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## Why are Video Games Addictive?

**By Dr. Brent Conrad****Clinical Psychologist for TechAddiction**

In a previous article, we discussed the [specific video games that seem to present an increased risk of leading to an addiction](#) - or at least unhealthy or excessive gaming habits. These are the games that people most often seek help for moderating or giving up entirely. Notably, these games are all Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games or [MMORGS / MMOs](#) (e.g., World of Warcraft). Why are video games addictive and why do MMORPGs / MMOs seem to be especially addictive?

What is a MMORPG / MMO? In MMO games, players typically create their own character(s), join other players online to form committed teams (clans, guilds), and develop their character's skills, powers, and abilities by completing certain tasks or quests in a fantasy world which is largely shaped by the players. The worlds continue to evolve even when the player is offline.

**This article is an attempt to answer the question "Why are some video games so addictive?"**

### Video Game Addiction Explained



VIDEO: Quick explanation of video game addiction



## Reasons for Video Game Addiction

(w1)

**The most addictive video games have no pre-defined ends.** This is one of the central features of a MMORPG, but it is also becoming true for many other genres as well. The most addictive video games have no ultimate goal or point at which a player can say "I'm finished. I have completed every quest - there is nothing new to discover". As such, [there is never the experience of "Game Over"](#) - a point which signifies the natural end to a game.

(w2)

**Addictive video games feed a need of making social connections.** While video games used to be solitary activities, today's games encourage, and in many ways, [require that players interact socially with each other](#) - which feeds the universal human need for interpersonal connections. Interestingly, these connections can come at the expense of real-world relationships.

(w3)

**Video games are more addictive when in-game rewards are based on a [leveling system](#).** When starting a new video game a player's character begins with very basic attributes with regard to experience, strength, intelligence, courage, powers, etc. Initially, it takes very little play (perhaps minutes) to reach the next level and gain new skills - this is immediately rewarding and reinforces continued play. However, each successive level begins to take more play time to reach - eventually taking weeks or months to level-up. By this time however, the gamer has gradually adapted and accepted the greater effort required to reach the next level. Imagine if the very first levels (e.g., from Level 1 to Level 2) took 1 month rather than several minutes - how many players would find this rewarding enough to continue?

(w4)

**The more addictive video games often encourage play and collaboration with gamers worldwide.** This is true of online multiplayer video games in general. The fact that two users on opposite sides of the world can interact and join together in a common quest adds to the excitement and exploratory nature of modern games.

(w5)

**Addictive video games often have some form of [in-game currency](#).** The same goals and emotions which drive people to pursue wealth in the real world are also present in video games. As one amasses more virtual wealth (by spending more time playing and completing tasks), the virtual wealth translates into greater power, control, respect, influence, status, and purchasing power - which are obviously very seductive pursuits.

(w6)

**It is easier to view video games as [harmless online activities](#).** Whereas there is far greater awareness of the dangers

of alcohol abuse or gambling addiction, online gaming is generally seen as harmless hobby. Is it less harmful than alcohol addiction? Absolutely. Can most people play without becoming addicted? Sure. However, because of this it is also more difficult for players to recognize when they have a problem.

(w7)

**One important factor that makes video games addictive is that rewards often are set on variable schedules.** It has been consistently demonstrated in psychological research that [variable ratio](#) (reinforced after an average number of attempts) or [variable interval](#) schedules (reinforced after an average time period has elapsed) produces a steady rate of responding and which is far more difficult to extinguish (e.g., slot machines use variable ratio schedules to encourage maximum play time). In an addictive video game, a player may be rewarded on average for every five (for example) tasks completed. Sometimes it will take only one try while other times it may take 15 - the player never really knows how long it will take before the big reward comes - but he knows that if he plays long enough it will come eventually. This type of reward schedule encourages longer periods of play even in the absence of rewards. For a more detailed analysis of the ways people respond to different patterns of in-game rewards, see the article [Behavioral Game Design](#).

(w8)

**Addictive video games often require team play to advance.** A player starting a new game will initially be able accomplish goals by him/herself. However, before long significant advancement in the game requires that he/she join a group and accomplish goals together. The player will come to feel a connection to the team and responsible for advancing their gaming goals. Therefore, the player will want to advance his character even more so that he can make a greater contribution to the team. In fact, if he does not keep up with his team he may not even be able to join in on certain quests or travel to parts of the world requiring a more advanced character. Finally, since many tasks can only be accomplished in a group, the player will want to be online whenever his teammates are playing (which translates into more total hours online). The team component is clearly a very important factor in why certain video games are addictive.

(w9)

**The virtual world of addictive video games continues to evolve even if the player is not online.** Therefore, if you are not playing and active in the developments of the world, you are potentially left behind when you rejoin. To avoid "missing" something you must play as much as possible.

(w10)

**Companies regularly release upgrades or expansion packs.** Even if players start to get bored of the online worlds their characters inhabit, video game expansion packs can always add new areas for exploration, new abilities to try, new tasks to complete, and new characters to develop.

(w11)

**Top video game players or teams can earn real world rewards** (e.g., tournaments for cash prizes). This can be extremely motivating and can encourage massive amounts of time to hone and develop skills (the equivalent of an athlete training for the Olympics).

(w12)

**Addictive video games do not reward short and unscheduled periods of play.** Games that are very addictive require long-term commitments (months or years) of regular gaming sessions lasting at least an hour or more. MMOs, real time strategy games, and many first person shooters appeal to the hard core gamer who invests a significant portion of his free time to the experience. Due to the great investment (e.g., months developing a character) it becomes very hard to "throw away" all the work and uninstall the game.

(w13)

**Addictive video games may allow the player to immerse him/herself in a fully realized virtual world.** You can create your own character with attributes you wish you had in real life. You form relationships, develop a career, and accomplish things that would be impossible (or require far more effort) in the real world. Video games may offer an [escape from the reality of the physical world](#) and into a digital universe where players can assume any identity they desire.

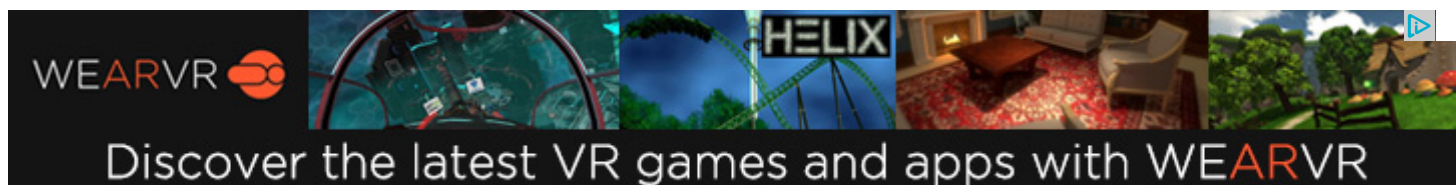
(w14)

**Some video games require monthly fees.** In order to play gamers must pay \$15 - \$20 per month even after the game has been purchased. Of course, the fact that there is a regular monthly charge encourages users to play more so that they "get their money's worth".

(w15)

**Video games can generate [strong emotions in players](#).** Because the world and the online experience is mostly user generated, gamers can experience wars, betrayal, friendship, romance, marriages, funerals, etc. The variety and intensity of emotions experienced online can be similar to emotions experienced in the real world.

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**Why Are Video Games Addictive? Can you think of any other reasons?**

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Your blog is really informative. Made me understood more about my male friends' attitude about this!

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thanks to shearing such a good information with us.

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**Gonzales5432** • 5 years ago

thanks for great info

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**G5** • 5 years ago

nice info ;) thanks

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**End-Your-Addiction** • 5 years ago

An addiction is a chain of events.

1. You get drawn in by the fantasy setting, dragons, magic etc.
2. You want to make your character stronger, better equipped and better than everyone elses.
3. You start using the game as an escape from the stresses of the real world. You dismiss family and friends and the only thing you want is to spend as much time in the game as possible.
4. You get tired of school/work and achieving things in real life. The game is all that matters now.
5. You stop taking care of your personal hygiene, you don't eat or drink properly, you don't walk out the door except for buying energy drinks and snacks. You get overweight, pale and filled with acne. You have no social connections except a lan or two and over the internet.
6. Mental breakdown that leads to depression and loss of sleep. Physical breakdown, stroke, osteoporosis, dental health issues etc.
7. Total rehab or death.

5 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Abdallah Mbengue** ➔ End-Your-Addiction • 2 years ago

lol number 7 killed me

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Uvogin Berserker** ➔ End-Your-Addiction • 16 days ago

In other words a hikikimori/NEET

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

**Katamari** • 3 years ago



Wow, an article about video game addiction that doesn't portray all games as inherently harmful and addictive. I am pleasantly surprised. :)

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**anotherMikeandwtfresearchpropo** • 3 years ago

i think comparing gaming addiction to alcohol addiction is seriously wrong. alcohol addiction is existent for as long as we know mankind, more or less. gaming addiction isn't even existent until the past 30 years or so. and only recently it has increased because of the wide availability of video games.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**lolavictrola** • 3 years ago

The social aspect is a huge part of what sucks people in to MMO gaming.

<http://www.zco.com/blog/mmo-an...>

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**AAA** • 2 years ago

Wow, this article is truly amazing. Only if I had read this before I caught the addiction of gaming...

^ | v • Reply • Share ›



**Rowan Gonzalez** • 2 years ago

The games themselves are of course not addictive, but the people that play them can become addictive.

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

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