Nordic Research Perspectives

Jessica Enevold, Anne Mette Thorhauge & Andreas Gregersen (eds)

NORDICOM

NORDICOM

Nordic Information Centre for Media and Communication Research

Based at the University of Gothenburg, Nordicom is a non-profit knowledge centre that works to collect and communicate media and communication research conducted in the Nordic countries. The purpose of our work is to develop the knowledge of media's role in society. We do this through:

- Following and documenting media development in terms of media structure, media ownership, media economy and media use.
- Conducting the annual survey *The Media Barometer*, which measures the reach of various media outlets in Sweden.
- Publishing research literature, including the international research journal Nordicom Review and the periodic journal Nordicom-Information.
- Publishing newsletters on media trends in the Nordic region and policy issues in Europe.
- Continuously compiling information on how media research in the Nordic countries is developing.
- The international research conference NordMedia, which is arranged in cooperation with the national media and communication association in the Nordic countries.

Nordicom is financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Swedish Ministry of Culture and the University of Gothenburg. Visit our website for more information about Nordicom's work and about our academic book publishing.

www.nordicom.gu.se

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM IN PROBLEM GAMING?

Nordic Research Perspectives

Jessica Enevold, Anne Mette Thorhauge & Andreas Gregersen (eds)

NORDICOM

What's the Problem in Problem Gaming?

Nordic Research Perspectives

Jessica Enevold, Anne Mette Thorhauge & Andreas Gregersen (eds)

© Editorial matters and selections, the editors; articles, individual contributors; Nordicom 2018

ISBN 978-91-87957-88-8 (print)
ISBN 978-91-87959-89-5 (pdf)

The publication is also available as open access at www.nordicom.gu.se

Published by:
Nordicom
University of Gothenburg
Box 713
SE 405 30 GÖTEBORG
Sweden

Cover by: Per Nilsson
Printed by: Stema Specialtryck AB, Borås, Sweden, 2018

Contents

Preface 7

1. *Anne Mette Thorhauge, Andreas Gregersen & Jessica Enevold*
Introduction. What's the problem in problem gaming? 9

2. *Rune Kristian Lundedal Nielsen*
The genealogy of video game addiction.
A critical account of how Internet gaming disorder came
to be proposed as an officially recognized mental disorder 15

3. *Andreas Gregersen*
Games between family, homework, and friends.
Problem gaming as conflicts between social roles and institutions 35

4. *Anne Brus*
Generagency and problem gaming as stigma 51

5. *Anne Mette Thorhauge*
Problem gaming as broken life strategies 65

6. *Faltin Karlsen*
Life phase and meaningful play 83

7. *Patrick Prax & Paulina Rajkowska*
Problem gaming from the perspective of treatment 91

8. *Ian Sturrock*
How the ethical dimensions of game design can illuminate
the problem of problem gaming 107

Authors 123

Preface

Several chapters in this anthology are based on the research project 'Computerspil, hverdag og familie: afhængighed og problematiske spillevaner i kontekst' (Videogames, everyday life and family: addiction and problem gaming in context). The project ran between 2014 and 2016, and was funded by the Independent Research Fund Denmark. Many of the contributing authors also participated in a symposium titled 'Nordic Research on Problem Gaming from an Everyday Perspective' (held at Lund University in January 2016). Thus, the now presented book is largely the outcome of the research project and symposium.

We would like to thank the peer reviewers and Nordicom for their hard work; we would also like to thank those who have contributed to the project with data. Moreover, we would like to thank 'Center for Ludomani' (Center for gambling addictions) for fruitful collaboration throughout the project period, as well as the attendants at NordMedia 2015 and DIGRA 2015, where parts of this material were presented.

Anne Mette Thorhauge, Andreas Gregersen & *Jessica Enevold*

Problem gaming from the perspective of treatment

Patrick Prax & Paulina Rajkowska

Introduction

Problem gaming and game addiction[1] are some of the major contemporary concerns about digital games (Cohen 2006). Problem gaming has not only attracted scholarly attention but is also becoming an issue of politics and policy. The World Health Organization (WHO) is proposing for the next International Classification of Diseases (ICD), ICD-11, to include under section 6D71 'Gaming Disorder' as a disorder caused by addictive behaviour. However, this entry is contested and the discussion around it shows the different perspectives and approaches to problem gaming that can be found in contemporary research.

The WHO is in ICD-11 proposing the categories of 'Gaming Disorder' and 'Hazardous Gaming', which is understood as a condition that can lead up to gaming disorder. The definition of gaming disorder focuses on the continuation of gaming despite negative consequences and the impairment of societal and personal functioning.[2] This proposal has been met with criticism from researchers who point out that it is unclear 'whether problematic gaming represents a "real" disorder or merely symptoms of other pre-existing problems such as depression' (Fergusson 2016: 1573; Kardefelt-Winther 2016). They further claim that there is an 'over-reliance on psychometric evaluations where patient-interviews are needed' (Kardefelt-Winther 2016). Fergusson et al. (2011) suggest that research should investigate treatment outcomes to help the analysis and understanding of problem gaming as we today lack a clear understanding of this phenomenon.

This chapter describes an interview study which aimed to address the lack of research mentioned above. In line with the focus of this anthology on problem gaming in everyday life, the aim of this chapter is to contribute to this discussion with two perspectives on problem gaming, i.e. that of the people who are treating problem gaming every day as well as that of the people who receive treatment, the latter of which are arguably those most impacted by it. Our findings make it possible to problematize the definitions of problem gaming in the existing literature, along the lines of other

Prax, Patrick & Rajkowska, Paulina (2018). Problem Gaming from the Perspective of Treatment in Jessica Enevold, Anne Mette Thorhauge & Andreas Gregersen (eds.) *What's the Problem in Problem Gaming? Nordic Research Perspectives*. Göteborg: Nordicom.

chapters of this anthology. Finally, the chapter will discuss some of the implications of these different perspectives on problem gaming for treatment, identity construction, and societal power structures.

Perspectives on problem gaming

This chapter will provide an overview over the existing theoretical perspectives on problem gaming, starting with the perspective that could be said to be closest to the prognosis proposed in the WHO. This perspective uses the term 'game addiction'.

Game addiction

This particularly influential addiction model comes originally from substance addiction and gambling disorder (Desai et al. 2010). It has then been appropriated and reformulated by Griffiths (2005, modified from Brown 1993). The model uses the criteria of *salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflicts* and *relapse* to define game addiction (Griffiths 2014; Griffiths & Meredith 2009).

However, the way this model appropriates the addiction criteria from substance addiction to gambling (Suisaa 2008), and then further to gaming, has been criticized both because of limitations of this appropriation based on differences between problem gaming and substance abuse (Charlton et al. 2007) and because of the production of an addiction discourse around games that is unjustified (Cover 2006). Based on this addiction model and research inspired by it, Domahidi and Quandt state as a problem that 'online addiction in general and (online) computer gaming addiction are not yet part of the diagnostic standard manual (DSM) in medicine and psychology' (Domahidi & Quandt 2014: 202). The inclusion of a proposal for problem gaming into the DSM-5 is seen from a critical perspective by van Rooij (2016) and Quandt (2017), who call for more exploratory work to understand problem gamers and a broader, undogmatic discussion instead of a rushed diagnosis.

Motivations for gaming

There are a number of competing frames for understanding problem gaming, most of which stress the importance of the social environment for the formation and/or definition of problem gaming. Two of these competing perspectives (Hellström 2015; Forsberg & Wallmark 2002) were recommended by the treatment professionals we interviewed and have been included here.

Hellström (2015) foregrounds the importance of the motivation to play to the probability of a problematic outcome. She finds three motives for gaming – (1) 'fun/social', (2) 'demand/status' and (3) 'escape motives' (Hellström 2015: 46) – which are related to negative social outcomes.

> Gaming for fun or social reasons was associated with a reduced probability of negative social consequences. Gaming because of demands from others or to gain status increased the probability of negative social consequences and escapism motives were the strongest predictor of negative social consequences associated with gaming. (Hellström 2015: 47)

This perspective points out that there is a particular connection between the reason for play, the perspective of the gamer and the impact of the behaviour on the gamer's life. Regrettably, the possible reasons behind an escapist motive for gaming are not further explored (Hellström et al. 2012).

Network perspective

However, focusing on the reasons for play instead of the behaviour of the gamer already constitutes a broadening of the understanding of problem gaming which is also the case for the perspective of Forsberg & Wallmark (2002). Their network approach explicitly takes into account not only one individual, but also its social context.

Causal relations in a system are understood as more circular than linear. A change in an individual person or a single relationship is followed by a response from other individuals, changing the state of the whole system (Forsberg & Wallmark 2002: 29-31). It is thus hard to find unambiguous causes and effects.

The network approach contextualizes problem gaming as both a cause and a consequence of other problems in the gamer's psychosocial well-being. This suggests a system theoretic approach where the problem behavior is seen as a part of complex social relations and processes that take place for example in the families of players (Forsberg & Wallmark 2002).

Co-morbidity

An additional perspective that has not come from the interviewees, but also defines problem gaming through its social outcomes, uses the concept of comorbidity (Karlsen 2013).

Karlsen moves away from a definition of problem gaming that evolves around the behaviour of an individual gamer to also take into account the social contexts and life situations (Karlsen 2013: 113). One of his main conclusions is that life phases are a useful lens to understand problem gaming and that a change in the life circumstances of gamers can lead to a change in gaming behaviour without withdrawal or negative long-term consequences. Another conclusion is that 'to the extent that their gaming can be labelled pathological, their gaming habits seem to be part of a larger picture of problems, indicating some sort of comorbidity' (Karlsen 2013: 112).

The notion that problem gaming could be co-existing with other problems in a relationship of comorbidity has also been proposed by Lemmens et al. (2011: 150) and Wood (2008), while Fergusson et al. (2011: 1577) argue that it could be a symptom of an underlying condition.

The central point of difference between the work based on Griffiths' model and the alternative perspectives presented here lies in the role of the gamer in the frame of problem gaming. These critiques have a valid point. Out of the six criteria for game addiction proposed by Griffiths (2014) only one, *conflict*, is related to the social environment of the gamer/addict; the other five, in contrast, relate to the internal life and actions of the gamer.

This is not to say that social consequences are not reflected in the work based on this model. For instance, Beranuy et al., who also point out the need for a study of gamers in treatment (2012: 151), stress the effect of problem gaming on the social environment and other areas of life, both as a consequence and cause of an addiction.

To sum up, problematic gaming is currently most prominently defined through Griffiths' psychological framework, which most closely resembles the medical definition produced by WHO. This approach focuses on the individual behaviour as a central point of the definition. Alternative approaches present in the field have instead stressed the role of environment and social circles in the development of problematic gaming behaviour. In this chapter, concepts such as life cycles, motivation for play, network perspective, and co-morbidity will be used in the coding and the analysis of the data acquired through interviews with practitioners and patients in order to see how current theoretical approaches are grounded in the reality of treatment.

Method

Interviews and participation

Data collection and the following analytical process have been developed throughout the duration of the project and have gone through several iterations. To better explain the relevance of our findings and make the process more transparent, we will explain how this occurred step by step.

The project began with an exploratory approach and was further shaped through 'unstructured interviewing' (Fontana & Frey 2005: 705) of social workers at Ungdomsteamet [The Youth Team] in Uppsala. Ungdomsteamet is one of the few treatment groups available in Sweden. Their activities are aimed at youth with problems such as, among others, problem gaming. The interviews with Ungdomsteamet were used to develop points of interest and questions for our further inquiries. Unfortunately, we were not allowed to record those interviews; therefore, we are not able to provide any direct quotes from them. Ungdomsteamet also gave us feedback to an early version of this text to make sure that we had understood their perspective correctly as well as introduced us to the theoretical work of Forsman and Wallmark (2002) which they considered a complementary explanation of their approach and which we used to further refine our future interviews. Finally, Ungdomsteamet has been an important contact node between us and their past patients. Thanks to their referral, we were able to get in touch with several families that have previously undergone treatment and

from them we have gathered more data using 'focused semi-structured interviews' (Minichiello et al. 2000).

This method had two major advantages: it allowed for interviews with enough freedom for the interviewees to explain their understanding of phenomena and it made it possible to develop interview guides over the course of the interviews based on the previous findings and topics (Kvale 1997; Kvale & Brinkmann 2009).

After the first wave of interviews conducted in Uppsala, we managed to gain further access to practitioners through contact with Spelberoendes Förening Göteborg [the Game Dependency Organization in Gothenburg]. At Spelberoendes Förening Göteborg we interviewed the project leader and the responsible for their work with problem gaming as well as four youth and two parents who participated in collective meetings at the organization or had personal coaching sessions there. We also participated in a weekly meeting of a support group for gamers. We were even allowed to listen in on a meeting between the organization and their supervising authorities, but once again we were not allowed to record.

Spelberoendes Förening Göteborg had originally worked with gamblers and extended their focus only two years ago (in the frame of a project that is funded by Arvsfonden [the Swedish General Inheritance Fond]). The project will continue until the end of 2017. The organization hosts the support group mentioned above, but also allows for private coaching meetings and offers help and counselling over the phone.

In Uppsala, we conducted a total of three interviews with workers from Ungdomsteamet and two interviews with parent/son groups. In Gothenburg, we interviewed two professionals, four youth and two parents. As regards the professionals, all of them are educated social workers who have worked with either gaming or gambling. As regards the families, the interviewees came from different socioeconomic and personal backgrounds.[3] Due to that fact that we did not manage to reach any type of saturation, we need to point out that there is a risk that important perspectives have been omitted. There is also the risk of a selection bias since the social workers mentioned that the most difficult cases refuse to participate in interviews.

The interviewees gave written consent to the use of the interview data in research. The parents consented for their children. The interviews were primarily conducted in Swedish but included some English, due to the language limitations of the interviewees. After the transcription, the interviews were translated into English by the authors.

Collected data has then been organized and studied through application of thematic analysis (Ryan & Bernard 2003). All recorded interviews have been partially transcribed, omitting the banter that took place for making the interviewees more comfortable, and then coded. The initial codes that emerged from the data have then been iteratively processed into the broader themes (Braun & Clarke 2012) that will be presented in the analytical part of this chapter. In order to be able to contextualize the differences and similarities in their particular approaches, we have also sorted our data based on the different stakeholder groups we interviewed. Transcribing, coding and categorizing has been done by both authors. This has given us the opportunity of

critically reflecting on our methodological process and further improving the conclusions we can draw from our research.

Results and analysis

Here we present the different perspectives of the three groups and the ways they negotiate and problematize problem gaming and relate them to the concepts of co-morbidity and network perspective. These concepts showed to be most prominent in our data and will be used to structure the chapter, although also the notion of life cycles will be mentioned. Finally, the importance of the motivation for play has been subsumed in the headline of personal suffering which has come out of the data. The data will be presented as quotes. As mentioned above, it was not possible to record the meetings with Ungdomsteamet which is why it is not possible to present direct quotes from them.

Co-morbidity and network perspective

From the point of view of the treatment professionals and the parents, problem gaming is characterized by negative consequences in other parts of the gamers' lives. These negative consequences were found in the areas of social life, occupation and education, physical and mental health, and family life. From the side of the professionals, this is evident in the aim of the treatment of both organizations. In both cases, the focus was to help gamers and their families to live a happier and more fulfilling life.

> *Social worker:* We have youth coming to us who just stopped living. They put their lives on pause and we need to work with helping them.

The focus on giving problem gamers back what they had previously discarded also informed the method of treatment. In both cases it consisted of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and coaching. The aim was to find the motivations and aims of the gamers themselves. Coaching was also chosen because it offered some practical help for planning a daily routine and because it afforded a conversation about what the gamers might be missing in their lives which could be a jumping-off point to get them to talk about their situation and their feelings. In principle, it was explained as:

> *Social worker:* The important part is that I see you and I get you started. Make you begin something new. Make you want it, too. That's what coaching helps us with. It helps to find possibilities, find solutions and find the will to do other things. I work with human beings so it's the actual person that's important. Who are you and why have you gotten stuck in the computer?

Ungdomsteamet [The Youth Team] presented this technique and as an example drew a pie chart that represented the time of a day that the gamer could fill with activities until the entire time was used up. Spelberoendes Förening Göteborg [the Game

Dependency Organization in Gothenburg] used a similar round chart that portrayed different areas of life (e.g. social relations, work, and free time) to illustrate the way time and focus was balanced or out-of-balance in the life of the gamer.

From the point of view of the treatment professionals, problem gaming is characterized by the emergence of negative consequences in other parts of the gamers' lives. These negative consequences were found in the areas of social life, occupation and education, physical and mental health, and family life. However, the aim was not to reduce gaming time as an end in itself, or to bring the gamer to stop gaming. The point was not to remove something from the gamers' lives, but to add other things and activities that could balance the time the gamers spent on gaming. The professionals stressed this focus and pointed it out as different from the way addictions to, for example, gambling or alcohol, were treated. There, the focus of the treatment is on the specific problem behaviour, while in the case of problem gaming, the point is to stress the importance of other things in life.

In their discussion of problem gaming, also the parents focused on the importance of passing school and finding and maintaining a workplace rather than the gaming practice in itself. The parents described that their children extended gaming time into sleep time and could not pay attention at school because they were so tired. After having extended gaming time, the next step that the parents described was how the gamers – in order to be able to play longer and without interruption – skipped school completely.

Some parents showed understanding for gaming being a social activity and acknowledged the social relationships and friendships their children had online. All of them mentioned that their children played with others, chatted, and talked over VoIP. Some of the friendships online extended into the real world:

> *Parent 1:* They become really close. So [my son] told me many times: 'Mom, he is my best friend, we are so great and can talk about anything', and of course they play at the same time. They also meet in real life. The boy was here during the summer and [my son] has been there for a week to visit. They just sat in the boys' room and played games the whole time. That's basically what they do together, but that friendship means a lot to my son.

However, others dismissed online relationships completely and called them unreal.

> *Parent 3:* All the time, we said: 'You need to see real friends. Go outside the house. Do something.' 'I have friends', he said. 'I have a lot of friends.' It was impossible to discuss because he was so dependent on the game.

In general, it can be said that in the eyes of the parents, problem gaming was defined as any gaming activity that negatively affected an area of life that the parents saw as essentially important. These areas were, as earlier mentioned, occupation and school, social contacts, health, and family relations.

Besides the understanding of problem gaming, one of the issues that emerged was the low level of knowledge about the games their children were playing. Parents often

did not know the name of the game their child was playing. In any case, the parents' only source of knowledge about the games were their children or the professionals who had been treating them. The parents had failed to acquire detailed knowledge about the games, their aims, culture, or the problems associated with them, by themselves. One parent explained this as follows:

> *Parent 2:* I don't have the time to stand and look when they play. I sometimes ask the youngest son when he plays, but there is no contact. If I stand there and watch I'm disturbing them. That's when the fights start. There is a lot of fighting involved.

This is especially relevant because it ties directly into one of the problems around gaming, the dysfunctional family. In a dysfunctional family, in the way described by the parents, the communication between the parents and the children did not work any longer, which meant that simple rituals like shared meals did not happen any longer, and the main kind of communication was arguing about gaming.

This point has also been stressed by Ungdomsteamet [The Youth Team] who explained that often the solution to problem gaming was not to dictate behaviour rules for the gamer but to remind the family that it was important to spend quality time together and to communicate openly. As soon as the family started doing things together again, gaming became manageable. Ungdomsteamet called this time spent together 'TT' (for 'tid tillsammans', Swedish for 'time together') and recommended the families to start using TT as a pre-defined notion for a shared enjoyable activity in their everyday life. TT also appeared as a central concept from the side of the parents.

This point again stresses the importance of the social surroundings of the gamer for not only the practical development of a problem gaming but also on a more abstract level on what is understood as problem gaming. The exact same gaming time and habits can be integrated better into family life with a higher level of parental knowledge and understanding and a working and friendly family atmosphere because of TT which can make the difference between problem gaming and intense but unproblematic gaming. As summed up by one of the interviewees:

> *Parent 1:* The big change that occurred because of Ungdomsteamet is that we can now easier talk to each other. It's not conflict-free, but we can talk and my son himself keeps track of his presence and what he needs to do to make things work. I also think it is easier for me to understand his gaming.

As soon as the family started doing things together again, gaming became more manageable. This finding is in line with the network approach as defined by Forsberg and Wallmark (2002). Within treatment of problem gaming, the network approach is centred on creating mutual understanding and acceptance inside the network and aims to reduce conflict instead of, for example, pushing playing time under some arbitrary border or creating rules for the sake of rules. This is in line with the findings of Domahidi and Quandt (2014), who also reject a focus on the time spent gaming in diagnosis and treatment of problem gaming.

A topic that was central in the accounts of the gamers was previously existing issues that, in one way or the other, led to the problem gaming. It is important to stress here that none of the gamers saw problem gaming as purely a symptom of a previous condition or situation. Instead, they presented problem gaming as something that, on the one hand, does cause problems and sadness while it, on the other hand, often emerges from a situation with pre-existing underlying problems. These problems can be of varying nature but the most common examples were related to problems in school (like bullying); to cases of death in the family or to a dysfunctional family; to loneliness and separation due to living far away from friends or due to an injury that made it impossible to continue physical activities and sports that had been an important part of their earlier lives.

> *Gamer 2:* There were some incidents that happened. Like my grandpa passed away. And when that happened, you know, I did not see the sunlight for two weeks, I think. 'Cause it was my holidays as well; no, I was unemployed at that time, just straight out of high school. And for two weeks, I did not see the sunlight, basically. I just played, played, played, played. So yeah…

To explain how problematic gaming developed in the first place, the interviewees frequently said that while gaming started as a symptom of an underlying problem it had itself become a new problem and even grown so far that it became the defining problem of the gamers' lives. This perspective is useful for understanding problem gaming not as something static and binary, but as a condition that over time can change in nature and intensity. Here, gaming can start as a benign and even valuable activity that later on develops into an additional problem in an ecosystem with the other, underlying, issues. (For instance, see Beranuy et al. [2012], where the findings show that problem gaming can develop out of the use of gaming as a way to deal with other problems.)

However, this notion of an interaction of problematic issues which together form problem gaming means that the gaming is in a relation of comorbidity with other issues. While gaming, in this view, may still be a problem in itself, to simply remove the gaming behaviour does not necessarily solve the situation. At the same time, though, gaming can still be seen as a problem in itself. Karlsen (2013) also uses the notion of co-morbidity in his analysis of problem gaming, and the here presented data supports this view on the relationship between problem gaming and other issues in the gamers' lives.

The suffering of the gamers

One of the advantages of co-morbidity as a perspective is that it makes it possible to both understand problem gaming as a symptom of other issues as well as an underlying cause of suffering. This is also confirmed by our data as suffering has been a central aspect of the definition of problem gaming, especially from the side of the gamers we interviewed. When approaching the question of problem gaming, the gamers tended

to focus on their subjective experiences of the situation. This means that what parent and treatment personnel understand as the defining factor of problem gaming, the negative consequence of time spent gaming, is for the gamers themselves not the central aspect. The gamers also recognize that their suffering can be caused by the same factors as the other groups see as the core elements of problem gaming. However, this stressing of the emotional reaction of the gamer foregrounds suffering as the deciding element of problem gaming.

Declining physical and mental health are the aspects of problem gaming that are most internal to the gamer. The parents and treatment professionals stressed physical health; depression and subjective suffering were only mentioned implicitly. In their view, what made gaming a problem was physical inactivity, an unbalanced diet, and irregular sleep. This is the most notable difference to the gamers' perspective on problem gaming.

Problem gaming was seen as both cause and effect of mental health problems. While depression and suffering were described as elements of addiction and consequences of gaming, diagnosed conditions like ADHD and social anxiety were mentioned as reasons for the development of problem gaming. Some parents of children with such diagnoses also reported that they initially thought of gaming as helpful for their children, who would become calm and manageable while gaming. This ambiguity of cause and effect can also be observed around other elements of problem gaming. While social isolation was presented as one of the most prominent effects of gaming, it was also mentioned as one of its causes. Lack of social contacts, living far out and isolated on the countryside, but also bullying in school or difficulties finding work were mentioned as triggers of problem gaming.

> *Parent 3:* He felt so bad that he didn't want to continue his life. He was so depressed, yes. There was one moment when I went out of the kitchen and he was sitting with a knife. Because he didn't want... he didn't find any reason to continue his life. And that was because he just played. All friends had just left. [...] He had problems in school too.

In the view of the gamers, the central aspect of problem gaming was their subjective suffering and depression. While gamers recognize that problem gaming creates problems in other areas of life, the main problem seems to be how they feel about these problems. This means that the gamers do have notions of what a fulfilled life looks like and realize that they are not living up to those. An example illustrating this is an interviewee who says that gaming became a problem when it became the only escape from a miserable life outside of the game:

> *Gamer 1:* The reason why I became a gamer, or why I started to go into gaming completely, was because I was bullied in school and the school didn't do anything about it. They actually came forth with some stupid idea that it was my fault in the end. That hit me quite heavily and I went right into the computer and fled from reality. I was in my little bubble and didn't give shit about anything.

Interviewer: Everything else hurt?

Gamer 1: Yeah. And with that came the depression that I felt every time I closed that computer at night.

Another example shows this focus on suffering as the defining factor of problem gaming for a competitive gamer who was the head of a CS:Go team on the verge of international success. He has now given up gaming and identifies himself as a game addict because of way he suffered from the stress of the training and the immense time-commitment of what is essentially two full-time jobs, the regular day-job and the semi-professional gaming.

Gamer 2: I miss the fun parts. But in the end, it was not fun anymore. It just got really strict and it was like, it was your life, you know. Gaming all the time. And you started to lose self-confidence and you just thought you were shit at everything except for the game. So yeah. I just miss, you know, the fun moments with the friends and stuff. Just playing for fun.

Their use of the notion of game addiction as a coping mechanism will be further discussed in the analysis section. However, while their gaming practice would not typically be seen as problem gaming or an addiction, the gamer literally states that what matters from their perspective is how it feels.

Gamer 2: So, there was a time, you know, you were all alone. Well, you weren't. But couldn't see the people close to you. The people who actually cared. That was quite a rough time. It doesn't sound rough, you know, but the feelings were.

Discussion

Definition of problem gaming

While the interviewees did not offer their own definition of problem gaming, it is possible to point out the aspects that made gaming problematic based on their narratives. In summary, it can be said that neither of the three groups focused on the gaming behaviour in their definition of problem gaming. The concept of game addiction, specifically based on the work of Griffiths (2005), is too focused on the individual and misses the surrounding network of elements, i.e. aspects that constitute problem gaming in the perspective presented in this chapter. Griffiths' psychological perspective approaches problem gaming in same way that it approaches substance addiction and gambling. In this view, problem gaming is seen as something that needs to be removed from an addict's life since it is inherently damaging, negative, and without value.

In the view of the gamers, the many hours spent gaming were never mentioned as a measure of problem gaming. Instead, they stressed the effect of this time spent on other areas of life and on the psychological health of the gamer. The understanding

of problem gaming as problems in other areas of life resonates with the network approach used by the treatment professionals. It needs to be emphasized that the Network Approach (Forsberg & Wallmark 2002) applied to problem gaming not only stresses the importance of the social context, but actually defines problem gaming based on aspects related to the gamer's social functioning. However, this approach overlooks the impact problem gaming itself has in the form of psychological and physical health consequences and suffering. Thus, in order to fit our data, it needs to be augmented with the understanding of co-morbidity as used by Karlsen (2013). While we do not have the long-term data necessary to problematize the notion of life phases and problem gaming, it can be said that this notion seems to hold and that the dynamic of comorbidity, where gaming and other issues in concert form problem gaming, is a useful to explain what problem gaming is from the perspective of our interviewees.

Both Ungdomsteamet [The Youth Team] and Spelberoendes Förening Göteborg [the Game Dependency Organization in Gothenburg] discussed whether the term game addiction was warranted to describe what this anthology is calling problem gaming. Here, there was a difference between the perspectives of Ungdomsteamet and Spelberoendes Förening. Ungdomsteamet rejected the term 'game addiction' and instead used the notion of problematic gaming in their meetings with families and their discussions with us.[4] Their reason for rejecting the notion of 'game addiction' was that they felt that such an approach would focus too much on the behaviour of the individual gamer and not enough on the system of social relations that this gamer was a part of – something that, in the eyes of Ungdomsteamet, was a central aspect of problem gaming. 'Game addiction' conceptually focused the attention on the gaming behaviour and the gamer. In the frames of this concept, it is the individual that needed to be changed in order to solve eventual problems. 'Problem gaming', on the other hand, focused on the problems that emerged in some kind of relation (as cause, effect, or both) to the gaming activity and which had to be solved to help the gamers and their close ones to a better life. In the eyes of Ungdomsteamet, it was possible to solve problem gaming without changing the gaming activity by helping the family to communicate, spend time together, and by enabling the gamer to also fulfil their other responsibilities.

Problem gaming as role conflict

In their definition of problem gaming, the interviewees pointed repeatedly to specific areas of life that their gaming behaviour needed to displace in order for it to become problem gaming. School, work, friendships, and family are areas which come with particular social roles and responsibilities. That these very specific aspects are so tightly connected to our interviewees' definition of problem gaming indicates the importance of these societal roles and responsibilities for understanding problem gaming. In his chapter in this anthology, Andreas Lindegaard Gregersen presents a theoretical perspective where problem gaming is understood as role conflict. Linde-

gaard Gregersen's approach partially explains findings of this chapter, especially in relation to the importance of other areas of life for the definition of problem gaming.

The effectiveness of increased communication in the family in resolving problem gaming as represented by the practice of TT also supports the notion of problem gaming as a conflict between different societal roles. The effect of TT could then be explained as an improvement of communication between family members and something that leads to a greater understanding of the conflict between the roles of the gamer. Being a team member in their clan and a young adult and child in their family becomes a topic of mutual agreement and, in that way, defuses problem gaming. That said, this perspective does not fully account for the elements of individual suffering in the definition of problem gaming that is presented in this chapter. Suffering could be seen as an outcome of role conflicts. However, there is nothing in the data that supports this connection. Instead, gamers mentioned that their internal perspectives could even be hard to understand from the outside but were still valid as an element of problem gaming. This does not mean that social role conflict is not a useful lense for investigating problem gaming, but it indicates that it doesn't capture all aspects of this complex phenomenon.

'Game addiction' as a pragmatic resource

The material conditions of the existing treatment options for problem gaming are somewhat poor. Ungdomsteamet's efforts in the area have been discontinued and Spelberoendes Förening will only have funding to deal with problem gaming for another year. These very real threats to any kind of treatment for problem gamers are the backdrop of the acceptance of the game addiction discourse even though the treatment of problem gaming shows that it is, or at least can be, very different from an addiction.

Both Ungdomsteamet and Spelberoendes Förening stated that their aim was to help people have a better life, and the project leader at Spelberoendes Förening pointed out that it would be preferable and morally right to simply help people that are in need of support instead of requiring a diagnosis before freeing up resources. However, as long as that is not a real world possibility, it is necessary to use notions like game addiction in order to be able to help gamers, despite the fact that their problem gaming can't be compared to other addictions in a straightforward manner. The effect of political pressure and the need to manipulate social institutions for access to resources on the definition of problem gaming and game addiction is an area for future research.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that from the perspective of the three groups of interviewees, treatment professionals, parents and gamers, problem gaming is defined through

the negative effect the gaming behavior has on other areas of life, which then leads to suffering on the side of the gamer. Problem gaming is not seen as the one aspect that needs to be removed from a gamers life in order to resolve it; instead, the gamers life needs to be refilled with the elements that have been lost due to problem gaming. This immediate connection of problem gaming to other areas of life and problems highlights that problem gaming is not exclusively a reason for – or a symptom of – other problems, but that it stands in a relation of comorbidity to them. In order to understand and address problem gaming, it is therefore elementary to analyse the entire network of relationships and practices in which problem gaming occurs instead of focusing on the gamer and their problematic behaviour.

However, our analysis shows that the counter-reaction against a psychological perspective that focuses on the gamers and their behaviour in the definition of problem gaming might have thrown out the baby with the bath water. While the social surroundings and conflicts are certainly the better starting point for defining problem gaming, it is important not to lose track of the emotional life and the subjective perspective of the gamer. If we don't want to risk to lose the agency of the players in the definition of their own lives and happiness, suffering needs to be an essential part of what defines problem gaming.

Notes

1. This chapter is using the term 'problem gaming' instead of 'game addiction' or 'hazard gaming'. Terms like game addiction bring with them a number of fixated notions which this chapter and anthology aims to problematize and examine. However, since the term 'game addiction' does fill a particular role in societal infrastructure and discourse, and since our interviewees use it, we will also use the term during the discussion of theory and in the analysis of the interviews.
2. In section 6D71, gaming disorder is defined as follows: "Gaming disorder is manifested by a persistent or recurrent gaming behavior (i.e., 'digital gaming' or 'video-gaming') characterized by an impaired control over gaming, increasing priority given to gaming over other activities to the extent that gaming takes precedence over other interests and daily activities and continuation of gaming despite the occurrence of negative consequences. The behavior pattern is of sufficient severity to result in significant impairment in personal, family, social, educational, occupational or other important areas of functioning. These features and the underlying pattern of gaming are normally evident over a period of at least 12 months in order for a diagnosis to be assigned, although the required duration may be shortened if all diagnostic requirements are met and symptoms are severe."
3. It has to be mentioned that the choice of informants was limited by the difficulty of access. We were only capable of talking to youth and parents that came forward when prompted by their respective treatment centre.
4. While the two terms are not identical, they are close enough to here be considered as synonyms.

References

Beranuy, Marta; Carbonell, Xavier & Griffiths, Mark D. (2013). A Qualitative Analysis of Online Gaming Addicts in Treatment. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 11(2):149–161.

Braun, Virginia, & Clarke, Victoria (2012). Thematic analysis, pp. 57–71 in Harris, Cooper; Camic, Paul M.; Long, Debra L.; Panter, A. T.; Rindskopf, David & Sher, Kenneth J. (eds). *APA handbook of research methods in psychology, Vol 2: Research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological, and biological*. Washington, USA: American Psychological Association.

Bryman, Alan (1988). *Quantity and Quality in Social Research*. London: Unwin Hyman.

Charlton, John P. & Danforth, Ian D. W. (2007). Distinguishing addiction and high engagement in the context of online game playing. *Computers in Human Behavior,* 23(3): 1531–1548.

Cover, Rob (2006). Gaming (Ad)diction: Discourse, Identity, Time and Play in the Production of the Gamer Addiction Myth. *Game Studies,* 6(1).

Desai, Rani A.; Krishnan-Sarin, Suchitra; Cavallo, Dana; Potenza, Marc N. (2010). Video-Gaming Among High School Students: Health Correlates, Gender Differences, and Problematic Gaming. *Pediatrics*, 126(6): 1414–1424.

Domahidi, Emese & Quandt, Thorsten (2014). Living in a Virtual World? An Excessive Gamer Typology, pp. 204–214 in Quant, Thorsten & Kröger, Sonja (eds). *Multiplayer –The Social Aspects of Digital Gaming.* London: Routledge.

Ferguson, Christopher (2016). Comment on the Proposal to add the new entity to 'Disorders due to substance use or addictive behaviours', *WHO ICD 11*, http://apps.who.int/classifications/icd11/browse/proposals/f/en#/http://id.who.int/icd/entity/1602669465?readOnly=true&action=AddNewEntityProposal&stableProposalGroupId=64d935b0-8c2e-439f-90d6-e0d7d00d4c40 [accessed 28/09/2016].

Ferguson, Christopher J.; Coulson, Mark & Bernett, Jane (2011). A meta-analysis of pathological gaming prevalence and comorbidity with metal health, academic and social problems. *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 45(12): 1573–1578.

Fontana, Andrea & Frey, James H. (2005). The interview: From neutral stance to political involvement, pp. 695–728 in Denzin, Norman K., & Lincoln, Yvonne S. (eds). *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Forsberg, Gunnar & Wallmark, Johan (2002). *Nätverksboken – om mötets möjligheter*. Solna: Liber.

Griffiths, Mark D. & Meredith, Alex (2009). Videogame addiction and treatment. *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*, 39(4): 47–53.

Griffiths, Mark D. (2014). An Overview of Online Gaming Addiction, pp. 195–199 in Quant, Thorsten & Kröger, Sonja (eds). *Multiplayer – The Social Aspects of Digital Gaming*, London: Routledge.

Griffiths, Mark D. (2005). A 'components' model of addiction within biopsychosocial framework. *Journal of Substance Use*, 21(4): 191–197.

Hellström, Charlotta (2015). *Adolescent Gaming and Gambling in Relation to Negative Social Consequences and Health*. Digital Comprehensive Summaries of Uppsala Dissertations from the Faculty of Medicine 1131. Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis.

Hellström, Charlotta; Nilsson, Kent W.; Leppert, Jerzy, & Åslund, Cecilia (2012). Influences of motives to play and time spent gaming on the negative consequences of adolescent online computer gaming. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 28(4):1379–1387.

Kardefelt-Winther, Daniel (2016). Proposal for Deletion of the Entity of Gaming Disorder, *WHO ICD 11*. http://apps.who.int/classifications/icd11/browse/proposals/f/en#/http://id.who.int/icd/entity/1448597234?readOnly=true&action=DeleteEntityProposal&stableProposalGroupId=1cda9b24-6fc9-40bd-b529-d3e8e8a1e3b1 [accessed 28/09/2016].

Karlsen, Faltin (2013). *A World of Excesses – Online Games and Excessive Playing*. Farnham, England: Ashgate.

Kvale Steinar & Brinkmann Svend (2009). *InterView. Introduktion til et handværk*. København: Hans Reitzels forlag.

Kvale, Steinar (1997). *Den kvalitativa forskningsintervjun*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Lemmens, Jeroen S.; Valkenburg, Patti M. & Peter, Jochen (2011). Psychosocial causes and consequences of pathological gaming. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 27(1): 144–152.

Minichiello, Victor; Aroni, Rosalie; Timewell, Eric & Loris, Alexander (2000). *In-depth Interviewing: Researching people*. Hong Kong: Longman Cheshire Pty Limited.

Quandt, Thorsten. (2017). Stepping back to advance: Why IGD needs an intensified debate instead of a consensus. Commentary on: Chaos and confusion in DSM-5 diagnosis of Internet Gaming Disorder: Issues, concerns, and recommendations for clarity in the field (Kuss et al.). *Journal of Behavioral Addictions*, 6(2): 121–123.

Ryan, Gery W. & Bernard, H. Russel (2003). Techniques to Identify Themes. *Field Methods*, 15(1): 85–109.

Suissa, Amnon Jacob (2008). A Critical Perspective on Gambling, pp. 119-133 in Zangeneh, Massod; Baszcynski, Alex & Turner, Nigel E. (eds). *In the Pursuit of Winning: Problem Gambling Theory, Research and Treatment*. New York: Springer.

van Rooij, Tony (2016). Proposal for Deletion of the Entity of Gaming Disorder, *WHO ICD 11*, apps.who.int/classifications/icd11/browse/proposals/f/en#/http://id.who.int/icd/entity/1448597234?readOnly=true&action=DeleteEntityProposal&stableProposalGroaupId=1cda9b24-6fc9-40bd-b529-d3e8e8a1e3b1 [accessed 28/09/2016].

WHO (2014). Public health implications of excessive use of the internet, computers, smartphones and similar electronic devices. Meeting report from *Foundation for Promotion of Cancer Research*, 27-29 August 2014 at National Cancer Research Centre, Tokyo. http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/184264/1/9789241509367_eng.pdf [accessed 28/09/2016].

Authors

Andreas Gregersen
University of Copenhagen
Department of media, cognition
and communication
agr@hum.ku.dk

Anne Brus
University of Roskilde
Department of people and technology
abrus@ruc.dk

Anne Mette Thorhauge
University of Copenhagen
Department of media, cognition
and communication
annemette@thorhauge.dk

Faltin Karlsen
Westerdals Institute for Film and Media
Kristiania University College
Faltin.Karlsen@westerdals.no

Ian Sturrock
University of Hertfordshire
School of Creative Arts
i.sturrock@herts.ac.uk

Jessica Enevold
University of Lund
Department of arts and
cultural sciences
jessica.enevold@kultur.lu.se

Patrick Prax
Uppsala University
Department of Informatics and Media
patrick.prax@im.uu.se

Paulina Rajkowska
Uppsala University
Department of Informatics and Media
paulina.rajkowska@im.uu.se

Rune Kristian Lundedal Nielsen
Center for Computer Games Research
The IT University of Copenhagen
rkln@itu.dk

NORDICOM

Nordic Information Centre for Media and Communication Research

Contacts

Editor
Johannes Bjerling, PhD
phone: +46 766-18 12 39
johannes.bjerling@nordicom.gu.se

Administration, sales
Anne Claesson
phone: +46 31 786 12 16
anne.claesson@nordicom.gu.se

Postal address
Nordicom
University of Gothenburg
PO Box 713
SE-405 30 Göteborg

+46 31 786 00 00

www.nordicom.gu.se

@Nordicom_News

Info@nordicom.gu.se

@NordicomNews

@nordicompics

Recent publication

Books on Screens. Players in the Swedish e-book market. Nordicom, 2017

Negotiating Journalism. Core Values and Cultural Diversities. Nordicom, 2017

Cultural Journalism in the Nordic Countries. Nordicom, 2017

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM IN PROBLEM GAMING? is a valuable contribution to the debates about young people's gaming habits and the highly contested concept of *video game addiction*. The chapters in the volume provide a number of perspectives on the issue, such as players' life conditions and lifestyle choices, problem gaming from a family perspective, the voices of treatment professionals, and how game design can become problematic.

How problem gaming is framed is a highly relevant issue that affects policies surrounding the consumption of videogames. This anthology is a just in time contribution and an essential read for researchers in the field as well as for policymakers, social workers, clinical psychologists, teachers and others who encounter problem gaming in their profession.

Jonas Linderoth
Professor of Education and distinguished scholar in the Digital Game Research Association (DiGRA)

NORDICOM
Nordic Information Centre for Media and Communication Research

University of Gothenburg
Box 713, SE 405 30 Göteborg, Sweden
Telephone +46 31 786 00 00 • Fax + 46 31 786 46 55

E-mail info@nordicom.gu.se
www.nordicom.gu.se

Nordic Council of Ministers

UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

ISBN 978-91-87957-88-8