

11-5-2022

Transforming from Addicted Video Gamer to Doctoral Candidate: An Autoethnographic Reflection

Xiao Hu Dr.

University of Science and Technology of China, China, xiaohu13@ustc.edu.cn

Hongzhi Zhang Dr

Monash University, Australia, hongzhi.zhang@monash.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr>

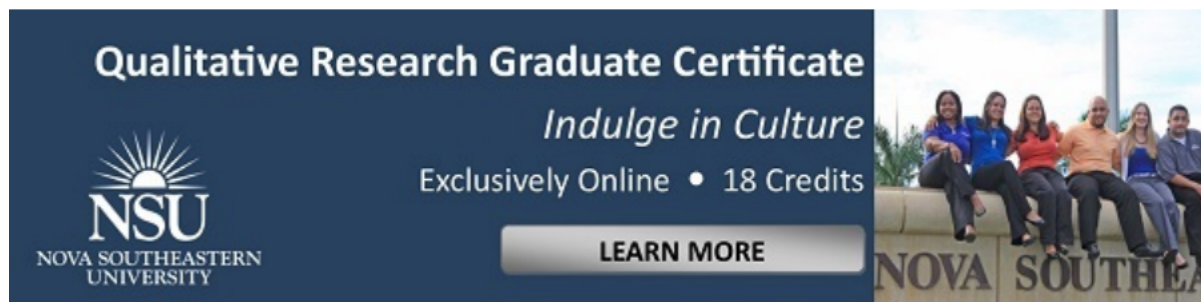


Part of the [Educational Psychology Commons](#), and the [Quantitative, Qualitative, Comparative, and Historical Methodologies Commons](#)

Recommended APA Citation

Hu, X., & Zhang, H. (2022). Transforming from Addicted Video Gamer to Doctoral Candidate: An Autoethnographic Reflection. *The Qualitative Report*, 27(11), 2404-2418. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.5528>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the The Qualitative Report at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Qualitative Report by an authorized administrator of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact nsuworks@nova.edu.



Transforming from Addicted Video Gamer to Doctoral Candidate: An Autoethnographic Reflection

Abstract

Video game addiction has become a significant concern in many countries with the development of the digital entertainment industry. Researchers have devoted their efforts to understanding the causes of video game addiction and seeking solutions and treatment approaches to help reduce the addictive problem. Similar to the worldwide situation, video game addiction issues are also a major socio-cultural problem in China. Although qualitative and quantitative research methods have been used in video game addiction studies, current research still follows the model of collecting data from objective participants and then analysing it. Contrarily, there is a lack of first-person empirical data on overcoming video game addiction. This research adopts the autoethnographic approach to study video game addiction topics. The outcome indicates that the author's game addiction is mainly created by seeking fun in gameplay and escapism from real-life problems. The factors that help the author overcome the addiction and further turn into a positive influence in his life include shifting attention and making life more purposeful.

Keywords

addiction, video games, motivation, prevention, autoethnography

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

Transforming from Addicted Video Gamer to Doctoral Candidate: An Autoethnographic Reflection

Xiao Hu¹ and Hongzhi Zhang²

¹University of Science and Technology of China, China

²School of Education, Culture and Society, Monash University, Australia

Video game addiction has become a significant concern in many countries with the development of the digital entertainment industry. Researchers have devoted their efforts to understanding the causes of video game addiction and seeking solutions and treatment approaches to help reduce the addictive problem. Similar to the worldwide situation, video game addiction issues are also a major socio-cultural problem in China. Although qualitative and quantitative research methods have been used in video game addiction studies, current research still follows the model of collecting data from objective participants and then analysing it. Contrarily, there is a lack of first-person empirical data on overcoming video game addiction. This research adopts the autoethnographic approach to study video game addiction topics. The outcome indicates that the author's game addiction is mainly created by seeking fun in gameplay and escapism from real-life problems. The factors that help the author overcome the addiction and further turn into a positive influence in his life include shifting attention and making life more purposeful.

Keywords: addiction, video games, motivation, prevention, autoethnography

Introduction

Since the new millennium, video games have become essential to Chinese teenagers' and young adults' daily lives (Liu et al., 2012). However, there are also debates emerging with China's fast growth in the digital entertainment industry. One typical argument is that playing video games can harm the younger generation. Teenagers' and young adults' vulnerability in their personalities makes them quickly become addicted to this virtual entertainment method (Wu et al., 2013). In some worse scenarios, video games have been named as the reason for several crime cases (Golub & Lingley, 2008) to illustrate their damage to society. Such issues are becoming a major socio-cultural problem in China (Wu et al., 2013; Zastrow, 2017). Researchers are trying to find the causes of video game addictions and develop solutions for people with problematic video game usage.

Although academia has made an effort to discover the solution to video game addiction and related issues, the scope of the first-person investigation is still narrow. This article aims to answer the research questions of how the first author overcame his video game addiction problems and what insight can be found for further video game addiction studies. It is generated in alignment with the first author's doctoral research project. As he needs to understand the rationale and identity as an academic researcher in the doctoral project, he self-examines his previous life. This article uses the autoethnographic data analysis method. It aims to provide first-hand examinations of reducing video game play addiction symptoms and further transformation from game player to gamification researcher. The analysis indicates that the first author's video game addiction is mainly caused by the desire to seek fun in gameplay events and the escapism from real-life problems in a particular life stage. The factors that help

the first author overcome the addiction and further turn into a positive influence in his life include shifting attention and making life more purposeful.

Literature Review

Video Game Addiction

For a long time, the academic field has been plagued by problematic information technology usage issues. Starting from the last decade of the 20th century, with the development of information technology and the world wide web, addiction problems to the internet and digital entertainment have been identified as a new type of mental health problem (Lam et al., 2009). Drawing experience from the definition and diagnosis of drug abuse and addiction, the American Psychiatric Association (2013) recognises information technology addiction as a subset of behavioural addictions in the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V). The conditions of IT addiction have been generalised as a maladaptive mental state of dependency on IT usage (Xu et al., 2012). It manifests in different areas, such as internet addiction, excessive computer usage, problematic internet use, video game addiction, and online game addiction (e.g., Griffiths, 2000; Lam et al., 2009; Xu et al., 2012). The World Health Organization (2018) has also proposed the eleventh edition of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-XI), which confirms gaming disorders as a subclass of behavioural addictions.

Although official organizations have proposed these standards, researchers continue to question their validity in various areas, including selection criteria, object classification, measurement scale, and theoretical foundation (e.g., Aarseth et al., 2017; Van Rooij & Kardefelt-Winther, 2017). Jin et al. (2019) propose a detailed study of the internet gaming disorder's controversy. Their research illustrates the debate about internet gaming disorder and related symptoms in several aspects, including definition, the standard of examination, and research methodology. Their arguments show the necessity of extending the frontier of gaming disorder research, involving more caution and influential elements in gaming disorder research, and stressing the benefits of internet gaming activity (Jin et al., 2019). Despite the doubters and the lack of a universal definition, previous research indicates that addictive conditions toward information technology are actual and clinically significant disorder symptoms (Weigle, 2014).

Similar to the worldwide situation, video game addiction issues are also a major socio-cultural problem in China. According to the research of China Youth Internet Association, 14.3% of 13–17-year-old Chinese youth are addicted to the internet and online games. The percentage increases to 15.6% for those 18–23 (China Youth Internet Association, 2010). Wu et al.'s (2013) study also indicate that Chinese young adults are vulnerable to problematic video game usage. This finding accords with Zastrow's (2017) argument that excessive gameplay behaviour can be a significant adolescent public health issue, typically in China and South Korea. It also indicates that the rise of the internet and video game addiction can cause socio-cultural issues in contemporary China (Golub & Lingley, 2008).

The rapid growth of internet and video game addiction problems in China requires more focus on finding solutions. Researchers devote their efforts to different aspects. Based on a review of previous research, Liu et al. (2011) suggest that cognitive behavioural therapies combined with group therapy or military training can effectively treat internet and gaming addiction. Lam et al. (2009) also remind us that psychological stress can be comorbidity with addiction symptoms. Clinicians must be aware of this feature when conducting treatment. Other suggestions include fostering parental monitoring (Xu et al., 2012) and improving social relatedness (Wu et al., 2013). However, due to the lack of theoretical guidance, controversial methods have also been introduced in treating Chinese teenagers and young adults with video

game addiction. For example, over 6,000 internet and video game addicts have been treated with regular electroshock therapy at the Addiction Treatment Centre in Shandong Province, China (Ives, 2017). Studies have discovered this centre's inhumanity and therapy, so the government finally suspended this treatment method (Branigan, 2009). This controversial treatment illustrates the importance of revisiting the causes of video game addiction before applying the solutions.

The Video Game Addiction Issue

In the search for video game addiction causation, the experience of explaining other behavioural addictions is essential to draw lessons. Significant symptoms manifested in behavioural addiction conditions include conflict, withdrawal, relapse, reinstatement, behavioural salience (Brown, 1997), tolerance, euphoria, and cognitive salience (Charlton & Danforth, 2007). All these symptoms are considered within the functionalist perspective (Smith et al., 1956). Therefore, the manifestation of these symptoms is located in the motivational sector (Yee, 2006). Based on previous research outcomes, video game addiction's causation is also traceable from the motivational perspective. There are two types of motivation in game design and game thinking: intrinsic and extrinsic (Werbach & Hunter, 2012). Combined with addiction studies, Shi et al. (2007) point out that the two main aspects of video game addiction are internal psychological and socio-environmental aspects.

The two areas of causation for video game addiction provide specific directions for research to explore. For example, Wan and Chiou (2006) propose three motivational needs for game addicts: a sense of achievement, social visibility, and a feeling of immersion. A sense of accomplishment concerns the mastery of gaming skills, social visibility is the player's desire to be connected and recognised by others, and the feeling of immersion represents the player's escapism into the fantastic gaming world (De Castell & Jenson, 2007; Yee, 2006).

Furthermore, Lam et al. (2009) identify four significant factors associated with internet and online game addiction in Chinese adolescents in a cross-sectional health survey conducted in the southeastern region of China. These factors are being male, drinking, dissatisfaction with family, and recent stressful events. The findings suggest that internet addiction manifests internal stress for young people. Apart from being male, the other three factors are all stress-generating variables (Lam et al., 2009). These stress-causing factors also manifest in different types of addiction. Therefore, Lam et al. (2009) suggest that psychological stress can be comorbidity for internet addiction, meaning that the addiction symptoms can reflect the mechanism of escaping from life pressure.

Although arguments state that video game addiction can be examined from a neurobiological perspective (Ko et al., 2009), the mainstream recognition of video game addiction is still grounded in the psychological and behavioural fields. Research indicates that video game addiction manifests an established psychological disorder like depression and anxiety (Weigle, 2014). Based on this argument, the diagnosis of video game addiction also focuses on psychiatric discipline. However, although many clinical trials and studies on video game addiction treatment worldwide, the research outcomes have been majorly published in recent years (Weigle, 2014). The limited effect of video game addiction research causes blurry scopes and content for the current video game addiction diagnosis and treatment practice.

Treatments For Video Game Addiction

Recognized as a psychiatric disorder symptom, the primary treatment for video game addiction is in the mental intervention category. Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is commonly used in addiction treatment. However, its effectiveness remains doubtful (Widyanto

& Griffiths, 2006). Other techniques like behaviour therapy and self-monitoring are also in use, but the lack of study makes their outcomes unconvincing (Young, 2009). Practitioners also combine internet and gaming addiction treatment with social work approaches. This combination is still in its early stages. Hence, researchers have indicated that it requires a more specific investigation into effective treatment methods for social workers before consultation (Liu et al., 2012).

Electroshock therapy has been used in China's internet and online game addiction treatment facilities. Apart from this method, there are also practices such as internet addiction boot camps with military training and medical therapy (Ransom, 2007). However, these treatments are controversial, as corporal punishment has been used and caused several unintentional deaths ("Chinese teen," 2010). Releasing governmental laws and regulations to restrict these controversial treatments and the importance and necessity of finding appropriate ways to treat video game addiction have been proposed.

Based on previous studies of addiction prevention and harm reduction (e.g., Echeburua & de Corral, 2010; Eissenberg, 2004; Wiehe et al., 2005), Xu et al. (2012) propose a table of video game addiction prevention and harm reduction factors. It includes six major indexes, which are:

- Attention switching: The extent to which other meaningful activities are offered to distract an addict's attention from engaging in the problematic behaviour.
- Dissuasion: The extent to which an individual perceives others' efforts to prevent playing the online game using exhortation, argument, coaxing, browbeating, or coercion.
- Rationalisation/education: The degree to which an individual is trained to understand the issues associated with a problematic behaviour program.
- Parental monitoring: The extent to which an individual perceives their parents or guardians to pay attention to and track their whereabouts, activities, and outcomes.
- Resource restriction: The degree to which a player perceives that they are being restricted by the constraining of game-playing resources such as money, equipment, regulation, and guidance.
- Perceived cost: The extent to which a player perceives the financial cost of playing online games to be high. (Xu et al., 2012, p. 326)

According to the findings, Xu et al. (2012) suggest that attention switching and parental monitoring can effectively reduce online video game addiction symptoms. They also indicate that further research needs to be conducted to test other indexes.

Wu et al. (2013) explore this topic from a more subjective angle. By adopting the self-determination theory (SDT), they argued that three psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) can negatively correlate with video game playing. Furthermore, they indicate that these psychological needs also positively correlate with purpose in life, which can be defined as having life goals, perceiving life experiences as meaningful, and believing that life has a reason and an objective (Ryff, 1995). This positive correlation connects video game playing with the purpose of life. The more satisfying psychological needs have been fulfilled, the better a person's purpose in life, and the more robust protection they can get against problem video game playing (Wu et al., 2013).

However, although the earlier studies examine video game addiction and related problems from subjective and objective scopes, the research methodology is still objective. Either a questionnaire or an interview collects the empirical data of others, then the researcher narrates or describes it, then generates findings. It limits the scope of data analysis to a third-

personal perspective and lacks direct indications and descriptions of questions such as what video game addiction is like and how to resolve this addiction problem. Therefore, the rationale for this article emerges.

Methodology

This study uses the first author's experience and relative social contexts as qualitative research data; therefore, the most appropriate methodology is autoethnography. Autoethnography is an innovative research method that challenges traditional ethnographic studies in socio-cultural research (Ellis et al., 2011). Compared with conventional ethnographic studies, autoethnography research focuses on the researcher's angle. It changes the viewpoint of data collection from "looking on" to "looking in" (Austin & Hickey, 2007). It strengthens the importance of subjective understanding when examining the conversation between an individual and their social context. Autoethnography combines two approaches, autobiography and ethnography, together (Ellis et al., 2011). Typically, the researcher selects their life experience to compose an autoethnography study at a particular time stage. Autoethnography takes a conversation between the author's subjective experience and a specific socio-cultural context, reflecting the principle that individuals are connected to a particular ethnographic context (Atkinson, 2006). More importantly, autoethnography offers a directive and subjective way to illustrate the value of the researcher itself (Anderson, 2006). Autoethnography, by breaking the limits of a researcher's significance (Anderson, 2006), allows the researcher to understand better what influence they can bring to their works (Adams, 2005), as well as create a more comprehensive perspective on postmodern ethnographic research (Sparkes, 2000).

This study's primary research data is generated from the first author's personal experience with video games. This source allows him to recognize how the change of identity affects the course of his life, which also illustrates the autoethnography's function of giving the researcher a unique voice for their personal life (Chang, 2008). The selected moments in the first author's life experience are based on the time sequence, starting with childhood, then moving to the early teenage stage, then to the young adult stage, and finally to his overseas study years. Each stage is a narrative section that displays the first author's experience of video games embedded in the broader historical and social background. This fulfills the purpose of placing the author into particular social contexts to generate feasible insights for recognizing video game addiction issues and satisfy the requirement of autoethnography research (Laslett, 1999).

The entire axis of the first author's narrative on life experience is reviewed by the second author from a third-personal perspective. As Umberson and Terling (1997) state, an individual's self-concept is partly formed as a reflection of how others view the individual. Therefore, a person's relationship with others is critical in developing their identity. The second author has a similar background to the first author. For example, they were both born, grew up, and received fundamental education in China. They both have postgraduate teaching and research experience in Australia as well. Their age gap is not too large. These common points allow the second author to understand the first author's narrative in the particular social and cultural background and examine the credibility of data analysis from the identity level. The study shows the first author's identity shifting from an addictive video game player to a motivated higher education research student. The difference between his former and later identity fits the negotiation between the researcher's former and current self (Ellis, 2009) in a compelling autoethnographic study.

This article also addresses the consideration of autoethnographic research's credibility and ethical issues. As autoethnography captures an author's personal experience as research data, the emotional component within a researcher's life experience can interference when

conducting data analysis (Wall, 2016). A significant issue of emotional interference in autoethnographic articles is that the narrative and storytelling parts overshadow the analysis and discussion parts, which makes the research outcome insufficient in knowledge-based contribution (Wall, 2016). As the authors all have a Chinese higher education background, they drew experience from Chinese academia to help write this article more credibly. In Chinese academia, the authors tend to narrate the story in the third person, using the phrase *Bizhe* (Chinese: 笔者) to indicate the author rather than the first-person account. This rule applies to both qualitative and quantitative research articles in Chinese. The third-person narration reminds the author to stand in an objective viewpoint when writing the research outcome. As a result, in this article, the first author will tell his story using the first-person account while using the third-person account in writing other introductory and conclusive sections. Likewise, after the entire story section, the first author will provide a discussion and conclusion section to connect his life experience with broader social and cultural experiences with relevant educational perspectives (Allen, 2015), thus providing a reliable research outcome. The second author will examine all the textual data generated by the first author, ensuring that the emotional element do not overlay all the content. According to Wall (2016), although traditional ethical consideration may not be required in autoethnography, “there are always other characters in the story beyond the author, and it’s important to consider how they are represented and included in the story” (p. 4). In this article, the first author will not give any rich details that can reveal the identity of characters other than himself or cause the characters to dominate the storytelling. These characters will be mentioned as general concepts, such as parents, peers, following students, and community members. Using this de-identify approach, it is possible to protect the information of objective entities within the first author’s story, avoiding the ethical issue.

While using autoethnography in the local setting is not subject to committee approval, the design of this study was carefully reviewed to verify that both authors gave their consent for disseminating personal data. The second author supplied emotional support and sufficient human care to deal with morally challenging situations during the research process. Additionally, relational ethics was adequately taken into account. In the current study, where researchers and participants had pre-existing relationships, the authors created a positive relationship to support the growth of the study by engaging in relational ethics.

The First Author’s Story

Stage 1: Lost in The Virtual World

The early days of the 1990s were the doorway to fast economic development for the whole country of China. Thanks to my father’s job, I had a chance to experience one of the most fashionable forms of entertainment in my hometown city in the early 1990s: computer games. It was enlightening for my childhood years that life could be so enjoyable with those digital games. My parents also supported me in exploring the realm of computer games. They thought it was an effective way to help me improve my abilities, such as imagination and reflection. They even invested a considerable family budget in buying hardware for my gaming activities, although we were not a wealthy family then. In general, digital gaming was one of the major activities in my childhood daily life.

However, things changed when I entered secondary school. In my family, the relationship between my parents and became more and more intense as the pressure of studying grew, but I still spent lots of time playing games. From my personal angle, I admit that playing games negatively influenced my secondary school life. Playing games caused me to lose the balance between study and leisure. My school performance worsened as I gained more

happiness and fulfillment in the virtual space. At first, it was just skipping homework to play games, probably once or twice a week. Due to the decrease in my homework quality, teachers became unsatisfied with my study outcome. Then it took extra time to play games, typically late at night after my parents went to bed. It naturally caused sleep debt and further led to a drop in my classroom performance. After that, things went even worse. The video games had totally captured my attention. I started to skip classes and lie to my parents that I went to a school training session but went to the internet café for gameplay. I began to fail in school exams, first one subject, then multiple subjects. Finally, I failed the most significant event for Chinese teenagers to display their education success (Gaokao) and win the chance to continue pursuing their higher education dreams (National College Entrance Examination).

Stage 2: Rebuild the Balance

After the failure in my first Gaokao, I decided to give a second try at getting into higher education. Thus, my primary task was finding a more balanced time-distribution pattern between study and gameplay. However, although the importance of balancing these two things was clear to me, it was still tough for me to harness myself at first. The workload in the Gaokao re-preparing school was heavy. Students had to learn new content that fits into the updated test syllabus while reviewing previous years' course content to consolidate their knowledge base. Besides the pressure from the study, there were also negative comments from others. The older generation and peers tended to rate the Gaokao re-preparing students as unsuccessful examples for the following grades. Therefore, we always feel inferior and lack confidence in everyday life. Those subjective and objective causes made me feel the urgency of studying, so I started to cut my gaming time intentionally. I could barely control my impulse to play games for the first several months. But it soon rebounded after I got familiar with some of my classmates. We all shared the hobby of playing World of Warcraft, the world-renowned multiplayer online game. We started playing together after school, discharging our repressed emotions and escaping from the heavy workloads. At first, it was just several times during the weekdays, then we sneaked out and played in the internet café for much longer during the weekends. Things went back to the old track just a few weeks before my second Gaokao. My head was full of gaming things instead of exam preparation. Without a doubt, I failed the second try of Gaokao in the end.

This second defeat in Gaokao struck me a lot; I felt lost for the future. Missing the chance to get into university was not in my anticipation, so I had no idea what to do next. Under those circumstances, I was also losing interest in playing video games. After a painful summer holiday, I decided to continue my study at a vocational and technical college. There was a vast difference between my initial expectation and reality. However, I had no way but to accept this option because it was the only possible choice for me at that moment. There were many more students who played video games at that vocational and technical college, but I saw that they were using the games as an anaesthetic. They neither had long-term plans for their lives nor were they willing to take any responsibility for their lives and families. The most popular topics in the dorms were gaming, dating, and partying; hardly anyone talked about studies and professional development. The situation made me think about my attitude towards video games: they should be a mentally beneficial booster for my daily life rather than a digital drug that trapped me and turned me into an aimless shell that only knows how to pursue pleasure. After learning this lesson, I began to feel a powerful strength in my mind, which helped me improve my self-control ability and resist the temptation of video games. Having this ability, I had another plan which seemed crazy: quit college, go back to the re-preparing school, study another year of secondary school courses, then try a third time in the next year's Gaokao.

It was not an easy choice to quit tertiary education and go back to secondary education, but I decided to leap. When I returned to the re-preparing school for a second time, I could feel a significant improvement in my ability to balance study and gameplay. During the third Gaokao preparation experience, although I still played video games, I could control my gameplay behaviour within an acceptable range. On the one hand, I had a strict timetable containing only one hour of gaming time on Monday and Thursday mornings. On the other hand, I could also gain a sense of pleasure and achievement by solving textbook exercises. The feeling was the same as I got from gaming activities. These two aspects helped me progress in my second re-preparation journey. After all these ups and downs, I finally passed Gaokao on my third try with a more balanced gameplay life pattern and earned myself the chance to enter higher education. In terms of this success, my most challenging time with video games has passed.

Stage 3: Back to The Right Track

When I entered the university, I could handle the relationship between playing games and taking daily classes in a more appropriate pattern. Although I had more spare time to dispose of, I did not spend all that time on gameplay activities. I went to university clubs, joined the college soccer team, read in the library, and made efforts to develop my professional skills. Video games became a relief for my study tasks, not something that mainly occupied my daily life anymore. This change helped me focus on my studies and professional development more effectively yet improved my academic performance to a certain degree. Likewise, as I had used two different years of passing the Gaokao, I was a little older than most of my classmates. Because of this age difference, I seemed more capable of noticing other students' concerns and was willing to offer my effort to help them. In Chinese universities, apart from lecturers and sessional teachers that teach professional courses, there is a specific type of tutor whose duty is focused on students' general study issues and daily life problems in the university. This position is called student tutor (Chinese: 辅导员). My university had a special rule for student tutors; they could select several outstanding third-year students to be their assistants. Because I became recognised for my capability to discern others' problems and offering help, as well as my good academic performance in my second year, I was allowed to be an assistant student tutor in my third-year university period.

The duty of being an assistant student tutor was simple but broad in scope. My task was to help first-year students adapt to university life and make their transition smoother and more enjoyable. As the education system requires, Chinese university students will mainly experience a change in their daily routine after entering the institution. They will move out of their family home and into the university dormitory. With this change in everyday life, every student encounters study and life problems to a certain degree. My main job was to identify their problems, offer solutions, connect them with resources, and do some consulting if needed. When working with incoming students, my colleagues mostly put themselves in the role of teacher, but my strategy was simple: be a friend to these students. Some of my colleagues used this opportunity to showcase their teaching assistant skills. However, I thought my duty was better served in another direction: I did not want my students to simply follow my instruction by just focusing on their university studies. Instead, I believed a suggestion from an experienced friend could be more acceptable than instruction from a teacher with distant responses. Compared to the role of instructors, I would instead consider myself a friend to them. To be friends, the general topic of conversation plays a critical bond between my students and me.

In this case, video games became one of those bonds, as some of my students shared a passion for several familiar video games, such as *World of Warcraft* and *Counter Strike*. The

typical hobby of video games links us in a particular way. We played together, and I also advised them to avoid the abusive behaviour of gameplay. With my effort, most of the first-year students had a successful transition in adapting to university life. Some of them even became my true friends and kept their connection with me.

Stage 4: Onto the Higher Level

After I graduated from undergraduate studies, I got the chance to continue my postgraduate studies in Australia. Given my previous working experience as an assistant student tutor in an undergraduate institution, I knew how important it was for me to have a good adaptation result at the beginning of my overseas study journey. Living in the city of Melbourne, a multicultural metropolis, I had a wide range of ways to experience new cultural settings and immerse myself more fully in the local social atmosphere. Among all the methods, the most effective way, not surprisingly, was to join in gaming activities and events. Melbourne is a lively city, and the social vibe here tends to be more recreational than in the town I lived in during my undergraduate stage. Because they already had a well-developed gaming community, I felt more comfortable in this city as a game player. The public view towards the game player and gaming activity was also more generous in Melbourne, so I could have fewer concerns about unleashing my favourite digital games. Through my participation in local gameplay events, my hobby of playing digital and tabletop games allowed me to connect with local gaming communities and further extend my social network among residents and people from countries other than China. These friendships helped me better understand the local community's culture and life habits and improve my English language proficiency and confidence in my communication skills. This was another critical time when games brought pleasure and benefits to my quality of life.

With the benefits of playing games, I had a smooth transition for my overseas study. I avoided many adaptation problems, such as the language barriers that research shows were supposed to happen in my cross-cultural adaptation. However, according to my observation, among my peers and fellow Chinese international students, although games were also an essential part of their overseas lives, there were not many students who were intentionally utilising gaming's positive effects. Likewise, after completing my master's study, I undertook a Graduate Certificate in Educational Research course. The research project I developed in that course focused on Chinese international students' cross-cultural problems. By running a small-scale survey with a questionnaire and interview, that study identified Chinese international students' cross-cultural adaptation problems in multiple areas, such as being more independent and optimistic in overseas contexts and improving their English language proficiency. It illustrated the necessity of finding solutions for Chinese international students in an Australian university context. Based on this experience, I asked myself: is there anything I can do to make gaming a more beneficial activity for Chinese international students' overseas study journeys? This became why I started developing my research interest in how to use games or related technologies to help Chinese international students' cross-cultural adaptation in Australia.

Discussion

To produce a meaningful research outcome, autoethnography research must combine personal experience with specific ethnographic and social contexts (Reed-Danahay, 1997). In this study, the first author is the researcher and the research participant. To generate theoretical knowledge, the participant's transformation from an addicted video player to a higher education research student must be linked to Chinese society's border social and cultural context. Specifically, his experience of identity transformation can provide insights into both

the causes and solutions of video game addiction. The participant's experience of getting addicted to video game products mainly reflects a need for escapism from his real-life problems (Yee, 2006). The latter identity-transforming intervention approach supports interventions such as attention switching (Wan & Chiou, 2006) and making life more purposeful (Wu et al., 2013).

Motivation and Escape from Life Pressure

Both internal and external factors can influence addictive behaviours. Internal factors consider a person's mental and motivational conditions, while external factors are more associated with environmental, historical, and socio-cultural effects (Shi et al., 2007). In the participant's case, stages one and two show evidence that both internal and external factors cause his video game addiction. In his childhood experience, although the entire social context was rigid and critical of video game products, with the support of his family, he still had a lot of happiness and fun playing video games. This memory creates his natural desire to play video games and further cultivates his impulsive gameplay motivation when he grows up. Despite this internal perspective, another main reason for the participant's addictive gameplay behaviour is escaping from real-life problems and pressure. According to previous studies (e.g., Lam et al., 2009; Wan & Chiou, 2006), people with addictive symptoms are most likely to have real-life situations. Their addictive behaviours are often strengthened by the intention of avoiding thinking about life-based problems (Yee, 2006).

The participant's life experience also reflects this tendency. Both stage one and stage two contain his evasive behaviours towards daily life issues. His life pressure came from bad school performance in the secondary school stage. He could not get positive feedback from his school attendance for coursework quality and interpersonal relationships. His attempt to fix these problems was not to improve his performance but to find something that allowed him to vent these negative feelings. As the participant had a natural desire to play video games, and as it was possible for him to forget all the unhappiness during the gameplay, video games became his solution to counter real-life pressures in the secondary school stage. The more depressed he became from school life, the more time he spent playing video games. This inevitable causation made him rely on gameplay behaviour and further led to his addiction to playing games.

The same thing happened again in the participant's Gaokao re-preparing period. Although he had decided to quit the gameplay behaviour for one year, he failed with the heavy workload in courses and his shared hobby with peers and started to play video games again. What was worse was that due to his previous inhibiting behaviour during gameplay, the reversion of desire to play the game came like a flood, not to mention that he had some friends who could play the game with him. Compared with his secondary school days, he spent even more time playing video games in the last several months of the Gaokao re-preparing period. The inhibiting of gameplay desire led to his addictive gameplay behaviour rebounding and further caused his second defeat in Gaokao.

Attention Switching and Purpose in Life

After the participant's second failure in Gaokao, he gave up trying and continued his vocational and technical college journey. At this stage, his attitude toward gaming started to change. The cause was simple: he saw lots of his peers who wasted their everyday lives seeking happiness and living a low-pressure lifestyle. Consequently, he felt much more pressured to be aimless like them. The participant could feel less happiness and fulfillment when playing video games but more anxiety about his future. He began to seek an alternative cure for his anxiety and then realised that he needed to move his focus from gaming to something that could offer

him an aim for the future. This thought revoked his aspiration and guided him to quit tertiary education, return to the secondary school, and try the Gaokao for the third time. By making this attempt, the participant wanted to leave the hostile environment, focus on the coursework again, and rebuild his confidence for the future.

Switching attention is a helpful treatment for eliminating addictive behaviours (Xu et al., 2012). Using one thing that can grab an addict's attention from their caution can effectively relieve their addiction symptoms. In the participant's case, the objective that caught his attention was the life he lived when he successfully passed the Gaokao. The participant lived his days in a lifestyle that made him feel aimless and hopeless, so a better future was more worthy of devoting himself. Under these circumstances, playing video games was unsuitable for his primal need. Consequently, his addictive gameplay condition was also released. During his third attempt at Gaokao, the participant also learned to balance his study workload and gameplay activity. His decision to pay attention gave him success in Gaokao and taught him the best position for video games in his life. It was the first step that the participant's life took to turn back on the right track.

Figuring out the proper position for video games in the participant's life also gives him more opportunities to extend his life in other dimensions. In his undergraduate stage, the participant developed his skills in various areas, such as sports, literacy, professional journalism, and interpersonal communication. The more knowledge and abilities he absorbed, the more substantial the responsibility he had to become a role model for his peers. He realised that his previous addictive gameplay experience could alert people to the endangerment of video game overuse and illustrate that there are still hopes and solutions for people with addictive symptoms to turn back. Giving his life this purpose also provided him additional courage to avoid getting addicted to video games again, as researchers discovered that making a more purposeful life is also an effective method to treat addictive behaviours (Wu et al., 2013).

In the participant's case, the discovery of pedagogical meaning in his experience endows his life with a worthwhile goal for its future direction. On the one hand, the addictive experience he used to think of as wasting days was also meaningful in displaying the potential damage of video game addiction. On the other hand, his turning back experience can also reflect the resilience of defeating addictive symptoms and provide insights for other people who suffer from similar problems. These valuable beliefs also encouraged the participant to be more solid and rigid when facing video game products. Therefore, a virtuous cycle had been built, and his life was more balanced between studying, working, and gaming.

Because of the purpose he made for my life, the participant received an opportunity to work as a student mentor during his third-year undergraduate time. This mentorship allowed him to gain experience with student transition and adaptation issues, which led to his decision to focus on student transition research during my overseas postgraduate stage. As he needed to choose a topic for his first research proposal, the participant automatically thought about the two keywords from his past life: video games and student transition issues. The consideration of student transition experience was natural due to his previous duty as a student mentor. His recognition of games as a hobby also changed when he arrived in Melbourne. The local entertainment industry and the market were more developed. The game activity was treated as a part of the local lifestyle with less criticism and judgment than its reputation in his hometown city. He was living in this social gaming environment taught him how to approach games and gameplay more appropriately in his daily life. This experience also gave him another purpose for his hobby of playing video games. It also echoes Ryff (1995) that perceiving life experiences as more meaningful benefits a person's development. The updated goal that the participant had with his gameplay hobby also extended his selection of research interests, which, combined with his experience of student transition experience, developed as his topic

for the doctorate research project. This journey gave him extra courage to fight video game addiction symptoms and bring his life to a brighter future.

Conclusion

This study uses autoethnography to examine the first author's previous life experiences and discover a possible solution to reduce video game addiction symptoms. The author reflects on his teenage and young adult stages' relationship with playing video games. He indicates that the main reason for his video game addiction was the natural desire to seek fun in game products and escape from increased real-life problems and pressure. The author's experience of returning to everyday life reveals that the most effective solutions for reducing addictive behaviour were switching attention and bringing purpose to the original life. Because this study was conducted by an autoethnographic method, the limitation is obvious: the sample is narrowed to the author's own life experience, which can be considered subjective evidence. Hence, further research needs a larger sample group if it still uses the autoethnography approach to create a more universally adapted research output.

References

- Aarseth, E., Bean, A. M., Boonen, H., Colder Carras, M., Coulson, M., Das, D., Deleuze, J., Dunkels, E., Edman, J., Ferguson, C. J., Haagsma, M. C., Helmersson Bergmark, K., Hussain, Z., Jansz, J., Kardefelt-Winter, D., Kutner, L., Markey, P., Lundedal Nielson, R. K., Prause, N., Pyrzbylski, A., ... & Van Rooij, A. J. (2017). Scholars' open debate paper on the World Health Organization ICD-11 Gaming Disorder proposal. *Journal of Behavioral Addictions*, 6(3), 267-270. <https://doi.org/10.1556/2006.5.2016.008>
- Adams, T. E. (2005). Speaking for others: Finding the "whos" of discourse. *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 88(3/4), 331-345.
- Allen, D. C. (2015). Learning autoethnography: A review of autoethnography: Understanding qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(2), 33-35. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2015.2093>
- American Psychiatric Association. DSM-5 Task Force. (2013). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5™*. Arlington, VA, US.
- Anderson, L. (2006). Analytic autoethnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35(4), 373-395. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241605280449>
- Atkinson, P. (2006). Rescuing autoethnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35(4), 400-404. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241606286980>
- Austin, J., & Hickey, A. (2007). Autoethnography and teacher development. *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences*, 2(2), 369-377. <https://doi.org/10.18848/1833-1882/cgp/v02i02/52189>
- Branigan, T. (2009). China bans electric shock treatment used to 'cure' young Internet addicts. *The Guardian.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jul/14/china-electric-shock-Internet-addiction>
- Brown, R. I. F. (1997). A theoretical model of the behavioural addictions—applied to offending. In J. E. Hodge, M. McMullan, & C. R. Hollins (Eds.), *Addicted to crime?* (pp. 13-65). John Wiley.
- Chang, H. (2008). *Autoethnography as method*. Left Coast Press.
- Charlton, J. P., & Danforth, I. D. W. (2007). Distinguishing addiction and high engagement in the context of online game playing. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 23(3), 1531-1548. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2005.07.002>

- China Youth Internet Association. (2010). 2009 nian qing shao nian wang yin diao cha bao gao [2009 report on youth internet addiction disorder]. Retrieved from <http://www.docin.com/p-46439854.html>
- Chinese teen 'beaten to death in boot camp for troubled youths.' (2010). *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/8034214/Chinese-teen-beaten-to-death-in-boot-camp-for-troubled-youths.html>
- De Castell, S., & Jenson, J. (2007). *Worlds in play: international perspectives on digital games research* (Vol. 21). Peter Lang.
- Echeburúa, E., & de Corral, P. (2010). Addiction to new technologies and to online social networking in young people: A new challenge. *Adicciones*, 22(2), 91-95.
- Eissenberg, T. (2004). Measuring the emergence of tobacco dependence: the contribution of negative reinforcement models. *Addiction*, 99 Suppl 1, 5-29. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1360-0443.2004.00735>
- Ellis, C. (2009). Fighting back or moving on: An autoethnographic response to critics. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 2(3), 371-378. <https://doi.org/10.1525/irqr.2009.2.3.371>
- Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview. *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, 36(4 - 138), 273-290. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23032294>
- Golub, A., & Lingley, K. (2008). Just like the Qing Empire: Internet addiction, MMOGs, and moral crisis in contemporary China. *Games and Culture*, 3(1), 59-75. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412007309526>
- Griffiths, M. (2000). Does Internet and computer 'addiction' exist? Some case study evidence. *Cyberpsychology and Behavior*, 3(2), 211-218. <https://doi.org/10.1089/109493100316067>
- Ives, M. (2017). Electroshock therapy for internet addicts? China vows to end it. *The New York Times*.
- Jin, Y., Yu, M., & Hu, Y. (2019). The controversies and tendency of Internet Gaming Disorder research. *Advances in Psychological Science*, 27(1), 83. <https://doi.org/10.3724/sp.j.1042.2019.00083>
- Ko, C. H., Liu, G. C., Hsiao, S., Yen, J. -Y., Yang, M. -J., Lin, W. -C., Yen, C. -F., & Chen, C. S. (2009). Brain activities associated with gaming urge of online gaming addiction. *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 43(7), 739-747. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychires.2008.09.012>
- Lam, L. T., Peng, Z., Mai, J., & Jing, J. (2009). Factors associated with internet addiction among adolescents. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 12(5), 551-555. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cpb.2009.0036>
- Laslett, B. (1999). Personal narratives as sociology. *Contemporary Sociology*, 28(4), 391-401. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2655287>
- Liu, C., Liao, M., & Smith, D. C. (2012). An empirical review of internet addiction outcome studies in China. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 22(3), 282-292. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049731511430089>
- Ransom, I. (2007) Chinese boot camps tackle Internet addiction. *New York Times*. Retrieved from www.nytimes.com/2007/03/12/technology/12iht-addicts.4880894.html?_r=0
- Reed-Danahay, D. (Ed.). (1997). *Auto/ethnography: Rewriting the self and the social*. Oxford: Berg.
- Ryff, C. D. (1995). Psychological well-being in adult life. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 4(4), 99-104. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8721.ep10772395>
- Shi, Q., Xu, X., Liu, N., Li, J., Sun, X., & Zhang, K. (2007). Why some people are addicted to

- computer games: An analysis of psychological aspects of game players and games. In *HCI International 2007: 12th International Conference, HCI International 2007, with 8 Further Associated Conferences, Beijing, China, July 22-27, 2007, Proceedings* (pp. 1279–1283). Lecture Notes in Computer Science.
- Smith, M. B., Bruner, J. S., & White, R. W. (1956). *Opinions and personality*. Wiley.
- Sparkes, A. C. (2000). Autoethnography and narratives of self: Reflections on criteria in action. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 17(1), 21–43. <https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.17.1.21>
- Umberson, D., & Terling, T. (1997). The symbolic meaning for relationships: Implications for psychological distress following relationship loss. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 14(6), 723–744. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407597146001>
- Van Rooij, A. J., & Kardefelt-Winther, D. (2017). Lost in the chaos: Flawed literature should not generate new disorders: Commentary on chaos and confusion in DSM-5 diagnosis of Internet Gaming Disorder: Issues, concerns, and recommendations for clarity in the field (Kuss et al.). *Journal of Behavioral Addictions*, 6(2), 128–132. <https://doi.org/10.1556/2006.6.2017.015>
- Wall, S. S. (2016). Toward a moderate autoethnography. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 15(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406916674966>
- Wan, C. S., & Chiou, W. Bin. (2006). Psychological motives and online games addiction: A test of flow theory and humanistic needs theory for Taiwanese adolescents. *Cyberpsychology and Behavior*, 9(3), 317–324. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cpb.2006.9.317>
- Weigle, P. (2014). Internet and video game addiction: Evidence & controversy. *Adolescent Psychiatry*, 4(2), 81–91. <https://doi.org/10.2174/221067660402140709120337>
- Werbach, K., & Hunter, D. (2012). *For the win: How game thinking can revolutionize your business*. Wharton Digital Press.
- World Health Organization. (2018). 6C51 Gaming disorder. Retrieved from <https://icd.who.int/dev11/l-m/en#/http://id.who.int/icd/entity/1448597234>.
- Widyanto, L., & Griffiths, M. (2006). ‘Internet addiction’: A critical review. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 4(1), 31–51. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-006-9009-9>
- Wiehe, S. E., Garrison, M. M., Christakis, D. A., Ebel, B. E., & Rivara, F. P. (2005). A systematic review of school-based smoking prevention trials with long-term follow-up. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 36(3), 162–169. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2004.12.003>
- Wu, A. M. S., Lei, L. L. M., & Ku, L. (2013). Psychological needs, purpose in life, and problem video game playing among Chinese young adults. *International Journal of Psychology*, 48(4), 583–590. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207594.2012.658057>
- Xu, Z., Turel, O., & Yuan, Y. (2012). Online game addiction among adolescents: Motivation and prevention factors. *European Journal of Information Systems*, 21(3), 321–340. <https://doi.org/10.1057/ejis.2011.56>
- Yee, N. (2006). Motivations for play in online games. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 9(6), 772–775. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cpb.2006.9.772>
- Young, K. (2009). Understanding online gaming addiction and treatment issues for adolescents. *American Journal of Family Therapy*, 37(5), 355–372. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01926180902942191>
- Zastrow, M. (2017). Is video game addiction really an addiction? *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 114(17), 4268–4272. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1707226114>

Author Note

Dr Xiao Hu is a postdoctoral researcher working at the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Science and Technology of China (USTC). His research interest locates on internationalisation of higher education and educational technology, especially the gamification applications in education. His currently work investigates the development of students' collaborative problem-solving skill with the digital technology assistance.

Dr Hongzhi Zhang is a senior lecture at School of Education, Culture and Society in the Faculty of Education, Monash University. His main research interests lie in educational equity, education policy, Asia study, and curriculum and pedagogy. Drawing on educational philosophies of Asian traditions, Hongzhi's research about "Asia as method" is innovative and influential. He has established "Asia as method" as a researchable concept and contributed influential theoretical and empirical developments in research about "Asia as method" in educational studies, particularly how it can be developed in multicultural, postcolonial Asia countries and for it to be culturally expansive in Western education systems as an ideal and as a practice across cultures. His particular foci have been in researching an overall "Asia as pedagogy" to help to cultivate a new research imagination in Australian cross-curriculum priority "Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia." Please direct correspondence to undefined hongzhi.zhang@monash.edu.

Copyright 2022: Xiao Hu, Hongzhi Zhang, and Nova Southeastern University.

Article Citation

Hu. X., & Zhang, H. (2022). Transforming from addicted video gamer to doctoral candidate: an autoethnographic reflection. *The Qualitative Report*, 27(11), 2404-2418. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.5528>
