The Relationship Between Gaming and Gambling Disorder
Conflict of Interest

- CEO: Game Quitters
- Consultant: The Cabin Rehabs & Reset SummerCamp
What Will You Learn?

• Three recent trends in the convergence of gaming and gambling and their risk for problem gambling

• Common techniques video games use to keep players engaged

• How to identify at-risk gamers using a validated screening tool

• Strategies to support problematic gaming treatment and recovery
Who is Cam Adair?

- Addicted to video games for 10 years
- Became an escape from intense bullying, anxiety, and depression
- Dropped out of high school, pretended to have jobs, wrote a suicide note
- Founded GameQuitters.com to help others, now serving 75,000 members each month in 95 countries
- Named one of Canada’s Leaders in Mental Health by CAMH
- Published in Psychiatry Research with Dr. Daniel King
Massively Popular

- 2.3B active gamers worldwide (Newzoo, 2018)
- 54% Male and 46% Female (ESA, 2019)
- Average age: 32 (M), 34 (F)
- 83% of teenage girls play regularly, 96% of boys (Pew, 2018)
- Global Gaming Market is $137.9B (Newzoo, 2018)
- Mobile revenues account for more than 50%
Gaming Disorder

- Official recognition in ICD-11 by World Health Organization (May 2019)

- ‘Gaming Disorder’ is characterized by: 1) impaired control over gaming, 2) gaming takes precedence over other interests and daily activities, 3) and continuation or escalation of gaming despite the occurrence of negative consequences.

- The behavior pattern must be of sufficient severity to result in significant impairment in important areas of functioning

- Would normally have been evident for at least 12 months
Screening Tool

• The Internet Gaming Disorder Scale (Lemmens, Valkenburg, & Gentile, 2015, APA)

• Psychological assessment, empirically supported

• Scale has two versions: a short (9-item) and long (27-item)

• Normal gamers: (score<2), risky gamers (2-4), and disordered gamers (5+) - in the last twelve months

• Online quiz for gamers or loved ones: gamequitters.com
Warning Signs

- Pre-occupation
- Withdrawal symptoms
- Tolerance (King, 2017)
- Unsuccessful attempt to control
- Loss of interest in previous hobbies
- Continued use despite negative impact
- Deception
- Use of games to escape/relief negative mood
- Jeopardized or lost a lost significant relationship, job, education
The Negative Impact

- School grades, school refusal, absenteeism, dropout
- Loss of face-to-face friendships and social isolation
- Mood changes (irritability, anger, boredom)
- Increased anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts and attempts
- Poor sleep schedule, insomnia, staying up all night
- Loss of money, time, unemployment
Problem Gamers

- Male (90%) adolescents are most at risk (5%), young adults (18-24) tend to experience negative impact

- Life revolves around gaming - user shifts priorities and takes shortcuts to maximize gaming

- Gaming is no longer a beneficial activity - they play because they cannot stop or control their behavior

- Gaming 30 hrs/week is a red flag, but 70 hrs/week or more is likely a problem
Risk Factors

• Trait impulsivity

• Anxiety, Social Anxiety, Depression (48% - King, 2018)

• ADHD, Autism

• Low self-esteem

• Excessive porn and internet use

• More chaotic or insecure family environments

• Single-parent households

• Less structured routines and schedules
Early 20s:

- Sold his truck for $17,000
- Moved in with grandma
- Spends all day gaming or watching people play on Twitch
- Hangs out with online friends on Discord
- Mother doesn’t know what to do
- Unemployment
Why Gamers Play:

- Video games fulfill specific emotional needs: Temporary Escape, Social Connection, Constant Measurable Growth (Advancement), and Purpose

- Games are intentionally designed to keep you hooked using state of the art behavioral psychology

- Games are fully immersive, and provide hyper-stimulation (dopamine)

- Overexposure causes structural brain changes: numbed pleasure response, hyper-reactivity, and willpower erosion - take up to 90 days to reverse

- Gaming is a safe place to fail - real world failure can be permanent
Peer Pressure

- Gaming is a community and a culture - these are meaningful relationships and may be their only relationships

- Gamers spend as much time playing games as they do watching other people play on websites like YouTube and Twitch

- Online world becomes a more reliable means of gaining social feedback and acceptance

- Gamers can feel guilty if they leave their game early because it lets their team down or they might fall behind in their skill level

- If they are not gaming they may be a social outcast at school
Gamers Are Defensive

- Society has shamed gamers for being gamers (lazy, wasting their potential, those are not your ‘real friends’)

- This has created an Us. vs. Them mentality, which brings gamers closer together

- Shame and stigma are barriers for people to ask for help

- Don’t tell them “you’re addicted” as it hurts your relationship, instead focus on the behavior “you missed school today”
Identity

- Gamers identify with being a ‘gamer’ and develop attachments

- They value their collection of games and achievements in the same way people value their real-world goods and relationships

- Their gaming history provides a record of progress, which is commonly a contrast to their lack of real-world progress

- Brain studies show addicts are more likely to identify with their online avatars to compensate for a poorer sense of self

- Tantrums/self-harm can be a form of anxious-attachment styles - similar to how it takes 90 days to get over a relationship ending
Alarming Trends
Games Have Changed

• Games used to be simple: Atari, Pong, Pacman

• Today games offer unlimited experiences of winning and losing, complex narratives and characters

• Large open worlds to explore, opportunities to socialize

• They are accessible on all of your devices

• Games are constantly changing to keep you involved (and spending money)
Free-to-Play Games

• iPhone and App Store transformed gaming (mobile revolution)

• Business models changed from one-time purchase to being free with the opportunity to spend money within the game

• Games-as-a-service with additional downloadable content and micro transactions (consumables)
Fortnite Phenomenon

- The hottest game in the world: 250 million people play
- Free to play game has earned $4B in revenue
- Fortnite: World Cup ($30M in prize money, 16-year-old won $3M grand prize)
- Parents are hiring coaches for their kids
- Battle Royale mode is a 100 player “last person standing”
- It’s cartoonish and retro (less gore and perceived violence)
Fortnite Phenomenon

- It’s free to play (low barrier, especially for kids)
- You level up within a 10-week season (unique rewards)
- Live map events and map changes (maintains hype)
- Daily challenges (keeps you coming back)
- Limited daily-refreshed shop (inclined to check daily)
- Available on all platforms
‘Educational’ Games

• Doctor Kids — kids play doctor/dentist

• Pop-up with an offer to purchase new mini games

• If child manages to press the X cancel, character on screen cries

• Game is marketed to kids as young as 6

• Structured so not spending money is wrong or shameful

• Study found 135 apps had manipulative advertising targeted to kids
What are Loot Boxes?

- Items in video games that may be bought with real-world money but provide randomized rewards
- Different types: Skins (costumes), pay-to-win (FIFA)
- “Seemingly” random but odds are often not disclosed (and they can dynamically change based on your player data)
- Some have real-world value (you can trade, sell, or bet them)
AWP | Dragon Lore

Covert Sniper Rifle

Souvenir Available

$2,000
Let’s Go Whaling

- Loot boxes are psychologically akin to gambling (Drummond, 2018)

- Large-scale study found link between the amount gamers spent on loot boxes and the severity of their problem gambling (Zendle, 2018)

- Within top 5% of spenders, 45% were problem gamblers

- Loot boxes are in 63% of top games in Google Play Store (1.6B downloads)

- 49% PEGI rated as suitable for children 7+, 93% for children 12+
Kinder Eggs or Slot Machines?

Loot boxes and slot machines:

- Random distribution of prizes
- Variable value of prizes
- Near-miss features
- Visual and sound cues associated with participation and reward

- Prize: Anything of value the sponsor awards in a promotion. (Example: real money or a virtual reward to advance in a game)
- Chance: A process beyond the participant’s direct control determines the outcome.
- Consideration: Requires money or significant effort.
THE DIAMOND CASINO & RESORT
LOS SANTOS

NOW OPEN
GTA Online

- 50 million players
- Real money to gamble for virtual chips
- Spin the *lucky* wheel, play slots, horse racing, table games: roulette, blackjack, poker
- An estimated 5 million kids play this game
Gateway to Gambling

• Simulated gambling may lead to real-world gambling: 26% had migrated to online gambling from social casino games (Kim, 2015)

• Simulated gambling normalizes gambling: it appears more positive, safe, normal or socially accepted, and may increase young people's confidence in gambling due to the relative ease of winning (King, 2018)

• Simulated gambling increases risk of problematic gaming (5.2% amongst FTP games - Dreier, 2017) and/or gambling (Kim, 2017)
“My addiction was slot machines, which is regulated in my country. And after years of being addicted, I got free, and stopped. Loot boxes started it all over again. It has exactly the same dopamine trigger, and the same programing of a slot machine. The cool colors, and sound effects please the addicted.” -Mo Kalifi.
Parents Fault?

- Court documents revealed Facebook knowingly duped game-playing kids to spend money without parents permission

- Only 32% of parents said they knew what a loot box is, but less than a third of them selected the correct definition

- Parents aren’t expecting a Disney game to try and prey on their kid

- Parents likely don’t know a credit card is attached to the account

- Games can add gambling features post-launch and no physical copies will have a proper label (self-regulated)
The Rise of Esports

- Esports is a term for organized competition for video games
- Universities are adding esports teams, and offering scholarships for esports
- 600 universities and 19,000 high schools in U.S.
- Revenues will cross $1B in 2019
Esports Betting

- eSports arenas in casinos
- Betting on professional gaming teams
- Fantasy eSports
- Betting in-game items (“skins”)
- Esports betting est $9.3B in 2019 (Eilers & Krejcik Gaming)
Twitch & YouTube

• Twitch - 15M daily visitors, 355 billion minutes watched (2017)

• Amazon acquired Twitch for $970 million

• Gamers spend just as much time playing as they do watching other people play

• Opportunity for gambling industry to advertise
CSGO: Skin Betting

- Counter-Strike: Global Offensive (CS:GO) introduced skins
- Skins are a unique way to decorate your weapons
- Exploded popularity of the game by 1,500% in two years
- Buy skin for cash, place bet in game, sell skin on third party site
- 3M players wagered $2.3B worth of skins (2015), Valve received a 15% kickback
- CS:GO gambling industry was worth $7.4B in July 2016
CSGO Lounge

Trades

- **Sarr** wants to trade: (just now)
  - Factory New
  - Minimal Wear
  - Field-Tested
  - Any Offer
  - Any Knife

- **BronKs** wants to trade: (just now)
  - Battle-Scarred
  - Minimal Wear

- **Big Ounce** wants to trade: (just now)
  - Field-Tested
  - Minimal Wear

Boys

- 44 minutes ago **LIVE**
  - TSM 53%
  - EchoFox 47%

- 1 hour from now **BMC has 1-0 adv.**
  - BMC 76%
  - Nexus 24%

- 2 hours from now
  - Cloud9 76%
  - Splyce 24%

- 2 hours from now
  - Liquid 67%
  - NRG 33%
Gold Rush

- Activision generated $7B in revenue (2017) and $4B of it came from in-game transactions
- Video game industry in U.S. $43.4B (up 18% from 2017)
- FIFA Ultimate Team made up 28% of EA’s revenue (2017)
- Ninja was paid $1M to play (stream) himself playing Apex Legends on the first day of its release
- Apex Legends reached 50M players in two weeks
Industry Response

- FTC investigating Loot boxes
- Netherlands, Belgium: Loot boxes are gambling and now illegal
- U.K. Gambling Commission concerned but not illegal
- Australia Senate not sure
Policy Suggestions

- Better inform consumers: transparency, prevention programs, loot boxes rated M for Mature (18+)

- Prevent gambling-related problems: parental controls, age verification in the digital age

- Facilitate treatment seeking and support recovery: gambling counselors most equipped to help problem gamers

- Increase evidence base: we need more research on loot boxes and the link between gaming and gambling
Additional Resources

- [GameQuitters.com](http://gamequitters.com)
- 200+ videos and 70+ inspiring stories
- Step by-step guides for gamers and parents (Reclaim & Respawn)
- Residential Treatment: The Cabin (Thailand), reSTART (US)
- Game Quitters Parent Facebook Group
Any Questions?

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programs & resources: gamequitters.com
References


References


References


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