Kellen Rouff

Matt Salvia

Eng. Comp 101

20 Nov 2017

Classifying Video Games as an Addiction

In the past couple decades, video games have become a prominent form of entertainment that is still gaining popularity. As with many things, some people take this enjoyment too far, so that it leads into an addiction. Video games have become one of these outlets that can lead to a life ruining addiction. Some people would argue that addictions cannot be without a substance like drugs, tobacco, and alcohol. But the American Psychiatric Association (APA), the scholars who decide on mental disorders, have started to recognize video games as an addiction in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DMS-5). The APA should recognize Video Game Addiction as a formally recognized international addiction.

The APA has put video game addition under section 3 of the DSM-5 which is the section of non-formal disorders. This means there is enough research for it to be considered as a non-formal disorder but further research is needed to have it be recognized as a formal disorder. This doesn’t mean that its no less of a problem than any other addiction. As Mark Zastow talks about this in his article, Is Video Game Addiction Really an Addiction, by showing the effects on the neural pathways, the distinction of addiction, and how the definition of addiction should be redefined. Lastly, Dr. Ryan Cleave goes onto share his own testimony of the experience he had with video game addiction and how it was corrupting and destroying his life in his book, *Unplugged*. These all will help show how the APA should formally recognize Video Game Addiction as an addiction in the next revision or edition of the DSM-5/6.

Addiction has been an ever-growing problem in today’s society, many things are being introduced into the Section 3 of the DMS-5 for recognition of being a possible addiction. To be considered as a formal addiction, studies have to be done to meet a very high bar so that there is no confusion that it is not being mistaken for another mental disorder. For reference on what this means, “Some people who are depressed stay in bed all day, but we wouldn’t say that they have a bed addiction” (Zastrow). But the research that is being done with Video Game Addiction shows that there is no mistaken that it is its own addiction.

The research that is being done shows how Video Games meets the new criteria of what an addiction is. Prior to 2013, Addiction wasn’t even in the DSM, but was called substance-disorders. When addiction was first introduced, it used to be thought to be caused because of the substance and only the substance mattered but in the past 15 year it has become known that the addiction comes from the reward that the substance provides. This advancement was through neuroimaging that helped show similar activation of the brains reward system in response to drugs and gambling. Video games have also been shown to activate this reward system.

Video games activate the brains reward system exceptionally well by giving rewards through many different mechanics. Like in gambling addiction, the addicted person hears the bells and whistles of the slot machine, which then triggers the release of dopamine through the anticipation of an award. As the person continually anticipates these rewards and more dopamine is released into the brain, the stress and fear of not having that feeling causes the addicted person to need more of the substances to subdue these feelings. This is a never-ending cycle that the person goes through. Video games achieve this same affect through a couple different mechanisms like achievements and loot boxes.

When a person gains an achievement in a game, a text pops up and sounds play notifying the player that they did something worth being awarded for. These would be just like the slot machines, as they unlock these achievements the anticipation and need of the sound and text pop up would trigger the flooding of dopamine into the brain. Loot boxes also do the same as achievements, but they also reward the player with items that they can use and show off within the game. This interactive reward system triggers the addictive behavior more so by giving a value (common, rare, legendary) to the items that are obtained. But even small things like getting a kill or completing an objective can trigger that release of dopamine because ultimately it provides a positive result for yourself and can lead into an addiction.

Living a life that is lead with an addiction can be crippling in many different ways. A common problem that many addicted people have while gaming is that “Just 3 or 4 hours passes in real time, but they feel they have spent thousands of years finishing the game” ( Zastrow). Then there is the other side of it, the ones who can’t keep track of hours, days or even weeks because of their overextended time of playing. This causes several problems within the addict’s life by creating problems for their family, job, and social lives. The addict’s family will miss seeing the person they love during important family moments as they start to lie about their addiction. This all creates a stressful environment which will eventually break the family apart leading to many other possible problems. In the book, *Unplugged*, Dr. Cleave shares how destructive his addiction was by saying “my kids hate me. My wife is threatening (again) to leave me…My parents are so mad at me, they don’t bother to visit their only grandchildren anymore” (3). As for their job’s, they will start to do poorly at the workplace until they don’t even come to work anymore which result in them getting fired. Finally, their social life will dissipate into friends giving up on trying to hang out or help the addict. Dr. Cleave experiences this during his addiction with how his “friend no longer bothers to call” (Unplugged 3). These are some of the most common problems that every type of addict faces as they are consumed by their addiction. Then there are some that find themselves seeing objects or sounds from their gaming experience seeping into their everyday lives.

Some of the worst addicts can’t tell whether they have stopped playing the game as they visualize things from the game into their everyday lives. When this happens, it is known as game transfer phenomenon (GTP). Ortiz de Gortari interviewed many different gamers and found that many of them have had GTP happen to them ( Zastrow). I can personally say that I have also had this kind of incident happen to me, especially when boredom starts to sink in and I was unable to occupy myself with something else and I would rather be home playing games. The things that I have seen are some of the same things that the gamers that were interview said they have seen. These include health bars over people’s heads, in game sounds playing when doing tasks that would trigger the music for doing the same task in game, and seeing enemies in real life and pretending to kill them for points. Ms. Gortari conducted a survey in 2015 with 2,362 gamers, the results were that “97% of the gamers reported having experienced GTP” ( Zastrow). This is a part that still needs much more research done because it’s “not clear that addiction and GTP share the same neurological pathways” but this is relatively new research that was just discovered and conducted in the past couple years ( Zastrow). But as Ms. Gortari and her colleagues come to understand that “people with severe GTP are more likely to have problematic or addictive gaming habits” (Zastrow). But many people think that it is impossible to classify video games as a source of an addiction.

Many people feel differently on what can cause an addiction, some saying only hardcore substances like drugs and alcohol can be the only source to be counted as a source of an addiction. As Mr. Christopher J. Ferguson from the New York Times, went on to cite some information from a test by the American Journal of Psychiatry that states that they “found that at most 1 percent of video game players might exhibit characteristics of an addiction.” But we have to keep in mind that this is still a new concept that was only introduce a year or two ago and the need for further testing is high. For comparison, this case study only tested 18,932 people and said that .03% to 1% showed a possibility of video game addiction; while alcohol addiction in 2015 was sitting at 6.2% or 15.1 million people who qualify to be addicted (www.niaaa.nih.gov, Przybylski). Mr. Ferguson goes on to say that “evidence for addiction to video games is virtually nonexistent” but this is no different from when cigarettes first came out. When they first came out, no one knew the dangers that came with smoking them and the possibility of becoming addicted to them. These are the reasons that people who say it can’t be an addiction should remember about how other things that weren’t considered harmful at first were later because of the research that was done.

Just like everything else that has come to be known as an addiction, the research is still very new and more is needed for video game addiction. But there is no doubt as time passes that we will see more understanding of the problem at hand. Of course, there is a possibility of it not becoming known as an addiction but maybe be classified by a different type of disorder. Either way it needs to be classified as some type of disorder because of the rising problem of over use with gaming. I believe that more research is definitely needed to come to a conclusion of whether it can be formally classified as an addiction but it is good that it is now known as a non-formal disorder so that people who are being affected by it can get the help they need.

Works Cited

Cleave, Dr. Ryan. “*Unplugged*.”Health Communications, Inc. 2010.

“Alcohol Facts and Statistics.” *National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, June 2017,www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohol-health/overview-alcohol-consumption/alcohol-facts-and-statistics**.**

Ferguson, Christopher J., and Patrick Markey. “Video Games Aren’t Addictive.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 1 Apr. 2017,www.nytimes.com/2017/04/01/opinion/sunday/video-games-arent-addictive.html**.**

Przybylski, Dr. Andrew K., Weinstein, Dr. Netta, and Murayama, Dr. Kou. “Internet Gaming Disorder: Investigating the Clinical Relevance of a New Phenomenon.” *American Journal of Psychiatry Vol 174 Issue 3,* 4 Nov 2016

Zastrow, Mark. “Is video game addiction really an addiction?” Proceedings of the National Academy of Science. vol. 114 no. 17, 4268-4272, 25 April 2017. DOI 10.1073/pnas.1705077114

American Psychiatric Association “Internet Gaming Addiction” Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th, ed. Pg. 795-98 American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013