Chapter 3

Games between family, homework, and friends

*Problem gaming as conflicts between social roles
and institutions*

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Introduction

This chapter outlines a theoretical framework for understanding aspects of problem gaming as a very general type of problem, namely that of conflicting social demands from different social actors embedded in social institutions. The chapter is based on the sensitizing idea outlined in the introduction to this anthology, namely that problem gaming can profitably be seen as problematized gaming. When one adopts this viewpoint, it becomes natural to ask 'To whom does this instance of gaming appear as problematic and why?'

One answer, outlined in the present chapter, is: 'This behaviour is seen as problematic by one or more persons who are in some sort of structured, social relationship with the person who is doing that which is seen as problematic.' Thus, the overall aim of this chapter is to situate problem gaming as a social problem – as opposed to being merely an individual problem.

The argument is based on two assumptions. The first is that a significant aspect of problem gaming in relation to youth is recurrent interpersonal conflicts structured around gaming habits. The second is that gaming in general is embedded in the structures of everyday life, and a significant aspect of everyday life consists of social interactions, many of which are structured by institutionalized roles and practices. The chapter brings these two premises together in its outline of a general sociological framework which situates aspects of problem gaming as actors embroiled in conflict due to conflicting social obligations structured by institutionalized social roles. I want to emphasize at the outset that the intention is not to reduce the phenomenon of problem gaming to social conflict, nor to institutional role conflicts. Rather, the intention is to bring to the fore some of the social and relational aspects of problematized gaming and invite the reader to consider how this element of social interaction may often form a significant portion of the full problem.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, it outlines a sociological framework for understanding particular social problems as role conflicts between institutionalized

roles. This entails an outline of social institutions, of social obligations cashed out as commitment and attachment, roles and role-sets, and the most pertinent connections between these three levels of analysis. The level of generality exhibited by the first part of the chapter is fully on purpose, since one of the main aims of the following is to thoroughly de-emphasize an individualized notion of problem gaming and instead emphasize its very general, social character. This rhetorical strategy is based on a conviction that our understanding of problem gaming will benefit substantially from seeing it as related to a much more general problem, i.e. conflicting social demands in a network of institutionalized relationships. In that sense, my aim is to show that problem gaming is a lot like other everyday problems – they have an intrinsically social and rather general component.

After outlining this general framework, the chapter seeks to illustrate the utility of this framework with a few worked examples of how gaming might become problematic for the social actors involved; these examples are based primarily on qualitative interviews with young gamers. Problem gaming is here situated in specific contexts of everyday life, where important social institutions are family and school: In a typical instantiation of problem gaming, one of the functions of these institutions is to serve as the wellspring of social obligations that clash with those of gaming. In other words, when gaming is or becomes problematic, it is often because social demands from different social actors and institutions clash.

As stated above, a few worked examples are given at the end of this chapter to serve as illustrations, and examples compatible with the present framework can be found in other chapters in this anthology (this is not coincidental, since all of the contributions have inspired some part of the present framework and its articulation here). The most obvious connections are to the thematic analyses and case summaries given by Brus, both of which pivot around parenting and the concept of generagency. Other examples can be found in the analysis of the structure of everyday life and socially situated reflexive agency given in the chapter by Thorhauge, as well as in the description and analysis of an overall set of relevant relationships between social actors presented in the chapter by Prax and Rajkowska. Finally, the historical analysis of the concept of addiction given by Lundedal Nielsen's chapter shows that one significant aspect of the discourses of addiction hinges on mishandled social obligations, and the present chapter may help to further contextualize this. The main aim is to deliver a general theoretical framework, the idea being that a more substantial analysis of problematized gaming can and should be carried out with theoretical as well as empirical attention to local circumstances.

Theoretical framework

Social institutions and institutional logics

The main underpinning concept for the following is social institution. Although this concept is central to many arguments in sociology, it is difficult to give a single definition. The concept is typically invoked to explain how social structure has a level of endurance across time and space: common examples are the enduring social arrangements observed in marriage, religion, family, and education. To simplify matters, the following proceeds from the overview of institutions given by Scott (2014).

First, it is important to see social institutions as somewhat malleable social structures, which may change substantially over time and exhibit a substantial degree of local variation, and which enable as well as constrain both the short-term and longer term strategic agency of its members. This element of flexibility, change, variation, and 'wiggle space' for individual agency is an important initial point of emphasis, since institutional perspectives are often seen as unduly monolithic and conservative.

Second, still following Scott, it is possible to distinguish between at least three main dimensions or 'pillars' of social institutions, which enable this constraining and enabling endurance: the regulative, the normative and the cultural-cognitive. With the dangers inherent in simplification and paraphrase, Scott's three perspectives can be employed to single out, respectively, an instrumental and explicit focus on rules and sanctions, a less explicit but still normative focus on tacit understandings of correct conduct tied to roles, and the cultural-cognitive aspects of how actors navigate these structures. Scott also hints at a forth pillar, namely the emotional dimension of institutionalized conduct, and this is quite important for the argument I present here.

The notion of social institution that I want to invoke here is thus one that includes institutionalized social obligations, explicit rules and more implicit norms of appropriateness, normative approval and disapproval of conduct as well as sanctions in accordance with rules and norms, and the dimensions of positive and negative affect arising when individuals go about their daily business within these institutional frames. The argument, in a nutshell, is that these elements of social organization are relevant for understanding problematic gaming. In the next sections I will elaborate on these concepts, more or less in the order listed here, although they overlap to some extent.

Institutional obligations: commitment and attachment

I have already stated that my proposal for understanding problem gaming hinges on clashing social obligations. Goffman's observations on institutions are a useful entry point to the general nature of social obligations and their institutionalized character (see Goffman 1961, 1961/1968, 1963). As Goffman sees it, social obligations have the fundamental function of '[tying] the individual to social entities of different sorts' (Goffman 1961/1968: 159).

Goffman's analysis of social obligations distinguishes between *commitment* and *attachment*, where Goffman uses the metaphor of cold and heat to distinguish between the two: commitments, roughly, are 'cold' services rendered in a predominantly instrumental manner, where a particular behaviour merely has to be performed, and this aspect of obligations thus fall along the lines of the instrumental and more explicit logic of institutions. This concrete instrumentality of commitment makes certain aspects of obligations comparatively easy to identify and turn into objects for surveillance mechanisms, and this means that they are more often than not expressed in explicit rules.

The 'warmer' attachment refers to the comparatively more complex issue of various emotional displays of affect and enthusiasm. This distinction thus supplies an ostensibly simple but important dimension to the concept of social obligations: A purely instrumental approach to obligations misses the fact that chores may be done happily or grumpily, and depending on the nature of the instrumental activity, particular displays of attachment will be markedly appropriate or inappropriate. Emotional attachment is often bound up with the perceived values of the institution in question; many institutions call for both concentrated attention (what Goffman calls 'focused interaction') and emotional involvement as visible displays of positive affect, as in e.g. being visibly engaged, happy and joyful at a family birthday and suitably involved in a party game involving the whole family, etc. While such a normative call for attentional focus, positive affect, and inclusion is an element in many social situations, there are certain institutional settings which call for displays of aggression, animosity and exclusion. Chief among these latter settings is the realm of competitive games and sports, and this potential clash between proper expressions of types of affect in different institutionalized settings should be noted already at this point.

Goffman emphasizes that although obligations of commitment and attachment are general and thoroughgoing components of social structure, these social obligations always come with limitations, as captured by his statement that 'one cannot think clearly about the claims of commitment or of attachment that a social entity makes on its participants without thinking of the limits felt proper on these claims' (Goffman 1961/1968: 159). Obligations to social institutions are thus never unconditional, but are invariably set up as ties with acknowledged limitations: There is always some respite from the demands of a given institution, some area where the bonds are relaxed or do not apply at all. This institutionalized guarantee of limited freedom, i.e. that individuals are never bound unconditionally to one or more institutions, may itself lead to conflict. While this result may at first seem paradoxical, certain conflicts related to social obligations arguably arise *exactly because* the character of the obligations is not absolute but instead open to discussion. Such discussions typically involve the various conditions, contingencies and exceptions that may or may not apply, and this element of possible contention is also important for the later examples.

A final point from Goffman's analysis is that social obligations typically involve and invoke a great deal of personal responsibility on the part of the obligated agent, and all parties involved typically recognize this aspect of social obligations.

Roles and role-sets

One way to further formalize these social bonds is to tie them to the concept of roles. Roles are often encountered within social psychology and sociology, but the concept is applied differently by various writers in different traditions; the following outline of role theory is based on Merton's (1957) classic exposition, Goffman (1961), and the more recent overview in Lofland et al. (2006).[1]

The basic idea is that social obligations tend to be formalized into functional bundles that serve as particular roles for people to inhabit or 'step into'. Thus, when people act as parents, teachers, pupils or siblings, they do so in accordance with a particular institutionalized normativity tied to the performance of these roles. Roles can be seen as belonging to role-sets, which comprise a limited and connected set of roles as well as the internal relationships of obligations and responsibilities belonging to a particular institutional setting, as seen in for instance schools where pupils and teachers are the most important roles in that set.

In contrast to some versions of role theory, one of the defining features of the notion of role in the framework employed in this chapter is that a role may be tied explicitly to larger institutions and primarily (but not exclusively) to a specific institution.[2] This means that a role comes with a set of responsibilities not just towards other roles but also towards the institution who 'owns' that role: when individuals are involved in conflicts, it is often a clash between the roles inhabited by the individuals, and when roles clash in this fashion, the clash has ties to the larger institutional context. A conflict between a parent and a child is thus, to some extent, a conflict between institutionalized ways of comporting oneself according to the specific roles involved.

Roles and conflicts within and between role-sets

With regard to the possible conflicts arising between roles, one of Merton's points is especially relevant to the present argument, namely that conflicts between roles can be internal or external to a role-set. Conflicts internal to the role-set arise when the set of connected roles within a single role-set comes into conflict, and this typically happens within the confines of a particular institutional setting. An example would be the child role within the family role set; a large set of social obligations is part and parcel of this role and these are tied to the other roles in the role-set, in that a child routinely interacts with other members of the family, who in turn may inhabit the roles of siblings or parents.

Moving to conflicts external to a role-set, it should be readily visible at this point that many social conflicts are not just conflicts within a role-set but additionally *between* different role-sets: any individual has to play several roles at different times in different circumstances, and each of these roles come with a role-set of their own. To take a simple example, a young boy may be both a son and a pupil, and these two roles have role-sets of their own, which belong to family and school respectively. This

can lead to problems when particular circumstances make different roles 'collapse'. An example would be that a child in a family is also a pupil in school, a friend to some of the pupils (but not to others), and possibly a member of specific communities, for instance a community dedicated to gaming. The institutionalized obligations within and between role-sets, then, is the general structure that enables complex role conflicts. Today's youth has to be members of the household and the family (and the latter is often in plural), pupils, responsible friends, team-mates and players – and the obligations requisite to these different roles have to be fulfilled by a single embodied individual.

Conflicts and coalitions of power

There is an additional and arguably integral aspect to how these role conflicts may play out, namely the distribution of power: Role-sets often come with in-built power differentials tied to the distribution of obligations and responsibilities. Keeping with the example of family, the parent-child relationship exhibits a clear asymmetry in terms of powers to regulate, evaluate and coerce behaviour.[3] A role set thus typically comes with potential conflicts built in, due to demands made by one role to another within this established asymmetry of power and authority.

Merton also identifies the possible formation of 'coalitions of power' within and across role-sets. This term refers to the possibility for several inhabitants of different roles to form a kind of alliance against other roles. An example of such a coalition within the role set internal to family would be an alliance between both parents against their own child, or between child and grandparent against a parent – or children against parents for that matter, as seen in an example later in this chapter.

What I mean to imply here is not just that the basis of many conflicts in families and schools is based on the asymmetry of authority between children and parents and teachers, although the apparent banality of this mechanism should not occlude its importance for understanding the social aspects of problem gaming. I also want to draw attention to the complexity and wider implications of coalitions of power, once they start to span institutional divides. All of the role-sets come with complex bonds of commitment and attachment, and these may be more or less compatible – and this compatibility (or lack of same) will be visible in that intersection occupied by the individual responsible for meeting all these obligations, across roles and role-sets. When situations escalate, a particular kind of *inter-institutional role conflict* may arise where coalitions of power are formed both within but also across institutional divides. I am here thinking in particular of allegiances between parents, teachers, and other institutionally empowered authority figures such as doctors and psychiatrists which may form alliances in opposition to one or more children or young individuals.

From individuals in conflict to institutional values and affect

The power asymmetry mentioned above may be especially easy to see when one focuses on the cold, instrumental side of institutions, where some actors have insti-

tutional power to give orders and issue sanctions if these orders are not followed. But this is only half of the story. Conflict between institutionalized roles is also a conflict between a single individual and the values that underpin the institution in question, and some institutions are major power bases of society at large. As Scott (Op. cit.) and Goffman (Op. cit.) emphasize, the major institutions in society, such as family and school, operate not just in terms of pure instrumentality but also very much in terms of moral emotions such as pride and shame attached to notions of morality, responsibility, and individual and collective identity.

Moreover, as Nippert-Eng (1995) argues, individual actors may at times come to represent the institution as a whole, where a child becomes representative of childhood as such, with all of the implied value orientations that follow from this. I think this representative function is essential to understanding the potential severity of interpersonal conflicts in relation to gaming in the context of family and school. My contention here is that the representational and moral dimensions of institutions are to a large extent 'baked into' social conduct in general, since a larger set of connected values license the structure of the role-set in that institutional setting (as part of the specific 'institutional logic' governing this sphere, see Scott (Op. cit.).

When a young individual rejects a specific demand from his or her parents, for instance a request of paying attention to the immediate surroundings instead of an ongoing game, the individual in question does not just reject this isolated request for attention, commitment, and attachment: S/he additionally rejects the warmth and importance of family values. Such a rejection may carry with it not just irritation, but anger, shame, and a feeling of stigmatization. Conversely, when a pupil does not deliver the required homework because he or she has been up late gaming, that pupil in a very real way rejects and disrespects the idea of education as worthy pursuit and thus rejects a moral self that is devoted to ideas about *Bildung*, empowerment, and improvement of one's social position. At the same time, the problematized individual may feel that other social actors do not treat him or her with the respect accorded to a fully functional individual and that the surroundings may at times gang up on him or her by way of the aforementioned coalitions. In addition, the responsibility for achieving a successful 'life strategy' navigating all these social obligations is, at times, put squarely on the individual, and this can be a supremely difficult achievement for some, as described in the chapter by Thorhauge (Chapter 5).

Problem gaming as problematized gaming

Having presented a general framework designed to capture significant elements of problem gaming as social conflict, I will now turn towards the data from an empirical research project on problem gaming and deliver three worked examples as illustrations of how one might flesh out the problems of problem gaming within this framework. A more detailed presentation of the research project and the resulting data sets can

be found in Thorhauge's chapter (Chapter 5). The following is based primarily on qualitative interviews with young gamers (N=19), and especially the interviews with young males who reported domestic conflicts in both the survey and interviews. The presented analysis is a variant of case-oriented thematic analysis with an explicit element of deductive theory present from the beginning, as outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994). Thus, this is not presented as an inductive categorization akin to variants of grounded theory.[4] On the contrary, I was from the beginning assuming that institutionalized roles and role-sets would be visible in the data and I was looking for ways in which these would manifest themselves in problems related to gaming. Following the framework outlined above, individuals from this age group have several roles to perform, and they are more or less forced to conform to these roles as part of their everyday activities.

Across the interviews, the most relevant social arenas for understanding gaming problems seemed to be family life, school, and leisure contexts. This led me to work with a tentative formulation of three social roles, which each come with a fairly well-defined role-set: son or daughter, pupil, and game player. Each of these roles come with particular institutionalized demands, and a defining feature of two of these three roles is that of strong primary responsibilities towards a particular social institution. Sons and daughters owe primary responsibility to family and especially to parents (and other caretakers where responsibility have been delegated). Pupils owe primary responsibility to school and especially teachers and other pupils; a setting as institutionalized, if not even more so, than that of family. Game players owe responsibility to other game players and especially team-mates in competitive games where failure to comply with game-specific roles may lead to a series of unwanted consequences. These three arenas can obviously be elaborated much further, but the basic premise should be clear.

Based on this theoretical framework and the various sources of data collected (survey, semi-structured interviews, focus groups and field notes) during the problem gaming study, I propose the following as a synthesized prototypical example of a game related domestic conflict:

> A young person is engrossed in a competitive match in a multiplayer game with some of his friends. For some reason, a parent may now see it fit to exercise parental power (as licensed by the parent role) in an effort to make the family member conform to other obligations. Typical demands will be that the gaming individual should instead show commitment to the family member role (respect common norms, do chores, participate in family meals, go to bed etc.), and this might overlap with a parental desire that the young person should instead do something that corresponds to the parent's understanding of physical and social well-being (physical exercise and sports, play an instrument, participate in Boy Scouts activities, get a good night's sleep etc.). Both types of demands will often align with obligations that fit those of the pupil role (stop wasting time and do your homework, or at least do something

productive), and the latter type of demand is typically licensed as more productive by demands from the local school as well as the overall institutional logic of education. The roles of family member and pupil (and the obligations invoked by the parent in relation hereto) will thus conflict explicitly with the demands of the roles of friend and game player. If the player is distracted and plays badly or even exits the match prematurely, he will come to violate both the demands of his friends and the demands of his teammates.

This type of conflict is very clearly focused on the gaming activity itself and the conflicts that may arise when this is interrupted by parents and others. However, as the following three examples will show, the reality of family conflicts around games is often more complex and involves more than just gaming per se. All of the following examples are cases selected from the pool of informants in the problem gaming study. None of them are intended as demonstrations of every aspect of the theoretical framework; rather, the intent is to offer three illustrations of the possible application of the various elements of the framework to different situations.

Three worked examples as illustrations of gaming and problems with commitment and attachment

As the first worked example, the case of one of our male informants may be used to illustrate connections between different institutions as well as the way domestic conflict may escalate internally in a family. This informant has had a fairly high level of social conflict in his life in the recent years, but this seems to have stabilized at a lower level at the time of the interview; this case offers what is arguably a common type of conflict with uncommon levels of escalation. The informant in question will also be referred to in the chapters by Brus and Thorhauge (Chapter 4 and 5); here, as well as in those chapters, this informant will be referred to as Rune.

Rune is a young boy aged 16, who lives with both his parents and his sister. He is clearly devoted to gaming, plays competitive games for six hours most days, and tentatively sees his future vocation within the field. Importantly, however, he does not see a future for himself as a professional gamer, but rather as a streamer (on the platform Twitch). He emphasizes that a Twitch streamer may play any game, as long as he or she does it in ways that draw an audience. He also mentions following several streamers and mentions that late-evening streaming on his phone in bed is part of his general pattern of media consumption. Rune's commitment and emotional attachment here seems to be somewhat generalized, not so much to a particular game as to gaming culture and its manifold presences across media. It is also worth mentioning that he talks about his problems with gaming in very specific terms, and he considers himself 'addicted' to gaming and several times compares gaming to smoking. He is also, to some extent, worried about his spending of real world money on virtual goods.

When asked explicitly about conflicts, Rune says that his parents are generally worried about him gaming too much, at first due to him not getting enough exercise. He then refers to an episode where the conflicts around gaming escalated to the point where he left a note on the kitchen table and took a bus to live five days with his then-girlfriend (who lived more than 100 kilometres away). It turns out that the lead up to this incident was a period of intensified yelling and conflicts, apparently due to problems between Rune and his teachers at school as well as the amount of gaming at home. When teachers had 'written home', i.e. written notes to the parents about skipping school and improper behaviour in school, the parents would 'overreact' by yelling and cutting access to the internet and even 'throwing out [his] PlayStation 3'.

Rune himself summarizes this situation as a fundamental lack of respect for him as an individual, and he feels that his parents were clearly violating his personal boundaries, physically as well as mentally. He also mentions that his sister (who is 3 years older) felt the same way, and that the family had held a family meeting after the run-away incident where the siblings would address their common concern, i.e. lack of respect.

This example shows how coalitions between parents and schools as well as between siblings may play important parts in the formation, development, and resolution of conflicts related to gaming. This focus on respect for individuals and their life projects accords well with the points about reflexive agency and the 'reflexive imperative' mentioned by Thorhauge in her chapter (Chapter 5).

An additional point may bring out the further relevance of reflexivity and responsibility to see the paradoxical situation of this informant: On the one hand, he recommends that parenting must be done with respect for the rights of young individuals. At the same time, he professes that 'his life was a mess' and that problem gaming should be addressed by having stricter rules and enforcement, a shift towards the cold, instrumental and coercive side of institutions.

As a second worked example, I will give two specific examples from one of our focus groups which may deepen the understanding of local notions of proper conduct, regulation, commitment and attachment as well as the formation of coalitions.

First, a young boy, who was not in a problem gaming conflict situation, referred to having his PC use monitored and curtailed by both his mother and father who thus formed an alliance with that explicit purpose. The motivations for this alliance, however, were perceived as quite different by the young boy. From the mother's side, her desire for restriction seemed to be tied to what she perceived as toxic language and problematic emotions in relation to the specific PC gaming communities around *League of Legend*s and *Counter Strike: Global Offensive*. Both of these games are highly competitive, and a certain level of animosity and verbal aggression is common among players of these games. The boy would thus take care to lower his voice and not use expletives when his mother was around. The father seemed to be less worried about language, and instead seemed to be primarily motivated by a desire to make his son use the PC for homework instead. The father would thus intermittently check up on the boy's activities when using the PC system.[5]

This PC system was later revealed (in a post-focus group discussion) to be both expensive and paid for entirely by the young boy through a job in the local supermarket. We did not pursue this potential conflict between property rights and social obligations with this informant, but across our interviews conflicts surrounding privacy and autonomy may at times overlap with conflicts related to responsibility in fiduciary matters.

The second example involves another young boy (from the same focus group discussion), who stated that his mother was very intent on limiting his console playing, apparently because she was worried about violent games and 'brain-washing'. He also mentioned that his older sister thought that he played too much and would at times hide his gaming controller to keep him from playing.

At first, the moderator interpreted this as a relatively simple coalition of power between mother and sister, motivated by a common desire to 'save' the younger boy from improper media content. However, it was later revealed that the boy did not see any such motivation on the part of his sister. Rather, his explanation was that the sister interfered with his gaming behaviour because his console gaming activities were tied to the big screen TV in the common living room, and access to this TV was a scarce common resource in that home. By contrasting these two examples with the previous one, we can see how the distribution of material resources and the delegation of authority within various family structures may alter the local structure of role conflicts.

As the final worked example, one of our cases can be used to illustrate connections gaming culture and obligations cashed out as commitment and attachment. This male informant is 15 years old, and he is a single child living with both parents. He is a competitive player of multiplayer games, mostly *League of Legends* which is also his favourite e-sport. A first example concerns a situation where the informant tried to balance his commitment to boy scouts with his commitments to gaming. The boy referred to the community of the scouts in fairly positive terms, but at the same time stated that the actual activities involved were kind of boring – here we see the communal values taking precedence over the more instrumental side of the boy scouts, who are typically lauded for both the values of community and a practical ethos of outdoor living and being 'always prepared', come rain or snow.

His interest in gaming, in contrast, seem to carry none of these positive values to his parents, although it is clear that the informant is also highly social in his gaming activities and talks about how gaming allows him to connect to other friends (who are also gamers) as well as to the larger gaming community.

The boy thus talks about both the boy scouts and gaming as valuable communities, but his commitment and attachment to gaming had at one point led to an explicit confrontation between him and his parents, where the parents had chastised him for leaving a boy scout camp early in order to prioritize the transmission of the World Cup in *League of Legends.* While the boy felt he had merely chosen a different community of equal value, his parents saw things very differently.

A second example from the same informant shows how the dynamics of commitment and attachment can work in connection with the structure of mediated everyday life. As the interview progresses, it becomes clear that the conflicts between the boy and his parents are not just about excessive gaming, but rather seems to stem from a combination of inattention in social interactions, due to media use, and excessive devotion to activities connected to gaming culture. The boy has taken to using his iPad during most of the day, to an extent that he is watching iPad videos during breakfast and in bed in the evenings – and he has even brought the iPad with him when walking the family dog.

This dog, he explained, was originally acquired partly to serve as a kind of 'attachment anchor' for the boy, since he is an only child. He thus describes how he had begged for a domestic pet over a long period, and he also expresses that he has 'begged his parents for a brother'. He still professes to like the dog, but he finds dog-walking boring when done alone. His interest in gaming and his attachment to the gaming communities seems to have led to the iPad being a constant presence outside of school – the iPad and, by extension, the gaming community have become almost ubiquitous in the informant's life. This presence of a media platform seems to be just as important for triggering the family conflicts, and it has led to the father confiscating the iPad for a full week, with no mention of a full week of gaming abstinence.

Problem gaming as media-enabled de-segmentation of daily life

This last example, where an iPad colonizes almost every aspect of a boy's life, may seem rather specific and perhaps also tangential to excessive gaming, but several of our respondents make reference to streaming and other activities, all of which signify their attachment to gaming culture and gaming communities in addition to the actual act of playing games. These media activities are in some sense not gaming activities per se, but they demonstrate commitment and especially emotional and attentional attachment to the domain of gaming culture – and this emotional attachment is generally frowned upon by the parents.

The common denominator here could be said to be the alteration of the spatio-temporal segmenting of everyday life, a dynamic helped in large parts by the presence and manifold networking of contemporary media: It is this networking, in particular, that allows gamers to participate enthusiastically in communities wherever they are, whenever they want. For scholars such as Goffman (1959/1990), Zerubavel (1997) and Nippert-Eng (1995), the specific configurations of space, time, cognition, and emotion are important patterns in the structures of everyday sociality.

Nippert-Eng refers to the particular *segmented* nature of everyday social life, and by this she refers to a logic which compartmentalizes the social in ways that keep domains of life separate from each other. This idea of segmentation accords extremely well with both Goffman's and Scott's analysis of institutions, where school would be an

instantiation of a heavily segmented and segmenting institution, and the home would be another segment, itself segmented into public and private areas. Conversely, the various bonds of attachment and commitment to various institutions is heavily structured as demarcations of separated times and spaces for these obligations to be fulfilled.

When looking at the lives of our informants through interviews, this segmenting seems to be the typical way of organizing family, school and gaming: School is work and the home is the arena for more leisure-oriented activities. When one looks at the conflicts described by our informants, there are indications that breakdowns in this segmentation can be a key part of the problem of problem gaming. I would thus argue that a kind of super-theme or core category can be found here that might help explain *why* parents and others feel that gaming is such a problem: The problem is a particular kind of *spatio-temporal emotional and attentional de-segmentation* of daily life, where gaming attachment seems to flow unconstrained across boundaries: gamers may be present physically without being really present emotionally; they are physically located in their homes, but they do not participate in family-oriented rituals of commitment and attachment.

Since the family has traditionally claimed the household as the physical site of family life, networked media has a potential for creating conflicts between attachment to different communities and their requisite values by bringing the various gaming communities and their demands for attention and attachment into the home – and all areas of the home. Gaming activity itself, with its own logics of competition and collaboration, as well as enthusiastic commitment and attachment, is one specific driver for domestic conflicts to arise. In addition, gaming-related activities has the potential to become problem-related activities and, in turn, these activities may become problematized in themselves because they signify attachment to gaming values, which are seen as orthogonal to family itself as well and other institutions which are deemed more compatible with family values, such as school, scouts, sports or guitar playing.

Conclusion, limitations and implications for further work

In this chapter, I have attempted to de-individualize problem gaming by providing a general sociological framework for analysing problematic gaming activities as embedded in overall institutional structures. The most important structures are the social obligations between various social roles, which are licensed by the larger institutional set of norms and values. When these obligations clash, a conflict arises. In the examples given above, problem gaming seems to take two main forms which often co-exist. The first is that of excessive gaming, i.e. commitment and emotional attachment to playing games in amounts deemed excessive by parents and teachers – and possibly by the gamer as well. The second, which is closely related to the first, is excessive commitment and emotional attachment to gaming-related activities, often by way of networked

personal media platforms. When both of these issues co-exist and the conflict starts involving school and its institutionalized obligations, the problems may escalate.

Several things have been left out of the argument. First, I have refrained from taking a more specific approach to the notion of family and parenting, and instead opted for a very general outline of family-related problems. In relation to the case stories involving teenagers and conflict, an obvious next step would be to acknowledge the importance of this life phase for certain types of problem gaming, for instance as seen in Karlsen's chapter in the present volume (Chapter 6). One might additionally look towards research into parenting teenagers, e.g. Coleman (2013) and the overview of parenting styles given there.

Second, I have followed the rather pragmatic line evident in Lofland et al. (2006), where roles and role-sets are seen as constructs that may be illuminating depending on both case and the temperament of the researcher. One might thus incorporate various constructionist approaches with the role perspective, for instance by taking variations of understandings of family and reformulating them as different and more local institutionalized logics of family and investigate how the local role-set looks. The present framework should be open enough to incorporate certain aspects from sources like Gubrium and Holstein (1990), as well as those mentioned in Morgan's (2011) brief overview of specific family practices.

Another issue related to that of avoiding 'reification of family' is that the family as an institution is well known to be both historically and locally malleable. The roles, norms and conventions of family life are being negotiated and re-negotiated, both on a daily basis and over the longer term. Modern life arguably involves a higher degree of complexity than in previous times, and this includes, but is not limited to, negotiation and re-negotiation of roles and possible relationships of responsibility. This leads to increased responsibility for everyone inside the family organization: Being a 'proper family' and a 'proper parent' entails a certain kind of responsible parenting but also responsible 'offspringing' – i.e. taking responsibility for one's own successful childhood as well as adolescence. Lee, Bristow, Faircloth, and Macvarish (2014) have argued for the rise of 'parental determinism' in society, where parenting is seen by many as a key influence on the success or failure of a child; there are indications in our data material that this issue could be relevant in relation to problem gaming.

A final issue stems from an empirical focus on interviews with the gamers themselves and the very limited attention given to other relevant roles in the role-sets of family and school. As such, the worked examples here offer no insight into how these relationships are experienced from the 'other side', so to speak. Incorporating these other individuals seems an obvious route for further research – and an outline of such an analysis can be found in the chapter by Prax and Rajkowska (Chapter 7).

Notes

1. The present proposal is intended as a 'soft' role theory, i.e. more akin to the pragmatic position offered by Lofland et al. (2006) than to the functionalism associated with a writer like Merton. I am thus not arguing that roles and role-sets are universal and unequivocally functional or dysfunctional in one particular form, but I am arguing for roles as broadly relevant templates of social conduct with probable ties to institutions which tend to structure interaction along particular lines.
2. This emphasis on the institutionalized aspect of roles accords well with the position of writers such as Berger and Luckmann (1966) and Scott (2014), while Goffman's notion of roles is arguably more locally oriented.
3. Although one can discuss at length the various complexities underlying such a simple statement, it should suffice for now to recognize that a general asymmetry exists, and in the majority of family settings this is not in favor of the child. See Brus' chapter in the present volume for examples on how this ties in with problem gaming.
4. The discussions surrounding what a contemporary grounded theory position would amount to are way too complex to enter into here; I use the term here, with some hesitation, to represent any position which seeks to minimize a priori theoretical commitments. The introductions in Bryman (2016) and Punch (2014) outline some of the basic problems with assuming a unified grounded theory position as well as some of the more specific problems that might follow if one follows the recommendations in the original formulations.
5. This type of dual purpose is specific to PCs compared to game consoles.

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