Gaming Disorder A Challenge Facing the Armed Forces: An Information Booklet

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This booklet is dedicated to my spouse Corain, and to my daughter Evelyn. Thank you for your support and love.

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Table of Contents

Prologue

I decided to provide a booklet on gaming disorder because of the impact that it has had in my life. My introduction to video games began at the age of seven when my parents bought us a Super Nintendo and Mario. As a child, I found that playing videogames was exciting and fun filled. From the various levels, to the competition that my brothers and I had while playing the games. In every sense of the activity, it was good clean fun. My parents rarely regulated our gaming time due to the large family we had and video games "made great babysitters."

For a good deal of time, my gameplay was regulated by the daytime hours. When we moved out to the country and I no longer had my friends with me, and everything changed. I found myself spending hours on a game in a single day. Most of my free time, about 80%, was spent playing videogames. I distinctly remember spending so much time on a single game that the clock on the game reset at 99 hours and 99 minutes. At the age of 13, I did not know that I had a problem or that something was wrong. I was the only member in my family that played video games to this level. Yet nobody batted an eyelid except when I refused to do my chores because I was playing a game. My parents didn't mind because I wasn't causing them any trouble. My whole childhood, all the way through graduation, was spent playing videogames about 80% of the free time that I had. At one time, I even skipped one of my football games to play Halo with some friends.

After high school is when it got really bad. School was seen as a disturbance to my gaming and I no longer had to go to school anymore, and so I logged on average 40 hours of gameplay a week. My normal day no longer began with any type of self-care. I would immediately start my day by logging into World of Warcraft and

begin my gaming session. My father repeatedly lost his temper at my schedule of playing games until 6 AM and then sleeping until 1 or 2 in the afternoon. My gaming became a constant point of tension between my father and I.

Later when I moved out of the house, I quit playing videogames for a short period of time, but that only lasted for a couple of months. With the release of Halo 4, I quit my job, bought a new Xbox, and spent almost every dollar I had so that I could play more video games. In so doing I placed myself in a situation in which I could no longer pay my portion of the rent. After a few weeks of playing Halo, I ended up selling my Xbox and all the games I had at a substantial loss in order to pay the rent. This process of buying and selling my games and systems became a regular thing for me over the next few years. I would try to quit playing videogames by selling everything I had for a loss, only to go back out a month or two later and buy them all back.

When it came time to get married, I remember downloading a new game the day after my wedding. I tried to talk up my new wife about how cool the game was, yet she vehemently disagreed with video games in general and as such, they caused a division in our marriage. My decisions moving forward became whether or not I should spend time with my new spouse or play video games. Though I felt that I was up to the challenge, my wife did not see it that way. She did not outwardly oppose my gaming habits but figured that it would resolve on its own. I ended up subjecting my spouse, who had just moved 600 miles away from friends and family, to complete isolation. Her saving grace was a new puppy that we bought which kept her company through that time of despair and loneliness.

Eventually, my gaming habits did decrease some and my control over how much time I spent gaming and when I spent gaming improved as well. My gaming habits started to improve when I started

this research on gaming addiction. I was able to associate myself with the gamers that were being portrayed in the research statistics. I realized that what I was doing to cope with my addiction was not working and that I needed something more. I wanted a solution that would help me keep my hobby but allow me to play mindfully. In a sense, I came to the understanding that if I was able to play mindfully and in moderation, then I wouldn't have to give up games. Otherwise, I would have to give up gaming altogether.

So, I began gaming mindfully and started recording my gaming times and have been able to come to some measure of control over my habit. I no longer spend time going from one game to another to get my fix, but spend it actually enjoying a single game. Though the game time ebbs and wanes, the relationship with my spouse has significantly improved and her attitude toward my hobby has improved as well. Nevertheless, it is still a struggle at times to maintain moderation, but the benefits that I have seen in my marriage from addressing this issue has eclipsed all the pain and effort to get to this point. It is from these benefits and through my research that my eyes have been opened to the realization of this challenge.

Information Booklet

Video games are not going away any time soon. In fact, their prevalence in the home and on smart devices is only increasing. As such, video game addiction and problematic gameplay are serious problems facing a large portion of the United States military. It affects not only the gamer and their close relationships, but also their combat performance. Like any addiction, it can destroy lives and cause countless problems for all parties involved.

On the other hand, it can be of benefit for the soldier for enjoyment and comradery purposes. It can in some situations even help the soldier to blow off steam and inoculate them to some of the side effects of PTSD. But like every good thing, it can be abused and cause disastrous effects. Whereas the physical health of the soldier may not substantially be adversely affected, the emotional and social effects can be challenging.

Therefore, it is the hope of the author that this *booklet* will provide some initial steps to help mitigate the damage of video game addiction and educate current and future gamers of the potential risks of playing video games to addictive and problematic levels. It will also provide chaplains and others a valuable rescource that is easy to read, current as to publications, and sensitive to a military environment.

Introduction

Our military personnel and families face complex challenges by serving in the Armed Forces as well as the possibilities of injury from combat. Due to the challenges associated with serving in the Armed Forces, the U.S. military has implemented programs to increase soldier readiness and resiliency. These programs focus on improving the physical, social, emotional, spiritual, and family life of the soldier.[1] One area that is challenging all five areas of readiness is the use of video games amongst soldiers and their families. But before we get to how problematic gaming and gaming disorder affects the soldiers, it is requisite that we identify the scope at which video games and the act of playing video games affect the population of the United States and more specifically the military.

Video games saw an exponential rise in playing ever since the introduction of in-home gaming systems with updated and more powerful computers. With the beginning of the Atari in 1977[2] to the Xbox One, PlayStation 4, Nintendo Switch and mobile devices, gaming has taken off as one of society's largest past times. It is estimated that there "are more than 2.5 billion video gamers worldwide"[3], with the largest concentration being in China. It has even become a worldwide esports[4] phenomenon. The gaming industry nets over 90 billion dollars in sales a year with a projection to increase revenue.[5] There are about 200 million video game players in North America,

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1 Cashmere Jefferson, "Building Resilience Across USARPAC," US Army News & Information, last modified February 18, 2011, accessed September 18, 2019, https://www.army.mil/article/52143/building_resilience_across_usarpac.

2 Todd, Coopee, *Atari Video Computer System (1977)*, Toy Tales, accessed December 12, 2018, https://toytales.ca/atari-2600.

3 "2018 Video Game Industry Statistics, Trends & Data," WePC, accessed December 12, 2018, https://www.wepc.com/news/video-game-statistics/.

4 Esports is a form of electronic sports using video games as the platform of competition. The format typically involves a multiplayer competition between professional individuals or teams. It has seen an exponential rise in the last 10 years boasting nearly 1 billion dollars in revenue and over 450 million viewers annually.

5 WePC, 2018 Video Game Industry Statistics.

with the majority of gamers[6] residing in the United States. One recent study estimates roughly 160 million American adults play internet-based games.[7] Another study shows that "more than 86 percent of young adults ages 18 to 24 and more than 65 percent of all adults had recently played online games."[8] In another study given by the American Journal of Psychiatry, they stated that "more than 2 out of 3 [people] did not report any symptoms of Internet gaming disorder, and findings showed that a very small proportion of the general population (between 0.3% and 1.0%) might qualify for a potential acute diagnosis of Internet gaming disorder."[9] Yet at the same time another survey that targets specifically gamers stated that, 65% of gamers spent over 40% of their time playing online video games and 43% of that population spent over 60% of their time playing online games.[10] Another survey found in "examining all types of online gamers (N=4374), the mean age was 21 years, and participants were mostly male (91 percent) and single (66 percent). Their average weekly game time varied between less than 7 hours (10 percent) and more than 42 hours (also 10 percent) with most of the gamers playing 15–27 hours weekly (35 percent)."[11]

When one considers how this might affect the military population, they need only look at the demographic of the soldiers of the military. Forty-four percent of the population of the active duty military is

6 One who plays video games

7 Ranna Parekh, "Internet Gaming," *American Psychiatric Association*, accessed December 12, 2018, https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/internet-gaming.

8 Ranna Parekh, "Internet Gaming."

9 Andrew K. Przybylski, Netta Weinstein and Kou Murayama, "Internet Gaming Disorder: Investigating the Clinical Relevance of a New Phenomenon," in *American Journal of Psychiatry* 174, no. 3 (2017): 230.

10 These numbers only represent console gamers, though the numbers for PC, tablet, handheld console and smart-top box is almost identical. Web PC, "Data of Average Time Spent by Gamers in the U.S. Playing Online Multiplayer Games by Device (as of December 2016), accessed September 12, 2019, https://www.wepc.com/news/video-game-statistics/#mobile-gaming.

11 Mark D. Griffeths, "Gaming Addiction and Internet Gaming Disorder," in *The Video Game Debate: Unravelling the Physical, Social, and Psychological Effects of Video Games* (London: Routledge, 2015), 74-93.

composed of soldiers ages 17-25.[12] If the numbers given by various surveys is accurate, then the number of young soldiers that play video games is around 85%. Within that number, one could infer that over half of the soldiers spend at least 40% of their time playing online games. Considering the average work week being around 40 hours, then a significant portion of young soldiers spend around 15-25 hours playing video games. At the same time, one cannot exclude the number of soldiers who are over the age of 24 who play games. Almost every survey of online gamers conducted, state that the average gamer is in their early 30s.[13] So one can easily identify that the majority population that plays video games is the same as the majority population of the military.

If this is the average amount of time that people spend playing video games, then how much gaming is too much? This question in and of itself is problematic. "The Council on Science and Public Health defined a 'heavy gamer' as any gamer that played for more than two hours a day (American Medical Association 2007)."[14] Yet if anyone looks at any person's past time, then watching television for more than two hours a day can define a person as being a heavy watcher of television. For some, a few hours a day would be more than acceptable, while for others it would not be. In order to determine how much gaming is too much, one must look at the effects video games have on a person and their environment. When one does this then time becomes one factor but not the main factor in determining problematic use. In order to ascertain how much gaming is too much,

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12 "2016 Demographics, Profile of the Military Community," Department of Defense, Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy, accessed August 26, 2019, https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2016-Demographics-Report.pdf.

13 Anna Brown, "Younger Men Play Video Games, but so Do a Diverse Group of Other Americans," Pew Research Center, September 11, 2017, accessed September 18, 2019, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/11/younger-men-play-video-games-but-so-do-a-diverse-group-of-other-americans.

14 Ciaran O'Connor, *Control the Controller: Understanding and Resolving Video Game Addiction* (London: Free Association Books, 2014), loc. 692 of 2463, Kindle.

a few other questions must then be addressed.

To what extent does video games affect the gamers? This is a list of some of the problems associated with problematic and addictive gaming levels. With these negative side effects, it is acknowledged that these symptoms mainly come from an excess in video game usage and gaming in and of itself is not wholly bad. Some of the psychosocial consequences of gaming can be, sacrificing work, education, hobbies, socializing, time with partner/family, and sleep, increased stress, an absence of real-life relationships, lower psychosocial well-being and loneliness, poorer social skills, decreased academic achievement, increased inattention, aggressive/oppositional behavior and hostility, maladaptive coping, decreases in verbal memory performance, maladaptive cognitions, and suicidal ideation. [15]

Even a casual reading of this list communicates the gravity of the situation. Soldiers already have a plethora of challenges facing them and combining those challenges with those listed above can easily affect soldier resiliency. At the same time, it can place a large load on the family of the soldier as well. What happens when a soldier doesn't have a lot of family time, decides to spend his time playing video games instead of time with family?

Along with the social challenges, some medical consequences have been identified with gaming disorder.These include epileptic seizures, auditory hallucinations, visual hallucinations, enuresis, encopresis, obesity, wrist pain, neck pain, elbow pain, tenosynovitis – also called "Nintendinitis," blisters, calluses, sore tendons, and numbness of fingers, hand-arm vibration syndrome, sleep abnormalities, psychosomatic challenges, and repetitive strain injuries. Taken together, this relatively long list of potential psychosocial and medical negative consequences clearly indicates that excessive gaming is an issue irrespective of whether it is an

15 Mark D. Griffeths, "Gaming Addiction," 82.

addiction.[16]

In one survey they found that gaming "addicts displayed increased emotional difficulties including increased depression and anxiety, felt more socially isolated, and were more likely to display internet pornography pathological use symptoms."[17] Physical and mental readiness is a core component of military resiliency and the side effects listed above directly affect these two areas of readiness. On this same note, addiction to gaming not only comes with its own problems but is also a gateway to other problems as well. The research supports that there are, "similarities in changes in the brain between video gaming and addictive substances."[18]

So how do we know when someone is playing at addictive or problematic levels? Simply put, all one needs is to look at the symptoms. Does the gamer have any of the symptoms mentioned above? Too what extent are their symptoms prevalent? One must also keep in mind that for many of the medical symptoms, the average person would not be able to deduce without the input of a medical provider. While for many of the behavioral symptoms, parents and other close relationships would be able to recognize them right away. It has been found that at least, "up to 23% of people who play video games report symptoms of addiction."[19] The International Classification of Diseases 10th edition has also outlined specific symptoms that qualify a person for a diagnosable gaming disorder.

Gaming disorder is characterized by a pattern of persistent or recurrent gaming behavior ('digital gaming' or 'video-gaming'),

16 Mark D. Griffeths, "Gaming Addiction," 82.

17 Laura Stockdale and Sarah M. Coyne, "Video Game Addiction in Emerging Adulthood: Cross-sectional Evidence of Pathology in Video Game Addicts as Compared to Matched Healthy Controls," in *Journal of Affective Disorders* 225, (2018): 265.

18 Ranna Parekh, "Internet Gaming."

19 Christine L. Mathews, Holly E. R. Morrell, and Jon E. Molle, "Video game addiction, ADHD Symptomatology, and Video Game Reinforcement," in *The American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse*, (June 6, 2018): 1, https://doi.org/10.1080/00952990.2018.1472269.

which may be online (i.e., over the internet) or offline, manifested by:

impaired control over gaming (e.g., onset, frequency, intensity, duration, termination, context);
increasing priority given to gaming to the extent that gaming takes precedence over other life interests and daily activities; and continuation or escalation of gaming despite the occurrence of negative consequences. The behavior pattern is of sufficient severity to result in significant impairment in personal, family, social, educational, occupational or other important areas of functioning.[20]

Not everyone will fall into all of these categories but may have some of the symptoms. For this reason, this project will provide another category of identification labeled as problematic gaming.[21] Problematic gaming includes some aspects of gaming disorder but not all of them and may include some of the symptoms listed earlier. The major area that will distinguish the two terms is the last listed in the diagnosis above. The gamer has not attempted to or has not seen a reason to adjust his gaming until this point. They therefore are making a first attempt to cut back or reign-in the amount of gaming taking place. Their ability to make minor/major and lasting changes has not been impeded. Problematic gaming is most identifiable by the individual's family, friends, or counterparts and may not be seen as a problem for the individual.

Literature Review and Information about Gaming

One of the reasons for this review of the literature about gaming is to educate those who do not have a gaming background of any kind. One does not go into battle with little information and subsequently one should educate themselves on video games and their effects on the

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20 World Health Organization, "Gaming Disorder," in *ICD 10*, accessed June 6, 2019, https://icd.who.int/browse11/l-m/en#/http://id.who.int/icd/entity/1448597234.

21 The idea for problematic gaming comes from Ciaran O'Connor's *Control the Controller*.

gamer before attempting to counsel such an individual. This is a major purpose for this project. It provides information that is important for the counselor and the counselee. It gives the reader an insider's view of video games from the standpoint of a recovering video game addict and briefly outlines the gamers world.

Much of what is presented in this project will be backed with research studies and articles while other areas are from the experience of the writer. Using this method of outsider information and insider experience, the writer will educate and inform those who have little experience with video games and those who have lost control of their gaming hobby. It has been suggested that, "Counselors should continue to stay informed of emerging research and continuing education opportunities regarding outcome research; evidence-based practices; and introduction of best practices in the prevention, intervention, and treatment of pathological gaming or gaming addiction."[22]

Gaming Demographics

One need not look very far to see someone playing some type of videogame. It is approximated that there are around 2.5 billion gamers worldwide, with the majority of gamers being in Asia, Europe, North America, and Australia.[23] Video games and those that play them come in a variety of shapes and sizes. No longer are video games regulated to arcades with nickel coin machines and strobe lights. No longer is the average gamer, a person sitting in a basement with dim lighting and being pale and underweight. Video games have become in some sense, the past time for a major portion of the world.

22 Rochelle Cade and Jasper Gates, "Gamers and Video Game Culture: An Introduction for Counselors," *The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families* 25, (2016): 70-75.
23 "Video Game Industry Overview: Top Countries by Game Revenues," WePC, accessed January 21, 2020, https://www.wepc.com/news/video-game-statistics/#gamers-demographic.

In fact, video games have become widespread enough that they are on almost every mobile device in the United States. It was found in a study by Pew Research that 81 percent of the U.S. population own smartphones.[24] It has also been surveyed that there are around 209.5 million mobile gamers in the United States alone.[25] This accounts for approximately two-thirds of the population of the United States above the age of 10[26] and three-quarters of the population of smartphone users. Thereby supporting to the idea that most of the population of the United States has played or does play video games, and that the military makes up a portion of the population gaming is implied as a major concern.

Many games have become a mode of competition for the gamers. A phenomenon called Esports has gained greater popularity in the world today. The more popular the game, the greater viewership for the game company and the gamer. Esports has become a form of entertainment for individuals that is starting to rival major league sporting competitions. Twitch alone has racked up more than 9.36 billion hours of viewership in 2018.[27] One single gamer by the callsign "Ninja" recorded over 226.85 million hours of viewership in the year 2018.[28] This same gamer has a net worth of 10 million dollars.[29]

24 Pew Research Center, "Mobile Fact Sheet," accessed January 21, 2020, https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/mobile/.

25 Statista, "Number of mobile phone gamers in the United States from 2011 to 2020," accessed January 21, 2020, https://www.statista.com/statistics/234635/number-of-mobile-gamers-forecast/.

26 "Child Population: Number of Children (In Millions) Ages 0-17 in the United States by Age, 1950-2018 and Projected 2019–2050," childstats.gov, accessed January 21, 2020, https://www.childstats.gov/americaschildren/tables/pop1.asp.

27 James Batchelor, "Twitch Streamers Racked Up 9.36 Billion Hours Viewed in 2018," accessed February 5, 2020, https://www.gamesindustry.biz/articles/2019-02-04-twitch-streamers-racked-up-9-36-billion-hours-viewed-in-2018.

28 Paul Tassi, "Fortnite's Ninja Was 2018's Most Viewed Twitch Channel And It Wasn't Even Remotely Close," accessed February 5, 2020, https://www.forbes.com/sites/insertcoin/2018/12/30/fortnites-ninja-was-2018s-most-viewed-twitch-channel-and-it-wasnt-even-remotely-close/#78913f86dfec.

29 Dana Hanson, "The 10 Richest Twitch Streamers in 2019," accessed February 5, 2020, https://moneyinc.com/richest-twitch-streamers-in-2019/.

Gaming has become a form of employment similar to professional athletes in our day and the average salary of a professional gamer is about $60,000 annually, with the upper limits being in the millions.[30] Today, the number of professional gamers resemble the amount of professional athletes in major league sports, and is just as competitive.

If playing and watching video games were just a matter of a nice past time, then one would have no cause for alarm. What is alarming though, is the amount of people who play video games at a detrimental level. If one uses even a conservative number for those who fit the category of addictive levels of gameplay, 3%, then about 6 million individuals in the U.S. have an addiction.

Reasons for Video Game Addiction

When one considers the possible reasons for video game addiction and problematic gameplay, one may chalk it up to three general factors for the addiction. The first being that addiction can be seen as a disease, and it being inherently its own factor. The second factor can be that the person has a particular addictive personality. The third and final factor is the games themselves are a contributor to the addiction. We will consider each point briefly but spend most of the focus on the latter two factors, because these are not widely understood.

Addiction as a Disease

The easiest way to explain this model is in the form of allergies. Some people may not have any allergies whatsoever to pollen but may be mildly allergic to dogs and deathly allergic to bees. Using this model with gaming, some may not have any problems whatsoever when they play video games, while others may have some problematic levels of gameplay and others have addicted levels of gameplay. For

30 "Professional Gamer Salary: The Truth Revealed," Career Gamers, accessed February 5, 2020, https://careergamers.com/professional-gamer-salary-the-truth-revealed/.

some it is possible to moderate their levels of gameplay, while for others abstention is the only avenue available to them that will bring about a cure. "There are a minority of addicted gamers who will simply never be able to pick up a game without getting sucked back into addicted play. For these people, it is best that they come to terms with themselves as having a disease, one that they can control, post recovery, by understanding that abstinence is the only cure and that they can never go back to games."[31]

Personality of Gamer as a Factor

A second possible reason for addiction is the addictive personality. Basically, there are "common traits that correlate with excess of some kind,"[32] that may contribute to an addictive personality. Mehroof and Griffiths found there were five traits that "displayed significant associations with online video game addiction: neuroticism, sensation seeking, trait anxiety, state anxiety, and aggression. The strongest predictors were state anxiety and sensation seeking."[33] They suggested that sensation seeking may be a means of coping with stressors in real life and at the same time mentioned that goal directed rewards may increase the likelihood of gaming addiction.[34]

Sometimes we think that gamers are these introverted people sitting in dark corners keeping to themselves. But recent surveys indicate the opposite in many fields. A study performed Bean and Groth-Marnat found that people who play World of Warcraft[35] tend to have "average levels of conscientiousness, agreeableness, openness to experiences, extraversion, and to be slightly less neurotic than the

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31 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 1002 of 2463, Kindle.

32 Ciaran O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 1030 of 2463, Kindle.

33 Mehwash Mehroof, Mark Griffiths, "Online Gaming Addiction: The Role of Sensation Seeking, Self-Control, Neuroticism, Aggression, State Anxiety, and Trait Anxiety," *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking* 13, no. 3 (2010): 313–316.

34 Mehroof and Griffiths, "Online Gaming Addiction," 315.

35 World of Warcraft is one of the world's largest Massive Multiplayer Online Roleplaying Game. It currently has over 10 million monthly subscribers.

overall population."[36] At the same time, they found that the women who played World of Warcraft had higher levels of agreeableness and openness.[37] Thereby alluding to the idea that women who play videogames "may need to have a certain level of openness, possibly more than what is considered normal, to venture into this area when compared with men."[38]

In this same study, they found that, "the style of play gamers gravitate toward appears to be at least partially dependent on their personality."[39] Which seems to suggest that those in the military who have a knack for combat may gravitate toward first person shooters such as Call of Duty or Battlefield.[40] Some of this may also be to fulfill a desire that is not being fulfilled by joining the military. Soldiers typically display some level of pride in joining the military and this translates over to video games as well. "It may be that those who most embrace military identities have the greatest motivation to escape the material conditions that construct them, in favor of digital spaces that idealize them."[41] Common military commercials promote a military life that is full of adventure, glory, and combat. Promoting the idea that members in the military participate in high tempo activities and honestly just do really cool things every day. Video games are meant to "create virtual worlds of action and combat that engage players as participants."[42]

When this fantasy of being a high tempo special operator collides with reality, some soldiers may gravitate toward video games that

36 Anthony Bean and Gary Groth-Marnat, "Video Gamers and Personality: A Five-Factor Model to Understand Game Playing Style," *Psychology of Popular Media Culture* 5, no. 1 (2016): 27–38.

37 Bean and Groth-Marnat, "Video Games and Personality," 34.

38 Bean and Groth-Marnat, "Video Games and Personality," 34.

39 Bean and Groth-Marnat, "Video Games and Personality," 35.

40 These are amongst the most popular FPS games in America.

41 Banks and Cole, "Diversion Drives and Superlative Soldiers," Discussion.

42 Robin Anderson and Marin Kirtu, "From America's Army to Call of Duty: Doing Battle with the Military Entertainment Complex," *Democratic Communique* 23, no. 1 (Spring 2009):45–65. (50)

transport the individuals from a mundane reality into a fantasy where they can be the hero or the special forces soldier who perform feats on an unimaginable scale. One soldier stated, "[T]he avatar is a special force 'badass' in the heroic and cinematic sense. This pulls at me in a primal way, to be that ultimate warrior."[43] Video games allow the regular soldier to play as a special operator accomplishing impossible missions, taking out the bad guys, and saving the world. Ashcraft said something similar,

> The average military member will never actually live out that exciting, epic firefight, the moment of a decisive battle, the heat of combat, or the thrill of knowing you just outwitted your mortal enemy and crushed them beneath your strategic might and skill, so gaming definitely offers a way of living out that fantasy. Call it a strange form of escapism.[44]

The military has made its own contributions to this effect. In 1999 the Army fell short of its recruitment goals and in order to increase the recruitment levels the military adapted a better avenue to reach their desired applicants.[45] What avenue of approach would you use when you realize that the majority of the population of the United States that play video games is the upcoming and current prime candidates for the military? This line of thinking may have led to the U.S. Army to produce their very own game to increase recruitment levels. "America's Army was released on the 4th of July in 2002…the game was given out at recruitment stations,"[46] in an effort to implant a desire into the general populace to join the military. "America's Army boasts the most authentic rendering of combat because real soldiers

43 Banks and Cole, "Diversion Drives and Superlative Soldiers," MVG Coping through Avatars.

44 Brian Ashcraft, "Video Games on the Front Lines," accessed February 15, 2020, https://www.kotaku.com.au/2011/02/video-games-on-the-front-lines/.

45 Anderson and Kirtu, "Doing Battle with the Military Entertainment Complex," 49.

46 Anderson and Kirtu, "Doing Battle with the Military Entertainment Complex," 49.

help create the synthespians[47]." The game was a huge success. "In its first six months America's Army saw 1.5 million downloads. It was considered the most successful game launch in history at the time and became the number-one online action game in the country with more than three million registered players."[48]

At the same time, the U.S. Army uses video games to help with coordination of troops. An example of this would be a training room filled with computers and various electronic equipment for the purpose of running mission simulations. My particular unit has used America's Army to run mock missions. We were able to overlay a map of our training environment into the game. Thereby allowing us to do an actual mock mission with similar terrain as the mission we were about to run. We were able to load our current equipment and vehicles into the game, thereby providing us with a virtual layout of how everything would look on the mission. We then could simulate where the attacks might come from and what preventative measures, we could take to mitigate the damage we receive.[49]

In such a game, the military is able to dictate to the common civilian or soldier who the enemy is. The enemy is depicted in Arab clothing firing off AK-47s and (Rocket Propelled Grenade) RPGs. Civilian companies do the very same thing. Call of Duty: Modern Warfare, places the gamer behind the rifle of one who fights against the Russian communists and Arab terrorists. They are projected as the enemies of the United States and are eliminated as the campaign progresses. Campaigns such as these educate the gamer on who

47 A synthespian is a computer-generated actor.

48 Anderson and Kirtu, "Doing Battle with the Military Entertainment Complex," 49.

49 This is just one example of how the military has used video games as a platform for education on military tactics and training. Just recently the Army has placed an emphasis in augmented reality goggles to help with training soldiers, https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2020/02/11/the-army-wants-to-buy-40000-mixed-reality-goggles/. At the same time, here is another article that explains some of the other uses that the military has employed video games see http://theconversation.com/how-the-us-military-is-using-violent-chaotic-beautiful-video-games-to-train-soldiers-73826. Video games are also used in simulation exercises and to prepare soldier with use of weapons, tactical engagements, and how to react to fire.

the bad guys are. Oddly enough, soldiers will play games such as these while deployed. "I would see many soldiers, in combat, with [Playstation Portables] PSPs or anything we could hook up to 220v electricity. When soldiers weren't on patrol, we often had violent war games on our systems. It was weird. Like we didn't get enough violence."[50]

A similar experience as the one mentioned above occurred as I was deployed to Iraq. Almost every guy in my unit played Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2, to include my platoon sergeants and commander. It became a bonding agent for our unit and a conversational topic. Oddly enough, instances would occur when we would take actual incoming mortar and rocket fire, and many would just keep on playing as if nothing was even happening around us. It was indeed an odd occurrence to have so many of us playing Call of Duty and fighting against one another in a multiplayer setting and then go out that evening and run missions as a unit. Video games have an ability to bond people.

Games as a Factor

Which then leads into the idea that the games themselves may have some blame for the addictive levels of gameplay in gamers. This comes as no surprise; gaming companies try to make their games appealing in order to gather player customers. At the same time, many game companies try to get the gamer hooked on their game. Many games are advertised as "hours upon hours of gameplay" or "the most addictive game you will ever play."

On top of that, many games are rated by how much content is in the game. A game that inevitably has more content will take a gamer a longer amount of time to beat the game. The more content

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50 Jayne Gackenbach, et al, "Video Game Play as Nightmare Protection: A Preliminary Inquiry with Military Gamers," *Dreaming* 21, no. 4 (2011): 221-245.

equals the greater amount of time spent playing the game. The greater amount of time that it takes a gamer to complete their game inevitably aids the game company in increasing profits. The whole purpose is to keep the gamer in the game for as long as possible, not unlike gambling. This is especially true for games that require monthly subscriptions, or who plan on releasing more content later. "Within the gaming industry, the 'golden ticket' is to create a game that needs as little new content (graphics, animations, text and code) as possible for as much attendance as possible for the players. Ideally players will end up competing against or alongside each other and thereby find a never-ending source of challenge."[51] Games such as World of Warcraft, Runescape or other MMORPGs[52] rely on huge levels of content and are constantly releasing more content for the gamers in order to keep their fan base playing their game and not switching to a different game.

Another factor that involves content is how much time is required in order to compete at the higher levels of the game. We will use World of Warcraft as an example. This particular game has been in play for over the last fifteen years. The game model revolves around each person doing various quests and running through various raids[53] and dungeons[54] in order to obtain better gear. Better gear allows the players to compete at higher levels of the game. The best gear however is dropped from the hardest bosses[55] in the game, adding to the notion, the harder the difficulty the greater the reward. Yet there is another factor, "All roleplaying games, with negligible exceptions,

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51 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 1142 of 2463, Kindle.

52 MMORPG is an acronym for Massive Multiplayer Online Roleplaying Game. It denotes a game where thousands of players will come together on a single game server and embark on various quests or dungeons that provide various rewards.

53 A raid is a term that denotes between 10-50-man dungeons. They require a large amount of people to kill the enemies in the dungeon.

54 A dungeon in gaming terms means a place where monsters will spawn, and players can embark together in killing these monsters which will drop various rewards. The progressively get harder as the game progresses.

55 Bosses are the strongest monsters in the game, raid or dungeon.

have random drops of loot coming out of the bad guys when they die; sometimes you will find nothing, sometimes you will find a unique and ultra-rare weapon – you never know."[56] One could spend weeks killing the same boss and never receive the drop that they are wanting. Whereas another person might have a really lucky day or week and get everything they had been working for. The game is designed around this progression of gear. No matter how good someone is at the game, they can only do as much as their equipment will allow them. So, they will inevitably spend copious amounts of time in order to achieve their goals of getting better gear.

The amount of time investment in order to obtain said gear is where the crux of the problem is. Those who spend more time in the game will have better odds of having better gear than those who do not spend as much time. Let's use my character as an example. I spend anywhere between 10-20 hours a week playing World of Warcraft. In gaming time, this may seem like a lot of time spent gaming, but in World of Warcraft playtime, this is not nearly enough. Fifty eight percent of gamers who play World of Warcraft spend over 20 hours a week playing the game with 28% spending over 30 hours in the same activity.[57] Even with 10-20 hours of gameplay, I am only able to compete in the game as an average gamer due to the limits of my gear. Ten to twenty hours a week does not allow me to compete at the higher levels of the game. If a gamer wishes to play at higher difficulties with better players and gain better rewards, they most likely would have to spend over 20 hours a week playing the game. It is because of this scenario that I make the statement that games can be part of the problem as well.

The reward system also plays a part in the addiction. It is exactly like gambling. A person has a percentage chance of receiving said

56 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 1110 of 2463, Kindle.
57 "Time spent playing World of Warcraft 2013," Statista, accessed February 17, 2020, https://www.statista.com/statistics/327295/time-spent-playing-world-of-warcraft/.

item and will spend a great deal of time trying to acquire said item. Some items in the game have less than a 1% chance of dropping but gamers will grind[58] the enemies that drop these items for weeks, months, and even years in order to obtain the item. When it comes to better equipment, the games are designed to educate the player on what the best equipment is. When the better equipment drops a feeling of elation follows. You feel like you have just won the lottery when the piece of gear that you had been pursuing for so long has finally dropped.[59]

The games are designed to reward effort. Imagine on a daily basis that you get rewarded for your hard work almost every time you log into the game. How often does that happen in real life? Does your boss or your wife reward you each day for your effort? Do they reward you even better each week? This is another attribute of video games. They reward you constantly for accomplishing certain tasks. The system of MMORPGs is based around this mechanic[60] for rewarding for effort. You complete a quest and you gain more experience, gold, and even an item you had been wanting for some time. After some time, your experience causes you to level up, which provides more motivation for you to continue playing so you can receive more rewards. The more time you spend playing, equals more rewards and then with the greater amount of time comes the greater rewards.

If you ask gamers, why they play video games, you will inevitably receive a variety of responses. But in almost every game there is an underlying trait of rewarding those who put in the time and effort of playing the game. If there was no reward for playing the game, then there would be no motivation to continue. Although, there is the social aspect of video games, or the aspect of escaping the challenges that one might face in real life, the competition, but underneath it all, there

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58 Grind is a term when applied to gaming in which a player will kill the same monsters or run the same dungeons over and over for hours on end in order to achieve the expected results.
59 This is a very common feeling among gamers of World of Warcraft and other MMORPGs.
60 A mechanic is a term that encompasses rules within a game that a player interacts with.

is one thing that keeps the players coming back—rewards. Rewards or accomplishments in the game become the drug for the problematic gamer. It essentially becomes the hook that is the hardest to pull out. Anyone who has ever played sports and won a game, knows the feeling that comes with being the champion. Games are designed to replicate this feeling. Where can a gamer go to find these same levels of rewards in the real world on a daily basis and feel this same way multiple times a day? All of this contributes to the motivations for playing video games and what some of the benefits are.

Benefits and Motivations

One may be able to list the various motivations for playing video games, but it is not possible for this project to cover them all in depth. So, I will endeavor to provide some of the major contributors and list some of the other motivations for gameplay. One major factor that video games have going for them is their ability to immerse one into a virtual world so completely. Players may use video games as a way to temporarily reduce stress in order to cope with real life problems. Social support that some players may receive, may also help moderate stress levels.

Video games provide a platform for education and control. An example of this was the creation of the flight simulators to help educate pilots on the operations involved in flying a plane without ever placing them in the position of endangering themselves or others. When it comes to control, only so much can happen in a video game and the player is given control over that space. He or she can basically alter the space to the desired outcome of the gamer. This gives the gamer some sense of control within the sphere that they are operating in. Stephen Covey outlined the importance of recognizing the areas of our lives that we can control, "As we look at those things within our Circle of Concern, it becomes apparent that there are some things over which we have no real control and others that we can do something

about."[61]

Video games becomes to the gamer an area of control which they ultimately control the outcome. There is a great deal that is out of the gamers control in reality, yet on the flipside there is an overwhelming large portion of video games that are within their control. Video games can only act so far as their programming. The smarter or quicker the gamer is, the greater their ability may be at outwitting the programming of the game.

Games are not designed today to place a gamer in a scenario where he or she cannot win. They are placed in an environment for progression, slowly adding difficulty and mechanics to the game over time. With this increase in difficulty, comes an increase in reflexes and comprehension of the game. The gamer gains or strengthens his ability to react in situations in which he may not feel that he has full control. If the gamer fails or dies in the game, he is given another chance to tackle the challenge. He is able to retry again and again until he beats the game or level. During this process he is training his brain to react and act in faster ways to allow for success, which increases the ability of the gamer to master the game space. The greater their ability to master the game space they are playing equates to the greater their ability is to control the outcome of the game. Very few formats allow a person to fully engage with an activity where they are the controllers of their own outcome and at the same time allows for an infinite amount of retries when the outcome is not desired.

The benefit of being able to control your outcome is critical to those who play video games, especially for those who suffer from PTSD as a side effect of war. First Person Shooters (FPS) place the gamer in the cockpit of the combatant and allow him the ability to reenact, so to speak, to the combat that he may have experienced

61 Stephen Covey, *7 Habits for Highly Effective People* (Salt Lake City: Mango Publishing Group, 2015), loc. 1361 of 6716 Kindle.

while on his deployment. However, unlike when he was in real combat, the outcome is completely in his control. This provides a pseudo avenue of narrative therapy. The gamer is able to reenact a similar sequence of events and alter the outcome. He is able to face his adversary or demons on the screen and confront them in a safe environment. With the increase in realism of video games, and now virtual reality, this is easier to do more now than ever. All of this contributes to the motivation for playing video games and its potential for positive and negative side effects.

One of the positive side effects of playing video games outlined by Gackenbach et al was their ability to somewhat inoculate soldiers to reoccurring nightmares. They found in their study on military gamers, "that, while gamers did behave aggressively in dreams, this behavior occurred far less often than with those who rarely gamed."[62] In this study they found that gamers who played less often "reported more threat and combat in their military dreams than did the high-end gaming group."[63] They listed two examples to emphasize this point,

low-end gamer:

I couldn't find my rifle and something was chasing me. I searched the entire forest until I did find my weapon. As I turned around to shoot what was hunting me - the trigger felt like it was a 1,000 lb. trigger pull. The rounds I was shooting were delayed and where not hitting where I was aiming. (Subject #21)

While here is one from a high-end gamer:

I was told by my old Sargent [sic] to load up on the humvv [sic] in my gunners spot. he said we were going to roll out to fight some were in Baghdad. we drove down to the combat area where there

62 Jayne Gackenbach, et al, "Video Game Play as Nightmare Protection: A Preliminary Inquiry with Military Gamers," *Dreaming* 21, no. 4 (2011): 221-245. (240)
63 Gackenbach, et al, "Video Game Play as Nightmare Protection," 241.

was a brutal fight me and quite a few men against the insergants [sic]. i remember shooting and seeing men fall on both sides. i saw the faces of the dead eyes wide and staring at the sky soulless faces of friends. i walked dazed back to the humvv [sic] and woke up. (Subject #115)

Aggression and combat motifs are present in both dreams, but the high-end gamer is fighting back, even if "dazed" in the dream. Such active engagement may be indicative of practice in game play; this notion is supported by the marginal significance of the self-participating in reaction to threat finding in military dreams. Resolution of the threat was more likely to be located in the dream ending for the military dream among the low-end gamers.[64]

Ultimately what they were able to find was that those who participated in high combat games seemed to be able to resolve the threats they experienced in their dreams and "high-end gamers had more happy endings and fewer unhappy endings for their recent dreams."[65] Alluding to the idea that video games, such as Call of Duty and others, allow for the gamer to reexperience their past encounters to some level and address them. They provide soldiers a semblance of control that allows them to overcome various fears. At the same time, it seems that "high-end gamers seemed less bothered by their military dreams than the low-end gamers."[66] They later concluded that, "There is some preliminary indication that playing video games in the military may help inoculate soldiers against the negative effects (i.e., severe nightmares) of deployment…[and their] report indicates that moderate video game play was associated with fewer psychological problems."[67]

Video games have depth, require contact with the body, contains

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64 Gackenbach, et al, "Video Game Play as Nightmare Protection," 241.
65 Gackenbach, et al, "Video Game Play as Nightmare Protection," 241.
66 Gackenbach, et al, "Video Game Play as Nightmare Protection," 242.
67 Gackenbach, et al, "Video Game Play as Nightmare Protection," 243.

others in close proximity, allows one's mind freedom to wander and provides a safe environment.[68] Each of these paradigms create a draw for gamers. When military gamers were asked how they used digital games to deal with military-service challenges, four non-exclusive themes emerged: escape and diversion from stress, managing physical and psychological challenges, experiencing camaraderie/support from other MVGs, or enjoying connections to civilian life…Nearly half of the participants (n = 41) said they had used video games at some point to deal with challenges associated with military service, mentioning at least one of the four themes. [69]

At the same time Nick Yee listed 10 motivational factors that encapsulated the motivations of why people play video games. His list comprised of advancement, analyzing game mechanics, competition, chatting and casual interactions, developing supporting relationships, teamwork, geographical exploration, role-playing, avatar customization, and escapism.[70]

Let's consider competition as a form of motivation. When a couple of guys get together to play a game of basketball, is the score kept? It is commonly observed and reiterated that men will turn everything into a competition. Men also tend to be the largest majority of gamers in the world. The most successful games in the world tend to be games that pit players against one another in a means of competition. Games such as League of Legends, Fortnite, Call of Duty, DOTA 2, PUBG, Overwatch etc. These games rely on the competition model of gameplay and are a major contributor in Esports. One game, Call of Duty: Black Ops 4 realized that many of their gamers spend most of their time playing multiplayer PVP matches and didn't even bother

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68 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 588 of 2463, Kindle.

69 James Banks and John G. Cole, "Diversion Drives and Superlative Soldiers: Gaming as Coping Practice among Military Personnel and Veterans," *The International Journal of Computer Game Research* 16, no. 2 (December 2016): Results: MVG Coping in Everyday Life.

70 Nick Yee, "Motivations for Play in Online Games," *Cyber Psychology and Behavior* 9, no. 6, (December 2006): 772-775, https://doi.org/10.1089/cpb.2006.9.772.

making a storyline for players to play through. Their reasoning was, "When I first started on multiplayer in the Call of Duty franchise, 10 percent of our population was playing competitive multiplayer," he said. "Fast forward to 2015 or 2016, you're looking at 90 percent of our players are playing multiplayer ... If you look at it through that lens and trying to deliver more for your players and how you're playing the game, it's a pretty easy decision."[71] Competition and social gaming runs side by side when it comes to multiplayer gaming formats.

Social gaming with your friends and family across the nation or world becomes a major factor of motivational gameplay. In 2014 I had the opportunity to meet a father whose children no longer lived at home. I was surprised to see that he had an Xbox system in his living room and asked if he played it. He stated that his reasoning for playing the Xbox was to play Halo with his sons that have left home. He said he was able to stay in touch far easier when he played video games with them than when he tried calling them. He was given more time with his sons, during his gaming session with them than he would ever be able to manage in just a single phone call. His contact with his children went from not very often to almost daily contact with them.

Social gaming has become a major factor for many soldiers to stay in touch with their past battle buddies. One might not be willing to call up their friends, but they may be more willing to game with them. One soldier stated, "It's where I connected to a lot of my military friends and military family. Where I have time to be around others like me, even if it's only on teamspeak."[72] Sonja Utz and et al found in their study that with the increase of gameplay came the increase in quality online friends.[73] Soldiers who play games with their past battle

71 Michael McWhertor, "Treyarch explains why Black Ops 4 won't have a single-player campaign," accessed February 17, 2020, https://www.polygon.com/2018/5/18/17366980/call-of-duty-black-ops-4-no-single-player-campaign.

72 Banks and Cole, "Diversion Drives and Superlative Soldiers," Results.

73 Sonja Utz, et al, "Effects of Passion for Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games on Interpersonal Relationships," *Journal of Media Psychology* 24, no. 2 (2012): 83.

buddies may be able to increase the quality of their relationships and maintain a stronger bond through the use of video games. Utz and et al noticed however that those who play video games problematically had a decrease in the number and quality of their offline relationships.[74] They described problematic gameplay or "Obsession Passion…as urgent and compulsive, whereas harmonious passion is described as voluntary engagement in an activity."[75] Thereby alluding to the idea that those who play video games compulsively would fall into the category of problematic gameplay and those who play voluntarily would fall into the category of a healthy gamer. It is on this note that we will begin to discuss the various negative effects that arise when playing video games to problematic and addictive levels.

Negative Effects

There is an extensive list of the negative effects of playing video games to problematic or addictive levels. Just as there are extensive lists of doing any activity to addictive levels. Though when it comes to video games the physical manifestation of these negative effects is not as serious as the psychosocial manifestations. As stated earlier, video games place the gamer in a virtual world that all but occupies most of the concentration and attention of the gamer. It is hard to play a competitive game when one is distracted by outside events. Many games are basically designed to penalize the gamer for a lapse of concentration. Whether that is being shot by the enemy or standing in some type of fire mechanic. Games are designed to grab your attention and keep it.

The requirement of this level of concentration or attention is also where the greatest level of side effects is seen. It is hard for many to play a video game and watch their child at the same time. It is hard to remember what their spouse just said to them in the moment of

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74 Sonja Utz, et al, "Effects of Passion," 83.
75 Sonja Utz, et al, "Effects of Passion," 77.

a heated battle. It is easy to forget the chores or tasks that you need to do when you lose track of time playing a video game. It becomes easier to forget about the real-life obligations one has in lieu of the attractive obligations one has in the game.

What video games do well is transport the individual from one plane of reality to a plane of fantasy. The better the game is able to do this, the greater the implications for discarding reality altogether in the moment of gameplay. Alluding to the idea that the greatest risk for gaming addiction or problematic gameplay is the damage to our relationships with others. "Unless steps are taken to reduce gaming addiction, sufferers will ultimately see their relationships wither away, possible even becoming irreparably lost."[76]

Games are immersive and require a gamer to shift in and out of the game space when they begin playing the game or quit playing the game. It becomes a moment in which one has to shift their mindset every time they partake in the activity. "It is during this period of adjusting between the world of the game and the world outside that gamers will often become agitated or moody."[77]

Video games require differing amounts of time. Games such as MMORPGs typically require the most amount of time to even participate in the game itself. If one were to consider the amount of time it would take for a person to complete every achievement on World of Warcraft, they would have to measure it in years of play time. It took one gamer about 900 days of playtime to complete all of World of Warcrafts 3000+ achievements in 2018.[78] One should expect that it will take a significant amount of time investment when you consider the amount of playtime required to achieve a 100%

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76 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 535 of 2463, Kindle.

77 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 588 of 2463, Kindle.

78 Steven Messner, "This player completed all of World of Warcraft's 3,314 achievements and it only took him 6 years," accessed February 13, 2020, https://www.pcgamer.com/this-player-completed-all-of-world-of-warcrafts-3314-achievements-and-it-only-took-him-6-years.

completion rating on a video game, especially MMORGs.

"On the surface, video game addiction appears to be about the amount of time spent gaming…but the actual indicators that something is wrong are both quite specific and not directly linked to time. Perhaps the most relevant and poignant sign is an increasing amount of palpable tension between the gamer and those close to them."[79] The amount of game time that one is able to allocate will vary considerably when one is single and living on their own with very few responsibilities to speak of, than one who has a family and an extensive number of responsibilities. Compare that to how much time one can spend on their hobbies during retirement and how much time one can spend on their hobbies at the height of their career.

A significant portion of the military is composed of single soldiers. The negative effects of problematic gameplay may not be seen in the relationships with their family because their family may not be around. Where their negative effects may be seen with other soldiers who interact with them on a daily basis or their performance at work, one need only look at the relationship with the soldiers around the gaming soldier in order to determine whether or not he or she is playing to problematic levels. Consider questions such as these,

- Does the soldier participate in social activities with other soldiers?
- Does the soldier show up to formation late on a regular basis?
- Do the other soldiers invite the gamer out to other activities?
- Do other soldiers speak about the gamers gaming habits often?
- Is their frustration expressed by other soldiers involving the gamers habits?
- Is their casual joking about the soldier and the amount of time he spends gaming?

79 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 691 of 2463, Kindle.

Typically, there is a feeling that within the group of soldiers who have a relationship with the gamer that something is wrong. Something is off about how much time the gamer may spend playing games or a level of frustration with the gamer. At other moments there may be times when those around the gamer will not even bother with him because of his gaming habits. They will just chalk it up to, "that is just what he does all the time, so why even bother." All of this leads to what the indicators for playing games at a problematic or addictive level.

Indicators

One cannot play video games at a problematic level without exhibiting some of the signs and symptoms that follow. When it comes to an addiction, there are criteria that need to be met in order to consider a person as one who has a problem. Varying on the number of criteria that the person meets, they may be classified as one who has a mild, moderate or severe problem. The criteria used for substance abuse and subsequently for gaming disorder must include:

> hazardous use, social or interpersonal problems related to use, neglected major roles to use, withdrawal, tolerance, used larger amounts/longer, repeated attempts to control use or quit, much time spent using, physical or psychological problems related to use, activities given up to use, and craving.[80]

Generally speaking, most people who study gaming disorders focus primarily on six categories of signs and symptoms: salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, conflict and relapse.

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80 Deborah Hasin, et al, "DSM-5 Criteria for Substance Use Disorders: Recommendations and Rationale," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 170, no. 8 (2013): 834–851.

Salience

"The gaming has become the most important part of the gamer's life. The majority of their thoughts and desires are now about the game."[81] This is probably one of the easiest identifiable indicators of video game addiction. The reason for this, is one need only ask a person how often they think about gaming throughout their day. Most people don't have a problem answering this question. If gaming is on the forefront of their mind most of the day and their life seems to revolve around gaming, then it is most likely they have fulfilled the indicator for salience. Gaming has become for the gamer, the largest focus of their day and may be manifested in the gamer planning what they will do as soon as they are able to play.

The phenomenon of Esports and streaming services provided by Twitch and other companies has given rise to another area of concern. That being the amount of time spent viewing others playing video games, similar to how one views any other professional sport. This is particularly manifested in the younger generation of adolescents and young adults. Watching people play video games provides an avenue for an increase motivation to play games. It isn't any different than a person watching a sport and having an increased desire to play such a sport. Whereas this rarely happens in regard to the professional sports due to physical and social constraints, that is not the case when it comes to video games.

Gamers may watch Esports or one of their favorite streamers thereby increasing their desire to play games. This inevitably feeds into one of the indicators of an addiction being salience or thinking about playing games or games themselves throughout the day. The access to streaming services provided by Twitch and other companies increases the availability of the gamer to indulge in the gaming world. Thereby increasing motivational levels to the point where the gamer is only thinking about the game they are going to play when they get

81 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 745 of 2463, Kindle.

home from work or school.

Mood Modification

"The gamer's emotional state becomes heavily influenced by gaming to the point whereby they appear to need the game in order to control their moods."[82] Gaming is meant to provide some level of enjoyment. If it doesn't then people wouldn't play in the first place. What one needs to be aware of when they play video games are the feeling of numbness that may accompany gaming, which is an undesirable trait for gaming. If the gamer finds themselves using video games to regulate their behavior, then gaming turns from a want into a need. For those on the outside looking in, it may seem like the gamer has hyper focus on the game or may seem to be a completely different person while playing the game.[83] The major factor when observing yourself or another person to see mood modification is how the gamer is using the game to regulate his emotions. If this is the case, then there is some relevance for alarm. But keep in mind that enjoyment while playing a video game is exactly what video games are designed to do.

Tolerance

"The gamer is never satisfied by the games; either perpetually playing the same game or constantly cycling through many different games."[84] This idea is easily seen by both the gamer and the observer. It is easy to see one switch from one game to another and yet never feel satisfied, almost as if they were looking for the joy that they used to feel. Gamers tend to feel a higher level of joy with a new

82 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 772 of 2463, Kindle.
83 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 800 of 2463, Kindle. I don't necessarily agree with this observation in the light that it takes a great amount of focus to play many games. One thing my spouse would mention to me is the idea that sometimes I would have an emotionless face while playing the game. Thereby alluding to the idea that there is some mood modification, but I don't necessarily look at it in a negative light.
84 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 800 of 2463, Kindle

game, because of the new experience that it poses to the gamer, hence you will see them buy game after game without ever completing the game.[85]

A second indicator of this is the desire to get every little achievement in the game, even when the game is no longer fun or desirable. A main feature of World of Warcraft and other MMORPGs is their system of goals and achievements, which make them seemingly endless, and their social and competitive focus, which promotes and increases devotion to the game. Yet this format is not regulated to MMORPGs anymore. It is now a fundamental property of almost every game. Achievements are exactly that. They provide a reward system for completion of an act typically in the form of achievement points. Depending on the amount of points or the type of achievement, one may receive differing rewards. But mainly, they have become a way for game companies to garner more gaming time out of the gamers. For the gamers, video games have in some sense become a job and less of a hobby.

It is important to realize that tolerance for a gamer and tolerance for a substance is not the same thing. Tolerance to a substance typically manifests itself as a person needing more of the same substance to achieve the desired outcome. Gamers typically start playing a game with higher enjoyment and the more they play in a single period, the less enjoyment they feel overtime. This has been my experience playing video games and the experience of many of my fellow gamers. Many gamers may find themselves trying to play video games for longer periods in order to receive the same enjoyment that they had in the beginning only to find out that playing video games is more like gas in a car. The longer you play/drive, the less enjoyment/gas there is left. "What addicted gamers become tolerant to is the challenge. If a player has reached gold, they will want platinum. If

85 This was a major indicator for myself and my best friend. I found that he would play a single game for maybe a week and then lose interest and go buy a different game. He would then tout how awesome the new game was and then after a few weeks would be on another game.

they have reached the highest level in a game, they will want the best equipment for their character. If they have earned nine achievements, they will want 10, and so on."[86]

Withdrawal Symptoms

"When the gamer finds themselves unable to play, they suffer from negative emotional states such as irritability, sadness, or anxiety"[87] One of the easiest signs of this is the explosion of anger/rage that follows when a gamer is forcibly disconnected from the game. One reason for this is the idea that you have disconnected the gamer from his sense of security. Video games provide an environment for absolute control and security. Only so much can happen in a video game. By forcibly removing them from their game, you have removed their mood modification device. They may experience anxiety, anger, sadness and a host of other feelings when they are not able to play their games. At times when the gamer knows he won't be able to play video games, such as a long vacation or a weekend away from the games, he may experience these feelings.

Conflict

"The gamer finds themselves frequently arguing with or trying to deceive others when it comes to the subject of their gaming habits."[88] The gamer will use almost any means necessary in order to play their games. Outbursts become a way of manipulating those who may prevent them from playing video games. It then becomes for the observer a time in which they have to choose whether or not to fight with the person about their gaming habits or just keep the peace in the household. For the gamer, everyone becomes an obstacle to their gaming habits, something that needs to be overcome in order for them to enjoy themselves. For the observer, they may find themselves being

86 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 854 of 2463, Kindle.
87 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 882 of 2463, Kindle.
88 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 909 of 2463, Kindle.

the bad guy more often than not.

Relapse

"The gamer has previously made attempts to control their gaming, either with or without the support of others, but has always reverted back to excessive gaming." This is seen easily as the gamer making commitments with themselves or other and finding himself breaking his commitments or trying to bend the rules until there are no more rules. However, a relapse is different than a slip. "A slip is defined as a single (isolated) instance of substance use after a period of abstinence. Slips are usually incidental, impulsive, and unplanned. They commonly result from unexpected exposure to a high-risk situation that overwhelms a person's ability to resist temptation."[89] These can be treated as learning opportunities for the gamer, in that they may identify what happened that lead up to the slip and be able to prevent it in the future. "A relapse can be seen as the result of a slip that has gotten out of control. Instead of being isolated instances of use, relapses are characterized by a return to the former (pretreatment) pattern of use and a re-emergence of addictive patterns of thinking and behavior."[90] A relapse in gaming is a revert back to previous excessive gaming habits.

Resolving Video Game Addiction

I have chosen Ciaran O'Connor's modality of treating video game.[91] The reason I like his model the best is because he bases it on moderation first before fully abstaining from the activity. Basically,

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89 Arnold M. Washton and Joan E. Zweben, *Treating Alcohol and Drug Problems in Psychotherapy Practice* (New York, The Gilford Press, 2006), 211.

90 Washton and Zweben, Treating Alcohol and Drug Problems, 211.

91 There are various other modalities available. See Daniel King and Paul Delfabbro, *Internet Gaming Disorder: Theory, Assessment, Treatment, and Prevention*, (London: Academic Press, 2018), and Kimberly S. Young and Cristiano Nabuco de Abreu, *Internet Addiction: A Handbook and Guide to Evaluation and Treatment*, (New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, 2011).

trying to help the gamer reign in control over the gaming in order to keep their hobby. Abstaining from playing video games becomes the final step if all other avenues have failed. People have a hard time giving up things they like. One doesn't want to give up his golf game but may be more inclined to regulate how much time he spends golfing. The same idea holds true for video games. They are a hobby that can be enjoyed in moderation, but like every good thing, it can be abused.

It is his model that I will present briefly and paraphrase in order for the reader to get a brief overview of what it entails. O'Connor outlines 10 steps in his recovery model. They are, "(1) Adopt an Attitude for Recovery (2) Take a Tech Detox (3) Arrange Offline Activities (4) Begin Gaming Mindfully (5) Draw up Boundaries (6) Maintain Boundaries (7) Seek Professional Help (8) Go Public (9) Reach out to Others (10) Review."[92] We will address each step as we move forward.

Step 1: Adopt an Attitude for Recovery

"The first crucial step, as with any addiction, is to acknowledge that there is a problem."[93] One cannot progress in solving a problem if one is not aware of the problem. Many gamers may suspect that they game to problematic levels, but unless they are able to come face to face with their problem, then it is unlikely that much will change in their abuse of video games. O'Connor uses a recovery message that outlines his entire process of recovery, "My gaming has become a problem that is affecting both me and those around me. What I've been doing so far to control it has not worked. I need to make a radical change in my behavior in a way that I have not tried before."[94] His recovery message models many other addiction recovery programs. <u>One admits tha</u>t their gaming has become a problem, their own

92 O'Connor, *Control the Controller,* loc. 1485 of 2463, Kindle.
93 O'Connor, *Control the Controller,* loc. 1514 of 2463, Kindle.
94 O'Connor, *Control the Controller,* loc. 1514 of 2463, Kindle.

efforts to control such problem has not worked and they need to make a radical change. "People whose gaming habits have progressed to the point of addiction are going to need to give up their sense of self in order to make headway."[95] He adds one caveat to this recovery message if the gamer cannot identify himself with it, "In situations where the gamer simply cannot identify with the recovery message it is best to consider the problem a household issue rather than trying to force the issue onto them."[96]

Step 2. Take a Tech Detox

A tech detox is exactly what it sounds like. The gamer is to abstain from any kind of technology for the period of 76 hours. "For someone addicted to games, this is short enough to be a realistic and feasible request (though it certainly won't feel so to them, at least at the outset) and long enough such that they will be forced to be creative in finding new ways to occupy themselves."[97] This allows them to reset their mind and body and brings the gamer back down to reality. One specific suggestion of his is to make sure to involve the whole family in this tech detox. By doing so it allows for the family to show support to the gamer in helping them overcome their addiction. At the same time, filling the day with meaningful activities is a must.

Lastly he states "This step can be a useful litmus test as to whether or not addiction is present. If the supposedly addicted gamer engages with relatively little conflict, then it is perhaps a sign that they are not addicted."[98] The family and gamer should then question whether or not the gamer is playing to problematic levels or just enjoying the game. An example of this is the common feature that happens when a highly anticipated game releases and the gamers spends a great deal more time playing the game than he normally does. In these cases, it

95 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 1571 of 2463, Kindle.
96 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 1571 of 2463, Kindle.
97 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 1571 of 2463, Kindle.
98 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 1600 of 2463, Kindle.

is highly likely that the gamer will return to normal gaming attitudes after a short period of time. If this does not occur, then one might have a reasonable fear that the gamers are playing to problematic or addicted levels.

Step 3. Arrange Offline Activities

"The gamer will need to re-establish relationships with both others and themselves."[99] During their addiction or problematic gameplay, gamers may have alienated themselves from others and their own bodies. Their interaction with others around them may have been relegated to scenarios with only the briefest of meetings. Members of the family may feel alienated by the gaming activity and the arranged offline activities become a way to reconnect with one another without the barrier of video games or other tech devices. "As with the tech detox and counseling, the entire household should support these activities through getting involved with themselves."[100] Examples of these could be a weekend camping, hiking, go-karts, etc. The options are as plentiful as the imagination and resources available to the household. It is encouraged to pick things that involve some form of physical exertion, not necessarily working out or anything of that nature, although not a bad idea, but things that involve the other senses of the body rather than just the fingertips and the eyes.

Step 4: Begin Gaming Mindfully

"The Gamer is now aware of their predicament, needs to both return to their hobby and in an entirely new and more mindful fashion."[101] The purpose of this step is to allow the gamer to game in such a way that he is aware of himself and others around him. He is aware of what the effects of gaming are, and he now begins to

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99 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 1600 of 2463, Kindle.

100 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 1600 of 2463, Kindle.

101 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 1600 of 2463, Kindle.

game actively instead of passively. Active gaming involves making a conscious choice to play games and a conscious choice to stop playing games. Passive gaming is being acted upon by video games and others around you. A critical step that is to be taken by the gamer is keeping a gaming diary/log sheet. Basically, the gamer records how many hours of gaming, level of enjoyment while playing the game, and comments about things that may have happened while playing the game. Here is an example:

An Example of a Gaming Log Sheet:[102]

Monday		
Hours of Gameing	*Enjoyment*	*Comments*
10–11 am	9	Started playing a new game
11–12 am	5	
1–2 pm	6	Just argued with___ at lunch
2–3 pm	3	
11–12	2	Only about 20 minutes before I went to bed. Waste of time.
		Total Time Gaming Today: 5 Hours

Some of the side effects of keeping a gaming log is the astonishment that gamers may come to, when they realize how many hours, they spend gaming and how unenjoyable it may seem to them. Some may state that they are trying to numb their feelings or to pass time and may be exactly aware of how much time they spend gaming. Although this may be the case, the overall effect of the diary keeping will inevitably help gamers play more mindfully regardless of their

decisions.[102]

Step 5: Draw Up Boundaries

Step 5 is a crucial step. It also happens to be one of the hardest steps because it involves a collaborative effort between the gamer and those close to him. The overall objective of this step is to help the gamer reign in control over their gaming. An added side effect of this process is to help the gamer cut down on his gaming time.

Drawing up a system of boundaries should be a collaborative process between the gamer, their household and any professionals working with them. The more involvement that the gamer has, the more invested they will be in maintaining them. If they are left out of the decision-making process, then they are much less likely to keep to them. Equally, if the gamer draws up boundaries on his own, he only has himself to answer to, which is likely to fail.[103]

One factor that will help in this process of making boundaries is to consider, the acceptability, specificity, simplicity, realism, and consideration of the boundaries. Acceptable boundaries should be acceptable for both parties involved. Specific boundaries deal in concrete time limits. Simple boundaries do not consider all of the various contingencies and other day to day activities that may influence gaming time. Real boundaries bring about a level of control and allow for some generosity. Considerate boundaries allow for differing types of games that require different amounts of playtime chunks. An example of this would be that an Role Playing Game will inevitably require larger chunks of playtime in order for the gamer to achieve some sense of fulfillment or accomplishment, whereas one may play an First Person Shooter game in smaller chunks and get the same amount of fulfillment.[104]

102 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 1627 of 2463, Kindle.
103 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 1627 of 2463, Kindle.
104 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 1691 of 2463, Kindle.

Some examples of boundaries:

• All 'tech' is off between 10 a.m. and 8 a.m. on weekdays
• You have 10 hours gaming to spend a week, however you want
 • No gaming on weekdays
 • You can game for up to two hours a day, no more
 • You can have the tablet every other day[105]

Step 6: Maintain Boundaries

This is the hardest step. O'Connor outlines some of the challenges associated with this step.

For the gamer, this means having to restrain themselves from their instinctive responses when faced with boredom, upset, pain and any other difficulties that they otherwise might face. For the parents of gamers, this is going to involve policing and enforcing boundaries in the face of their child's disapproval. Finally, for partners, friends and spouses, it will require them to equally risk their relationship with the gamer by enforcing boundaries but without the authority of being a parent. In these situations, encouragement and honesty become all the more important.[106]

In order to combat some of the problems associated with this step, he outlines a few strategies for the gamer to consider. Gamers should try to delay starting, finish early, change games if needed, and avoid substitutes.[107] The gamer should choose to hold off playing

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105 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 1691 of 2463, Kindle. He also gives an example of the credit system (you do one hour of homework/chores and you get to play for one hour). Though he reiterates that this method is probably one of the least effective strategies and almost always fails.
106 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 1723 of 2463, Kindle.
107 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 1723 of 2463, Kindle.

the game for just a few minutes in order to prove to themselves that they have control over playing video games. Ending game time early emphasizes this same principle and teaches the gamer that they do not have to "extract every last drop of 'fun' out of the time spent gaming."[108] As stated earlier in the project, some games are more addictive than others and subsequently it may be that the gamer needs to change the game that they play. This may be extremely difficult for some gamers who have been playing the same game for years, who have invested a large amount of time into one game, or who just really enjoy a particular game that they play. Lastly, they should avoid substituting playing video game for watching people play video games. Watching people play video games ramps up the motivation for play themselves and continues to feed the addiction so to speak.

Step 7: Seek Professional Help

If the gamer has reached step 7 then they are most likely dealing with an addiction and not just problematic gameplay.[109] If this is the scenario, then it is best for the gamer to implement the rest of the steps.[110] O'Connor outlines a few practices for various therapies that are effective in treating video game addiction. Some of these are Cognitive-behavioral therapy, Motivational Interviewing, Family Therapy, Counseling, and psychoeducational groups.[111] He also recommends keeping an eye out for "troubled domestic life" which can exacerbate the problem and even be one of the root causes of the problem itself.[112]

Step 8: Go Public

It is common for those who struggle with an addiction to hide

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108 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 1723 of 2463, Kindle.

109 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 1868 of 2463, Kindle.

110 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 1868 of 2463, Kindle.

111 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 1868–1895 of 2463, Kindle.

112 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 1895 of 2463, Kindle.

how much they participate in the addiction. A gamer may find themselves telling their spouse that they are headed to campus to do homework yet may end up playing video games instead. They may try to participate in their gaming in secret in order that they may not be found out. All of this brings about some level of shame to the gamer and anger on part of the close relationship. They gamer may feel ashamed about what he is doing and may try to hide it. The close relationship may feel betrayed by this news and anger or frustration may be a result of finding out. So, the gamer may seek to hide it so that he doesn't have to deal with the negative repercussions of his gaming in secret. Again, this is where honesty, empathy, justice, and mercy are needed the most.

It has been my experience when I sought to hide my gaming that I did not want to tell my spouse that I had just wasted a whole day playing video games instead of spending that time at home with her and my daughter or doing my homework. When I worked up the courage to tell her what had happened, her response was what I expected. It involved some level of frustration and anger. Basically, this response reinforces the cycle of hiding the addiction in order to avoid the negative outcome of telling the spouse. When I reiterated this idea to her, and my feelings of shame that were already there, her response was somewhat mitigated. The negative repercussions of shame and guilt are already there and need not be reinforced by the close relationship. Though it is particularly hard on both parties involved. It is hard for the person to admit the wrong and hard for the close relationship to mitigate the response in such a way that is constructive and not destructive. So, in order to combat the hidden addiction, one needs to go public.

One starts this by "bringing all gaming into a public space."[113] Some suggestions would be placing the gaming consoles in an area with high traffic such as the living room, avoid allowing for gaming

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113 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 1925 of 2463, Kindle.

devices to be used in the bedroom or other private areas, and in cases of mobile devices, allowing for the observations of the close relationship. "Beyond these steps, make sure that the problem is made clear to the household. Once a gamer has admitted that they are struggling they should also approach their online gaming friends and let them know what's going on. They are ironically, though not surprisingly, a powerful source of encouragement and support."[114]

Step 9: Reach out to Others

"For those gamers that choose to play in order to avoid the social world, a crucial goal is to develop their confidence in being with others...Strengthening confidence in social situations requires immersing ourselves into relationships that we would previously have avoided."[115] This challenge may be one of the hardest for those who do not do well making new friends, but it is absolutely crucial for them especially. In order to cut back on gaming, one must have some form of outside support and the more people that they have supporting them the better the chances for a successful outcome.

Step 10: Review

This step is about reviewing the progress of the gamer throughout the recovery process. It involves the whole household and is used to determine if the addiction or problem is still present. It may also be used as an opportunity for the gamer to be allowed to manage his gaming on his own for the next few months. The review process is typically implemented every three months as a checkup but may be altered due to differing needs. It is at this point they need to consider

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114 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 1925 of 2463, Kindle. He is not kidding about online friends being supportive. In all but one case, my online friends were supportive of my decision to quit a particular game or limit the amount of time I spent playing. Many gamers are aware of the real-life challenges that video games can bring because they may experience these in their own lives. Some to greater effects than others. So, in all honesty, they have been some of the most understanding people when it comes to this step.

115 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 1925 of 2463, Kindle.

if their efforts have been working and whether they should abstain completely from playing videogames if they make no progress.[116]

Stopping an activity entirely is an admission that you are no longer, as an individual or as a household, able to moderate the behavior. While abstention should be a last resort, it should also be considered as a continuation of the recovery message. Effectively, you are acknowledging that systems of moderation, no matter how you attempt them, do not work. Once a number of substantial three-month attempts have been made toward moderation it is time for more drastic action.[117]

In order for abstention to be as easy as possible, it is important for the gamer to remove all forms of gaming and any chances to return back to said gaming. Depending on the type of gaming that one does, effects what this entails. It could be a deletion of all games and characters on the game thereby removing any opportunity for the gamer to return to the game without considerable amount of effort. Friendships play a large role in this as well. If the company you hang out with play video games all the time, then it might be time to find new company or hope that your friends won't play games while your around.

Finally, it is important to keep an eye out for addiction switching. In my case, I went from playing video games for 3-4 hours a day to reading books for 3-4 hours a day. Though this may seem like an improvement, it still prevented me from getting my homework finished and spending quality time with my spouse. Any good things taken to an extreme can be cause for alarm. One of the most common scenarios is changing from one device to another. A person may get rid of all gaming platforms in their house, and turn off of their computer but then may spend all their time playing games on their

116 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 1982 of 2463, Kindle.
117 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 1982 of 2463, Kindle.

phone or tablet. Essentially placing them right back into the same situation as they were in before.

Additional Suggestions for Loved Ones

It has been reiterated that the negative effects of problematic gaming or video game addiction is best seen in the gamer and the relationships they have with others. It can be an utterly lonely world to live in when you are the spouse/loved one of an addicted gamer. Aside from the recommendations listed above, it is paramount that you have someone you can speak with if you cannot do so with your spouse/loved one. It is common for those who seek professional help with their loved one's gaming addiction to meet with a professional counselor. Having someone to confide in and speak with about your frustrations is beneficial and can be extremely rewarding.

On top of these things you can help the gamer in their journey by giving regular affirmations and encouragement. One of the hardest things to overcome when caught in addiction is the lack of hope. You can be a source of motivation and hope for the gamer. It is particularly important "to remain strong for them when they are showing weakness. While it is important that you communicate when you are upset, angry or afraid for them, avoid behaviors that imply that you can't handle these feelings, such as losing your temper, breaking down into uncontrollable tears or simply abandoning/ignoring them."[118]

Other ways you can help the gamer includes, modeling controlled behavior in your own negative habits, and making it explicitly clear on how their gaming affects you. For example, "You game so much, I no longer feel like I'm married" "It's disheartening to see you fail at school because you're too busy gaming," and "You've spent over half my earnings this year on games," are all examples of how the effect of

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118 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 2070 of 2463, Kindle.

gaming addiction can be made clear to someone.[119]

Secondly, you can show interest in video games that the gamer is playing. One of the best ways to show that you care about someone is showing interest in what they care about. When a person attacks something that another person loves, it puts them on the defensive and reduces the relationship with them. Knowing about their games also helps you understand the situations they are coming from and allows for empathy. When you do not care to show interest in their hobby, you are relegated to "a weak position to even begin talking about them – you're relegated to the you don't get it' area. You've also cast a vote against that person: by shutting out someone's interest you are shutting out the person, to some extent."[120]

Lastly, if you are parents of a gamer, BE UNITED! Nothing destroys progress more than two people who are sending mixed signals to the gamer. Do not use the bad cop, good cop mentality. No matter how much you agree or disagree in private, when it comes to speaking with the gamer about their challenges, BE UNITED! Agree with one another on what you are going to say and do, before you ever approach the individual.

Suggestions for Health Professionals

First one needs to create a safe environment for expression. You may be dealing with people who have been purposely avoiding social settings because of their fears. Second, they need to understand their own personal judgements about gaming. You may have a stigma toward video games yourself and may need to check it at the door so progress can be made in their life. Do not miss the cues for the underlying problems associated with gaming by focusing solely on video games as the problem. Lastly, be sure you have some education

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119 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 2070 of 2463, Kindle.
120 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 2099 of 2463, Kindle.

on video games. It is hard to educate someone or even relate to someone if you have no knowledge of video games. Either educate yourself or refer the individual to another who can better provide care.[121]

121 O'Connor, *Control the Controller*, loc. 2128–2156 of 2463, Kindle.

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