

# Understanding first controlled gaming in teenagers.

## A qualitative study among young French daily or week-end video gamers

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**French monitoring Centre on Drugs and Drug Addiction  
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**No conflict of interest to claim**

# to better understand ordinary gaming practices of teenagers aged 11 to 15, through their perceptions

**Motivations to play**  
**Gaming contexts**  
**Regulations**

(Mutatayi C, Neybourger P., Philippon A., Guilbaud F., 2022)

**30 semi-structured individual interviews**, during/after Covid-19 lockdown episodes (visioconference or phone).

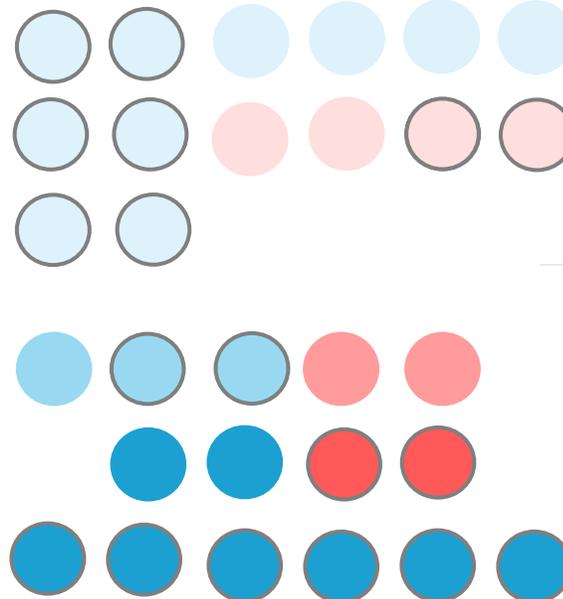
**12** aged 11-12, **18** aged 13-15 (60%)



[ ++ **online multiplayer gamers** ]  
e.g.: MOBA, Battle Royale, etc. NOT MMORPG!

**3/4** boys

**3/4** middle-class



**14** non-school day players  
(at weekends and on Wednesdays)

**16** daily players

Incl. **11** intensive players  
(>1h daily)

# Motivations to play: fun, socialisation...

Beyond pleasure (hedonic function),

→ Multiplayer online games described as spaces for **sociability**, for **reuniting** with **real-life** friends and continue the day's interactions, for sharing with siblings, **keeping in contact**.

→ While playing online, **concurrent chat** with friends or teammates is **full part** of the game or a **motivation in itself**.

Gaming platforms may be used as a **communication tool**, a **social network**

→ Performance, intrinsic features of games, marketing tricks often at the 2nd place

✓ **Naila (11 y. o.):** *When you play as a team, you can laugh with people, you have **fun**, you **talk**. There's **laughter**, there's **stress**, there's **everything in fact**.*

✓ **Jonah (15 y. o.):** *We don't necessarily play **the same game** (...) but we stay in the chat for, I don't know, 2 hours or so, 2 or 3 hours.*

✓ **Morgan ★ (13 y. o.):** *I like the game Fortnite **just because I can talk with my cousins and friends**, but otherwise that's it. **It's not really a game I'm very interested in.** (...) We play and talk at the same time. We tell little stories that have happened to us or we talk about the game.*



# A driver for personal or collective achievement

When gained experience, gaming has a narcissic potential, becoming a social **showcase** of skills and a source of self-esteem

→ Herein, a **route** offering more control and options than many social or leisure activities (including sport)



→ Either victory or defeat are strongly incentive, being experiences of frustration and achievement: the **spice of defeat or the sweet taste of victory**

✓ **Alessio**★ (14 y. o.): *Yes, when I lose, maybe out of **frustration**, I want to **do better than the game before**. And when I win, it's more out of motivation that I feel like continuing to play (...) **I feel strong**, I tell myself: "Me and my team were the best in that game, why shouldn't we be the best again in the next game?" It's motivating.*

# Gaming contexts : an accumulation of intervals

Play time is **interstitial**, an accumulation of intervals between many obligations, given high social occupation and “war” on boredom for teenagers

Gaming is extensible, intertwined in other digital practices, in a context of high connectivity

→ Difficult to estimate specific playing time

→ Due to its materiality, gaming is more visible to parents than other digital practices, which contributes to parental disapproval



**Jason** ★ (13 y. o.): *But when Dad tells me to stop, most of the time I'm not playing... I'm just with my friends on Discord [a social media], talking to them.*

**Lauren** (13 y. o.): *With video games, time flies. So I don't necessarily stay on them that much. I **alternate** sometimes between social networks or gaming or reading or whatever... But, I think that, for my parents, **in their mind I spend more time than just that!***

# Shifting to PC, a turning point

A rather opportunist alternation between types of video games, play modes and media (PC/console/phone), depending on who is available and with what equipment, how much time and in what mood (to perform/to relax ...).

Shifting to **PC** is both the symbol and a vector of greater **dexterity** (with keyboard and mouse) and **expertise**...



- It shows a shift in the **intentionality** and **intensity** of gaming
- A retreat to the intimate space of the bedroom
- Socially determined...

*Aaron (13 y. o.): If you play on the computer, you are better than those who play on Switch for example. (...) In fact you know the keys by heart so you can win more easily.*

*Jason ★ (13 y. o.): As soon as I'm on the PC, I have a lot more accessibility, (...) equipment on operators or weapon skins that I can get for free.*

*Rose (15 y. o.): when I got a PC, I was able to use Fortnite a lot more, play a lot, play better with other friends and all that*

# Time and school are main regulators...



Regulations exercised by parents, by teens on themselves, between players which imply **responsibility** for time, social interactions, protecting one's identity, the game content and even the expenses invested = digital education.

An essential step towards a more autonomous practice by adolescents in a space where parents have little control

Time limits are main levers for parents to supervise access to video games (e.g. the symbolic hour)

"Homework first". This **priority** is an **internalised principle**, increasing with age

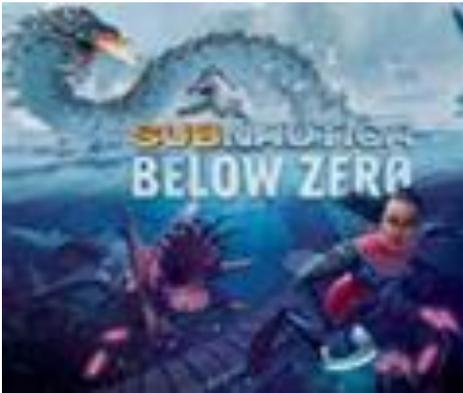
**Athena** ★ (14 y. o.): **Homework is my priority.** (...) *If I haven't finished my homework or made progress, even for the other days, I don't even touch the console. It's not even something my parents tell me. For me, it makes sense.*

# A give-and-take system between self-regulation and parental monitoring

Gaming as a **counterpart and reward** for school perseverance and performance.

Extra play time is at the heart of a give-and-take rule

Also part of a **supportive and responsive parental monitoring**, described by "in control" players, based on **dialogue, esteem** and **trust**: parents listen, show interest, don't denigrate.



**Alessio ★ (14 y. o.):** *Sometimes, especially at dinner, just after playing, I tell them about what I've done [in the game]. And well, even if they don't understand anything...(...) I'm pleased because they are interested in what I do. (...) For example, sometimes my parents come into the room and say: "So what are you playing? How are you? How is it going? Are you winning?" And it sounds so silly, but in reality, I'm so happy.*

# Inter-regulation and self-regulation

Gaming involves supportive attitudes: mediation, alliance, conciliation, solidarity ("carry"), team spirit are driving forces to regulate interactions between players

→ A factory of psychosocial skills?

✓ **Virgile (14 y. o.)** : *We play separately - well, each on our own - **but the aim is still to help each other.** But other than killing the enemy, we... Actually we never get angry. **In fact, there is no need to get upset.** (...) We always agree. **We can't disagree.***



# Conclusion

The socialising value of games is a major retention factor perceived by teen players (as much or more than marketing tricks).

Our results suggest that play time is not a sufficient criterion to qualify whether a behaviour is problematic: they contradicted the belief that intensive gaming inherently leads to social isolation and impaired school involvement.

The psychosocial enrichment or impoverishment resulting from gaming practices must be better assessed by surveys.

Playing video games deal with a lot of peer interaction and moderation with limited threats from peers (Gaetan 2012, Gaetan, Therme et al. 2015, Rossé 2017), may enhance self-esteem and offer to play interchangeable roles.

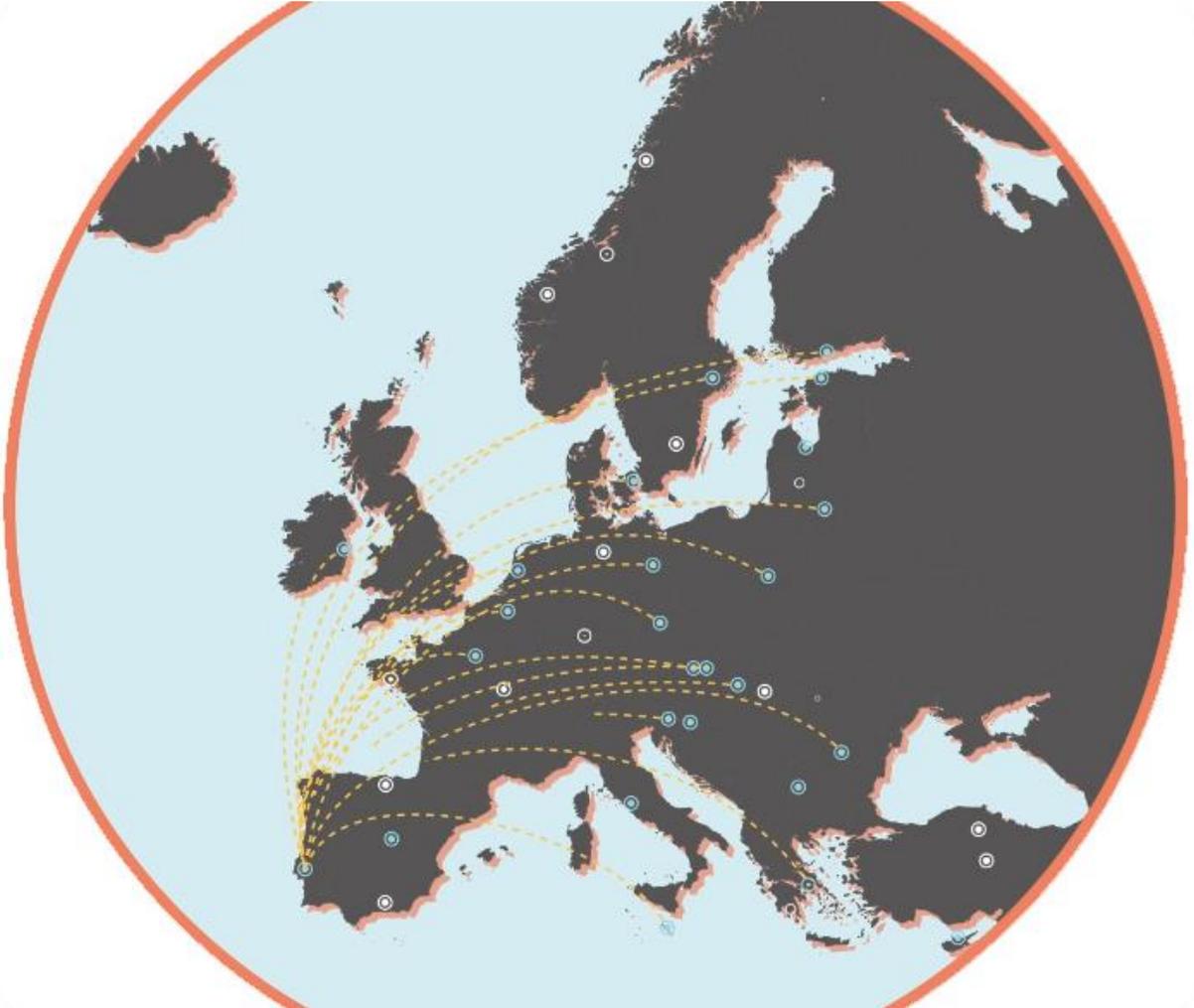
→ Could video games be used as a space for consolidating psychosocial skills among peers and a space for prevention?



# REITOX member

**OFDT is the French focal point for the EMCDDA.**

OFDT is a member of the European Information Network on Drugs and Drug Addiction (REITOX).



# RÉFÉRENCES ET REMERCIEMENTS

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**Thank you for  
your attention**

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