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“Video games are a ubiquitous part of almost all children's and adolescents' lives, with 97% playing for at least one hour per day in the United States.” (Granic, Lobel, & Engels, 2014). Video gaming is a billion dollar industry and its growing popularity with adolescents and young adults is becoming a part of everyday life for a majority of children in the modern era. Video games can have immense value and opportunity. They can be enjoyable and useful when used appropriately for entertaining or learning experiences. Society today seems to put an emphasis on the consequences of gaming. Gaming has even made national news when discussing the possibility that a violent video game can influence violent behavior. For the last decade, video game use has been researched more and more. With this new research some new discoveries have come to light. As it turns out, there are a number of good benefits that one receives when playing video games. Whenever someone gets to the point of playing a video game for a solid 20 hours straight on a frequent basis, then of course, there may be a problem. This problem could be a number of things, but most likely it is video game addiction. Video game addiction has become a serious problem for such a large group of people that centers have opened up to specialize in just video game addiction. The first Detox Center for Video Game Addiction opened in the Netherlands (“Detox for video game addiction? Experts say gaming can be a compulsion as strong as gambling”, 2006). “Video games may look innocent, but they can be as addictive as gambling or drugs and just as hard to kick,” explained Keith Bakker, director of Amsterdam-based Smith & Jones Addiction Consultants and founder of the center. This paper will investigate just what makes a video game so addicting and the consequences of becoming addicted to video games. I will also explore methods that can lead to recovery as a way to help those that cannot control their endless desire to dwell in a virtual world.
A Brief History of Video Games

First, let us start with a brief history of video games. The first video game was called Tennis for Two and it was created by a physicist named William A Higinbotham in 1958. This game led to the first fully interactive video game called Space War! Nolan Bushnell and Ted Dabney took the premise of Space War! and created the first coin operated arcade game. They named their company Atari and became an instant sensation with their first game, Pong. Since Pong was released in 1972, gaming has been gaining a steady flow of players. (“History of Video Games”, 2008) In 1977, the Atari 2600 is released, being the first home console for everyday people. Later, some former Atari employees started a new company called Activision. Activision was the first company to make software for a console without directly making the console themselves. Today Activision is one of the biggest gaming development companies there is. In 1980, Namco brings Pac-Man to the United States and becomes instantly popular. Mario and Donkey Kong are introduced shortly after. Microsoft enters the gaming world with its first version of Flight Simulator. 1986 brought the release of the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES). This home console achieved record sales and brought gaming to a newer, more accessible level to the masses. In 1989, Sega released the Sega Genesis, which was the biggest competitor for Nintendo at the time. That same year Nintendo released the Game Boy and the age of mobile gaming began. The Game Boy came with Tetris built in and with its relatively low price, competitors could not compete. Sony released the first PlayStation in Japan in 1994. It was a huge success and paved the way for Sony to hold a substantial claim in the gaming market. In 1996, Nintendo releases the Nintendo 64 gaming system. It is the first gaming console that runs 64-bit. Releasing alongside the Nintendo 64 were Mario 64 and Zelda: Ocarina of Time. Both games are considered masterpieces in the gaming world. In 2000, Sony releases the PlayStation
2. The PlayStation 2 is the first console to use DVD interface and for the first time, a home console could have better graphics than a computer. In 2001, the gaming scene gets much bigger. Nintendo releases the Game Boy Advance and it sells 500,000 units the first week of release. That same year Nintendo released the GameCube and Microsoft released the Xbox. Nintendo, Sony, and Microsoft continue to be at the top of the console gaming market. The newest console releases include the Wii U from Nintendo, the Xbox One from Microsoft, and the PlayStation 4 from Sony. They are each capable of incredibly realistic graphics. In the handheld gaming department, there are numerous devices to play games on. Nintendo and PlayStation both have hand-held gaming consoles available, but there are 1000’s of games that one can download on a phone now. The handheld gaming market has blown up. Any developer can create a game and sell it on the app store for a dollar per person and become an overnight sensation. (“The video game revolution”, n.d.)

Video games started out as needing a supercomputer to run them and a small fortune to own them, but now there is a video game just a click away from any electronic device in the modern world. There are several genres of video games, and they can all tell a great story and offer many different kinds of experiences. You can be a cage fighter, an octopus, a dragon, or a Pokémon. The environments and experiences that video games offer players to be immersed in are limitless. You can play as the star player of your favorite sports franchise, fight as an American soldier taking the beach of Normandy, or control a custom made character in a massively multiplayer online role playing game (MMORPG). Video games are often described as movies that you act out with a controller, but it’s more than that. In a video game, you are able to make any decision you like in the order that you wish to make it. Not all games allow this of course, but some do. In a Grand Theft Auto game, for instance, you do not have to follow the
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‘rules’ of society or morality. You can get in a car and run over civilians if you wish. If the police catch you killing someone in the game, you can choose to kill them too, or run away. Everything has a consequence though. Running from the cops is not an easy task and time spent doing that means you have spent less time expanding your empire. Gaming is about free will and having a voice. Having the ability to do whatever you like is something some people never have an option to do in real life, and I believe that is a part of what makes gaming addiction prevalent in the current world.

Violence in Video Games

There has been an increasing amount of research into video games and into the habits of those that play them. I believe a big reason for this is because of the national media coverage given to the children involved in the Columbine shooting. The two involved in the shooting were known to be avid gamers. They often played Doom and other first person shooters like Call of Duty. The whole ‘violence in video games’ debate began after this and called for more research on the matter. One of the bestselling games ever is Grand Theft Auto. The franchise is no stranger to media coverage. Grand Theft Auto even had a movie release in theatres this last September called The Gamechangers that shows the public resistance upon the release of the Grand Theft Auto video game series. Grand Theft Auto is notorious for being a violent game full of player choice opportunities. In the game it is completely possible to have sex with a prostitute that you pick up, pay her, and then get out of the vehicle and kill her with a baseball bat and take your money back. Indeed the game has some disturbing things that can be done, but that is the nature of the game. Grand Theft Auto is ‘open-world’ and the player has somewhat of a free will. Did that scenario have to happen with the prostitute? No, that was completely optional. The player also has the option to focus their playtime on killing rival gangs or doing driving stunts.
The possibilities are endless and are certainly a big reason for its success. That being said, research done in the last decade has revealed that violence in video games does result in slight increased aggression levels of the player, but that is not the whole story. “Aggression is defined as behavior that is intended to harm another individual” (Adachi & Willoughby, 2011). Adachi and Willoughby studied aggression-related video game characteristics. This study aimed to examine the effects of violent video games on aggression. Their journal article displayed that competitiveness plays a larger role in aggressive behavior in the short term. As it turns out, violence in video games may not be the cause of aggression in the players that play, but instead it is the competition in video games that drives aggression levels up (Jerabeck & Feguson, 2013). Cooperative play has proven to be an aggression reducer. Instead of being tasked with destroying an enemy alone, having someone to do it with promotes teamwork and motivation, but not aggression. Another study tested violent video games and what reactions the participants have after playing them. “The data showed that the violent video game primed aggressive concepts as expected, but also raised positive concepts, and did so independently of the participants’ history of playing violent video games” (Bosche, 2010). With this information, it can be argued that violent video games do not strictly increase aggression, but also raise positive concepts. (Thomas, 2009)

**Positive Effects of Video Game Use**

Video games are not all bad though. There are a number of benefits to playing video games. It has been shown that video game training has enhanced cognitive functioning in young and older adults. Results from a study showed better reaction time, attention, memory, and global cognition (Toril, Reales, & Ballesteros, 2014). Video game technology has been used to help with the deteriorating effects of aging. Since aging has diminishing returns on cognitive function
among other effects, researching for ways to slow down or reverse this process has always been a goal for scientists. “A number of recent studies have shown that positive changes in older adults’ cognition can occur after training with video games” (Toril, Reales, & Ballesteros, 2014). These studies have shown that with old age, the brain becomes more elastic. Having more elasticity, the brain can change and grow in different areas easier than it could when it was younger. Having older adults use video game training revealed many cognitive improvements including: intelligence, attention, hand-eye coordination, global cognitive function, and processing speed (Toril, Reales, & Ballesteros, 2014). More research is needed in this field to see the true capabilities of video games on the minds of older people. Perhaps there is a way that video game training could cure Alzheimer’s someday; only further research can reveal this.

Video games may make living a longer life less frightening if it can keep your mind sharp and cognitive functions in peak working condition.

To further prove that cognitive function is increased when playing video games, a study was done to measure the cortical thickness in the brain of one-hundred and fifty-two fourteen-year-olds. “Cortical thickness across the whole cortical surface was correlated with self-reported duration of video gaming.” (Kuhn, Banaschewski, Barker, Buchel, Conrad, & Heinz, 2014). The more that these adolescents had played video games, the more cognitive function they had. There was not a single person that played video games that showed cortical thinning (Kuhn, Banaschewski, Barker, Buchel, Conrad, & Heinz, 2014). Video games effect cognitive performance. This includes task switching ability, visual short-term memory, mental rotation, enumeration, flanker interference, and self-reported problematic video game usage (Collins & Freeman, 2014). In another study, people were tested to see whether or not video game players are superior in multiple domains of visual attention like they are hypothesized to be. In the
experiments, subjects were tested for perception threshold, visual short-term memory, processing speed, top-down control, and special distribution of attention. It was discovered that video game players had advantages in perception threshold and visual processing speed (Schubert, Finke, Redel, Kluckow, Müller, & Strobach, 2015). In a study done that investigated the relationship between video game use and college GPA, video games were found to be negatively correlated to a student’s GPA and to the use of drugs and alcohol (Schmitt & Livingston, 2015.) The research shown in these articles tells us that video games do not diminish cognitive function, but they are a distraction for college students. Cognitive function was not shown to be smaller than even with problematic players. The problem just seems to be the urge to play, even at the expense of one’s grades. To no surprise it is easier for a college student to be physically and emotionally invested in a video game than in their class studies. When playing video games, a line must be drawn by the player. It is easy to play a game that you like for endless hours, but it is hard to know when to stop. A player must set boundaries for themselves in order to not become addicted.

**Video Game Addiction**

Video game addiction is a serious threat to our millennial generation. In China, ten percent of its thirty-million gamers are said to be addicted along with fifteen percent of American gamers (Young, 2009). It is being treated as an epidemic in China. China has put laws into place to help limit the amount of time spent gaming. What can make someone so addicted to a video game that they feel the need to play constantly? I think part of this comes from just what a video game is. Video games are a form of art and serve as an outlet for many artists. The creation behind video games is limitless and with the increased processing power year after year, the possibilities for what a video game can do become pretty remarkable. With the graphical
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capabilities of hardware in this modern era, these games are brought to life in almost unsettling realism. It is not hard to imagine a child with what he would call a mediocre life to want to “play” a hero in a video game and be praised over and over again for his accomplishments whereas in real life, he goes by unnoticed. The problem with video game addiction lies deeper than the games themselves.

It is possible to be addicted to any game, but with the emergence of Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPG), video game addictions have grown exponentially. World of Warcraft (WOW) is perhaps the biggest and most successful MMORPG. MMORPGs are games that never really have an ending. There is always something to do in these games. In these games you can create your character from the ground up. You get to decide what he looks like, what race he is, and even the sounds and mannerisms can be tuned to your choice. Older, more linear games had a very definite ending. Like Mario, for instance, after going through all the levels and fighting all the turtles in your way, you eventually see Mario free the princess and save the day. In a MMORPG world, you might end an epic, three hour long quest, but as soon as you are done with that one, there is another one to do. It is literally endless. It is quite common for a WOW user to log more hours into their virtual world than live life in the real world.

**Immersion**

To comprehend just what online gaming addiction is, you must first understand how a virtual world has the biggest influence over the addiction. Being immersed in these huge open worlds has a huge impact on the level of addiction in a player. Games like Pac Man, Donkey Kong, and Space Invaders were immensely popular in the 1980s. These games were single-player only where a player would only play against the computer and compete for the highest score possible. In order to achieve a high score with these games a lot of practice would be
needed to improve hand-eye coordination. As time went on, games became more evolved. In the 90s, gamers could see games that allowed the creation of levels, rooms, and character customization. Games like Quake and Doom allowed players to choose what weapons to use on different enemies. Players could now make decisions that change the way one can play. In Doom, you can either kill a demon the traditional way by using a shotgun or you can choose to use a chainsaw for a more up-close and personal feel. Gaming became hugely popular in the late 90s and evolved video games even further. The video games produced by Microsoft and Sony were incredible movie-like experiences, thanks to increased computing power in their consoles. With the extra power developers were allowed much more space to do much more impressive things. The worlds made from then on are not simply virtual pictures, but living breathing environments. Life can be found in every crevice of some games. Each game has scenery of its own, be it forests, oceans, castles, skies, beaches, mountains, you name it. These living worlds have their own set of currency even and economy. You may spend coins, gold, pelts, blood diamonds, whatever. This currency is often used to improve your character by making them stronger, smarter, or to even make them look cooler by having a certain item to wear.

These games have societies. In order to play in these games, players must first create their character. This is the version of themselves that is virtually in the game. When doing this a player must decide the species, race, history, philosophy, and heritage. A player can make their character look as real and as original as he/she likes. While making a human character for instance, the player can adjust the hair style and color, skin color, height, weight, face/facial expressions, and even how your character sounds. Then you can pick a profession to have in this world. A player may choose their character to be a banker, lawyer, engineer, bounty hunter, or a thief. Then there is the name. The name giving may be the most important task when creating a
game character. This name will be the name that the player will play as for quite some time.
Players that he plays will/may call a player by their character name even in real life so it must be
something worth being called. In some ways, some players will play under this other name for a
character in a video game more than they play as themselves in the real world. A player may
have many characters in one game. A player may decide to have a strong warrior/barbaric type
of character to play as when they just want to run in a situation and swing an axe around, but
they may also have a quiet, sneaky character that they may use when they feel like hiding and
sneaking into places that might prove hard to fight through. The possibilities of characters and
play styles are nearly limitless. In most games, the ‘default’ character that you play as is typically
the hero. What makes some games a little more interesting is having the option to play as a
villain.

**Psychological Effects and Consequences of Video Game Addiction**

Hardcore players are usually younger and may suffer from emotional issues, low self-esteem, and low self-worth. People that suffer from such emotional problems are more
susceptible to becoming addicted to playing video games. In these interactive video games,
players can act out and take risks in the game that they otherwise would not do in real life. These
young players attach themselves to these other identities, try out leadership roles, and be more
vocal. The issue here is that since players are so young, sometimes they rely on these new
versions of themselves and they cannot make the distinction between what was done in a video
game and what was done in the real world. (Young, 2009)

In perhaps the worst case scenario for someone that plays video games, death by video
games is it. “in August 2005, a 28-year-old South Korean man died—not by committing suicide,
but after playing the game Starcraft at an Internet cafe for 50 hours straight” (“South Korean man
dies after games session”, 2005). This is what video game addiction can do to you. This man played fifty hours straight. No autopsy was done, but examiners had determined that he died from heart failure from exhaustion. It is not uncommon for video gamers to go without some sleep, skip a meal, or skip a shower just to get in some more game time. In any given single gaming session, a gamer may play from anywhere between ten and twenty hours straight. When video gaming affects a player enough to keep them from showering, eating, drinking, or sleeping, then there may be a serious problem. What causes this sort of addiction? I believe that the nature of the games themselves has a big influence on gamers and their need to keep playing. As stated earlier, these online games are always changing. Even when you log off, the game keeps going on. People are still playing and influencing the world that you play in whether you are logged on or not. Because of this, a constant need to check on things in the world is limitless. In these big MMORPGs gamers must invest a lot of time in the game in order to be competitive in the game. A MMORPG character can continue to grow and progress for as long as the player is playing with that character, but the only way to progress your character is to put in many hours doing an endless amount of in game jobs and quests. To a gamer, personal health problems mean little compared to the level of their virtual world character. Gaming online is immensely time-consuming and emotionally taxing. Since there is less care about a player’s real life physical body, many things happen. Many dedicated gamers can suffer from carpal tunnel, eye strain, repetitive stress injury, and back strain. “As one gaming addict explained, “I stopped bathing. I didn’t eat unless it was a quick snack I could eat in front of my computer. I lost weight. My skin was pasty and pale. I didn’t shave or comb my hair. I did nothing. I looked so bad that my mother told me I looked more like a heroin addict.”” (Young, 2009) Some gamers may lose weight due to sacrificing nutrients for game time, but most gamers are overweight. Studies have
shown that regular video game use is distinctly associated with being overweight (Melchior, 2015). People that participate in video games greater than once a week are more likely to be overweight. This study showed no relation to body weight and internet use however. The relationship was only found with video game use.

A player can feel the character that they are playing in a video game. Playing as a ‘hero’ leads to positive social behavior, whereas playing as a ‘villain’ leads to negative social behavior. There was a connection found between empathy and game character with regards to perception. Typically a game will have you play as the hero and in order to ‘win’ or beat the game a player must accomplish heroic tasks. In this study, players empathize with the character and the environment that they are in. Unfortunately, players also showed empathy when playing as a villain and became anti-social and closed off. So having empathy in games can backfire when playing a villain. It can increase hostile perception. (Happ, Melzer, & Steffgen, 2013)

Unlike video games of the past, modern video games are very social in structure. Whatever console or computer that you play on, you have a ‘friends’ list. While playing any game you can chat with friends and invite them to your game to play with or against you. The International Gaming Research Unit at Nottingham Trent University in the United Kingdom did a study to evaluate the kind of social relationships that took place in and out of MMORPGs (Cole & Griffiths, 2007). It was discovered that MMORPGs are very, very socially interactive video games. In these games there are immense opportunities to meet new people and form friendships that can even last one’s lifetime. As it turns out, the relationships had in these online games had a tremendous amount involving how much they enjoyed the game. The success of these gamers finding such great friends is attributed to being able to be who you want to be in the virtual world. In the real world, the same socially active friends may be too shy to talk due to
their appearance, sexuality, age, or any number of things. Because of the amount of time spent with these friendships in a virtual world, real life consequences occur. Couples do not last when one partner is glued to a computer screen. Marriages can possibly lead to divorce if nothing is done to help with the gaming addiction. Families can be severely disrupted by a gaming addicted parent. The more time that is spent with friends made on a MMORPG is less time being spent with the wife and kids. As the bond grows between a player and his online ‘clan,’ the less that player will care or participate in their real life relationships. The player will just stop doing anything productive or meaningful in their real life and relationships will end. The only thing that an addicted gamer will care about and want to spend time with is with their ‘video game family.’ In the virtual fantasy world, gamers can join guilds, lead battalions, win wars, and enjoy the spoils of war. To a gamer that just seems much more interesting than investing in real life relationships (Cole & Griffiths, 2007).

Gamers often make their first friends by meeting experienced players in whatever game or genre they are playing in. The friends that they make help them out by showing how things work involving controls and strategies. They can also help fill the new player in on the lore of the game universe. When playing a MMORPG a gamer is never alone. There are literally millions of people playing the same game and they are all just a chat box away. The feeling of finding friends and actually playing with them is particularly influencing on younger gamers. It is so easy to send a ‘friend request’ and then get accepted by someone, compared to how one makes friends in the real world. There is a big difference between getting rejected in person by someone you would like to be friends with compared to just getting a notification on a screen that says ‘friend request declined.’ This is especially critical for younger children who may not have any real life friends. They may have been abandoned. A video game is never going to leave.
The controls are not going to change and the friends made are not going to leave because they feel the exact same way. The social elements and interactions inside video games involving other people is a primary force in video game addictions. When parents punish or discipline a child that is addicted to video games by suspending video game use, parents may be faced with irrational anger and violence. The child suspended from video game use will feel as though they have experienced a loss. They can become depressed, anxious, and irritable. There is a psychological withdrawal when a gamer is this dependent. If these feelings linger, rational thought will cease and they will act out or ‘snap’ on someone (Leung, 2007).

Video gamers are not the only ones affected by their addictions. In South Korea, a four-month-old girl died from suffocation because the parents were at a coffee shop playing World of Warcraft for hours (“Couple’s online gaming causes infant’s death,” 2005). The couple was arrested. In Reno, social workers found a twenty-two-month-old boy and an eleven-month-old girl that were so malnourished that they were near death. The parents pleaded guilty to child neglect and are in prison. Apparently, the couple was so distracted by video games that they could not even take care of their two baby children (“Nevada couple blame Internet for neglect,” 2007).

In order to prevent situations like above, it is necessary for everyone to be aware of warning signs for video game addictions. The quicker an issue with gaming addiction is found and addressed, the better the results or chances of complete recovery. Video game addiction is still somewhat new to the modern world and video games are always changing. There has not been anyone to live a lifetime with video games yet, so it is impossible to know exactly what happens to the mind over the course of decades of video game use. That being said, many therapists may not know or overlook signs of online gaming addiction.
Signs of Addiction

Video game addiction will start with a person being preoccupied by gaming. A gamer will continue to think about and fantasize about whatever virtual world they play in when they log off. Another way to tell if someone is preoccupied with gaming involves events. Do they cancel events often? When they do show up are they late? A gamer will often cancel plans in order to spend more time playing a video game. Often they will say that they are ‘busy.’ Deadlines will be missed, work and school will be neglected, and all while gaming becomes increasingly the top priority. Video game addicts will get to a point in their addiction that they will begin to lie to family and friends in order to try and hide what it is that they are doing. A student may say he is staying up late doing homework, for example. There will be a loss of interest in all the hobbies that the person used to enjoy or used to devote a significant amount of time to. “As one mother explained, “My son loved baseball and played Varsity on his high school team until he discovered X-Box Live. His grades plummeted after he discovered the game, but it wasn’t until he quit the baseball team that I knew that something was seriously wrong. He loved baseball too much. He won a baseball scholarship for college and dreamed about playing professionally. Now, nothing else matters to him except the game”” (young, 2009).

Some people that become addicted to video games undergo personality changes. Video games can turn an outgoing and active person into somewhat of an introvert. Instead of keeping in contact and getting together with friends and family on occasion, it becomes more important to find that rare piece of virtual gear for their in-game character. The amount of time spent searching in a virtual world for some kind of item or accolade is extensive. The reward comes
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when the item has been obtained or the goal has been reached. It is like a ‘high’ for gamers when such accomplishments are done and it gives the gamer a sort of ‘hero’ status among fellow gamers.

Addicts use gaming as a means to psychologically escape the problems of life’s troubles. A more common means of escape would be alcohol, sex, or drugs, all of which are harmful to your health and can be expensive as well. Gamers look to the cheap and legal alternative to get away from real life problems. The feelings that addicts get when playing their games is much like the effects of drug and alcohol. They escape into the games where they are actually recognized for their feats or accomplishments. A video game turns the socially awkward into something amazing. It turns the unappreciated, quiet minimum wage employee into a force to be reckoned with on World of Warcraft. A video game can take all the psychological and emotional issues from a person and replace them with characteristics that they choose for their online character. It is not hard to imagine why a person gets pulled into a video game. Games want to be played. When you finally beat a boss on a hard difficulty and finally save the city, an achievement pops up. The game immediately tells you ‘good job.’ Does that happen in real life? Often when a task is completed, there is no one to cheer you on and let you know how you did. Some people need that. Letting people know when they do a good job may be the difference between that person working harder in real life or getting online to play a video game for so many hours straight. There is certainly nothing wrong with playing video games as a casual gamer for a hobby, but when you are dependent on playing in a virtual world more than paying attention and interacting with the actual world that you were born in, then you may have psychological issues.
Adolescent Addicts

Adolescent gamers are the most susceptible to becoming addicted to online video games. Coincidentally gaming developers’ most targeted audience is adolescents. These adolescents are easily influenced. Environmental challenges and peer pressure are the most common reasons or causes for an adolescent to become addicted to playing video games. Most gamers have gamer friends and once a certain portion of a game hooks a player in, the addiction process has started. With friends it is even easier for this to happen, since playing a single quest or raid could potentially take many hours to do alone. Gamers will continue to play video games no matter what once hooked. Once hooked, it is a quest to be the best at any cost. An adult suffering from video game addiction may lose a job, or risk having a divorce. An adolescent suffering from video game addiction may have grades drop, scholarships lost, or suffer from emotional withdrawals and experience physical changes. With all the consequences that may come with playing video games for countless hours, gamers continue to play the game no matter what. “In the event that an adolescent is using online gaming as an escape, it is more than likely that many more obstacles will be encountered and as a result a teen will struggle with unmanageable physical and emotional consequences” (Young, 2009). “Furthermore, children of substance abusing parents are shown to have an increased risk of using gaming as means to cope with problems such as developmental issues, school problems, health problems, delinquency, sexual problems, mental issues, and family problems” (Young, 2009). In order to address these issues the entire family unit needs to seek help, not just the player or child otherwise relapse is almost certain. Treatment for a video game addict is usually forced by a judge, parent, or teacher. Effected adolescents that have been referred to treatment act like nothing is wrong with them.
They have said that they do not really have a problem or that they are not doing anything different than their peers. In order for treatment to be successful, controlling video game use is not the only thing that must be done. The individual must be shown how to develop the areas of their life that have been inhibited by video game use. Instead of using video games to hide from whatever real world issue comes up they must face their problems head on instead of simply avoiding them. This is easier said than done. A gaming addict needs to rebuild self-esteem and have stronger problem solving skills, especially when dealing with face-to-face situations in real life. Because gamers spend so much time under the name and actions of a video game character, they lose their sense of self. They associate themselves as part of their gaming life. So a player’s real life identity must be rebuilt. “It is important to consider an adolescent’s individual situation when treating their addiction. It is necessary to look at family dynamics such as family history of addiction, background, communication dynamics, or conflict and how these factors may be impacting a teen’s developmental stages, emotional well-being, and esteem (Young, 2009).”

Many adolescents are severely lacking in communication skills. This is usually another reason that an adolescent has turned to gaming. It is easier to communicate with a headset while you are alone with the ability to mute whoever you want compared to holding a real conversation with a person in the flesh. Because of the poor communication skills, gamers will typically have feelings of isolation, bad self-esteem, and other issues. This is why it is so important to help adolescents communicate when they are not logged into a video game. Therapists that can help in this area. Having an older client simply speak to the adolescent can help build up communication skills. This person could be a family relative or a friend. It just needs to be somebody that the addict is comfortable holding a conversation with. The adolescent may also read magazines or television shows and have them pay attention to body language and facial
expressions. Gamers are not very good at reading body language since all they see when talking to people is a screen.

**Treatment and Recovery Options**

Parenting is a vital component in regulating video game usage. Parents need to be on the same page when it comes to setting boundaries on video game usage for their children. Boundaries could include making set time frames where the children are allowed to play. This is perhaps one of the most important elements to controlling how much your children play video games. There are programs and software available to help monitor the internet and video game use that your child is doing because you cannot always trust what a video game addict will tell you about their playtime. Parents need to be sure to not be ‘enablers’ in their children’s video game addiction habits.

It can also be beneficial to have your child take breaks during playtime to rest eyes and move around. This will help with eye strain and keep muscles somewhat active and remind the child that there is still the real world to play in. This brief exercise will keep the child from becoming too immersed in a video game that could possibly lead to a twenty-hour gaming session.

Many children feel empowered when playing a video game. Accomplishing challenging tasks in an effort to master a particular game or genre can give a child a something to be proud of and feel like they did something worthwhile. This feeling is okay in moderation, but you do not want your child to only feel empowered when playing a video game. It is important to get children involved in other activities that they may take an interest in. sports, for example, is a great hobby for children to take part in because being involved in sports teaches many life lessons through human interaction that playing video games could never offer.
As mentioned earlier, treatment options vary for treating video game addicts. Family therapy is especially useful for not only helping the video game addict, but also helping the family understand what the addiction is and what triggers or causes their child to play a video game for endless hours. “Brief Strategic Family Therapy (BSFT) is a short-term, problem-focused therapeutic intervention, targeting children and adolescents 6 to 17 years old, that improves youth behavior by eliminating or reducing drug use and its associated behavior problems and that changes the family members’ behaviors that are linked to both risk and protective factors related to substance abuse” (Young, 2009). Going through this intervention process will help find the real deeper issues in the individual or family that is helping to cause the online gaming addiction. Every case for every video game addict is different and needs to be treated as such. “The therapeutic process uses techniques of: 1) Joining—forming a therapeutic alliance with all family members. 2) Diagnosis—identifying interactional patterns that allow or encourage problematic youth behavior. 3) Restructuring—the process of changing the family interactions that are directly related to problem” (Young, 2009).

Each and every family is unique in its own way. Since a family is made up of different parts and each part has its own way of doing things, it is important to make all the parts understand where everybody is coming from. This step is called Joining, and it happens on two levels. “First, at the individual level, joining involves establishing a relationship with each participating family member. Second, at the level of the family, the therapist joins with the family system to create a new therapeutic system. Joining thus requires both sensitivity and an ability to respond to the unique characteristics of individuals and quickly discern the family’s governing process” (Young, 2009).
Once the joining process is complete, the therapist can then focus on diagnosing the causes or interfering factors that are influencing irresponsible behavior from the child. Once the therapist sees the interactions of the family, they can begin to decide what needs are being met for the child and what needs are being neglected. A number of factors from a family can influence children to become addicted gamers. The root cause may be undetermined, but poor communication, dysfunctional family practices, or different parenting styles can be the difference between having your child be normal or addicted to playing video games. “Fearing rejection, an adolescent may use the game as a safe place to share feelings and confront conflicts with other players. Other patterns in family therapy to observe are enmeshment, triangulation, or disengagement, which may be creating pressure on the adolescent to turn to the game as a means of escape” (Young, 2009). Instead of facing issues face-to-face in the real world, some turn to video games to distract them from life’s stresses. Playing video games is ok if done in moderation or for a limited time, but playing video games for extended days, weeks, and months will only make the real life issues that the gamer is running away from worse.

Once the problem has been diagnosed, the therapist then puts forth a plan to change the way the family operates. The restructuring process is supposed to make the family work better together and improve the livelihood of the child and eliminate any problems that might influence the child to turn to video games instead of being confident and facing problems head on. It is important for a child to have a support system. In order to correctly restructure the family in positive ways, the therapist must see how each family member reacts in real time, not just from stories told by the family. To do this, the therapist puts the family through enactments. In these enactments a therapist can see how a certain family member reacts or overreacts to the situation. The results will always be different and vary from family to family. Once the therapist
understands the underlying reasons for why the addicted gamer feels compelled to play video games for hours on end and understands how the family as a whole deals with problems and the relationships that they have with each other, then the therapist can begin reframing. Reframing gives the family a different perspective. It allows them to see just what they are doing to themselves. The family can see what they are doing that is hurting their family or influencing the unhealthy gaming behavior of their child. The therapist then makes a special point to reframe the child’s mind. The child needs to know that there are other ‘safe’ places to go besides playing video games. There needs to be new pathways of communication between the child and adults. It is also important to ask the gamer questions about the games that they play. What does your character look like? What alliance did you join? Who do play with? What makes your character so interesting? What achievement have you received in your game that you are most proud of? How does it feel when you are playing? The answers to these questions can paint a picture for the therapists. You can begin to see just what the child is looking for when they are playing these online games. You can see what the alliance does for him compared to what his family unit does. These are the reasons that the child is addicted to gaming. All the things and emotions that the game can give the child cannot be given by the parents or family. This is a fundamental reason that the child chooses to spend more and more time playing video games, because they are more appealing. To fix this, the therapist needs to take the traits that make the child want to play the video game and show the family how to offer the same traits. The family needs to offer more support than the video game to a point where the child will see the video game and realize that nothing in the video game can replace what he has and can spend time with in real life.
Conclusion

Playing video games can cause a number of things to happen in an individual. They can influence the way one thinks, acts, and lives. As with any hobby, playing video games needs to be something done in one’s spare time, not all the time. Since the age of video games has just begun, there simply is not enough research available to tell us what happens in the long term to video gamers. Since video games are also evolving all the time, the research that is available now may not apply to what video games will do to a player in the next decade. I can only assume though that the temptation and problems that come with video game addiction will only become stronger and more prevalent with the more advanced video gaming technology releasing all the time, year after year. Virtual Reality headsets are being made more affordable. With the level of immersion that these headsets will bring could change video gaming dramatically. Once this technology is developed and made more available for the masses I fear that addicted video gamers will eventually have some trouble facing reality, or even being aware of what is the real world and what is the game world.

Video game companies need to be paying attention to the research that is coming from their video games. Video game companies probably want their audiences to be addicted to their hardware and software, but that is turning video games into a potentially dangerous product. The more and more addictive these games become, the more likely players will suffer from a number of potential psychological and emotional issues that were addressed in this study. I am concerned for the future of gaming. Video games have already made such leaps in evolution over the last couple of decades. The graphical improvements are amazing and competitive multiplayer has become widely popular ever since high speed internet has become available to the average person. The next two decades could bring about anything, but I would like there to be something
positive come from gaming in the near future. Since there is already progress being made on keeping the elderly mentally sharp using video games, there needs to be even more research into this. I would like to see video games cure mentally ill minds. I would like to see video games offer new perspectives that help people grow as a person in the real world and make people better. There are positive things that video games can do for people. These need to be explored and developed more frequently. Training exercises with Virtual Reality headsets could help train soldiers for combat or even allow soldiers to control a robot soldier in the field. Instead of reading about how to do something, like how to ride a horse, or fly a plane, a person could just experience the thrill of doing these things as a sort of ‘practice’ for the real thing without actually putting their lives in danger. There needs to be a real life application from all games. I do not want to see a video games’ sole purpose be to get the gamer addicted and invest hundreds or even thousands of hours into the game for no real life gain. If gaming continues to evolve the way it has, I fear that is exactly what is going to happen. I do not know exactly how these changes need to happen, but I know that they need to happen for the betterment of the minds of our future generations. This is why continuing to research video games and the effects that they have on the mind is so critical to the future of our modern civilized world. Change can start with the parents. Parents should play a much larger role in video game use. Since adolescents are the most susceptible to becoming addicted to video games, parents need to control what video games are played for their children and control how long they play them at a time. Video games are not evil, but they can be abused and create an unhealthy mind much like eating junk food all the time will create an unhealthy body.

Video games are a big factor in lives all around the world, especially America since more than ninety percent of our youth play them. Because of their popularity it is important to study
them and figure out just what these video games are doing to our adolescents and young adults psychologically, physically, and even spiritually. So far it has been discovered that video games can improve cognitive performance slightly. It has also been discovered that violence in video games is not the sole cause for real life violence in adolescents or even the most influential cause. It has been determined that competitiveness is the primary force behind adolescent violence. Competitiveness is not something that can just be done away with since it can be found in just about every activity and walk of life. What can be done is have limitations placed on exposure for these extremely competitive games. Time spent in a virtual world should not be equal to or greater than the amount of time that a player focuses on the real world. Casual gaming is a fine hobby to have. In fact, “a recent study showed that regular and occasional video game players reported significantly higher levels of wellbeing and less depression than non-video game players” (Toril, Reales, & Ballesteros, 2014). Playing video games with moderation can be a good thing to help one relax, much like a movie can do. The problems begin to occur when a video game player plays an excessive amount of time while sacrificing relationships and other parts of their lives. If nothing is done to address the issues that make players addicted to video games, I fear that events like the one in South Korea where the man died after playing fifty hours straight may become an everyday occurrence. At that point it may be too late to help the addicted gamers of the world. Only one thing is certain, video games are not going away anytime soon or at all for that matter; therefore, they need to be understood completely to ensure that we are not placing future generations in a compromising position where real life decisions may be less important than decisions made in a virtual world.
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