



# Esport: Becoming a professional - A qualitative study

**By Jonathan Smed Iversen**

## **Abstract**

Esport as a phenomenon is growing at an incredibly rapid speed and every year it seems to become exponentially larger as a medium. For many people, video games is not just about playing for fun anymore. The genesis of organized competitive gaming has led to the rise of esports as a competitive environment where players seek to improve and compete like any other sport. Despite this huge growth, academia has not been keeping up as research in the field of esports is still in its infancy. Esports presents an opportunity for millions of casual gamers to pursue a career in what used to be a hobby. This transition from being a casual gamer to becoming a professional esports player presents an interesting field of study.

Therefore the research question of this current thesis will be: *What kind of factors affect the transition from being a casual player to a professional esports player?*

This master thesis is a qualitative study on the factors affecting the transition from being a casual gamer to becoming a professional esports player. After a definition of esports and how it should be understood academically, a narrative literature is conducted to amalgamate a synthesis of current state of the art research to identify any gaps as well as find out what kind of factors are found in current body of literature. The biggest gap found is that none of the studies has been conducted in Scandinavian countries. Through phenomenological interviews with three Danish professional esports players, this thesis finds that Scandinavian esports players experience many of the same contributors and barriers to becoming a professional esports player as the studies found in the literature review does. Working hard towards self-improvement and goals, individual confidence and the social environment are all identified factors that play important roles in their careers. It was also found that support plays an important role as well as being able to reconcile esports with personal life. While most findings matches the findings of current international studies, it was also found that the Danish esports players have experienced having a good reputation to be extremely important in terms of getting opportunities and building a fanbase. None of the informants in this thesis received any support from their parents in the initial stages of their careers, but this motivated them to pursue their career with more vigor. These findings are unique findings that do not match with the current existing body of literature and should be studied further.

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# Chapter 1 - Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

Playing video games as a leisure and recreational activity has become increasingly popular amongst all age groups (Entertainment Software Association 2017). Due to growing globalisation and the internet becoming a massive factor everywhere, video games have been transformed from simple single player games, to massive multiplayer environments with millions of players (Bányai et al., 2018). The rise of video gaming in a competitive scene has been named “Electronic sports” or “Esport”.

The initial chapter of this thesis is an introduction to the aims and research question followed by a presentation of how this thesis will be structured. Finally an introduction to the personal and professional interest in the field of esport as well as a definition of esport will be presented in this chapter.

## 1.2 Aim of current master thesis and Research question

The aims of current thesis is to contribute to the research in Esport - in particular I am interested in shedding light on the variety of factors that affects a players transition from playing games casually to doing it as “a career. Framed as a research question the question being asked and answered is:

*What kind of factors affect the transition from being a casual player to a professional esport player?*

### **1.3 Professional interests**

The academic relevance of esports is fairly scarce in the sense that research in the field of psychology is still in its infancy (Wagner, 2006, p. 2). While the study of computer gaming is becoming increasingly integrated into academic writing, esports as a phenomenon is still relatively unexplored, due to most academic discussions on video gaming usually being shifted in the direction of game ethics of violence and addiction (Ibid). As such, one query of this thesis is to expand on the interest in esports as a phenomenon in the field of psychology. This is especially grounded in the wish for a broader interest in esports and gaming than the more common interest of aggressive and addictive behavior as a consequence of playing video games. This current thesis also aims to address the biggest gaps found in a state of the art literature review given in the following chapter. This being a lack of proper insight into the cultural resources available to the players in terms of supporting and restraining factors in their transition to the professional scene, as well as a need for deeper insight into the individual motivational patterns of the players. A more detailed conceptualization of these factors might contribute to understanding how governing structures in esports could make a professional career more accessible to those with the adequate talent. The current literature on esports is also a broad mix of studies conducted in South Korea, Germany, USA, Finland, Slovakia, and Australia. The empirical study conducted in this current thesis has a narrowed down focus, specifically on Scandinavian people in order to create a more focused approach to what constitutes motivation and cultural resources in a Scandinavian context.

### **1.4 Personal interest**

On a personal note, I have since my bachelor thesis focused on video games and their effect on intrinsic motivation and learning. I have studied the theoretical work that shows just what kind of pull video games have on people and how this can lead to both addictive behavior as well as leading to something more productive. My personal goal of this master thesis is not only to identify the psychological factors that may hinder or support people going into a professional career in esports, but also to contribute to how we understand competitive gaming in the field of psychology.

## **1.5 Disposition**

This thesis is divided into six chapters. In the last section of this first chapter, there will be an introduction to esports and how it will be understood in this thesis. In chapter 2 a literature review will be conducted in order to scope out any research in the field to identify any gaps in the existing academia which this current thesis can fill. Chapter 3 will be an introduction to the methodology of this current thesis in which the qualitative approach, philosophy of science, analytical tools, and ethical considerations will be presented. In chapter 4 the analysis of the collected data will be presented, and in chapter 5, the findings of this thesis will be discussed in relation to current international, followed by an evaluation of the quality of this current thesis and presentation of implications. Finally the conclusion of this thesis will be presented in chapter 6.

## **1.6 Defining esports**

The definition of Esports will in this master thesis be derived from the article by Michael G. Wagner 2006, discussing the scientific relevance of esports. Studying esports scientifically does require the term “esports” and its meaning to be specified. While there outside of the above definition of esports does not yet exist a globally accepted definition, some studies have referred to esports as “Competitive gaming” or “Professional gaming (Bányai et al., 2018). According to Wagner, this term however might not fully encompass the essence of what esports truly is. Esports as a research field should be divided into its two components: Electronic and sport. The increasing interest in competitive gaming is likely a product of children starting to manage communication and information technology as part of the cultural development (Wagner, 2006, p. 2).

The “sport” component needs some revision to suit the application of this current thesis. Sport scientist Claus Tiedemann defined sport as:

*“Sport is a cultural field of activity in which human beings voluntarily go into a relation to other people with the conscious intention to develop their abilities and accomplishments - particularly in the area of skilled motion - and to compare themselves with these other people*



*according to rules put self or adopted without damaging them or themselves deliberately.”*  
(Wagner, 2006, p. 2).

Wagner however, argues that in order to best understand esports as a sports institution, a slight modification to Tiedemanns original definition will provide great utility. By deleting the reference to skilled motion, and introducing a missing element of the need for the contestants recognition of their success, Wagner introduces a modified version of Tiedemanns definition:

*“Sport” is a cultural field of activity in which people voluntarily engage with other people with the conscious intention to develop and train abilities of cultural importance and to compare themselves with these other people in these abilities according to generally accepted rules and without deliberately harming anybody.* (Wagner, 2006, p. 2).

Using this definition of sports, we can apply an understanding to esports as a product of global transition from an industrial society, to one of technological communication and information. Wagner dubs the training and advancement in digital space as *Cyberfitness*, and thus the fusion of electronic and sport is finally defined:

*“eSports” is an area of sport activities in which people develop and train mental or physical abilities in the use of information and communication technologies.* (Wagner, 2006, p. 2).

This current master thesis will be utilizing Wagner's definition of esports as framework for assessing esports as a phenomenon.

## **Chapter 2 - The transition from casual gaming to professional gaming: Supporting factors and motivational structures - a review**

In this second chapter of the thesis a literature review will be conducted to identify current state of the art literature in the field

The chapter will be structured in three parts. First a literature review will be conducted to identify the supporting and restraining structures found in current literature as it pertains to becoming an esports player, then a presentation of the findings through a thematic framework. As the literature on esports in particular is very limited, a complementing expanded search in the literature on traditional sport psychology will be conducted in the third part of this chapter in order to have a more comprehensive body of literature for this thesis.

### **2.1 Literature review**

In order to map out current empirical studies and research on esports in the field of psychology, creating a literature review will provide a synthesis of published literature on the topic and its current state of the art (Ferrario, 2015, p. 230). For this master thesis, a review would provide much utility for identifying potential gaps on current research as well as give insight into how this thesis might contribute to further research. The need for literature reviews is made clear in cases of abundance of information, contrasting opinions on a topic, or a lack of scientific consensus due to a shortage of research (Ibid).

This following literature review presented was originally conducted on my 9th. semester as a standalone project (Iversen, 2018)

#### **2.1.1 A narrative literature review on interest in esports**

The literature review in this thesis will be presented as a narrative review with the goal of identifying current state of the art research in the field of esports. A narrative review is deemed to provide greater utility than a systematic review, due to the goals of the review to address a phenomenon, this being player experience of playing esports..The historical nature of the

narrative literature review therefore provides a superior synthesis than the rigorous nature of the systematic review when tracking developments of multiple principles in research of esports (Ferrari, 2015, p. 231).

As of now there are no firmly established method and requirements and specifications of how the findings of a narrative literature review should be presented. However it is recommended to borrow some of the tools from the systematic review in order to focus the search as well as create as much transparency as possible (Ferrari, 2015, p. 231).

### **2.1.2 Search and Criteria for inclusion**

The criteria for inclusion has been established prior to the literature search in order to create clear focus and to make sure only eligible studies are included.

Only peer reviewed published articles has been included in the review and the articles also have to be published between 2010 and 2019. The time interval is set due to the rise of esports being quite recent. Another criteria of inclusion is that the literature has to be evidence based and it has to be an empirical study. This means that some method of gathering data have to be included in the paper in order for it to be included. Lastly, the literature must be researching esports. This means that any studies on single player gaming or traditional sport is excluded.

### **2.1.3 Databases and search terms**

As the aim is to create a broad and comprehensive search, three different databases have been selected for the review: *PsycINFO*, *Pubmed*, and *Scencedirect*. Google scholar was also used for initial scoping searches.

PsycINFO contains all publications in the field of psychology, while the addition of Pubmed and Scencedirect provide extensive databases of both medical and sociological publications. As such, the three databases were chosen to make sure that any studies from any potential sociological and medical studies that might have been missed in PsycINFO should be covered by Scencedirect and Pubmed (Forrester, 2012, p. 94).

To optimize the search and also to make sure every relevant study is included, the correct keywords have to be chosen. The final keywords were picked after the initial scoping

searches. *Wildcards* and *Boolean operators* also provide the means to create a focused search to locate the essential studies (Forrester, 2012, p. 95).

Boolean operators like “AND, OR, NOT” are used to structure how keywords work together to create the best search possible. Wildcards are signs like an asterisk (\*), a question mark (?), or a citation (“), which all also provide great use when attempting to specify the search. One example of this is the search term “Competitive Video game”. This search provided 7.721 results on sciencedirect (Iversen, 2018). Using the asterisk wildcard and changing the search term to “Competitive video gam\*” provides a substantially smaller 236 results on sciencedirect.

The search terms used in this literature review are:

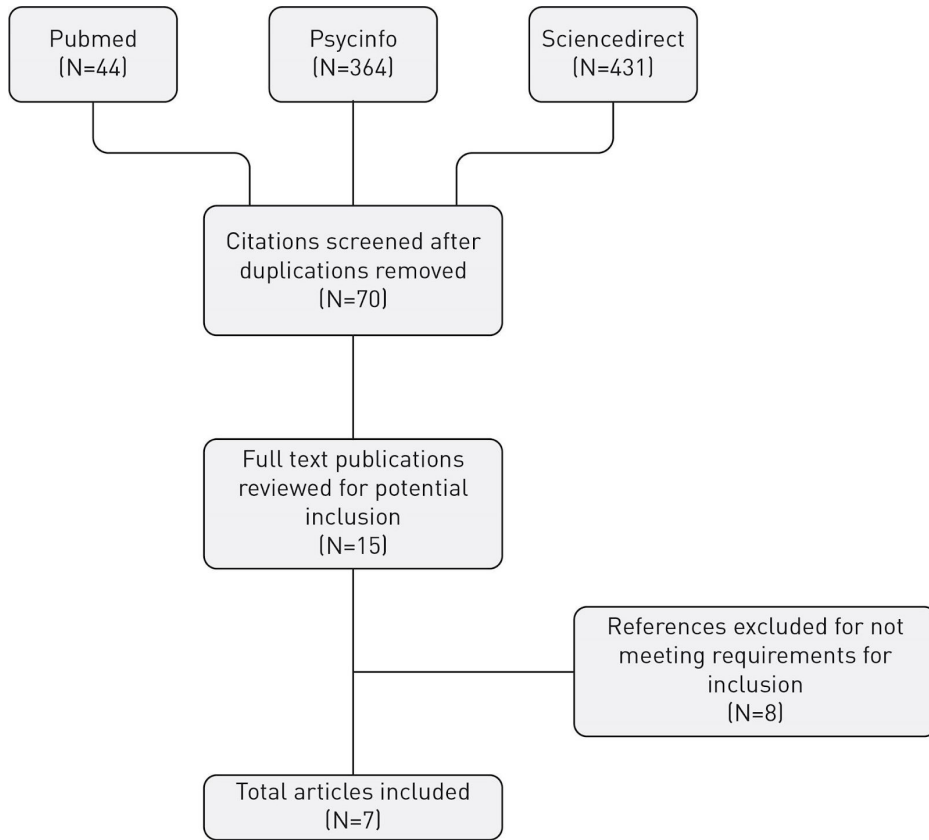
*Esport, Esport AND Motivation, Competitive video gam\*. Esport AND Gratification, Esport AND Social, Esport AND Mastery, Esport AND Self determination theory, Esport AND gamification.* (Iversen, 2018)

The keywords were chosen during scoping searches on google scholar. Important keywords like “Esport”, “Competitive video game” and “Motivation” helped with identifying articles, which in their content gave the keywords “Uses and Gratification”, “Gamification”, “Mastery”, and “Self Determination theory”. Self determination theory as a keyword also had its origin from previous known game theory. When searching in the different databases, titles and abstracts were both included because authors might use synonyms for esport in their titles or abstract (Iversen, 2018).

## **2.2 Results**

Using the search methods described previously, a total of 7 eligible papers were found as a result. Shown in figure 1.2 is a flowchart constructed to reflect the process and number of total papers found as a result of the search in the three different databases. As shown, initial searches using the methods yielded a total of 839 results. However only 70 after removal of duplications had anything to do with video games, and further 15 of these had anything to do with esport. Finally, 8 papers were excluded because they did not meet the criteria for

inclusion, this being that it has to be empirical studies. The large exclusion after initial screening and removal of duplications show that research in esport is still incredibly scarce



**Fig 1:** Flowchart of search (Iversen, 2018)

7 articles were found to fit the criteria of inclusion.

By utilizing the CHIP tool as referenced by Forrester, the 7 papers found to be relevant to this current paper has been organized in figure 1.3 below. The 7 papers are listed by Context of study, how the study was conducted, the issues examined, and the people involved in the study (Forrester, 2012, pp. 95-97).

The papers found in the literature review is displayed in the table below

Study	Country	Sample	Method	Statistical analysis	Goal of study
Weiss & Schiele (2013)	Germany	360 esports players	Self report questionnaire	Multiple regression analysis	Investigating psychological needs in use of esports
Martončík (2015)	Slovakia	108 esports players & 54 casual players	Self report questionnaire	Group comparison	To investigate difference between esports players and casual players motivation for gaming
Kim & Thomas (2015)	South Korea	9 esports players, 2 coaches, and 2 directors.	Interviews	Interview analysis	To conceptualize motivation and learning for professional players in a stage model.
Seo (2015)	South Korea, USA, Australia	10 esports players	Field observations and Interviews	Thematic analysis	To investigate what makes esports consumption attractive to the player, and identity transformation.
Gray et al. (2018)	USA	26 League of Legends players	Assaying saliva samples in order to measure hormone level	Self report questionnaire analysis & SPSS	To investigate effects of mens steroid hormone levels when playing competitive video games
Kätsyri (2013)	Finland	17 male video game players	Blood measurement and fMRI scanning	SPM8 software package analysis	To investigate difference in neural response to playing competitively against human and computer
Winter (2016)	USA	12 selected esports players	Qualitative interviews	Interview analysis	To conceptualize the distinction between playing games for fun or for work

Fig 2: Results (Iversen, 2018)

## **2.3 Presentation of literature**

Following is an introduction to the theoretical and empirical contents of the included literature in the review. The results will be presented in a thematic framework. This is very helpful as the query of the narrative review is to create a synthesis that seeks to find create an overarching historical narrative of the included literature (Forrester, 2012, pp. 105-108; Ferrari, 2015, p. 231). The findings can be classified into two different themes: 1) Going from a casual player to professional 2) Individual motivating factors of an esports player.

### **2.3.1 Theme 1 - Going from being a casual player to professional**

The first theme of the review is a synthesis of the literature with a focus on the challenges esports players face when pursuing a career in professional esports

The theme can be divided into three subcategories: *Esports as a serious leisure activity*, *Identity transformation*, and *Stages of becoming an esports player*. The following is a presentation of the literature that covers these aspects of becoming a professional esports player.

#### **2.3.1.1 Esports as a Serious leisure activity**

Both studies by Yuri Seo (2016) and Jenifer Sunrise Winter (2016) draw inspiration from Robert A. Stebbins and his theory of *Serious leisure* (Seo, 2016; Winter, 2016; Stebbins, 1982, pp. 251-272). Seo's approach to collecting data was done in two steps: First Seo would attend different esports events in multiple countries as a part of an observation field study. In the second phase, he would conduct in-depth qualitative interviews with different esports players (Seo, 2016, pp. 264-272). The study has three goals: First to explore how esports consumption makes a career in professional gaming attractive, second to study the players and their own personal drive towards pursuing a career in esports, and finally to how the players themselves experience the journey to becoming a professional (Seo, 2016, pp. 264-272). By utilizing serious leisure as a term to conceptualize esports as an activity, Seo creates a distinction between playing video games as a recreational activity and playing video games on a professional level. Serious leisure is defined as "*When one systematically pursues a hobby or volunteer activity which launches them into a career centered on acquiring and expressing its special skills*" (Stebbins, 1982, pp. 251-272). According to the findings of Seo, players



pursuing a career in esports are not just driven by immersion and escapism, but rather they are kept engaged by rivalries with their peers as well as driven by watching other players play the game and compare themselves amongst each other. This is further manifested in their need for respect from their fans, peers, and coaches (Seo, 2016, p. 266). Esports is governed and overseen by several different institutions that contribute to standardizing and condition the fandom and community. This is what plays into the players' general outlook on esports as a competitive environment in which they vigorously pursue to become better than their peers and rivals. Seo also found in his study that players generally found the feeling of self-improvement, self-actualization, and mastery of the game to be the biggest attractions of pursuing a professional career. In Seo's findings, esports players do not find esports to be exclusively a leisure activity, nor exclusively work. Esports strikes a balance between doing what used to be a recreational activity in a way that requires responsibility and a constant need to improve (Seo, 2016, p. 271). This stride to improve and compare themselves to others are the main factors that Seo attributes to what makes esports a serious leisure. In the study by Winter (2016), the data also suggests that the validation of their identity as professional players comes largely by the friends they make and a feeling of belonging in a group (Winter, 2016, pp. 3-5). Winter also supports the conception of esports as a serious leisure with her empirical findings. According to her qualitative interviews, most players do not consider esports a job because they get to indulge in their personal interest full time. Some players however do feel that playing with their coach feels like work and they are also mindful of the more serious nature of playing at a competitive level (Winter 2016, p. 11).

### 2.3.1.2 Identity transformation

As a way to conceptualize the journey and transformation from being a “casual gamer” to a “professional gamer”, Seo draws inspiration from the mythical “Hero’s journey”. Using this type of storytelling, three different stages of development can be identified: *Call to adventure*, *The road of trials*, and *The master of two worlds* (Seo, 2016, pp. 271-272). It is in this journey that the players undergo their identity transformation.

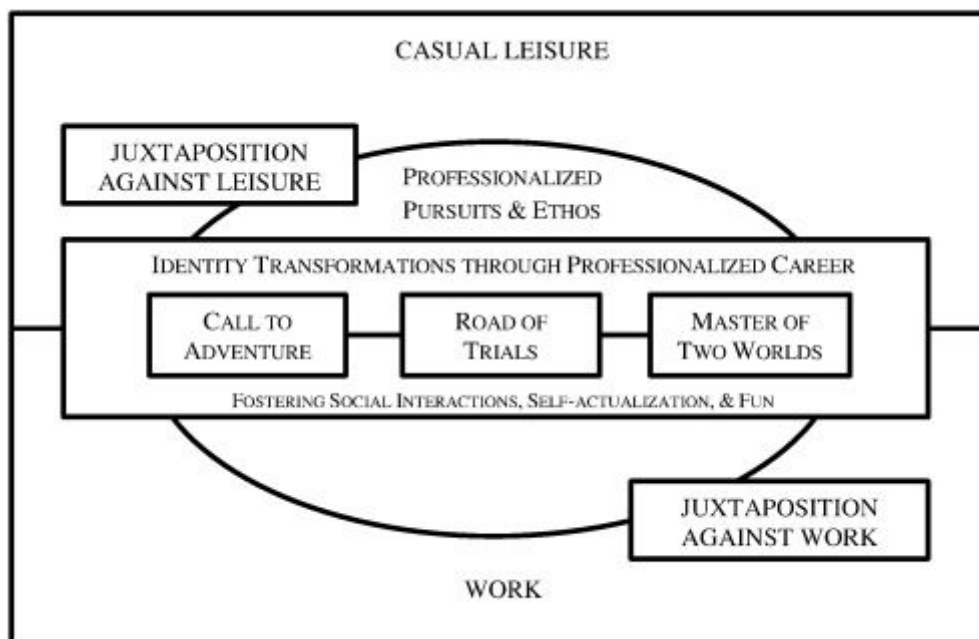


Fig 3: The Hero's Journey (Seo, 2016)

In the first stage, Call to adventure, the player regards games as a pure casual leisure activity. In the original Hero’s journey, the hero (this being the player in this case) finds himself in the ordinary and familiar world. However, something occurs that that exposes him to changes that call him to depart this world in a call to adventure. In the case of the esports players, the ordinary world would be mainstream culture outside of competitive gaming. They are playing games for fun, though they might in some way be exposed to competitive gaming through their friends, peer group, family, or media and events. It should be noted that they still would be considered casual gamers, but gradually as they begin to form initial ideas of the competitive aspect of gaming and create relationships within the social field of esports communities they might discover the allure of playing at a more serious level or that they have some talent they might utilize better than simply just playing the game for fun. As such,

the call to adventure can be seen as the players progression from identifying with gaming as purely a recreational activity in mainstream culture, to becoming a part of the esports community where gaming becomes more of a serious leisure (Seo, 2016, p. 270). As the heroes begin their journey, they must face a gauntlet of tests, tasks, challenges, and many different kinds of obstacles in order to begin their identity transformation. This is what is called the road of trials. As the players embark on their journey initiated by the call to adventure, they must face challenges like expanding their knowledge of the game, acquire different skills in order to set them apart from the casual consumers. In esports, the road of trials becomes the endeavor in which the players need the perseverance to immerse themselves in the community (Seo, 2016, p. 270). As the players completely immerse themselves in this new world, they complete their transformation into being integrated in the professional environment. Their values about gaming have changed from being interested in the pure intrinsic joy of gaming and enjoying the appealing storylines and other features of the game, to being more concerned with mastering the game. The hero's journey concludes with being the master of two worlds. In this stage, the player is now fully integrated into the new world and have the capacity to influence this new world, but also to integrate the new values they have acquired into their old world. This means that when the players become fully professionalized, thereby establishing their social identity as competitive gamers, they can start to reconcile and integrate some of these new values and ideas into different aspects of their life and perception of self (Ibid). This might result in the players assuming a more prominent role in the community beyond being a player, like being a mentor to newcomers.

As such the hero's journey serves to conceptualize the journey and transformation from being a casual gamer to becoming a professional gamer. The important changes in the lives of the players are centered around departure, destination, and the road in between (Seo, 2016, p. 273). As the players transform their identity, their relationship with gaming is transformed from pure leisure activity, to serious leisure. Virtues of self improvement, mastery, and social recognition and respect, are in accordance with Seo's research the main factors that fuel this transformation. When the players become the master of two worlds, they can integrate the ethos from esports to gain a feeling of self actualization and incorporate these values into different aspects of their lives.

### 2.3.1.3 Stages of becoming an esports player

Continuing with the literature on what constitutes the progression into the professional esports scene, in an effort to further conceptualize the process of becoming a professional esports player, Sahoan H. Kim & Michael K. Thomas introduces the *Stage theory model of professional game player*. Kim & Thomas created this model using the data from qualitative interviews conducted with esports players, coaches, and councilors (Kim & Thomas, 2015, p. 179).

This model serves as a mapping of the different stages of how the player experiences their relationship with the game as they become a professional esports player in five stages as illustrated below. The model has some similarities with the Hero's Journey, but it does provide a more nuanced analysis of the personal player experience and how they keep themselves engaged with the game.

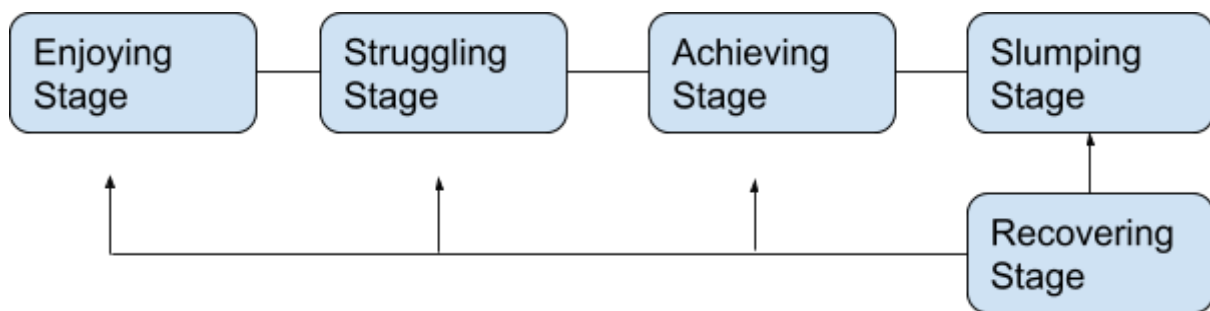


Fig 4: Stage Theory Model (Kim & Thomas, 2015)

During the first stage of the model, *the Enjoying stage*, the players are not engaged with the professional environment, and they can be described as “casual gamers”. They might be affiliated with a “clan” or “guild” or any other type of community where they need to display their skills, but this is still not a true competitive environment. Through their experience with the guilds and communities they are engaged in, they enjoy gaming as a leisure activity in which they get better at the game and receive knowledge and feedback from other members of the community which leads them to pursue a professional career in gaming. Starting a professional career synthesises their serious hobby with their life. Their activity system of the players in the enjoyment stage is that of general game users (Kim & Thomas, 2015, p. 181). Some players pass the trials gatekeeping them from becoming a professional player, and these players enter the *Struggling stage*. The players are transitioning from being a very skilled

casual player, to becoming part of a professionalized environment. This means that the players high skill-level they have acquired no longer is the means for guaranteed success. They have entered a competitive environment which requires them to adapt to and assimilate skills and techniques from senior members as well as coaches (Ibid). They must become hyper specialized in order to thrive in a competitive environment, which also includes internal competition with the rest of the team members. The players must strive to receive acknowledgement in order to gain a spot on the team and participate in official matches. The struggle to advance in such a highly competitive environment starts to detract from the enjoyment of the game. In this new culture where the players have to adapt their style to fit with the team and coach, the players activity system becomes that of a professional player, which in some ways becomes a contradiction of the enjoying stage because of the lesser intrinsic enjoyment of the game. This is where *Stage shifting* occurs. While they were casual players in the enjoyment stage, the players only had the objective of having fun, but as they shift into the struggling stage they have become part of an organization where the main goals are to outplay their teammates and systematically learn every aspect of the game in order to succeed. Community members are no longer friends, but competition (Kim & Thomas, 2015, p. 181). It is noted that some types of esports, like *Counter Strike* or *League Of Legends* have a strong emphasis on the team working together, and therefore in addition to the internal competition for spots on the team, the team is still working together in a competitive setting and adjusting their gameplay to each other. In this case the behavior of the team acts as a collective instructor for the player. The essence of the struggling stage as such becomes the constant battle for the recognition in order to gain position on the team. Over a period of time the rigorous training and learning while participating in the professional team activity leads to some players managing to shift into the *Achieving stage*. The achieving stage has its genesis in the process of the players becoming established on their team but also gains global recognition in the esports community. Some may even be featured in national broadcasts and gain a following of fans. The players are not just acknowledged by their teammates, but they are also in a position to lead their less experienced teammates, much in the same mentoring relationship they themselves underwent in the struggling stage. In the achieving stage, the goal is to continuously defeat the other teams. The game no longer feels like practice, but instead it has become an integrated part of their self and reality. They have conversations with the coaches and their peers to discuss strategies, and they players are leading within the team

in cooperation with their teammates. Because the players experience their peers trust in them and their achievements they play the game without experiencing much anxiety or stress. When they are in the achieving stage, they players once again enjoy the game much in the same manner as they did in the enjoying stage. The achieving stage however, usually cannot be maintained by the players. Many players experience failure in their efforts to win games continuously because their skills and strategies were countered by opposing teams. Rivaling teams are constantly working to dethrone them, and when they start to experience this, it triggers a shift into another stage where the players lose self-confidence (Kim & Thomas, 2015, p. 182). This confrontation with their skills and strategies they developed in the achieving stage becoming insufficient results in the players entering the *Slumping stage*. The players struggle to recapture the glory and satisfaction they experienced in the achieving stage, which forces them to simultaneously develop new skills but also once again compete with their teammates to stay in their top position. The activity system are now once again very similar to the struggling stage. They once again become fixated on winning games which again detracts from their enjoyment of the game. Some players recover and reasserts themselves as an elite talent, but it seems inevitable for all players to sometimes experience the slumping stage. And while some players transcend their slump and once again find themselves in the achieving stage, some players never manage to avoid the slumping stage, leading them to pursue different endeavours (Ibid). As such the stage model is viewed as a dynamic process in which players tend to cycle through the different stages, often when they need to recover from the slumping stage.

### **2.3.2 Theme 2 - Individual motivating factors of an esports player**

The second theme found in the literature illustrates what keeps esports players motivated and helps them staying successful once they are at the professional level. The subcategories in this theme can be divided into: *Intrinsic and Extrinsic motivation, Biological drives, and Competition, challenge, and goals.*

### **2.3.2.1 Intrinsic and Extrinsic motivation**

Kim & Thomas references Self Determination Theory by Richard Ryan & Edward Deci, by addressing how the different stages influence the players motivations. Although the stages all have unique and different components as it relates to the activity system, the stages can all be categorized by two main characteristics: The “intrinsic” and the “extrinsic” stages. Enjoying stage and Achieving stage are both stages in the intrinsic category., while Struggling stage and Slumping stage are both in the “extrinsic” category. When the players are in the intrinsic stages, the experience of playing the game is that of enjoyment. The object is related to intrinsic motivation. In the enjoyment stage, the relationship is that of a cooperative and communicative field between casual players. The same goes for achieving stage, where the players are getting rewarded and the learning is mostly at an individual level with less emphasis on outside regulating curriculum (Kim & Thomas, 2015, p. 183). Kim & Thomas has found many similarities in the achieving stage with the enjoying stage. The struggling stage is characterized as a stage where the players are more extrinsically motivated. The players have to acquire new skills regularly which triggers extrinsic motivation. They are constantly compared to their peers and have to follow the training regiment created by their coach. The same concept is present in the slumping stage where they once again have to improve because of outside factors which condemns them to become better due to their deficiencies compared to their rivals (Kim & Thomas, 2015, p. 183). As such, players experience both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as they enter the different stages. One interesting find by Kim & Thomas is, that even though the players had started playing for fun, they sowed a positive reaction to the extrinsic values related to game playing. They felt comfortable when they were in the extrinsic stages even though they encountered stressful situations. To them, it would be more “professional” getting acknowledgement and being in competition with teammates, than simply enjoying the gameplay.

### **2.3.2.3 Biological drives**

Jari Kätsyri (2013) conducts a study in where measurements of brain activity by fMRI scan on competitive video game players facing off against other players and computers showed,

that the players felt a greater sense of reward when winning against other players than winning against a computer. Video gaming activates the striatal regions involved in affect processing and triggers striatal dopamine release (Kätsyri, 2013, p. 8). The striatal regions especially has been measured to be activated when winning versus losing. According to Kätsyri, the striatal regions getting activated by winning is most likely linked to the hedonistic pleasure linked to being successful, the striatal region also facilitates reward expectations (Ibid). The players were made aware of when they were set up to face off against human opponents and computer bots. When asked to evaluate their experience, the findings show that players felt a stronger level of empathy towards their opponents when they were human, which led to them keeping greater track of their actions. This also activated the regions of the brain that relates to the neural reward system (Kätsyri, 2013, p. 6). This especially relates to the striatal and front cortical reward system responses to winning and losing, which were significantly increased when the participants played against human rather than computers. According to Kätsyri , this might have something to do with the fact that the players are aware that they are beating other humans, and the knowledge of the opponent players displeasure of losing, which leads to a feeling of malicious pleasure (Kätsyri, 2013, p. 10). As such, the main findings of the fMRI scan and study by Kätsyri is that winning activates the striatal regions more than losing, and doing so against human players as opposed to computer bots is also linked to greater activity in these regions. This serves as a strong argument for why esports players are biologically driven towards the competitive scene and one of the big factors keeping them engaged is the competition and social rivalry with other players. Similarly to Kätsyri, Gray (2018) conducted a measurement study on esports players, and their reaction to playing against other players versus playing against computers.. This was done with a focus on their hormone levels to see weather any significant change in hormone levels could be measured between the two scenarios. The main result however, showed that no particular difference in any hormone levels were registered. Gray notes that the players were familiar with each other prior to the experiment, and he contributes this to the null nature of the difference in hormone levels. No real emotional stressors were present due to the familiarity of the setting, and no real consequence to a potential loss were present (Gray, 2018, p. 4). Gray therefore hypothesizes that players in a more real competitive setting in a larger public venue, also burdened by financial stakes, should experience a difference in hormone levels. Even though the study by Gray provided limited data, the study by Kätsyri paired with Gray's



ideas should provide plenty of groundwork for the assumption that esports players are biologically motivated by their neural reward system when facing off against other players in a competitive setting. This seems to especially be triggered by the anticipation of winning and beating their rivals, paired with the hedonistic pleasure they experience in success.

#### **2.3.2.4 Competition, challenge, and goals**

The included study by Thomas Weiss & Sabrina Schiele (2013) is a survey of 360 esports players with the main query being to investigate which competitive and hedonic need gratifications leads to the engagement in esports by the players. This is done by applying a theoretical framework of uses and gratifications theory (Weiss & Schiele, 2013, pp. 3-4). The results from the survey showed that the most notable need gratifications were identified as competition, challenge, and escapism (Weiss & Schiele, 2013, p. 5). According to Weiss & Schiele, the dimensions of competition and challenge relate to the player desire for competition, especially when playing against other teams. This provides them with an opportunity to advance themselves and gain a position of power in the hierarchy of the competitive scene (Weiss & Schiele, 2013, p. 7). The findings of the study suggests that the need for challenge is found in the sportsmanship aspect of esports. The challenge when playing video games by yourself is mostly centered around intrinsic enjoyment, but in competitive esports the players are driven by a strive towards fame and success.

Marcel Martončík (2015) uses GOAL questionnaire to study the player motivation for consuming esports with the focus being on life goals (Intimacy, Affiliation, Altruism, Power, Achievement, and Diversion). In a comparative study between two groups, one of casual gamers and one of professional gamers, the results show that the biggest differences in life goals between the casual and professional gamers is found on the two items of affiliation (the need to help others) and diversion (the need for excitement and new experiences) (Martončík, 2015, p. 3). Martončík proposes that this most likely is due to the more social nature of esports in comparison to casual gaming, with esports players having to work with teams and being in competition. The difference in affiliation is likely linked to the esports players helping teammates and guiding newer members to improve.

### **2.3.2.5 Summary of literature review in relation to current thesis**

As mentioned earlier, the reason for including a literature review was twofold: First to identify the body of research in the field of esports, especially pertaining to the experience of becoming a professional and motivations of esports players. Second to identify any gaps in methodology and general knowledge in the same field in order to create the implications for how this master thesis may contribute to the field of study.

The data derived from the studies included in the first theme, going from casual to professional, holds some of the most integral observations for how this thesis will form its initial assumptions on what kind of barriers and supporting factors esports players experience when transitioning from casual to professional. What seems to be echoed in all of the included literature is that playing at a professional level causes a shift in values and motivational patterns for the players as it pertains to video games. The overarching narrative seems to be a shift from gaming as a recreational activity into gaming becoming a much more cultural and social activity where integrating esports into their personal lives is necessary. In the second theme, all the literature has a focus on identifying motivating factors for esports players. We get a biologically and neurochemically oriented perspective on what drives esports players in the studies by Gray and Kätsyri. The most notable find is the heightened activity in the neural reward systems of the brain when facing off against other players. Weiss & Schiele identifies that players are driven by the need for competition and challenge which manifests in the much greater need for mastery of the game as well as social recognition when playing video games at a professional level. Martončík investigates the motivations of esports players through the lens of the GOALS questionnaire and finds that esports players generally are driven by social interactions and helping their peers, as well as the pursuit of new experiences and excitement. Something he also reckons differentiates the motivations of esports players versus casual gamers, with casual gamers showing less value in the goals of new experiences and the need to help others,

Two major gaps have been identified in current literature: First a deeper understanding of cultural resources available in the esports environment and communities would be very useful to better understand what constitutes the shift in values and motivation as well as further explain the social nature of esports. Secondly, the demographics are somewhat fragmented in the sense that the studies are conducted in South Korea, USA, Germany, and Slovakia.

Wagner draws attention to the fact that esports has quite different connotations in the west and the east, and as such the split between western studies and studies conducted in South Korea might create a distorted overall view (Wagner, 2006, p. 2). This current master thesis will be conducting a qualitative study in a western culture, specifically from a Scandinavian point of view, in order to create a deeper understanding on esports in Scandinavian countries. The literature review yielded a very limited number of 7 eligible studies too, and while this can definitely be contributed to the fact that research in esports and esports as a scientific phenomenon is still very new, it still presents a potential limitation of the perspective in this current thesis. In order to broaden and nuance the theoretical framework, it would be useful to expand the search of literature.

## **2.4 Esports and traditional sport theory**

While the literature found in the review covers a wide range of factors affecting the transition into professional esports, it would still benefit this current thesis to expand the search for literature in order to address the relative small sample of studies found. As noted in the introductory aim of defining esports, the two components of “electronic” and “sport” were both addressed. In order to create a viable and more nuanced perspective of the factors influencing the transition of becoming a professional esports player and the motivations of the players, it would be useful to consider whether the use of more traditional sport psychology would benefit the theoretical framework. Yuri Seo draws in his paper from 2016 attention to T.L Taylor, who defines sport as an activity that requires training, skill improvement, and dedication (Seo, 2016, pp. 16-17; Taylor, 2012). As the data from the literature review indicates, the stage model introduced by Kim & Thomas is centered around the process of learning and mastering the game and gaining competence, as well as the need to overcome challenges, which supports the description by Taylor. The same can be said of the findings by Weiss & Schiele and Martončík, whose findings also supports the presence of the requirement

to advance competence in order to succeed in esports. George B. Cunningham also supports the idea that academics in the world of sports management can and should consider the impact that esports will have on the literature on sports in a broader sense (Cunningham, 2017, p. 3). As a final note, Shane Murphy argued in his paper from 2009 that the traditional theoretical approaches from sport psychology can be used to examine different motivating factors in esports (Murphy, 2009). Murphy also argues that the tendency to be motivated by either the need to master the game and improve themselves, or the need to surpass rivals and be recognized by their peers are present in both traditional sport and esports. This also aligns with the findings of existing empirical data on esports. As such there is a strong argument to be made for the utility of applying knowledge from traditional sport psychology when investigating the factors at play when becoming a professional.

## **2.6 Expanded search**

In order to expand on the included state of the art, an additional search has been conducted with a bigger focus on traditional sport psychology and theory. As stated in the above, there seem to be great continuity between esports and traditional sport in terms of motivations and values of the players, this pertaining to the patterns of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, the need for improving competence and knowledge, and finally a social dimension that reflects player rivalries as well as recognition by peers (Kim & Thomas, 2015; Weiss & Schiele, 2013; Murphy, 2009; Seo, 2016). The following is a presentation of the literature found using *SPORTDiscus* as a database in order to scope out any studies on traditional sport theory as well as utilizing the journal of applied sport psychology. The included literature from traditional sport psychology will be presented in the two themes similar the previous review: 1) Going from casual to professional and 2) Motivation of players.

### **2.6.1 Going from casual to professional**

The included literature found from sport psychology that investigates the factors affecting the transition from casual to professional can be categorized into the subcategories: *Talent development* and *Social support*.

### 2.6.1.2 Talent development

Taryn K. Morgan & Peter R. Giacobbi creates a study in which they synthesize and utilize multiple perspectives to describe major influences and experiences during the development of collegiate athletes. This is done through semi-structured interviews with 8 athletes, 10 parents, and 6 coaches, analyzed through grounded theory. Morgan & Giacobbi gathers existing talent development research in order to investigate how we can shorten the journey to becoming a professional athlete (Morgan & Giacobbi, 2006, p. 295). By using an interactional approach that describes the relationship between nature (genetics), nurture (practice), and situational factors (parents, coaches, teammates) talent development should according to Morgan & Giacobbi be accomplished (Ibid).

To conceptualize the factors affecting the journey to becoming a professional athlete, Morgan & Giacobbi first refers to Bloom (1985) and Côté (1999). Bloom did a qualitative study on talent development with 21 olympic swimmers and 18 tennis players with a longitudinal study spanning four years. Bloom identifies three stages of talent development: The early years, the middle years, and the late years (Morgan & Giacobbi, 2006, p. 296). The early years is referred to as *the stage of initiation*, which is characterized by fun and playful activities where the individuals receive guidance and support from their parents. The middle years is called *stage of development*, and this is achievement-oriented because the children become more serious about their activity, practice harder with a determination to succeed. Finally in the late years, referred to as the *stage of perfection*, the individuals become experts in the sense that they become skillful and autonomous regarding their practice.

Juan Côté also applies a stage model to conceptualize talent development. Côté conducts qualitative interviews with four athletes and their families about the athletes talent and career development. Data is sampled from the interviews and divided into three chronological categories which he names the *stages of sport participation* (Côté, 1999; Morgan & Giacobbi, 2006, p. 296). The first stage is called *the sampling years*, which occurs from the age of 6-13, which similarly to Bloom's stage of initiation, mostly consists of play, enjoyment and leisurely experimenting with sport. Parents provide opportunity for talent development for the children by encouraging them to get into sport and support their need for fun and excitement (Ibid). The second stage is called *The specializing years*, which occurs in the age of 13-15.

This is when the athletes start to choose a sport in which they wish to pursue with more focused practice. The parents facilitate the young athletes practice and support them financially in order to have them properly hone their talent (Côté, 1999, pp. 404-406). The third stage is *The investment years*, which has its genesis around age 15. This stage is characterized by the intense vigour that the young athlete pursues becoming an expert at the sport activity by training intensely. The parent role in this stage is now much more indirect in that they act as counselors and as emotional support.

In yet another study by Durand-Bush & Salmela (2002), the focus on talent development is investigated through a qualitative, interactional perspective (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002). The qualitative interviews are conducted with 10 olympic champions to assess the factors influencing their performance and talent development. Similarly to Bloom and Côté, Durand-Bush & Salmela identifies stages of development in athlete careers: *The sampling, Specializing, Investment years*, which are derived from Côté, but they also identify a new fourth stage: *Maintenance years* (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002, pp. 158-160). Different from the more determined age transitional model from Côté however, Durand-Bush & Salmela suggests that the transition between stages is marked by significant events like new coaches, starting high school, or accomplishments (Ibid). In the Maintenance years, which is the new stage introduced, the athlete needs to maintain motivation and competence in order to remain successful. This means that he needs to engage in rigorous training and the parents contribute by being people whom the athlete can trust and confide in (Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002, p. 161). It seems that athletes who progress to this stage develop certain characteristics and skills that helps them cope with pressure, keep themselves motivated, and perform to the best of their abilities (Ibid).

### **2.6.1.2 Social support**

As the studies outlined in the above shows, there are some factors that are identified as strong predictors for how well athlete advance their talents and as such become more prominent members of their sports league, and multiple studies from the journal of sport psychology show that social support seems to arise as a commonly cited factor for assisting the athlete in becoming professional (Morgan & Giacobbi, 2006, p. 297). Rees & Hardy (2000) interviewed

10 high-level athletes through qualitative semi-structured interviews and identified four dimensions of social support being integral to athletes: *Emotional, Esteem, Informational, and Tangible* (Rees & Hardy, 2000, pp. 15-22). In essence these different kinds of support all contribute to overcoming challenges for athletes in order to progress further. Emotional support is defined as the kind of support shown by generally “being there” for people and provides comfort and security (Ibid). Esteem support refers to the bolstering of the athletes sense of competence and receiving feedback that helps them with overcoming nerves and doubt about themselves, injuries through reassurance that they can recover, and help with pulling out of potential performance slumps (Rees & Hardy, 2000, p. 18). Informational support refers to the support provided with advice and guidance. Finally tangible support refers to more instrumental support in the shape of financial assistance, help with doing any physical tasks in order to help the athlete better cope with stressful situations (Ibid). The result from the study also shows that these different kinds of support might have different levels of utility depending on each individual, like how some of the athletes in the interviews using informational support from coaches in order to cope with performance concerns, while other athletes rely more on emotional support from their family in order to overcome the same issue (Rees & Hardy, 2000, pp. 24-28; Morgan & Giacobbi, 2006, p. 297). Daniel Gould (2002) also demonstrates in a study of Olympic athletes and their development by conducting interviews on them as well as their family, guardian, significant other, etc., that becoming a professional athlete is greatly influenced by the support given to them by their social surroundings. Gould focuses specifically on the athletes ability to cope with anxiety, confidence, coachability, and resilience (Gould, 2002, pp. 179-180). The results from the study shows that the development of athletes indeed are greatly influenced by interactions with their parents and coaches alike, and Gould himself links the results to the stages of talent development described by Morgan & Giacobbi in the former section (Gould, 2002; Morgan & Giacobbi, 2006, p. 296).

Morgan & Giacobbi introduces a model to conceptualize what constitutes the kinds of support influencing the athlete in their endeavors which does include many of the illustrated examples of the studies by Rees & Hardy, and Gould.

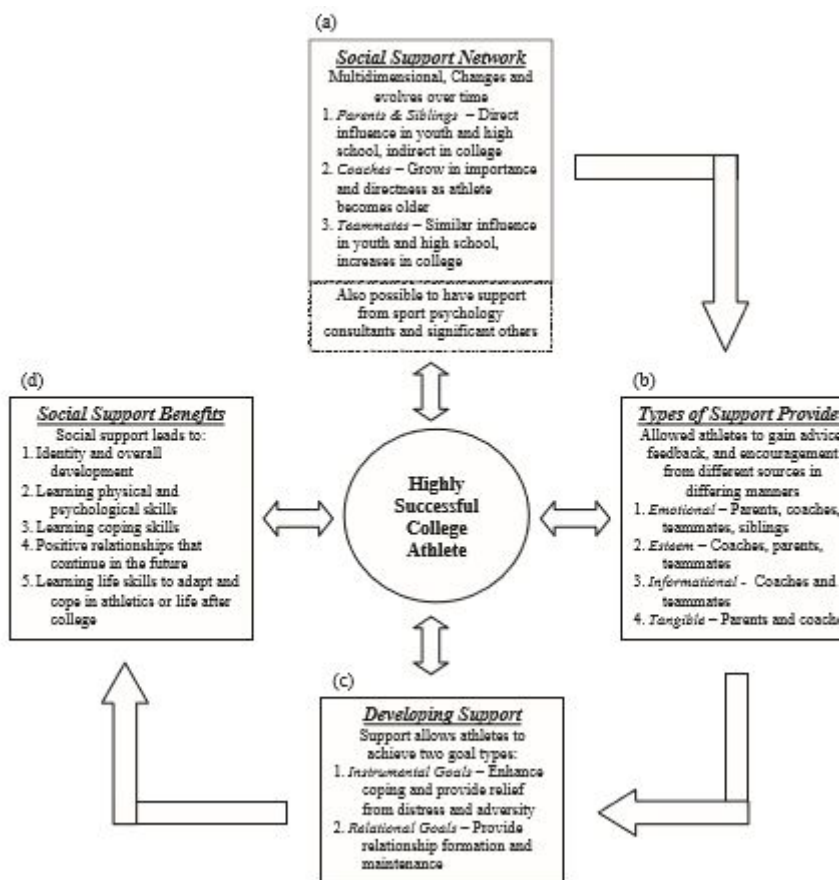


Figure 5: Morgan & Giacobbi (2006)

In their study Morgan & Giacobbi categorises support into four dimensions: *Social support network*, *Types of support*, *Developing support*, and *Support benefits*. Section A refers to who in the athletes support network provides them with support, like parents, siblings, coaches, and teammates. During the younger years, parents are more influential, and as the athlete grows older, the coach and teammates start to play a more prominent role. Section B refers to what kind of social support is provided. Morgan & Giacobbi directly relates this to the previously described study by Rees & Hardy (2000), and their four types of social support. Section C describes how the social support develops. Instrumental goals helps the athlete with coping and relational goals helps the athlete with maintenance. Essentially section A and B, being the “who” and “what” of the support acts as catalysts for the development of instrumental and relational goals. Finally, section D describes the benefits achieved by the previously mentioned sections. Morgan & Giacobbi argues that the social support can lead to development in learning, forming an identity, and coping with the stressors of becoming a professional (Morgan & Giacobbi, 2006, p. 308).



## **2.6.2 Theme - Individual motivation**

Similarly to the literature found in the literature review on esport, a dimension of individual motivation and drives have been found as well. This theme conceptualizes the motivations of athletes and what individual factors constitute their engagement in sports. The subcategories found to shape the motivation of athletes are: *Confidence, Goals and causality, and Stress*.

### **2.6.2.1 Confidence**

In a study by Kate Hays, Ian Maynard, Owen Thomas, and Mark Bawden, different kinds of confidence in professional athletes are identified. In their study, the authors seek to identify sources of confidence and how confidence shapes the performance of athletes.

According to the authors, self-confidence has consistently been identified as a major influence on the performance of athletes, and they attribute the framework of their understanding of self-confidence to Albert Bandura and his conceptual paradigm of Perceived self-efficacy (Hays et al., 2007, p. 434; Bandura, 1993). According to this conception, the degree to which an individual will enact cognitive, motivational, and affective processes is predicated on the translation of knowledge into action (Ibid). Perceived self-efficacy does not refer to the skills the individual have at their disposal, but rather it describes the individuals own perception of their own capabilities and their ability to succeed in their endeavors. Hays et al., argues that self-efficacy can be chalked into multiple constituting components, mostly based around the experience of mastery and psychological and emotional states. As such they include the fundamental understanding of self-efficacy into their design in which they seek to investigate how confidences shapes performance of athletes. In their findings they categorize the source of confidence in to nine different dimensions: *Preparation, Performance Accomplishments, Coaching, Social support, Innate factors, Competitive Advantage, Experience, Trust, and Self-Awareness*.

*Preparation* is according to their findings integral to the athlete feeling confident about their performance. This refers to both physically being in good condition, but also general practice of skill repetition in order to perfect their talents (Hays et al., 2007, pp. 439-440). Another

part of preparation is mental preparation, such as identifying their own weaknesses and set up goals to strive towards. By creating and achieving goals, the athletes also report a great sense of confidence.

*Performance Accomplishments* as a source of confidence stems from the athletes feeling a sense of achievement from performing successfully in competition. Good results lead to greater confidence and predicts better performance in future endeavors.

The coach is also identified as source of confidence. *Coaching* for some of the athletes in the study means advice, or social support. Positive feedback leads to confidence and thus helps the athlete in their performance (Hays et al., 2007, p. 444). For some athletes in the study, they are more reliant on their coach to establish training regiments and structure their development of their mastery of the sport, and less to provide them with support. Many of the athletes on the study also gains confidence from *social support* of family, partners, and friends. This echoes the points on the former theme of becoming a professional athlete. Some athletes also believe they are born with some *innate abilities* that constitute their performance. This essentially means that some athletes believe they have a natural talent for their sport, and thus this gives them confidence. Another source of confidence is *competitive advantage*, which according to the study relates to seeing competitors perform badly or give in to the pressure. *Trust* as a source of confidence is experienced with the trust within the team. A belief that the teammates will perform at the same standard as the athletes themselves. Finally, *Self-awareness* about their actions and whether they know what they are doing and where they are going also leads to confidence.

Hays et al. find confidence to be a multidimensional construct that is has its source in multiple factors. They also argue that there is a direct link between confidence and performance and motivations of athletes, and through their study they confirm the theoretical assumptions of confidence in relation to the individuals perceived level of skill and efficacy (Hays et al., 2007, pp. 451-453).

### **2.6.2.2 Goals and causality**

The framework of understanding the relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivational patterns was presented in the paper by Kim & Thomas in the literature review, and while

current research on motivation in psychology is numerous, it seems there is a consensus about the relevance of distinguishing between these two types of motivation. Christopher M. Spray et al., however argue that it would be useful to create a deeper in depth study in causality and its relation to motivation. In their study, Spray and his colleagues provide an experimental test of the two of the most commonly cited theories of motivation: Achievement goal theory, and self determination theory (Spray, 2006, p. 44). This is done in order to understand how autonomy and goals shape the motivation of athletes.

### **Achievement goal theory**

Achievement goal theory (AGT) is built on the assumptions that people define success and understand ability differently, and the fundamental idea of this is to divide goals into two different goal orientations: *Task oriented goals* and *Ego oriented goals* (Spray, 2006, p. 44). In some cases, the individual is focused on performing a specific task, with a strive towards mastery and self improvement. The athlete engage in the sport and exercise in order to improve themselves, which according to AGT reflect a “task” goal. Athletes judging themselves based on their own effort and personal improvement are more likely to be intrinsically motivated to engage in the sport, because they value the factors linked to the nature of the task rather than the outcome (Ibid). Some people are however more driven by a need to win and outperforming others. Individuals who are driven towards the goal of demonstrating great ability compared to their peers and receive praise for their accolades (Ibid). This reflects an “ego” goal. Current research suggests that people that are mostly ego oriented focused tends to be more feeble in their motivation if they experience insecurities about their level of competence, while task oriented people generally focus on self improvement, and as such they are less prone to become demotivated even when their competence is insufficient (Ibid). Therefore the research show that a high task orientation, either as a singular force or in combination with ego orientation predicts the most adaptive form of motivation.

### **Self determination theory**

Self determination theory (SDT) also builds on the assumptions of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, but further details this by applying an approach of cognitive evaluation (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Spray, 2006, p. 44). SDT is built in the fundamental notion that people are

motivated by three basic psychological needs: Autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Ryan & Deci argues that a continuum forms the connection between demotivation, extrinsic motivation, and intrinsic motivation.

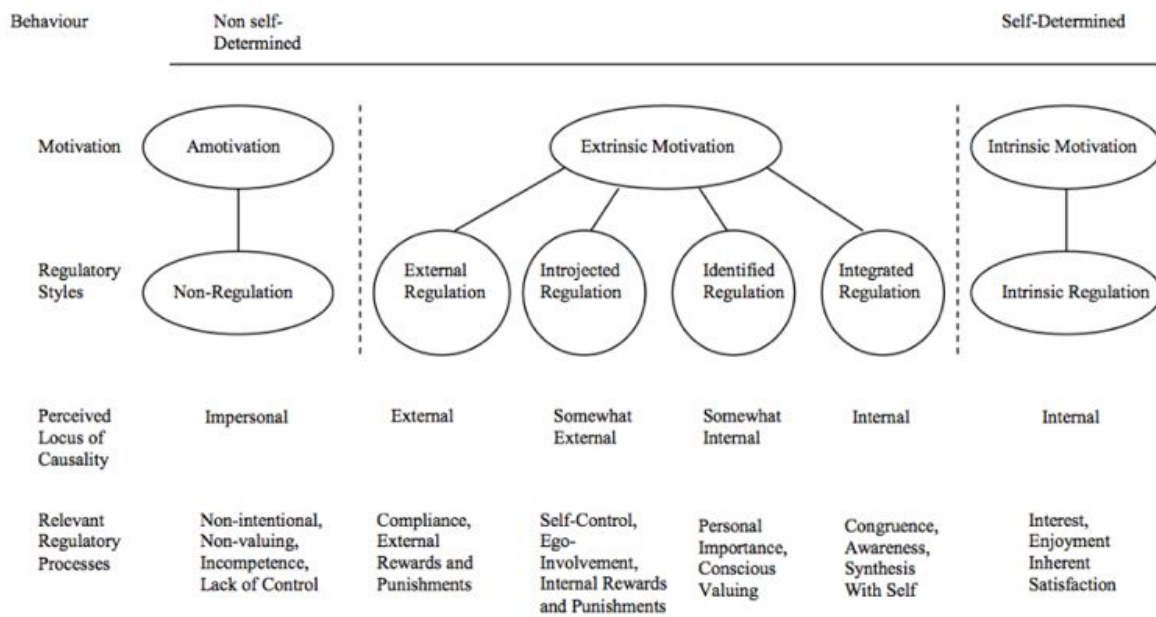


Fig 6: Motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 72)

The continuum follows the degree to which an individual has internalized the values of the activity and their level of autonomy and feeling of causality is increased as the individual progress towards intrinsic motivation. In this continuum, different kinds of extrinsically regulated behaviors are detailed: *External regulation*, *Introjected regulation*, *Identified regulation*, and *Integrated regulation* (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 72). These kinds of regulations range from external pressure (external regulation), internal pressure to avoid guilt (introjected regulation), and self determined motivation in alignment with personal goals and values (identified regulation). The last type of extrinsic motivation is called *Integrated regulation*. The individual, while still regulated by outside factors to do the activity, has internalized the values and has gained a sense of causality that creates a synthesis between the activity and the self. As such, even though a person might be compelled to do something by outside forces, it is still possible to internalize the values of the activity to a degree that it somewhat resembles intrinsic motivation. Presence of the experience of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, all

contribute to the integration of the activity into the self and personal goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 72).

### **Autonomy and Task involvement**

By combining these two theoretical frameworks, Spray and colleagues presents an experimental test in which they include a large group of 147 novice golf players with the aim being for them to make a successful putt. Half of the group were introduced to the experiment with task oriented instructions. That the aim was to learn and master the techniques of golf putting, and they told not to worry about making mistakes or how other performed. The other half were introduced with ego oriented instructions, as they were informed that the purpose of the experiment was to outperform the others. Afterwards each half were assigned to two different communication conditions. One half were given rationale, acknowledgement, and choice. They were told that seeking improvement is important. Conversely the other half were introduced with less autonomy by being told that competition is a part of life, and they should seek to do better than others.

A quantitative questionnaire shows that under conditions of positive feedback the athletes show enjoyment and free choice behavior. Interestingly, the two approaches to checking for the meaning of autonomy and task/ego orientation for the intrinsic motivation of athletes show interactions with both the intrinsic motivation and performance of athletes. When autonomous control and ego orientation manipulation were applied to the groups of participants, they indeed reported a decrease in intrinsic motivation. The presence of autonomy for the athletes especially contributes to nurture a *locus of causality* for the individual to keep them intrinsically engaged with the sport (Ryan & Deci, 2000, pp. 71-74; Spray, 2006, p. 49). As such, the communication style used in the experiments show that this can hold tremendous influence on the commitment and motivation of the athletes. The coach and teacher can interact with the athletes in a rigid and controlling approach which pressures the subjects to think and act in a specific way, or they can approach them in a way that supports their sense of autonomy, in which the athletes become more invested in doing something out of their own volition (Spray, 2006, p. 49). In accordance with the basic psychological needs presented in SDT, communication with interpersonal relationships are bound to shape individual motivation and their sense of autonomy, competence, and

relatedness. From the theoretical perspective of AGT, the controlled setting of ego orientation also proved to be hampering much in the same way of depriving athletes of autonomy because it takes away their own agency and sense of self improvement (Ibid). Interestingly, according to SDT task involvement indeed can lead to intrinsic motivation and ego involvement in a controlling setting will likely lead to an external locus of causality and decrease in intrinsic motivation. However it should be noted that ego involvement can be viewed as introjected regulation. Normatively defined goals can be pursued for relative autonomous reasons which might affect the degree to which intrinsic motivation is decreased (Spray, 2006, p. 50)

The manipulation of goal orientation and autonomy also seems to have a big impact on the performance of the athletes as well. Individuals with a task oriented approach will pursue tasks with a sense of autonomy which means that they are more likely to utilize self-regulating behavior and regulate their concentration level to optimize their performance (Ibid). Task oriented individuals will approach the activity with the mindset of wanting to better themselves and not feel regulated by outside evaluating factors by comparing themselves to others. This also enhances performance (Ibid). By contrast, an ego orientation will likely hamper the attention to mastering the activity because of the more controlling environment.

In a more recent study by D.J. Brown, athletes thriving in sport and what implications best describes this is investigated. At its essence, thriving is found to be reinforced by a high level of confidence and motivation, which in turn should enhance performance of athletes (Brown, 2017). Thriving is according to Brown enabled by *contextual enablers* and *personal enablers*. Contextual enablers include support received from different agents within the environment as well as aspects of the environment itself, while the personal enablers are the psychosocial characteristics of athletes. Much like the theory of SDT and AGT suggests, the findings of Brown and colleagues were that thriving in sport involves being optimistic, focused, and in control. Being cognisant of areas to improve, experiencing development, and having a sense of belonging (Brown, 2017, p. 142). Thriving is seen as living well and Brown himself compares the characteristics of thriving in sport to being motivated.

As such, the findings suggest that AGT and SDT can be used in tandem to investigate the degree to which a sense of causality and goals might affect both motivation, performance, and general well being of athletes. Supporting the individuals sense of autonomy can enhance the sense of causality and intrinsic motivation in opposition to a more controlling approach. The focus should be on self improvement and self regulation in order to optimize both motivation and performance of athletes, as well as them thriving in the activity (Spray, 2006, p. 50; Brown, 2017, p. 142).

### **2.6.2.3 Stress**

Thriving and motivation have both been established as constituting factors for successfully progressing in sports, and while being too externally regulate might lead to demotivation, Elsa Kristiansen argues for the importance of understanding stressors in sports in order to understand the risks of imbalance in the well being of athletes (Kristiansen, 2011, p. 569). It would therefore be useful to understand stressors and what effect they might pose on the well being and engagement of athletes, ultimately potentially limiting the progression to becoming professional.

Kristiansen depicts two different important types of stressors that athletes are exposed to by presenting the current body of research and literature. *Organizational stressors* and *media stressors* (Kristiansen, 2011, p. 570). Stressful situations in organizations are usually related to coaches, team dynamic, and planning of the organization the athletes are a part of. Media stressors are described as the athletes feeling the presence of journalists and media outlets being intrusive, as well as the need to act a certain way in order to not be depicted harshly by the media in the community (Kristiansen, 2011, p. 570; Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002). Just like Brown and Spray, Kristiansen employs AGT and its goal involvement theory to test the psychometric dimensions of stress. The study shows that a climate with a focus on performance and ego involvement are positively connected to both media stress and organizational stress, while a climate with focus on mastery and task involvement a proved not to be correlated with any type of stressors. As such, it is hypothesized that a climate with a focus on task orientation and self improvement might be critical when attempting to protect athletes from experiencing stress (Kristiansen, 2011, pp. 575-576). As such, in terms of

coach-athlete relationships, when the coach becomes focused on performance and ego oriented goals, this in turn might pressure players to live up to their expectations of their coach and peers in the organization, resulting in stressful thinking (Ibid).

## **2.7 Expanded search - Summary**

By expanding on the search for literature to the realm of traditional sports, we now have a deeper understanding of the pivotal structures of what constitutes supporting and hampering factors that athletes might be exposed to when becoming professional. Social support and talent development are both very dependant on psychosocial dimensions like coach, parents, and peers, as well as individual understanding of own abilities and potential. The progression into a professional athlete is according to the current body of literature shaped by how the athlete develop themselves in the sport environment, and what resources are available to them with training, coaching, and support. With a focus on motivational climate and how this shapes their personal well being, the need for intrinsic motivation has been identified as key factor for performing and thriving, as well as for reducing stress. Current literature seems to indicate that the need for a climate with focus on personal improvement and mastery as opposed to a climate with a focus on performance and outcomes yield better results in all of these areas.



## **Chapter 3 - Method**

The following chapter is a presentation of the methodology of the current thesis' empirical study . The chapter will start with a presentation of the underlying philosophy of science and the method used for data collection and then turn to the methods and principles used for recruitment of informants, the method for analysis, and finally some ethical considerations.

The general approach to how data collection and analysis will be conducted in this current thesis will be grounded in *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis*, or *IPA* (Langridge, 2007, p. 109). IPA as a tool for research employs great attention to the individual and their experience, meaning making, and own lifeworld (Ibid).

### **3.1 Philosophy of science**

The general approach to how data collection and analysis will be conducted in this current thesis will be grounded in *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis*, or *IPA* (Langridge, 2007, p. 109). Hence, the thesis will be applying a Heidegger inspired phenomenological method (Langdridge, 2007). The following is presentation of Heidegger's phenomenological approach, which is inspired by both Hermeneutics and Existentialism

#### **3.1.1 Phenomenology**

Phenomenology is the study of human experience and how things appears to the consciousness (Langridge, 2007, p. 10). Originally created by Edmund Husserl, and later further developed by Martin Heidegger, the phenomenological approach to how we view that world and truth is grounded in a focus on human experience as a topic in its own right. The focus is on people's perception of the world, or their perception of things in the appearing (Langridge, 2007, p. 11). By utilizing this approach to scientific theory, we cannot acknowledge the world in one true dominant truth, but rather the individual itself creates truth and meaning by understanding the world. Indeed according the phenomenology as a philosophy, the truth of the world is as i appears to the individual person (Berg-Sørensen, 2012, p. 235). Etymologically, phenomenology as an approach concerns itself with meaning making of phenomena and how this arises in experiences. In opposition to the positivist / post-positivist worldview where one objective truth can be uncovered outside of phenomena,

Husserl argued that it is simply not possible to find one objective truth. Instead it should be through a first person perspective that we can start to understand what shapes the subjectivity we use to understand the world and things as they appear to us. Using this approach in research, we are interested in describing the world as it appears to people (Ibid). By distancing itself from the objective truth, phenomenology as an approach does not deny the existence of the world, but rather it should be nuanced and understood through the subjective experience. The fundamental philosophy behind phenomenology originating from Edmund husserl has the human experience at its core, with intentionality and first person perspective as the main pillars. Intentionality relating to the fact that human consciousness does not exist autonomously on its own, but rather it needs to be directed towards an action of some sorts by being exposed to different phenomena. As such, human consciousness is shaped by subjective perceptions, experience, and values. In other words, to understand phenomena it is equally as important to understand consciousness (Ibid).

Martin Heidegger integrates some aspects of existential and hermeneutic philosophy into his understanding of phenomenology. As such Heidegger modifies the fundamental approach to understanding phenomena from Husserl's original philosophy. According to Heidegger it is impossible for the researcher to separate ourselves from what things in the appearing that are investigating in a detached and neutral way (Langridge, 2007, p. 27). As such we must incorporate our own existence into our understanding of the world with regard to cultural and historical context (Ibid). In opposition to the Husserl philosophy of adopting a god's eye view and bracket off to observe and describe a phenomenon, Heidegger argues that the phenomenon must be interpreted, not just described. For Heidegger, phenomenology is not just a tool to observe universals and things in their being, but rather a way to interpret the meaning of the things as they appear. Through Heidegger we can understand phenomenology can not just be a transcendent philosophy, but rather a philosophy where we, through a third person perspective, must acknowledge our natural existence, cultural context, and how these might shape our understanding of things as they appear (Langdridge, 2007, p. 28). As such, this current thesis will be utilizing the scientific theory of a phenomenological approach which is grounded in Heidegger's understanding. This will allow for interpretation of the esports players and their experience in the analysis of the qualitative interviews, as well as

make sure that we through a third person perspective can gain a more complete understanding of esports as a phenomenon.

### **3.2 Data collection**

The data collection in this current thesis will be done through *semi-structured qualitative interviews*. The goal is to create idiographic research with a small sample due to the time consuming process of the analysis (Langridge, 2007, p. 109). The qualitative interview as a tool is used to gain insight into the person being interviewed and their views on the world, explore their values and thoughts linked to their experiences, and finally to apply a scientific perspective in order to understand this (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 17). As such the qualitative interview becomes a very useful tool due to the query being to understand the experience of esports players and their personal goals and motivations.

Pragmatically speaking, the utility of semi structured interviews for this current thesis will not only be based on the phenomenological scientific method, but also on the fact that this kind of data collection allows for construction of knowledge through verbal relations between the researcher and the person being interviewed (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 34). As such, the open nature of the semi-structured interview means that the esports players have free space to describe their experience in detail. This also means more flexibility and an explorative approach with how the interviews will be conducted (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 126).

### **3.3 Interviewguide and Course of action**

The interviewguide is constructed with a thematic framework inspired by the themes and theory in the existing literature found in the literature review. When constructing the interviewguide it is important to have a thematic understanding of the area of research, and therefore the thematic framework holds direct influence on what is investigated (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 127). IPA studies usually rely on a guide with open questions like asking the informants to describe their opinions and experience with different phenomena.

The interviewguide itself is structured by having clusters of questions in five different categories. The questions are all open questions that invite the informant to reflect and come up with their own line of thinking. The goal of the questions have also been to make sure they

are not too invasive or trying to get the informants to say something specific. Supporting questions is also included in the guide in order to help the informant with collecting their thoughts or probe them to reflect on certain things. The five categories are all created with inspiration from the themes discovered in the literature review in the chapter 2, and this is also done as a step to synthesize the analysis in accordance with the theme based approach of IPA (Langridge, 2007, p. 110).

The informants will all be introduced to the query of research question of the thesis and asked to introduce themselves in the beginning of the interviews. After that the interview will be structured into five parts. First they will be asked questions inviting them to reflect on their journey from playing casually to becoming professional, and what kind of challenges they faced. Next they will be asked about their relationship with gaming and the game they are playing competitively, their experience with the esports environment, what kind of support they have received, and finally they will be asked about training, staying motivated, and pressure. As a final question the informants will be asked to give their opinion on what qualities you need to have in order to become successful in esports. Even though the guide has a detailed structure, it is in no way meant to be followed rigorously. Some question may not be asked and additional questions not present in the guide might also occur in order to make sure that the conversation is not hampered by a firm structure.

### **3.4 Transcription**

The Interviews in this current thesis will be recorded on a dictaphone and transcribed. Transcribing interviews means using recorded data from the qualitative interviews and convert them into a written medium (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009 p. 202). The goal of this is to take the relational and verbally constructed knowledge and experience from the interviews and derive meaning from this through analysis. It is therefore important to be alert to the dynamic and contextual nature of the language and spoken words used in the interviews and have an eye on how the spoken language translates to the written language on paper. This means that it is inevitable that some factors may get lost in the translation due to the difficulties of translating the atmosphere in the room to paper (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 203).

A set of ground rules have been devised in order to create a consistent and accessible set of data from the conducted interviews. In accordance with the agreed upon terms with the informants, made up abbreviations will be used for them in the transcription. I will be using the abbreviation “JI” for myself and use codes like “AHK” for the informants. The interviews are transcribed as spoken language and as such the presentation of the data will reflect this. In accordance with “Dansk standard for udskrifter og registrering af talesprog”, for how precise and thorough the transcription needs to be varies depending on the goal. Seeing as this current thesis will be applying an interpretive phenomenological analysis approach, the detail to which the exact wording is written down is not as vital as it would have been for conducting a discursive approach (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, pp. 203-209; Langridge, 2007, p. 110). The goal for the analysis of the data in this thesis will be to have a bigger focus on the meaning, semantics, and content of the experience for esports players, and as such there is a lesser need for the same rigorous transcription techniques. However, it is vital to include the details of what is being said in order to be as faithful as possible to what the informants share. Therefore the following set of ground rules will be applied in the transcription process:

- The words “øhm”, “ja” or “mmh” will not be included in the transcriptions as this might make reading it more accessible. This includes any “Ja” uttered by myself during a sentence spoken by the informant.
- CAPITAL LETTERS will be used when words are spoken with strong emphasis
- “...” will be used if somebody is interrupted
- “/.” will be used whenever the informant interrupts themselves or rephrase something
- “?Unclear?” will be used should there be any unclear phrases or words
- \*Redacted\* will be used if any sensible information needs to be held back, like names or places

Whenever parts of the data should be included in the analysis, the quote will be modified to not include the signs and coding from the above in order to make it easier to read.

### 3.5 Recruitment of informants

The informants for this current thesis are all people who are either currently active in the competitive esports scene or have had previous experience with the same. All the informants were found through Facebook by making a public post which, and therefore the informants were all found by reference from my own network. The informants were selected based on whether they have had any experience in the professional esports scene. This means that selection of informants was done on the basis of knowing their background in relation to the purpose of this thesis. All selected informants are above the age of 18 in order for them to give consent without having to consult parents. As such the sampling is a purposive sampling because the goal of this thesis is to explore a specific environment and people. This kind of purposeful recruitment is also referred to as *Snowball sampling* (Naderifar et al., 2017, p. 2). This kind of sampling provides great utility when looking into a very specific fragile population.

Three informants have been selected, each with varying levels of experience and playing different kinds of games at a competitive level. It was a very important criteria for them to have at least some experience with being a part of a team and attend competitions because the query of this thesis is to explore the journey from playing casually to professionally.

The three informants will be referred to by the names: AWI, AHK, og HWI. AWI is 20 years old and has been playing competitive *League Of Legends* for multiple teams in both Denmark and Germany, claiming two northern championships with his team. AHK is also 20 years old and plays FIFA as a part of the danish “eSuperliga” for one of their teams. He has recently qualified for “eChampions” which involves some of the europe's top talent in FIFA. Finally HWI is 23 years old and plays Counter strike at a competitive level with him starting up his own team and acts as captain and behind the scenes leader. The interviews with AHK and HWI were conducted face to face, and the interview with AWI was done over a skype call.

### **3.6 Method for analysis - IPA**

With the scientific philosophy of a phenomenological approach, the chosen method needs to reflect this as the paradigm for gaining a deeper understanding of the themes of the experience of the informants. the method of *Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis*, or *IPA*.

IPA is an inductive tool for analysis in which the paradigm is derived from the hermeneutic-phenomenological approach with the goal of understanding the experience and world view of the informants (Langridge, 2007, pp. 107-108). The focus is on how the individuals perceive and their lifeworld. As researchers we do not engage the topic with a predetermined research hypothesis, although we do have a sense of what we generally wish to explore. It is vital that the researcher does not suspend his own natural attitude, but rather tries to incorporate it into the research (Berg-Sørensen, 2012, p. 220). It is the focus on meaning and experience that makes IPA a great phenomenological tool for analysis.

The fundamental method of IPA as an analysis tool is a thematic framework in which the analyst is focused on making sense of the informants lifeworld (Langridge, 2007, pp. 110-111). The process of creating the thematic framework of the analysis is structured in 4 steps:

- 1) The transcript is read and re-read, adding comments and creating a “descriptive coding” in the margin.
- 2) The transcript is coded thematically by noting emerging themes in the margin. Initial notes are transformed into more meaningful statements. The notes should reflect broader and more theoretically grounded concerns.
- 3) The themes are organized into a set of categories. Some themes discovered in the former step might be clustered into the same category, thus streamlining the themes.
- 4) The themes are utilized by contextualizing them with quotes from the empirical data

An example of the categories found in one of the interviews in this current thesis before they were clustered into the final themes used in the analysis can be seen below. Some of these themes can be clustered together or grouped in a way where one of the themes covers the other themes as well:

## AKH

- Confidence
- Time investment
- Sacrifice
- Leisure vs work
- Performance orientation
- Performance and results
- Competition
- Support
- Feedback
- Integrating esports
- Results affecting motivation
- esports environment
- Achievements
- Social support
- Pressure
- Identity-shift
- Monetary gain
- Life adjustments
- Extrinsic rewards
- Time investment
- Fans

**Fig 7:** Example of coding process (appendix 2)



With the emerging themes and coding of the IPA approach, they can be used in tandem with existing literature found in the literature review in order to create a thorough analysis. This is done through an interpretive approach inspired by the hermeneutic paradigm integrated with the phenomenological approach of IPA.

### **3.7 Ethical considerations**

When conducting any kind of research with data collected from people it is important to be cognizant of any ethical issues that might affect the thesis and research process. The following will be a presentation of ethical issues in two parts: Micro-ethics and Macro-ethics. As an opening remark, this thesis is also written with the ethical consideration of conducting *Genuine and competent research*, which means that it is important that i am truthful and honest about how the research has been conducted. This means that deliberately inventing data or misinterpreting any of the informants quotes purposefully, or lie about findings would be considered a breach of the ethical guidelines of the university (Sullyvan, 2012, p. 63).

#### **3.7.1 Micro-ethics**

Micro-ethical issues relate to making the research morally acceptable as it relates to the individual being a part of the data collection (Sullyvan, 2012, pp. 59-63). The informants are relaying personal information and thoughts, and it is extremely important to consider some key factors of ethical issues. These issues are: *Informed consent, Confidentiality and Anonymity, The role of the researcher, and Consequences* (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 88; Sullyvan, 2012, p. 63).

In order to make sure that all participants of this current thesis has been perfectly aware of what they agree to talk about, they have all been presented with the query of the thesis as well as gotten briefed about what topics they generally will be asked about. It is vital that the participants know what will be asked of them and that they have enough information about

the project so they can make an informed decision about whether they wish to participate or not (Sullyvan, 2012, p. 64). All the participants chosen are also above the age of 18 in order to make sure that they are competent to give their own consent (Sullyvan, 2012, p. 65). It is also important to inform the participants that they at any time may withdraw from participating in the study, this includes after the interview is finished, and they will be given full access to any material produced with their data (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, pp. 89-90). In order to make sure these requirements have been met, two documents have been provided to all participants. One with a description of this thesis and its research question, and a form of consent which they have been asked to sign (Appendix). The form of consent informs them that they at any time may withdraw or gain access to the thesis, and that they will be required to provide information about their age, career, and experience in esports.

*Confidentiality* and *Anonymity* refer to how we treat the information given to us by the participants, and how we protect their personal information. The participants anonymity must be protected, and that is why they have been given synonyms instead of using their real names (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 91; Sullyvan, 2012, p. 68). This also means that their identity is known only to me, and any mention of their name or where they live will be edited out in the transcription, and the tapings will also be deleted afterwards to make sure they stay anonymous. To protect their confidentiality it is made clear to them what purpose their information is going to be used for before they consent.

The researchers *Role* requires careful consideration of integrity and how the researcher becomes the primary tool for gaining useful information from the participants. In relation to the introductory presentation of the importance of competent and genuine research, the role of the researcher becomes integral to make sure that the information collected from the participants is presented as truthful and transparent as possible (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 93). I also made sure not to make the participant uncomfortable by asking too invasive questions or try to steer the interviews in a certain direction by asking loaded questions. It is therefore important to be cognizant of the asymmetry in the power relation between me as a researcher and the participants as informants in which the researcher has a dominant position (Ibid).

Finally it is important to consider the *Consequences* of the interviews. The risk of causing any kind of stress or negative effect on the participants should be as small as possible, and it should always be outweighed by the potential beneficiary outcomes of the interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 92). Asking too many probing questions about a bad experience might result in the informant feeling anxiety and lead to dismay. It is also important to consider the consequences beyond just the participant themselves, but also what consequence it might have on the group they represent. The informants for this thesis will be representing the esports community, and as such the way the data is reported should not be harmful to either the individual informants or any of the people in the community.

It should also be noted that the interview is not therapy. As a psychologist it might be tempting to steer the conversation in a direction where it helps the participant with an issue they describe, but the main goal of the interview is for the participant to help the researcher with expanding their knowledge (Ibid). The same open and dynamic nature of the semistructured interview might also tempt the participants to share something they might regret at a later date.

### **3.7.2 Macro-ethics**

Considering how this current thesis might contribute in a broader and more global perspective is another important part of the ethical issues. This means considering how this thesis might contribute to esports and if it will negatively or positively influence anyone who is a part of it. While the interviews conducted in this thesis focus on both individual motivation as well as the factors influencing the journey from casual to professional, some of the results produced in the analysis might shed light on some of the barriers existing in current esports for new players. The goal of this thesis is not to “expose” any flaws or bad aspects of esports, but rather to understand the different factors of becoming professional and how the players deal with these.

## Chapter 4 - Analysis

In this chapter, the findings of the interviews conducted for this thesis will be presented in a thematically structured analysis. The four themes found in the collected data are: *Personal development*, *The influence of social relations in esports*, *The importance of support*, and *The reconciliation of esports with personal life*. These themes have been discovered by clustering emerging themes found by reading the transcripts and making notes in the page margin.

### 4.1 Personal development

The first theme concerns personal development and relates to esports players feeling that a personal experience of progression contributes to the transition from casual gamer into the competitive level of esports. For this theme, the following subordinate themes have emerged as a result of the empirical data: *The experience of self improvement*, *The importance of setting goals and having a purpose*, *How individual confidence impacts success* and *Performance in competitive matches*.

In this theme, the informants describe how their own individual performance, goals, and general self improvement factor in as they make their transition into the competitive esports scene.

#### 4.1.1 The experience of self improvement

All of the participants contributed much of their success in the esports scene to how hard they work and how well they manage to improve their skills and talent in the game. The experience of self improvement is highlighted in numerous ways as something that keeps players motivated and engaged, and this also acts as a driving force for their transition into the competitive scene.

Both HWI and AWI also reported a feeling of personal motivation whenever they experience improvement in any way. HWI describes how the experience of learning motivates him:

*“Hver eneste gang jeg spiller på hold der kan jeg mærke at jeg lærer noget nyt mere eller mindre og så får jeg det ind i sit eget spil og så på den erfaring. Det driver mig.”* (HWI,

appendix 5). For HWI, the integration of new skills and improving upon his gameplay motivates him.

Similarly, AWI finds self improvement motivating because of the feeling of progression:

*“(…) jeg kan godt lide den progression der er med holdet hvor du udvikler dig.”* (AWI, appendix 4). It can be noted that for both informants, being in a team seems to be integral to how their improvement is facilitated. For AKH, the sense of self improvement is also seen as a very motivating experience:

*(…) Det giver jo altid endnu mere end at man spiller mod nogen der er lige så gode som sig selv fordi det presser en selv til at spille hurtigere og til at tænke hurtigere, og så føler man sig lige pludselig meget blessed mod folk der måske ikke lige er SÅ gode igen.* (AKH, appendix 3)

For AKH, it is an element of competition that creates self improvement because he becomes optimally challenged. This also becomes a very motivating experience when he gets to employ his improved abilities to beat someone else in competition. Further aspects of competition will be explored later in the analysis, but in relation to self improvement, there seems to be an aspect outside of just becoming better for your own sake, but also to content with rivaling players in the environment. Improving is also something that AKH has experienced as a result of rigorous hard work and training when he describes:” (...) *sådan det der med at man skal lige altid sidde lige i skabet når man skal lave hovedstød eller at den bare lige skal sidde oppe i hjørnet hver gang, fordi ellers så går den ikke ind mod de allerbedste. og det er mere det man bruger sådan en træning til, hvor at det andet det er mere sådan lidt/. det højner ens niveau og det gør selvfølgelig en mere skarp.*” (AKH, appendix 3). While HWI and AWI attributes their improvement to playing and working in a team, AKH highlights training and competition as the prime factors that have facilitated his progression.

In summary, the informants generally all feel motivated when they experience a sense of self improvement and progression in their skill level. For some, the motivations stems from their development being facilitated in a team environment while for others it has its origin in the personal hard work and stride towards competition and experiencing the chance to outperform potential opposing players.

#### 4.1.2 The importance of setting goals and having a purpose

The next sub theme that emerged in the informant reflections is about how having goals and a sense of purpose both helped them work harder as well as getting a more intrinsic enjoyment out of esport. AWI talks about how establishing certain goals has helped him staying motivated to keep playing.

*(...) Jeg arbejdede faktisk på et tidspunkt med en sportspsykolog, og jeg skulle lave en sætning med hvad mit formål med at spille det var. Så jeg tror at det/ Det der i hvert fald giver mig motivation det er formålet med mit spil. Og det føler jeg at jeg kan opnå, fordi så er der stadig noget vej. (AWI, appendix 4)*

Interestingly, AWI also shares that he feels motivated, not just by a sense of progression, but also knowing that there is still a certain goal he has not reached yet. This is also echoed by AKH, who describes how himself and his team feel very motivated when they start a new season because they have new goals they wish to accomplish:

*(...) men så går der alligevel lidt tid i de der 2-3 måneder hvor man starter igen, hvor man er: “Okay nu glæder jeg mig også til at vi starter igen”. Og så kommer motivationen ligesom tilbage fordi “Nu skal vi eddermame også gøre det bedre i år”. Og så bare træne rigtig meget og så bliver vi gode. Nu ligger vi måske på en 7. plads, og måske højere oppe i tabellen. Hvor 8. pladsen så det er det der skelner. Så ryger der 8 fra og det er så finaleturnering. Så lige nu så er vi alle sammen super motiveret. (AKH, appendix 3)*

For both AWI and AKH, the sense of purpose by working towards a concrete goal keeps them engaged. Likewise HWI also reports that the absence of clear goals and expectations can be detrimental to the progression of a team:

*(...) og det er noget mange danske hold har problemer med, det er at de ikke er gode til at forventningsafstemme og fortælle hvad de sådan forventer af hinanden, og til at starte med der havde vi lidt forskellige forventninger [på holdet]. Det ender så med at vi snakkede om det og vi blev ved med at have*

*dialog om det og til sidst der fik vi stablet nogle systemer sammen (...)* (HWI, appendix 5)

For HWI, not having established goals can be a potential barrier for any team because each individual might have different personal goals.

In summary, having goals and a clear purpose seems to motivate the informants and there are also experiences that seems to suggest that making sure to have goals in alignment with each other is necessary for players to thrive with other players in the community as well.

### **4.1.3 How individual confidence impacts success**

The next sub theme concerns how the confidence of esports players shape their transition into the competitive scene, and how this affects their motivation and general success. For all three informants, their confidence have at some point shaped their experience of being an esports player in numerous ways.

For AKH, what first got him into trying out in at professional esports was experiencing that he had talent for the game in a more casual setting:

*(...) så røg jeg til en turnering og så fik jeg 2. pladen til den første turnering, og så tænkte man "ej det kan jeg da godt finde ud af", og så begyndte man at tage til turneringer mod folk.* (AKH, appendix 3)

AKH describes attending a social tournament in the game of FIFA, in which he found out that he was very good, and so this became the springboard for him to start attending more tournaments and working towards playing at a more serious and competitive level. When playing for stakes, AKH has great confidence because of his perceived level of skill. For AWI, his confidence is very affected by expectations and the pressure of wanting to do well. He describes the experience of trying out for a team for the first time after failing to make it on a former tryout: "*(...) nu har jeg prøvet for et rigtig godt hold. Et top 4 hold i national liga. Jeg var satme nervøs fordi, for der havde jeg også prøvet på et Tysk hold som så endte med at sige*

at de ikke ville importere en på min rolle”(AWI, appendix 4). In contrast to how AKH experienced a success in one tournament which gave him the confidence to keep participating in more tournaments, AWI describes how he did not manage to get accepted into a team on their tryout, which affected his confidence when trying out for a new team after. AWI also describe the importance of not letting your confidence be affected by failure as a very important aspect of becoming an esports player:

*(...) så det er måske lidt frygten der kører lige nu. Om man er god nok og om man får andre muligheder. Jeg tror lidt at det er den der kører på. Men jeg har i hvert fald lært mig til bare, at det er godt hvis du kan tilgive dig selv og så komme videre fra det så du ikke bare sidder og kører rundt i ring med det.*  
(AWI, appendix 4).

From the quote it seems that AWI thinks that a lack of confidence can be a detrimental barrier to an esports players' potential development if they let mistakes and failures shake them too much. He also have experienced concerns about if he is good enough to warrant an opportunity to play for a team, which induces a feeling of fear. HWI supports this by saying:”(...) *dengang jeg spillede på scenen, der var jeg rigtig nervøs og der endte jeg med at lave et dårligt play som endte i at vi faktisk tabte kampen, og det var semifinalen.*” (HWI, appendix 5). For HWI, his confidence directly affected his performance in a negative manner and caused him to make a crucial mistake. Somewhat similar to AWI being nervous for being tested in a tryout, HWI had his confidence shaken when he had to perform in front of a live crowd.

In summary, their perceived level of skill and general confidence have held great influence on all three informants. In some cases, feeling confident about themselves is very motivating and can lead to them pursuing new goals. Conversely stressful situations like playing in front of crowds and trying out for teams seems to negatively affect confidence and sometimes even performance.

#### **4.1.4 Performance in competitive matches**

This sub theme regards all the different experiences the informants have had with different performances and how their achievements have shaped their journey as esports competitors.



Having a good showing in competition can be a great for giving the player a sense of accomplishment and motivation as shown by by HWI when he says: *“(...) men jeg synes at det er fedt for jeg får lyst til virkelig at performe for så at vise dem her at jeg faktisk kan gøre nogle ret fede ting.”* (HWI, appendix 5). For him, performance is not just about getting a certain result, but also to prove himself to people in the community. This also leads in to another quote from HWI where he states: *“(...) og som Lars Løkke siger i sin tale så bliver man “judged på sin performance, og ikke by the looks”. Så jeg tror helt klart at det er det der gør det.”* (HWI, appendix 5). For HWI, he is very mindful about the fact that people are judging him by his performance and he needs to do well in order to show what he can do and to shape the community's perception of him as a performer. AWI is also focused on how his performance influence people around hi, but this is with a bigger focus on how this can potentially shape his career: *“Og hvis du performer godt, så ser folk dig som et godt mærke som de godt vil investere i. Så det vil sige næste gang at et nyt hold de skal kigge efter tryout, så hvis de kender dit navn, så har de tendens til at tage det.”* (AWI, appendix 4). AWI focuses on how his performance and accolades might contribute to how other organisations view him and therefore give him potential future opportunities.

AKH views performance and achievements as something that creates a lot of pressure to do well. As he describes a situation in which his team needed to perform well in order to qualify for an event:

*(...) og det ligger selvfølgelig også et pres, fordi vi kunne have afgjort det i tirsdags, og så havde vi kvalificeret til den her finale, men nu SKAL vi ud og vinde en kamp mere ud af de tre kampe vi spiller og vi har to svære hold, så det lægger en del pres, og dem bag ved en kommer hele tiden op.* (AKH, appendix 3).

This shows that not only does AKH consider the potential for future achievements depending on his performance as something that pressures you to do well, but it also shows that sometimes you can look back at past bad performances and feel pressured to do better. AKH also takes note of rivaling teams and their performance and achievements, which puts even more pressure

on him to do well. AKH also highlights the rigor of having to perform constantly: “*Så starter man måske med at spille 20 kampe fredag og så er man allerede helt smadret lørdag, fordi det er jo også hårdt når man spiller på højt niveau at anstrenge sig så mange timer.*” (AKH, appendix 3). For AKH it seems to require a good amount of mental endurance to master the constant pressure of having to perform at a high level against rivaling competitors.

In summary the informants consider their performance in competition to be something that influences their standing in the esports environment and might potentially provide them with opportunities. For some it might induce a sense of pressure to outperform others as well as performing to the best of your ability which can potentially be detrimental to their success. Players tend to look at their own as well as other players past and future performances when they evaluate their own perceived abilities.

## **4.2 The influence of social relations in esports**

The next theme found in the interviews covers how having friends, working with their team, being in competition with other players and teams, and gaining a reputation with accolades in a community influences the informants in their transition into becoming an esports player. The three sub themes presented will be: *Working in a team*, *Competition in the community*, and *How reputation and friendships influence the career*.

### **4.2.1 Working in a team**

When becoming a professional esports player, an early thing to adapt to for many players, is being a part of a team. This environment affects the way that the game is being played and AWI states: “*Altså det er mere at du ikke kun spiller for dig selv, så når du skal begynde at spille hold så er det nogle lidt andre kommunikationer, og lidt andre regler.*” (AWI, appendix 4). AWI had to adapt to playing for other people than just himself, which means that it has been necessary for him to communicate with other people. HWI have also experienced a difference between playing alone and playing on a team:

*Altså det er meget ændring. Man kommer sådan ind i et struktureret system, sådan når du spiller competitive matchmaking så spiller du for dig selv og du*

*spiller for at du gøre det godt og så prøver du at vinde på at det du gør vinder, hvorimod at på et holdplan der skal man sammen lægge aftaler og så er man rollebaseret på hvad forskellige spillere gør og hvordan det ligger til deres styrke, hvorimod det andet er lidt mere individuelt* (HWI, appendix 5).

Interestingly, HWI has also experienced that this new structure and dynamic makes it possible to work around each individual and create roles for everyone. HWI describes the team dynamic as something that potentially creates benefits for each individual on the team if they abide by the rules and planning. AWI also finds that working in a team allows him to also focus on his own game and reflect more on himself as a player:“(…) *jeg fik en stor indsigt, også hvor vigtigt det var at uddele opgaver til holdet, så alle ligesom har mindre at tænke på så man ligesom kan fokusere på sit eget spil også*” (AWI, appendix 4). He further adds that working in a team with other players and coaches has helped him reflect more on his own abilities:“(…) *jeg fandt faktisk ud af at frem til da jeg kom ind på holdet, der havde jeg ikke nogen idé om hvorfor jeg gjorde noget. Jeg gjorde det bare.*” (AWI, appendix 4).

For HWI, there is an element of evaluation in his team:“(…) *og så tager man det efter kampen og det kan godt komme til at tage op til 1/2 time, hvor man snakker om den kamp man lige har spillet der varer 45 minutter.*” (HWI, appendix 5). This communication helps the team develop both as a unit and individually. This also goes for whenever the team experience failure as AWI states:” *De har egentlig bare kigget videre hvis jeg har tabt en serie. Altså selvfølgelig kigge på hvad der gik galt, men mest bare kigge fremad, hvad gør vi næste gang i stedet. Så du ikke sætter fokus på fejlene.*” (AWI, appendix 4).

HWI also describes his experience with how important open communication is to how well a team does in esports:”(…) *det der er nøglen ved vores hold for eksempel det er at der er åben kommunikation, så man snakker om alt i åbent forum og tager konflikter og løser dem sammen.*” (HWI, appendix 5). Open communication as a tool to success seems to have some relation to the importance of setting goals and having common interests on the team. HWI also reckons that if a team fails to regulate expectations with each member they are more likely to experience issues:

*(...) og det er noget mange danske hold har problemer med, det er at de ikke er gode til at forventningsafstemme og fortælle hvad de sådan forventer af hinanden, og til at starte med der havde vi lidt forskellige forventninger. Det ender så med at vi snakkede om det og vi blev ved med at have dialog om det og til sidst der fik vi stablet nogle systemer sammen (...)* (HWI, appendix 5).

Communication is highlighted as integral to a teams success for HWI. Feedback also becomes an important aspect of having a well functioning team. For HWI, it has helped him grow as a person: *“Ja jeg er vokset som person for når man snakker om kritik, når man snakker om fejl, og ændringer af spillestil og sådan.”* (HWI, appendix 5). Communicating different opinions becomes about being able to handle criticism and feedback from others: *“(...) og så vokser man en som person fordi man oplever mange forskellige meninger og bolde oppe i luften som siger “hey, vi har det sådan her som vi synes vi skal gøre det””* (HWI, appendix).

Finally, both AKH and HWI have had experiences in which the team dynamic became instrumental in motivating each member to work hard and perform well. AKH describes how his team felt at the start of a new season with the chance to perform better than they did last season: *“(...) Og så kommer motivationen ligesom tilbage fordi “Nu skal vi eddermame også gøre det bedre i år”. Og så bare træne rigtig meget og så bliver vi gode.”* (AKH, appendix 3). Conversely, HWI also feels that the team motivate each other, but for him it is not as much motivation stemming from the team looking to perform well, but rather the team benefitting from the synergy they create when they work well together: *“(...) det skaber bedre synergi mellem os og det skaber en bedre holdånd og det skaber et bedre sammenhold også”*. (HWI, appendix 5).

In summary, the dynamics of working with a team is generally described as being a motivating experience that helps the performers grow both on an individual level as well as the team growing as a unit. This also means that they have to adapt to new rules and learn to not just play for themselves in order to function properly.

## 4.2.2 Competition in the community

Naturally in a sports environment, competition is a big aspect, and for the players who participated in the interviews for this thesis, they have experienced competition as something that can be both motivating and induce stressful feelings. All informants reckon that competition with other teams and players can cultivate personal progression and keep them engaged:

*(...) altså den der med at der er noget på spil hver gang man spiller, det med elo points og man kan komme op og blive bedre og bedre, det motiverede mig til at gøre det på et hold og se hvor godt vi kunne gøre det der* (HWI, appendix 5).

For HWI, playing in competition against other teams with risks and real stakes is what motivated him to create his team. The risk of losing as well as the prospect of gaining something keeps him engaged. Another thing characterizing being in competition is as highlighted by AWI, that it is necessary to look at what rivaling teams do and implement that into his own game in order to to be successful: *“og der er meget med at du skal se andres gameplay. Hvad det er de laver. Og så egentlig kopiere det, eller tage nogle principper og implementere det i dit eget.”* (AWI, appendix 4).

Interestingly, including the opponent in competition is not exclusive to learning from what they do and adapting to it, but players can also influence each other with their attitudes as shown by AKH: *“ (...) jeg kan ikke klare det mentalt at folk de ikke har nogen ambitioner, fordi jeg ikke føler at det er en ordentlig kamp. Og min styrke det er helt klart når folk de gerne VIL spille FIFA.”* (AKH, appendix 3). Spirit of competition between players becomes integral to both the enjoyment as well as engagement. Facing off against an opponent where both sides feel like they are the better players forsters a better performance: *“ (...) men de har nok ego til at tænke at de nok selv er bedst i kampen. Der er jeg bedst til at spille mod folk, når de tror nok på sig selv.”* (AKH, appendix 3).

Another aspect of competition that is highlighted by the informants is the feeling of ongoing rivalries and how they compare themselves to others. Beating rivaling teams and players is important for the prestige it gives in the general community as illustrated by AKH: ”

*(...) det betyder meget hvem der lige er den bedste i nordjylland fordi der er ingen tvivl om han er den mest populære blandt de nordjyske klubber, for hvem vil ikke have en lokal spiller der gør det godt? Jeg vil gerne have den højeste løn selvfølgelig også. (AKH, appendix 3).*

The competition between teams and players is not just about winning tournament prizes, but they are also thinking about it as if they are competing for potential future opportunities in the esports organisations. Looking at the accolades and how well rivaling teams and players perform also puts pressure on the others, as shown by the quote from AKH about someone he considers a rival in the industry:

*(...) Lige nu der spiller han bare fuldstændig sindssygt godt, og jeg har ikke lyst til at møde ham derovre, fordi at man bare ved hvor god han er for tiden, og det presser jo en selv lidt fordi man tænker “Nu skal jeg være endnu bedre”, og der er ikke nogen der kan finde en løsning på ham. Det kan jeg heller ikke selv. Det kan godt presse en selv fordi jeg tænker “Shit hvad så hvis jeg møder ham i første runde før gruppespillet (...) (AKH appendix 3).*

When other players are doing very well it puts pressure on the others to perform as well or even better, which can be stressful. As shown by AKH, there is also a big focus on trying to “find a solution” to the good players in the industry. Fearing a good competitor can therefore also be demoralizing at the prospect of the opposing competition being too strong.

In summary, competition seems to be something that all the informants thrives in to some degree, and the feeling of risks and playing against other people with similar goals as their own becomes very engaging. The informants generally compare themselves to other players and uses this to learn and improve themselves, but they also experience pressure when they see rivaling teams and players do well.

### 4.2.3 How reputation and friendships in the industry influence the career

Friendships, the social environment, and how people generally perceive esports athletes at a personal level is something that all three informants have experienced to be very important factors in terms of esports success. The general esports industry in Denmark is described by AKH as very open and welcoming:

*I Danmark er det rigtig godt [det sociale miljø] sådan iblandt spillere, hvor vi næsten alle sammen er venner uden for banen, men i udlandet på twitter og sådan nogle ting, der er der mange der får svinere. Så på internationalt plan competitive miljø der vil jeg sige det er lidt hårdt fordi folk godt kan være lidt onde mod hinanden, men i Danmark der er det sjældent at der sker sådan nogle uenigheder, også fordi vi har kendt hinanden også før det blev stort, og det er også det der gør at den danske scene på en eller anden måde er så populært fordi man kan mærke folk de har det godt.* (AKH, appendix 3).

For AKH, the esports scene in Denmark is still in its early stages and the feeling of being in an environment of people with common interests sparks friendships which generally creates an enjoyable experience. The quote from HWI from earlier also describes why he thinks esports is very accessible in Denmark: *“Jeg tror fordi at miljøet er så accepterende over for alle og som Lars Løkke siger i sin tale så bliver man “judged på sin performance, og ikke by the looks”. Så jeg tror helt klart at det er det der gør det.”* (AWI, appendix 4). AKH also thinks that being friends with teammates outside of esports helps with reducing some of the stress and pressure:

*Jeg tror at det betyder rigtig meget i og med at presset måske ikke føles så stort når man har hinanden som venner, så hvis den ene fucker op den ene aften så tænker den anden ikke bare “Kæft en idiot, jeg gider aldrig møde ham igen”, han skal afholdet”, fordi at man stadig godt kan lide personen.* (AKH, appendix 3).

Interestingly, AWI describes his experience with the danish esport environment to be less welcoming: *”Samtidig så miljøet, det er sådan lidt toxic.”* (AWI, appendix 4). Denmark is described as a good place for talent development, but the interest in staying in Denmark is limited: *“I Danmark er der noget kultur med talentudvikling for eksempel, men når man når et vis punkt så gider spillerne ikke være der længere.”*(AWI, appendix 4).

Both AKH and AWI describe the importance of building a reputation in the community as well as conducting yourself well in order to succeed:

*(...) Så det skal man også have i og med at det skaber bare god omtale. nu har jeg været i TV2 Nord for lidt tid siden. 3-4 uger siden. PR kan give sponsorer, for pengene de skal jo komme et eller andet sted fra. Og det kommer jo fra sponsorer ligesom i alt andet sport. Så det der skal til det er at man også har en fanbase der ligesom går ind og siger "Vi vil gerne se ham" og "Vi støtter ham" og ja "hvis han promoverer et eller andet så kan vi godt finde på at købe det". Og det er det der skal til for at man kan blive fuldtids FIFA spiller i hvert fald. Det er at man skal have en fanbase der er stor nok til at der er nogen der kan få et eller andet ud af det* (AKH, appendix 3).

AKH describes the importance of building a fanbase that wants to support you as a performer, as well as the importance that building a brand and doing PR is to establishing yourself in the industry. AWI also focuses on conducting himself a certain way in order to shape public opinion of him: *”Der har været noget sociale medier hvor jeg har prøvet at fremstå på en bestemt måde. Jeg vil gerne prøve at fremstå på en bestemt måde og reklamere lidt med hvor hårdtarbejdende man er. Måske slikket røv lidt på nogle spillere for at komme ind. Noget socialt.”* (AWI, appendix 4).

In summary, having friends in the community and being mindful of how you present yourself to the public is described as important factors for succeeding in esport. Not making connections with the right people could potentially harm the career of the players as they will not be a name well known enough to have people invest and let them advance.



### 4.3 The importance of support

The theme of support emerged from the informants all having experiences with support from their parents, team members, and fans shaping their experience with becoming professional. Three sub themes have been identified: *Receiving support from friends and family*, *Support within the team and organizations*, and *Fan and community support*.

#### 4.3.1 Receiving support from friends and family

All three informants describe a relatively similar pattern to how their parents have shown support to their decision to pursue a career in professional gaming. For all three, they experienced that their parents did not support their initial decision as shown by HWI:

*Altså mine forældre de var rimelig meget imod det, de var sådan "okay, nu skal i op" og "vi synes du spiller for meget" og så slukkede de for internettet. Mine venner de synes det var fedt, altså det er jo ikke fordi jeg har negligeret og vennerne for at spille Counter Strike, altså jeg har altid fundet en god balance, men det er helt klart mine forældre som der har været rigtig meget imod dem selvom jeg spillede fodbold og havde et arbejde og passede skolen, så synes de alligevel at jeg brugte for tid foran computeren. Fordi de er fra den der tidligere generation som ikke helt forstår det.* (HWI, appendix 5).

While his friends supported him from the beginning, his parents not only did not support him, but actually directly created barriers for him by cutting off internet access and not letting him practice. AWI further adds: " (...) mine forældre de var også "Du spiller lidt for meget". *Tænkte det var afhængighed.*" (AWI, appendix 4). It is experienced by the participants that their parents wanted to limit their consumption of gaming either out of fear or not wanting them to neglect other aspects of their life. AKH adds that he has been working part time as a teacher to finance his esports career, and in the beginning his parents wanted him to get more work out of fear that he would not make enough money from esports: " (...) hvor tidligere så var de sådan "Ej du skal lige have lidt mere arbejde" fordi at lærervikar måske ikke altid gav nok timer." (AKH, appendix 3).

Interestingly, for all informants their parents started supporting them as they began to become successful and make money from their esports career. This is illustrated in a quote from AKH:

*Jeg vil sige at min far og min mor, de var lidt skeptiske i starten fordi jeg sad og spillede noget for meget, men så når der begynder at komme success i det og de kan se at der begynder også at komme penge i det og det bare går fremad flere steder og det bare bliver større og større så kommer der bare sådan "Okay så er det fair nok. Han har en vigtig kamp på onsdag, så tjener han en del penge hvis han vinder den kamp. Så den kamp skal han bare ha' muligheden for at vinde" (AKH, appendix 3).*

When the informants started making money and generally shows a certain amount of success their parents started to support their endeavors and let them pursue becoming professional. The quote above also shows that they stop putting up barriers and as shown in another quote by AKH: "Og en hel weekend hvor mit hold kom forbi dengang vi spillede champions league. De lavede jo mad og så spiste vi når vi havde tid." (AKH, appendix 3), they actually contribute by letting them allocate their own time as well as helping by housing practice sessions and providing dinner. HWI adds that his parents also provide material support by lending him their car so he can attend events: "De låner mig deres bil når jeg skal til Lan så jeg kan køre." (HWI, appendix 5). The parents even start to develop an interest in the esports career as mentioned by HWI as well: "De spørger ind til det hver eneste gang de ringer til mig nu og spørger hvordan det går med det." (HWI, appendix 5).

While AKH and HWI both described the barriers of not being supported by their parents, AWI interestingly describes being motivated by his friends doubting him and advising against pursuing his career in esports:

*Jeg tror at til at starte med, det der skubbede mig det var at jeg var sådan semi god, men jeg ville gerne have at de sagde jeg var god, mine venner. Men de sagde at der var lang vej, og det gav mig lidt blod på tanden. Så skulle jeg lige vise dem. Det var i hvert fald det der gjorde at jeg kom i challenger første gang. (AWI, appendix 4).*

Not feeling supported by his friends gave him the will to prove them wrong and led to his initial success in the competitive scene. While not being supported generally is identified as a barrier by AKH and HWI, for AWI it had the opposite effect and became integral for the beginning of his career.

In summary, the informants all reported that their parents were against their initial pursuit of a career in esport, providing little to no support and even becoming a barrier. As they progress and become successful, the tendency is that the parents begin to show increasing support. The support of the parents generally seems to be of a logistical nature as they allow the players to have time to invest in their career and help them with material support. Finally, an interesting find was that one of the informants reporting that the limited support shown by his friends initially led to his success in the beginning of his career.

### **4.3.2 Support within the team and organizations**

All the informants have experienced different kinds of support in their professional environment as well. All three report that the teams they have played on generally support each other emotionally and with guidance. One example by AKH especially shows how the team support each other and how this even manifests itself in their performance:

*(...) så de har kun 20 minutter de der FIFA kampe, så de går lidt stærkere. Og så vi kan bare se at det går helt galt hvis han ikke tager sig sammen, og han er meget bedre end det der. Og han smider bare bolden hen til den anden hele tiden og vi sidder bare og tænker: “Jeg håber ikke han scorer flere mål”. Men så går vi hen og fortæller ham at det kan han godt og “Kom nu det er ikke sådan du er, hvis du skal spille næste uge så ved du godt at du skal spille bedre end det der”. Så går han ind og spilder brandgodt og går op og scorer til 2-2, og vi kiggede bare hinanden sådan: “Wow hvor kom det fra?”, for han lignede virkelig bare en spiller der bare var helt nede. Også fordi han lige havde smidt kampen dagen før, så han lignede bare en der tænkte “Det*

*gør jeg igen, det gør jeg igen, det gør jeg igen”. Men det gjorde han så ikke, for lige pludselig tog han sig sammen (...) (AKH, appendix 3).*

AKH describes a game where one of his teammates performs really bad, and the team supports him both by telling him that he is better than that and that he can perform better which directly influences his performance afterwards with him playing extremely well. While the cause of his win can be attributed to his own performance, it seems likely that the encouragement from his team led him to play his absolute best. Another example of the team supporting each other is illustrated by AKH and how his team deal with members feeling insecure: “ (...) *men det er lidt svært sådan at hjælpe hinanden op med usikkerhed inden man skal ind og spille en kamp udover at fortælle at du godt kan og "Du ved hvad du skal" og sådan noget. Man siger ofte "Du ved hvad du skal" og "Du kan godt".*” (AKH, appendix 3). While insecurities can be hard to deal with, encouraging words from the team sometimes help.

Teams also support each other emotionally when people experience failure after a game, this is something that two out of the three informants have had experiences with. AKH puts it this way: “*Ja det gør vi, så sidder vi derinde og snakker og hjælper og gearer hinanden lidt op, og giver hinanden tips hvis det nu ikke går så godt og så videre.*” (AKH, appendix 3). This is also exemplified by HWI:

*(...) også hvis de har en dårlig oplevelse, det er mest det der hedder tilt, så prøver man at få dem i godt humør, tager nogle timeouts, får dem helt ned og få dem til at grine og mærke at det ikke er så super seriøst og så prøver vi igen.* (HWI, appendix 5).

The team supports both by cheering each other up after a bad experience, but they also make sure to take some of the serious aspect away from playing so people feel less demoralized by their mistakes. AKH and his team make an effort to highlight the good things they do in each game, even after having a bad game:

*(...) så i stedet for at gå ind og blive sur fordi at han ikke har trænet lige så meget som at han burde have gjort, så går man ind og siger "okay du spillede jo godt 80% af kampen", og ligesom får bygget ham op.* (AKH, appendix 3).

The team is also cognizant of the fact that their support is necessary in order for everyone to perform optimally and they make sure to show as much encouragement to each other as possible in order to have everyone play their best:

*(...) også fordi at han skal jo spille dagen efter, og han skal også præstere, ellers kan det være fatalt for os jo, også for mig jo. Også fordi han skal jo ikke have det dårligt på grund af det. Så bliver vi nødt til at gå ind at hjælpe hinanden (...).* (AKH, appendix 3).

HWI also has had experience in which the team support each other emotionally outside of the game. On his team, they help each other out with issues not necessarily related to the game or esports:

*(...) også hvis det er der nogen der har nogle problemer uden for counter-strike så snakker vi også om det og det er sådan at vi er to personer som der har rimelig meget autoritet. Så hvis de har noget at snakke med folk om så har vi lidt sådan en "storebror-figur" agtig, hvor de så kan komme til os og så at snakke om det hele.* (HWI, appendix 5).

Another factor of team support is coming from the coach which is described to be supportive in multiple ways by all three informants. Primarily, the role of the coach is described as one that provides guidance and tips on how to improve as reported by AWI:

*Altså i tyskland der havde jeg en træner der hed [Navn] og han hjalp mig til at forstå spillet. For jeg fandt faktisk ud af at frem til da jeg kom ind på holdet, der havde jeg ikke nogen idé om hvorfor jeg gjorde noget. Jeg gjorde det bare. Det kørte rimelig meget på system 1, hvor han lærte mig at*

reflektere over hvad der er man skal gøre, og hvad der er det rigtige at gøre.

(AWI, appendix 4).

The role of the coach is experienced as one that helps the players develop their talents in the game. HWI describes the coach as someone who keeps a birds eye view on the team and their dynamics: “Så kan han se alle de valg man laver undervejs, og så vil han komme ind og spørge ind til undervejs “Hvorfor gør du det her, og går ind her på det tidspunkt?”. og han har simpelthen det her sjette syn.” (HWI, appendix 5). While the coach is mostly described as someone who provides guiding support by helping the players and team improve, one of the informants has had an experience where the coach provided emotional support to one of the team members:

*(...) men det har en af vores andre spillere prøvet, hvor han sad herinde i stuen faktisk, vi sad og spillede her. Han taber en rigtig vigtig kamp, så han bliver faktisk mega sur. Han er kun 13 år og begynder simpelthen at græde .  
Og så går vores træner hen og trøster ham og han tager ham med ud og snakker med ham. Så de er meget supportende, også sørger for at folk de har det godt. (AKH, appendix 3).*

For one of the three informants, the role of the coach is not just to support with guidance, but they also make sure every player is feeling well and help by comforting them if they get sad or frustrated.

Support in the team generally takes the form of guiding and emotional support. The team rally each other with encouragement and cheer each other up whenever someone has a bad experience. Additionally the team members help each other with problems and issues outside of esports as well. The informants generally see this as instrumental to creating successful performances and helping the team succeed as a whole. The coach supports with guidance and to a lesser degree emotional support.

### 4.3.3 Fan and community support

Two of the informants have had experiences with fan support and they feel encouraged and motivated when they experience fans, both in live audience and online, cheering them on.

AKH describes playing with fans watching:

*Det er meget anderledes i forhold til hvad det var på scenen i FIFA til at starte med, nu hvor der er så mange tilskuere. Der er mange der lader sig påvirke er det utrolig meget. Jeg synes at det er mega fedt når folk de råber. Så på den måde så styrker det jo ligesom en at nogen sidder og følger med og kigger og hepper på en og "Sådan!" og "Godt lavet!" og sådan nogle ting. Det får en til at føle sig sådan, lidt mere end bare en gamer på en eller anden måde. (AKH, appendix 3).*

Fan support is described as something that may influence the performers directly, and being cheered on and getting praised brings them great enjoyment and a feeling of being something special. In another example is this, AWI describes how his team had a fanbase in Germany: *"I Tyskland der var det mega fedt, for der havde holdet faktisk en fanbase, og der sad de og skreg ens holdnavn. Det var meget fedt."* (AWI, appendix 4). The importance of having a fanbase is highlighted by AKH when he was asked about what he thinks are very important factors to becoming successful in esports. Players can stream their gaming online with fans watching and interacting with them: *"Der skal både det til at man har en fanbase. Det er rigtig rigtig vigtigt for klubberne og det er også det jeg er i gang med at bygge op. Nu er jeg begyndt at streame her for halvanden måned siden og jeg har fået 1357 følgere bare derinde. Og der er dem der betaler hver måned for at subscribe hvis du kender til det"* (AKH, appendix 3). AKH describes two different kinds of support from fans in addition to the moral support. The fans help getting players in the spotlight, and they also provide monetary support when donating money.

Another aspect of streaming is the fan interaction and this is described by AKH as something that has been very helpful to his development and engagement with his esports career:

*(...) de skriver alt muligt og de stiller også spørgsmål, fordi nogle gange kan det godt blive lidt kedeligt at spille de der 30 kampe fordi 15 af dem man møder måske ikke er særligt gode, så begynder bare, man tænker “Kan den her kamp ikke snart slutte?”. Så er det lidt sjovere når man får spørgsmål der. (AKH, appendix 3).*

The interaction with the fans supports the player by keeping them entertained and engaged even though the practice of playing the game itself might be a boring activity in itself. Furthermore they show their support by cheering and giving a sense of having company and not just playing alone:

*(...) nu sidder jeg her alene og der hjælper det også at streame faktisk fordi jeg er blevet bedre til at koncentrere mig, fordi at der er mange mennesker der sådan kigger med og skriver “kom nu AKH” og sådan nogle ting, i stedet for at man bare sidder derhjemme og man bare tænker “så kan det også bare være ligegyldigt, fordi jeg spiller bare igen næste uge. Så på den måde hjælper det bare at have nogen til at bakke en op (...) (AKH, appendix 3).*

AKH describes how being “in the company” of his fans and viewers when playing helps him focus and makes the task of practicing more meaningful.

Fan support generally seem to have a positive effect on the transition to a professional career in esports. They provide moral and monetary support, as well as providing the players with a platform to make a name for themselves. Finally, they provide players with a sense of companionship that keeps them focused and engaged to keep playing. In situations where they need to perform in front of a crowd, the audience provide aid by cheering them on.

#### **4.4 The reconciliation of esports with personal life**

The final theme that emerged from the interviews is how esports is integrated into the personal life of esports players, and how this has affected their journey into the competitive scene. All informants have reported experiences of their esports career directly influencing their personal life outside of esports and how this have shaped their motivation and also presented some obstacles.



Two sub themes will be presented: *How becoming professional affects enjoyment of the game*, and *Life adjustments*.

#### **4.4.1 How becoming professional affects enjoyment of the game**

The intrinsic enjoyment of playing the game is something that seems integral to keeping players engaged. For all three informants, they started playing the game as a leisure activity out of the sheer enjoyment of playing the game, and as they started having success in the professional scene they each had different experiences with how it changed their enjoyment of the game. The informants all agree that enjoying the game is very important in order to succeed in esports. HWI states:

*For at blive en esports spiller så skal du have “the drive” for det spil du spiller som du godt kan lide. Du skal kunne sætte dig ned og så vil du sidde og spille det i 14 timer på en lørdag. Du kan godt blive frustreret, men du må ikke miste glæden for spillet. Så snart glæden er væk, så kan du ikke blive esport spiller (HWI, appendix 5).*

The opinion that enjoyment of the game is needed in order to transition into the professional scene is supported by AKH:

*Man skal helt klart have det der med at man skal kunne lide at spille FIFA, fordi at hvis man går fuldtid på det, så er det godt nok meget FIFA men skal spille. Så er det jo hver dag at man skal stå op at spille 3-4-5 timer, og måske lige lidt taktiske overvejelser og lidt andre ting. Så det er også noget man skal have lyst til. (AKH, appendix 3).*

Both HWI and AKH agree that it is vital to keep enjoying and loving the game in order to be successful. Even though they both argue for the need for enjoying themselves, AKH does describe some factors that can reduce his enjoyment of the game, usually being the time required of him to put into the game: ” (...) og det føles også nogle gange lidt dårligt når det er arbejde, sådan at man kommer hjem søndag og kan se “okay jeg mangler stadig 15 kampe.

*Så de næste 6 timer der sidder jeg derinde foran.*” (AKH, appendix 3). Having commitments to fulfill can detract from intrinsically enjoying the game, especially if those commitments interfere with something else. He continues: “ (...) *Så det kan godt nogle gange være lidt træls at det føles lidt mere som et arbejde og man skal gøre det. Hvor det før var en hobby, og det er lidt en mærkelig grænse at bryde.*” (AKH, appendix 3).

Conversely, HWI states: “*Jeg ser det stadig som en hobby, og jeg ser det stadig som en hobby selvom det er competitive og jeg lægger mellem 40 - 50 timer hver uge i at spille counterstrike.*” (HWI, appendix 5). For him, the esports still absolutely feels like a hobby and he enjoys it no matter how many hours he needs to put in his practice. He does however add later that: “*Det man gør for at udvikle sig det er at man ser andre kampe, man downloader det man kalder “demoer” og der kan man se hvordan pro spillere spiller forskellige spots og strategier, hvor det svarer til at “scoute” sine modstandere i fodbold, og det er ret “grindy”, altså du skal virkelig ned og arbejde og det er ikke det sjoveste.*” (HWI, appendix 5). This does indicate that some aspects of being an esports player still can reduce his enjoyment of the game, this being closely related to AKH and his issues with the need to invest many hours into practice or doing something in the game that is not in alignment with what they think is fun.

One interesting note from AKH, is that even though he finds esports to be more of a job than a hobby, he does miss it whenever he is away from it for a period of time, suggesting that he does harbor a certain intrinsic enjoyment for playing the game. This is shown in a quote where he talks about being away on holiday:

*(...) Og der kan man godt komme til at savne det, for det er jo på en eller anden måde, sådan en ven. Sådan at så sætter man sig derind og det er noget man er rigtig god til, ligesom at man kan savne at være ude og spille fodbold med sine holdkammerater, man savner også sine holdkammerater når man ikke har set dem længe over en vinterferie, så er det godt at komme i gang igen. Sådan kan man også godt have det med FIFA altså. Så på den måde betyder det også noget for en, og jeg tror også jeg altid ville komme til at købe spillet, også selvom jeg en dag stopper med at spille meget.* (AKH, appendix 3).

In summary, enjoying the game is critical to keeping the players engaged and is a very important factor for making the transition into the competitive scene possible. It seems inevitable that some aspects are bound to compromise the players enjoyment of the game, like practice sessions and the many commitments. The informants have varying opinions of if they perceive esports as a job or hobby, while they all agree that there is an element of serious play that is not found in casual gaming.

#### 4.4.2 Life adjustments

All three informants report that it was necessary for them to make several adjustments to their personal life and routine in order to make it possible to pursue a career in esports. The overall most prominent adjustments highlighted are centered around needing to create structure and planning, the need for a massive time investment, and finally the need to make sacrifices. AWI and HWI both make schedules for their everyday and when they need to practice. As stated by HWI:

*Jeg har prioriteret ved at sætte ned på et skema og struktureret sådan "Okay, jeg skal nå det her på uni og arbejde inden jeg skal træne", og så "okay nu kan jeg nå at træne det her og så kan jeg lige nå at se en demo". Det handler virkelig bare om en struktur i hverdagen for at få det til at hænge sammen. (HWI, appendix 5).*

In order to integrate his esports career into his already established life as a uni student, HWI has needed to create structure by having a schedule for everything he needs to get done. In addition to having to structure themselves properly, there is also a massive time commitment as described by AKH:

*(...) og så skal jeg også træne hver dag. Så er jeg i københavn hver tirsdag og onsdag, og der kan jeg jo ikke arbejde på skolen heller. Ja, det kræver bare meget tid, og nogle dage bliver jeg også nødt til at sige til min kæreste "jeg kan ikke" fordi jeg er nødt til at træne eller spille, selvom det egentlig lyder lidt nørdet. (AKH, appendix 3).*

This time commitment even means that he does not always have time to do what he wants. HWI adds:

*Som det ser ud lige nu så er der en der arbejder nat så han kører hjemmefra klokken 21 og så arbejder han fra 22 til 06, og de dage han ikke arbejder der træner vi fra 19-23, og de dage han arbejder træner vi fra 17-21, men det er meget fleksibelt og vi prøver at komme op mellem 4 og 5 gange om ugen. (HWI, appendix 5).*

As seen by both quotes above, players and teams need to dedicate a lot of their time to practicing. While making time and creating structure helps, the need for this has also been a barrier when the players attempt to make efforts in other areas of their life. This is exemplified by AKH:

*(...) fordi sidste år og der blev det mere sådan, fordi jeg gik i 3.G: "Kan du tage til København i den her weekend for at spille? Og Sverige i næste weekend?" og: "Næ. Jeg har 5 afleveringer den her weekend og jeg skal også gøre det godt i dem for jeg vil godt have et godt snit". Og der blev det sådan en praktisk barriere fordi at jeg var sådan lidt "Jeg skal også gøre det godt i min skole fordi jeg skal have et godt snit til når jeg er færdig for ellers kan jeg ikke læse den uddannelse jeg gerne vil læse"*  
(AKH, appendix 3).

Wanting to allocate time and effort to other aspects of his life became a barrier to his esports career which delayed his transition to the following year when he had finished school. As such it becomes necessary to make sacrifices in other aspects of their life in order to properly pursue a career in esports, which also is highlighted further by AKH as he talks about canceling a night out with his friends to practice esports:

*(...) dengang jeg lige kvalificerede mig til champions league, hvor jeg tænkte "okay drenge nu tager vi i byen", da dropper vi det dog fordi det var så stort. Så er det andet ligegyldigt. (AKH, appendix 3).*

One last identified life adjustment is mentioned by AKH, which is the integration of his esports personality as part of himself. For AKH he has experienced the need to reconcile his esports career with his normal life to a degree where it is a part of his whole identity:

*Ja, altså det er begyndt at blive meget mere at være den person, fordi nu kan jeg jo ikke rigtig tage i byen mere. Der var en dag hvor jeg var sammen med min kæreste og hendes venner og deres kærester, hvor vi så var i byen og jeg blev stoppet rimelig mange gange (AKH, appendix 3).*

Esport influences his life in a way that it becomes difficult to separate the two. He adds: “ (...) *Der synes jeg at det var lige lidt for meget når man bliver genkendt på vej hjem fra byen.*” (AKH, appendix 3), explaining that it can be a struggle when the professional esports identity overlaps with personal time.

The overall life adjustments need have been identified as creating structure, investing a huge amount of time, and finally sacrificing other aspects of their personal lives. The main find of this sub theme is that all the informants have experienced the need to somehow integrate esports into their everyday lives as well. For some this has been about needing to create structure so esports does not interfere too much with their other life goals, while for one of the informants, esports have in some cases “taken over” his life as he has been at social events or trying to do well in school at the same time.

## **4.5 Summary**

With the analysis of the data done, a synthesis with the collective findings of the factors that affect the transition into becoming a professional esports player can now be presented. The first finding is that the majority of the informants are driven by feeling a sense of progression in their skill level and improving in the game. For two of the informants, self improvement is best facilitated in a team effort, where for one it came down to an individual effort. Secondly, It also becomes a supporting factor for their transition into the professional scene due to the skill level it requires for them to succeed in competition another find is that having goals and a sense of purpose motivates all three informants and for two of them the feeling of pursuing a goal is also attributed as a supporting factor for their success in esports. For one informant, not having clear goals and purpose is a direct barrier to having success in esports. A third find is that a high amount of individual confidence is connected to making the transition to a professional career easier because it directly influences how they perform. Two of the

informants reported having experiences with their confidence being shaken by feeling pressure which led to their insecurities becoming a barrier to their success. This leads to the fourth find of the analysis, which is that performance in competitive matchups is important for creating pathways to the competitive scene. Two of the informants have experienced that a successful showing in a competition has awarded them with opportunities that supported their transition into the competitive scene. All three informants also acknowledge the pressure this can put on players, which for two of them have resulted in them underperforming and having their performance become a barrier instead of a supporting factor.

A fifth find is that the social environment is a huge factor when making the transition into the professional scene. The players need to learn to function in a team and not just play for themselves. The team can be a huge supporting factor to the success of each individual as they help each other grow and improve. A sixth find of the analysis is that competition can be a supporting factor as well as a barrier to the success of esports players. Competition provides a platform to improve themselves and keep them engaged by the thrill of being optimally challenged. Conversely though, two informants reported having experienced the pressure of their competitors to be a potential barrier to their own success, especially since they might be competing for the same goal. The seventh find is that all three informants reckon that having a good reputation and having friends in the community is a force for any esports player due to the social nature of the environment.

The eighth find is that receiving support from family and friends as well as from teammates have been integral to all the informants. None of the informants had the support of their parents in the genesis of their journey, but interestingly none of them describes this as a barrier to their success. One of them even felt motivated to prove his parents wrong and attributed his initial success to this. It is however the case for all three informants that their parents now support them both emotionally and practically which has helped them. The team and coach support is described by the informants as the team helping each other with emotional and guiding support, while the coach predominantly provides guidance. Interestingly, one of the informants reports that team members also support each other with endeavors outside of esports, which he reckons also helps the team in its advancement in the competitive scene. Fan and community support is also described by two of the informants

as integral to successfully becoming professional, as they provide both monetary support and encourage them to do better in competitions.

A ninth find is that reconciling esports with their personal life is very important for a successful transition into the professional scene. In some cases this means that trying to balance esports with other aspects of their lives have proven to be challenging and requires a tremendous amount of planning and work. The time investment needed can be a supporting factor if they are willing to sacrifice other aspects of their lives, but it becomes a barrier for those not able to invest themselves fully and integrating esports fully into their life. For one of the informants however, the transition has been way more smooth and he has not experienced any issues with reconciling being an esports player with life outside of esports. In the tenth and final find, the informants agree that enjoyment of the game is very important in order to succeed. The informants generally have different opinions on if they consider esports work or a leisure activity and how this has shaped their enjoyment of the game. One still feels intrinsic enjoyment even though he practices many hours each day, while the other two define it more as work, and report that the hard work has reduced some of their enjoyment of the game.

## **Chapter 5 - Discussion**

### **5.1 Findings of the analysis in comparison to current literature**

In the first part of the discussion, the findings of this current thesis will be compared to the existing literature found in the review and expanded search in order to find similarities and discrepancies as well as to address the gaps in current literature. This will be done for each of the four main themes from the analysis.

#### **5.1.1 Personal development**

The analysis shows that the informants generally are driven and by feeling progression and improvement through training and hard work. Some experience this as a result of team effort while others experience the biggest improvements when they practice by themselves. This find matches the international literature in relation to how improving and feeling competent generally is found to be very motivating (Kim & Thomas, 2015; Spray, 2006; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Brown, 2017; Seo, 2016) as well as a great catalyst for advancing in the professional esports scene, like it is shown in the stage models created by Kim & Thomas (2015), Bloom (1985) and Côté (1999) in which all three are characterized by initial advancement through skill improvement. Likewise individual improvement through teameffort is also described in the model by Morgan & Giacobbi (2006) as a determining factor for talent development.

It was also found in this current thesis that setting goals individually and as a team both are important factors in becoming a professional esports player. Personal goals that are created out of their own volition has according to the data in this thesis been very motivating and instrumental for one of the informants success. This matches the findings presented by Spray (2006) and Hays et al (2007), where it is argued that working towards personal goals with a sense of autonomy predicts success and personal motivation.

A high amount of individual confidence has in this thesis been found to be of great utility for the informants, which is in alignment with the current body of literature as it is illustrated by Hays et al (2007). The perceived level of skill and mastery of the activity as well as getting good results will according to current studies lead to better performance and motivation for



athletes. Hays also argues for low confidence being potentially detrimental to the success of athletes, which also aligns with the finding of this thesis that the informants have experienced doubt about themselves and nerves which have led to bad performances and this being a barrier to their success in esports.

Performance in competition and pressure to do well have in this thesis been identified as something that stresses the performers and can be detrimental to their success in esports. This is especially the case when they compare themselves to the performance of other players or they feel pressure to perform well by organizations. This matches the existing international studies that shows organizational pressure to perform well is a potential stressor and related to ego orientation and diminished intrinsic motivation (Kristiansen, 2010; Spray, 2006; Brown, 2017; Kim & Thomas, 2015; Morgan & Giacobbi, 2006).

### **5.1.2 Social relations in esports**

This thesis found that the esports players have experienced that working together in a team and adapting to the structures and rules is very instrumental to their transition into the professional esports scene. This matches the literature which generally have shown that the teamwork is a big aspect of what drives esports players as it pertains to the need to adapt to the team rules and other people (Kim & Thomas, 2015; Martončík, 2015; Seo, 2016). This is also supported by Kristiansen (2010) who found that climates with a focus on mastery and self improvement instead of performance is less stressful. Kim & Thomas (2015) contributed the need to adapt to the team rules and internal competition to be a potential stressor and barrier the individual esports players. However this was not the case for any of the informants in this thesis as they all only reflected on their working with their team as a positive and supportive experience. Playing for other people than themselves is also noted in the thesis as an important factor, which is in alignment with Martončík (2015) and Winter (2016), who both found that a sense of belonging in a group becomes vital to the success of esports players. Finally, individual development was found in this thesis to be something the informants generally also have experienced as a result of the feedback and evaluation they get from their team. This relates to the informational support given by the team and need to guide others identified by Rees & Hardy (2000) and Martončík (2015).

Another find of this thesis is that the informants generally thrive when feeling optimally challenged in competition. This is related to their need to show what they can do and gaining a good position in the community, but it has also been attributed to the thrill of the challenge itself as well. This supports the empirical data by Weiss & Schiele (2013), Kätsyri (2013) and Seo (2016) which states that esports players will strive towards challenge in order to feel competent and to gain fame as well. However it was also found that competition in some cases becomes a barrier for the informants' progressions in esports as watching other people and rivaling players do well puts pressure on themselves to do better, which can result in anxiety and self-doubt. This matches the studies by Spray (2006) and Kim & Thomas (2015) that both found that athletes will feel stressed about others performing better than themselves and will measure their own perceived level of skill in accordance with rivals as they are outperformed.

It was also found in this thesis that the informants have experienced that maintaining a good reputation and a public presence is has been very important for their success in esports. Acting a certain way in public is important because the Danish esports environment is described as intimate where many people know each other, and this is directly in opposition to the international scene where the environment is described as way more hostile. The other part of this is using reputation to build a fanbase who wants to support them, which also is described as an important factor for becoming professional. Interestingly, the finding of the need to maintain a reputation is relatively unique. While Seo (2016) and Winter (2016) both found that integrating yourself in the esports environment is important, they do not address how reputation and how the players publicly conduct themselves directly affect their transition into the esports scene.

### **5.1.3 Support**

Receiving support from family and friends have in this thesis been found to provide great utility for esports players to become professional. The informants all received support from their parents when their professional career became successful and were provided with material and logistical help. This matches the models of talent development and social support presented by Morgan & Giacobbi (2006) and Rees & Hardy (2000), where tangible and

emotional support from the parents help athletes develop their skills and progress in their career. One very interesting find however, is the find that none of the informants experienced any kind of support from their parents in the beginning before they became professional. This is in direct opposition to the findings of Bloom (1985) , Côté (1999), and Morgan & Giacobbi (2006) who all found that early support from parents by being encouraged to pursue sport is instrumental to the progression into a professional career. It could be argued that the informants started their esports career later in their lives after becoming grown up, and as such the support would already have shifted towards team and coach support being more important. However, the informants reported that the fact that their parents and friends not providing them with support became on the the main catalysts for their pursuit of a professional career. This is a very unique find that does not match with the current international body of literature. It was also found that team and coaches support by providing guidance and feedback, and team members support each other emotionally as well. This matches the studies by Morgan & Giacobbi (2006) and Rees & Hardy (2000) that both found that coaches and teams support each other both with guidance and emotional support. Another interesting find is that this thesis found that esports teams also support each other emotionally with issues outside of esports. It is stated in studies by Rees & Hardy (2000) and Gould (2002) that teams can support each other by comforting each other and providing a sense of security. It is however not specified whether this also pertains to issues outside of esports. Finally it was found for this thesis that support from fans and the audience has helped them tremendously in the transition into professional esports. They specifically have experienced feeling encouraged by crowd reactions and feeling a sense of companionship while engaged with their fans. This is a unique find because none of the international studies found have studied the meaning of fans and audience. While Weiss & Schiele (2013) argues that esports players are driven by a need for recognition and fame, the exact meaning of audience and fan support has not yet been explored.

#### **5.1.4 The reconciliation of esports with personal life**

This thesis has also found that the reconciliation of esports with personal life has been a huge factor for the informants. For some of the informants this has meant integrating esports into their own perceived identity and a need for a huge time investment and planning. The

integration and transformation of identity matches with the findings of Seo (2016) and Winter (2016). They also found that in order to become a professional esports player there is a need for internalization of esports into their own identity. The time investment and planning being potential barriers are also addressed in these studies (Seo, 2016; Winter, 2016). The final find of this thesis has been that informants have found that their enjoyment of playing the game also is a big contributing factor to their success in esports. They have experienced that the rigorous training needed has been a barrier to their enjoyment and motivation, which potentially could harm their transition into the professional scene because it no longer feels like a hobby, but more like a job. This also matches with the findings of Seo (2016) and Winter (2016), in which it is found that esports is a “serious leisure” because it is a hobby turned into a job. This was also found to decrease their informants intrinsic enjoyment of the game. Kim & Thomas (2015) also found that intrinsic motivation decreases as the players progress further into their professional career when they are tasked with having to practice hard to overcome obstacles.

### **5.1.5 Discussion of the unique findings**

Generally many of the findings of this thesis have supported the current international literature found in the literature review. However the findings that reputation and a fanbase are important contributing factors is a find that is uniquely found with the Scandinavian esports players in thesis. As it is described by HWI and AKH, the Danish esports community is more intimate in the sense that most people talk and know each other, and this might be the reason that reputation branding of themselves is presented as an important factor in a Scandinavian context. The find that none of the informants received any support from their parents before they actually showed success in their esports career is in itself interesting, but the fact that this was a contributing factor to their success rather than a barrier is even more interesting. The literature that found support from parents to be a vital factor in early talent development was created with data from traditional sport, and this can possibly explain the discrepancy. Video gaming as a sport is still very new and has some bad stigmas associated with it, especially concerning addiction, which is what the parents of the informants also showed concern for. The fact that the informants still persevered could be attributed to the Danish esports community being very open and accessible and thus the informants had enough confidence to

prove their parents and friends wrong. However this would require further study to discuss in more detail.

## **5.2 Quality and trustworthiness of this thesis**

This second component of the discussion will be an evaluation of the quality of the conducted research for this current thesis. Lincoln & Guba (1985) presents four criteria for evaluating the quality of qualitative research which will be used for this discussion. The four proposed criteria are: *Credibility*, *Transferability*, *Dependability*, and *Confirmability* (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005, p. 6).

*Credibility* refers to how well the constructions of the social world are represented in the study. This essentially serves to highlight if proper representation and if the processes for the design and coding for the analysis are transparent.

The interviewguide and coding for the analysis have both been created with no peer debriefing which does diminish the credibility as a potential researcher bias could have been addressed better by getting a second opinion (Frost & Kinmond, 2012, p. 173). One way this might have affected the quality of the data is that the design of the interviewguide. The data from the interviews have identified a significantly larger amount of factors that have helped the esport players become professional than factors that have been barriers to their success. As the introductory chapter showed in piece 1.4, i have a personal interest in esport and to see the limited research in the field thrive and this could potentially have created positive biases in the creation of the interviewguide as well as during the conducted interviews.

This also leads into the next issue with the credibility of this thesis, being the degree to which member checking have been included. Lincoln & Guba propose that member checking by getting feedback and validation from informants on the data collected should be used in order to enhance the credibility of qualitative research (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005, pp. 6-10). The informants were briefed about the research question and general focus of the thesis, however the questions were not discussed with informants in detail. In the interview process, the semi structured design meant that the informants were fed ideas or asked to further detail some of their comments, which does enhance the credibility of the data collection, as this means that the data is of a collaborative nature. It would have enhanced the credibility of this thesis if the

informants were shown the data after transcription in order to gain their validation and potential critique of the researchers analysis of their experience. This would also address some of the potential bias of the the researcher in the interpretation of the data.

The second criteria of evaluating the quality of qualitative research proposed by Lincoln & Guba (1985) is *transferability*. This refers to how well the results of the study can be generalized or transferred to other contexts (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005, pp. 6-10). The best way to enhance the transferability is by presenting data and work that reflects a transparent structure and rich descriptions of the processes of the thesis. To enhance the transferability as much as possible, steps have been made to make the rigour of this thesis as explicit as possible. The interviewguide and fully transcribed interviews have been included in the appendix so that anyone wishing to transfer the work to another context understand the intent of each methodological step taken. The rules used for the fully transcribed interviews have been made explicit as well. For the coding and analysis, before the final four themes were presented, a reference is made to the list included in the appendix with all initial themes found in the three interviews so that it is made explicit how the four themes of the analysis were identified. A literature review has been included in chapter 2 of the thesis with the goal to illustrate what kind of gaps in current literature that this thesis aimed to fill. The narrative literature review does as it is stated in part 2.1.2 of chapter 2 not have specific requirements to show the same rigour and rigid structure in the search as a systematic review. Even so, some ideas from the systematic review, like inclusion criteria and a presentation of keywords used, have been integrated into the literature review of this thesis in order to create more transparency to enhance transferability. It should also be noted that the narrative literature review is not designed to be replicated, as it serves as a continuous synthesis with a broad focus that can be updated rather than replicated(Ferrari, 2015). It can still be argued however, that the transferability is diminished by the absence of a more explicit presentation of how the final seven studies were found. While a flowchart is included depicting the exclusion process in the review, an argument can be made that the process still is somewhat unclear. It should be noted that the major exclusion came from the step where articles not depicting anything on esports were removed because the body of literature on esports still is very scarce. This leads to the final topic on transferability of this thesis. Due to the extremely limited body of literature found for the initial review, the decision were made to expand the search by a complementary

investigation of traditional sport psychology. This was not done through a review and as such the process has been very selective and could have been made more transparent by conducting a secondary literature review.

The third proposed criteria by Lincoln & Guba (1985) is *dependability*. This refers to how well the results of the research can account for potential change in environment and context the research is conducted (Ibid). For this current thesis there have been clear goals with the research question and what was initially intended was carried out by utilizing a specified approach and methodology. As stated in the above, a detailed interviewguide and rules for transcription as well as guidelines used for the coding have been included should the need for replicating the study arise. Measures to further evaluating the stability of the data in different environments have not been taken due to the time consuming nature of having peers replicate the study or revisiting the initial coding after a long period of time, but both of these could in theory improve the dependability of current thesis.

The final proposed criteria is *confirmability*, which refers to the internal coherence and data which is free of researcher bias to the point that other people can read the data and confirm the results (Ibid). The steps taken in this thesis to enhance confirmability have been to address the data in relation to existing literature and empirical studies and record both theory satiation as well as findings that were unusual and unique. As discussed in the credibility discussion, personal researcher bias should be considered as something that might influence the data, and this can be addressed through audits like a researcher diary or a journal detailing the coding process of the analysis (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005, p. 6). While a short description of the coding process is detailed before the analysis, this is by no means exhaustingly described. A journal or diary with personal reflections might have enhanced the confirmability of this thesis, especially with the potential bias described in the personal interests earlier.

### **5.3 Implications of this thesis**

In this third part of the discussion the implications of this thesis will be discussed in two parts: First a discussion of implications for future research and then a discussion of the practical implications.

#### **5.3.1 Implications for future research**

Esport is a fairly new institution and as illustrated by the literature review in chapter 2 it is still a relatively unexplored domain in the field of psychology. The goals of this thesis have been to investigate the supporting factors and barriers to becoming a professional esport player in a Scandinavian context. This has however been done through a fairly small sample size of three informants, and it would therefore be useful to further study these factors with larger samples in order to investigate if the same findings would be eligible in a larger population. The informants for this study all play different games at a professional level, and it would possibly provide some utility to future research to account for this, as different types of games likely entail some differentiating experiences with esport communities overall. It should also be noted that all the included informants were people who succeeded in becoming professional, and as such it is reasonable to assume that they all had mostly positive and successful experiences to share. Future studies might benefit from getting data from people who tried and failed to become professional esport players in order to gain a better understanding of more potential barriers.

The findings of this thesis generally supports most of the existing international literature on becoming a professional esport player or athlete. However some interesting findings would benefit from further investigation. First the finding that reputation and how you esport players conduct themselves can be a big determining factor for their success. This finding is unique and if explored further could possibly shed light on some aspects of the cultural resources in Scandinavian esport communities. Secondly, the finding that the informants in this thesis felt that the absence of early support from their parents and friends motivated them to prove everyone wrong. This finding is in contrast to what the current published studies indicate. As



such it is recommended that future research further investigate Scandinavian esports cultures and how they compare to other parts of the world.

### **5.3.2 Practical implications**

There is no shortage of studies on motivation and talent development in sport psychology, but esports is a very unexplored territory. The very scarce research found in the literature review of this thesis proves that more attention needs to be paid to esports from academia as the sport seems to grow at a rapid rate.

The results of this thesis show that while there are many similarities in the factors affecting the journey to a professional esports career between a Scandinavian country and other countries, some differentiating factors should be taken into consideration. The findings could prove useful to Scandinavian esports organizations trying to help players in their pursuit of a professional career.

## Chapter 6 - Conclusion

The goal of this current thesis have been to answer the research question: *What kind of factors affect the transition from being a casual player to a professional esports player?* The reason for this have been that current psychological studies in the field of esports are scarce and to create a bigger interest in esports as a phenomenon in the field of psychology as it has shown to be a fast growing institution worldwide. Furthermore the current body of literature that exists is scattered across countries from the entire world, and creating a study with a narrowed down focus to Scandinavia was argued to possibly gain a deeper insight into the cultural resources influencing the transition for esports players. In order to synthesize the state of the art body of studies, and to identify any gaps in these, a narrative literature review was conducted in chapter 2. The review yielded 7 studies, of which 4 were quantitative studies and 3 were qualitative studies. Due to the very small body of literature found for psychological studies on becoming a professional esports player, it was decided to expand on the literature by scoping and including traditional sport psychology studies. The identified gaps in the literature was found to be that it has not been done in a Scandinavian context, but covered a wide array of different countries. It was also found that a need for addressing the cultural resources in the esports community would be useful.

Then a series of semi structured qualitative interviews were conducted to investigate what kind of supporting factors and barriers esports players experience when pursuing a career in professional esports. Due to the exploratory nature of the research question and the focus on the experience of the individual esports player, a phenomenological approach was chosen as the philosophy of science with the method for analysis being Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis. Through the coding and analysis, four main themes emerged: *Personal development, The influence of social relations in esports, The importance of support, and The reconciliation of esports with personal life.* In the analysis it was found that the informants confirmed many of the the findings of current international studies. The informants described the hard work and reflexivity needed for self improvement to progress further in their career, the importance of having goals and a purpose, and that their individual confidence have been important factors that have affected their journey to becoming professional, which generally supports the current literature found in the literature review. It was also found that that

working with the team was generally have been very helpful to the informants by helping them reflect on their own strategies and getting feedback from others. These findings also support the current body of literature. One interesting find was the informants reporting that maintaining a good reputation and presenting yourself in a certain way was very important for their career success. This was attributed mostly to the potential opportunities they get through networking in the environment, and also the importance of building a fanbase who supports them. This was a relative unique finding because none of the current literature have found anything related to the importance of maintaining a certain reputation. It was also found that support from family and their organizations has helped the informants tremendously in their career, especially as it relates to emotional and informational support from their teams and coaches. This also supported the literature on support and talent development. Very interesting however, was the find that while the informants reported receiving support from their parents now when they are starting to be successful, none of them received any support when they initially started their esports career. Even more interesting was the fact that they felt motivated and the need to prove them wrong became a catalyst for their initial progress. This find is in direct opposition to the international literature and its general consensus that early support from the parents is integral to the development of athletes. Finally it was found that reconciling esports with their personal life has been necessary, both as it pertains to time investment and sacrifices, but also in relation to them having to integrate their esports identity into their identity outside of esports, which supports the existing literature as well. This current thesis has been able to confirm a large part of the existing literature on supporting factors and barriers in becoming an esports player, as well as having found some unique factors that possibly relates to Scandinavian cultural resources that should be further studies in future research.

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