It was never about the games.

A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Construction
of "Video Game Addiction" in Swedish News 1991-2017

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Abstract

This theoretical thesis employs critical discourse analysis to scrutinise the construction of *video game addiction* in Swedish press from 1991 to 2017, and examines its potential contribution to a moral panic. Our research is based on the assumption that media discourse influences societal norms, which in turn, can profoundly affect individuals and groups.

Our primary results suggest that a small group of moral entrepreneurs, mainly treatment providers for gambling disorders, were given an ideological near-monopoly over the conceptualization of video game addiction in the Swedish press. They popularised diagnostic criteria and screening tools by paraphrasing those developed for substance addiction, thus implying that this new disorder was just like substance addiction and therefore warranted similarly aggressive interventions and possibly clinical treatment.

Additionally, we found that the often alarmist concerns over players' health, education, social life and other presumed harms of video game addiction were not primarily rooted in the games themselves. Our sample shows that the discourse seamlessly expanded to incorporate new sources of addiction, treating video games, the Internet, computers, social media, smart phones, and, most recently, screens as functional synonyms.

Our analysis suggests that the moral panic might be a manifestation of deeper societal factors, including traditional patriarchal family values, prejudice against youth, expectations of neuro-normativity, and conservative views on digital media. Recognizing the influence of these underlying factors may help parents, teachers, social workers and gamers themselves navigate the still-ongoing media trend of using pop psychology and amateur neuroscience to justify patriarchal and capitalist morality tales.

Key words: discourse analysis, video game addiction, moral panic, moral entrepreneurs, Owe Sandberg, Patrik Wincent, youth culture, juvenism, forced treatment, Sweden

Content

1 Introduction

This study will examine the construction of video game addiction as a social problem in the Swedish press from 1991 up until the 2018 inclusion of *Gaming Disorder* into the diagnostic system IDC-11 by the World Health Organization (WHO) (Pontes et al., 2021). Over this period the popular conception of a *video game addict* transitioned from being a playful tease (Expressen, 1991) or a self-deprecating joke (Expressen, 2000) to a credible explanation for declining academic performance in Swedish schools (Dagens Nyheter, 2014) and a legitimate justification for forcing adolescents into institutional care (Aftonbladet, 2006; Svenska Dagbladet, 2007; Dagens Nyheter, 2012).

Social constructionist theories (Nikander, 2006) suggests that mass media representations of games and game culture can shape how society views and values games. This can influence who gets to *play* games, who chooses to *make* games, investments in the games *industry- and culture*, and even *legislation*. There is, for example, some evidence to suggest that the heightened concerns over video game habits in the media have influenced the attitudes of Swedish social services (Falk-Lundgren & Johnselius, 2010) and even Swedish courts (Gustavsson & Lundqvist, 2010). Some scientists have argued that the WHO's decision to formally recognize Gaming Disorder as a diagnosis might have been similarly influenced by an under-examined moral panic of video game addiction (Aarseth et al., 2017; Bean et al., 2017; van Rooij et al., 2018) .

The concept of addiction is in parts a social construction too; what a society recognize as addictive behaviour, the substances or habits it deems problematic and the social consequences for individual addicts vary considerably over time, geographical region, and across different social contexts (Alexander, 2010; Crocq, 2007; Peele, 1998; Room, 2003). The WHOs conceptualization of Gaming Disorder has been scientifically criticised for its roots in substance abuse- and gambling criteria, which might not be applicable to media consumption (Bean et al., 2017) (Aarseth et al., 2017). It has also been argued that alternative explanations have not been adequately explored (Enevold, 2018) and that this particular pathologization might inadvertently promote abusive treatment practices (Bean et al., 2017; L. Clark, 2015; Pontes et al., 2021).

In a 2015 series of articles for the independent magazine Kit, journalist Thomas Arnroth interviewed Swedish gamers who were placed in addiction treatment centres alongside young drug addicts and juvenile offenders. These facilities provided little assistance to the so-called gaming addicted youth; the methods employed to treat drug addiction appeared to be ineffective for those who excessively play video games. For these adolescents, the treatment experience instead became a traumatising event. Their lives were already fraught with problems, and the treatment only exacerbated the situation, rather than ameliorating it (Arnroth, 2015).

1.1 Problem statement

Despite the increasing popularity and cultural significance of video games, the portrayal of them as addictive has led to severe consequences for some players. The recent formalisation of medical diagnostics for Gaming Disorder might have been a result of decades-long moral panic, and the clinical conception as an individual behavioural addiction do not seem to equip parents, schools or social workers with the necessary understanding to effectively interpret and address adolescents' media habits (Prax & Rajkowska, 2018).

This study will use discourse analysis to critically examine the role of the news media in shaping public understanding of gamers as *addicts* and video games as *addictive*, up until the (much criticised) clinical recognition of Gaming Disorder by the WHO. By analysing how video game addiction is constructed as a social problem in the Swedish press, what remedies or interventions are proposed, and evaluating how the discourse may have constituted a moral panic, we hope to challenge the dominant addiction narrative and promote more empathetic views on young people's media habits.

1.2 Research Questions

- How has *video game addiction* been constructed in the Swedish press?
    - How is the player constructed as an addict?
    - How are video games constructed as addictive?
    - What interventions or control mechanisms are promoted by this discourse?
- In what ways has the discourse around video game addiction resembled a *moral panic*?

1.3 Positionality and Ethical Considerations

As with any academic study, it is essential to be aware of our personal biases and how they may have influenced the research approach and findings. In this study, both authors are white middle-class neuroqueer Swedes with Bachelor's degrees in Game Design. Both have worked in the game industry and we both consume games regularly. We have grown up with video games, we have studied games, we have developed games. We have built our communities and careers through and around gaming. Simply put, games and game culture have been a massively important part of our lives, and we hold the medium close to our hearts.

From our personal encounters, we've noted the detrimental impact of this discourse on people's interpersonal relationships, emotional well-being, and personal integrity. We've witnessed how the concept of video game addiction is frequently misused by both parents and professionals as a scapegoat to ignore human rights and to avoid acknowledging the complexity of mental well-being for adolescence as well as ignoring toxic family dynamics. And prior to video game addiction, we remember the moral panics around video game violence, and the demonising of role-playing games.

Twenty years ago one of us suffered the loss of a friend through an inexplicably brutal murder (*Hallandsposten*, n.d.) (Norén, 2005). Our confusion and grief was compounded by the national press's invasive treatment of his family and our shared role playing community. In their relentless pursuit of a sensational story journalists stole rule books and character sheets and used them to publicly defile his likeness (*Medieombudsmannen*, 2003) (*Sveriges Radio*, n.d.), speculate about him "losing himself" in the games, and to imply that his "occult obsessions" had invited this horrific fate.

> The police's hottest lead in the hunt for the murderer is the bloody and violent vampire games [that the victim] participated in. (...) [He] regularly [played] violent vampire LARPs - a variant of role-playing games with strong elements of occultism and death romanticism. (...) The dismemberment of the body may indicate that the murder was ritualistic.
>
> (*Expressen*, 2003)

Similar to the moral panic surrounding role-playing games two decades ago, we believe that Swedish society has been confronted with a comparable fear-based narrative concerning video game addiction. The stigmatisation caused by the previous moral panic resulted in families and friends being pursued by the media, an irreparable tarnishing of the victim, and ultimately, an unjust judgement (Norén, 2005). These experiences motivate us to critically examine the media's portrayal of games and question whether it is serving the public good.

We believe that our knowledge of video games and experience with game culture equips us to identify some of the discourse's underlying presumptions and biases. And while our attitude toward video games is at its core optimistic, we are also acutely aware of their many problems, such as unethical or "dark" design practices, dubious business models, exploitation of user-created content and poor representation. As developers and designers we firmly believe that our industry should, to borrow a quote; *"Take responsibility. Not all of it, but some."* (Prax, 2019).

And in the spirit of reflexivity and representation, it is essential to acknowledge that our analysis does not explicitly deploy a postcolonial lens, but we recognize the profound influence of colonial legacies on shaping societal norms and concepts like addiction. The World Health Organization (WHO), although globally mandated, has faced criticism for being western-centric in their prioritising of medical practises, technologies, a lack of non-western voices and inadequate recognition of social

determinants of health (Abimbola, 2019; Kwete et al., 2022). The western-centric bias which shapes global health norms, contributes to the categorization of behaviours, what's considered 'normal' or 'healthy' as well as the definitions of disorders, such as video game addiction.

As researchers, we commit ourselves to continually broadening our perspectives, examine our values, challenging the prevailing norms that have been influenced by colonial legacies, and enhancing the inclusivity and diversity of our understanding in future work.

2 Background

"Everything we think of as dichotomous is in fact spectral."
John Green

This background will provide a brief explanation of addiction as a social construction, emphasising that societal norms, political, and cultural factors shape our understanding of addiction and related behaviours. It further explores this perspective within the Swedish context, demonstrating how language barriers and public policy might influence the perception and treatment of addiction. We provide a brief overview of related works on moral panics to understand societal reactions towards perceived threats, such as video games, in the media. Lastly, to assist any readers less familiar with games, we highlight some of the problematic issues that the addiction discourse may overlook, as well as some of the great potential games hold for enriching people's lives.

2.1 Addiction as a Social Construction

The social constructionist view of addiction suggests that addiction is not merely a biological or individual issue but is shaped by social, cultural, and political factors. This view argues that societal norms, cultural context, and political and economic structures significantly influence how addiction is defined (Alexander, 2010, Chapter 9), who is labelled as an addict, and how society responds to addiction (Peele, 1998) (Room, 2003). Consider for example this list of substances commonly understood to cause dependence; heroin, caffeine, alcohol, prescription medications, steroids, nicotine and cannabis. Each substance carries its own weight of public opinion, laws, and cultural patterns of use. Public perception about what substances are drugs, what uses are considered pathological, and how to respond to such use changes over time and can be heavily influenced by the societal context and what group is seen to consume these substances or engage in such behaviours (Campbell, 2000; Crocq, 2007; Reinarman & Levine, 1997).

Bruce K Alexander (2010) traces the historical roots of addiction, drawing a conceptual line from the currently dominant 'disease model' to its ideological inception in the religious discourse of the 19th-century temperance movement. He argues that the model's historical roots in religious philosophy have fostered a moralistic and punitive ideology that prioritises individual responsibility and punishment over social context and harm reduction. This perspective has been foundational to policies such as the War on Drugs, which has had disastrous consequences. According to the disease model, exposure to certain addictive drugs can trigger a transformation in some individuals, turning them more or less permanently into addicts. While these individuals may attain sobriety through consistent, daily effort, their recovery typically requires ongoing treatment since they are now labelled as "addicts" and addiction is understood as a "chronic, relapsing disease." (Alexander, 2010)

Sociologist Robin Room underscores the cultural implications of this Western concept of addiction, emphasising that our understanding of addiction is not solely biological or psychological, but also

deeply rooted in social and cultural factors (Room, 2003). He posits that invoking the concept of addiction attributes significant power to the substance involved, reflecting a cultural tendency to perceive addictive substances as exerting a potent, almost controlling influence over an individual's behaviour. This perspective establishes a direct causal link between substance use and negative behaviours. However, Room notes that this direct causal link is not universally accepted across all cultures. Other societies may recognize a broader range of contributing factors, suggesting that the Western focus on the substance itself may downplay other significant influences.

Viewed sociologically, this conception of addiction serves as a framework for understanding why an individual with addiction fails to "behave rationally". The perceived "failure" lies in the inability to cease a harmful, recurring behaviour. This conceptualization inherently positions addiction as an individual problem, with the expectation that the individual should exercise self-surveillance and willpower to control their desires. This perspective contributes to the ease with which the notion of addiction can be extended to almost any repeated behaviour perceived as harmful (Room, 2003; Sulkunen, 2007).

2.2 Swedish Context: Gaming, Gambling, and Addiction

In this section, we delve into some aspects of the Swedish context that shape its approach to gaming and gambling. We examine the historical state gambling monopoly and its influence on current policies, the predominance of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) in psychiatric treatment, and the linguistic conflation of 'game' and 'gambling'. These factors collectively help shape Sweden's cultural understanding of behavioural addictions, inform treatment strategies, and influence perceptions of responsibility.

The Linguistic Conflation

In Swedish, the term 'spel' is used to denote both 'game' and 'gambling'. For those who grew up in Sweden prior to the widespread availability of consumer video games, 'spel' in public discourse was almost exclusively associated with gambling. Consequently, it is not unusual for us, as game developers, to encounter parents, politicians, and other stakeholders from an older generation who initially interpret our work in the 'spelindustrin' - the entertainment games industry - as being part of the gambling industry.

Although it was not formally recognized as an addiction until relatively recently, problem gambling has long been colloquially referred to as such in Swedish. Common terms used to describe both problem gambling and problem gaming include 'spelberoende' (gaming addiction), 'spelmissbruk' (gaming abuse), and 'spelproblem' (gaming problem) (Binde & Forsström, 2015). This terminology is used by organisations such as the National Society of Gambling Addicts (Spelberoendes Riksförbund) and by many therapists and health professionals who view gambling addiction as a medical condition akin to addiction to alcohol, narcotics, and other drugs (Binde & Forström, 2015).

All three terms share the semantic ambiguity of 'spel', creating no linguistic barrier for Swedes to perceive video games as potentially addictive. Indeed, we have found instances of this conflation as early as 1976 (*Göteborgs Posten*, 1976), and in our more limited sample of news articles from 1991-2017 'spelmissbruk' and 'spelberoende' are continuously used to refer not to gambling but to video games. This linguistic slide underscores the complex relationship between gaming and gambling in the Swedish cultural and linguistic context.

Until the Swedish translation of the 5th edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) was published in early 2015, pathological gambling was classified as an impulse control disorder, translated as 'spelmani' in the diagnostic manual (Binde & Forsström, 2015). This psychiatric term shares the same semantic problems as the more colloquial terms do. The 2015 translation of the DSM-5 introduced a new name for the diagnosis, 'hasardspelssyndrom', introducing 'hasardspel' partly to disambiguate and clarify that the diagnosis of gambling disorder does not encompass video games (Binde & Forsström, 2015). The term 'hasardspel' can be used interchangeably with 'spel' when referring to gambling. However, both 'hasardspel' and the medical diagnostic term 'hasardspelsyndrom' are infrequently used in everyday language, resulting in continued linguistic confusion.

One concrete example of this continued ambiguity can be seen on the landing page of Svenska Spel, the largest gambling company in Sweden. In English, they refer to themselves as "All of Sweden's **Gaming** Company" (emphasis added), while in Swedish, they use the phrase "hela Sveriges spelbolag" (Svenska Spel, n.d.). Here the term 'spel' in 'spelbolag' could be interpreted as either 'game' or 'gambling', possibly blurring the distinction of what industry Svenska Spel operates in and what kind of service they provide.

Another, possibly more damning, example is the The Swedish Public Health Agency's webpage "spelprevention.se" (figure 1) which demonstrates how this semantic overlap can blur the distinction between gaming and gambling-related issues. The site is designed for professionals in healthcare and social services who encounter, assess, and provide care and treatment to individuals with gambling problems, gambling addiction, or gambling disorder (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2023). In the screenshot below, we have highlighted in yellow the few instances where this government agency has made an effort to disambiguate the meaning. In contrast, the darker purple highlights indicate instances where the language is ambiguous, offering no clear distinction between video games and gambling.

Figure 1

spelprevention.se

Note. Screenshot of the Gambling Regulation section on Folkhälsomyndigheten's page "spelprevention.se", accessed 2023.
14 purple highlights mark ambiguous uses of 'spel' to refer to gambling or betting.
3 yellow highlights mark un-ambiguous use of 'spel om pengar' to refer to gambling and betting.

While the semantic overlap might be an historical and linguistic accident, the lack of disambiguation in current Swedish policy seems less so. In their 2003 *'Proposal for an action program to combat gambling addiction'* the Public Health Institute positioned pathological gambling as an addiction and video games as a predisposing activity; "Young people's interest in video games can contribute to the desire to also start gambling. The great availability of games on the Internet increases the opportunities to start playing." (Statens folkhälsoinstitut, 2003, p. 23). This assertion implied that the simple act of "playing" could be a risk factor for developing gambling habits, thereby creating a connection for the healthcare system between gambling and playing video games.

Swedish Addiction Care

Several of the treatment providers who first raised concerns over and offered treatment for video game addiction in Sweden, share a background in treating gamblers (Sevemark, 2008) (Fleischer, 2005). The expertise and training of social workers and treatment providers in specialised sectors, such as gambling addiction, can greatly affect their knowledge and perception of emerging concerns like video game addiction. Their expertise in specific fields might influence their evaluation methods, intervention techniques, and even their understanding of what constitutes harmful behaviour within the context of playing video games (Falk-Lundgren & Johnselius, 2010).

Prior to 2019, the Swedish gambling market was under a state monopoly, a structure justified by the belief that the state was best equipped to ensure a responsible market, balancing the provision of gambling services while mitigating harmful usage (Riksdagen, n.d.) (Liria, 2006; Riksdagen, n.d.; Statens folkhälsoinstitut, 2003). In the early 2000s the Public Health Institute developed a proposal for addressing what they perceived as a surge in the number of citizens seeking assistance for problem gambling (Statens folkhälsoinstitut, 2003). The primary initiative of the proposal was the implementation of an extensive educational campaign.

This campaign was designed to engage a diverse audience, including healthcare and social workers, educators, parents, psychologists, gambling providers, and the gamblers themselves. The campaign's emphasis was on prevention and the promotion of responsible gambling, with the objective of reducing the societal and individual costs and harm associated with gambling (Liria, 2006; SBU, 2022; Statens folkhälsoinstitut, 2003). However, Alexius (2017) argues that an effect of this campaign was the establishment of a dominant paradigm of "responsible gambling measures", which has since been articulated in policy, prevention strategies, and treatment approaches that places a significant emphasis on the individual gambler's responsibility for both the emergence and management of gambling-related harm. This perspective heavily relies on the individual's capacity to control and adjust their consumption to prevent harm related to gambling, thereby shifting the primary responsibility for addressing gambling-related harm, not onto the state, but onto the individual.

Another outcome of the proposal was the funding for the development of an educational- and treatment manual titled "Till spelfriheten! Kognitiv beteendeterapi vid spelberoende" (Liria, 2006), translated as "To Freedom from Gambling! CBT for Gambling Addiction." This manual reframes pathological gambling as an addictive disorder, adopting a biopsychosocial model of gambling addiction. This represented a shift from the diagnostic manual DSM-4 in use at the time, which classified pathological gaming as an impulsive disorder (Binde & Forsström, 2015). "Till spelfriheten!" explicitly incorporates ideas from substance abuse treatments, including findings from Project MATCH, an eight-year-long US-based study on treatments for alcoholism. The author justifies this approach by noting the lack of extensive treatment research in the field of gambling addiction. This incorporation of substance abuse treatment strategies underscores the new treatment manual's

innovative approach to addressing gambling addiction, reflecting a broader shift in understanding and treating this issue.

Grounded in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, the "Till spelfriheten!" emphasised techniques such as cognitive restructuring, exposure with response prevention, and social skills training. It posits that gambling addiction could be a heritable brain disease, characterised by cognitive traps, the illusion of controlling luck, and a hyperactive reward system shaped by positive reinforcement (Liria, 2006). The manual identifies several elements that contribute to the addictive nature of gambling, including intermittent reward patterns, the potential for significant financial gain, and the thrill associated with winning or losing. It also highlights factors that increase the risk of developing a gambling addiction, such as a hereditary predisposition, a desire to escape reality, and a lack of social and emotional regulation skills. Treatment is structured into sessions, with the introductory session informing the client that the CBT approach is pedagogical, goal-oriented, focused on the present, and includes home assignments designed to equip the client with the skills to regain control over their life. The manual suggests that the inability to stop gambling can be attributed to a lack of certain skills, underestimation of one's capacity for change, and difficulty managing cravings (Liria, 2006).

The Public Health Institutes' proposal also led to the creation of several websites, such as "spelalagom," translated as "game moderately." The site's home page presented a direct message to players, emphasising personal responsibility without resorting to blame or prohibitions. It states, "Game moderately! is a straightforward and clear message that directly targets the players, without finger-pointing and prohibitions. [...] Svenska Spel's philosophy on responsible gambling is that it is most effective when the tools are placed in the hands of the players themselves" (*Spela Lagom*, 2007). The site offered a self-assessment test, several self-help resources, and practical tools, such as guidance on setting a gambling budget. Several similar sites were launched, some targeting relatives of addicted gamblers. Additional tools were also developed, such as Playscan, designed to help gamblers stay within the "green zone" of gambling (Alexius, 2017).

Alexius's 2017 study revealed that within Swedish treatment settings, any criticism levelled by gamblers against gambling companies was often interpreted as an attempt to evade personal responsibility. In response to such criticism, treatment providers would frequently remind gamblers of Svenska Spel's state affiliation, emphasising the individual's role in managing problematic gambling. This reflects a significant shift in the Swedish medical perception of gambling. While the previous stance held that the state was best positioned to mitigate harmful usage, the current perspective identifies gambling as an individual issue and places the responsibility of responsible gambling on the individual consumer (Alexius, 2017).

2.3 Moral Panic

Bean et al. (2017) argues that Moral Panic Theory (Cohen, 2011), which examines how societies create narratives about perceived threats and their moral causes, is crucial for understanding both the popular and clinical conceptualizations of video game addiction. Moral panics often target youth and have historically often focused on media-related harms, including comic books, pinball machines, rock music, TV and video games.

Cohen (2011) defined moral panic as a social phenomenon, a widespread over-reaction to forms of deviance or wrong doing believed to be threats to society's values and norms. Moral panics are usually

led by community leaders or groups intent on changing laws or practices, and the threat they identify is often amplified by the media's sensationalist reporting and alarmist language. Certain groups or behaviours are stigmatised, and often framed as dangerous or deviant but sometimes as victims that need protection. Moral panics can be seen as a form of social control as the panic often aims to maintain social order and preserve existing power structures. Bean et al. (2017) suggests that even decisions by scientific bodies may reflect generational attitudes and moral panics, as much as they do scientific evidence. This is significant to our study given evidence that opinions on video games among clinicians and the general population are influenced by age (Ferguson, 2015; Przybylski, 2014).

In "Dangerous Media? Panic Discourses and Dilemmas of Modernity," Kirsten Drotner (1999) highlights the persistent and recurring nature of moral panics. She argues that, as societies evolve and new forms of media emerge, these new media challenge established norms, values, and social structures. This can create anxieties and fears among certain segments of the population, which may then manifest as moral panics (Drotner, 1999). She argues that these "media panics", which arise from anxieties about the social, cultural, and moral effects of new media, are recurring phenomena that reflect broader societal concerns and what she calls the "dilemmas of modernity", and identifies succinctly as "the economic and social upheavals of secularisation, industrialisation and urbanisation" (Drotner, 1999, pp. 612–613). Drotner draws on several Swedish moral panics to illustrate her point. Examples include the fear surrounding the introduction of comic books in the 1950s, which were believed to corrupt youth and promote criminal behaviour, and the fear of young people's consumption of video in the 1980s, which were thought to encourage violence.

2.4 Previous Work

In his study "När spelen blev farliga", Peter Sevemark examines the construction of "computer game addiction" or "computer game abuse" as a social problem in the Swedish press between 2000-2006 (Sevemark, 2008). The study found that four themes were important in the advocates' claims-making activities in the press: 1.figures showing the spread of the phenomenon, 2.moralising criteria in self-diagnosis tests, 3.the establishment of the new term in the press, and 4.sensational stories. In the discussion section Sevemark notes that the county court's ruling to involuntarily commit a 14-year-old for his "video game addiction" in 2006 came *after* "video game addiction" had been promoted by various stakeholders in the media. He argues from a social constructionist perspective that forced custody due to excessive gaming might not even have been taken seriously by the social services and the county court if there had not been advocates bringing the issue to the forefront. It is even possible that the parents of the children taken into custody might not have perceived the games as the main problem if it were not for the therapists and stakeholders drawing attention to it through sensational stories in the press.

Falk-Lundgren & Johnselius (2010) investigates how Swedish professional social workers perceive problematic computer and video gaming as an addiction. Using qualitative interview techniques, the study investigates social workers' understandings of dependency in their encounters with adolescents perceived as having problematic gaming issues. The different treatment centres visited in the study seem to base their understanding of gaming addiction on the type of addiction they initially worked with, and the individual therapists' views on whether video games are in fact addictive was strongly correlated with their own personal experience with video games. Social workers who specifically describe problematic gaming as an addiction use terminology similar to substance abuse, while those

who do not believe in the dependency framing describe problematic gaming more as a consequence of the interaction between the player and their surroundings (Falk-Lundgren & Johnselius, 2010).

The study discovered that video game addiction was built by referring to everyday living as "reality" and problematic gaming as "escapism." The time spent gaming was seen as the most important factor in developing a gaming addiction. A vast and deviant playing time is assumed to prevent the player from meeting requirements and commitments such as work, school, and social interactions, ultimately failing to become adults. As a result, the player is classified as addicted, paving the way for institutional normalisation.

Gustavsson & Lundqvist (2010) examines the 3rd paragraph of The Care of Young Persons Act (the formal law is "Lag (1990:52) med särskilda bestämmelser om vård av unga", colloquially referred to in Sweden as "Lagen om vård av unga", or "LVU"), focusing on the legal prerequisite of "other social destructive behaviour" in four Swedish cases where youths were placed under compulsory institutional care due to problematic gaming between 2006-2010. The study highlights that there is no definitive ruling from a higher court on whether excessive gaming should be considered as socially destructive behaviour in itself, so in all four cases the courts have had to interpret the consequences of excessive gaming in order to make a ruling. The authors found that negative societal perception of computer gaming may have influenced the judgments, and questioned the application of "other socially destructive behaviour" in terms of legal certainty and justice. They argue that the line between acceptable and problematic computer gaming is unclear, making it difficult to predict whether consequences of problematic gaming can form the basis for compulsory care (Gustavsson & Lundqvist, 2010).

2.5 A Game Designers Perspective

"If the games we play do not wake us, why then do we play them?"
Kafka (ish)

As we embark on a project to deconstruct the public notion of video game addiction we believe it is crucial to properly acknowledge the multidimensional character of games and game culture. There are many important issues that we as a society should be concerned about, which the addiction discourse might lead us to overlook. On the other hand we feel that it is equally important to recognize the undeniable contribution that video games make to people's lives, well being and communities. By understanding more of why people play, one might avoid needlessly contributing to a moral panic.

2.5.1 Dark Design, Colonialism and the Digital Divide

Gamers are still convinced that there are only:
Two races: white and "political"
Two genders: Male and "political"
Two hair styles for women: long and "political"
Two sexualities: straight and "political"
Two body types: normative and "political"
Emma H Vossen, PhD

At *Pocket Gamer Connects Helsinki 2016*, Torulf Jernström gave a presentation on how to "capture *whales*," a term used in the games industry to describe big in-game spenders. He opened the talk with:

> ...it is about ehh summary of a huge bunch of behavioural psychology. So the tricks on how to monetise a game well. Some of you will probably will be slightly shocked by all the tricks have listed here but I'll leave morality of it out of the talk. We can discuss it if we have time later.

(PocketGamerbiz, 2016)

the audience laughed and he proceeded to speak openly of the psychological tricks that his company used to keep players in the game and "get more people to spend more". Despite ending the talk with time left for discussion, no ethical or moral problems were addressed in the room. Games journalist James Stephanie Sterling later reported about this presentation which then triggered significant discussions around dark design principles, developer indifference towards their customers' wellbeing and the lack of ethical concern within parts of the games industry (Sterling, 2019).

Video games can be predatory and exploitative in various ways, not including manipulative monetization strategies. Some games are designed to promote propaganda, a well-known example of such is the game *America's Army,* which critics argue romanticise warfare and offers a skewed perspective on military life (Ottosen, 2009). A less explicit, but very common influence is the tendency of games such as *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 4* to show prejudice against Arabo-Islamic cultures, and implicitly push ideas of European and American society as superior (Lee et al., n.d.) These prejudicial undertones are not limited to cultural superiority alone; games often perpetuate harmful stereotypes across various social dimensions, including gender, mental health, and ethnicity (Austin, 2021; Engelbrecht, 2020). Furthermore, with the introduction of chat AI, the issue of representation will become even more complex. These AIs are usually trained on data that is primarily from the United States, which can inadvertently reinforce American-centric beliefs and biases. As a result, there will be new ways of perpetuating damaging prejudices and cultural hegemony globally.

Video games and video game cultures additionally share many of the same challenges faced by other digital media (Pangrazio, 2018). Challenges such as inequitable access, digital literacy, digital identity and -belonging, representation, personal integrity, media coercion and manipulation, misinformation and disinformation, echo chambers and, a particular hot potato for video game culture, radicalization to violence (Danskin, 2021). These are just a few of the important issues that we believe should be met with serious concern from both game developers, publishers, distributors and society at large.

2.5.2 Competence, autonomy, and relatedness

Games are the aesthetic form of systems,
just like music is the aesthetic form of sound.
Associate Professor Naomi Clark (paraphrased)

Observers unfamiliar with games and gaming culture may view games merely as frivolous diversions and thus easily dismiss the intense engagement of young individuals with this medium. For those genuinely seeking to understand the motivations and behaviours of gamers, we suggest a shift away from broadly used, yet semantically vague descriptions such as "fun", "rewarding", and "escapist". Instead, we propose the application of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) for a more empathetic and nuanced understanding of why gamers can appear so deeply invested. This theoretical framework posits *competence*, *autonomy*, and *relatedness* as three fundamental psychological needs, all of which are satisfiable through video games (Ryan et al., 2006). By adopting the SDT perspective, games can be understood not as vacuous and unproductive activities, but rather as complex platforms capable of fulfilling important psychological needs by offering opportunities for individual agency, skill acquisition, and social interaction.

In addition to providing joy and fulfilment to millions of people, games can also be measurably beneficial. The very act of play has also been identified as important from a pedagogic perspective, as it provides opportunities to practise and make mistakes (Koster, 2005). Well-designed games have the power in principle to immerse learners in authentic environments and support them through meaningful activities (Gee, 2007). They can, among other things, accelerate language learning (Klimova & Kacet, 2017), action games can improve visual acuity and attention (Bediou et al., 2018), casual games can decrease stress and depression (Russoniello et al., 2009, 2013), online games can improve literacy (Steinkuehler, 2007), science games help foster scientific habits of mind (D. Clark et al., 2009) and some games even let players participate in scientific discovery (Bauer & Popović, 2017).

In his book *What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy* (Gee, 2003) suggests that games are often crafted in ways that encourage and facilitate active and critical participation, and that they "encourage reflective metatalk, thinking and actions in regard to the design of the game" (p. 46). There are some important implications to his observations. First, that video games are *made* by people. As designed objects they are necessarily a cultural expression and thus carry meanings. Second; that the meaning they convey is not primarily dictated by the visuals on screen or the narrative settings - but through active interaction with the game systems. Third; that the experience of play is necessarily situated in the player and that one must engage with this individual in all of their complexity, to understand their motivations, their interpretation and their needs.

3 Theory and Method

In this section we will discuss the theoretical foundations and methodologies that underpin our research. We will delve into social constructionism, discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis, and moral panic theory, providing an overview of these concepts and their relevance to our study.

3.1 Social Constructionism

Social constructionism is a theoretical framework that emphasises the role of language, culture, and social context in shaping human experience and understanding of reality. Because this perspective is broad, it is difficult to find a singular definition. Vivien Burr has summarised four basic assumptions that can be said to be common positions within the social constructionist field. Or as she herself puts it: "things you would absolutely have to believe in order to be a social constructionist" (Burr, 1995)

Firstly, social constructionism is about adopting a critical approach to the world and ourselves. Our knowledge of the world is not some ideal reflection of an objective reality but should rather be understood as a result of our way of categorising the world. For example, in a social constructionist approach we can understand medical diagnoses as a product of social and cultural influences. Medical diagnostic systems are based on established and accepted knowledge of the human body and health, and are the result of ongoing research. However, a diagnostic system does not *only* reflect current knowledge, but also a powerful language system that has concrete effects on people's lives. Diagnostic systems consist of sets of terms and concepts that delineate and describe symptoms in order to categorise patients based on these symptom descriptions. These systems enable health care professionals to define certain conditions as "normal" and others as deviations from the norm. Diagnoses can then have material consequences in the form of access to treatment resources, social security, and special interventions from schools.

It is important to emphasise that this does not mean that social constructionism denies the existence of non-linguistic phenomena in the world. Experiencing pain and being sick is not something that can be changed by avoiding talking about it. A deadly disease is life-threatening in and of itself, not because we write or talk about it as if it is dangerous. However, the *meaning* and *experience* of illness differ depending on the context. Addiction, for example, can be experienced as a personal moral failing and lack of self-control, a spiritual bankruptcy, a disease from which one suffers, a method of self-care or a coping mechanism (Alexander, 2010).

Secondly, social constructionism is based on an anti-essentialist view. Since our view of, and knowledge about, the world is always culturally and historically influenced, people do not have any inherent essence. Our worldviews and identities could have been different. Thirdly, it is emphasised

that knowledge is produced and maintained in social interaction, where common truths are built up and struggles are fought over what is true and false.

These assumptions are particularly relevant when examining resemblance of a moral panic, as it suggests that the panic is not a natural or inevitable response. For example, we might reasonably suspect that society's view of addictive substances and behaviours is strongly influenced by which group consumes or practises them (Sulkunen, 2007) (Alexander, 2010).

Finally, social constructionism points out that the social construction of knowledge has concrete social consequences because different social worldviews lead to different social outcomes where some forms of action are seen as natural and legitimate while others are seen as unthinkable. What is seen as knowledge and reality is constructed through language (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002a) Therefore, studying the language used to describe video game addiction can reveal underlying biases and assumptions that explain why the current understanding of the issue has been reached.

Simon Lindgren (2009) highlights a common criticism of social constructionism, namely that if all knowledge is socially contingent, there can be no constraints or regularities in social life. However, even though language is a building block of the construct that we call society, we are not rebuilding that construct every day. We are born into an existing society, and it is likely a similar society that will persist after our death. The construction process has inertia, an aversion to change, and it's unusual for an individual or small group to cause any fundamental societal changes. This inertia or inflexibility is sometimes referred to as 'dialectic' (Lindgren, 2009). Dialectic, in this context, refers to how language simultaneously creates society and is being created by members of the society.

Access to language is often a matter of power. The individuals and groups with resources to describe the world have a lot of influence over our ability to interpret and understand the world. Resistance against the current society can thus take the form of change to language and thus peoples' experiences (Svensson, 2019).

3.2 Discourse Analysis

In brief, discourse analysis can be described as a way of understanding and studying language use and its effects on society, people, and their relationships. In more concrete terms, discourse analysis is a theoretical perspective - with certain assumptions about the function of language - and a method for studying language use (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002a).Within discourse analysis, "language" is considered as an action. We perform actions when we use language, and language affects our way of experiencing, thinking, seeing, and feeling. Therefore, discourse analysis is a way to go beyond the descriptive role of language and approach an understanding of the meaning that language (and other symbols) plays in people's experiences of the world and how they behave towards other people. Within social sciences, discourse analysis plays a particular role since the perspective and method can be a way of gaining knowledge about how societies are created - or 'constructed' - by people in their social interactions (Svensson, 2019).

3.2.1 What is 'Discourse'

Different disciplines have different definitions of what discourse is, and different positions suggest different proposals (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002a). In social sciences, discourse is believed to not only

involve language but also action and the interaction between them. Therefore, the focus is on the relationship between the sender and the text, as well as between the sender and the receiver.

A common definition of the term discourse is that it is a particular way of talking about and understanding the world, or a specific way of interpreting the world (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002a). One way to explain this is that there are certain boundaries or frames for how different phenomena can be described in ways that are deemed truthful or plausible. If one can identify these frames, one can also identify the discourses (Svensson, 2019).

Taking video games as an example of a phenomenon surrounded by discourse, one can ask certain questions to identify the boundaries around the discourse of games. Are games described similarly in different media (is there a consensus?). Perhaps there are different ways of talking about video games depending on the *type* of game or *who* is playing, for example; 'educational games' vs. 'violent games', 'e-sport athlete' vs. 'unemployed', etc. Is there a conflict around how games should be portrayed? One can also try to see the boundaries of what can be said. For example, would it be possible in the public debate in Sweden today, to advocate for a total ban on video games? If one can identify these boundaries, one can understand the core of the discourse as well as where its outer limits lie.

3.2.2 What is Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is a method of studying and analysing language use in social contexts. It is a broad field that encompasses a variety of approaches and methods, but the main goal of discourse analysis is to uncover the underlying structures and assumptions that shape the ways in which language is used to create meaning in social interactions (Nikander, 2006).

Discourse analysis can be applied to a wide range of "texts", including written, spoken, and visual media, and can be used to study a variety of social phenomena, including power relations, identity construction, and cultural norms and values (Svensson, 2019). As a simple example, if movies consistently frame people smoking as cool, powerful and mysterious, then society might come to associate some of those values with real-world smoking. It might normalise smoking among certain groups, and in certain contexts. Smoking by other groups (children?) or in other contexts (the library?) would be seen as abnormal. Instead of seeing this as just the way things are, discourse analysts know that norms are produced in language and are not necessarily as natural as we may have assumed .

3.2.3 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis, or CDA, is "a type of discourse analysis research that primarily studies the way social power, abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in social and political contexts" (van Dijk, n.d.). It was developed by thinkers like Michel Foucault, Teun A. van Dijk, and Norman Fairclough during the 1970s and 1980s. The main goal of CDA is to look at how language can both demonstrate and influence social practices, and to uncover the ways that power relationships are maintained or challenged within society (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002b).

CDA is useful because it can reveal how knowledge claims in texts are made and justified, and certain voices legitimised at the expense of others, in the construction of particular 'discursive realities' (Whitton & Maclure, 2017). It's based on the idea that language isn't just a neutral way to communicate, but is actually a social practice that carries certain beliefs, ideology, and power

dynamics. By looking at different types of communication, like writing, speech, and visual media, CDA can help us see the power structures that might be at work and give us a better understanding of social issues. (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002b)

In "Critical Discourse Analysis as a Research Tool" (Janks, n.d.) provides a pragmatic introduction to Fairclough's model for CDA[1]. It consists of three interrelated processes of analysis: *description, interpretation*, and *explanation*. In the description stage, researchers closely look at the language features of a text, such as the words used, grammar, and how ideas are connected. This helps them identify patterns that might show power relationships or ideological beliefs.

Next, in the interpretation stage, they think about the context surrounding the language being used. This means considering things like the person speaking or writing, the people they're talking to, and the bigger social and political environment. By looking at these factors, researchers can better understand how the context might affect the meaning and how people understand the language being used.

Lastly, in the explanation stage, researchers try to figure out the larger social implications of the language being used. They look at how power relationships, beliefs, and social structures are either supported or challenged through the way people use language.

3.4 Moral Panic Theory

"The Rise (and Refinement) of Moral Panic" (Bowman, 2015) provides a rather comprehensive background on moral panic theory, examining its foundations and applications in contemporary society. The paper discusses how moral panics theory has been refined and expanded upon over time. The main characteristics of a moral panic in Stanly Cohen's (1972) original conceptualization, are the following:

1. Intense public reaction to a perceived threat.
2. A definition of deviance where a group or behaviour is classified as deviant and a threat to social order.
3. A sense of urgency and call for immediate action.
4. The creation of folk devils. A target group is cast as the symbolic representation of the perceived threat, which is often constructed by and gets perpetuated by various actors such as the media, politicians and special interest groups.
5. Implementation of social control mechanisms to regulate the perceived threat

In their expansion upon Cohen's initial concept, Goode & Ben-Yehuda (2009) provided a more detailed framework for identifying and analysing moral panics. They characterised moral panics using five key elements: (1) *concern*, where there is a heightened level of concern about certain groups or categories, (2) *hostility*, where one can observe an increase in hostility towards the 'deviants' of 'respectful society', (3) *consensus*, where a consensus about the reality and seriousness of a threat can be found, (4) *disproportionality*, where public concern is in excess of what 'should' be, and (5) *volatility*, where the panic is temporary and fleeting and though it might recur, the panic is not long

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[1] sometimes referred to as the "dialectical-relational approach".

lasting. This model can provide a more nuanced understanding of the various factors that contribute to the formation and development of moral panics in society (Bowman, 2015) .

Goode & Ben-Yehuda (2009) also brought the idea of "moral entrepreneurs" to our attention; a term used to describe individuals or groups who take the lead in defining certain behaviours, actions, or groups as threats to societal values. They explained that these moral entrepreneurs play a pivotal role in igniting and perpetuating moral panics. Moral entrepreneurs can be formal - such as politicians, law enforcers or religious leaders - who leverage their authoritative position to promote their moral views. Or they can be informal - everyday people or activists - who, driven by their strong belief systems, work towards influencing society's moral codes (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009).

These moral entrepreneurs often identify 'deviant' behaviour, elevate it into the public consciousness, and push for it to be recognized as a significant issue that demands immediate attention and action. They use various strategies, including manipulation of public sentiment, engagement with the media, and lobbying efforts, to foster a sense of fear, urgency, and consensus around their cause. This sense of moral righteousness and urgency often results in disproportionate public reactions (panic) to the defined 'threat', and thus moral entrepreneurs might affect shifts in societal norms and legal frameworks well beyond what an objective measure of the perceived threat might motivate (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 2009).

4 Outline for Analysis and Interpretation

"If we can hit that bullseye, the rest of the dominoes will fall like a house of cards.
Checkmate!"
Zapp Brannigan

This section will provide an outline for our methodology, data selection, sampling strategy and analysis protocol. We will also discuss the authors' positionality and outline some known limitations with the current study.

Our process for analysis is modelled after the five steps suggested by (Svensson, 2019):

1. get to know the sample
2. organise the sample
3. close reading and coding
4. interpret the data, derive themes
5. contextualization

We opted to use the collaborative qualitative analysis software Dedoose[2] to help us organise the data. We close read the corpus and began coding sections of the texts directly relating to our research questions:

- any mention of addiction, substance abuse or related language
- any description of symptoms of an addiction
- any descriptions of the games or the gaming habit
- any descriptions of the player / "addict"
- any linguistic conflation of video games ("spel") and gambling ("spel")
- actors; parents, the state, experts, treatment providers, game developers, etc
- alamist statements
- moderate or "anti-alarmist" statements

In a second read we aimed to highlight any *implied* meanings, norms and attitudes. Specifically, we looked for;

- any use of metaphors or similes
- normative statements ("should", "must", "good", "responsible", "just", etc)
- perceived consequences of video game addiction
- implied or suggested solutions to video game addiction
- attitudes towards gaming
- each article's position towards the concept of "video game addiction"

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[2] https://www.dedoose.com/ it's main benefit over more fully featured tools (such as nVivo) is that Dedoose supports simultaneous collaborative editing.

During these readings we also discovered some recurring themes and patterns in the sample that we had not thought of beforehand. Some of these are;

- reversing causality to strengthen a narrative
- conflating video games with other digital technology
- authoritarian parenting advice
- emphasis on productivity, devaluing leisure time
- dichotomising the virtual / digital and the "real"
- dismissal of the virtual and digital

4.3 Analysis protocol

To answer our research questions we have categorised them which also shapes the structure for the result, analysis and conclusion:

- *The Addict*   - How is the player constructed as an addict?
- *The Drug*   - How are video games constructed as addictive?
- *Remedies*   - What interventions or control mechanisms are promoted by this discourse?
- *Moral Panic* - In what ways has the discourse around video game addiction resembled a moral panic?

While Gaming Disorder is currently recognized as a behavioural addiction in ICD-11, it was not officially classified as such until after the end of our sample period and therefore we have chosen to use "The Drug" as the categorical title to reflect the prevailing discourse of the time.

For each category, we have components that have guided our collection and interpretation of data for the analysis of our core concepts. The choice of these is motivated by the aim to uncover the power dynamics, ideologies, and social structures that underlie the construction of video game addiction, and to identify the possible moral panic surrounding the issue.

4.3.1 The Addict

Characterization of Players
Demographic and personal attributes, as well as normative expressions and cultural context. This frame can help identify potential stereotypes and biases that may be shaping the representation of gamers.

Responsibility and Agency
How the players are positioned within the discourse, as either active agents or passive victims. Understanding these dynamics can reveal power relations and assumptions about the players' capabilities and responsibilities.

Relationships with Family, Friends, and Society
The portrayal of players' social relationships. Can help uncover implicit assumptions about the impact of gaming on personal relationships and social integration.

Mental Health and Well-being

Seeks to identify potential associations between gaming and mental or physical health, which can contribute to the stigmatisation and pathologization of gamers.

Players' Voices and Perspectives

Including the players' own experiences and perspectives in the analysis ensures a more balanced and comprehensive understanding of the discourse. This frame also helps to explore the power dynamics between different actors involved in shaping the discourse.

Moral or Ethical Judgments

Analysing moral and ethical judgments made about gamers and their habits can reveal underlying value systems and ideologies that inform the discourse, such as assumptions about what constitutes 'acceptable' or 'problematic' behaviour.

Economic, Educational, and Relational Impact

To explore the consequences of gaming behaviour as presented in the discourse, which can contribute to the construction of gamers as a particular social group with specific characteristics and implications.

4.3.2 The Drug

Addiction Definition and Theories

The definition and use of "addiction" in the Swedish press when referring to video games, as well as comparisons of the symptoms, long-term effects, and progression of the condition to different types of addiction disorders.

Signs and Symptoms

This category includes warning signs and diagnostic criteria to recognize when someone is addicted to videogames, and the perceived consequences of excessive gaming,

Consequences of Play

How the games affect the player - brain, behaviour, and social relationships.

Depiction and Understanding of Video Games

What specific games, genre or platform are mentioned, and how are they described? What metaphors and analogies are used to describe games? This category is intended to capture what level of gaming literacy exists in the discourse.

4.3.3 Remedies

Individual Solutions and Treatment

Comparisons to other types of addiction and various potential solutions provides insight into how video game addiction is conceptualised and framed in relation to other addictive behaviours.

Technology, Funding, and Research

Calls for more research, funding, or technological solutions to try and capture the broader context of the discourse, including the role of different stakeholders, like government, academia and industry.

Communication, Demography, and Needs

Investigating the proposed solutions' consideration of communication and the needs of different demographic groups can reveal the inclusivity and sensitivity of the discourse. It helps identify potential gaps or biases in addressing the diverse needs and experiences of different communities affected by video game addiction.

Rights, Interests, and Ethical Considerations

Analysing how the discourse balances the rights and interests of gamers with the need for intervention and support can reveal the power dynamics at play, as well as potential conflicts between different stakeholder groups. Examining the ethical implications of proposed solutions can provide insight into the underlying values and principles guiding the discourse.

Actors, roles, and case studies

Identifying the actors proposing solutions and those being heard allows researchers to map the power relations and dynamics involved in shaping the discourse. Examining case studies and success stories can provide a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of proposed solutions and the emphasis on addressing underlying causes of video game addiction.

Root Causes

Examining the prevalent theories of causation in the discourse by studying the hypothesised underlying elements such as psychological requirements, social environment, personal circumstances, or fundamental properties of video games. Recognising these theories can be helpful because they have a direct impact on the interventions and solutions that are suggested. Various root causes will call for various preventative measures, therapeutic modalities, and policy solutions.

What doesn't work?

Analysing the opinions of various actors in the discourse about what they consider actively harmful or counterproductive when trying to address video game addiction reveal more perspectives and assumptions that shaped the understanding of possible solutions.

4.3.4 Moral Panic

Concern / Urgency

Is there a heightened level of concern about video game addiction? Are the articles presenting it as a pressing social issue that needs immediate attention?

Hostility

Do the articles create a sense of hostility or animosity toward gamers, video games, or the games industry? Is any group being depicted as "folk devils" or is there a threat to societal values and norms?

Consensus

Is there an apparent consensus within the texts that video game addiction is a significant problem and that urgent action is needed? Are multiple sources, experts, or interest groups reinforcing this message?

Disproportionality

Do the articles exaggerate the prevalence or severity of video game addiction? Are the risks, consequences, or potential harms presented in a way that is disproportionate to the actual scale of the issue?

Media Framing / Alarmism

How are the articles framing video games and video game addiction? Are they using loaded language, sensational headlines, or vivid imagery to elicit strong emotional reactions from readers?

Moral Judgments / Normative Statements

Do the articles express moral judgments or criticisms related to video gaming, gamers, or the gaming industry? Are they suggesting that video game addiction is indicative of a broader moral decline in society?

Solutions and Responses

Are the articles proposing solutions or advocating for specific interventions to address video game addiction? Are these proposed solutions or interventions aligned with the severity of the problem or are they disproportionate?

4.4 Data Selection and Sources

We have relied on the National Library's newspaper archive[3] to acquire our data. We used the same search terms as (Sevemark, 2008) but added variations of the perhaps antiquated phrases "TV-spelsberoende" and "TV-spelsmissbruk" to the query. Where Sevemark's results were limited to 2000-2006, our updated query was able to capture relevant texts all the way back to (*Göteborgs Posten*, 1976)[4].

Our complete query was:
```
dataspelberoende   OR dataspelmissbruk   OR dataspelmissbrukare   OR
dataspelsberoende  OR dataspelsmissbruk  OR dataspelsmissbrukare  OR
datorspelberoende  OR datorspelmissbruk  OR datorspelmissbrukare  OR
datorspelsberoende OR datorspelsmissbruk OR datorspelsmissbrukare OR
"TV-spelsberoende" OR "TV-spelberoende"  OR
"TV-spelmissbruk"  OR "TV-spelsmissbruk" OR "TV-spelsmissbrukare"
```

During an exploratory phase we noticed that a lot of results were duplications printed in several newspapers. Therefore we decided to limit our sample to the four largest national newspapers; Aftonbladet, Dagens Nyheter, Expressen and Svenska Dagbladet. Our thinking was that these four had the most resources to do their own reporting and were thus unlikely to feature duplicated content. By virtue of being the most widely distributed papers they are also likely to see the most reader submission and public dialogue.

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[3] Swedish: Kungliga Biblioteket Tidningsarkiv, see: https://tidningar.kb.se/

[4] 1991 is the earliest text from *the four newspapers of our sample*. However, (*Göteborgs Posten*, 1976) was the first publication we found to connect digital gaming and addiction.

The earliest relevant text in our chosen four was (*Expressen*, 1991) which became the natural starting point of our sample. We decided to limit our analysis to the time period 1991-2017 - the year before Gaming Disorder was accepted by the WHO.

With these limits our search yielded **72 published texts:**

Aftonbladet: 22 items,   1998-2017
Dagens Nyheter: 15 items,   2003-2014
Expressen: 14 items,   1991-2014
Svenska Dagbladet: 21 items,   1998-2017

Total: 72 items, 1991-2017

We closely read all of these in order to further reduce the amount of content to analyse. We removed 18 articles that only mention video game addiction without commenting on the topic. Five articles credited to the TT News Agency[5] were also removed because they were very short summaries of other articles. We also found a comic strip about gaming addiction but we choose to not include it in the analysis because of the limited amount of linguistic data.

After identifying all relevant items from the search results, the dataset reduced to 48 texts:

Aftonbladet: 16 items,   2004-2016
Dagens Nyheter: 10 items,   2006-2014
Expressen: 11 items,   1991-2014
Svenska Dagbladet: 11 items,   2000-2017

Total: 48 relevant items, 1991 - 2017

4.5 Sampling

Given the large size of the dataset and the rigorous analytical procedure inherent in CDA, it was unfeasible to assess all 48 articles within the scope of this research study. Therefore, a two-step sampling method was used to try and produce a reliable yet manageable representation of the dataset. The first step included creating four distinct timelines, each of which had just one text every year from each newspaper. When a newspaper published several relevant texts in the same year, the choice was made using an alphabetical hierarchy based on the headline (or, in the absence of a headline, the opening paragraph of the text).

The second step was to discard half of each timeline. We kept the earliest article from each newspaper, and selected every other article after that for analysis. If at this point any newspaper had fewer than five articles in the sample, we also added the last article from that papers' timeline. Our final sample was distributed thusly:

Aftonbladet: 5 items,   2004-2016
Dagens Nyheter: 4 items,   2006-2014

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[5] TT News Agency is the national wire service of Sweden, privately owned by the largest media houses in the country. https://tt.se/om/om-tt

Expressen: 5 items,   1991-2012
Svenska Dagbladet: 5 items,   2000-2017

Total: 19 items, 1991-2017

The full data sample is presented in *Appendix A*. We believe that our two-step sample procedure achieved an acceptable balance between the requirements of a thorough analysis and the realistic constraints of the study. Our aim was to capture the evolution of the discourse over time, while limiting the analysis to ~20 items of text.

4.6 Limitations of the Study

Our sample comprises four newspapers out of the numerous outlets that have reported on the issue, and from these four outlets we have analysed a total of 19 texts out of the 48 we identified as relevant. Considering that we are trying to cover over 20 years of reporting makes the sample used in this study a relatively small representation of the period, both in terms of news sources and the number of texts analysed

Our sample might not accurately reflect the temporal distribution of the discourse. Coverage of video game addiction across all media saw big peaks in 2006, 2012 and 2018 (see *Appendix A*) but this is not reflected quite as clearly in our analysis as we opted to sample an even distribution over the time period. We chose this strategy in order to capture the evolution of the discourse.

For reasons of scope and convenience, the study's sample is restricted to print newspapers[6], even though the period of most activity for this discourse coincides with the transition of many newspapers to digital platforms. Consequently, we may have overlooked a significant portion of the discourse that was published on various online outlets, which could have included interactive elements such as comments sections and chat features that would offer valuable data for further analysis.

This study solely examines newspaper discourse, despite the issue being extensively covered across different media and formats. For instance, private blogging was a popular trend in Sweden during the early 2000s, and a considerable amount of writing and debate may have taken place within the "blogosphere." Television programs such as Kalla Fakta, Uppdrag Granskning, and similar shows also addressed the issue of gaming addiction, possibly reaching a wider audience than newspapers.

In summary, the scope of our study is limited to the analysis of a significant, yet specific, subsection of the societal discourse on gaming addiction.

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[6] The national database of newspapers is fully digitised, searchable and has recently been made available via our local library. While our focus on print news means that the study is blind to what was happening online, it did provide a truly archeological dimension to our corpus.

5 Results

The result section provides a summary of our findings in the sample, organised according to our research questions. We looked to understand how the discourse of video game addiction constructs the player (*The Addict*), the games (*The Drug*) and possible interventions and solutions (*Remedies*). Additionally, we aimed to identify signs that the discourse around video game addiction might have been a moral panic. Despite a portion of our findings being presented in percentages to highlight key trends, the overarching aim was to provide a comprehensive and contextual understanding of the video game addiction discourse, which necessitated a more descriptive narrative approach for the majority of our results. The table in *Appendix C* provides a brief summary of each article, in order of their publication.

Attitude overview

Throughout the sample, the validity of video game addiction as a concept is openly contested. While some view it as a significant issue that has not received adequate attention, others argue that the diagnosis is merely a moral panic and without merit. A third category presents a more nuanced perspective that acknowledges some of the issue's complexity. These three viewpoints appear with the following frequencies:

Video game addiction is a significant problem!	53%
Video game addiction is a complex issue.	26%
Video game addiction is nonsense!	21%

5.1 The Addict

We have tracked instances of when players are given the opportunity to express themselves and in what context. These expressions have been broadly sorted into four categories, namely: "active voice," which refers to instances where the player's voice is central to the article; "quoted," which refers to instances where the player's voice is not central but is quoted by the author; "spoken for," which refers to instances where someone else is telling the story of the players' thoughts, feelings or motivations; and "not present," which refers to instances where neither the player nor their voice is present in the text.

Players' voices and perspectives

Active voice	21%
Quoted	31%
Spoken for	38%
Not present	10%

We mainly see experts talking for the players and using their quotes to strengthen their own arguments "deep down they know that something is wrong". In the majority of the times when the player has an active voice it is in the context of presenting video game addiction as a huge problem. They are people who tell the story of how they were addicts and have now recovered.

Characterization of Players

The Swedish press often portrays video game players as children or boys, with an age range of 11-17. Players are commonly described as fixated, isolated, aggressive, lacking self-control and insight to their own behaviour. Their gaming environment is depicted as solitary, often in the dark, and sometimes likened to a "drug den."

Responsibility and Agency

Players are frequently portrayed as lacking insight and requiring parental intervention. They are sometimes seen as manipulative and untrustworthy. However, other portrayals show players exercising self-control, being aware of dangers, and using games for escapism.

Relationships with Family, Friends, and Society

Players' relationships with their families are often strained, with mothers depicted as worried and concerned. Gaming conflicts can lead to broken family dynamics. Players are also portrayed as sacrificing real-life friendships for gaming, which is seen as isolating yet also a social experience. Players are often described as living outside society, struggling to function within it, unable to find jobs, education or get a partner.

Mental Health and Well-being

Excessive gaming is sometimes seen as a symptom of other issues like depression or anxiety. However, the majority view holds that gaming leads to these problems. The well-being of players is commonly described as anxiety-filled, stressed, and sleep-deprived.

Moral or Ethical Judgments

Behaviours such as not obeying parents, showing aggression, and prioritising games over family are considered problematic and pathological. Players should play outside, have many friends, play sports, and want to work and study. They need to be taught balance, moderation, and self-control. There is a recurring claim that video game addiction should be treated as seriously as other addictions, implying a moral imperative for society to address this issue.

Economic, Educational, and Relational Impacts

The presented consequences of video game addiction is that it can lead to quitting work, underachieving academically, and creating conflict within families. This addiction can also have long-term economic consequences for individuals and society.

5.2 The Drug

This category covers how video games are understood in the discourse. It also includes how its effects are used and any warning signs that the player has consumed too much.

Addiction Definition and Theories

The Swedish press frequently associates video games with drugs, drinking, and gambling. Diagnostic criteria are shared in the form of warning signs and symptoms by different treatment providers. The press presents these as *experts* and are typically therapists or psychologists with experience of treating *gambling disorders*. These experts agree that regulated exposure to games can be safe, but excessive use can have detrimental implications, particularly for children. However, a significant proportion of the sample demonstrates that video games have life-changing negative effects on grown up boys as well, affecting their employment and social lives.

A few counter-arguments to this discourse suggest that games should not be associated with drugs and highlight some of the benefits of gaming.

Signs and Symptoms

In this discourse, the warning symptoms of video game addiction can be categorised as psychological, behavioural, and physical alterations. Psychological markers include a rush when connecting to the internet, a loss of control over gaming habits, and withdrawal symptoms. Behavioural indications entail playing for extended periods of time, abandoning social life for gaming, and ignoring duties. Physical symptoms include inverted daily rhythms, sleep, food, and personal hygiene neglect. To combat video game addiction, parents are encouraged to list the negative effects of gaming, help the players break the denial, limit screen time, and accept that the child will be upset for a while.

The Most Common Warning Signs in the Discourse:

- **Loss of control:**
  Losing track of time, Gaming for long periods, 3-4 hours at a time

- **Withdrawal symptoms:**
  Becoming irritable and unhappy when not connected or playing.

- **Difficulty following rules:**
  Repeatedly breaking agreements about computer time and not turning off when prompted.

- **Isolation:**
  Quitting other activities and socialising less with friends.

- **Denial:**
  Responding with anger and denying being addicted to gaming when confronted.

- **Reversed daily rhythm:**
  Gaming during the night and neglecting sleep.

- **Neglect of responsibilities:**
  Neglecting school, personal hygiene, and social relationships.

- **Aggressiveness:**
  Becoming aggressive towards those who interrupt and try to control the gaming.

Consequences of Play

The effects are described as a disregard for obligations, hostility, a decline in social skills, disturbed sleep, and social isolation. Mental health will deteriorate, and there may be professional and financial consequences. Gaming may also eventually lead to substance abuse or gambling disorder.

Depiction and Understanding of Video Games

The press often conflates video games with other digital media and devices and are frequently likened to drugs, alcohol, or gambling, with negative connotations. The discourse rarely describes games in detail, and the accomplishments, skills, and relationships formed in games are deemed "not real" and unimportant. The games are sometimes described as having deeply engaging social elements while still being considered isolating.

The discourse often portrays video games and their virtual worlds as alluring, engaging, and highly absorbing, due to the experiences they offer players and the manipulative design strategies employed by game developers. These manipulations include using adrenaline, dopamine, and social pressure to keep players engaged. Games are described as "rewarding" and "stimulating," terms that often serve as dog whistles for sweeping neurochemical claims that link games to drug use. In several instances, it is hard to know if the expert is discussing gaming or gambling. The press also rarely acknowledges the joy, play, gratification, or entertainment that video games can provide.

5.3 Remedies

This section focuses on what remedies and intervention strategies for video game addiction are present in the discourse. It looks at how 'treatment' and 'recovery' are defined and interpreted in our sample, as well as the various therapeutic models and what approaches are deemed as ineffective for addressing the issue. It also examines the roles played by different treatment participants, such as medical professionals, parents, and gamers themselves, and how these roles impact how the treatment is viewed and put in place.

Individual Solutions and Treatment

Across our sample the prevention and rehabilitation of video game addiction is mainly put on the parents. They should control their children's screen time and intervene early to avoid the development of an addiction. If they fail they should seek professional help and forced detention camps and forced institutional care are not condemned but *presented as a reasonable reaction to the problem* of a child's addiction. Family intervention and "straight talks" about the negative consequences of their child's addiction is presented as effective. Parents should gather knowledge about the games, engage in physical activities with their children, and create one-sided contracts to enforce agreements about playtime. Complete abstinence may be necessary in severe cases, and social activities and real-life

interactions can be protective. The idea is that the children must learn self-control and self-discipline to avoid developing an addiction and "losing control" over their life.

Technology, Funding, and Research

For circumstances when parental control has "failed", it is common to hear arguments for the necessity for institutional and governmental remedies, such as treatment providers and treatment homes. Some stress the significance of acknowledging video game addiction as a public health issue and propose that the government should finance research and treatments. The lack of research is used as a reminder of how little is known about this addiction, sometimes in the context of concern about the unknown, and other times as a warning against utilising the addiction framework.

One text, A book review of Tom Chatfield's "Why games are the 21st century's most serious business" (2010) provided a glimpse of a possible alternate conceptualisation of video game addiction. In the review we learn that a large treatment centre in the Netherlands had realised, after two years and "a couple of hundred treatments", that their patients were not addicted to video games, but rather that their excessive play was a symptom of other problems.

Communication, Demography and Needs

The adolescent players do express a desire for better communication on a few occasions, but it is not embraced as a workable answer. A mother emphasises the importance of seeing video games from the players' point of view and how communication was a tool for that, however, the article later makes the point that it is insufficient. There is one instance of a player who, after speaking with a teacher, completely changes their gaming behaviour, but the player's self-control gets credited as making them do better. The most prevalent way to talk about communication is in the form of how video games create conflicts and how they cause the players to become aggressive and manipulative. The advice for parents on how to act to deal with their child's addiction does not take the player's age or any individual needs into consideration.

Rights, Interests, and Ethical Considerations

A consistent throughline of our sample is the implication that it is okay, even encouraged, to ignore the rights of children in order to protect them from the negative consequences of addiction. Players are forced into counselling, forced institutional care and even detox boot camps, with varying amounts of support from treatment providers, the press and even the public.

Root Causes

There is some recognition that video game addiction can be a symptom of underlying issues such as mental health problems or social isolation. A few voice the importance of addressing these root causes, rather than simply treating the addiction as an isolated problem. The most common view is that individuals turn to gaming as a way to escape real-life challenges and it can exacerbate existing problems by further isolating individuals from real-life social connections and experiences. However, there isn't a specific focus on addressing the root causes of video game addiction in the discourse, as it mainly discusses the experiences of gamers and the potential risks and benefits of gaming.

Actors, roles, and case studies

Treatment professionals, frequently joined by worried parents or former video game addicts, are some of the most prominent voices in this discourse. These people include professionals like psychologist Owe Sandberg, who had ties to a number of treatment centres, including Kolmården, Johan gården, and the Game Over gambling rehab facility. Patrik Wincent, a psychosynthesis therapist and founder

of Dataspelsakuten, a facility that specialises in treating video game addicts, is another prominent individual. Several treatment centres that focus on treating gambling addiction are also in our sample. These include Game Over, Reconnect, No Game, Johan gården, the Malmö adult psychiatry gambling disorder department, the Stockholm Stadsmission reception for young men, and Kolmården.

Various interest groups, such as Fairplay and GoodGame, are also important contributors to the discourse. Parents are regularly heard as well, frequently voicing their worries and concerns. Players' voices are also heard, including five people who have been treated and recovered from perceived video game addiction.

Additionally, researchers and governmental organisations like the Swedish Media Council (Statens Medieråd) contribute their thoughts on the topic. Each of these roles has its own perspective and area of interest, and the combination of these voices creates the discourse and understanding of video game addiction.

What Doesn't Work?

There are several approaches mentioned as being especially ineffective, for example sick leave, leaving the player to escape into the games, trusting their voice when the player says that they can stop gaming and acting as an enabler for the player. From the counter discourse some approaches are mentioned as harmful such as "pathologizing normal behaviours", viewing excessive gaming as an addiction when it is just a symptom, and using substance abuse models to explain excessive gaming.

5.4 Moral Panic

This result section is a summary of findings in the discourse on video game addiction, focusing on Goode and Ben-Yehuda's five characterizations of moral panic. Our sample of news articles reveals a general consensus that video game addiction is a significant and growing problem. The texts tend to exaggerate the issue's prevalence and severity, expressing alarmism. Hostility is directed towards parents, the state, and the healthcare system, while game developers and the industry are not held accountable. Assessing volatility in the discourse, we observe peaks in press mentions of video game addiction (2006, 2014, 2017) but also a persistent base level of interest since 2014.

Finally we recognize the presence of moral entrepreneurs or opportunists, such as treatment providers, who advocate for their services and promote normative views on children's activities. This phenomenon emerged prominently during our analysis, and its significant impact must be accounted for.

Consensus

Roughly a fifth of the articles in our sample reject the notion of video games being addictive and several of them argue against a moral panic that they perceive to be taking place. Nevertheless, there is an apparent consensus within a majority of the sample that video game addiction is a significant problem, with interest groups, treatment providers, experts, parents, and even the legal systems reinforcing this message. The journalists rarely question the experts and often adopt similar language - using drug comparisons, alarmist tones, confusing gambling / gaming - to bolster and support the experts' views on video game addiction.

Concern/Urgency

The articles exhibit a heightened level of concern about video game addiction, presenting it as a pressing social issue that needs immediate attention. They describe an escalating problem, with professional help being difficult to obtain, and note that countries like China and the USA are taking action, while Sweden is falling behind and not taking responsibility for the new generation. Expert opinions, recovered addicts and parent testimonies further emphasise the urgency and the need for early and swift action.

Disproportionality/Alarmism

The articles exaggerate the prevalence *and* severity of video game addiction by publishing poorly-sourced and inconsistent "reports" of "potentially addicted", while equating gaming addiction with substance abuse. They also regularly confuse gaming with gambling, potentially leading readers to believe that large amounts, perhaps most, children are at substantial risk of becoming gambling addicts.

The articles also suggest that video game addiction is a dangerous form of escapism that "traps" the player from the "real world", negatively impacting their education, careers and real-life relationships. Long-term exposure to video games seem to be the biggest risk factor in developing severe addiction, with consequences ranging from poor hygiene and sleeping habits, to suicide. Effective intervention is difficult because the gamer is perceived to be a uniquely violent and aggressive type of addict. Their reluctance and frustration supposedly means that they are already "lost" to the games, and is a key reason why parents must seek professional help early.

Hostility

Responsibility for the crisis is placed primarily on parents (specifically *mothers*), the state and healthcare system. Parents are criticised for enabling their children's gaming habits, and the state is accused of dodging responsibility and not providing necessary resources for research and treatment. Despite a vague notion that video games have "mechanisms" specifically "designed" to "trap" players, responsibility is not placed on game developers or the games industry.

Volatility

Our sampling method makes it difficult to evaluate whether the concerns over video game addiction have been fleeting or long lasting. However; applying our search terms to all news papers in the national library database, one can get a sense of the prevalence of press mentions of "video game addiction"(figure 2):

Figure 2

Svenska Dagstidningar
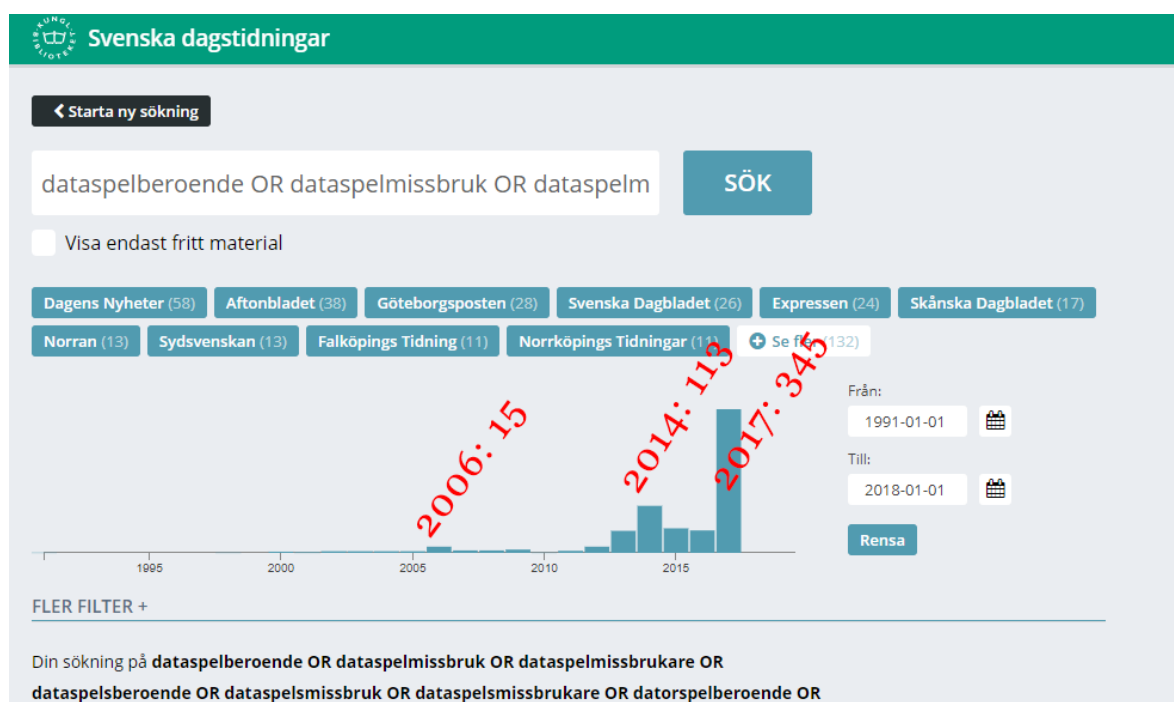
Note. Screenshot accessed 2023 from the national library database of print news.

The discourse does seem to have some peaks, and these become even more pronounced if we include web, tv and radio news (see Appendix A). It is noteworthy that the baseline level of interest remained elevated after 2014.

Moral Entrepreneurs

This section is not one of the five aspects, but is a finding from the data that can not be ignored. Throughout the sample several treatment providers emerge as something of moral entrepreneurs, including **Owe Sandberg** (Kolmårdens behandlingshem, Game Over, Johan gården/Linnebygdens behandlingshem, Fair Play), **Patrik Wincent** (Dataspelsakuten), **Oskar Foldevi** (Reconnect, previously at Game Over), Magnus Björk and Inger Lundberg (both at Game Over), and the interest organisation **Fair Play.**

These individuals and their organisations advocate for their own services and approaches to video game addiction treatment. They are also the people who provide the press with "warning signs" - list of addiction symptoms for parents to look out for. These lists of warning signs tend to promote a strongly normative view on what children ought to be doing with their time. The child ought to be outside in the "real world", studying or interacting with "real" friends. A compilation of all of these warning signs is provided in *Appendix B*.

According to these experts, we should demand that parents "take their responsibility" and "dare to take the fight" by restricting childrens' access to video games as early as possible. Adolescents' frustration when limiting their playtime is framed as withdrawal symptoms, and, if an adolescent is in denial about their addiction, this too is a sign the adolescent is in fact addicted and needs professional help.

6 Analysis

"My life results tripled the year I gave up hope
...and every game on my phone that had anything to do with farming."
Frankie Dart

Drawing upon the data from our sample, which is concisely summarised in the Results section, this segment examines the multiple conceptualizations of *The Addict, The Drug,* and *Remedies* within the discourse. These conceptualizations are put together and condensed into tropes, which illustrate the recurrent patterns we've noticed in how people talk about players, video games, and proposed solutions. We will also look at how the coverage of video game addiction in our sample may have assisted in the rise of moral panic.

6.1 The Addict

6.1.1 The Innocent Addict

The Innocent Addict is a combination of players who get depicted as young, lacking awareness of their own addiction, "they get angry and deny the problem"(Aftonbladet, 2004) and require parental intervention to help them "break the denial". An example is this advice from Patrik Wincent:

> Help the child break the denial. Video game addicts often become manipulative in order to continue playing. Breaking the denial requires knowledge, therapy, and admitting that they are powerless against video gaming.

> (Aftonbladet 2013)

This text paints a picture of young addicts who, due to their age and naivety, struggle to recognise their own addictive behaviours - they lack *insight* into their own illness. They can become manipulative in their attempts to maintain their gaming habits, even denying that there is a problem at all. This denial is explained as a powerful barrier to breaking free from their *addiction*. Overcoming it requires knowledge, therapy, and most importantly, the individual's own acknowledgment of their powerlessness over their gaming habits.

However, the young age and lack of insight of these innocent addicts mean that they are often not equipped to identify and tackle these issues on their own. They are not able to discern what constitutes excessive gaming, making it the responsibility of their guardians to be vigilant about the signs of addiction. This is why it is common to see articles ending with lists of telltale signs that parents or guardians should be on the lookout for. Headlines like "When has my child played enough? Here are 5 warning signs" (Aftonbladet, 2004) are intended to educate parents about the potential dangers of excessive gaming and help them intervene before it is too late.

These players are typically described as children, boys, and within the age range of 11-17, sometimes younger. This is the group that gets spoken for - the most. It's not uncommon for the authors to claim what *The Innocent Addict* thinks or feels. For example, the statement the manager Inger Lundberg of Game Over made *"- The young people rarely want to participate in such things, but often they know deep down that something is wrong.*"(Svenska Dagbladet, 2006) or this comment from Jan Löwdin, a licensed psychotherapist and team leader for the reception for young men at Stockhoim City Mission."Playing helps you *avoid feeling* what it feels like inside."(Svenska Dagbladet, 2017)

Even in the part of the discourse that is against video game addiction as a concept, "children" is used when talking about protecting the player, and it is more common to use "youth" when wanting to protect the person's integrity.

> Tobes' (M) statement misleads parents into believing that video gaming is the cause of Swedish youths' declining school results. (...) We can all wish that our children would spend more time on homework, but it is irresponsible to claim that if parents limit video gaming, this would automatically lead to more homework reading.
>
> (Dagens Nyheter 2014)

Within the context of family dynamics and support, family members of these young players frequently feel powerless in the face of the gaming addiction. They are described as having a sudden personality change, sudden isolation and disobedience followed by aggression.

The games are designated as the cause of conflicts and sometimes even physical fights between children and their parents. The dominant narrative is that the relationships within the family are strained, with parents worried about school performance and wanting their child to desire more family time while *the Innocent Addict* isolates themselves further.

When it comes to friends and social circles, *the Innocent Addicts* are described as suddenly sacrificing their real-life friendships and sport activities for video games, prioritising their in-game relationships over their offline connections. In terms of mental health and well-being, they are often portrayed as depressed, lonely, anxious, sleep deprived, and sometimes even suicidal as result of their "video game addiction".

The moral and ethical judgments that arise when discussing *the Innocent Addict* are mainly how their behaviours are considered problematic and pathological. Such behaviours include not obeying parents, isolation from social activities, and a decline in school performance. The message is often that it is crucial to teach young gamers the importance of balance, moderation, and self-control, while also encouraging them to engage in social activities, outdoor play, and sports. With no intervention, these players may experience failing grades and become unattractive to employers resulting in potential long-term economic difficulties because of their addiction.

6.1.2 The Sober Addict

The trope of *the Sober Addict* is a narrative that portrays players who have overcome addiction and embraced sobriety as strong and disciplined individuals who have taken control of their lives. This narrative typically validates the addict's past denial of their addiction and emphasises the importance of interventions in their recovery process.

The Sober Addict is characterised as having gained insight and self-awareness as a result of their addiction struggles. They have come to understand the negative impact of their addiction on their lives

and have taken responsibility for their actions. This newfound self-awareness has led to self-control and self-improvement, although relapses are still a possibility.

For parents, the reward of a sober child is a sense of relief and the hope that their child will have a more normal and successful life with improved social relationships, academic performance, and overall well-being. For *the Sober Addicts* themselves, the reward is freedom from addiction - to not be "a slave to the games", the opportunity to form meaningful relationships, and a sense of purpose in real-life activities.

> He says he has discovered the wonderful 'human contact in the real world' (. ...) The interest in psychology opened up a whole world. It showed that there is a meaning to my life. When I sit at the computer, life has no meaning, not in the long run. A game you play to the end, then it stops. Life becomes empty and you try to fill it with another game, but it doesn't work in the long run.
>
> (Aftonbladet, 2013)

Simply put, the trope of *the Sober Addict* portrays individuals who have overcome addiction as strong and disciplined individuals who have gained self-awareness and taken control of their lives. Similar to the religious perspective on addiction that Alexander (2010) elaborates on, they seem to have gone through a transformation akin to a spiritual awakening; *the Sober Addict* has found meaning, happiness, community and is looking forward to life. Their salvation came at a cost and they're hoping their testimony will help others facing the same struggle redeem themselves.

6.1.3 The Cautionary Tale

The Cautionary Tale trope serves to alert readers of the risks associated with excessive video game use, to validate the need for intervention by showing what happens when no one intervenes.

> It started innocently with the children's TV and computer games. And it ended with divorce, sick leave, and several surgeries for repetitive strain injury [musarm].
>
> (Svenska Dagbladet, 2000)

The Cautionary Tale, the long-term addicts are portrayed as often finding themselves increasingly isolated, their interest in maintaining relationships dwindles, and their social skills remain underdeveloped. There are numerous examples of long term addicts who choose to play video games alone, without any interest in spending time with family or making plans for the future. They may experience negative effects as a result of their seclusion and lack of socialisation, such as mental health problems, loss of identity and trouble adjusting to adulthood.

This isolation also extends to *the Cautionary Tales*' position in society. Not only are they detached from their immediate social circle, but they're also described as finding themselves unable to engage with the broader social structure. They are perceived as living "outside of society", incapable or uninterested in pursuing a career or building social relationships. This perception is echoed by Owe Sandberg's testimonies of young individuals dropping out of school due to excessive gaming and he illustrates the social isolation by using the example of a 25-year-old client who has never been on a romantic "date with a girl"(Svenska Dagbladet, 2006). Or as Oskar Foldevis puts it;

> For many, it is difficult to take charge of their lives. In the games, they are used to being among the best. Out in society, they end up further down the ladder. Some have a poor understanding of how society works, what demands are placed, and what opportunities exist. They haven't watched the news or read newspapers, haven't talked to others about jobs and studies, and have a poor grasp of what they

can do in life, according to Oskar Foldevis' experience. This means they lack goals and do not know what the purpose of their studies is, he says.

<div style="text-align: right">(Svenska Dagbladet, 2017)</div>

This emphasises the disparity between their virtual achievements and their real-life struggles, furthering their detachment from societal norms and expectations.Another aspect of *the Cautionary Tale* is the lack of illness awareness among addicts. As encapsulated in the following quotation;

> My son has never been interested in talking to anyone outside about his situation. He doesn't see it as a problem to be computer-dependent. Now that he's an adult, I can't force any external help on him, as long as he doesn't realize himself that he has an addiction that can lead to serious consequences.

<div style="text-align: right">(Dagens Nyheter 2012)</div>

This lack of insight into their own addiction can make intervention and recovery even more challenging. This troubling perception extends beyond the individual's mental health and seeps into every facet of their life. The story of the addicted son continues with that he doesn't spend any money on amusement, food, or clothing, spends all of his free time on his computer, and may even go several days without eating. Over time, his addiction got worse, which decreased his academic performance and he lost control over his life.

Additionally, there are financial repercussions. For instance, in the case of Bibbi, her behaviour caused her phone bills to soar to 10,000–12,000 kronor per quarter. Nobody could see what Bibbi was doing. She pretended to work when her children came over for a visit. (2000, Svenska Dagbladet) Another financial example is Pitcock that was forced to retire from football at the age of 24 owing to depression but most importantly video game addiction.“Pitcock played one season in the club. That was all. At 24 years old, he chose to retire. The reason for the early ending was that he was both depressed and video game addicted." (Aftonbladet, 2011)

There are also occasions when we are given more generalised warnings and prognostications of what would happen if no action is taken rather than specific examples. These examples of unmanaged video game addiction's negative effects serve as a warning, *the Cautionary Tale* - emphasising the need for intervention and assistance for those who struggle with "video game addiction".

6.1.4 The Healthy Gamer

The Healthy Gamer is a social one,who is able to balance in-game and real-life responsibilities. In contrast to the other player tropes, they're not playing games to run from problems but for enjoyment, community and relaxation.

> Gaming creates new structures of meaning and social contexts.(...) In a society where social cohesion is slipping further into Ferdinand Tönnies' anonymous Gesellschaft, it is liberating to become part of a band of conspiring adventurers. Our desire for connection in this regard cannot be overstated. This gives birth to new alliances, new loyalties.

<div style="text-align: right">(Svenska Dagbladet, 2009)</div>

This player is more varied in age and gender. We have several examples of parents playing games and also instances where the young player is compared to a young Zlatan, an athlete or a chess player. The young player's obsession is seen as a normal part of being a teenager.

6.2 The Drug

Throughout the sample we were able to identify several distinct, yet somewhat overlapping, conceptualizations of video games. Video games and the gaming habit are frequently likened to substance abuse, alcohol addiction and gambling addiction. A particular subset of this construction is one that we call "games as gateway drug", leading (children) into more severe addictions. There is a third conceptualization that sees video games as a new and unique kind of threat to our youth. Slightly less common is the idea of video games as childish, trivial and innocent. Least common is the frame put forth by what we call the "counter discourse": those defending video games or arguing against video game addiction tend to validate video games as something *productively* beneficial. This section explores these conceptualizations in more depth.

6.2.1 Traditional Drug

The most common conceptualization likens video games to substances and behavioural addictions such as drug use, alcoholism, and gambling. Experts in the field of addiction treatment, along with journalists, often use language that equates video games to these addictive substances and behaviours. Abstracting the relationship to gaming into brain chemicals is common even if the presented expert does not have any education around neuroscience. For example this explanation from Patrik Wincent:

> When a parent wants a child to turn off the console, it can become chaotic. Imagine it yourself. Here we have a digital machine that makes you feel good, and someone wants to take it away from you. Dopamine release increases by 200 percent during video games. It's the same level of elevation as during orgasm.
>
> (Aftonbladet, 2013)

The conceptualisation of games as drugs is also expressed in less explicit ways. The newspapers uncritically invite private treatment providers, specifically psychiatrists, psychologists or therapists as authorities on addiction and the only help available. Through their diagnostic criteria, "warning signs," and discussions on safe versus excessive gaming, they imply that "excessive" gaming leads to serious negative consequences as demonstrated in the trope of *the Cautionary Tale.*.

These experts are often accompanied by testimony from *the Sober Addict:* a former patient who is frequently brought along when the treatment providers are making their cases. Their story helps strengthen the framing of video games as dangerous.

Games as a Substance

The games are often explicitly compared to substances or plainly as " drug-like". The treatment providers use the language of drugs to describe and compare the addiction itself. For example in this quote where Owe Sandberg explains that video game addiction has the same signifiers as hashish addict.

> - At times, it develops into a true addiction exhibiting the same characteristics (. ...): withdrawal symptoms, tolerance development, and distorted perception of time. Like a hash addict entering their glass dome, they retreat into their own world, experiencing a near-intoxicating effect, explains Owe Sandberg.
>
> (Aftonbladet, 2004)

He describes the games as having the same isolating effect he believes hash has on its user. Other treatment providers make the comparison to substance abusers as a part of their argument that the state should do more. For example the statement from the treatment provider Magnus Björk, "The government doesn't even want to acknowledge that many youths engaged in video gaming have already developed an addiction and require treatment the same as drug-addicted people"(Dagens Nyheter, 2008). We also have the psychologist Martin Foster, who describes video games as "having their own life" and that "gaming addiction parallels other forms of dependency, and the support available mirrors approaches used in substance abuse treatment." and he is contrasting that to statements on excessive gaming being a symptom and not the cause (Dagens Nyheter, 2012).

However, the ones that are pushing the substance narrative the most are the newspapers themselves. Headlines such as *"Similarities with alcohol addiction", 'Stuck in video game addiction"*, or *"Back from their video game addiction"* are just few examples that are paired with body text including words like "abstinence", "relapse", "dopamine rush", "cravings" or just explicit statements like "the video game becomes like a drug.". The message a reader gets by the framing of the majority of the journalists is that video game addiction is in fact a real thing and that it looks very similar to substance addiction.

Games as a Gateway Drug

This perspective illustrates that video games, especially for children, can act as a stepping stone to more severe addictions or harmful behaviours. The idea is that excessive gaming can expose young people to other addictive substances or activities, ultimately leading to a spiral of increasingly dangerous behaviours and dependencies. As expressed by a treatment provider in our sample (Dagens Nyheter, 2008) "So the question is - what does Jan Nyren do to address the fundamental issue of young people getting stuck on *drug-like video games,* and potentially also falling prey to *gambling addiction*?" raising concern that video games may lead to a gambling addiction.

This portrayal of video games can create a sense of urgency among parents and society, as it suggests that gaming addiction is not just an isolated problem, but rather a precursor to more serious issues. For instance, early in the narrative of *the Recovered Addict* Bibbi, we can read how Bibbi misjudged the dangers of video games.

> It was during a visit there that Bibbi first saw the similarities between almost pathological computer use and addictions to alcohol, gambling, and betting. But no alarm bells rang for her own sake, 'TV and computer games seemed so harmless.
>
> (Svenska Dagbladet 2000)

Her narratives end dramatically with "But the scars on the wrist will never go away", implying self-harm, but the scars are from surgery for her repetitive strain injury.

Games as Gambling

It's often unclear if we are talking about video game addiction or gambling disorder. As an example, at the end of an article that has talked about video game addiction the journalist interviews Anders Håkansson, introduced as the first professor in addiction medicine specialised in gambling disorder. In addition to commenting on the importance of studying "video game addiction", Anders also talks about project "Spelglädje utan spelberoende" - which can be translated to "*Gambling* Joy without *Gambling* Disorder" but this translation is also correct "*Gaming* Joy without *Gaming* Addiction".

The project "Spelglädje utan spelberoende" is currently being conducted in collaboration with Blekinge Institute of Technology. In this project, the aim is, among other things, to measure the playing experience and identify the components that make players hooked. " Currently, this expertise exists in the commercial sector and is used by game designers in the gaming industry. The dream is to be able to use this knowledge in the future to incorporate restraining signals within games." Previous studies have shown that approximately 1-2 percent of all computer gamers could be said to have a possible video game addiction.

(Svenska Dagbladet, 2017)

There is no way to know just by reading the article if the project is about *gambling* or *gaming*. Reading about the project on Blekinge Institute of Technology doesn't make things clearer:

The research project is within an area that spans across multiple research disciplines, where there is currently a noticeable research gap and lack of communication between ("spelteknisk") gambling / video game technical research and medical addiction research. The ambition is to develop a research collaboration in which we can connect clinical aspects of ("spelberoendemekanismer") gambling/video game addiction mechanics and correlate them with measurements of ("spelinlevelse") gaming experience, ("spelbeteende") gambling/gaming behaviour, and addiction mechanisms in an experimental environment, and relate the research findings to ("spelutveckling") gambling/game development for("spelglädje") gambling/gaming enjoyment without ("spelberoende") gambling disorder/ video game addiction.

(Blekinge Tekniska Högskola, 2016)

The project was, however, funded by Svenska Spel, the Swedish states' gambling company at the time.

Another example of the confusion is in a list of five signs to answer the question, "when has my child played enough?" where the last bullet point states "denies ("spelberoende") *gambling/gaming* addiction." (Aftonbladet, 2004). Or how Owe Sandberg can be introduced as the specialist in *video game addiction* and then, at the end of the same text, be listed as an addiction therapist specialised in ("spelberoende") *gambling/gaming* addiction. Linköping municipality's decision to write a contract with Game Over, a church owned (Stadsmissionen i Linköping, 2003) treatment facility for gambling disorder, in order to address the increase of "video game addicts" also blurred the line between *gaming* and *gambling* addiction (Svenska Dagbladet 2006). Even early perspectives highly critical of "video game addiction" as a concept adds to this confusion by using ("spelberoende") gambling/gaming addiction when they mean "video game addiction".

This is probably one of the reasons for why these treatment providers could enter the discussion around "video game addiction" and claim expertise without having the relevance for their experience questioned.

6.2.2 A New Unknown

This concept portrays video games as a novel and dangerous danger to children that traps players in a virtual world. In this context, the word "virtual" has an unfavourable connotation that contrasts with what is thought to be the "real" world. A clear headline poses the question, "Is gaming more enjoyable than real life?," before providing the assertive response: "-Yes, for many it is".This contradiction is exemplified by reports such as a mother's testimony concerning her son's withdrawal from society. She describes how the characters from his video game became his "real" friends and how his love of the online world began to outweigh his real life. The worry that playing video games could skew players' perceptions of reality is clearly expressed by this story.

Video games as otherworldly are also amplified by voices in the discourse that are less critical of games. For example, the author Nicklas Lundblad headline for his letter is "The world faces competition from virtual Azeroth." and he described in detail some of how the world in World of Warcraft works, not only how game mechanics surrounding death affects the players investment but also how the social world differs, that there are communities and tribes within the game. He makes the argument that even if one doesn't like video games there is much to learn from them. He painted the picture of World of Warcraft as something completely unique and new.

A danger that has been repeatedly mentioned by the various treatment providers, is that the player can lose the ability to do anything that is not instantly gratifying, and as a result lose their ability to operate in the real world. A psychologist gives an example of how finding your coat or participating in discussion at the dinner table can be too big of a task because of how much harder it has become to motivate oneself due to too much gaming.

> The risk with gaming is that it becomes harder to motivate oneself to do things in real life. Such as calling a friend or finding your coat to go out - doing all those tedious tasks before the fun part. In games, the fun is just two clicks away. (...) In games, there is always a goal, a problem to solve, which is not the case at the dinner table. Many people find that descriptive conversations are not as interesting, says Oskar Foldevi.
>
> (Aftonbladet, 2016)

Additionally, most of the treatment providers claim that a distinct attribute, specific to video games, is that excessive gaming can hinder social competence, while, within the gaming environment, they possess a remarkable sense of confidence. Resulting in a deficiency in interpersonal skills that can manifest as fearfulness in real-world scenarios, where individuals may feel too intimidated to socialise, visit a cinema or embark on travels. Dataspelsakuten describes how the player loses the ability to enjoy spending time with others.

> Suddenly, he/she is an adult with social skills like a 10-year-old. He doesn't know how to behave around friends, how to talk to someone in a close relationship, or how to simply enjoy the company of friends.
>
> (Svenska Dagbladet, 2017)

The virtual world is rewarding in the *same way* drugs are, but unlike regular addictions, it is difficult to detect when someone is 'trapped' in the virtual world - there are no smells or physical signs of the "substance abuse". The games are uniquely designed based on "all the knowledge that behavioural scientists have about how we function" and the developers are using this competence to create a product that hooks the player.

The treatment providers also suggest that "video game addicts" are uniquely resistant to help and may display *violent* behaviour. A manager from Game Over explains how the aggressive reaction is a completely new behaviour:

> - When parents try to limit gaming, they are met with great aggression. We haven't encountered this phenomenon among other gambling addicts. It can even lead to physical fights," says Inger Lundberg, supervisor and therapist.
>
> (Svenska Dagbladet, 2012)

This is another example of the linguistic confusion in Swedish and it is used to downplay the fact that "other gambling addicts" are adults who must choose to attend the treatment, whereas the "video game addicts" are adolescents who are likely to have been forced into treatment by their parents or through

the legal system. It would be similar to an adult who does not consider themselves a gambling addict, *having their poker game abruptly interrupted* by their parents unplugging the computer. Would it truly be the absence of the game, or is it the exercise of power that would upset him?

6.2.3 A Toy

Throughout the sample, video games are often portrayed as childish, trivial, and innocent activities. This view positions games as simple pastimes that offer little value or substance for players, especially when compared to more traditional hobbies or sports. The discourse surrounding video games as childish activities emphasises the notion that gaming is a mere diversion rather than a meaningful pursuit and/or taking away from meaningful conversations that could be happening.

> Five little white Game Boy games paralyse all intellectual activity on Roxette's newly started world tour. Discussions are not about money, pop, and politics. Rather, they revolve around how to get the highest score in Tetris, the art of fitting together falling blocks, or in Super Mario 3, which involves guiding the heroes Mario and Luigi through as many worlds as possible.
>
> (Expressen, 1991)

The language used to describe games often focuses on their triviality, presenting them as simple toys or time-wasters. This portrayal disregards the potential benefits or nuances of gaming, casting it as an immature hobby that is less valuable than other more productive ways to spend one's free time. For example, games are frequently contrasted with activities like football, which are seen as more natural, healthy, and pro-social.

When video games are discussed as social activities, they are often mentioned in passing or as part of an individual's personal experience, rather than as a broader, more general aspect of gaming culture. This tendency to minimise the social aspect of gaming reinforces the perception that games are childish and insignificant. In some instances, games are framed as innocent and harmless, which can be seen as a positive aspect but this framing also contributes to the perception that gaming is a superficial activity that does not warrant serious consideration or respect. The framing of Bibbi's early "addictive behaviours" is one example of the view of games as innocent.

> The husband was not as thrilled. "Bested by Mario again tonight," he wrote in his diary, as Bibbi, like many other evenings, had gone over to the neighbour's wife and played electronic games until late into the night.
>
> (Svenska Dagbladet, 2000)

The example of a game character marketed for children, combined with diary writing and that Bibbi wasn't out to meet the neighbour but the neighbours wife like how children are playing with the neighbours kids paints the picture of a kind of childish conflict. In this article it serves as a warning to not be fooled by innocent appearances.

6.2.4 The Productive Games

A minor part of the discourse discusses some of the positive aspects of video games. The social elements are one thing that are recurring as a strength. It has frequently been painted as the connections in the game are of less value than those in "real life" and that video games take advantage of group pressure in order to make the player addicted but in some instances the social part of gaming has been talked about as something just positive. "Video games can be a fun way to socialise" is listed

as one of five positive things with games and in the same article a player tells about his social online experiences.

> He argues that even online friendships can become deep and enduring, and above all, it is quicker to become close to each other online. - Online, there isn't as much at stake in revealing oneself. Therefore, it often becomes easier to discuss emotions online.

<div align="right">(Aftonbladet 2004)</div>

However, the strongest and least controversial theme in this discourse is that video games can be productive in some ways and improve skills. Skills which are mentioned include improved English, concentration, problem solving, spatial thinking and building a stronger sense of self esteem. Such as Karin Rebas' text where she author argues against "video game addiction" as a concept, and acknowledges parents' concerns but counters that video games can have positive effects.

> Indeed, it is true that many parents are concerned - for example, a Gallup survey last year revealed that nearly half of the parents believe their children play too much. However, according to research, gaming often has positive effects. Those who engage in gaming enhance their reaction skills, improve problem-solving abilities, and develop spatial thinking.
>
> <div align="right">(Dagens Nyheter 2006)</div>

The category that we are missing is the fun and joyful games. There are some representations in more miniscule ways, such as mentions of family *WII sports*, a mother playing *Angry Birds*, and parents and children playing *Tetris* together.

6.2.5 What games are not

It is made abundantly clear throughout the discourse that video games are not sport. In particular, video games are not football. This dichotomy between sports and video games is essentially ever-present, so we have to surmise that sports are thought of as a constructive, healthy, sensible way to spend one's leisure time while video games are not that. Unlike the active engagement and teamwork inherent to sports, video games are depicted as passive, isolating, and unproductive.

> If you're part of a study circle or play football, it's more directly connected to other people in society. However, gaming is so isolated, and the progress you make and experiences you have there are difficult to share with someone outside of it.
>
> <div align="right">(Svenska Dagbladet 2017)</div>

The argument being made is that, in contrast to discussing one's football victories, one's gaming accomplishments are so uninteresting that it cuts one off from society. An alternative perspective might be to suggest that adults don't dismiss the interests of adolescents, but rather choose to acknowledge, recognize and engage with what teenagers find important. Furthermore, the argument that Oskar Foldevi makes in this quote implies that gamers are not "people in society" but football players are.

The reason for why people play games is not explained as video games having something of value to offer.

> But why do people play so much? It's complex, according to Oskar Foldevi. [video games] offer the opportunity to experience flow... You become one with the game, performing at your best, and being

just challenged enough. Moreover, games are designed to be as motivating as possible, utilising all the knowledge behavioural scientists have about how we function.

<div align="right">(Svenska Dagbladet, 2017)</div>

Despite being described as near all-powerful motivation machines, video games are not useful and can not be made to serve a meaningful purpose. Video games are not educational, video games do not have artistic merit, and despite being experiences constructed by humans, the games seem to carry no meaning. The players are never engrossed in narrative, sense-pleasure, or aesthetics. In this discourse children *consume* video games rather than *play* them - there is no recognition that game play can provide genuine connection, sense of competence, or progression. Variations of the phrase "[just] sitting in front of the computer" appear frequently, implying that games are passive, repetitive, unimportant and inscrutable - akin to saying of a carpenter that she "held a hammer all day".

6.3 Remedies

There are two proposed solutions to video game addiction that are dominating the discourse. We refer to these as *the Tough Parental Love* and *the Professional Care*. There are other warnings against embracing the media's addiction models, the danger of pathologizing normal behaviour, and the fact that video game addiction is used as a scapegoat to mask more serious systemic problems. Excessive gaming should be seen as a symptom rather than a disorder, according to these viewpoints. (Expressen, 2010, 2012), (Dagens Nyheter, 2014).

We have also text mentioning the Swedish cases of forced institutional care, and concentration camps in China. There are no journalists questioning whether these are appropriate reactions, instead they invite treatment providers, presented as experts, advising parents to force their kids into counselling and amplifying the fear (Svenska Dagbladet 2012).

6.3.1 The Tough Parental Love
Parents frequently emerge as the central figures in preventing, addressing, and resolving the perceived issue of "video game addiction". The dominant narrative surrounding their role can be encapsulated as *the Tough Parental Love* which is all about a necessity for parents to employ firm strategies in order to effectively manage their kid's gaming habits and addiction.

What the reader can understand to be the most important task for the parents is for them to control their childs' time spent in the games. It's critical to start managing at an early age in order to limit the exposure. There are many concrete suggestions on limiting how many hours and that any trespassing of the time limits should have consequences. Parents are quoted stating regrets about not being harder on controlling their kids' time.

> In hindsight, Lisbeth realises that she should have set clear boundaries when Kalle was young. "I would have allowed one hour of gaming, no more. I would have encouraged him to play and not let him sit and play alone. (...) But I didn't initially understand the harm it could cause, and it's very easy to let it continue, thinking it's okay."

<div align="right">(Aftonbladet, 2013)</div>

This highlights the necessity for parents to be proactive and vigilant in regulating their children's gaming behaviours. It is not merely about setting time limits, but also about understanding the *potential impacts* of an addiction and intervening when necessary. Lisbeths regrets emphasise the idea of the importance of parents being equipped with *the right* knowledge about "video game addiction", and be aware of its telltale signs. Information about video game addiction and its telltale signs are either listed in the articles or recommendation to visit websites of treatment facilities that specialise in gambling addiction. An example of a list of signs, this one is from Game Over:

> Signs of excessive gaming:
>
> ▪ Neglect of sleep, diet, school, social contacts, and/or personal hygiene.
> ▪ Aggressiveness towards anyone who interrupts the gaming.
> ▪ Reversed sleep schedule - gaming occurs during the night.
> ▪ Withdrawal symptoms and relapses.

<div align="right">(Svenska Dagbladet, 2012)</div>

These lists are never accompanied with reminders that they are not diagnostic, or any suggestion for the parent to try to understand their child's point of view or even advising the parents to consult with a professional if they suspect their child is struggling with a gaming addiction.

Following these types of lists, it is common to see advice aimed at the parents for what to do when an adolescent is already in the throes of addiction. The narrative emphasises that the most urgent task for parents is to help their child *acknowledge* their addiction. It suggests that family intervention, where parents express the negative impact of the child's addiction on them, can be a powerful tool for bringing awareness to the issue or if that doesn't work "force them to counselling if needed" (Svenska Dagbladet 2012).

When the child has started to identify with the label of addict the instructions are that it is important to "help the child break the behaviour" and be prepared for abstinence symptoms "let them be bored" (Aftonbladet, 2013). Establishing contracts and promises between parents and their child is a commonly recommended strategy to set agreements on limiting gaming time(demonstrating the extent to which parents are expected to control and monitor their child's gaming habits).

> **Write a game contract** [headline]
> But first, you need to acknowledge together that there are negative consequences of gaming, such as family arguments about gaming, neglecting school, or other issues. In the contract, the following should be stated:
>
> 1. The maximum amount of time allowed for computer use each day.
> 2. The designated days that will be screen-free.
> 3. The specific actions or behaviours that can be rewarded with additional computer time.
> <div align="right">(Aftonbladet, 2004)</div>

The same article also lists "Difficulty adhering to rules. He/she breaks agreements about times in front of the computer, doesn't turn off when prompted, doesn't come and eat because he/she wants to 'finish playing'." as one of five signs of "video game addiction". The parents are also instructed to be vigilant in identifying potential manipulative tactics, lies and excuses, employed by the addict. Parents are advised to remain alert to not fall for any tricks. Patrik Wincents reminds the reader that "Video game addicts often become *manipulative* in order to continue playing"(Aftonbladet, 2013).

'Bad' parents, in this discourse, are depicted as permissive or neglectful, failing to impose limits on their child's gaming or even enabling excessive gaming habits.They may be characterised as distant, uninvolved, and/or naively enabling their child's obsessive behaviours or as anxious of their child's possible boredom if video games are taken away. Owe Sandberg talks about parents acting as enablers, facilitating the addictive behaviour by providing means and opportunities for the player. Such parents, according to this discourse, perpetuate the problem rather than addressing it.

> Owe Sandberg talks about 25-year-old clients who have never dated girls. At the same time, he points out that parents have been "enablers". "One horror example was an unemployed guy whose dad paid the rent, the mom brought food, and the grandmother cleaned," he says.
>
> (Svenska Dagbladet 2006)

In stark contrast, 'good' parents are those who take the perceived issue of video game addiction seriously. They are portrayed as vigilant, active, and firm, willing to enforce strict rules, establish gaming contracts, and even compel their child into treatment if necessary. Such parents are upheld as models of effective guardianship, their tough love approach seen as the solution to avert or overcome a child's gaming addiction.

However, this dichotomy presents an overly simplistic view, leaving little room for the complexity of parenting and the uniqueness of each child's situation. It places an immense burden on parents, making them the sole responsible party for managing their child's potential addiction and setting them up to discipline instead of cooperating with their child.

This narrative tends to ignore the importance of a diversity of professional perspectives, fails to recognize the multiple parts of the adolecent's behaviours and experiences, and mostly downplays the value of understanding the players' own perspectives. It fails to take into account how larger social issues might be impacting their intense interest in video games, as well as their particular socio-cultural and neurodiverse circumstances, including the age of the player.

And if the parents are unable to exert control over their child's alleged video game addiction, the other option is...

6.3.2 The 'Professional' Care

The conceptualization of *the Professional Care* for treating video game addiction in this discourse can be primarily attributed to three distinct sources:

1. In the early part of the discourse we have the psychologist Owe Sandberg and the treatment facilities that he oversaw, such as Kolmården, Johan gården and the gambling treatment centre Game Over.
2. Later on, in the second wave of the discourse, we see statements from Patrik Wincent, a psykosyntesterapeut and founder of Dataspelsakuten, a treatment centre.
3. Throughout our sample we have treatment providers with backgrounds in specialising in gambling addiction, these are: Game Over, Reconnect, No Game, Johan gården, the adult psychiatry department for gambling disorder in Malmö, and the reception for young men at Stockholm Stadsmission and Kolmården.

These sources converge to form a unified approach to tackling video game addiction, which we shall henceforth refer to as *the Professional Care*.

The perspective is from a medical model where video game addiction is explicitly compared with gambling addiction, alcoholism and substance abuse. Like Magnus Björk from Game Over writes in his letter to Dagens Nyheter (2008) "The government does not even want to acknowledge that many gaming-addicted youths have already ended up with an addiction and require treatment, just like people addicted to drugs.". The services they provide are talk-therapy and long-term institutional care. Some of the treatment providers emphasise the importance of involving the entire family.

What the professional intervention entails is far less defined than the advice given to parents. There is a consensus that most of the addicts cannot escape computers or the internet so they have to learn to tolerate some amount of exposure. The addict must therefore take accountability and learn self-control. If the parents have not managed to teach these skills or if the addict is an adult, teaching those skills are part of what *the Professional Care* can offer. CBT is by far the most mentioned therapy form, and promises to give the addict the tools and techniques to "take back control" of their life.

> The method is called cognitive-behavioural therapy, which means that the focus is placed on the behaviour and what can be done about it - not on why it has arisen - Partly, it's about learning self-control techniques, programming in different behaviours, and finding alternatives to sitting down at the computer. It may sound like brainwashing, and in a way, that's what it is," says Owe Sandberg.
> (Svenska Dagbladet, 2000)

Even though CBT is a common treatment option in Sweden during this time these treatment providers are often framed as being uniquely capable and are "*one of few*" who understands this issue."At the moment, there is virtually no help available." says Magnus Björk, working at Game Over (Dagens Nyheter, 2008) ending the letter with a prompt that the government must finance more treatment . The lack of research is also often mentioned, that the science is "scarce," "perfunctory," "nonexistent," "inadequate"or under-financed paired with arguments like ""The children are involved in an experiment." or "the youth are left to their own devices". These treatment providers are painted as pioneers at addressing this issue and there is no recognition or mention of other professionals with different perspectives or knowledge. We even get examples of mothers trying to get help from the usual channels but having their worries invalidated. For example the mother who sent in a letter talking about her adult son's situation, she explains:

> During his teenage years, I sought help from child psychologists, social services, and school counsellors. However, I didn't receive any understanding or support regarding my concerns about his gaming. "All teenagers spend time in front of the computer," was the response I received.
> (Dagens Nyheter, 2012)

And her story is echoed by statements of how video game addiction is a fast growing problem and yet it is hard to get professional help. "Many desperate parents call us and don't know what to do," says Inger Lundberg from Game Over, after she had just explained that she wishes that "video game addiction" would be viewed as any other substance or gambling addiction which would require the municipalities to offer treatment. Success stories, *the Recovered Addict*, are frequently used to try and validate both the effectiveness and need of these treatment methods.

6.4 Moral Panic

Based on our sample the press coverage of video game addiction has displayed several characteristics of a moral panic.

The press will frequently repeat alarmist quotes in the headline, "Shawn played himself to death", "Boys gamble away their lives," "The children are involved in an experiment," "The government turns a blind eye to youth gambling addiction," "Kalle got caught in a gambling addiction when he was 14 years old," "Expert: Addictions have increased.", which might induce fear and anxiety among readers - particularly parents. The texts, whether written by journalists or produced by a third party, often include exaggerated claims of how common the problem "might" be:

> There are no reliable figures on the extent of the problem of TV and computer game addiction in Sweden. Owe Sandberg, a specialist in internet and computer game addiction, estimates that the number of affected individuals could be around 30,000

> (Aftonbladet 2004)

These numbers and claims are never questioned by the press, and they are used to imply that video game addiction is a huge and pressing issue. Together, they paint a troubling picture of video game addiction, indicating that it is a serious problem that "may affect up to 40,000 Swedes", possibly more, and that it is not unique to Sweden (Svenska Dagbladet 2000), (Aftonbladet 2004), (Svenska Dagbladet, 2004). Studies demonstrating high rates of gaming addiction in the US and China, as well as treatment providers providing anecdotal statements highlighting the devastating effects of such addiction (Svenska Dagbladet 2000) (Dagens Nyheter 2008) (Expressen 2008) (Aftonbladet 2013). These exaggerated claims can cause unwarranted fear among parents and policy makers, leading them to impose unnecessary restrictions on children's media habits or to misinterpret normal gaming behaviour as addictive.

6.4.1 Press Conflating Gaming and Gambling

The press typically turns to a small group of treatment providers when they need comments on video game addiction. These treatment providers frequently make definitive comments that frames the concerns into an addiction narrative, rarely providing any alternative interpretations. For example this statement, from a manager at Game Over, on the case where a teenage boy got forced into institutional care:

> The verdict does not indicate what the boy was consumed by, but he had reversed his sleep schedule, neglected school, and experienced poor mental well-being. These are typical signs of video game addiction, according to Inger Lundberg.

> (Svenska Dagbladet 2012)

Despite having zero insight into the legal case or knowing anything about the people involved, Inger Lundberg is allowed to speculate, provide a list of symptoms for this type of addiction and advise parents to "be observant and persistent", to "force [your children] into treatment".

We find it noteworthy how the press does not bother to clear up the linguistic ambiguity between "(data)spelsmissbruk" and "spelmissbruk,".This lack of clarity might explain why all of their experts specialise in ("spelmissbruk") gambling addiction, indicating that the press may struggle to distinguish between the two. Despite the fact that the academics and treatment specialists who work with "spelmissbruk" frequently seem to be talking about video games, they are almost always talking about gambling. One particularly troubling instance can be found in Svenska Dagbladet (2017), where professor Anders Håkansson, a gambling researcher and unit manager of the adult psychiatry

department for gambling disorder in Malmö, is presented and mentioned in a piece about video game addiction as if his work is pioneering in the field of video game addiction. He was at this time working on a gambling research project founded by Svenska Spel - the Swedish gambling monopoly.

> Anders Håkansson is the unit manager for the gambling addiction clinic in Malmö and the first professor in addiction medicine specializing in gambling addiction. (...) In collaboration with Blekinge Institute of Technology, the project "Gaming Joy without Gaming Addiction" is ongoing. (...) Previous studies indicate that around 1-2 percent of all gamers could be considered to have potential gaming addiction.
>
> (Svenska Dagbladet 2017)

This semantic shift helps legitimise these experts' status on the subject and effectively shuts out any other professional perspective. Notably the press never invites a pedagogue, social worker, coach or school counsellor. The discourse is framing excessive play as a significant threat to children and teenagers, despite never including the perspective of those who work closely with children and teenagers. The effects of this are that excessive gaming is always framed by the traditional medical disease model of addiction. And even though many of these treatment providers show an awareness that they know that these video games are designed by someone they're not brought up as an actor to have a discussion with.

> - Yes, but the games are designed to hook us. The player must invest many hours to reach a certain ranking, a position that is lost if you take a longer break from gaming," says Patrik Wincent, psycho-synthesis therapist and CEO of the Video Game Emergency Clinic.
>
> (Svenska Dagbladet, 2017)

Furthermore, by excluding the perspectives of game developers, designers and researchers the discourse is largely unable to recognize the diversity and value of video games as a highly social pastime, a cultural expression, a complex bearer of ideas. Video games remain an abstract threat with no discernible features or specific modes of inducing dependence.Perhaps this explanation lies behind why "video game" and "video game addiction" seem to have so many logical equivalents within the discourse. Terms such as "video game", "internet", "computer", "social media", and "screen" are used interchangeably throughout our sample. This suggests that they are all viewed as potential gateways to addiction. However, this perspective fails to differentiate the varying uses of "screen time", which can include office work, socialising with friends online, shopping on the internet, and playing video games. By not acknowledging these differences, it implies that the specific features or benefits of video games are not the point of concern. Instead, they, along with other digital mediums, are collectively reduced to an abstract danger, often presented as some version of *the Traditional Drug*. This prevalent simplification suggests a lack of basic understanding of these different mediums and their unique roles and value to people's life.

6.4.2 The Traditional Addiction Narrative

The Traditional Drug is an element of the frequently occurring narrative trope is what we refer to as the *traditional addiction narrative*. Which is a powerful and familiar story structure, a compelling narrative, with clear stages and roles, and it can make complex issues seem more understandable. The trope is to frame *the Recovered Addict's* personal narrative as a hero's journey in the battle against a serious affliction, a challenge in self-discipline that they only barely conquered thanks to the help and wisdom of the mentor or in this case the psychologist. Bibbi's story in Expressen (2000) is one example:

The "call to adventure" or the start of the issue is where Bibbi, despite her husband's warnings and her own observations of the parallels between excessive gaming and other addictions, fails to see the danger in her developing gaming habit and instead views it as an innocent hobby:

> The children found it fun to have a mother who liked video games and Nintendo - at first. (...) "My husband disliked my interest from early on," explains Bibbi Rönn. She herself did not realise the problem at all, back then ten years ago. (...) It was during a visit [to Kolmården Treatment Center] that Bibbi first saw the similarities between excessive computer use and addiction to alcohol, gambling, and drugs. But there was no warning bell ringing for her own sake, "TV and video games felt so innocent." Bibbi continued playing in the evenings, while the workload increased at her job.

The "descent into the underworld," or the escalation of the issue, occurs after that. Bibbi's gaming progresses to the point that she spends 16–17 hours per day online, disregarding her financial obligations and personal commitments.

> At its worst, Bibbi was online for 16-17 hours per day. I basically only went out to buy coffee and cigarettes. Then I would rush back home. (...) The phone bills skyrocketed, 10,000 - 12,000 kronor per quarter was completely normal. No outsider knew what Bibbi was up to.

The *meeting with the mentor* takes place when Bibbi eventually meets with psychologist Owe Sandberg, who, like a mentor on a hero's journey, recognises her issue and offers the help she needs. This sets Bibbi on the *road of trials*, where she gradually cuts back on her activity while also having to deal with the challenge of cutting ties with her online friends.

> In the end, Bibbi got an appointment with psychologist Owe Sandberg at Kolmården Treatment Center. He, too, was initially a bit sceptical but soon recognized the similarities with other forms of addiction. (...) After a few months, Bibbi reduced her computer time to a maximum of one hour per day. Eventually, she also managed to disconnect from her online friends. Today, over a year later, she feels free. "Some days, I don't turn on the computer at all. Sometimes I chat for 10-15 minutes, but it doesn't give me anything anymore." Bibbi is working again.
>
> (Svenska Dagbladet 2000)

The "return," or recovery, occurs when Bibbi, after a year, feels free of her addiction. She can now manage her computer usage habits and even spend days without turning it on. Her return to work represents her successful reintegration into her former life, this time as a more mature, stronger individual who has overcome her addiction. The addiction made her lose her husband: "We had a major argument, and in that moment, I felt that the Internet was more important than my husband." and when she overcame her struggles the journalist writes that she gained a new man "Bibbi is working again. (...) And she has met a new man." This aligns with the hero's transformation as she returns home at the end of the hero's journey.

The addiction journey narrative has numerous advantages for Owe Sandberg, the press, and the journalist. This story reinforces Owe Sandberg's role as a specialist and a crucial mentor in the course of healing, reinforcing his professional credibility. The addiction narrative is an engaging story structure for the press and journalists that appeals to readers' emotions and provides a distinct, dramatic arc of struggle and salvation. It offers a clarified knowledge of a complicated problem, making it easier for a large audience to grasp. Additionally, many readers may relate to the story of overcoming adversity, which boosts reader engagement and may increase readership. Journalists can also describe the problem as a societal issue via this narrative, which may draw more attention and generate debate.

As a contrast, a completely different way to frame Bibbi's journey could have been as a tale of social support and connection discovered in a video gaming community. That Bibbi found comfort in her online network, a place where friendships grew and mutual support thrived, despite the mounting demands of her work. This was not an escape, but rather a point of connection that gave her strength to deal with the challenges of daily life. However, her significant time spent online drew concern and she was led to believe that she was suffering from a gaming addiction. Owe Sandberg, advised Bibbi to limit her time spent playing video games and interacting online. Although well-intentioned, this strategy may have neglected the significance of these links for Bibbi and possibly increased her sense of isolation during her burnout.

This alternative interpretation of Bibbi's narrative is not an attempt to reclaim any "objective truth", but rather to illustrate the diverse perspectives that the media could have taken when discussing her experience. In aligning her story with a conventional addiction narrative, we run the risk of distorting our understanding of her reality and oversimplifying complex human experiences. For example, Owe's treatment strategy centred on restricting Bibbi's online activities rather than recognising her online community as an important source of social support. Inadvertently cutting her off from a network that might have offered her much-needed empathy and friendship. Her personal story could have show how important it is to understand the nuanced role that online communities may play in people's lives, especially in tough circumstances.

Framing Bibbi's story as an addiction narrative might have been harmful to her in a number of ways. Cutting her off from her online group, a source of social support and connection might not be the best approach. She may have felt more alone and isolated as a result of the treatment because it classified this sort of connection as a component of an addiction. Secondly, by characterising her intense gaming and online activities as an addiction, it may have been difficult to identify and understand the true sources of her stress and burnout. This can result in these underlying problems not getting sufficient help or treatment. Also labelling as an addict has a significant stigma, which might have affected Bibbi's perception of herself and her self-worth. This may result in feelings of guilt or shame. An addiction narrative might oversimplify a complicated problem.

For the addiction narrative to work there is no need to include more perspectives on understanding the drug, *it is already understood*. The solution to the problem is already *defined*, it is clear and *simple. Just be more self-disciplined - it is not interesting to understand the past, just look forward.* By framing an activity like gaming as an addiction, the narrative can amplify perceptions of its dangers. It creates the excuse for the press to use sensational headlines like "Boys gamble/game [swedish: "spelar"] away their lives." or "Shawn gambled/gamed [swedish: "spelade"] himself to death".

In order to make the narrative fit the addiction frame journalists will sometimes even reverse causality. Quinn Pitcock retired from American football due to being "depressed and a video game addict". Despite quoting Pitcock explaining that he picked up the game controller to help him deal with his depression, the article headline frames his return as one from addiction; "Back - from his video game addiction"(Aftonbladet 2011). Similarly, a case of a teenager from Dalsland, being taken into custody and placed in a developmental home due to what was framed as video game addiction distorts the real issues at hand.

> The boy, who lives in Dalsland, has been taken into custody according to LVU, the law concerning the care of young individuals, and placed in a developmental home. The reason - excessive computer gaming that has gotten out of control.
>
> (Expressen 2006)

The press chose to ask a manager from the gambling treatment centre Game Over to speculate on the case: "The verdict does not specify what the boy was consumed by, but he had reversed his sleep schedule, neglected school, and experienced poor mental health. These are typical signs of video game addiction according to Inger Lundberg." And the law, LVU, under which he was taken, revolves around the question of whether a young person's conditions pose a threat to their health or development, not simply the existence of a potential addiction. This crucial aspect is lost in translation, allowing the addiction narrative to stand unchallenged.

This oversimplification can have serious consequences, as it allows the blame for complex issues to be casually placed on "video games", while advising parents to take a "tougher" stance with their children. The underlying conflicts or issues, such as in this case, the physical violence between the boy and his dad are then overlooked. It is deeply concerning that media narratives can so easily attribute these issues to video games, promoting punitive measures against children, instead of addressing the more complex family and societal dynamics at play. This, in turn, perpetuates the addiction narrative, feeding the public's fear and misunderstanding of video games and their impact on young people.

Another consequence of this classical addiction narrative is that the story requires the addict to recognize their addiction, before their heroic struggle can commence. The narrative explains addiction as something that changes the person's personality and ability to see the damage of their own behaviour. This strengthens the idea that those suffering from addiction must "accept their addiction". This idea that the "addict" is in denial ensures that protests and frustration from adolescence are interpreted as yet another sign of the serious affliction. Their "denial" only confirms the "diagnosis".In this way the addiction narrative becomes a tool to oppress and ignore the voice of the addicted.

6.4.3 An Addiction is Always Deviant

Addiction, in this discourse, is partly a craving for something harmful. As part of a moral panic is the tendency to amplify the negative consequences, which in this discourse are succinctly summarised in (Svenska Dagbladet, 2012b) as "neglect of sleep, diet, school, social relationships and/or personal hygiene". However, dependencies and cravings, even when self-reinforcing, are not necessarily harmful or negative. Consider a case where the drug is cheap, safe and plentiful - such as *caffeine* - or if the benefits given outweigh the costs - such as chronic medications.

The harm to the addict is projected from outside; a concerned public (as indicated by the press, moral entrepreneurs and former addicts) are imagining that children, in particular, are harmed by [video games / internet / screens].This perspective is clearly evident in statements such as the one quoted in Svenska Dagbladet (2000): You lose track of time and find it harder to turn off the computer. Addiction takes over your entire life", is an example of the pervasive belief that screen-based activities inevitably lead to damaging addiction."This assumption of harm, however, does not stop at the individual level. It also affects societal constructions and beliefs, which feeds the cycle of moral panic. The educational system is one such cultural institution that is scrutinised in this narrative. The discourse constantly mentions declining academic performance as one of the consequences of video game addiction.

> According to the social worker Sven Rollenhagen, many children don't return to school at all once the gaming devil has sunk its claws into them. Others "drop out of school" after the semester has started, as a result of their severe addiction.

> (Expressen 2012)

This statement clearly demonstrates how the narrative of video game addiction is used to explain away broader, more complex societal issues such as school dropouts. It shifts the focus from potential shortcomings of our educational system in addressing the diverse needs of its students and places an unrealistic expectation on children's free-time activities. Instead of examining the many factors that influence performance in school, it simply blames video game use, arguing that kids should ideally spend their leisure time socialising, practising sports, or playing outside.

To sum up, the term "addictive" has developed into a potent tool for criticising any behaviour seen as undesirable or abnormal. This carries a lot of weight because it not only stigmatises the behaviour but also demands serious concern and severe action to control it. There is no likelihood of seeing addictions from a neutral or even valuable perspective given the widespread belief that addiction is fundamentally harmful. The idea that addiction is a *disease* that spreads by *exposure* persists in the public consciousness although there are critics who argue against this simplified view. This knowledge helps to sustain the myth of addiction, frequently at the price of a deeper understanding of the complex human behaviours that it strives to define.

7 Discussion

"Without deviation from the norm, progress is not possible."
Frank Zappa

In this chapter, we will reflect on our results and try to make sense of some of the unforeseen findings that we made. These include ideas like *authoritarian parenting, juvenism, neuronormativity,* and the notable disinterest towards understanding video games.

7.1 Authoritarian Parenting

The pressure on parents to serve as both the solution and authoritarian enforcer of the disciplinary addiction model is substantial. Professional carers often employ the *"the Innocent Addict"* trope to portray children as manipulative individuals who need saving from their addiction-driven behaviours in order to avoid the risk of becoming "*the Cautionary Tale*". This simplistic explanation positions gaming as a substance that is the root to all problems within the family dynamic, placing the responsibility on parents to take control or risk their child suffering permanent damage.

Advice aimed at the parents is given from almost everyone who participates in the discourse and we see the most concrete actionable parenting tips from the treatment providers. The advice rarely takes their child's autonomy into account and there is no suggestion on asking open-ended questions to understand a child's perspective on their own gaming habits. The relationship between the parent and their child is never an interest for these treatment providers. The authoritarian *Tough Parental Love Treatment* is promoted as the ideal way to be a parent.

7.1.1 Mothers

We find it worth noticing that of all the treatment providers that have a recurring voice in this discourse are all white men who promote traditional family values and a patriarchal view on raising a child. Family dinner is the holy grail where if a child is missing you know as a parent that you have failed and need to act. And in a patriarchal take on parenting the mothers get the majority of the responsibility of making the whole family unit work in the day to day life. Their perspective as a stereotypical patriarch makes it easy to offer strict advice, because the quality of life for the whole family is not as dependent on the (stereotypical) fathers' relationship with their child and in addition to that, that stereotype lacks the practical experience of trying to foster a peaceful and functional family dynamic.

(*Aftonbladet*, 2013) about Kalle and his mother Lisbeth makes it easy to see how unreasonable these suggestions can be, and how careless the press can be in their insistence of using the addiction narrative as a frame. Lisbeth discusses how, in retrospect, she should have limited Kalles access to games, but that daily demands made it difficult. "Kalle has siblings.There is a lot of work, cooking, and laundry going on." While saying this, she also emphasises that the best thing she did was to stop

judging him, engage in conversation, and simply ask about the games "That sounds exciting; can you tell me more about it?". Kalle wishes she had done that more often, but understands why she didn't. "We live in a stressful world. Parents are frustrated, and things often fall apart. I wish they understood why we sit in front of the computer.". However, the lesson that readers are expected to draw from this story is that Lisbeth should have acted sooner and more forcefully while Kalle overcame his addiction by gaining insight and triumphing in a struggle with self-control. Blaming the mother and celebrating the Sober Addict.

Patrik Wincent ends this article with 12 pieces of advice for parents. The suggestions are about creating clear consequences, don't be a parent who is afraid of letting their child be bored and how to "break the denial". Building a relationship of compassion and curiosity for the child's activities is not part of the list. We also see this rhetoric internalised by parents. For example, a mother who writes to a psychologist advice column about her 20-year old "video game addict" son. She ends her letter with:

> "I am worried and wondering why it has come to this. What have I done wrong that I have not taught him to appreciate social contacts? I feel guilty and like I have failed as a parent. His lack of motivation and passive attitude is not something I recognize in myself. How can I help him come out of his room where the blinds are constantly drawn and the world of computers and the internet is more appealing than the spring sun outside in the real world?"
>
> <div align="right">(Dagens Nyheter, 2012)</div>

The parents' worries are neither unwarranted nor irrational so it is frustrating to note that the discourse provides so little in the way of alternative approaches. The "counter discourse" arguing against the perceived moral panic often minimises the parent's genuine fears, unintentionally invalidating their worries. From the perspective of the parent, the only suggestions they receive from people who take their concerns seriously are these *tough love* advice where it is more important to dominate and take control rather than foster a relationship of trust and empathy.

7.1.2 Fathers

Fathers are notably absent from our sample, and when they are mentioned the father is shown to be disengaged, "Why are you sitting here? Go outside and play with sticks." (Aftonbladet, 2013) entirely absent (Dagens Nyheter, 2012), an enabler (Svenska Dagbladet 2006) (Aftonbladet 2004) or domestically violent;

> The latest concerns a 16-year-old boy in Skåne whose parents were unable to limit his time in front of the computer. After police interventions at the family's residence due to fights between the father and the boy, the administrative court decided on custody under the Law on Care of Young Persons (LVU), reports Metro.
>
> <div align="right">(Svenska Dagbladet, 2012)</div>

In contrast, the only active voices from parents are from mothers, both in person and quoted by or referred to by our moral entrepreneurs, "worried mothers are constantly calling for help". That representation implies an expectation of women as responsible for managing familial concerns, that mothers are over-involved while fathers are depicted as essentially passive or problematic. The fathers depictions essentially reproduce the stereotype of the emotionally distant or absent male figure. That men, or fathers, are not expected to be involved or emotionally invested in their children's lives, a concept rooted in traditional masculine norms.

This skewed representation, unchallenged by the press, reinforces patriarchal norms that exempts authoritarian fathers from shared responsibility in fostering a healthy family dynamic and normalises leaving the mothers alone with the burden.

7.2 Juvenism

Elza Dunkels' concept, *juvenism* describes a societal tendency to view youth culture and the activities of young people as less valuable or inferior to those of adults. According to Dunkels, juvenism can manifest in several ways, such as the dismissal of young people's online activities as trivial or meaningless, the trivialization of their social interactions, and the undervaluation of the digital skills they acquire (Dunkels, 2022). Science, the centre group in this discourse, *the Innocent Addicts,* has primarily been people in the age range of 11-17, juvenism as a frame, encapsulates the oppression unique to this group more accurately than the more well known, similar frame of *childism*. This group of adolescence are constantly addressed as children and this has several consequences as outlined below.

7.2.1 Pathologizing Adolescence

Since the majority of *the Innocent Addict*s are teenagers it is noticeable that none of the experts recognize the many changes a person undergoes in their teenage years. No-one in our sample asks the obvious question; "how can I tell if it is a symptom of addiction or just 'normal' teenage behaviour?".

The Innocent Addicts are effectively infantilized to let treatment providers, parents and society at large treat unwanted change in behaviour, interests or personality as a symptom of addiction. The teenage years are a time of tremendous transition, when it is normal for people to move friend groups, establish new leisure interests, and distance themselves from their parents. Pathologizing these behaviours can affect how the individual understands themselves, it can create a sense of shame, guilt or isolation, making them feel as if they are inherently flawed or abnormal.

Change in sleeping patterns, mood swings and anger, changes in personality traits, shifting priorities (such as decreased interest in education), defiance, dishonesty, or altered transparency - could be a summarised list from our treatment providers OR as well as a list of known characteristics behaviours of growing adolescents. Many of the criteria our experts use in this discourse are borrowed from the DSM - 4 and 5s definition of substance abuse and these diagnostic criteria for addiction are modelled after *adults* - not children or adolescents (Kardefelt-Winther et al., 2017). The way addiction's core characteristics are understood has faced criticism for categorising ordinary, healthy behaviours exhibited by teenagers as pathological (Kräplin, 2017). Fortunately, considerable research is presently being conducted to construct symptom profiles that are age-specific (Carbonell, 2020). These initiatives seek to get a better understanding of how symptoms manifest and develop during a person's formative years. Even the Swedish Agency for Health Technology Assessment and Assessment of Social Services (SBU) has identified standardised assessment methods for addiction in adolescence as a knowledge gap and is calling for more research (SBU, 2022).

7.2.2 Validating Extreme Interventions

Building on the idea of juvenism, referring to young people in *the Innocent Addict* group as children rather than teenagers has the impact of indirectly supporting harsh, presumably disproportionate

measures. When a child deviates from the course that their parents had intended, society has a tendency to view that behaviour as "out of control," which permits urgent action to correct it. While defying parental orders or society norms when they are teenagers is typically recognised as a normal element of adolescent discovery.

The dialogue neatly avoids an important conversation about the independence of teenagers by continuing to refer to *the Innocent Addict* group as children. It fails to take into account the complex factors relating to their right to protect themselves and freedom of choice. The discourse could get more nuanced if it began to acknowledge *the Innocent Addicts* as teens, leading to a deeper knowledge of the balance between adolescent independence and protective oversight.

7.2.3 Neuronormative Violence

The Cautionary Tale and many of the warning signs for video game addiction also perpetuates *neuronormative ideas* by presenting neurodivergent traits as negative outcomes. Some of the common traits depicted as 'bad traits' include social differences, intense passionate interests, executive functioning differences, a different sensory profile, and emotional reactions when forced with hard context switching. By neglecting the perspective of neurodivergence, the media perpetuates the idea that there is a narrow and homogeneous way for the mind to function and that deviations from this norm are *unwanted* and *pathological*.

> Suddenly, he/she is an adult with social skills like a 10-year-old. He/she doesn't know how to behave towards friends, how to talk to someone in a close relationship, or how to simply enjoy the company of friends.
>
> (Svenska Dagbladet, 2017)

> When has my child played enough? Here are 5 warning signs: Loses control. Your child has lost their sense of time and can play for an indefinite amount of time. (...) He/she doesn't turn off the game when requested, and won't come to eat until 'the game is finished
>
> (Aftonbladet, 2004)

Many of the warning signs associated with "video game addiction" are rooted in *neuronormative assumptions*, which can lead to an oversimplification of complex issues related to mental health. The portrayal of video game addiction as an obstacle to traditional narrow markers of success such as academic performance, career advancement, productivity and a specific type of social relationships dismisses the unique cognitive profiles, needs, and challenges of neurodivergent people.

As a result, the mind and the core identity of some of these teens get *demonised* and the 'salvation'is to remove them from their games - a source of joy, from their social context, their community and force them into a mould that will never fit.

> She says, 'The children said they didn't want to live if they weren't permitted to play video games.
>
> (Svenska Dagbladet, 2006)

7.3 It's Not About the Games

"It is difficult to know where the limit lies. Is video game addiction similar to an alcoholic's addiction – that a little eventually becomes a lot? Is total abstinence the solution?" - Lisbeth, *a mother of a "video game addict"*

<div align="right">(Aftonbladet 2013)</div>

There is a striking absence of any discussions from our treatment providers regarding the role of the game developers or initiatives to establish severe regulations in our sample. Which emphasises their roles as the primary solution, and is one example of the disinterest in exploring other possible explanation models, and to us reads as a less authentic public health concern from their part.

If our moral entrepreneurs truly believe what they say about the harm and the seeming persuasiveness of video games, then it begs an interesting question - why aren't there any promoters of gaming legislation or of pushing "positive" applications of video games? While we are not promoting these as solutions one could imagine they would take inspiration from China and call for mandating pauses between gaming sessions or make an effort to get more tools for parental control in video games or push creation of games for education, exercising or therapy. The absence of these types of thoughts from the discourse raises concerns about the objectives and motives of these moral entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, the media's lack of diverse representation of experts on the topic creates a monopoly on the moral entrepreneurship surrounding the issue. Is a psychosynthesis therapist really the best source for understanding addiction in adolescence? How about social workers, family therapists, school counsellors or how about some narratives where the parent can have the active voice and tell a success story without them being framed into the *traditional addict narrative*? Or even better, - let the directly affected have a free voice.

The Sisyphean Cycle of Technology Panics (Orben, 2020) refers to an historical pattern of fears and concerns around new technologies. The term "Sisyphean" is derived from the Greek tale of Sisyphus, who was sentenced to roll a boulder up a hill only to have it roll back down for forever, symbolising a never-ending and futile struggle.

The cycle often begins with the introduction of a new technology or invention that disturbs the status quo and generates concerns about its potentially harmful societal impacts. As technology becomes more prevalent and integrated into society, these concerns frequently escalate, leading to calls for regulation or even total bans. However, as the new technology becomes more familiar and understood, these fears often fade, and the technology is eventually accepted as part of the society as a whole. However, the cycle does not stop there. As new technologies emerge, the process begins all over again, often with the same fears and concerns expressed in the past.

What Orben (2020) points out is that we need to recognise that media panics are endemic and continuous, and that we as researchers need a major shift in how we approach and respond to them. We have seen how actors in this debate have done their best to include gaming as an addiction diagnosis and push it as a societal issue, but the addiction that our society should be concerned about is our collective "addiction" to media panics.

7.4 Fuel to the Fire

A handful of counter-discourses have attempted to offer different perspectives, such as likening excessive gaming to being highly engaged in playing sports or illustrating the rich social communities in World of Warcraft. Some have attempted to distinguish between excessive gaming and addiction. Yet, many of these nuanced perspectives fail to properly acknowledge or may even seem dismissive to worried parents, especially in contrast with the direct and actionable advice on preventing addiction offered by moral entrepreneurs. A key premise most counter-discourses have accepted is that parents *are* the primary solution to video game addiction, either by attempting to reframe their views on the habit or by "being more engaged". Unfortunately this premise seems to preclude other avenues of addressing the issue, such as involving game developers and designers in providing realistic solutions.

One thing that is missing is an exploration of the implications of implementing the moral entrepreneurs' advice on *the Tough Parental Love.* Adopting an authoritarian parenting approach, like viewing one's child as manipulative as suggested by Patrik Wincent (Aftonbladet, 2013), can drastically change the family dynamic and strain the parent-child relationship. Adopting such an adversarial perspective could lead to long-term consequences such as a decrease in open communication, trust, and emotional bonding within the family. It may also potentially exacerbate feelings of isolation or misunderstanding in the teenager, which can lead to anxiety and unnecessary suffering. Importantly, if the parent-child relationship becomes fractured, the adolescents may *no longer feel safe* seeking help from their parents.

Also, the discourse continues to be framed as an adult issue, disregarding the voices and experiences of young gamers. This perpetuates juvenism, reinforcing the idea that video game addiction is an adult problem to be solved by adults, and consequently disempowers the very individuals most affected by the issue. Involving the adolescent players and giving them the power to shape and participate in the discussion could give the debate on video game addiction the understanding and perspective it lacks. Additionally, by the UN child convention (United Nations, 1990), children have a right to express themselves on issues that concern them, and the debate over video games certainly does.

8 Conclusion

"Diversity is strength. Difference is a teacher. Fear difference and you learn nothing."
Hannah Gadsby

We have reviewed the discourse on video game addiction in the Swedish press, with a focus on how it conceptualises the video game addict and video games as addictive, what interventions it promotes and in what ways it might have been a moral panic. The conclusions for each sub-question will be provided first, before we summarise the conclusion of our main research question and offer some reflections.

8.1 How are Video Games Constructed in this Discourse?

In our sample video games have mainly been confused with gambling and are constantly compared with drugs, as dangerously addictive, isolating, and harmful to players. Video games are also depicted as what we call *a New Unknown*, separate from our shared reality, thus creating a possibly false dichotomy between the virtual or digital and the "real" life. This virtual reality of the New Unknown is seen to have unique unknown effects on the players. There is little to no shown interest or attempt at trying to understand the value and benefits of gaming. Video games are so undefined that the addiction discourse might as well have been, and often is, about television, internet, social media or screens.

8.2 How are the Players Constructed in this Discourse?

Video game players are constructed through three main tropes: *the Innocent Addict, the Sober Addict* and *the Cautionary Tale.*

The Innocent Addict is a child who does not understand that they are addicted and is powerless against the urge to play video games. They are in reality however, primarily teenagers but depicted as much younger and dependent on parental intervention in order to overcome their addiction. *The Sober Addict* represents players who have overcome addiction, gaining self-awareness and self-control. *The Cautionary Tale* serves as a warning of the negative consequences that can arise from excessive video game use without intervention.

Age discrimination plays a significant role in the construction of the player, which validates violations of human rights and pathologizes normal teenage behaviours. The discourse consistently skirts the complexities of teenage development and adolescents' need for autonomy while promoting neuronormative ideas, oversimplifying mental health issues, and promoting productivity over leisure. Despite the fact that *the Innocent Addict* is the one who is most discussed and affected by the debate they are never allowed to speak for themselves.

8.3 What Interventions or Control Mechanisms are Promoted by this Discourse?

The proposed solutions to video game addiction mainly centre around authoritarian *Tough Parental Love* and the moral entrepreneurs' *Professional Care*. The intervention, *the Professional Care*, is seen as a solution when parents are unable to control their child's alleged video game addiction. This dichotomy, however, presents an overly simplistic view of the complex reality of parenting and individual adolescent situations, the *Professional Care* expressively rejects understanding the context of the behaviour and perpetuates a hyper individualistic view on mental health.

Both *the Tough Parental Love* and *the Professional Care* are notably promoted exclusively by white male treatment providers. They place a significant burden on parents, particularly mothers, to act as both the solution and enforcer of their disciplinary addiction model. They advocate traditional family values, suggesting parents need to take *control* of their child's gaming habits or risk them becoming *the Cautionary Tale*. This discourse propagates an authoritarian *Tough Parental Love* approach, and often neglects to consider the adolescent autonomy or perspective. It is particularly harsh on mothers, portraying them as the main responsible party for maintaining a functional family dynamic. Fathers, on the other hand, are noticeably missing from the discourse.

8.4 In What Ways Has the Discourse Around Video Game Addiction Resembled a Moral Panic?

Addiction seems to be broadly understood as inherently harmful, which precludes the possibility of a neutral or positive dependencies. Thus, calling something addictive is a powerful strategy to criticise something seen as unwanted. Our analysis indicates that the press and a small group of moral entrepreneurs have perpetuated a heightened public concern over some diffuse definition of "digital media use", primarily among youths.

The discourse privileges the addiction narrative by framing video games, internet and computers as a drug and only ever engaging with private addiction treatment providers. Other professionals who could provide different perspectives are effectively excluded from the discourse. This promotes exaggerated concerns and moral positions on how young people should behave.

Imagined harms include children neglecting sports, so-called real friendships, family time, homework, and proper nutrition. Falling grades are frequently cited as a societal problem, with the discourse implying that video game addiction is common and severe. This oversimplifies a complex issue (the possible failures of our education system) and places unrealistic expectations on how children should spend their free time.

The prevalence of "video game addiction" is exaggerated by the moral entrepreneurs focusing their diagnostic criterias and screening tools on relatively mild effects of addiction, such as irritability and staying up late, leading to misinterpreting high engagement play for addiction.

8.5 Summation

The discourse appears to have elements of a moral panic, with a focus on the imagined harms and societal problems linked to gaming, often at the expense of understanding potential benefits or the nuances of individual engagement with games. The narrative leans heavily on addiction language, treating gaming as a drug, while excluding voices that might offer alternative perspectives. By overstating the prevalence of video game addiction and focusing on relatively mild effects as diagnostic criteria, it risks misinterpreting high engagement play for addiction. This discourse, while alarmist, oversimplifies a complex reality and underscores the need for a more balanced, nuanced understanding of video game use and its impact.

In conclusion, the discourse on video game addiction in our sample has been heavily skewed towards viewing video games as harmful, addictive, and isolating, often blurring the boundaries between gaming and broader digital media usage. Players are framed within restrictive narratives, primarily as *the Innocent Addict, the Sober Addict,* and *the Cautionary Tale,* effectively ignoring the individual's context and developmental needs, and denying them a voice in the conversation. Solutions often rely on an authoritarian *Tough Parental Love* or *the Professional Care*, both promoted primarily by white male treatment providers, creating an undue burden on parents, particularly mothers.

8.6 Reflections

Finally, we wish to offer some reflections on our study, its findings and on possible future directions, as well as some implications of the problem that we have explored. While our sample of 19 articles may seem diminutive compared to the over 3000 mentions of video game addiction across all news media (see Appendix A page 2), it has nonetheless shed light on some key aspects of the discourse. Notably, our study identified two influential moral entrepreneurs in the news discourse, but it did not capture all influential figures, such as Sven Rollenhagen, who has been identified as a significant actor in other studies (Sevemark, 2010).

We also acknowledge that the discourse captured in our sample, primarily from print newspapers, may not be fully representative. It is likely skewed towards an older audience, less familiar with video games and potentially holding attitudes towards youth and youth culture that are not universally shared among the larger population. This implied demographic bias might partially explain why the discourse seems to be unable or unwilling to distinguish between different forms of digital media such as video games, Internet and computers.

Despite these limitations, our findings resonate with patterns of moral panic identified in other studies (Sevemark, 2010) (Fleischer, 2005) - works that used different methods and different sampling altogether - suggesting a disproportionate societal discourse around video game addiction. The construction of excessive play as an addiction has been widely accepted and the consequences of this pathologizing have had real and in many cases severe consequences. Critically, the issue does not seem to have abated as moral panics are wont to do. As recently as August 2022, the Chamber Court in Gothenburg ordered compulsory care for a 15-year-old boy, partly attributed to his 'dataspelsmissbruk', or video game addiction (*Norstedt Juridik*, 2022). While the intention to provide support for the boy is commendable, we know from those previously subjected to similar rulings under the Care of Young Persons Act that these interventions are often felt to be entirely misguided,

unhelpful, and responsible for causing severe, long-lasting trauma to both the individuals and their families (Arnroth, 2015).

The discourse around video game addiction could have taken a different trajectory, even if the term 'addiction' remained central. For instance, the Adaptive Paradigm of Addiction (Alexander, 2010) offers an alternative perspective, positing that addictions can serve as coping mechanisms for dislocation and loneliness. Re-examining our data through this lens provides a fresh perspective on the narratives we've explored. Pitcock (Aftonbladet, 2011), for example, turned to video games to alleviate his severe depression. Kalle (Aftonbladet, 2013) increased his gaming after moving to a new city where he struggled to make friends and had little support from his father. Bibbi (Svenska Dagbladet, 2000) spent more time on video games and computers as she repeatedly experienced burnout at work. The Adaptive Paradigm of Addiction allows us to reinterpret these cases, recognizing the addictive behaviours as desperate attempts to fulfil unmet needs. This alternative perspective could have provided more empathetic and constructive support to concerned parents, teachers, social workers and even, perhaps, to the chamber court in Gothenburg.

In terms of future work, we strongly advocate for a pivot from examining individual moral panics to more broadly understanding and preventing their recurrence. Acknowledging insights from Drotner, Orben and others, we stress the importance of learning from past instances in order to disrupt the pervasive and continuous cycle of media panics, rather than getting lost in the minutiae of each case. We see a collective challenge in recognizing and counteracting manifestations of juvenism, paternalism, colonialism and ableism broadly, as well as reframing our societal discourse to centre those individuals grappling with challenges, instead of allowing the narrative to be monopolised by voices that pathologize these experiences.

9 References

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Appendix A - Data Sample

Aftonbladet:

Sandberg, O. (2004, December 26). Experten: "Är man bara frisk och hel kan man inte bli sjuk av dataspel" (...). Aftonbladet.

Medierådet, Segelström, I., & Agebäck, A. K. (2007, November 19). Wow—Men var är alla vuxna? Aftonbladet.

Hägglund, J. (2011, August 14). Tillbaka—Från sitt tv-spelsberoende. Aftonbladet.

Olkiewics, E. (2013, November 17). Adrenalinet pumpar, det är fantastiskt! Aftonbladet.

Lidbo, U. (2016, November 8). Barnen är med i ett experiment. Aftonbladet.

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Rebas, K. (2006, November 30). Greppa handkontrollen. Dagens Nyheter.

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Öhman, P. (1991, September 20). Turnébuss på villovägar; en historia om spelmissbruk, köttbullar och lång dags färd mot spelning. Expressen. Kungliga biblioteket. https://tidningar.kb.se/

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Svenska Dagbladet:

Andersson, K. (2000, September 8). Internet ledde till beroende. Svenska Dagbladet.

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Reporting on Video Game Addiction across all media:
To provide a better view of the nation-wide activity on the "video game addiction" discourse we produced this graph by additionally searching Mediearkivet Retriever. We used the same search query as documented in **4.4 Data Selection and Sources,** but expanded the time period up until today, 2023-05 and, unlike our corpus, this search includes digital, printed and TV/Radio-sources, with no restrictions on publisher. The total result consisted of ~3217 unique mentions.
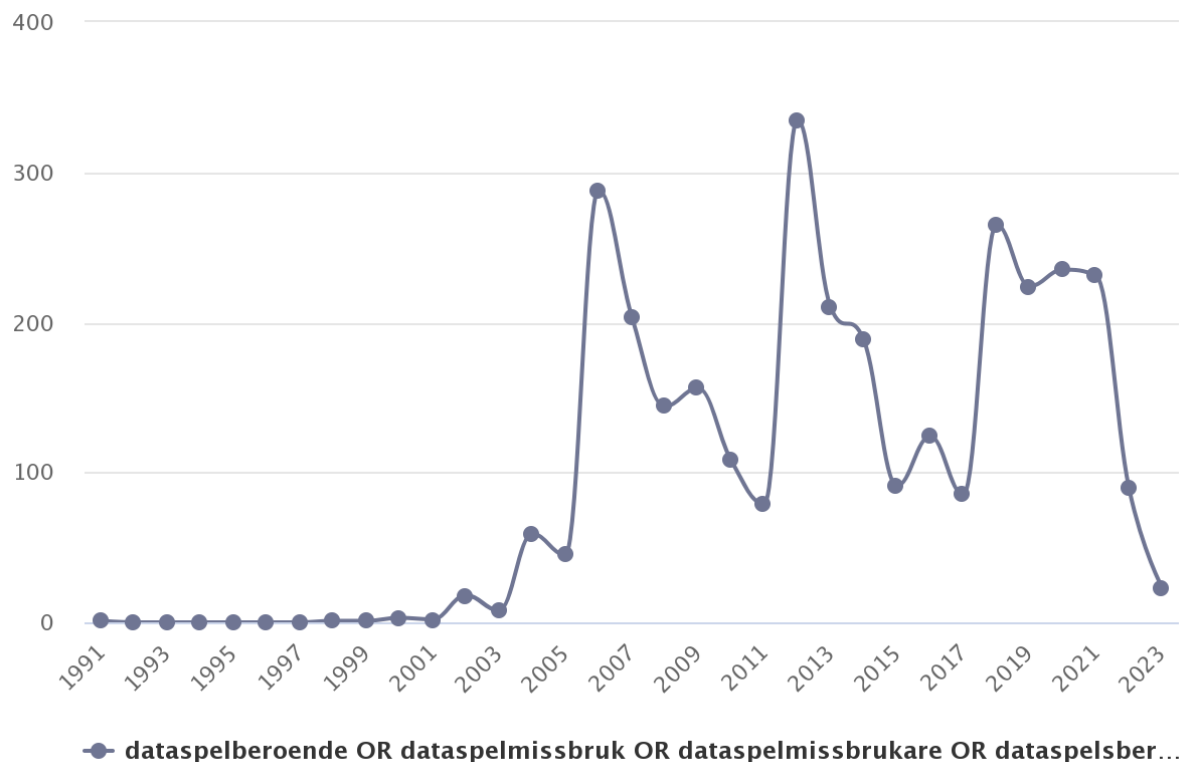
We note that the discourse activity is quite spiky, with clear peaks in 2006, 2012 and 2018. As documented in our study, these dates align with some highly publicised events in Sweden.

2006: Sweden saw its first case of LVU being used to force a teenager into institutionalised care for "video game addiction" (Gustavsson & Lundqvist, 2010).
2012: Another LVU case for video game addiction (*Dagens Nyheter*, 2012)
2013: The discourse remained highly active, possibly because the DSM-5 introduced "Internet Gaming Disorder" in Section III ("Emerging Measures and Models") as a tentative disorder requiring additional research. (Pontes et al., 2021)
2014: DSM-5 translated and published in Swedish[7] [8] [9]
2018: The WHO's includes "gaming disorder" in the 11th revision of the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD-11),
2019: ICD-11 was approved by the World Health Assembly in May 2019 (Pontes et al., 2021)

Lastly we want to note that the ICD-11 is scheduled for publication in Swedish by 2024[10].

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[7] http://www.empatica.se/dsm-5-pa-svenska/
[8] http://spelforskning.se/2015/01/09/hasardspelsyndrom-ar-nya-namnet-i-dsm-5-pa-spelberoende/
[9] http://eniveckan.se/svenska-dsm-5-nu-ute/
[10] https://www.socialstyrelsen.se/statistik-och-data/klassifikationer-och-koder/icd-11/

Appendix B - Warning Signs

Warning signs that might indicate a video game addiction, aggregated from our sample:

- **Watch out for these warning signs:** (*Svenska Dagbladet*, 2000)
  - Intoxication effect ("Ruseffekt") You feel a sense of happiness when you connect to the internet.
  - Tolerance ("Dosökning"). You spend more and more time on the computer.
  - Loss of control. You lose track of time and find it harder to turn off the computer. Addiction takes over your entire life.
  - Withdrawal symptoms ("Abstinensbesvär"). You become irritable and unhappy when not connected.
- **When has my child played enough? Here are 5 warning signs:** (*Aftonbladet*, 2004)
  - Loss of control. Your child loses track of time and can play endlessly.
  - Withdrawal (swe: "abstinens"). When your child is not playing, he or she becomes irritable, frustrated, and restless.
  - Difficulty following rules. He or she repeatedly breaks agreements about computer time, does not turn off when prompted, and does not come to eat because he or she must "finish playing."
  - Isolation. Your child quits other activities and socialises less with friends.
  - Denial. When discussing the problem, your child responds with anger and denies being addicted to gaming.
- **Signs that someone is addicted:** (*Svenska Dagbladet*, 2006)
  - Gaming for long periods, 3-4 hours at a time
  - Becomes restless and irritable when unable to play
  - Sacrifices social life for the game
  - Attempts to play less but fails
- **Criteria for gaming addiction:** (*Dagens Nyheter*, 2006) (quoting FairPlay.se)
  - range from playing "three to four hours at a time" to finding that "ordinary life is boring."
- **Young people also describe how gaming can lead to:** (*Aftonbladet*, 2007)
  - Late nights, poor eating habits, lack of hygiene, truancy, and neglecting homework, which creates conflicts with their surroundings. However, they seem to have some awareness that "ordinary life" cannot be neglected for too long, and gaming is described as something that occurs in periods.
- **Typical signs of video game addiction:** (*Svenska Dagbladet*, 2012)
  - Reversed daily rhythm ("vänt på dygnet"),
  - Neglect of school, and
  - Poor mental health.
- **Signs of excessive gaming:** (*Svenska Dagbladet*, 2012)
  - Neglect of sleep, diet, school, social relationships and/or personal hygiene

- ○ Aggressiveness towards those who interrupt gaming
- ○ Reversed daily rhythm – gaming occurs during the night
- ○ Withdrawal and relapse
- **"Relative? Here are 12 good pieces of advice"** (*Aftonbladet*, 2013)
  - ○ Write down all the consequences of video gaming that you perceive your child is experiencing. These could be things like sleep disturbances and poorer school results.
  - ○ Help the child break the denial. Video game addicts often become manipulative in order to continue playing. To break the denial, knowledge, therapy, and admitting that they are powerless against video gaming are required.
  - ○ Limit the time in front of the screen. There's the reduction technique, where the child maintains the same amount of gaming time for a week, after which it is gradually reduced to the agreed time. Or they can quit abruptly and experience withdrawal.
  - ○ (...) The goal is to break the trance state that often occurs when playing in large amounts.
  - ○ Accept the detox period. Parents are sometimes afraid that the child will be bored, and want to give them a solution. Let them be bored and find other things to do. They are so used to stimulation that their dopamine levels are out of balance.

Appendix C - Summary Overview of the Sample

Date:	Content:	Observations:
1991 Expressen	*"Five small white Game Boy games paralyse all intellectual activity on Roxette's just-launched world tour."* Other rock stars are addicted to drugs and alcohol, the boys in Roxette are addicted to video games. Marie introduced the games but has outgrown them, joking about her bandmates; *"They're not sane."*.	The bands' behind-the-scenes *"boyishness"* is framed as something endearing and jovial but somewhat childish.
2000 SvD	Psychologist Owe Sandberg launches a new clinic treating games- and internet addiction, which he breaks into four types; internet chat, daytraders (*"a kind of gambler"*), compulsive porn users, and video game addicts (*"young guys who enjoy video games"*).	Owe is working at Kolmårdens behandlingshem in Stockholm, where they deal with alcohol and gambling addiction. He is starting an internet addiction clinic in the same region.
2004 Aftonbladet	8 pages on video game addiction. Owe Sandberg claims "up to" 30 000 video game addicts in Sweden. Fair Play reports that 94% of youth play video games. Ludde, 20, a sober addict, shares his story. Andreas, 26, an addict in denial shares his story. 2-page spread about (American) Shawn, 21, who "played himself to death" in 2001. Very graphic. Nicholas Yee states that 47 percent of EverQuest and Ultima Online users admit to being addicted to their gaming worlds.	first appearance of Fair Play, an ambiguous interest organisation.
2006 Aftonbladet	*"40,000 Swedes may be addicted to playing computer games."*, Fair Play claims. Owe Sandberg has treated 150 of the worst cases, "their rooms look like drug dens". He sees parents as enablers. Linköping municipality procures treatment for their constituents, from the privately owned "Game Over" treatment centre. Johangården in Älmhult is also treating video game addicts and reportedly get new requests "every other day"	Game Over was a gambling treatment centre who made a pivot to also treat gaming addiction. Owe Sandberg was their Chefsbehandlare between 1999-2004.[11] Johangården (until 2002 known as Linnebygdens behandlingshem), was forced to shut down for malpractice

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[11] https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.krica.se/20130505-frukostseminarium-om-spel-och-natberoende/

	The Public Health Institute will submit proposals for the government to determine whether video game addiction is a public health issue.	in December 2006.[12] Owe Sandberg was listed on their webpage as an "expert consultant"[13]
2006 SvD	"Boys are gaming away their lives." A 13 year old boy is wasting his summer break playing at a LAN cafe. A 30 year old man playing in the same cafe is not spending time with his family right now, and denies being addicted to computer games.	Fair Play propaganda piece. To support their estimate of 40 000 gaming addicts they refer to a Bachelor thesis from Umeå Universitet.
2006 Expressen	LVU case. 15-year old forced into care.	NoGame comments on reporting
2006 DN	An opinion piece, arguing that the worry around video game addiction is exaggerated, pointing out the beneficial effects of gaming such as improved reaction ability, problem-solving, and spatial thinking. Urges parents to understand and engage with their children's gaming, setting boundaries where necessary, and learn about the potential positive aspects of gaming, instead of shifting blame onto the gaming industry.	Counter discourse
2008 Expressen	A visit to a Chinese detention camp, where a military psychologist is rehabilitating video game addicts using "military discipline". China has over 5 million addicts. Their detention camps have a higher success rate than similar camps in the US.	Sensationalistic and uncritical of harsh interventions
2008 DN	The government is ignoring this massive issue! Specifically; the government is looking into the current gambling laws, and Magnus Björk - founder of the treatment facility "Game Over" and author of a recently released book with the same name - believes video games should be regulated in the same way.	Magnus Björk, author of "Game Over" and founder of the treatment centre with the same name.
2009 SvD	World of Warcraft is designed to be a highly engaging and rewarding time sink. Some adults have enough insight to avoid the game because they know they'll get "hooked" and spend too much time in the game.	Counter Discourse, nuanced talk about gaming
2010 Expressen	Dutch treatment facilities have found that video game addiction can not and should not be treated like drug addiction. The gamers problem was not the substance, but lack of connection. ("good old fashioned communication")	A review of Tom Chatfield's book, *Why games are the 21st century's most serious business*

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[12] https://www.smp.se/nyheter/ny-kritik-mot-behandlingshem-i-almhult/
[13] https://web.archive.org/web/20100811070303/http://www.linnebygdensbehandlingshem.se/verksamhet.asp

2011 Aftonbladet	Pitcock, an American professional athlete has had his career disrupted due to video game addiction.	Traditional drug narrative
2012 DN	Worried mom writes a psychology advice column, about her 20 year old son who spends all his free time playing video games. Expert advice is nuanced: video game addiction isn't a formal diagnosis, the cause and effect might be the reverse, only the son gets to decide if he wants help or not. But also provides several links to treatment providers for video game addiction.	
2012 Expressen	"video games are not the cause of falling grades" A reply to sociologist Sven Rollenhagen, who recently claimed that children risk being trapped by the "video game devil" during their summer break and never return to school.	Sven Rollenhagen, another addiction treatment provider, is known to us from previous works (and from living in Sweden) to be a central actor in this discourse. It is notable that our sample only sees him mentioned once.
2012 SvD	A 16 year old has been forcibly removed from his home after "parents were unable to limit his time in front of the computer". Inger Lundberg, at Game Over, speculates that he suffered from video game addiction, and goes on to tell us that this issue first occurred in 2006 and has escalated every year since. Video game addiction is like addiction to alcohol and narcotics" and the "municipality should be forced to offer treatment". Socialstyrelsen says that they regulate gambling, but not video games.	This article is presenting Game Overs's "signs of excessive gaming" but confusingly attributes the diagnostic criterias to "Medierådet och Game Over".
2013 Aftonbladet	4 pages about Kalle (recovered addict) and his mother's struggle to help him. Patrik Wincent shares his expert insights and advice. Kalle was 14 when he "got stuck" in a game so addictive that it is known as "World of Warcrack". Now, at 23, he is a recovered addict still struggling with relapses. Kalles mom corroborates and shares her side of the story; "I felt powerless when he was gaming". ***"Expert: Addictions have increased"*** Patrik Wincent, former video game addict himself, explains that *"Dopamine secretion increases by 200 percent during video gaming. This is as significant an elevation as an orgasm."* If you have a child in your vicinity who is at risk, you can make use of Patrik Wincent's 12 tips.	Patrik Wincent, therapist and owner of Dataspelsakuten

2014 DN	**"Video gaming not the cause of poor school performance"** A response by four internet researchers, to Tomas Tobes (Moderaterna) recent claims that video gaming leads to deteriorating school results. The researchers argue that his claim *"is misleading and diverts attention from the real challenges that schools and society face. The diagnosis of video game addiction allows private actors to profit from therapy solutions despite unclear evidence"*	Counter discourse. Researchers: Daniel Kardefelt Winther Marcin de Kaminski Elza Dunkels Håkan Hyden
2016 Aftonbladet	Three experts are asked whether parents should be worried about their children's use of screens. Elza Dunkels (researcher, pedagogy) and Björn (journalist & author of "Skärmtid. Familjens guide till den digitala vardagen") emphasise the importance of parental involvement in guiding children through the digital world, helping them make informed decisions and understand potential risks. Patrik Wincent says these internet experts misjudge the risks, and that parents use these digital devices as babysitters; a "mass experiment" with unknown consequences. The article ends with a list of statistics on prevalence of digital devices and digital media among children.	Aftonbladet opted to use Wincent's clearly alarmist words as the headline, *"The children are part of an experiment."*
2017 SvD	2 page spread where Svenska Dagbladet opines; "Should extreme computer gaming be classified as an addiction? Yes, experts see similarities with other addictions - but the diagnosis does not yet exist.". Several treatment providers are interviewed. - Oskar Foldevi, psychologist at Reconnect in Linköping. Treats video game addicts and educates school- and healthcare providers. Previously worked at Game Over. - Patrik Wincent, Psychosynthesis therapist at Dataspelsakuten. - Jan Löwdin, psychologist at Mottagningen för unga män, Stockholms Stadsmission. - Anders Håkansson leads a gambling addiction centre in Malmö. He says gaming is a growing concern globally and "studies will show" that it "can be like other addictions".	The final section of this article, interviewing Håkansson, is seemingly deliberately ambiguous. Svenska Dagbladet makes it nearly impossible to discern when "spelberoende" is being used to refer to gambling (Håkanssons expertise and research project) or when it's used to mean video games. Not part of our sample, but this article had a second part the next day! Oskar Foldevi was given another 2 pages to talk about video game addiction.