Growing Up Gamers in a Digital World
Jeremy Eberle MA LIMHP, CDGC, LADC
Janet Johnson MA LIMHP, CDGC, LADC

Objectives
Signs and Symptoms of Gaming Use Disorder
Assessments Utilized to Identify Gaming Use Disorder
Treatment Strategies for Gaming Use Disorder

Presented by: Jeremy Eberle, MA, LIMHP, CDGC, LADC and Janet L. Johnson, MA, LIMHP, CDGC, LADC
This presentation will highlight the changing landscape of gamers as the age in which problem behaviors for gaming disorder is skewing younger. Providers will begin seeing more youth and families present for services who have missed fundamental development stages resulting in an at-risk population for anxiety, depression, diminished self-actualization, and reduced academic, employment, and relationship achievement. Utilizing a combination of developmental models to assist clients with these challenges, providers will be able to recognize current stages of maturation and how to help clients excel into a life they can be successful in.

In this presentation, use of the pronouns, “he or she” will be used interchangeably when sex or sexual identity is not a factor. This in no way is meant to insinuate or assign gender to those we treat, but universal terms meant to encompass the population at large. When sex and prevalence does correlate, this will be highlighted in discussion. The terms “client and Gamer” will also be utilized. Please feel free to replace any term you feel is more appropriate or are comfortable with when treating your specific population.

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• According to the World Health Organization, Gaming Disorder is a particular pattern of gaming behavior, either offline or online, where there is an impaired control over gaming takes precedence over other daily activities which results in impaired function or distress and continues in spite of negative consequences.

Dr. Vladimir Poznyak 2018

Signs and Symptoms

• Pre-occupation
  • Thinking about the game even when they aren’t playing it

• Withdrawal
  • Becoming irritable or frustrated when not being allowed to play the game

• Tolerance
  • Needing to spend more and more time or money to get the same effect

• Loss of interest in other hobbies or people
  • Game begins to take over more of their focus
Signs and Symptoms

- Continued use despite negative consequences
  - Family members complain, restrict gaming, running out of money, grades begin to suffer
- Lying about the amount of time or money spent on gaming
- Gaming to escape negative moods or distressing situations
- Jeopardizing school, work, or home relationships
  - Need 5 or more criteria in order to be considered having the disorder

What do our gamers get from these activities

- Competition-dopamine
- Connection to peers-some oxytocin
- Status
- Creativity-serotonin
Impact on Social Skills and Other Harmful Effects

Social Skills

- Social media and video games have changed the way we interact
- Kids no longer text
- Using our computers, consoles or discord servers to have interactions rather than in person
- Why are kids moving away from traditional forms of communication
Other Harmful Effects

- Higher unemployment rates amongst males in their 20’s
- Can cause problems in college or high school with grades
- Aggressive thoughts and behaviors especially present who excessively play video games when they are under 10 years old
- Poor social interaction
- More difficulty with relationships
Other Harmful Effects

Increased risk of ADD or ADHD due to highly interactivity of video games

Lowered metabolism

Musculoskeletal disorders of upper body due to sitting for prolonged periods of time
  - Gamer’s thumb
  - Trigger finger
  - Tennis elbow

Belief System

- Belief system is built around the game or social media presence
- Being good at the game equals being good at life
- Getting a job is less important than what I am doing online
- My online friends are more important than real life relationships
Belief System

- My career is going to online
- Failure would be fatal especially in front of other people
- The game gives tangible markers of success
- I have time to learn the skills I need

WHAT ARE OTHER COUNTRIES TRYING?
Growing Up Gamers: Diagnosing and Treating Gaming Use Disorder

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Assessments

Internet Gaming Disorder Test
Developed by Hailey Pontes and Mark Griffiths in 2014
- 20 item self-report questionnaire
- 6-point scale ranging from 0 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree
- Has good reliability and validity scores
- Uses the DSM criteria as basis for questions
- 71 is cut-off point-want to talk about this one

Treatments

Strategies for Gaming Use Disorder
Competency, Fidelity and Love

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Erik Erikson’s Stages of Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Crisis</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Category 4</th>
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<tr>
<td>Stage 4</td>
<td>Industry vs. Inferiority</td>
<td>5-12</td>
<td>Competency</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 5</td>
<td>Identity vs. Role Confusion</td>
<td>12-18</td>
<td>Fidelity</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 6</td>
<td>Intimacy vs. Isolation</td>
<td>18-40</td>
<td>Love</td>
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<tr>
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<td>4.5</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
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</tbody>
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Fidelity

Stage 5-Identity vs Role Confusion

- The ability to know who you are and to be the same person everywhere
  - Typically, a time where individuals are trying on new behaviors anyway
- As a result, many find themselves trying on new behaviors without a static sense of who they are
  - Begin to adopt beliefs about their abilities or skills based on negative feedback loop
  - Become more reluctant to take chances and thus spending more time isolated as they don’t know
  - Help clients uncover the sense of who they are

Love

- Stage 6-Intimacy vs. Isolation
  - Assisting client with resolving intimate relationship difficulties
    - Gamers and porn
    - Lack the confidence to initiate friendships or intimate relationships
    - May turn to games and avatars because there is less chance of rejection and can be bolder online
    - Role playing conversations
    - Point out the difference in personal narrative versus game narrative
Growing Up Gamers: Diagnosing and Treating Gaming Use Disorder

Motivational Interviewing

- As mentioned before, gamers have many beliefs about the world that keep them stuck.
- Use motivational interviewing to challenge these beliefs:
  - Trying to break them out of contemplation
  - Goal is to assist clients in trying new activities such as finding a job, seeking a new hobby or relationship
  - Empowering them to create the life they want outside of the game
Motivational Interviewing

- Pre-contemplation client
  - First build therapeutic rapport
    - Client may be coming in only to appease outside pressures so the important factor here is to neutralize their suspicion
    - Start by asking what they want out of therapy, not if they are willing to give up gaming
    - Begin to explore advantages and disadvantages of gaming

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Motivational Interviewing

- Motivated Clients
  - 90-day detox-assists clients in reassessing what is fun and what they enjoy
  - Optimal for all clients, but historically experience difficulty getting those in contemplation or pre-contemplation to attempt this
  - Want to begin to help clients find alternative activities in their life

Replacing Chemicals

Dopamine

- Competition releases dopamine so for gamers drawn more toward competitive games we need a replacement
- Exercise
- Creating lists with tangible rewards-applying for jobs, interacting with 5 new people
- Find other competitive avenues
- Diet
**Replacing Chemicals**

**Serotonin**
- Serotonin is the creative mood chemical in the brain. If a Gamer seeks serotonin, will need to find replacements
- Music-listening and creating
- Sunlight and nature
- Aerobic exercise
- Coding activities

**Replacing Chemicals**

**Oxytocin**
- Oxytocin is the connection chemical in the brain. If a Gamer is seeking oxytocin, will need to find a replacement
- Spending time with friends IRL
- 5 friends-dunbar
- Some form of affection
- Sensory stimuli, pets,
- Weighted blankets, stuffed animals
- Yoga
- Music-listening and creating
Strategies for Families

- Talk and listen to teens about what they are experiencing online.
- Set rules and boundaries:
  - Follow user agreements
    - Most suggest age of 13
  - Have consequences to when they break the boundaries
  - Model appropriate screen time
  - Draft a contract about acceptable use of technology
Strategies for Families

Family therapy

• Want to teach parents this is not a matter of fault; it is a matter of finding ways to increase positive family time

• Also want to process through the emotions which are happening in the family dynamic

• Want to reset the way in which we play and the way in which our children play

Strategies for Families

Play (Mildred Parten)

• Onlooker behavior
• Solitary independent
• Parallel
• Associative
• Cooperative
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Strategies for Families

Taking breaks

- Indoor Breaks
- Outdoor Breaks

References:

- Reuters: August 31st, 2021 Why and How China is drastically limiting online gaming for under 18s
- Bean, Anthony Video Gamers and Games in Therapy. Routledge 2018
- Eric Maisel Why Smart People Hurt
Thank You

Jeremy R. Eberle MA LIMHP, CDGC, LADC
Janet L. Johnson MA LIMHP, CDGC, LADC
admin@alternativeavenues.net
(402)875-1104