Blurred Lines...The Convergence of Gaming and Gambling

Daniel J. Trolaro, MS
Assistant Executive Director
Council on Compulsive Gambling of NJ, Inc.
3635 Quakerbridge Rd, Suite 7
Hamilton, NJ 08619
1-800-GAMBLER
www.800gambler.org
Fortnite addict headbutts mom after she tries confiscating console (9/3/18)

13-year-old boy used his parents' credit card to fund his video game addiction
Q: WHAT CAN EARLY EXPOSURE TO GAMING OR GAMBLING DO TO A CHILD?

A: THINK OF WHAT IS BEING LEARNED:
- Immediate gratification
- Inability to develop patience or control
- Early exposure or a Big Win can be a predictor in future problems for gambling
- For gaming, speed and action dominate the brain (Overdrive)
- If coupled with unresolved trauma in childhood, can lead to multiple issues in the future
Data from the Entertainment Software Assoc.

- 67% of U.S. Households own a device used to play video games.
- 65% of U.S. Households have at least one person who plays 3+ hours per week.
- Average gamer is 35 years old.
Essential Facts About Computer and Video Game Industry (2017)

- 54% cite social connection as most frequent reason to play games with friends. (Feeling of connection)

- 67% cite ‘quality of graphics’ as the number one reason influencing a decision to purchase a video game. (Realism / Escape)

- Most widely played multi-player genre is Shooter at 29%. (Action / Fast Pace)
What are eSports?!

* A global industry!
* eSports as an Olympic sport!

* Audience 225 million 2015 // 380 million 2018
* Revenue $325 million 2015 // $906 million 2018

* Competitive gaming in real time
* YouTube and Twitch streams tournaments live...Twitch now owned by Amazon who bought it for $1 Billion in 2014
What is a Loot Box?!

1) A consumable virtual item in a video game which can be redeemed to receive a random selection of further virtual items.

2) A loot box is typically a form of monetization, with players either buying boxes directly or receiving the boxes during play and later buying "keys" with which to redeem them.

3) Regulated under gambling law in some Asian countries.

4) Criticized for being a form of unregulated gambling, for creating situations in games that make people "pay-to-win."
Random Reward Mechanism that requires 3 components:

Eligibility: Requirement to trigger the random event of a loot box (i.e. accomplishment, paying $, spending time). The triggering event is done actively which perpetuates that “illusion of control.”

Random Procedure: The randomness is the process and is what makes it feel like gambling.....the HOOK!!

Reward: Skins, VC, Weapon, item of value, advancement
The Psychology of Gambling and Loot Boxes

- Gambling is a ‘Variable Ratio’ Payout – You have to keep playing in order to win but you never know when you will win....so are loot boxes

- Surprise element of when you will win is the addictive quality...same in loot boxes

- You also do not know how often or when it will occur but it is that uncertainty that is the hook.....see above!
What causes people to act against what they normally otherwise would not do?

- ‘Scarcity principle’ - fear of missing out since it will not be available later on.

- ‘Social Proof’ – HSN shows proof that item is being purchased and is desirable to consumers.

- In this vein, loot boxes should be viewed with caution and done responsibly due to ethics and predatory behaviors.
Activision continues to explore a matchmaking patent that encourages players to buy microtransactions.

Filed in 2015 and granted in 2017.

2 Examples...
Example #1

Outlines a process in which computer algorithms can match players together in order to increase the likelihood of microtransaction purchases.

“For example, if the player purchased a particular weapon, the microtransaction engine may match the player in a gameplay session in which the particular weapon is highly effective,” the text of the patent reads. “This may encourage the player to make future purchases to achieve similar gameplay results.”
Example #2

- Dynamic Pricing (Charging players more or less for the same content) of Loot Boxes within a game based on player participation, level of skill, and time.

- Example – 2 players within a game both wish to purchase an item. Player 1, who is an experienced player, pays $10. Player 2, who is new to the game, pays $20.

- No clear disclosure

- Are their supply restrictions on virtual items that should warrant this?
Why is Gaming so Popular?

- Free to play and Freemium
- Temporary Escape
- Social Connection
- Measurable Growth
- Purpose and Meaning
- Dopamine Overload
- Behavioral Psychology keeps you in a safe place to play, experiment, fail
Gaming Rehab Facility Video
Internet Gaming Disorder

- A condition for further study in DSM-5 (APA 2013)
- Not an “official” disorder in the DSM but one in which the American Psychiatric Association wants additional research done.
- W.H.O classifies as addiction in 2018!
Potential Risks with Gaming

- Can lead to Problem Gambling.
- Bigger concern among the youth.
- The earlier one starts, the higher likelihood to develop a problem.
- The brain develops the “gas pedal” faster than the “braking system.”
- Inability to control impact on time or money.
- Illusions of Control
- Sense of identity and belonging.
Problematic Cognitions with Gaming

- Allows the behaviors to hang around longer
- No amount of time spent is ever enough
- Continue until a level, reward, or feature is completed
- Gaining power and status through the game
- Escaping the real world
- The computer or console is an “electronic friend.”
Motivators and Advantages Around Internet Gambling

While prevalence is relatively low, participation is increasing:

- Convenience and Accessibility
- Greater value for dollar spent (*i.e.* payout rates and bonuses)
- Speed and Ease of Betting
- Variability and Robust Selection
- Comfort and lack of stigma
Challenges to Prevention

- Difficulty in differentiation between “Gaming” and “Gambling” activities in addiction research
- Many common features in terms of speed, aesthetics, and structure
- Both can create harm through excessive involvement
- Boundaries and lines are getting blurred (digital games with free and paid virtual currencies or items, as well as the capacity for wagering)
- Delay of gratification
Potential Pathways to Adolescent Gambling

- Social Casino Games: Easy, short duration, multiple devices, fun or competitive, isolation or social.
- Constant exposure normalizes the experiences
- Availability and Supply
- Positive experience + social interaction
- In game purchasing normalizes the habit of spending money on games....may carry to adulthood.
- Rewards (loot boxes and skins) and leveling up carries may carry over to comps in adulthood.

The 5 E’s of Why People Play Games or Gamble!

- Excitement!
- Entertainment!
- Escape life’s problems or pain
- Economics….It’s all about the Benjamin’s!
- Ego….Pride, reputation, or identity
Summarizing the ‘Blurred Lines’ between gaming and gambling:

1) Illusion of Control – skill vs. luck
2) Intermittent Reinforcement – every so often win
3) Social Proofing – others are doing it
4) Scarcity Principle – act now; act Fast!
5) “Near Miss” is a Hook – Sooooo close, do it again!
Principles of Recovery
Instill a Proper Attitude

- Humility vs. Pride
- Gratitude vs Blame
- Mindfulness vs. Denial
- Determination vs. Incompetence
- Respect vs. Ignorance
- Relation vs. Isolation
- Love vs. Hate
- Attention vs. Neglect
- Being Present vs. Being Absent
Cultivate a Culture

- Mindfulness
- Laughter / Levity
- Identity
- Life Skills
- Multiple “Tools in the Toolbelt”
- Resiliency
- Self-Empowerment
- Respond vs. React

- H.A.L.T
- Accountability
- Emotional Awareness
- Others First
- Language
- Presence
- Balance
- “Feeling Safe”
- Care and Connection
Importance of Language

1) Using the proper language can impact one’s recovery
2) Language can be stigmatizing
3) Can influence how a person is viewed outside
4) Can influence self-identity
5) Labels and perception (Abuse vs Use Disorder)
Summary of Recovery Principles

- Don’t think less of yourself....think of yourself less
- Rules without Relationships lead to Rebellion
- “The greatest sources of suffering are the lies we continue to tell ourselves” (Elvin Semrad, Boston U.)
- For people trapped in a mental prison, they battle between enjoying the pain of pleasure while suffering from the pleasure of the pain
- ‘The Body Keeps the Score’ by Bessel Van Der Kolk
- A ‘Dis-Ease’ of one’s inner being at varying levels
Thank you!

Visit www.800gambler.org
OR
Phone: 1-800-GAMBLER
OR
Send a Text to ‘800GAMBLER’
References

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