Players with predisposition for violence, distorted sense of reality and vulnerable personality

Hamar

The Changing Landscape of Gambling

29th of May 2013

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Results of studies of computer games and aggression have been conflicting. Still, the issue of players with predisposition for violence, distorted sense of reality and vulnerable personality remains. In this paper I will focus upon those with various predispositions and vulnerability towards development of unhealthy reactions and aggression. Thus, I wish both to focus both upon the ethical issues of how to protect the few from what might not be harmful for the rest and the safety concerns of possible violence and deviant reactions triggered or reinforced by games.

The discussion is mostly general and based upon psychological theory as well as ethical. In addition we have some case examples some of them based upon published material such as court proceedings and media coverage and some on case studies described to us by parents and professionals. All of the latter represents cases of minors that due to confidentiality have been altered in such ways that they cannot be traced back to the actual individuals.

Computer games are fascinating, entertaining and be thought of as promoting pro-social behavior. Gaming is part of new ways of communicating as well as learning (Facer in Coiro, 2008). Still, individual cases seem to indicate just the opposite and some cases even seem to copy details of what can be seen in certain violent games. The ethical question of what kind of rules society, parents and school should institute out of concern of the few and sometimes to the discomfort or even dislike of the rest is the same on a number of issues relating to moral, safety and behavior. Thus the regulating of computer games will have to relate to such concerns in the same way as towards other issues. On the individual level parents and professionals need to be particularly aware of those who might be negatively influenced by violent games.

Abnormal psychology

Abnormal psychology means relating to what is acknowledged to be psychiatric or psychological disorders. In many cases it means relating to what is regarded as insanity or mental illness (Seligman, Walker and Rosenhan, 2001). The number of people affected by mental illness is quite high. In the US a rough estimate is that around 20 % of the population have at least one mental illness in any given year, 6 % gave an addictive disorder, 5 – 9 % of children aged 9 – 17 have a "serious emotional disorder and 20 % of adults above 55 have a mental disorder (Seligman, Walker and Rosenhan, 2001: 4). Such numbers are obviously estimates and rather rough estimates depending upon definitions of insanity that might be open to dispute and change. The recent planned revision of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM V) (APA, 1994 and planned publication in 2013) is one illustrating example with the highly disputed diagnosis of social communication disorders including what earlier was labeled Asperger Autism (Groopman, 2013). The International Classification of Diseases (ICD 10) have the same challenges that will be disputed as well and the same will most likely be true for their planned revision to a new ICD 11 planned in 2015 (WHO, 1992).

Certain conditions, like autism,bipolar disorder and obsessions, have been particularly challenging (Grandin and Panek, 2013, Groopman, 2000, 2007 and 2013). The same is true for the number of people affected by a number of other mental illness (see for example Blumberg et al, 2013 and Hoffman, 2013).

Relating to insanity

Olivers Sacks wrote the book "An Anthropologist on Mars" described autistic writes as seemingly getting out of tune with their readers and "having peculiar narrational gaps and discontinuities, sudden perplexing changes of topics" (Sacks, 1995: 253). Obviously speaking such behavior will be confusing and often difficult to relate to for other gamers in social games as well. A lot of what we label as insanity will mean that the gamers will have other reaction patterns than other players and themselves experience the games in ways that are hard to anticipate for those who have difficulty in relating to their logic.

In fact for all of us relating to people who experience another reality than others will be highly challenging. It is also important to be aware of the danger of rigid predictions about others minds and potential (Groopman, 2013: 40). Diagnosis is after all rough categories often hiding great individual differences and predicting patterns of reactions that might be misleading. Then of course a lot of people will have mental disorders without being diagnosed and without experienced as mentally ill.

Peculiar narrational gaps

Another reality (peculiar narrations

Perplexing changes

Stuck in certain patterns

Discontinuities

Out of tune

Social problems /relational challenges

Relating to sanity

The question of how violent videogames affects children and adolescents has been raised by a number of researchers (see for example Frøyland et al, 2010, Schroeder, 2011 and Anderson, Buckley and Gentile, 2007). Most children and adolescents seem to be able to play and use games for entertainment, however there are exceptions.

What I am occupied with is not the statistical

What is outside of the norm

Ethics (The challenge of taking care of and relating to those who are reacting different from others)

The lessons of Utøya

Being in Norway it is natural to comment upon the terrorist attacks carried out by a lone attacker with explosives in Oslo ad by guns at Utøya. The terrorist reported that he used the game "World of Warcraft" both for motivation and entertainment (Brustad, 2011). The games were all of a kind that is readily commercially available and used for entertainment by numerous persons. Such training is not necessarily a sign of mental illness or deviance, but might also be a sign of an intelligent use of games for training rather like simulator training used by police forces, security agencies and in the military. Still, I wish to emphasize that the warped political ideas behind the terrorist attacks naturally for most of us a sign of madness and even of mentally illness. However, such a layman opinion might be different from the analytic judgment of professionals within mental health.

In an article in one of the Norwegian newspapers the following games were listed as played by the terrorist (Hultgren; Sandli, Brustad; Meldalen and Ruud , 2011: 24 -25) under the title "trained to kill".

Call of Duty Modern Warfare 2
Dark Alliance II
Defiance
Dungeons & Dragon Heroes
Legacy of Kain
Mace Griffin
Max Payne 2
Streets of LA
The Awakning
The Fall of Max Payne
The Lord of the Rings
The Return of the King
True Crime
Unreal II
World of Warcraft

I mention the list of games partly because I want to relate to the choice of games. Quite a lot of gamers would have tried a similar selection of games and quite some of them would find many of the games childlike and rather innocent.

As known to most of you the Norwegian terrorist, Anders Behring Brevig (ABB) was sentenced to the maximum sentence given within the Norwegian Criminal Code. In the court proceedings the first team of psychiatrists found him to be mentally insane while the second team found him to be "sane" in the sense that he was responsible for his actions and well aware of the consequences of his actions. The court finally ruled him to be sane.

Deviance but not mental illness

Ideas and ideologies we consider to be insane

The use of gaming as preparation

Desensitive training

Copy cat use of methods and getting ideas

The Adam Lanza case

The US case of Adam Lanza was far different, even if shared the characteristic of being a loner with a history of isolation. Even he was suspected of being mentally ill and there has been speculation of diagnosis ranging from Asberger autism to paranoid schizophrenia he was never diagnosed. Lanza was reported to have used a number of games;

Call of Duty

Dance, dance revolution

Dynasty Warriors

Reigns of Chaos

Starcraft

Warcraft III

Again the games were of a kind chosen by many youth and several of them might be characterized as rather innocent. The British telegraph reported with the following title; "Connecticut school shooting: troubled life of Adam Lanza (AL), a fiercely intelligent killer Adam Lanza was reclusive, painfully shy and intensely bright. He also lived in a house full of guns" The article did not particularly focus upon gaming, but rather the reclusiveness, the shyness, the intensely brightness and the availability to guns (Telegraph, read 20. February, 2013).

Reclusive

Painfully shy

Intensely bright

The availability to guns

Insanity

We are looking backward looking at the results, dissecting the past

The challenge is predicting and avoiding such outcomes

Relating to the staggering number of false positives we will have in any predictions

Violence and sanity

Obviously speaking, violence is not always a sign of insanity. In many case gruesome violence can be conducted out of dedication to religion or politics and in other cases in order to gain some kind of prestige or benefit. The British philosopher John Stuart Mill (1806 – 1873) wrote about empathic anger and from that point of view the Norwegian terrorist could be understood as having "empathic anger " doing his gruesome deeds in empathy for his greater cause (Mill, 1908 and 1956; Weihe, 2008:50). Gaming would from that point of view just be "training" for doing what the greater cause made necessary.

In other cases, like with rape or acts of violence, the act would in some case be individual and in other cases part of the actions of a group like football hooligans. Still, in all cases gaming and films might be used as part of the preparation and sometimes even be experienced as what triggers off behavior.

Empathic anger (John Stuart Mill)

Gaming as training for the greater cause

Rape and acts of violence for individual pleasure

Rape and acts of violence as part of group behavior (Football holligans, gang rapes)

The psychology of such acts can be understood in different ways

Not necessarily as anger

Not necessarily as lack of empathy but rather selective empathy

From a religious and even philosophical point of view it might even be

A question of evil

A question of virtues

From a political or society level

 # A question of what we "pollute" society with

 # A question of what we can restrict and of the benefits of having restrictions

 # A question of morals

 # A question of what is acceptable and unacceptable

Societies are different. Some countries, like Norway, have a tradition of restrictions and censorship

- **Alcohol**

- **drugs/narcotics**

- **gambling**

- **professional boxing**

Case stories

Still, the issue of players with predisposition for violence, distorted sense of reality and vulnerable personality remains. A number of case stories tell about people who partly can't separate between reality and phantasm / what has been seen in media or experienced in games and in some cases outright copies what they have experienced in games or film. Let me share a few case stories. The first and second one has been communicated by a local Norwegian medical doctor. The third case by a staff member of the protective housing and the fourth and fifth case by a family members taking contact because it is known that I am involved in the training of students studying compulsory gaming and gaming problems. All the cases are from the last three years and have been slightly changed in order to ensure anonymity.

Case number one (C1)

The case first case is two young boys around 10 years old who play "Call of Duty Modern Warfare" and a number of other games. The parents to one of them regard the games as entertainment, while the parents to the other regard them as deviant and dangerous. In connecting play acting of what they have seen one boy stabs the other in a rather dangerous way. He is wounded in the chest by a dagger like knife and is close to having his lung punctured. The choice of weapon and indeed the act itself seen to have been copied from a one of the games they have used. The boy who stabs has a history of violence towards other children and animals. He has inflicted pain towards others a number of times as his reaction to the pain of the other seems mostly to have been curiosity. Indeed he tells that he wants to know what happens and tells that he has copied what has been done from games and even been inspired of what he has seen. Since the case is with minors no action has so far been taken apart from some involvement of a teacher, a report to the local child protection authorities and the medical attention given to the wounded. The stabbing very nearly punctured the lung of the wounded boy

Underlying pathology

Copy cat

Choice of weapon

Playing what was in the games

Case number two (C2)

The second case is with a man known for paranoid schizophrenia. He is active gaming war games. The family contacts local health authorities because he does not seem to be able to separate the gaming from reality. The main danger seems to be reckless car driving, putting both his own life and that of others in great danger. Gaming seem to trigger off dangerous behavior and he does not seem to be able to separate between what he experience gaming and reality. He is a big man and he takes action to defend him against others when he feels threatened and then to take whatever care available to be able to get away.

Paranoid schizophrenia

Does not seem to be able to separate gaming from his distorted reality

Gaming triggers off behavior

Case number three (C3)

The third case is a man in his thirties with mental retardation. He is living in protective housing permanently staffed by health and social work professionals. Gaming is one of his main activities and the games of his choice are mainly connected to different kinds of fighting and often with elements of sexuality. His aggression level is quite influenced by playing games. Without playing his peaceful, playing games but starting to play he becomes aggressive and vulgar particularly towards the other sex. The vulgarity involves physically molesting and needs to be controlled in order to protect other mentally retarded living in the same unit. Other people living in the same unit are playing the same kind of games without any difficult reactions and seem to enjoy them as pure entertainment.

Mental retardation

Destructive anti social behavior triggered by games

Violence

Sexual vulgarity and acting out

Case number four (C4)

A family member tells about a twenty five year old member of the family who is an active member of a football supporter group and in addition a football hooligan. He enjoys watching football matches on TV is an active gamer himself. The family member does not know what kind of games he is playing, but experiences the games as very violent and warlike. The pattern of hooliganism is described as always the same, the play games and get into a kind of aggression, go to the matches and get involved in fighting. The family member experience that the games trigger them off. The hooligan himself says "Yeah it is like getting drunk and getting ready for the fight, you get into the state and want to hit someone, kick them hard and see blood". "Being part of the gang and gaming is part of it – just we are acting it out in real"

Gang violence

Football hooligan

Games and gaming used to "get in the state"

Case number five (C5)

A mother who is mourning her daughter who committed suicide takes contact after I have given a brief description of the course of compulsory gaming on Facebook. She is convinced that her daughter's suicide is triggered off by gaming. The mother describes how her daughter isolated herself and gradually identified herself with a person in the game. In the end she jumped like described in the game.

The mother describes how the girl dressed like the model in the game, behaved like the model and took operations to look like the abnormally well proportioned model in the play, how she developed eating disorders and gradually got more isolated from others.

Suicide

Eating disorders

Gaming

The practical lessons

The lessons to be taught by my examples will be different depending upon the interpretation of the cases. Obviously my simplified cases might hide complexities of reactions and metal states that can be interpreted in different ways. The last case (C5) might be understood as a classical example of eating disorders and depressions, possibly of other mental illness and it might involve abuse and almost certainly challenging social relations. Being a mother is far different than being a professional with health- or social services, and interpreting the case after the suicide is different than working with the case before the suicide.

We need to interpret such cases systematically in order to be better practitioners and in order to develop policy. In addition of course we need to involve individuals affected and sometimes, like with the grieving mother, take care of the victims.

The ethics

The logic of censorship is that certain kind of films, games or even literature will be offensive, destructive and sometimes trigger off or normalize unwanted behavior. Still, controlling others means that we regard some people to have a better judgment than others and that we restrict individual freedom and even freedom of speech and expression.

That balance is a challenge for all societies, but it is also a challenge for us as individuals and as professionals. We need to relate to how gaming will influence both us as individuals and others. In addition we need to relate to the fact that some stimuli might be harmful and trigger off destructive behavior for some individuals.

The general questions of how fighting as entertainment like boxing and violent games influence society and might normalize destructive behavior is another challenge.

Insanity, depressions, self destructive behavior

My case C 1 is such a case and possibly a case of insanity. How we relate to the case and how we choose to react will influence the individuals involved and even how their lives will develop (Bauman, 2003). The C5 case is also possibly a case of depression, possibly just of self-destructive behavior being triggered off by what has been experienced in the games. The self destructiveness is timeless and be described way bay in history.

Timeless problems

Gaming, suicide and self destructive behavior is nothing new and neither is behavior that is destructive to others nor insanity (Moore, 1790; Plass, 1995 and Englander, 2003). The old Romans has their gaming as well as the 1700s as illustrated by Thomas Moore famous publication "A full inquiry into the subject of suicide: The which added two treatsies on duelling and gaming" (Moore, 1790).

The question of censorship

What kind of restrictions can we use in order to influence the behavior of the few ?

The values of society

The ethical challenges will have to do with what kind of values we want to base society upon. Finding the common ground between philosophy, religion and other values of society might be challenging (Rorty, 2010 and 1997). However, we need that discourse and we need to relate it to the practical challenges of modern society as well as the timeless challenges of living together and being part of a society (Erstad and Sefton-Green, 2013 and Weihe, 2008). Our capacity of living with differences and people having an identity based upon different values will be part of that at the same time that we need to relate to the vulnerability of those who have problems like mental illness. My case C2 and C3 represent such cases, still with vastly different challenges.

Confronting crime and anti social behavior

At the same time we need to confront those who challenge the very value foundation of living together. My case number four (C4) is a case like that. A young man who regard fighting and hooliganism as entertainment.

The ethnographies of the games is just a small part of what we have to relate to (Thornham, 2011). Just dissecting the games and relating the games to entertainment value and well functioning kids give us no lessons. We need to relate gaming to a far more complicated landscape that include those who have behavior patters outside of the normal s well as people with completely different values. Thus, answers of statistics can be grossly misleading and we need to relate to another complexity as well as the values of society.

Working with the deviant few

- Taking individual pathology into consideration
- The question of the cognitive
- The question of relating to another often hidden reality
- Practical questions of treatment ranging from medication to different types of treatment and sometimes institutional settings
- The question of protecting others
- The questions of crime and rehabilitation

Diagnosing and predicting behavior is still another issue

- Most people who isolate themselves mostly harm themselves (some of them have mental problems but not all of them)
- Most people never develop "acting out" but might have offensive and troubling verbal behavior
- False positives

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