is it important to know who you are talking to, or does it feel safe because you are behind a screen?

- How does this compare to the other interaction methods we brainstormed?
- What about if you think about children playing this game?

**For parents:** Do you monitor whether or not your children are interacting with others online? Do you know who they are talking to or what they or others are saying? Do you feel like you have the ability to step in and regulate who they are talking to? Does it need to be regulated by an external body?

User Generated content is a large part of the online gaming world, and enables users to modify or create their own in-game content. Are there any concerns we have in terms of user created content? Are we worried about it or do we think it is a benefit of the games we play?

Sometimes games will provide links to external or third-party websites within the game? How do you feel about this? Is it a problem? How about if your information is shared with third party websites? Does this need to be regulated?

How about if you are asked for information about yourself? Do you share it easily? Is this an issue that you think about in terms of online games?

## Strong Themes

We are going to talk about content more generally in games now, Have you played something recently that felt confronting? How are computer games different from films or other media in terms of the way they make you feel and the sorts of impact they can have - are they really different, or are the same? How are they different and should we look at regulating them differently?

- What was a particularly confronting game you have played/heard about recently?
- How do you feel when you play games that have confronting content?
- Does it affect you in a particular way?

- How is this different to movies?
- Do we feel like the restrictions placed on games needs to be the lower/the same/higher than on films?

*[Show 1 clip as per rotation either 4A or 4B]*

So after seeing those clips - that came to mind straight away? How did they make you feel? Were there any that were particularly confronting to you? What was about the clip that was confronting, was it a particular action that you saw?

**For parents:** Would you feel comfortable if you knew your child was playing this game? Do you normally research the games before you let them play? Do you monitor films differently to games? Why do you think you monitor it differently/in the same way? Is there anyone or anything in particular that influences how you monitor what your children are watching?

How about if you knew other parents were letting their children play these games? Is it different when it is someone else's child? Should we be looking at regulating them differently?

## Wrap-up

That's all for today, you've been a really fantastic group and you've come up with some great insights to share with the Department.

Now if anyone would like to talk about anything they've seen today, please feel free to come and speak to me after this.

Type		Title	Rotation A	Rotation B
1. Loot Boxes	A	Fortnite (console) Loot box (Pinata)		
	B	Fortnite (console) Battle Pass		
	C	FIFA 18 (console)		
	D	Star Wars Battlefront II (console)		
	E	Forza Motorsport (console)		
2. Other Simulated Gambling	A	Flip diving (app)		
	B	Candy Crush (app)		
	C	Sonic Forces (console or app)		
	D	Slotomania Casino Farm Fortune Seeker (app)		
3. Online Interactivity	A	Roblox (console or app)		
4. Strong Themes	A	Detroit Become Human (console)		
	B	Battlefield Hardline (console)		

Group	Rotation
1	A 1,2,3,4
2	A 2,1,3,4
3	A 3,2,1,4
4	A 4,2,3,1
5	A 1,3,4,2
6	B 1,2,3,4
7	B 2,1,3,4
8	B 3,2,1,4
9	B 4,2,3,1
10	B 1,3,4,2