

Chapter 1

Internet Gaming Disorder: A Deeper Look into Addiction vs. High Engagement

Mario Lehenbauer-Baum

Sigmund Freud Private University, Austria

Martina Fohringer

University of Vienna, Austria

ABSTRACT

Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD) was introduced in the recent DSM-V as a condition needing more research. Therefore, this chapter contributes to this discussion by a summary of recent research findings and introduces an empirical study concerning differences between an engaged and a problematic use of games. We surveyed 577 participants (mean age 24.38 years; 77.1% male) from German speaking areas. We used a gaming addiction questionnaire and the Internet Addiction Scale (ISS-20). 93.7% are high-level player (level 85); 3.1% are addicted according to the ISS-20. We found 2 factors explaining “addiction” and “engagement”. Addicted players spend more time per week playing online with 31.31 hours/week compared to highly engaged players with 22.19 hours/week ($p < .001$), have higher scores in the Internet addiction scale ($p < .001$), and significantly lower scores in scales measuring the quality of life ($p < .001$). Therefore we conclude that items tapping euphoria and cognitive salience are of limited use when it comes to a classification of IGD.

1. INTRODUCTION

“Her child is like a drug addict — at age 12. His drug of choice is computer games” (Hansen, 2014), “5 warning signs of gaming addiction” (Sutter, 2014), “Increasing number of students addicted to online-gaming!” (Chieh-liang, 2014); these media articles are three recent examples from 2014. They confirm that addiction is still one of the most frequently mentioned terms in connection with the Internet and online-based video games. Accordingly, over the last decade news and research articles concentrated on the idea that the involvement of people with the Internet or digital games can become so intense that it

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appears addictive. However, despite this increased media and research interest, there are a lot of people who are using video games without any negative consequences. Therefore, it is still unclear where to draw the line; the current chapter contributes to this discussion by a summary of recent research findings and an empirical study concerning differences between a) the still beneficial and joyful (engaged) and b) a problematic or maladaptive (addicted) use of online-games.

1.1. Background: Problematic Use of the Internet and Online-Games

As one of the first researchers, Young (1998) stated that Internet Addiction is about to become a new “emerging” clinical disorder. She developed a diagnostic questionnaire with modified criteria of pathological gambling and surveyed Internet users (with items like “Do you feel preoccupied with the Internet” or “Do you feel the need to use the Internet with increasing amounts of time in order to achieve satisfaction?”); 80% (n = 396) were diagnosed as Internet dependent or addicted. Similar to pathological gambling, researchers assume Pathological Internet Use (PIU) is related to a behavioral addiction; people are not able to decrease their Internet use (Griffiths, 2000; Widyanto & Griffiths, 2007). However, Griffiths (1998) criticized this concept of Internet addiction as a broad term that covers a wide variety of behaviors. He argued that many of these excessive users are not “Internet addicts”, but that the concept of a behavioral addiction seems to apply to some of these users (Widyanto & Griffiths, 2007).

Petry (2011) states critically that there are no clearly defined criteria available for PIU or gaming addiction. This leads to a) a variety of names for the disorder, b) a variety of surveys and b) even more inconsistent prevalence rates ranging from 1% to 35% (Leung, 2004; Yoo et al., 2004) or even 80% in very early studies (Young, 1998). The terms describing a problematic gaming behavior varied with problematic Internet use, Internet addiction, pathological Internet use and Internet gaming behavior being four names used. While the discussion about the correct term is still going on, multiple studies revealed that a high amount of time spent online (either playing games or other online activities) is indeed linked to a problematic behavior or a higher risk of developing psychological problems such as depression or social anxiety (Chen et al., 2011; LaRose, Lin, & Eastin, 2003; Lehenbauer, Stetina, & Kryspin-Exner, 2007; Saunders & Chester, 2008; Selfhout, Branje, Delsing, ter Bogt, & Meeus, 2009; Widyanto & Griffiths, 2007). Furthermore, a heavy use of the Internet or excessively playing computer games seems to decrease the quality of life in general (Leung & Lee, 2005). Kardefelt-Winther (2014) suggested that Internet gaming might be a form of compensatory Internet use, e.g. people high on social anxiety may compensate for feelings of loneliness by socializing in a game or use it as some form of stress management tool. Caplan, Williams and Yee (2009) report similar findings; loneliness, introversion, aggression, addiction and depression are significant predictors of an excessive use of the Internet. Smyth (2007) studied the effects of playing MMORPG for one month. He found that this group of MMORPG gamers (compared to other game players) played for more hours per week, and reported greater impairments to health, quality of sleep and their social and academic life. On the other hand, they had more fun with playing, and reported a greater amount of friends found online.

Therefore, an excessive or engaged gaming behavior can not automatically be seen as addicted or problematic. Even a persistent gaming behavior can result from a passionate engagement with exploring virtual worlds and completing quests online without any negative consequences for the life of gamers. Accordingly, Leung and Lee (2005) report that occasional gaming increases the quality of life, up to a certain amount of the weekly amount of time spent with the game. These results make it difficult to draw a line between engagement and addiction; while most people use online-games without any problems, minorities of users seem to have problems with a healthy Internet use and are labeled as addicted.

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