

Comorbid Gender Dysphoria in a 16-Year-Old Adolescent Presenting with Gaming Disorder: A Case Report of a Behavioural and Family Therapy Approach

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Introduction

- Gender dysphoria refers to distress due to incongruence between gender identity and assigned sex.
- Some adolescents may use excessive gaming as both gratification and compensation for psychosocial distress, including unacknowledged gender identity issues¹.
- Gaming environments (e.g., avatars, online communities) can provide safe spaces for gender exploration and affirmation^{1,2}.
- Objectives: To explore the functional role of gaming in the context of comorbid gender dysphoria and demonstrate how a behavioural and family-based intervention supported a young person through treatment for gaming disorder.

Case Presentation

- Client: Marlie (pseudonym), 16, assigned male at birth.
- Gaming disorder, high online engagement (Rocket League).
- Left traditional school setting to do remote online from home, ceased attending gym, withdrew from real-life friends.
- Hidden Issue: Undisclosed gender dysphoria.
- Revealed: Mid-treatment, after therapeutic alliance and family sessions.
- Gaming Function:
 - Gratification: Success, status, tournament-level play.
 - Compensation: Relief from gender dysphoria, affirmation via online female identity.



Intervention

- Behaviour Activation (BA): Re-engagement with offline, rewarding activities.
- Contingency Management (CM): Structured parental reinforcement schedule³.
- Family Therapy: Brief Strategic Family Therapy to improve communication.
- Mode of Delivery: Weekly video sessions with individual and family components.

Results

- ✓ Reduction in time spent gaming
- ✓ Reduced reliance on gaming for gender-related coping
- ✓ Improved communication within family system
- ✓ Initiated gender-affirming care

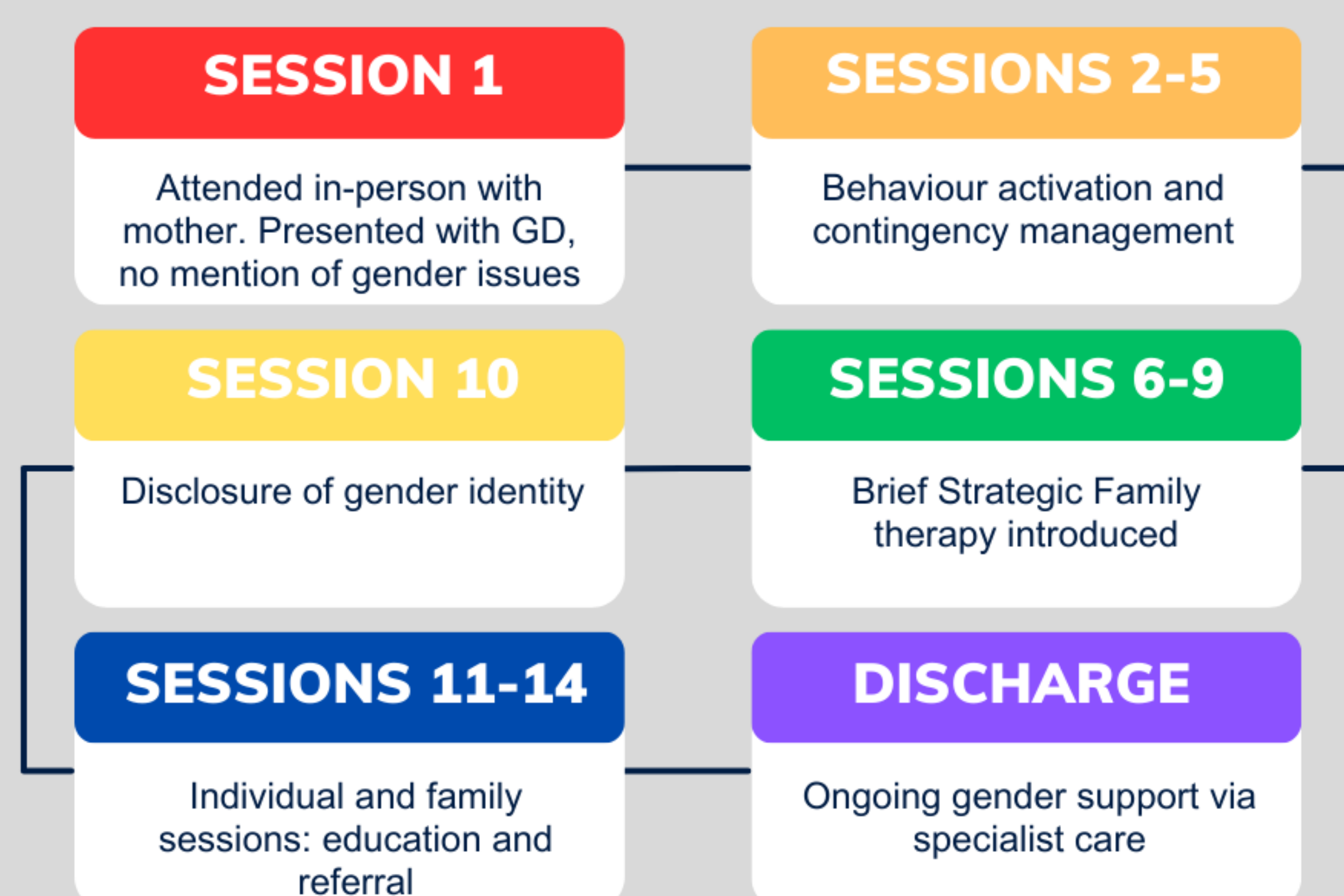
Discussion

- This case report highlights the potential link between excessive gaming behaviour among young people with gender identity issues.
- While evidence on gender dysphoria prevalence among adolescents is limited, studies suggest that up to 1.3% of Australian adolescents identify as transgender⁴.
- Gaming can serve as a coping mechanism for gender dysphoria, providing a sense of belonging and support.
- The gaming industry is increasingly gender inclusivity, with games like Monster Prom, Forza Horizon 5, and Temtem, allowing players to choose their preferred pronouns.



Intervention

Session Progression



Conclusion

- We hope this single-case observational report in the context of emerging literature, encourages researchers to further examine gender identity's role in adolescents experiencing gaming disorder.
- Clinicians should screen for comorbid psychiatric disorders when assessing gaming disorder.

Acknowledgements

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References

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