



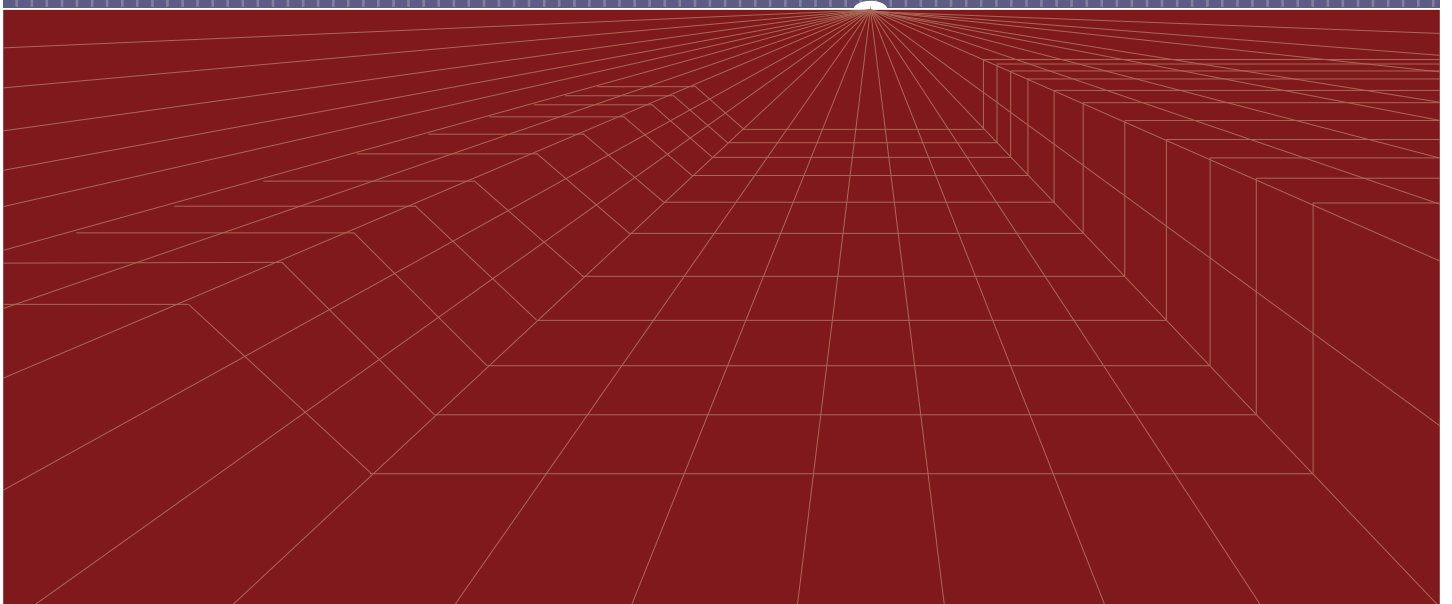
The Summary of  
The Swedish National  
Report 2007:12



THE SWEDISH NATIONAL  
BOARD FOR YOUTH AFFAIRS  
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# BEHIND the screen

– a Description of Those Who  
Play Computer and TV Games





## Preface

Studies by the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs on the leisure and culture habits of young people have shown that the new digital information and communications technology in many ways has changed the habits, conditions of life and possibilities for the young. Young people have found new ways to meet and communicate, but new lifestyles or youth cultures have also sprung up around the new information technology. Activities around computer games, for example, have become a common and central part in the everyday life of many youngsters.

The following article, *Behind the screen – a description of those who play computer and TV games (Bakom skärmen – en beskrivning av vilka som spelar dator- och tevelspel)*, has previously been published in the anthology *Unga och nätverkskulturer – mellan moralpanik och teknikromantik (Youth and Network Cultures – Between Moral Panic and Technology Romance*, Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs 2007:12). The anthology includes contributions from researchers who using various perspectives have sought knowledge about network cultures and what meaning they have for the socialisation and identity creation of youth.

More knowledge about how a rapidly changing society affects young people is critical. More knowledge about young people's situation and changed habits increases the potential for wise decisions and appropriate measures. Our hope is that this material can contribute with new knowledge about young people's situation, habits and interests and through this be meaningful to those working with youth or to those who want to know more about youth and computer games.



Torgny Sandgren

## Behind the Screen

– a Description of Those Who Play Computer and TV Games

### Leisure time significance and changed leisure habits

Our habits, our ways of spending time with each other, meeting and communicating have changed over the years and been affected by technological development. Trains, buses, cars and aeroplanes made possible closer contact and exchanges between people in different places. The possibility to reach many quickly snowballed when radio and TV became standard in households more than three decades ago. In the same way the new digital communications technology has come to play an important role in our everyday lives, not least for young people. Maybe Facebook and Lunarstorm are meeting places of the same dignity as the hamburger bar in the 1950's or the community centre in the 1970's? And maybe World of Warcraft, The Sims or Halo will give adults in the future as nostalgic feelings as Ludo or steam engines give the adults of today?

It is clear that digital communications technology has changed our way of living and communicating in several ways. These changes have also led to alarm and debate on possible negative effects, for example obesity and asocial behaviour. This article focuses on reviewing computer and TV games with the purpose of trying to describe who the players are and what meaning the playing has for youth. The discussion is based on a questionnaire study from 2006-2007 that went out to 6000 youngsters between the ages of 16 and 25 years<sup>1</sup>. In the questionnaire there were questions addressing, among other things, what they did in their spare time and what they think about their health, school and the future. Statistical calculations were made by Jonas Månsson at Växjö University.

The report *New game – about young people and computer games*, published by the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs in 2006, contained an analysis of the group 13-20-year-olds and their computer and TV game playing. In this article we examine the group 16-25 years old. The article tries to answer the question of who plays a lot and who plays less, what the distribution between the sexes is, and what significance the parents' labour market situation has. Also, the impact of playing computer and TV games on young people's social situation, health, recreation, school and plans for the future is discussed. The ambition is to gain new knowledge that can give a deeper and richer understanding of young people's situation and habits and thus can be of importance for those working with youth or for others interested in the matter.

The Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs has in the past few years observed the habits and attitudes of youth<sup>2</sup>. On the whole, changes in habits and activities have not been so dramatic; music, TV, friends and sports have throughout the years been the most common activities. An important change occurred at the end of the 1990's when the new information technology through computers, the internet and mobile telephones became more widely spread and thereby influenced young people's leisure time and activities. New meeting places such as LAN, game centres and internet cafés now exist in many places in Sweden<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The study was carried out by SCB (Statistics Sweden) as a postal questionnaire with three reminders during the period November 2006 until January 2007. It was aimed at the portion of the Swedish population between 16 and 25 years of age. In total 2867 individuals answered the questionnaire, which is 48,2% of the selection of 6000 persons.

<sup>2</sup> For example *Leisure time in separate worlds* (1998), *Arenas for all – a study on the cultural and leisure habits of youth* (2005) and *They call us young* (2003).

<sup>3</sup> A description of various meeting places can be found in the publication from the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs, *New Game – about young people and computer games* (2006).

Changes also affect club activities and meeting styles. A growing commerce around games and the internet is taking place and becoming an important industry. Activities related to the new communications technology are also increasingly highly valued among youth. This is established in the Board's publication *Arenor för alla (Arenas for all, 2005)*. The publication shows that in 1996 only six percent considered computer-related occupations to be especially important, whereas six years later the number had risen to 15 percent.

## The most common leisure time activities

In the Board's youth questionnaire from 2006 questions are asked about what 16-25-year-olds do in their leisure time. Different studies on leisure time habits pose different questions and give different answer alternatives. It is therefore important to see the activities in table 4.1 in relation to a limited number of possible answers (the questionnaire had 29 alternatives). Not quite a third, 31 percent, report that they play computer or TV games a few times a week or more often. Playing computer games is thereby a more common activity than for example singing, playing an instrument or creating music (table 4.1).

**Table 4.1 The fifteen most common leisure time activities one or more times a week among youth, 16-25 years old. In percent**

Activity	Once a week or more often
Spend time with friend	88
Surf or chat on the internet	85
Help at home with food, cleaning etc	81
Read	60
Sports or exercise, but not in a club	58
Write	48
Sports or exercise, in a club	35
Walk around town with friends	33
Out in nature	31
Play computer or TV games	31
Sing, play instrument, create music	25
Go to restaurant, pub, bar	24
Go to café	20
Got to party	19
Participate in club activities	18

Source: Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs Youth Questionnaire 2006.

## How often young people play computer and TV games

There are questions in the youth questionnaire from 2006 on whether they play every day, every week, every month, every year, or never.

Seven of ten youngsters 16-25 years old play computer and TV games, 31 percent play every week or more often. This group (those who say they play every day or every week) we will call *highly active players*. Those who play every month or a few times a year make up 37 percent and will be called *seldom players*. Finally, 33 percent claim never to play (table 4.2).

**Table 4.2 Proportion of young people 16-25 years old who report that they have played computer or TV games in 2006. Percent<sup>4</sup>**

	<b>2006</b>
Every day	12
Every week	19
Every month	17
Every year	20
Never	33

Source: Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs Youth Questionnaire 2006

## Who plays computer and TV games?

The results from the youth questionnaire have shown that computer and TV games are a popular leisure time activity among youth. But who is it that plays? Are there differences between men's and women's playing? How is playing distributed between age groups? In this section we look at differences in playing based on age groups and gender as well as the socio-economic situation of the players' parents.

## Playing and differences between the sexes

Earlier studies have shown that the most frequent players are men. Results from the questionnaire in 2006 confirm this.

The biggest difference between the sexes exists among those who report that they play every day. Only 3 percent of the women report that they play every day, compared to 24 percent of the men. In other words, eight times more men than women play every day. Among men it is unusual to never play. Only one in ten reports that they never play computer or TV games. Among those who never play the proportion of women is four times that of men. Computer games can, however, be regarded as a relatively common occurrence among women since more than a quarter of them play at least once a month (table 4.3).

**Table 4.3. Proportion of young men and women, respectively, who report that they play computer or TV games, 16-25 years old. Percent**

	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
Every day	24	3
Every week	31	9
Every month	20	14
Every year	13	26
Never	12	48
Total	100	100

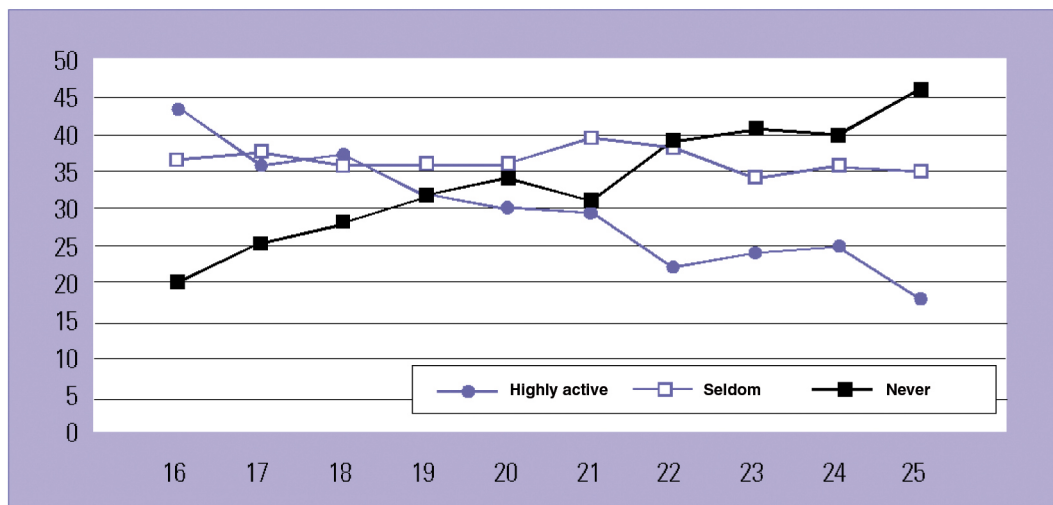
Source: Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs Youth Questionnaire 2006.

<sup>4</sup> In some tables the percentages add up to 101. This is due to rounding off as we have chosen to present the percentages in whole numbers.

## Playing in different age groups

Do they play equally much in the different age groups? Is playing more prevalent in younger or older age groups? In the Board's report *New Game – about youth and computer games* (2006) it was established that among 13-20-year-olds it was the group 13-15-year-olds that had the highest proportion highly active players (those who play every day/almost every day). What does it look like in the age group 16-25 in the questionnaire from 2006?

The questionnaire results show that the most highly active players exist among the 16-19-year-olds. The frequency of playing decreases with age. Among 16-year-olds 21 percent report that they play every day, which can be compared with 4 percent of the 25-year-olds. It is more than twice as usual for a 25-year-old never to play, than for a 16-year-old. Even though playing is more common in the younger bracket, playing is still widespread among 25-year-olds – three of ten play computer or TV games every month or more (figure 4.1).



**Figure 4.1 Young people's playing at different ages, 16-25 years. Percent.**

## Young people's playing and the parents' labour market situation

Does the parents' labour market situation have an impact on how much young people play? Table 4.4 shows young people's playing in relation to the father's and mother's situation on the labour market. The labour market situation is defined according to the classification by Statistics Sweden.

**Table 4.4 Young people's playing and the parents' labour market situation, 16-25 years. Percent**

	No work		Blue-collar		White-collar		Selfemployed	
	Father	Mother	Father	Mother	Father	Mother	Father	Mother
Plays every day	14	12	12	13	12	12	8	6
Plays every week	21	19	19	18	18	19	18	19
Plays every month	17	19	16	16	17	16	18	18
Plays every year	16	19	21	18	21	22	19	21
Never plays	32	33	32	34	33	31	37	37
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs Youth Questionnaire 2006.

How often young people play does not, to any large extent, relate to the parents' labour market situation. If we compare those who play every day with those who never play, however, we see a discrepancy among young people with parents who are selfemployed. In that group there is a slightly smaller proportion that plays every day and a somewhat larger proportion that never plays compared to the other groups.

### The significance of the parents' country of birth

Does the fact that the parents are born outside of Sweden have any significance for the young people's playing computer and TV games?

The questionnaire answers do not show any decisive difference between young people with parents born abroad compared with those who have parents born in Sweden. Young people with parents born abroad are, however, somewhat overrepresented among those who report that they never play (table 4.5).

**Table 4.5 Young people's playing related to whether their parents have immigrated to Sweden, 16-25 years. Percent**

	Every day	Every week	Every month	Every year	Never	Total
Parents born in Sweden	12	18	17	21	32	100
Parents born abroad	12	20	13	13	42	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs Youth Questionnaire 2006.

## The consequences of playing computer games for young people's social situation and health

In recent years the consequences of playing computer games for one's health have been discussed and debated. Alarm from politicians, professional youth leaders and parents has been observed. The alarm has often concerned consequences of playing for obesity, gambling addiction and moral misgivings about violent games.

In this section the social consequences of playing computer and TV games and its impact on experienced health are addressed. Does playing have consequences for social commitment? Are there differences in attitude to education and hopes for the future? What about health and exercising habits?

### Politics and social commitment

In the questionnaire there are questions about political interest and social commitment. Do those who play often differ from those who never play in their interest in politics?

The questionnaire results show that there are no big differences between the two groups. This means that the interest in politics is as high/low among highly active players as it is among other young people (table 4.6).

**Table 4.6 Playing frequency and interest in politics, 16-25 years, 2006. Percent**

	Highly Active	Never	Total
Very interested	8	7	8
Quite interested	29	32	30
Not particularly interested	37	37	39
Not at all interested	26	23	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs Youth Questionnaire 2006.

### How do those who play often feel?

The questionnaire from 2006 asks questions about health and how young people feel. How do the highly active players experience their health to be? Are there differences based on how often one plays?

Results do not show any big differences in symptoms of ill-health related to how often one plays. Those who play often, however, report being stressed to a lesser extent than the others. Twice as many of those who never play as of the highly active players feel stressed every day. Among the highly active players 7 percent experience stress as compared to 14 percent among those who never play (table 4.7).

**Table 4.7 Occurrence of symptoms of ill-health, 16-25 years. Percent**

	Highly Active	Seldom	Never	Total
<b>Headaches</b>				
Every day	1	3	2	2
Several times a week	12	13	15	13
Once a week	16	16	18	17
A few times a month	39	40	37	38
More seldom or never	32	29	29	30
<b>Stomach pains</b>				
Every day	1	2	3	2
Several times a week	10	10	11	10
Once a week	12	13	15	13
A few times a month	37	44	42	41
More seldom or never	40	31	29	33
<b>Difficulties falling asleep</b>				
Every day	5	5	7	6
Several times a week	18	18	16	17
Once a week	17	15	16	16
A few times a month	29	28	27	28
More seldom or never	31	34	34	33
<b>Felt stressed</b>				
Every day	7	12	14	11
Several times a week	25	28	33	29
Once a week	17	21	20	19
A few times a month	32	29	25	28
More seldom or never	18	11	8	12
<b>Tired during the day</b>				
Every day	15	17	21	18
Several times a week	39	38	36	38
Once a week	21	23	19	21
A few times a month	18	17	17	18
More seldom or never	7	5	7	6
<b>Sleeping difficulties</b>				
Every day	5	5	8	6
Several times a week	20	21	20	20
Once a week	18	19	15	18
A few times a month	28	30	27	28
More seldom or never	29	26	30	28

Source: Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs Youth Questionnaire 2006.

## Playing and alcohol consumption

The report *New Game* (2006) showed that those who played often drank less alcohol. A possible explanation is that it was youngsters 13-15 years old who played the most and this group drinks less often than older youth. What does it look like in the group of 16-25-year-olds?

The questionnaire from 2006 does not show any big differences between those who play often and those who play less based on alcohol habits. There does, however, appear to be a larger proportion of non-users among the highly active players. Among the highly active players 24 percent report that they never drink alcohol, which can be compared to 19 percent among those who never play computer and TV games (table 4.8).

**Table 4.8 Intoxication frequency, 16-25 years. Percent**

	Highly Active	Seldom	Never	Total
1 Never	24	17	19	20
2 Once a year or less	9	7	10	9
3 A few times a year	19	22	21	21
4 A few times a month	24	26	25	25
5 Several times a month	15	17	17	16
6 A few times a week	9	11	8	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs Youth Questionnaire 2006.

## Computer games and physical activity

In the last few years questions about obesity and passivity among youth have been brought up in various contexts. How does it look for those who play often, do they train as much as others?

Questionnaire results show that young people who play often do not report training less frequently compared to those who play less often. Among the highly active players 8 percent say they train every day, among those who never play, 7 percent. There is no big difference among those who say they train less often or never either. In the highly active group 17 percent report training less often or never, which can be compared to 18 percent among those who never play (table 4.9).

**Table 4.9 Amount of training among young people, 16-25 years. Percent**

	Highly Active	Seldom	Never	Total
1 Every day	8	7	7	7
2 Several times a week	41	44	39	41
3 Once a week	19	20	19	19
4 A few times a month	15	17	17	16
5 More seldom or never	17	13	18	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs Youth Questionnaire 2006.

## Future plans for education

In the youth questionnaire from 2006 the Board asked questions about what plans for education young people between 16 and 25 have. Are there differences between those who play a lot and those who play more seldom?

Among the highly active players 16 percent say they intend to enrol on a practical programme at a Swedish gymnasium (comparable to upper secondary school), which can be compared to 5 percent among those who report never playing computer or TV games. The questionnaire results also show that those who never play to a higher degree report that they intend to go to university. Among the highly active players 44 percent say they plan to go to university, among those who never play it is 58 percent (table 4.10).

**Table 4.10 Educational plans among young people 16-25 years. Percent**

	Highly Active	Seldom	Never	Total
Compulsory school (or equivalent)	0	0	0	0
Upper secondary – practical programme	16	8	5	10
Upper secondary – theoretical programme	3	2	2	3
Vocational training, non-Upper secondary	8	8	8	8
University less than three years	9	11	8	9
University three years or more	44	52	58	51
Don't know	19	18	19	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs Youth Questionnaire 2006.

### Future prospects

The 2006 questionnaire contains questions on how young people view the future. One question concerns whether they are pessimistic or optimistic regarding future prospects for the world in general. Can we see any differences between those who play often and those who play more seldom on the issue of future prospects? The questionnaire shows no big differences on the issue of future prospects between those who play often, those who play little and those who report never playing (table 4.11).

**Table 4.11 Future prospects for the world in general among the highly active players, 16-25 years. Percent**

Scale of 5	Highly Active	Seldom	Never
1	12	9	10
2	23	24	24
3	44	45	44
4	16	18	17
5	5	4	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs Youth Questionnaire 2006.

Comment: On a scale of 5 where 1 is pessimistic and 5 is very optimistic

# Summary and discussion

## Common activity

The questionnaire's results show that playing computer games and other computer-related activities are among the most common activities among youth. Seven of ten young people between the ages of 16 and 25 play computer and TV games, 31 percent play every week or more.

## The young men play the most

It is the men who play the most. The biggest difference between the sexes is among those who report that they play every day. Only 3 percent of the women say they play every day as compared to 24 percent of the men. Computer games can still be considered a relatively common occurrence among women as more than a quarter of them play at least once a month. The results of the questionnaire show that the most highly active players are found among the younger ones, in the group of 16-19-year-olds. It is more than twice as common for a 25-year-old never to play than for a 16-year-old. The proportion of youth with parents born abroad is somewhat overrepresented among those who report never playing.

## Consequences for the social situation and health of young people

Those who play often claim to be less stressed than the rest. It is twice as common for those who never play to feel stressed every day compared to the highly active players. Among the highly active players 24 percent report that they never drink alcohol, which can be compared with 19 percent among those who never play computer and TV games.

The questionnaire results show that young people who play often do not report training less frequently compared to those who play more seldom. The interest in politics and the view on the future does not differ either between those who play often and those who play seldom.

The results also show that those who never play to a higher degree report that they intend to go to university. Among the highly active players 44 percent say they plan to go to university, while it is 58 percent among those who never play.

## The effects of playing

The results from the Board's questionnaire indicate that those who play computer and TV games do not differ to any high degree from those who play more seldom. It is nevertheless important to establish that some results from research on the effects of computer game playing have not yet been published in Sweden, so therefore our knowledge about it is still incomplete. In 2005 the Swedish National Institute of Public Health carried out an analysis of 30 scientific studies on the effects of TV and computer game playing among children and youth. Taken all in all these studies show strong support for playing having positive effects on spatial skills and reaction time. They do not show any connection between playing and obesity<sup>5</sup>. Since no research on effects of playing computer games has been done in Sweden it is hard to draw any certain conclusions from either the Board's study or from other international studies. Regardless of possible effects of playing computer games, playing is a meaningful activity and cultural pattern for many young people.

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<sup>5</sup> Swedish National Institute of Public Health (2005). Hälsoeffekter av tv- och datorspelande. En systematisk genomgång av vetenskapliga studier. (Health effects of TV and computer game playing. A systematic review of scientific studies.)

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