

The Micro-Politics of Time in Young People's Talk About Gaming

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The digital gamer is a public concern, in particular when the gamer is a child or teenager. As digital games have become part of the everyday lives of children (and adults) in Western societies (e.g. Medietilsynet, 2016a), social and cultural norms relating to preferable and acceptable use of digital games have been placed on the public agenda and are being discussed by children, parents, researchers and politicians (Ng & Weimer-Hastings, 2005; Karlsen, 2013; Vadlin, Åslund, Rehn & Nilsson, 2015). In Norway and other Western countries, these norms resonate in the guidelines, advice, recommendations and topics that policymakers and other interest groups have created for discussion with children. For instance, on the *Medietilsynet*¹ (Norwegian Media Authority) and *barnevakten*² (Kids and Media) websites, adults, usually seen as parents, can find suggestions for how to deal with (potential) problems or challenges when addressing their children's use of digital games. The topics on these webpages are on the relation between digital games, age and 'acceptable usage'; in particular, the relation between game content and player age, suggestions concerning the amount of time children should spend on gaming and how to accomplish gaming within the sphere of other everyday activities, such as school and socialising with friends and families. In short, it could be argued that children's gaming practices are of concern in terms of *content* and *time usage*.

The concern about children and gaming is also made explicit through the establishment of PEGI (Pan European Game Information) and the ESRB (Entertainment Software Rating Board) that first and foremost have been created to guide

1 www.medietilsynet.no

2 www.barnevakten.no

parents to choose games that suit different age groups. These systems encourage producers to classify their games according to age and to place a content declaration on the cover or in a description of the game. The age recommendations are closely related to the content (mainly with respect to language, sex and violence) of the games (Medietilsynet, 2016a). These systems build on the idea that digital games may have negative influence, especially on children and therefore need to be regulated (Aarsand, 2011). The PEGI system, which is used in Europe, only has legal muscle in a few countries, for instance the UK. This also means that in countries where the PEGI recommendations serve as guidelines only, the responsibility for acceptable usage is placed solely on the parents and the players themselves.

Parents are an undeniably important group when it comes to children and gaming. Studies of US families' and parents' talk about children's use of digital games show that edutainment software and games are considered to be good, socially acceptable and even preferred activities, whereas entertainment games often are considered problematic and in need of regulatory control (Aarsand, 2011). Studies from other cultural contexts also show that parents apply rules to restrict and guide their children's consumption of media (Rideout, Roberts & Foehr, 2005; Vandewater, Park, Huang & Wartella, 2005; Livingstone & Helsper, 2007; Medietilsynet, 2016b). Three rules are repeatedly mentioned in these studies: first, restrictions on the type of game, second, restrictions on the amount of time children spend on media and third, restrictions relating to appropriate time for media use. Such rules are more likely to be applied to children under twelve years of age (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007). While the question of content is highly relevant among parents of younger children, this issue becomes less relevant when children are fifteen to sixteen years old (Medietilsynet, 2016b).

Even though the level of the parents' governance tends to decrease as children grow older, gaming is still a topic of concern. The question of time has especially been an issue in studies of MMO (massively multiplayer online) games (Ng & Weimer-Hastings, 2005; Linderoth & Bennerstedt, 2007; Ahlstrom, Lundberg, Zabriskie, Eggett & Lindsay, 2012). For instance, a large-scale study of the MMO game *EverQuest II* (Verant Interactive, 2004) shows that the average time usage is placed at 26 hours a week (Williams, Yee & Caplan, 2008). Studies of MMO games have often focused on (young) adult participants, in this case the average age is thirty-one years old. This study exemplifies how these kinds of games often lead the player to invest a great deal of time in them to be able to fully participate (cf. Linderoth & Bennerstedt, 2007). The question of time usage also has relevance in discussions on such phenomena as computer game addiction (Brus & Thorhauge, 2011), pathological gaming (Gentile, 2009; Lemmens, Valkenburg &

Jocken, 2011) and general health issues (Calvert, Staiano & Bond, 2013; Simons, de Vet, Brug, Seidell & Chinapaw, 2014).

Concerns about young people and digital games are seen in discussions across a variety of social practices, from mass media to families, all of which are practices with different purposes. Being a teenager in contemporary Western societies involves dealing with social and cultural norms that guide and regulate gaming. Taking a youth perspective, the present chapter explores how concerns about gaming are present in teenagers' talk about acceptable usage of games.

STANCES AND ACCOUNTS

Teenagers play computer games in school as part of their formal education (serious games) and at home together with families and friends. Just a few of them do not play digital games themselves but are most likely to have friends that do play. It could be argued that in one way or another digital games and gaming are part of young people's everyday lives in the Western world. The practice of gaming generates social and cultural norms concerning what, when, where, together with whom to play and how to play (e.g. Reeves, Greiffenhagen & Laurier, 2017). Social norms are restrictions on and possibilities for the social organisation of gaming (Goffman, 1974), as well as how this practice is understood and talked about (Foucault, 1999). Social and cultural norms in young people's talk about digital games and gaming can be discussed in micro-political terms (Baker, 2000). In this text, micro-politics is understood as claims, descriptions, stances and counter-stances on digital games and gaming in social encounters. To understand how social and cultural norms work among teenagers, I have focused on teenagers' *stance taking* to gaming and their *accounts*.

Stance taking can be described as a public act where the subject takes a stance with respect to objects or other persons (DuBois, 2007). This means that in interaction with the surroundings one evaluates objects and persons as, for instance good, bad, improvable or healthy. Taking a stance on something or someone involves evaluation through which one positions oneself with respect to these objects and persons. An important aspect of stance taking is that this is considered to be a social act where the stance is adjusted to other subjects present, as well as to the social and cultural context. For instance, one may agree or disagree with the previous talker, or a teacher can agree or disagree with directives in the national curriculum on mathematics. Thus, stance taking cannot be reduced to a private assumption or attitude, but is a social activity situated in a cultural context. According to DuBois (2007), a stance can be described as: "a public act by a social

actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means, of simultaneously evaluating objects, positioning subjects (self and others) and aligning with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of the sociocultural field” (p. 163). By directing attention on stance taking, the focus is on three aspects of the micro-politics of gaming, evaluation, positioning of oneself and others and alignment/dis-alignment with other persons.

Ethnomethodology/conversation analysis (EMCA) research shows that when participants break social norms, this is followed by accounts explaining why this has been done. “There is a range of accountable actions which are those for which members routinely offer accounts” (Edwards, 1997, p. 106). Accounts consist of descriptions (Potter, 1996). Paul Drew (1984) shows that a declined invitation is often followed by an account describing where to place the responsibility for not accepting it. Here, the responsibility is usually placed outside the control of the person invited. Invitations consist of what conversation analysis (CA) calls an *adjacency pair*, which in this case consists of a question, “Would you like to play *FIFA* with me?” and an answer “Yes sure.” or “No thanks.” When the answer is negative, in this case the invitation is turned down, then it is called a dis-preferred action. A dis-preferred action, for instance a declined invitation, is usually followed by an account explaining why. Accounts differ depending on the context in which they appear. Research has also shown that accounts may be a routinized part of the activity, for instance, after people have presented themselves in phone calls, they often provide an account of why they have called (Sacks, 1995).

To understand how social and cultural norms are dealt with in talk about digital games and gaming, focus here is placed on how teenagers take stances and make accounts in evaluating their own and others’ gaming.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on eight focus group interviews with a total of 11 girls and 21 boys, sixteen to seventeen years of age, attending two upper secondary schools in Norway. Each group had three to five students who were in the same school class during the day and a moderator (the author). Students in eight school classes were asked if they would be willing to participate in the study. In some of the classes, all the students wanted to participate, while in other classes 65 per cent said they were interested. The participants were chosen from these self-selected students. The interviews, lasting for 45-65 minutes, were led by the moderator, who used a semi-structured interview guide and digital game magazines as stimuli material to elicit focused talk and discussion. The topics of the interview were

good and bad games, my own playing and friends and parents. At the beginning of each session, the moderator explained the aims of the study, explained the interview procedure and introduced the magazines. It was also underlined that there were no right or wrong answers (cf. Puchta & Potter, 2004). During the interviews, the moderator directed and encouraged discussions as well as introduced new topics when necessary. The interviews were carried out at school during the day and were video-recorded and transcribed (Appendix 1) in Norwegian before being translated into English. The data were analysed by focusing on what was said and how it was said (Puchta & Potter, 2004; Wilkinson, 2006), with a particular focus on stance taking and accounts.

The focus of this text is on young peoples' talk about digital games and gaming. The importance of studying talk rests on two assumptions: First, descriptions are part of how we understand our surroundings and second, *talk is action*, it gets something done (Potter, 1996). These assumptions underline the importance of studying how the participants take stances, evaluate and make accounts concerning gaming to see how social and cultural norms work in teenagers' social interaction. The analysis rests on two CA principles, first, interaction between the participants is seen as sequentially organised in a turn-taking system, which means that one utterance is followed by another. Second, the participants' understanding of each other is displayed through how the other person responds to the former speaker's turn. As a participant in a conversation, I can see how my counterpart has understood what I have said through the uptake in the next turn and through the ways in which the conversation unfolds. Accordingly, how the participants orient to each other's turn is not only important for the participants to understand what is going on, but also this is where the analytical gaze should be placed to understand the social organisation of the activity. This has been referred to as the *proof procedure*, referring to how the participants themselves understand what is going on (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974). Moreover, taking an EMCA approach, the focus is on members' practices in describing their surroundings and displaying their understanding of the present activity. This is considered as the *participants' perspective* in the study of social interaction.

GAMING AS MORALLY ACCOUNTABLE ACTIVITIES

Contemporary Norwegian teenagers are described as well-adjusted and stately (Øia & Vestel, 2014). Compared to earlier generations of teenagers, this is a generation that consumes less drugs, alcohol and tobacco and debuts in these practices later in life than previous generations. In addition, it is claimed that the present

youth generation has less discipline problems in schools and that young people tend to talk and listen to their parents when it comes to making important decisions. They dress in similar ways as their parents, listen to the same music and in general have the same media habits. In short, it is argued that the generation gap is closing (Øia & Vestel, 2014). It could be argued that this indicates that what is seen as acceptable does not differ between the generations, but this does not mean that adults and children have the same rights and options in what they do. One of the areas where this is seen is in public discussions of young people's use of digital games and social media (Boyd, 2014).

In the present data, the question of time spent on gaming seems to be key to the way teenagers make a distinction between *non-problematic use* and *problematic use*. In this micro-political act of balancing between the acceptable and the non-acceptable, three aspects appear where gaming is seen as *a (less) preferred activity*, *a meaningful activity* and *a time-consuming activity*.

A (Less) Preferred Activity

In the present data, the teenagers were eager to display themselves as ordinary, who use digital games in an acceptable way (Aarsand, 2012). In seven out of eight focus group interviews, the participants answered the first question "What kind of games do you play?" by stating "I used to play World of Warcraft." while simultaneously taking a stance against this game in particular. Most of the participants stated that they were not that much into playing digital games. Nonetheless, almost all the participants stated that they regularly play digital games.

In Excerpt 1, we will meet Sindre together with four of his classmates, three boys and one girl. Before the excerpt starts, they have been talking about the kinds of games they play. Sindre has told us that he mainly plays flash games or games on *PlayStation 2*.

Excerpt 1

Participants: Sindre, Kristian, Martin, Lars, Ida and Pål (researcher)

- 131 Sindre Actually I don't play on the PC
 132 (1.0)
 133 but I feel that computer games are a waste of time after I've been playing, you
 know
 134 (2.0)
 135 and then=

- 136 =in what way?
- 137 Sindre Well I feel that I could have spent my time on something else (.) sometimes I'm
- 138 skateboarding for example (0.5) but if it's raining the::n I usually play but if I:::
- 139 (2.0)
- 140 but if it's nice weather outside then I go out
- 141 Pål Mm::
- 142 Sindre Then I can't bear being indoors
- 143 (5.0)

Sindre has just stated that even though he plays flash games, he is not one of those who use the PC when playing (line 131). Here, not playing on the PC is of importance because it marks that he is not into the kinds of games that are played on PCs, like *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004), *Guild Wars* (ArenaNet, 2005) and *Lord of the Rings Online* (Turbine, 2007) (MMO games). Hence, he also indicates that he is not that much into gaming, rather he is what could be called a casual gamer (in contrast to a hard-core gamer) (e.g. Juul, 2010). In other words, he downgrades his own involvement in digital games and gaming. After a rather long pause he takes a critical stance towards playing digital games by claiming it is “a waste of time” (lines 133-134). This makes Pål ask for an account (line 136), where Sindre then explains that gaming competes with other activities for the time he has at his disposal (line 137). Thus, time is turned into a restricted resource which gaming consumes. Sindre states that after he has been playing, he feels that he could have spent his time differently, preferably on other activities like skateboarding. Here, he tells us that playing games is a less preferred activity compared to other activities; in fact, he states that it feels like “a waste of time”. It could also be argued that it is unproblematic to prioritise skating over gaming. According to Garfinkel (1984), when rules and norms are violated, they will be visible due to the reactions among the participants. Since no one reacts to Sindre's stance, neither commenting nor asking for an account, it is reasonable to assume that outdoor activities like skateboarding can be seen as a preferable activity and that this can be seen as common knowledge among the teenagers in the focus group.

Excerpt 1 reveals an ambiguity concerning what stances can be taken and how this can be done. On the one hand, it could be argued that gaming is presented as a less preferred activity and placed in opposition to outdoor activities. Since outdoor activities are not prioritised when playing games, they are also presented as less preferable. This is even seen in the other interviews in which sports activities and parties are described as more important to take part in than, and in contrast to, playing digital games. It is interesting to note that other indoor activities, such as

reading, listening to music and watching TV are not mentioned as potential competition for outdoor activities. On the other hand, playing games is presented as a preferred and acceptable activity, particularly if it is raining or the weather outside is uninviting. Here, playing digital games is considered acceptable in the sense that Sindre sees no competing outdoor activities (lines 137-138, 142). Moreover, the question is not whether or not to play digital games, rather the question relates to the circumstances under which gaming can be considered a preferred acceptable activity. Displaying gaming as a less preferred activity does not mean that the participants actually prioritize outdoor activities like skateboarding, but it displays the socio-cultural norm when it comes to gaming in contrast to outdoor activities in Norway.

A Purposeful Activity

The first excerpt from the interviews showed how teenagers may orient to gaming as a less preferred activity, but also how it is an acceptable activity given the right conditions. In the interviews, the teenagers talk about playing digital games in the classroom, on breaks, at parties, at LAN (Local Area Network) parties and at home together with friends, siblings and parents. Playing digital games is something teenagers do to entertain themselves alone or together with friends. It is something they choose to do, but this choice may also be a negative one, something they do because they have nothing else to do. In my data, gaming is first and foremost described as a *fun* activity. In Excerpt 2, four boys and one girl are participating.

Excerpt 2

Participants: Sindre, Kristian, Martin, Lars, Ida and Pål (researcher)

- 42 Lars Well, maybe he does it because he thinks it's fun?
43 Sindre I only play because it's fun
44 Kristian Yes, me too

Lars is commenting on a story about a pupil who is gaming so much that he no longer goes to school. He suggests that the reason may be that he finds it “fun” (line 42). This is followed by alignments from both Sindre and Kristian, thereby establishing that the reason for playing digital games is that it is fun. Fun is used as an account, an explanation for why someone is playing and even why someone is playing very much. Moreover, it could be argued that fun is a valid account for playing digital games and the purpose of playing digital games is then to have fun.

The excerpt above shows how the boys in the interview establish an intersubjective agreement on the purpose of playing digital games where the meaning of fun is taken for granted. In Excerpt 3, the focus is on how teenagers deal with the interviewer's provocative stance, indicating that gaming is "a waste of time". In the upcoming discussion, the participants unpack what is meant by "a waste of time", introducing "fun" as an account. Here, we will see that fun is explained and specified. The focus group consists of four boys and the researcher.

Excerpt 3

Participants: Olav, Jens, Amid, Sander and Pål (researcher)

- 1 Pål But if I say that games are a waste of time?
- 2 Amid If you're playing many hours then it's a waste of time but if
- 3 you're playing an hour alone or two hours every other day or
- 4 something like that then it's not that much of a waste
- 5 Pål M::
- 6 Amid Actually, nothing that you do is a waste of time
- 7 (2)
- 8 Pål What are you thinking about then?
- 9 (2)
- 10 Amid What you want to do is not eh:: you eh:: you do something eh::
- 11 that is not a waste of time to play a game it is not a waste of time
- 12 to sit by your PC and eh:::: it's actually you who decides how
- 13 you're going to live your life
- 14 Pål M::
- 15 Sander [only if it's fun
- 16 Amid [if you want to be social
- 17 Pål M::
- 18 Amid Yes
- 19 Pål You said fun
- 20 Sander M:: yes if you really enjoy it then you should be allowed to do it, but
- 21 there is most likely a limit
- 22 Amid Xxx
- 23 Sander But I don't believe that anyone can be indoors for three days and
- 24 have fun all the time
- 25 Amid No
- 26 Jens No there is something special about that
- 27 Amid There was this guy in China who died from playing the computer
- 28 Sander But it depends

- 29 Amid He played for, he played (0.5) ye:a like four days in a row
30 without sleeping I don't remember what game it was (.) I'm not
31 sure but he died
32 Pål When did this happen?
33 Amid A year ago
34 Pål A year ago
35 Amid I read it in the paper (0.5) a Chinese guy you know (.) sitting at the
36 computer way too much you know hehe

A critical stance to spending time on playing digital games is presented by the interviewer when he suggests that it could be seen as “a waste of time” (line 1). Wasting time is an expression that assumes that the activity described is less preferable than other activities. Pål’s question invites Amid to unpack the expression, which he does by saying that playing becomes a waste of time when it lasts for “many hours” (line 2). Here, the keyword is the intensifier “many” (line 2). If you are playing “an hour alone or two every other day” then playing digital games “is not that much of a waste” of time (lines 2-4). Hence, he indicates that playing digital games in general is not considered a waste of time, only if one is playing more than two hours and more than every other day. At the beginning of this excerpt, Amid agrees with the possibility of seeing gaming as a waste of time, but he also specifies that playing is not a problem in itself.

Then, Amid turns his statement about gaming as a waste of time into a philosophical question and states that “actually, nothing that you do is a waste of time” (line 6). When the interviewer asks him to elaborate on his statement, Amid says that sitting in front of the computer is an active choice of how to live one’s life. Adding to this, Sander says “only if it’s fun” (line 15). Hence, he disagrees with Amid on the idea that nothing is a waste of time while at the same time he claims that gaming has to be fun. More precisely, it is not a waste of time if it is fun. Sander handles the expression “a waste of time” differently when he claims that gaming should be allowed when it is fun and enjoyable (lines 15 & 20). He does not tell us what this means when it comes to time spent on gaming or when it comes to prioritising gaming to other activities, just that there is “most likely a limit” with respect to when gaming is no longer considered acceptable (line 21). Using the words “most likely”, he displays that he is not familiar with this limit and indicates that he has not reached it in his own gaming, yet at the same time he tells us that there is a limit.

When Sander elaborates on having fun, he doubts that anyone can be indoors and have fun for an extended period of time; in this case three days (lines 23-24).

Two lines of reasoning are of interest here. First, gaming is seen as an indoor activity³ (as in Excerpt 1). Second, “having fun all the time” is used as an account legitimizing extended gaming (as in Excerpt 2). If the purpose of gaming is to have fun and this is not achieved, then the activity is not legitimate. Gaming for an extended period of time is only acceptable as long it is fun, which also indicates that gaming may turn into a problematic activity. Both Amid and Jens align with Sander’s utterances on not seeing the possibility of a three-day long gaming sequence being fun all the time. This indicates a common understanding of gaming as non-problematic and acceptable when it is fun, but as problematic if it is not.

Amid illustrates how three days of gaming may be seen as rather extreme by immediately following with a story about a Chinese boy who played for four days in a row without sleep and apparently died. The story functions as an account when taking a stance against extended gaming, claiming that it potentially can be a dangerous activity. In addition to the public concern about what has been called *hard-core gamers* playing for an extended period of time – virtually non-stop – is that gamers do not seem to prioritise basic needs, such as food, sleep and personal hygiene. A person who plays four days in a row is seen as someone who does not sleep while involved in a game. The trustworthiness of the story is established through references to a newspaper report indicating that this is common knowledge. Furthermore, reference is made to what people see as reasonable to expect from players from China, “A Chinese guy you know (.) sitting at the computer way too much you know” (line 35). Adding “you know” twice in the same utterance underlines the account as something that he expects the others to understand, a valid argument. The use of “you know” indicates mutual knowledge about what Chinese gamers are like. It could be mentioned that there were several articles in the press at this time focusing on professional Asian gamers who sold avatars that have been levelled to their maximum within particular online games. This was also a topic in the discussion between the teenagers at the time.

The present example reveals how time becomes an issue that the teenagers deal with even when the purpose of playing digital games is addressed. Here, the micro-political work is an act of dealing with the concern of extended gaming through balancing acceptable versus non-acceptable time usage. All in all, gaming is an acceptable activity as long as it is fun and playful. If one is playing for an extended period of time, this criterion runs the risk of not being met (lines 23-24). Playing for days involves not having fun all the time and can in the worst case involve putting oneself at an unacceptable health risk (line 31). Moreover, to be

3 It should be noted that *Pokémon Go* (Niantic, 2016) was not an option at the time of the interview and other pervasive games were not mentioned by the participants.

considered as acceptable gaming, one has to keep to the purpose of having fun, but at the same time fun is considered time-restricted.

A Time-Consuming Activity

In the present data, the notion of time reoccurs in the teenagers' talk about gaming. Time is not used as a neutral description of gaming, rather it is used to describe *when* it is considered okay to play and for *how long*. In other words, time usage is potentially problematic and thereby made morally accountable. In the first excerpts this can be seen when spending time on gaming is considered bad as long as the weather is good. In Excerpt 3, this can be seen when spending time on gaming is considered to be good as long as it is fun but becomes problematic when it lasts too long because the purpose of having fun all the time is not accomplished. But what does it mean to play "way too much", what is considered an extended amount of time spent on gaming, what does it mean to play a lot during a week?

In Excerpt 4 we meet one girl, three boys and the interviewer. The focus will be on how the teenagers talked about playing a lot and what this meant when it came to the issue of time.

Excerpt 4

Participants: Sindre, Kristian, Martin, Lars, Ida and Pål (researcher)

- 1 Pål I'm thinking about playing a lot (.) is 30 hours a lot?
2 (1)
3 Martin [No that could be done in a weekend
4 Kristian [No
5 Lars To me it's a lot
6 Ida To me it's a lot
7 Pål Is it a lot to you as well?
8 Martin 30 hours can be managed in one weekend, especially if it's a LAN weekend
9 Pål Okay
10 Martin Then it's easily done
11 Kristian Well if you're a hard-core gamer then, you know, the ones who play all the time,
12 so it will easily be 90 hours a week you know
13 (2)
14 Martin 90 hours then it starts to be difficult to manage it
15 Kristian Not if you're a hard-core gamer (0.5) then you most likely don't have a job either
16 you know

- 17 Martin A::
 18 Sindre Xxx
 19 (2)
 20 Kristian For example you can be a professional gamer
 21 Martin You'll be able to do it for three days but then it gets harder to do it longer than
 that
 22 (2)
 23 Lars I've heard about a guy up in the valley who has been gaming for four days and
 24 levelled it up to level 80
 25 (2)
 26 Ida I've got a friend who has taken a year off school and is playing day in and
 27 day out
 28 Martin Hehe
 29 Ida Who stopped sleeping
 30 Kristian That's completely pointless, you know why you're playing games is to get away
 31 from reality for a little while but if you [don't eh
 32 Ida [but he's playing 24/7=
 33 Kristian =exactly then you're not in reality anymore then there's actually no reason to
 34 play games (.) because if you take yourself out (.) you're no longer in real life,
 35 then there's no reason to game

Pål starts by asking if playing for 30 hours a week is a lot (line 1). Kristian and Martin answer simultaneously that this is not a lot (line 3 and 4), thereby taking the stance that spending 30 hours on gaming is reasonable. On the one hand, Martin claims that 30 hours can be done in a weekend (line 3) and points out that this is particularly doable on weekends when he attends LAN parties (lines 8), that is a gathering of people with computers or compatible game consoles primarily for the purpose of playing multiplayer online games. On the other hand, Martin downgrades his claim by saying "it could be done" (line 3) and it "can be managed" (line 8), thereby indicating that to him, it can be hard to spend that much time on gaming during an ordinary weekend. Both Kristian and Martin indicate that a total of 30 hours a week does not mean playing a lot. Lars takes the opposite stance and claims that 30 hours of gaming is a lot to him and here both Ida and the interviewer align with him. The two opposite stances reveal that playing digital games for 30 hours is not considered unproblematic by Ida and Lars, nor do they consider it to be ordinary behaviour (lines 5, 8 and 10). Moreover, there is disagreement as to what it means to play a lot.

Kristian then places 30 hours of gaming in perspective by referring to those people who play all the time, the "hard-core gamers" who easily play 90 hours a

week (lines 11-12). In contrast to 90 hours of gaming, 30 hours do not seem to be that much. Martin questions the amount of time suggested by Kristian when he says that it is especially hard to accomplish (line 14). Hence, Kristian is forced to give an account in which he argues that if you are a hard-core gamer, you probably do not have a job and Martin agrees with this. In other words, if you play that much, gaming is the only thing you do. Kristian continues by suggesting that one could be a professional gamer. Turning hard-core gaming into a profession clearly contributes to making the excessive time consumption acceptable, as opposed to an unemployed person spending most of his/her time on gaming. Up to this point in the dialogue it could be argued that the hard-core gamer is an extreme category that consists of people who are playing digital games for extended periods of time, most likely people who do not have an ordinary job, or are professional gamers.

The question of time consumption is a key element throughout Excerpt 4. Martin takes a critical stance towards the possibility of playing as much as 90 hours a week (line 14). After the accounts given by Kristian (lines 15-20), Martin modifies the assumed time the hard-core gamer spent on playing when he says “You’ll be able to do it for three days but then it becomes hard to do it longer than that” (line 21). In other words, he says that while it is possible to reach 90 hours a week, this would even be hard to manage for the hard-core player. Furthermore, he argues that the amount of time one has to spend every day on gaming to reach 90 hours a week would be hard to do for more than three days in a row. That means that playing 90 hours is displayed as very much, perhaps too much time, even when referring to a hard-core gamer.

So far, the discussion has been focused on examples the participants have read about in the newspaper. After a relatively long pause, Lars tells a story about someone in the valley who played digital games for four days in a row (lines 23). His story is even more extreme than Martin’s story about the professional gamer. It is told as an extraordinary example of extended gaming. At the same time, he also states that this “guy from the valley” managed to reach the highest level in the game *WoW*⁴. Ida continues this line of thought by telling yet another story about a boy who has taken one year off from school to play digital games. The idea that this is not only extreme but in her example also problematic is strengthened when she says that he has stopped sleeping (line 29) and is playing 24 hours, seven days a week. Kristian immediately reacts to the story as problematic by saying that the whole idea about gaming is undermined when it is turned into life itself. In light of these extraordinary gaming stories, both Kristian’s and Martin’s

4 *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) is often used as a frame of reference when discussions about extended gaming occur in the data.

stances seem more average. The teenagers use the stories in Excerpts 3 and 4 to illustrate examples of problematic and non-acceptable gaming. Common to these examples is how gaming is described as an activity that stretches over an extended period of time. More precisely, time usage is turned into a morally accountable action. This is illustrated by displaying examples of what they see as extended play and, in particular, extreme cases that show what they display as unacceptable playing.

THE MICRO-POLITICS OF TIME

Time is a reoccurring topic in studies of young people's gaming (e.g. Williams et al., 2008; Brus & Thorhauge, 2011; Medietilsynet, 2016a; Simons et al., 2014). Concerns arise, however, when young people play games for many hours during an extended period of time (e.g. Lemmens et al., 2011; Simons et al., 2014). The present chapter adds to this research by taking the teenagers' perspective on how they approach gaming in talk and how they particularly deal with the potential problem of playing for an extended period of time. In order to do that, the analytical focus has been on stance taking and accounts.

In the discourse on young people and gaming in Norway, gaming is often presented as *a less preferred activity* and related to problems, concerns and restrictions rather than possibilities with respect to such phenomena as friendship, social interaction and cooperation. As can be seen in the present data, gaming is contrasted to outdoor activities, which are considered to be both good and preferred activities. An example of such a claim can be seen in Excerpt 1. It is striking that the participants do not object to such a stance. Rather, it could be argued that it is taken for granted that some activities are of more value than others but it is also seen that what is considered the preferred activity is related to the context. Here, the notion of time is made relevant in terms of *when* it is okay to play. Hence, time is made into a morally accountable activity in the sense that players will have to legitimize their choices of when to play. Furthermore, it could be argued that the teenagers display an awareness of the changing conditions under which they are playing and that these demand different stances and accounts.

A recurring and key account when legitimizing gaming in the data was that gaming has to be *fun*. Put differently, the purpose of playing digital games is to have fun. If you are not having fun, then gaming becomes a non-acceptable activity, a moral problem. When fun is used as an account for playing games, then time is the key device. The data material displays vaguely that gaming for hours and

days is problematic since having fun is seen as time restricted. If the purpose of gaming is to have fun, then gaming is a *time-restricted* activity.

The teenagers also talked about gaming as a possible *time-consuming* and non-acceptable activity. This does not necessarily make gaming a concern, but it makes time usage something that the teenagers have to account for. Participating in arrangements such as LANs indicates that young people can spend many hours on playing without seeing this as problematic. Therefore, what does it mean to play a lot? Does playing sometimes become a problem? Extended gaming that results in quitting ordinary activities like school or, in its most extreme case, risking one's health, is found morally problematic. Gaming is a concern when gamers are not able to deal with everyday activities, which may be the outcome of playing for days. The teenagers in the present study do not agree on what it means to be "playing a lot" in terms of hours but they take a clear stance against being categorized as a "hard-core" gamer, which is considered morally problematic if you are not in fact a professional gamer. Thus, how one takes a stance on time usage related to gaming becomes an indicator of how much one is into gaming and categorized by one's social surroundings.

From the teenagers' perspective, gaming is of concern when it comes to the consumption of time. They have to manoeuvre their gaming with respect to *when* they are playing and for *how long*. The idea that time is of particular concern can be seen in the (re)production of stories about extreme cases, such as the Chinese boy, "a guy up in the valley" and "a friend" of mine. Last but not at least, the concern is seen in the micro-politics of what is considered acceptable use of digital games.

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APPENDIX 1: TRANSCRIPT CONVENTIONS

Symbol	Meaning
?	Inquiring intonation
=	Contiguous utterances
:	Prolongation of preceding vowel
[...]	Lines left out
(2)	Pause 2 seconds
(.)	Pause shorter than 0.2 second
Xxx	Something was said but the transcriber could not discern its content.
Wo[rđ	The bracket indicates the onset of overlapping speech
<u>Word</u>	Underlined means stressed word (or part of it)
WORD	Loud speech
((laughing))	Comments made by the researcher
>Word<	Embeds faster speech than surrounding speech
Hehe	Laughter