

# Virtual Addiction: Is Internet Gaming Addiction Fact or Fantasy?

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## INTRODUCTION

‘Videogame Addiction’ is a commonly used and loaded term that deserves both conceptual and empirical attention. It is my stance that it is one of the most problematic psychiatric disorders to be recently proposed. Problem gaming has been placed in Appendix III of the fifth and most recent edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association (DSM-5) as ‘Internet Gaming Disorder’ and identified as likely to be included in future editions of the DSM pending further research. It has also been added as part of the revisions to the International Classification of Diseases 11<sup>th</sup> Edition (ICD-11) by the World Health Organization (WHO) as ‘Gaming Disorder, predominantly online’.

I use a model of addiction that combines economic theory with current research in Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience and Philosophical work in the area. Presented is a Neureconomic and Picoeconomic account of addiction centered on Disordered and Addictive Gambling<sup>1</sup>. I then carefully conceptually apply this theory to a review what Nielson calls ‘ludophilic research’<sup>2</sup> available for the proposed disorder. That is, research that is empirical but has as part of its aim to establish why games are addictive. I argue that it is likely that some individuals do experience a clinical addiction similar to that of gambling when they engage in specific activities within videogames. However, the application of research on gambling should not be applied directly to gaming without critical attention to the differences, rather than simply the similarities between the two activities.

In this paper I argue that the wide scope of games and gamers can confound our understanding of the complexities of gaming: it could be said there are as many types of games as there are types of gamers and this hinders our understanding of the complexities of gaming. Current research into disordered gaming fails to reflect, understand or account for this diversity; the narrative of addiction provided by the psychosciences encourages gamers to self-define as disordered – both individually and as a community. This is a process that Rose<sup>3</sup> describes as the ‘invention of self’. It touches on the issues of identity, selfhood, autonomy and individuality both within and outside of games.

Furthermore, I argue that the broader conception of all video gaming as socially

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undesirable and addictive is incorrect and damaging. By pathologising game-playing, the psychosciences are in part complicit in subjective social judgement of a particular leisure activity enjoyed by many millions of people of all walks of life, and forming an important part of the personal and social identity of many. It has been noted that there are sociological reasons for this judgement, including as Cover rightly argues stereotypes regarding class and age.<sup>4</sup> Sociological and economic factors contribute to the problematic framing of such behaviour as disordered. This has direct implications for the conceptual understanding of problematic gaming in Psychiatry; for clinical treatment of those presenting with problematic gaming behaviour; and more broadly for game player's self conception – both as individuals and as a group. Furthermore it is important that gamers themselves are aware of these concerns.

### **OPTIONAL BIO**

I am a Philosopher of Science at the University of Sydney. My current research interests lie in the Philosophy of Psychiatry and Neuroscience, with a particular focus on the Philosophy and Science of addiction. My other research interests include Science and Ethics, Human Geography and Sociology of Science.

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 Ross, D., Sharp, C., Vuchinich, R. & Spurrett, D. (2008) *Midbrain Mutiny: The Picoeconomics and Neuroeconomics of Disordered Gambling*. The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- 2 Nielson, R.K.L. (2015) *Game Addiction in the Framework of Love: A Ludophilic Investigation*. In Enevold, J. & MacCallum-Stewart, E. *Game Love: Essays on Play and Affection*, MacFarland & Company Inc. Publishers, North Carolina.
- 3 Rose, N. (1998) *Inventing Our Selves*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, U.K.
- 4 Cover, R. (2006) Gaming (Ad)diction: Discourse, Identity, Time and Play in the Production of the Gamer Addiction Myth. *The International Journal of Computer Game Research*, vol. 6, no. 1.