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Perceptions of Parents and Children About Videogame Use

Michela Franzò [1], Gaia Maria Olivieri [2], Anna Salerni [2] and Marco Iosa [1,3,*]

[1] Department of Psychology, Sapienza University, 00185 Rome, Italy; michela.franzo@uniroma1.it
[2] Department of Dynamic and Clinical Psychology, and Health Studies, Sapienza University, 00185 Rome, Italy; olivieri.2007133@studenti.uniroma1.it (G.M.O.); anna.salerni@uniroma1.it (A.S.)
[3] Scientific Institute for Research, Hospitalization and Healthcare (IRCCS), Santa Lucia Foundation, 00179 Rome, Italy
* Correspondence: marco.iosa@uniroma1.it; Tel.: +39-3332150104

Abstract: This study aims to investigate the gap in perceptions of parents and children on the use of videogames in childhood. Methods: A survey was conducted with 75 pairs formed by a son or daughter and one parent. The data collected contradict the prejudice that playing video games reduces study time and leads to lower grades at school ($R < 0.13$). Our results support the idea that playing together fosters bonding and facilitates conversation. The impact of videogames on mood showed the most substantial differences in perception, with parents mainly reporting negative mood changes, while children reported similar frequencies of negative, neutral, and positive ones. In relation to the educational and informative potential of videogames, children had slightly more positive opinions than their parents ($p < 0.001$). Finally, more than half of the participants potentially agreed with the possibility of using videogames as academic tools. In conclusion, there is a gap between parents' and children's perceptions about videogaming, especially concerning their effects on children's mood. Playing together and developing deeper knowledge about videogames could enhance positive effects on children's development as well as their relationships with peers, parents, and at school.

Keywords: children; videogames; media use; parents; education

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1. Introduction

The history of research on videogames has extensively focused on their role as the favourite pastime of children and adolescents all over the world [1]. The most investigated question has been: 'Are videogames harmful to development?' However, the question has often been approached from a strongly moralistic point of view, according to the so-called 'moral panic theory' [2], which reflects prevailing cultural and political prejudices rather than scientifically analysed data.

There are many variables that may play a relevant role in modulating the effect of videogames on children and adolescents, such as the socio-cultural environment and the parents' level of education [3]. These aspects have often not been taken into account.

Instead, research should also consider children as active agents having motivations and roles and not merely as passive recipients. The relationship with parents, which is intertwined with family education, cultural aspects, and praxis, is also significant in education [4] and in the possible development of problematic gaming in children [5]. Furthermore, parents often may negatively perceive videogames due to their own experiences and cultural backgrounds, viewing games as distractions or even tools of corruption. Conversely, children may see videogames as an integral part of society, related to legitimate leisure or educational activities.

In this context, Nakamuro showed that children who play games on average would not be at significant risk of developing behavioural problems, obesity and disinterest in school, as the negative influence, although present, is ignorable [6]. Of course, the more time that is spent in front of a screen, be it a videogame or a television set, the greater the potential of these risks to increase. Moreover, some results showed that some categories of videogames, such as active videogames, can be beneficial in reducing inactivity and obesity in young people [7].

Prot and colleagues [8] hypothesized the existence of six dimensions in videogames that interact with individuals and have different consequences that could be both positive or negative: the amount of time invested, game content, game contexts, game design, game mechanics, and gameplay. Among the negative effects, the risk of developing violent behaviour has been the most investigated. However, videogames can also have positive cognitive effects, as they improve a wide range of visuospatial abilities, leading to faster visual reaction times and improving performance in target location tests. Moreover, videogames have the ability to capture attention, set precise objectives, provide feedback and reinforcement, and engage players by presenting challenges that adapt to their level of learning. For these reasons, videogames are even used in gamified education and training, such as for new employees in the workplace and in the medical field for promoting awareness about smoking, diabetes, and cancer [9]. Gentile went on to identify videogames as having the potential to improve problem-solving skills and also promote highly complex action strategies, enhance argumentation skills, and foster the acquisition of informal scientific reasoning patterns [10]. Gentile and colleagues conducted a study focusing on parental control over the use of videogames and television by third- and fifth-grade children, analysing the correlation between the parents' work and their educational level with their method of mediation with their children about time and play mode [11]. They found that parents with higher levels of education and income employed more restrictive mediation of their children's media use. Another study was focused on parents' perceptions of their children's use of videogames, aiming to assess parents' awareness and propose strategies to educate both adults and children on the appropriate use of videogames [12]. This research shows that most of the parents who participated (66%) played videogames themselves or at least one other adult family member (13%) did. On average, children seem to play more than adults, although some studies have reported that adults also spend a significant amount of time playing videogames daily [12,13].

A comparative study of parents' and children's perceptions of videogames was conducted by Kutner and colleagues [14]. This study concluded that a restrictive approach may actually backfire and harm rather than achieve the desired effect. They recommended that parents appeal to shared values with their children, to establish a discussion regarding the use of videogames and, consequently, about the nature of violence and its real-life consequences. Parental perception of video games are often more negative than positive, and these perceptions are affected by the age and gender of their children [15]. Moreover, parents tend to use more control-based strategies than those based on support and communication. They also report that difficulties in mediation stem from the widespread access children have to media and the Internet, social pressure, lack of control, and the digital divide.

Teamwork in videogames has been proven to positively influence outcomes more than playing alone [16]. In the same context, Musick and colleagues [17] investigated how families use videogames together and what positive effects this has on the parent–child relationship, specifically focusing on adults who have had positive experiences with their parents and/or children together. When it comes to collaborative games, Musick and colleagues [17] found that balanced cooperation is indeed established, with choices being

made based on who can come up with a better strategy at a particular moment. Thus, leadership roles shift fluidly, allowing everyone with an opportunity to make decisions and set goals, and even children experience a sense of power and control—something that is less common in real-life interactions, especially with adults. The studies cited above highlight the gap between some parents' negative perceptions of videogames and the potential positive effects when parents and children play together or at least exchange views on videogames. However, more information is needed about the gap in perceptions between parents and children about how much children play videogames and how they play.

Table 1 summarizes the aspects discussed, identifying five main themes where parents and children have different views, as suggested by the scientific literature. From a theoretical perspective, the article of Lim [12] summarizes some of these themes in light of the general aggression model, general learning model, social learning theory, and behavioural model. The study, conducted in Japan, found that a high percentage of parents (about 70%) played videogames with their children and also showed a good level of agreement on concerns regarding videogames. However, the literature also reports many discrepancies, as shown in Table 1, which may depend upon differences in family education and cultural aspects across different countries.

Table 1. Theoretical frameworks of the main themes with different views reported in the scientific literature by parents and children about videogames (VGs).

Theme	Parents' View	Children's View
Time Management (Risk of Addiction) [5,7]	Concerns about addiction are common, with parents fearing that excessive game play may lead to dependency, disrupt routines, and reduce motivation for other activities, and that the time spent on VGs may be underestimated by children.	Feeling they can balance their time between gaming and other responsibilities.
Social Interaction and Connectivity [11,15,16]	Worried that VGs might reduce face-to-face interactions or expose children to inappropriate online content. They may fear that gaming could lead to isolation from family or friends.	Multiplayer VGs connect children with other family members and friends and make new ones. Multiplayer VGs are social spaces that many children value for its sense of community and teamwork.
Safety and Content Concerns [7,14]	Content of VGs may present violence, mature themes, or online interactions with strangers. Many prefer to regulate or limit access to games based on content.	VG contents are a part of the gaming experience, often perceiving violence or intense themes as just part of the game rather than something that will impact them personally.
Educational Value and Skill Development (vs. Entertainment) [8,9]	VGs have limited educational value. Concerns that VGs lack the productive or developmental benefits they believe traditional educational activities or outdoor play provide.	VGs are not only a form of entertainment but also a space for learning and social interaction. Many VGs require problem solving, teamwork, and critical thinking, which children may value as learning experiences and digital skills that will be helpful for their careers.
Wellbeing Concerns [6]	Concerns about health and wellbeing are prominent among parents, who may worry about the impact of prolonged gaming time on their children's mental health.	Children often focus on the excitement and engagement VGs offer, and they reduce inactive time.

The purpose of this research is to investigate differences in perceptions on the use of videogames in childhood between parents and children. The findings could be useful in the development of new measures that take into account the opinions expressed by parents and children and that develop strategies that can enhance the positive and educational aspects of videogames, mitigating the negative ones.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Questionnaire

Similarly to previous studies [12,14,17], we administered an online questionnaire (written in Italian) using the Google Forms platform. The questionnaire took about five minutes to complete anonymously. Demographic information was collected at the beginning of the questionnaire. The e-mail address used to access Google Forms was not registered, and the sensitive information collected for the purpose of statistical analysis was: surname and first name initials, date of birth, and sex. Parents were asked to provide their own and their children's information in order to allow for the identification of parent–child pairs in post-processing. At the beginning of the questionnaire, the types of videogames accepted by the study were clearly stated: console games (both stationary or portable), computer games, games on tablets, and games on smartphones. The questionnaire for both children and parents contained analogous questions, with differences in language: forma language was chosen for the questionnaire for the adult questionnaire, and a more colloquial language was used for the children's version. The questionnaire is reported in Table 2, while the questions in the original Italian version are reported in the Supplementary Materials. The questions were developed after a careful evaluation of the literature, in particular Lim's work, for the selection of the predefined responses allowed for both parents and children [12].

Table 2. The questionnaire. Themes are reported here for clarifying the theoretical background of the questions but are not explicitly declared in the questionnaire.

Theme	Questions	Type	Prefixed Answers
Time Management	How many hours do you spend on videogames per day?	open-ended	Never; <30 min; 30 min–2 h; 2–3 h; 3–4 h; >4 h
	Do you engage in other activities during the week? How much time?	open-ended	No; <2 h; 2–4 h; 4–7 h; 7–14 h; 14–21 h; >21 h
	How much time do you devote to studying per week?	open-ended	None; <4 h; 4–14 h; 14–21 h; 21–28 h; >28 h
	What is your grade point average at school?	numeric rating	From 1 to 10
Social Interaction and Connectivity	How much of this time do you play videogames with friends and/or siblings?	open-ended	Never; <30 min; 30 min–2 h; 2–3 h; 3–4 h; >4 h
	Do you play videogames with one or both of your parents? How much in a week?	closed-ended	Never; <4 h; 4–14 h
	If you play videogames with one or both of your parents, how much do you think playing together affects your relationship?	multiple choice	Not applicable; no effect; closer relationship; quarrel
Safety and Content Concerns	What types of videogames do you play?	multiple choice	Horror; shooter; combat; action; PvP; adventure; fantasy; strategic; simulation; guide simulator; sport; cooperative
	What factors influence your choice of video games?	multiple choice	Description; genre; graphic; advertisement; advice from friends; age rating; etiquettes; parent's opinion; parental permission; price
Wellbeing Concerns	Does your attitude change after playing? How?	multiple choice	Aggressive; irritable; exalted; swinging; anxious; sad; listless; apathetic; no changes; calm; sociable; cheerful; active; lively
Educational Value	How educational do you think videogames can be?	Likert scale	1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely educational)
	How much useful information do you think you have learnt through videogames?	Likert scale	1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely useful)
	Would you like videogames to be used in school as teaching tools for certain subjects?	closed-ended	No; indifferent; Yes

2.2. Participants

The participants were pairs consisting of parent and son or daughter aged between 6 and 14. The selection was carried out according to the non-statistical convenience sampling method: the link to the questionnaires was shared using social media, messaging apps, and

sent to schools potentially interested. Responses to the questionnaires were collected from 22 May 2024 to 13 June 2024.

The study was carried out according to the principles of Declaration of Helsinki (versions 1964, 1975, 1983, 1989, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2013), and participants voluntarily took part in the study and digitally signed informed consent to data processing and participation after reading the information on the purpose of the study and the methodology of the data processing.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data were analysed using Excel (Microsoft) and Jamovi (version 2.6.13). Means and standard deviations were calculated for numerical variables, as well as percentages for nominal variables. The Wilcoxon rank sum test was applied for ordinal variables on the differences between parents and children's responses, while the chi-square test was used for nominal unpaired variables. Responses to Likert scale questions were evaluated using mean and median values. Multiple choice questions were assessed qualitatively using frequency histograms. Correlations were assessed using Spearman's coefficient (R) with the statistical significance value being set at 5%.

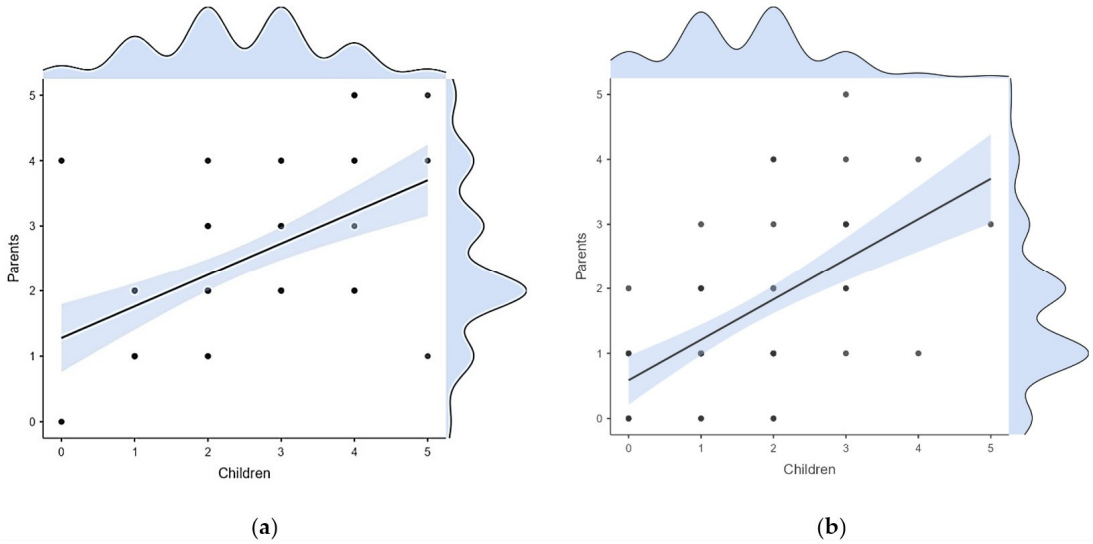
3. Results

A total of 150 people responded to the questionnaire, consisting of 75 pairs: 29 females and 46 male children, with an average age of 12.3 $\pm$ 2.0 years, and one parent per child (54 females and 21 males) with an average age of 45.0 $\pm$ 8.5 years.

3.1. Distribution of Hours of Gameplay and Videogames and Impact on Mood and Emotions

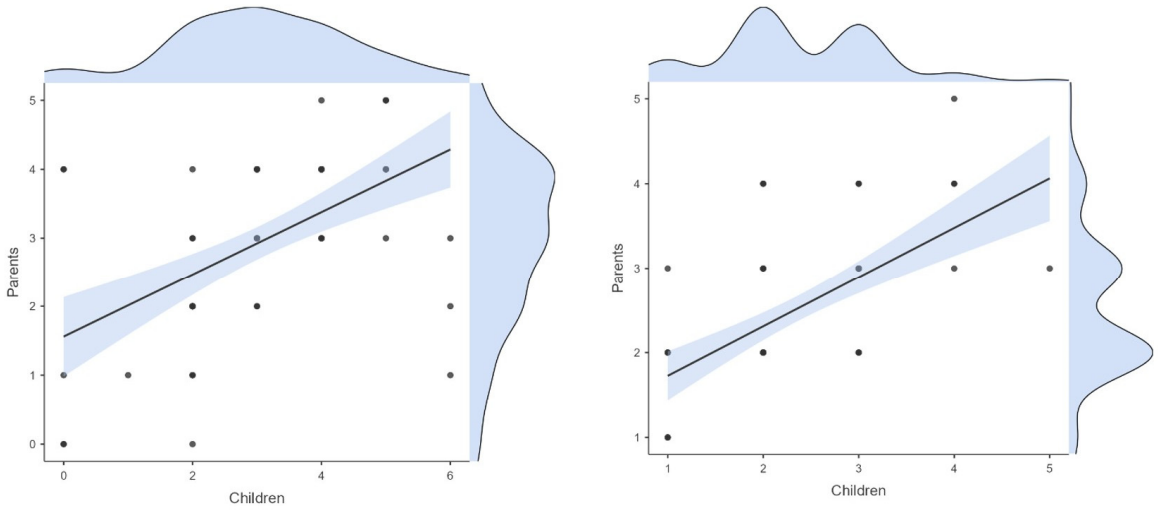
Figure 1 summarizes the answers of parents and children regarding the self-reported hours per day that children dedicate to playing videogames, either alone (Figure 1a) or with the company of friends and siblings (Figure 1b). The Wilcoxon rank sum test shows no statistically significant differences between the children's and parents' answers in either case ($p = 0.994$ and $p = 0.881$, respectively). The correlation between parents' and children's answers is slight but statistically significant. The correlation line has an angular coefficient $< 45^\circ$ and an intercept > 0, suggesting that parents' perception of time spent gaming was higher for children who self-reported playing fewer hours per day and lower for children who self-reported playing many hours per day. This trend is less accentuated when evaluating the hours spent playing with others ($R = 0.606$, $p < 0.001$).

Figure 2 reports the answers about the hours spent by the children on other activities and studying with respect to those spent playing videogames. In both cases, the correlations were statistically significant between children and parents ($R = 0.576$ in the case of other activities and 0.612 for studying), and no significant differences were observed ($p = 0.388$ and $p = 0.066$, respectively). The time spent playing videogames was neither significantly correlated to that spent in other activities (for children: $R = 0.113$, for parents: $R = 0.107$) nor with that spent studying ($R = 0.126$ and 0.047, respectively) as shown in Figure 3.



(**a**) (**b**)

Figure 1. Distribution of hours of (**a**) play alone or (**b**) in the company of friends or siblings, indicated by children (x-axis) and parents (y-axis) where: 0 is 'never'; 1 is 'less than 30 min a day'; 2 is 'between 30 min and 2 h a day'; 3 is 'between 2 and 3 h a day'; 4 is 'between 3 and 4 h a day'; and 5 is 'more than 4 h a day'.



(**a**) (**b**)

Figure 2. Distribution of hours dedicated to activities other than videogaming according to children (x-axes) and parents (y-axes). (**a**) Hours for other activities: 0 is 'no hours for other activities'; 1 'less than 2 h per week'; 2 is 'between 2 and 4 h per week'; 3 is 'between 4 and 7 h per week'; 4 is 'between 7 and 14 h a per week'; 5 is 'between 14 and 21 h per week'; and 6 is 'more than 21 hours'. (**b**) Hours for study: 1 is 'less than 4 h a week', 2 is 'between 4 and 14 h a week', 3 is 'between 14 and 21 h a week', 4 is 'between 21 and 28 h a week', and 5 is 'more than 28 h a week'.

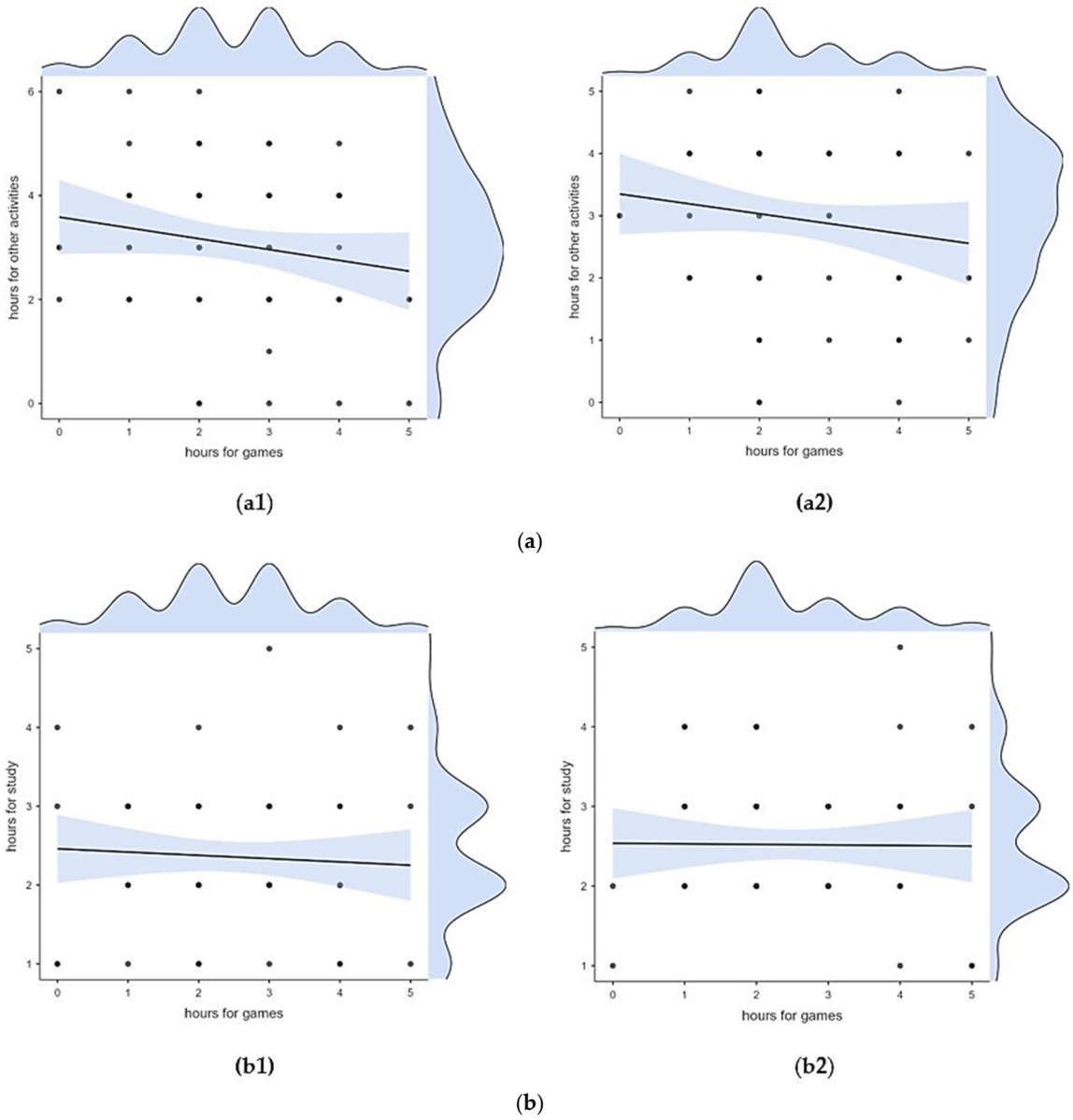


Figure 3. (**a**) Hours dedicated to other activities and to gaming for children (**a1**) and parents (**a2**); (**b**) hours dedicated to study and to gaming for children (**b1**) and parents (**b2**). Where for hours for games: 0 is 'never'; 1 is 'less than 30 min a day'; 2 is 'between 30 min and 2 h a day'; 3 is 'between 2 and 3 h a day'; 4 is 'between 3 and 4 h a day'; and 5 is 'more than 4 h a day'. About the hours for other activities: 0 is 'no hours for other activities'; 1 'less than 2 h per week'; 2 is 'between 2 and 4 h per week'; 3 is 'between 4 and 7 h per week'; 4 is 'between 7 and 14 h a per week'; 5 is 'between 14 and 21 h per week'; and 6 is 'more than 21 hours'. While for hours for study: 1 is 'less than 4 h a week', 2 is 'between 4 and 14 h a week', 3 is 'between 14 and 21 h a week', 4 is 'between 21 and 28 h a week', and 5 is 'more than 28 h a week'.

No significant differences (p = 0.821) were found in the school ratings reported by both groups, and their correlation was high (0.868), indicating consistencies between the statements of the two groups. When comparing the hours of gaming with school grades, the correlations were R = 0.013 for children and R = 0.019 for their parents (Figure 4a). In contrast, the correlations between hours spent studying and grades were R = 0.156 for children and R = 0.164 for parents (Figure 4b).

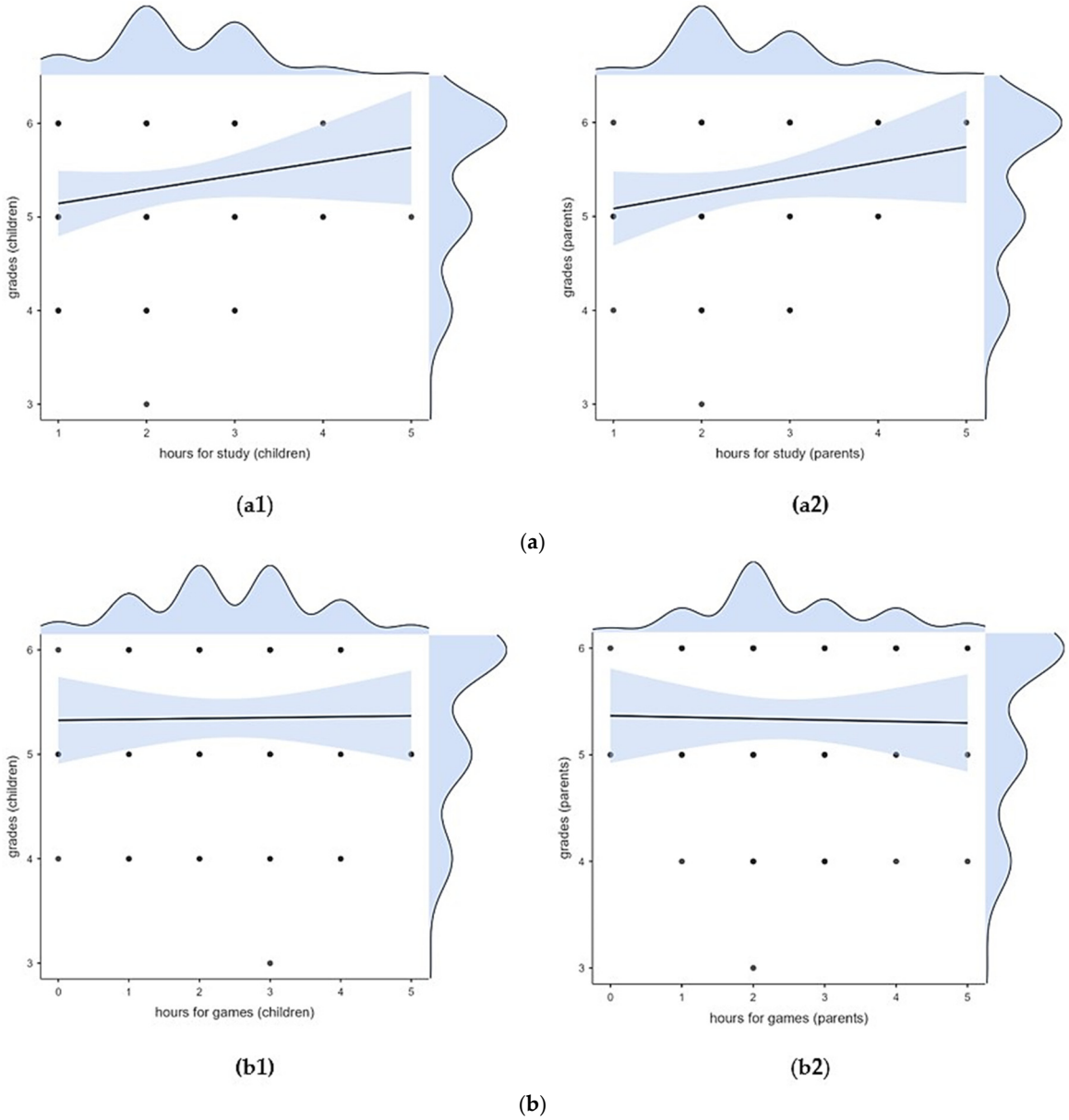


Figure 4. (**a**) Correlation between hours dedicated to study and grades at school for children (**a1**) and parents (**a2**); (**b**) hours dedicated to gaming and grades at school for children (**b1**) and parents (**b2**). Where for hours for games: 0 is 'never'; 1 is 'less than 30 min a day'; 2 is 'between 30 min and 2 h a day'; 3 is 'between 2 and 3 h a day'; 4 is 'between 3 and 4 h a day'; and 5 is 'more than 4 h a day'. While for grades: 0 is 'less than 3,5', 1 is 'between 3,5 and 4,5', 2 is 'between 4,5 and 5,5', 3 is 'between 5,5 and 6,5', 4 is 'between 6,5 and 7,5', 5 is 'between 7,5 and 8,5', 6 is 'between 8,5 and 10'.

Another important aspect is the effect of videogames on the perception of children's mood alterations. Figure 5 illustrates that parents tend to have a much more negative view than the children themselves. The most common response from parents is that children become more irritable as a result of gaming sessions, followed by the belief that their mood does not change. In percentage terms, only 12% of the parents' answers report positive mood changes; 17% perceive no mood changes, while 71% observe negative mood changes. In contrast, children provide more balanced accounts: 22% report no mood change due to videogames, with positive and negative mood changes being nearly equal at 37% and 41%, respectively.

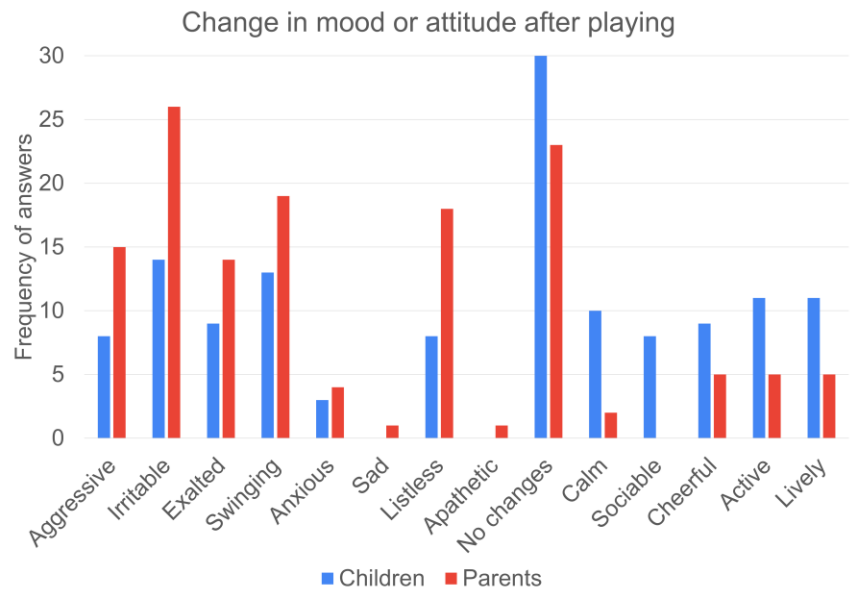


Figure 5. Frequency histogram of how the mood of children change after playing videogames.

3.2. Parent–Child Relationship

Table 3 summarizes the hours the children spent playing together with their parents, according to both parents' and children's declarations. A total of 57% agreed that they do not play together, 21% reported playing together for less than four hours per week, and the remaining 21% of responses were inconsistent between parents' and children's statements. The one-sample Wilcoxon rank test performed on the paired differences between parents and children did not show statistically significant differences (p = 0.841). In terms of the emotional impact of playing together, 13% of the sample agreed that playing helps them bond, while in 16% of pairs, at least one person indicated that playing together had made them closer (with parents reporting this twice as frequently as children). Only 5% of participants reported that playing together led to quarrels (as shown in Table 4). The differences between parents and children in the perception of mood change were not statistically significant (one-sample Wilcoxon rank test p = 0.372).

Table 3. Answers on questions about children's playtime together with their parents.

		Children			
		Never	**<4 h**	**4–14 h**	**Total**
Parents	**Never**	43	7	1	51
	<4 h	8	16	0	24
	4–14 h	0	0	0	0
	Total	51	23	1	75

Table 4. Answers on questions about the effects of children's playtime on their relationship with parents.

		Children				
		No Parent–Child Playtime	**No Effect**	**Closer Relationship**	**Quarrel**	**Total**
Parents	**No parent–child playtime**	41	5	3	0	49
	No effect	2	2	1	0	5
	Closer relationship	6	2	10	1	19
	Quarrel	1	0	0	1	2
	Total	50	9	14	2	75

3.3. Selection of Videogames to Play

To evaluate the categories of videogames the participants play, multiple choice options were provided, covering genres (shooter, combat, action, adventure, strategic, simulation), modes (PvP, cooperative multiplayer), and narrative settings (horror, fantasy, guide simulator, sport). Among children, action, fighting, and sports games were the most popular, with similar numbers of children (Figure 6). In contrast, for parents, sports games were the only type predominantly played. Apart from the categories of sports, adventure and fantasy games—where similar numbers of parents and children participated—children consistently reported higher engagement across all categories compared with adults.

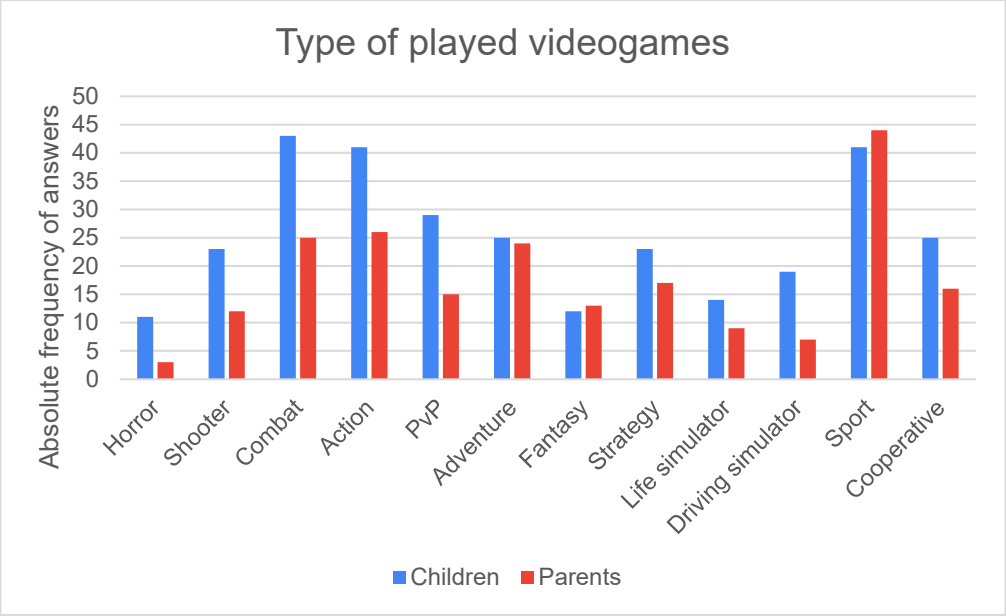


Figure 6. Frequency histogram in the percentage of the type of videogames children usually play.

In contrast, the answers from parents and children regarding children's motivations for selecting videogames were more aligned (Figure 7). The largest discrepancies were observed in the perceived importance of social media advertising, game graphics, and branding, where parents tended to underestimate these factors for their children. However, both groups agreed that the type of game and friends' recommendations were the most influential factors in game selection and purchase.

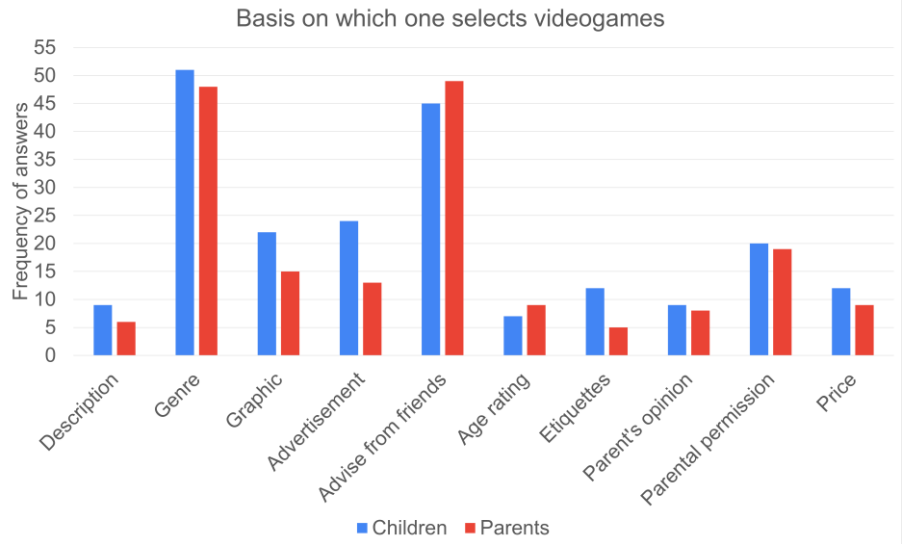


Figure 7. Frequency histogram of the reasons why children choose what to play.

3.4. Videogames as an Educative Tool

The participants also answered two questions on their views on the educational value and informational capacity of videogames, with the responses being summarized in Figure 8, which include both the mean and median values. On average, children rated videogames more positively than adults in terms of their educational level (Figure 8a) (Wilcoxon rank sum test: $p < 0.001$). A similar trend, albeit with slightly different median values, was observed for the perceived informational capacity of videogames (Figure 8b), with the Wilcoxon rank sum test also showing a significant difference ($p < 0.001$).

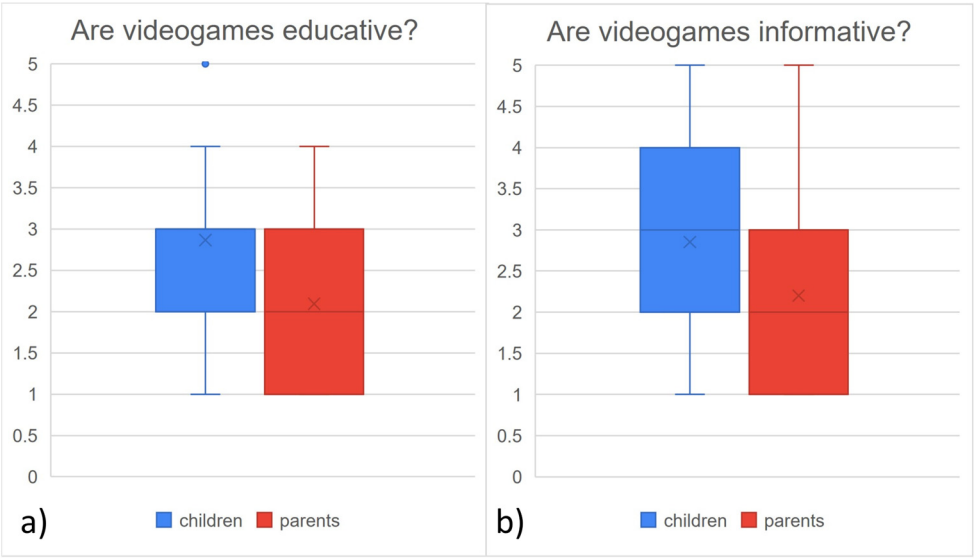


Figure 8. Box whisker plots of the educative and informative role of videogames for children (blue) and parents (red). The whisker limits represent minimum and maximum values of the 95% confidence interval, and the box limits the first and third quartiles; the bold line in the boxes is the median value for the two questions in Likert scale. (**a**) Are videogames educative? (**b**) Are videogames informative?

The last two questions addressed the potential use of videogames in school as teaching tools in schools. The contingency table (Table 5) reveals that most congruent answers indicated agreement with incorporating videogames in the school environment (48%), while agreement to keep them out of school was limited to only 5%. Although the majority

of parent–child couples replied positively, adults expressing negative opinions were three times more numerous than children. The chi-square test yielded a value of 4.56, with $p = 0.335$ indicating no statistically significant difference in the distribution of responses.

Table 5. Opinions on the inclusion of videogames in the school teaching process.

		Children			
		No	**Indifferent**	**Yes**	**Total**
Parents	**No**	4	6	14	24
	Indifferent	0	1	5	6
	Yes	4	5	36	45
	Total	8	12	55	75

4. Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate possible differences in perceptions on children's use of videogames between them and their parents.

Our study showed, for most of the assessed variables, non-significant differences between children and parents: time spent by children videogaming, videogaming with parents, studying, and in other activities per week were not differently perceived by children and parents.

The main difference was related to the negative change in children's mood after videogaming reported by 71% of parents and by only 41% of children. Another difference was related to the type of videogames played by children: they reported to choose more often horror, shooter, combat, action, and player vs. player videogames than that perceived by their parents. Finally, videogames were judged as more educative and informative by children than parents, but both agreed about their potential use in schooling.

Regarding time spent using videogames, although the tests did not report significant differences in parents' and children's perceptions of children's playtime, a notable trend emerged. When children reported restricted playtime, parents tended to report it as extensive, and vice versa. Similar results emerged in previous studies [11], which attributed these discrepancies to desirability bias. This bias likely leads parents to align their responses with cultural norms, often underreporting their children's actual gaming time. Another hypothesis is also that parents' reports could be less accurate than their children's ones because of the inherent difficulty in monitoring them consistently. However, children's reports are also not free from bias, and it would be worthwhile to investigate what biases might influence their reports.

Regarding time spent studying, only a few parent–child pairs reported significantly different estimates. No correlations were found between time reserved for playing videogames and other activities for either group. As shown in Figure 3, the correlation lines for both populations and questions are similar, indicating that the time children devote to studying or other activities remains consistent regardless of whether they play videogames or not. This result challenges the common prejudice that playing at videogames reduces time for studying.

The literature highlights that one of the major parents' concern is that excessive use of videogames might lead to lower academic performance and disinterest in other activities or socialization in the real world [6,8,12,14]. Despite these concerns, which are already not shared by children, in our study, no correlation has been found between hours dedicated to videogames and children's grades. So, while increased study can effectively lead to higher academic performance, playing videogames does not necessarily lead to students having lower school grades. Several research studies [6,12,14,17] show that, despite some

negative aspects, videogames often do not adversely impact children to the extent of causing academic or social issues. Instead, they can serve as a valuable medium for communication and shared activities with peers.

Regarding the use of videogames with others, particularly with parents, our results showed quite an agreement between children's and parents' perceptions. The number of parents and children reporting that playing videogames together improved their relationship (n = 19 + 14 = 33 as showed in Table 4) was more than double that of those reporting no effects (n = 5 + 9 = 14) and significantly higher than those reporting negative effects (quarrels: n = 2 + 2 = 4). These findings seem in line with the hypothesis that co-playing videogames facilitates more bonding and facilitates conversation, as previously reported in the literature [17]. While only a few participants reported a tendency to quarrel related to co-use, it should be pointed out that significant differences were found between parents' and children's responses, with 21% of responses being incongruent. Our research also revealed that more than half of the participants do not play videogames together. This percentage is in line with the data by Gentile and colleagues [11] but contradicts other research [12,17]. The discrepancy may be attributable to cultural differences, as both our study and Gentile's were conducted in Italy.

Our results showed that the genres of games more played by the children are action, combat, and PvP (player versus player). This result is in line with the study of Hamlen [18], who conducted a survey on a total of 118 fourth- and fifth-grade students from American public schools. In Hamlen's study, 56% of students chose action and sport as the most played genres of videogames. In our study, the type of games used turned out to be one of the focal points of the differences in the perceptions of parents and children; indeed, we discovered how parents underestimate their children's use of violent or frightening videogames. However, as Kutner and colleagues [14] pointed out, some parents are, after all, aware of this mechanism; although they have not directly seen their children playing these games, they suspect their children may access games that have been forbidden. Lim [12] offers another perspective, suggesting that some parents may not be particularly interested in their children's game content, leading to a lack of familiarity with the specific types of games their children engage with.

Our results further indicate that while parents are aware of the primary motivations behind the children's game choice, they tend to underestimate the influences of other factors. According to the literature [11,14], many parents impose restrictions on the games their children can buy, often based on the game's content. Lim [12] also notes that several factors influence adults' decisions about what games to purchase for their children, including the child's opinion, the parent's preferences, and online reviews. However, none of this research addresses children's motivation directly.

Our study highlights that the children's motivations behind game choices are primarily influenced by the type of game and recommendations offered by friends and social media. This result is also similar to the one obtained by Hamlen in [18], where interest in the subject was selected by 25% of the children, while sense of freedom from restriction was chosen by 14% and the challenging component was selected by 13%. Another aspect of our results that confirms the literature [12,14] concerns the parent's awareness of the content labels and ratings of videogames on the packaging (PEGI for Europe, CERO for Japan, and ESRB for the United States) or, at least, that they do not feel that their children are guided by these when selecting the choice.

Our results highlighted one of the most substantial differences in the perception between parents and children regarding the impact of videogame use on children's mood (Figure 5). Parents, in fact, predominantly reported negative changes, such as increased hostility, irritability, mood swings, reactivity, listlessness (red bars on the left part of the fig-

ure, where negative moods are indicated). In contrast, children presented a more balanced perspective. While not ignoring some negative implications, which they admitted and reported in turn, they also emphasized positive changes in mood, including tranquillity, sociability, cheerfulness, and liveliness. Still, parents should be conscious and knowledgeable about the social disorders videogaming can lead to, which are assessed by the Gaming Disorder Scale for Adolescence (GADIS-A) [19].

These findings align with the existing literature, which highlights the mediating role of the developmental environment in shaping the effects of videogames on children [3,11,14]. While active mediation may help mitigate the increase in aggression and irritability, restrictive mediation may instead be counterproductive for some children, fostering resentment towards parents and heightening attraction to prohibited games. This assumption is also demonstrated by Olsen and colleagues [20]. In this cross-sectional study of a total of 541 9–15-year-old children, they found out that one of the variables that influences the decision of children to game more is having arguments with parents about gaming.

In relation to the educational and informative potential of videogames, in our study, children expressed, on average, slightly but statistically significant (Figure 8, $p < 0.001$) more positive opinions than their parents. At the same time, children do not think videogames are particularly informative and do not believe they are highly informative or educational. These results are quite congruent with what has been found in previous research studies [11,12,14], which stated that parental mediation techniques aim to counteract the possible negative impact of videogames on education.

Finally, the last topic concerns the possibility of including videogames in school as part of the teaching method. The responses to our questionnaire from parents and children revealed the highest percentages of inconsistency. Yet, more than half of the participants, both adults and children, expressed tentative agreement with this idea. However, adults were more likely to oppose it than children. We did not investigate the reasons for doubting the use of videogames in school, but previous studies have reported that they were mainly related to the potential risks in deprivation of social interaction [8,12] and development of violence and participation in violent behaviour content [12,14]. Under proper adult guidance, videogames can have enormous educational potential. Mediated use of videogames could emphasize their positive aspects, helping, for example, to highlight real events presented within a fictional story and enhancing learning outcomes [3,11,14,17]. Examples of the positive use of videogames are serious games for children with special needs, for whom technology could be a valid helpful tool for increasing abilities and social interactions [21,22], for learning [23,24] and for information [25,26].

An important factor that should be considered about the group of parents recruited is their evolving demographic. Increasingly, parents who grew up as videogames players themselves may recognize the positive sides of videogames and use them for educational purposes or to strengthen the parent–child relationship. In addition, in the years of the pandemic due to COVID-19, the number of people turning to videogames for pleasure and to maintain relationships with people has probably increased, not only in children, but also in parents. Videogames in this context had so much of an impact that location-based games have shown usefulness in directing human movement in situations where popular-level interaction are needed [27,28]. In this context, gaming spectatorship should also be an aspect to consider and analyse, because streaming of gameplay on different Internet platforms, such as YouTube and Twitch, is a shared pastime. So, the time children spend on watching gameplays and their engagement may be a meaningful evaluation, considering that game designers are introducing spectators' active interaction in the gameplay [29].

Our study has several limitations. First, the non-probabilistic sampling mode and the different possibilities of interpreting the answers to some questions may have affected

the results. Second, actual measures of playtime or game types were not carried out, relying instead on self-reported data, which could introduce inaccuracies. Hence, the subjects' response cannot be confirmed or de-confirmed, although mainly, the interest of the study lay in highlighting inconsistencies in the perceptions of parents and children. Third, we did not take into account demographic factors (gender, age, economic status, etc.) and psychological factors (personality, expectation biases, etc.). Additionally, children's responses might have been not completely independent because they are influenced—implicitly or explicitly—by their parents' suggestions, social desirability bias, or the desire to please. The absence of open questions and the reliance on online questionnaires instead of in-person methods further constrained the depth and reliability of the findings.

Further studies should explore deeper correlations among factors, such as the correlation between parental education, occupation, and perceptions about videogames. It should also take into account aspects such as the child's gender and/or their personality.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, while there are small differences between parents' and children's perceptions about videogaming, some of these differences were statistically significant. A discrepancy with the literature was about the co-use of videogames: we found some differences, with our study showing only 32% of parents and children playing together, compared with the 70% reported by Lim [12] in Japan, which could be related to adult cultural differences. Despite this disparity, parents and children playing together reported positive effects, resulting in a closer relationship. In our study, children also reported positive effects on mood from gaming, whereas parents mainly reported negative ones. Despite parents and children not attributing a high level of an educational role to videogames, more children agreed in also using videogames at school. Our findings can be summarized by noting that parents are more concerned about the time kids spend playing videogames and the negative effects these might have on their mood rather than being interested in how they play, with whom they play, and the positive effects that kids experience through videogaming. As might have happened in Japan [11], where videogaming started earlier than in Italy, the next generation of adults will have grown up playing videogames and will likely play more with their own children, narrowing the gap between the two perspectives. Future research should investigate how country of origin and culture, as well as other factors such as economic status and gender, might increase or decrease the gap between adults' and children's perceptions.

Supplementary Materials: The following supporting information can be downloaded at: https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/mti9030021/s1, Table S1. The questionnaire translated in English; Table S2. The questionnaire in original language (Italian).

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