

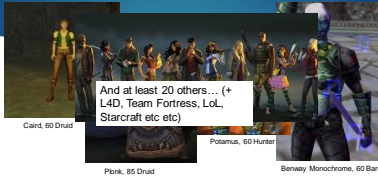
Online Gaming

MANAGING PROBLEMATIC OVERUSE

James Driver

- ▶ Registered psychotherapist working in Christchurch, New Zealand
- ▶ Master's dissertation focused on experiences of treatment for gaming addiction
- ▶ Founder of NetAddiction NZ
- ▶ Previously worked at Higher Ground, and Te Awhina – residential and outpatient treatment centres for drug and alcohol addictions

But previously...



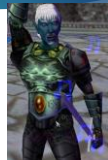
- ▶ Over 2000 hours played on one character (plus many more on others– around 16 hours per day for two years)

What I Spent 16 Hours Per Day Staring At



End Result

- ▶ \$20,000 or more in debt!
- ▶ No job
- ▶ No qualification
- ▶ No girlfriend
- ▶ Badly depressed
- ▶ Top 5% on server in arenas
- ▶ Epic weapon!



2. Understanding Games and Gaming Culture

ESPORTS GAMES

MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER
ONLINE GAMES

SANDBOX GAMES

MOBILE GAMING

Esports Games

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- ▶ Overwatch, League of Legends, DOTA, Call of Duty, Counterstrike
- ▶ Individual or small-team based games
- ▶ 14 percent of all Americans 13 or older consider themselves esports fans (2014) vs 8% (2013)
- ▶ One example – League of Legends
 - ▶ In 2016, 34 million people watched the final match (more people than watched the NBA finals)
 - ▶ In 2014, matches were played at Wembley Arena in London and sold out within minutes
 - ▶ The game has 32 million active players
 - ▶ This is just one game of many



The draw of Esport games

2

- ▶ Competition – players receive clear, quantifiable feedback about their skill level and where they rank compared to others
- ▶ Aspiration – as Esports becomes increasingly popular, players aspire to becoming like their heroes – much like professional sports players
- ▶ Progression – players have a clear path for improvement, and there is no 'skill cap' – that is, players can improve indefinitely
- ▶ Rewards – when players do well, they are encouraged by other players and receive a sense of potency and efficacy

MMOs

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- ▶ World of Warcraft, Second Life, Everquest, The Old Republic, EVE Online
- ▶ Massively Multiplayer Online (Role Playing Games)
- ▶ World Of Warcraft – around 8 million subscribers
- ▶ Up to ~2000 (or more) players online at one time in the same game world
- ▶ Highly social, frequently require larger teams (10-40 members) to be successful
- ▶ Research suggests MMOs to be one of the most likely game types to lead to addiction
- ▶ Use operant conditioning, variable reward structures and reward time invested to keep players subscribed



2 The draw of MMOs

- ▶ Social factors – game content requires large groups to succeed, so players feel an obligation to their group and a sense of being 'needed'
- ▶ Games provide a clear path for progression, and there is always something players can work towards – provides a sense of meaning and purpose
- ▶ Games offer guaranteed but randomised rewards, feeding into our desire for risk and excitement and creating a constant sense of progress and movement
- ▶ The game continues when players are not online, leading many to feel that they are 'missing out' when not playing

2 Social, Mobile and Facebook Games

- ▶ Candy Crush, Farmville, Clash of Clans, Puzzle and Dragons (Puzzle and Dragons earns between \$2-4 million USD per day)
- ▶ Use coercive "free-to-play" business models with microtransactions
- ▶ Competitive between friends who play
- ▶ Accessible anywhere
- ▶ Increased use of non-monetary gambling

3. Understanding Gaming Addiction

THE QUESTIONS EVERYONE'S ASKING

WHY DO PEOPLE GAME? PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

HIGH ENGAGEMENT, PROBLEMATIC, AND ADDICTIVE GAMING

WAYS TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCING GAMING ADDICTION

3 The Questions Everyone's Asking

Q: How much is too much? When does it become an addiction?

A: It's less about *how much* and more about *how, when, and why*

Kuss, D. (2013). Internet gaming addiction: current perspectives. Psychology Research and Behaviour Management, 6.

Q: Do violent video games make kids more aggressive?

A: It seems to be a risk factor for aggression comparable to that of other violent media.

APA Task Force Press Release. <http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2015/08/violent-video-games.aspx>

Scholars' open statement to the APA Task Force on violent media: <https://www.scribd.com/doc/223284732/Scholars-Open-Letter-to-the-APA-Task-Force-On-Violent-Media-Opening-APA-Policy-Statement-on-Violent-Media>

From Halo to hot sauce: What 25 years of violent video game research looks like: <http://kotaku.com/5976733/do-video-games-make-you-violent-on-in-depth-look-at-everything-we-know-today>

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Q: If my kid is developing a gaming addiction, are they doomed? Is it only going to get worse?

A: Probably not.

Dawson, D. et al. (2006). *Recovery from DSM-IV Alcohol Dependence*. *Alcohol Research and Health*, 29 (2)

Thege, B. et al. (2015). *Natural course of behavioural addictions: a 5-year longitudinal study*. *BMC Psychiatry*, 15(4)

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Problem Gaming Statistics

- Difficult to research due to no established criteria
- Studies conducted in Germany, USA, South Korea and Australia amongst others
- Most findings indicate problematic gaming rates of around 10% of the general population aged 13-25

Mentzoni, R. et al. (2011). *Problematic video game use: Estimated prevalence and associations with mental and physical health*

Rehbein, F. et al. (2010). *Prevalence and risk factors of video game dependency in adolescence: Results of a German nationwide study*

Gentile, D. (2009). *Pathological video game use among youth ages 8 to 18: A national study*

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Why do people game?

- Sense of purpose and goals – games provide clear milestones and tracks for progression. They create a sense for players of having a meaningful impact on the game world.
- Sense of achievement and potency – games provide competition and challenge, and give clear feedback about achievement.
- Sense of belonging and community – games create a sense of being needed and valued by others in the game world.

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Why do people game?

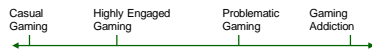
- Sense of freedom and escape – games are fun, and also enable players to become fully immersed in the game and escape difficult feelings or situations
- Sense of identity – games provide players with an alter-ego, and the opportunity to create a new identity for themselves



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- Film excerpts from 'Afk away from keyboard', Greg Stuetze and Alex Sticroth, www.afkthefilm.com

Problem Gaming as a Continuum



Problematic Gaming and Addiction

- ▶ Gaming meets many psychological needs: social contact and a sense of being valued, a sense of purpose, a sense of achievement and challenge, escapism
- ▶ When gaming becomes the only outlet for meeting a psychological need, other aspects of the person's life may suffer

Problematic Gaming

- ▶ Problematic gamers may:
 - ▶ Begin to think obsessively about gaming even when not playing
 - ▶ Lose track of time while gaming to the detriment of other aspects of their life
 - ▶ Become agitated or depressed when their gaming is interrupted,
 - ▶ Develop tolerance – needing to play for longer to feel satisfied
 - ▶ Use gaming as a coping strategy

Positive Reinforcement Cycle



Addictive Gaming

- ▶ Addicted gamers may:
 - ▶ Experience withdrawal symptoms when not playing, including depression, anxiety, or difficulty concentrating
 - ▶ Continue to game even though they no longer enjoy it, and may have made attempts to control their gaming without success
 - ▶ Neglect other areas of their life to a critical degree – losing jobs, losing relationships, failing out of school/Uni etc

Positive & Negative Reinforcement



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So how do you tell the difference?

- ▶ It's not about *how much*, it's about *how and why*
- ▶ When gaming becomes the *only* way to experience certain feelings or meet certain needs, it can become a problem
- ▶ The more gaming is used to meet a particular need or feel a certain way, the harder it becomes to get the same feeling from other things

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How Can We Help?

- ▶ As with any addiction, a person has to reach the point of recognising the problem *for themselves*
- ▶ However, we can help them recognise this and prepare them for making that change when they are ready
- ▶ It's crucial that they know that support and alternatives are available when they are ready to seek these things
- ▶ Most importantly: support the person *under* the addiction, don't support *the addiction itself*

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Ways to Help

- ▶ **Exploration and Understanding**
- ▶ Modelling
- ▶ Supporting Alternatives and Reducing Perpetuating Factors
- ▶ Setting Appropriate Limits

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Exploration and Understanding

- ▶ Be curious – willing to learn, ask and understand how and why young people are gaming
- ▶ Be open to listening and hearing – what else is going on in their life? What do they want for themselves? What do they value, care about? What matters to them?
- ▶ Be receptive to learning about the types of games they are playing, who they are playing with, what they get out of
- ▶ Be willing to hear what it is that would make giving up gaming hard – what would they be losing?

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Ways to Help

- ▶ Exploration and Understanding
- ▶ **Modelling**
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- ▶ Setting Appropriate Limits

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Modelling

- ▶ Modelling appropriate technology use
- ▶ Modelling ways to find meaning and purpose in life
- ▶ Modelling ways to experience competence and efficacy
- ▶ Modelling ways to connect with others and have good social relationships
- ▶ Modelling ways to manage difficult feelings and stress

Ways to Help

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- ▶ Exploration and Understanding
- ▶ Modelling
- ▶ **Supporting Alternatives and Reducing Perpetuating Factors**
- ▶ Setting Appropriate Limits

Perpetuating Factors

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- ▶ Lacking the means, support or encouragement to engage in meaningful activities
- ▶ Situations in life that lead to them feeling powerless or impotent – including bullying, difficulties at home, factors limiting their ability to perform at school etc.
- ▶ Lack of strong peer relationships outside of games
- ▶ Stresses or difficult feelings arising from life situations or other mental health issues

Supporting Alternatives

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- ▶ Helping them to engage with activities that give a sense of meaning
- ▶ Supporting them to have the patience to develop competency in other areas
- ▶ Helping them to build and repair existing relationships, find a sense of belonging
- ▶ Encouraging them to explore and develop their own sense of self and identity
- ▶ Providing alternative ways to manage difficult feelings and experiences

Ways to Help

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- ▶ Exploration and Understanding
- ▶ Modelling
- ▶ Supporting Alternatives and Reducing Perpetuating Factors
- ▶ **Setting Appropriate Limits**

Setting Appropriate Limits

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- ▶ Appropriate limits are ones that everyone can live with
- ▶ Limits should be designed to *support the person while not supporting the addiction*
- ▶ Allow *natural consequences* to occur, as much as possible avoid punishment
- ▶ Where that is not possible, have clear consequences, defined ahead of time

Conclusions

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- ▶ Problematic and addictive gaming primarily seems to arise when gaming is meeting psychological needs that are not otherwise being met
- ▶ Understanding the function of games in a person's life – that is, what needs are being met by the game – is key to helping people overcome gaming addiction

Conclusions

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- ▶ The key needs that games can meet are: a sense of purpose and meaning, a sense of achievement and potency, a sense of community and belonging, a sense of freedom and escape, and a sense of identity
- ▶ To help someone with addiction means helping them find other ways to meet those needs as much as it means helping them to reduce the gaming

Support and Information

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- ▶ NetAddiction NZ – www.netaddiction.co.nz
- ▶ Stopgaming- <http://www.reddit.com/r/stopgaming/>
- ▶ Online gamers anonymous – www.olganon.org – offers support both for gamers wanting to change their gaming, and support for parents/family members
- ▶ Family therapy