Review of Phenomenological Strands

This registered report outlines planned qualitative research on esports and gaming disorder. I have reviewed the report considering the key issues and provide suggestions below and I think it is very well-done and recommend acceptance pending minor revisions. For reference, I am a researcher who has studied game "addiction" and the potential benefits of gaming for 10 years in clinical and non-clinical settings. I do not have experience with IPA but have conducted other qualitative and mixed methods studies.

Thank you for letting me review this. I look forward to the results.

Michelle Colder Carras

3.1 Key issues to consider at Stage 1

Does the research question make sense in light of the theory or applications? Is it clearly defined? Where the proposal includes hypotheses, are the hypotheses capable of answering the research question?

It does a great job of the above for the most part. One area that I think should be re-evaluated is the hypothesis (QH2) that suggests that participants with clinical-level gaming-related health problems will be likely not to express the pursuit of self-development and social value. This is contrary to previous research that suggests that gaming offers benefits as well as problems, even to those who may have clinical-level problems. As with other forms of "addiction", even at the level where use is compulsive and out of control, people may still be experiencing benefits. This may be even greater for gamers who belong to guilds or stream regularly to an established community.

Is the protocol sufficiently detailed to enable replication by an expert in the field, and to close off sources of undisclosed procedural or analytic flexibility?

Yes

Is there an exact mapping between the theory, hypotheses, sampling plan (e.g. power analysis, where applicable), preregistered statistical tests, and possible interpretations given different outcomes?

Yes

For proposals that test hypotheses, have the authors explained precisely which outcomes will confirm or disconfirm their predictions?

N/A

Is the sample size sufficient to provide informative results?

Yes

Where the proposal involves statistical hypothesis testing, does the sampling plan for each hypothesis propose a realistic and well justified estimate of the effect size?

N/A

Have the authors avoided the common pitfall of relying on conventional null hypothesis significance testing to conclude evidence of absence from null results? Where the authors intend to interpret a negative result as evidence that an effect is absent, have authors proposed an inferential method that is capable of drawing such a conclusion, such as Bayesian hypothesis testing or frequentist equivalence testing?

Yes

Have the authors minimised all discussion of post hoc exploratory analyses, apart from those that must be explained to justify specific design features? Maintaining this clear distinction at Stage 1 can prevent exploratory analyses at Stage 2 being inadvertently presented as pre-planned.

Yes

Have the authors clearly distinguished work that has already been done (e.g. preliminary studies and data analyses) from work yet to be done?

Yes

Have the authors prespecified positive controls, manipulation checks or other data quality checks? If not, have they justified why such tests are either infeasible or unnecessary? Is the design sufficiently well controlled in all other respects?

N/A

When proposing positive controls or other data quality checks that rely on inferential testing, have the authors included a statistical sampling plan that is sufficient in terms of statistical power or evidential strength?

N/A

Does the proposed research fall within established ethical norms for its field? Regardless of whether the study has received ethical approval, have the authors adequately considered any ethical risks of the research?

Yes

Other notes/suggestions

1. Consider adding design elements or reporting some information that can be used later to meet standards for qualitative reporting. Some information (per JARS-qual) that could be added is reflexivity on the researchers' experiences and backgrounds. One design element that could be added is member checking. I realize this is somewhat contentious in phenomenological qualitative research, but to me as a gamer/researcher/person who has experienced some "addiction" symptoms as well as mental health challenges, the idea of using clinician interviews after the fact seems less supportable. Just a bit more explanation of this choice would help, or some consideration of additional methods of triangulation outside the research group.

2. What is the study procedure? It was not clear to me until the final page that the Group 3 interviews would take place after analysis of Groups 1 and 2.

3. More information on the recruitment and screening process is needed. How will people be screened into the study (i.e., how will inclusion/exclusion criteria be assessed) if they respond to advertisements? How will it be determined that esports players do not have gaming "related health problems"? What exactly is the definition of esports? Please give some example games. Will it be assessed whether people are playing esports competitively/professionally? What if there are options in the game to play solo vs competitively; will that be assessed? Will professional esports athletes or sponsored streamers be included? How will the study purpose be explained to participants? Will the interviewers reveal their own perspectives/backgrounds during the screening or interviews?

4. What is the expectation of retaining members for the 2nd interview and what will be done to enhance this probability?

5. "which can be seriously harmful when over and under medicating…" implies that medication is

the treatment that will be given. This should be expanded to (potentially unnecessary) psychosocial treatments. It may also good to discuss this in light of children/adolescents being brought to treatment and that as a coercive practice.

6. Please support "which has recently become one of the most prevalent forms of videogame play" with a citation. I'm not sure I agree with this.

7. The explanation of qualitative hypotheses as disclosing biases is a bit confusing to someone with little knowledge of IPA. How does this differ from the researchers' inherent biases and how these are addressed in other forms of qualitative analysis (e.g., reflexivity)?

8. "We are not aware of reviews that summarize these results" – my unpublished thesis discusses this in the section "Incidence and transition between states of problematic gaming, at-risk and non-problematic gaming" on page 28.

9. Are there figures saying that gaming-related clinical services are rarely used in Finland? Even a personal communication would help.

10. I didn't realize that the ICD-11 diagnosis is not yet in clinical use; is it still in field trials? Please cite.

11. Please provide a link to *Pelit* and give 1-2 more examples of forums that will be used to recruit gamers.

12. Please clarify whether full time students will be included in the esports players sample or only those with a full time job.

13. Will only Finnish-speaking people be recruited?

14. Have you considered using DeepL or some other supported AI translation to translate interviews into English as an intermediate step, with the caveat that they are not quality-checked? This could be a very valuable dataset. Perhaps such transcripts could be posted as well, and it could be made clear that the interviews were machine translated. Eventually the authors may find collaborators willing to provide funding support for further translation/quality checking.

15. My apologies if this was covered, but what will happen to the audio recordings? How long will they be retained?

16. Please provide more description of the documentation of the coding process.

17. Please clarify the role of the Stage 1 interview phenomenological manuals in the Stage 2 interview analysis.

Typos

"those who play videogames daily with better"→ have better

"neglection of needs/responsibilities"→ neglect

a priory I think should be a priori