CC: The revised Stage 1 manuscript was returned to the three reviewers who evaluated the original submission. The good news is that the reviewers are broadly satisfied and we are now close to being able to award Stage 1 in-principle acceptance (IPA). Among the remaining issues to address are methodological clarifications and minor presentational issues, together with assurances regarding the anonymisation of participant data.

Other than these points, the one remaining significant issue is the suitability of the proposed design for the programmatic RR track in which there will be two separate Stage 2 outputs. After the first round of review, I was not fully convinced that the second proposed Stage 2 output was sufficiently robust and substantive to justify a separate RR (in accordance with Stage 1 criterion 1C).

This concern is revisited here by one of the three reviewers (Malte Elson), and I admit I do share the reviewer's concern. However, after re-reading the revised manuscript myself, including especially the authors' contingency plan for the designation of the second Stage 2 output as either a complete qualitative report or a case study, I have decided that the best course of the action in this case is to grant the authors' the benefit of the doubt, much as with many Stage 1 RRs that, in spite of careful planning, face a non-zero risk of recruitment failure. To comprehensively settle this issue, in this final revision, I would like to see (in both the manuscript and in the authors' response to reviewers) a clear description of the conditions under which the second RR would be impossible -- i.e. presumably if the sample size is below the minimum needed even for a case study. Although this may seem obvious, I believe it needs to be clearly articulated, primarily for the authors' own sake. As noted in the PCI RR policy, once a programmatic IPA is awarded, the prespecified boundaries defining different Stage 2 outputs are treated as design elements; therefore, like any other design element, Stage 1 IPA will be contingent on authors adhering to the prespecified and approved article boundaries at Stage 2. Where one of these elements becomes impossible to complete, authors must ensure that they are aware of the conditions under which a Withdrawn Registration would be required, and the resulting reporting requirements: "For programmatic RRs, entire components that are planned as separate Stage 2 outputs can be withdrawn without affecting the IPA of the remaining components. In such cases, each remaining Stage 2 output must include a URL to the Withdrawn Registration of the withdrawn component." Therefore, while I am satisfied for the authors to split the project as described, the authors should bear this in mind in reaching their own final decision about the risks and benefits of the programmatic track.

Overall, given the enthusiastic evaluations of the reviewers, provided the authors are able to respond comprehensively to these remaining points in a final revision, Stage 1 IPA should be forthcoming without requiring further in-depth review.

R: We have now clarified that, in case of zero participants for the next round, we will withdraw the second outcome.

ME: I commend the authors for aiming to share the literal transcripts after allowing the participants to review them. However, I take issue with the method by which the authors claim to "anonymize" the transcripts (p. 12). Clearly, simply removing the name of someone from a transcript may not be enough to anonymize their utterances, particularly when they go into personal details that could make them easily identifiable to others. The risk of de-anonymization can be minimized by removing names and other references to places or people (which the authors should do before the transcripts are published), but I don't think there is good way make in-depth interview data truly anonymous in the sense of the GDPR. I recommend that the authors explain to their participants that they will do everything in their power, but that an element of risk remains.

R: We agree with this comment and share the reviewer's concerns regarding protecting the participants. Indeed, it will be made clear to the

participants that transcript sharing involves distinct risks. That said, we also note that the risks involved are not simply higher, but of different *kind*; because we do not share explicit demographic details (as survey studies often do), there are fewer automated means for participant identification (while transcript details can be more easily identified by e.g. locals). As for each participant, in addition to removing the usual names and other direct identifiers, we will process the transcripts in detail. We also note that the data will not be left for free download, but the FSD will control access to it so that only researchers with valid intentons can use it. By taking these and other such details carefully into consideration, we pursue a balance between minimizing risks, respecting the participants' autonomy, maximizing their wishes to contribute to scientific development, and meeting the highest standards of excellence in our own reserach.

MC: " both Group 1 and 2 participants will fill out various paper-based screening tools (Appendix 2);" –Appendix 2 shows 3 separate scales and a single-item question to measure gaming problems, as well as 6 other self-reported scales. Will all scores be reported in a table as part of the description? I assume these will not only be used as part of participants descriptions, but in later work; this might be explained a bit further. It might also be good to list any demographic information that will be collected.

R: We have added a note about this and a link to the other RR, from which the survey was applied. We must be very careful how and what demographic details will be reported and shared with the qualitative transcripts without compromising participant privacy; therefore, we rather not state explicit details at Stage 1 (which might lead to difficulties at Stage 2 if we promise to report something that we cannot report after all). Depending on the sample, we will use descriptive abstraction in a way that is safe and informative. We have not planned specific future use for these surveyed data , but at least the listed screening tool outcomes will be stored for reuse.

MC: "we expect these meaningsthe above to produce significant life conflicts for the treatment-seeking"—do you expect that the meaningfulness they derive to be the thing that produces conflict? or can the conflict derive from aspects that aren't seen as meaningful and positive, like symptoms/impairment? E.g., play that feels like a compulsion—you're no longer getting anything out of it but you still feel like you have to keep doing it. Any counterbalancing positive aspects/meaning are outweighed by the loss of control/continuance despite problems. This, I think, would be more likely to cause life conflict rather than the meaning itself. I think " because that meaningful behavior clashes with their other key valuesabove." can be deleted, unless your hypothesis is predicated on the meaning itself causing the conflict.

R: We agree with this accurate comment; the part has been revised accordingly.

MC: "forums by recommendation of the Finnish Esports Federation (https://seul.fi), with whom we collaborate –" this potential conflict of interest should be explained in greater detail.

R: We have reframed this part into: "which has assisted us in previous research as well" to avoid confusion. We coudn't see the potential COI earlier, but after this, we agree this is something that should be addressed. To control the already high word count in the ms, we address this issue here. The SEUL has a good network for local active players, and has thus assisted us (and other researchers) in finding participants in several previous studies. They share us a list of clubs, teams, etc. which allow contacting criteria meeting players directly. In this assisting role, SEUL has very little agency in terms of participant recruitment, as we choose the communities/institutions which we contact (and the participants in those communities/instutitions who volunteer to participate). We should also keep in mind that this is still only a potential COI; SEUL

MC: Link the self-reported health problems to gaming in a consistent way, e.g.

- "Likewise, as we term our other group 'players without self-reported health problems'"-->self-reported health problems related to gaming
- "those who play esports games several hours per day without self-reported health problems"--> without self-reported related health problems related to gaming

will help modelling the differences-->will help model the differences

those who play videogames daily to have better psychosocial adjustment-->have better

has suggested similar meaningfulness to be part of those who meet the DSM5 criteria for 'internet..."--> has suggested similar meaningfulness to be found by those who meet the DSM5 criteria for 'internet

depth and breath—depth and breadth

longitudinal case study,-- perhaps a case series rather than a case study

R: All fixed.