Problematic and Addictive Computer/Video Gaming

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1984

IBM PC

1-2 phones
per household

Steve Jobs “It is now 1984.
It appears IBM wants it all”

Console TV with Pong

LNW Research
1979-1984

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30 Years Later: 2014

PS4

Xbox One

iPotty

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2014: 24/7 Media/Device Availability

"With technology we are bringing boredom to the brink of extinction. Satisfying this with the immediate gratification of media consumption may have tragic consequences for mankind."

Dr. Kenneth Woog

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Computer/Video Gaming Industry 2014

- $85B Sales Worldwide, $20B US
  - League of Legends (2009) - Riot Games
    - Almost 1 million players online at any time
    - 27 Million players daily
  - World of Warcraft (2001) – Blizzard Entertainment
    - 7.5 million subscribers worldwide (same as 2007)
    - Grossed more than $10B (as of 2012)
  - Call of Duty – Activision
    - >100 million copies sold
    - Console and Computer
  - Grand Theft Auto
    - >150 million copies sold

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Is Violent Video Game Play and Violent Media Consumption Harmful?

- Controversial – strong proponents each side
  - Intuition says yes, they should be harmful
    - School shootings – looking for a smoking gun?
  - Yet youth violence has actually declined!
- Significant research on effect on aggression
  - Desensitizes individuals to violence and aggression
    - Concern that this limits inhibition to aggression
    - Is this desensitization harmful?
  - Violent video game play does appear to have short term effects on the perception of aggression
    - Is this having any real effect on aggression and violence?

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Violence as a result of Violent Game Play

- Research on actual report of violent behavior limited
  - Frequency and time spent playing violent video games was significantly associated with general and violent delinquency of institutionalized youth (Delisi, et al 2012)
    - Was violent gaming the cause or are violent individuals drawn to violent video games?
    - Could playing video games reduce violent crime?
- Rarely discussed but potentially broadest threat:
  - Family violence, self harm, damage to property when gaming is removed, interrupted
  - Mental health issues related to excess video gaming
    - Depression, anxiety, isolation

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My Introduction to Problematic Computer/Video Gaming: 2002

- Coincidentally two 15 y/o males referred to me at the same time
  - Played role playing games (not first person shooter games)
  - One attempted to strangle mother with power cord when she unplugged the computer to get him off
  - Other had not been attending school for 3 months, stabbed brother with kitchen knife when he would not let him sit at computer
- No prior history of mental illness or behavior problems
  - Teens denied addiction and were resistant to counseling
  - Both eventually placed on involuntary psychiatric holds.
  - Cycles of abstinence, behavior contracting did not help cure the addiction or motivate positive change
  - Attempts to help parents reestablish parental authority failed

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Iowa State University
National Institute of Media and the Family
Survey of Video Game Play (2009)

- Nationwide Harris Poll Online survey
- Sample of 1178 youth 8-18 years of age
- 11 Questions Similar to Criteria for Pathological Gambling:
  - Negative Consequences of Play
  - Avoiding important academic, occupational or social responsibilities
  - Problematic behaviors as a result of play
- 8.5% of respondents met 6 or more criteria
- Pathological use correlated to 25 hours/week of play
- Self report of how affected by violent games:
  - No difference between those playing excessively

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2015: Research Still Limited

- Majority of research from China, Taiwan, South Korea
- Prevalence and correlational studies

  US Europe 1.5%-8.2% of gamers in the US, higher in Asia
- No high quality clinical treatment outcome studies
  - Little research done in the US
- Common Treatment recommendations:
  - Inpatient and Outpatient Programs
    - Limiting access to computer/internet
    - Individual psychotherapy, CBT, ACT, Mindfulness Therapies
    - Group psychotherapy, 12 step online group
    - Recreational therapies, career and educational coaching

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Internet Gaming Disorder

APA Proposed Diagnostic Criteria - DSM-5

Persistent and recurrent use of the Internet to engage in games, often with other players, leading to clinically significant impairment or distress as indicated by five (or more) of the following in a 12-month period:

- Preoccupation with Internet games. (The individual thinks about previous gaming activity or anticipates playing the next game; Internet gaming becomes the dominant activity in daily life).
- Withdrawal symptoms when Internet gaming is taken away. (These symptoms are typically described as irritability, anxiety, or sadness, but there are no physical signs of pharmacological withdrawal.)
- Tolerance—the need to spend increasing amounts of time engaged in Internet games.
- Unsuccessful attempts to control the participation in Internet games.
- Loss of interests in previous hobbies and entertainment as a result of, and with the exception of, Internet games.
- Continued excessive use of Internet games despite knowledge of psychosocial problems.
- Has deceived family members, therapists, or others regarding the amount of Internet gaming.
- Use of Internet games to escape or relieve a negative mood (e.g., feelings of helplessness, guilt, anxiety).
- Has jeopardized or lost a significant relationship, job, or educational or career opportunity because of participation in Internet games.

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How Does One Become Addicted? Patterns

- Increasing game play, starts with a few hours, evolves to most if not all available free time (>35 hours / week)
  - Baby sitter, low cost entertainment
  - “At least he is not going out and getting into trouble”
- Increasing social and team involvement and responsibility to team members - > play, > rewards (loot)
  - i.e. Raids, increasing participation points
- Weekend play binges - 12hrs+ / day
- Decreasing real life social involvement
  - Play commitments often 7 days a week
- Increasing effort made to manage lifestyle
  - Do minimum in school, sports, work, etc.
  - Work around parental controls

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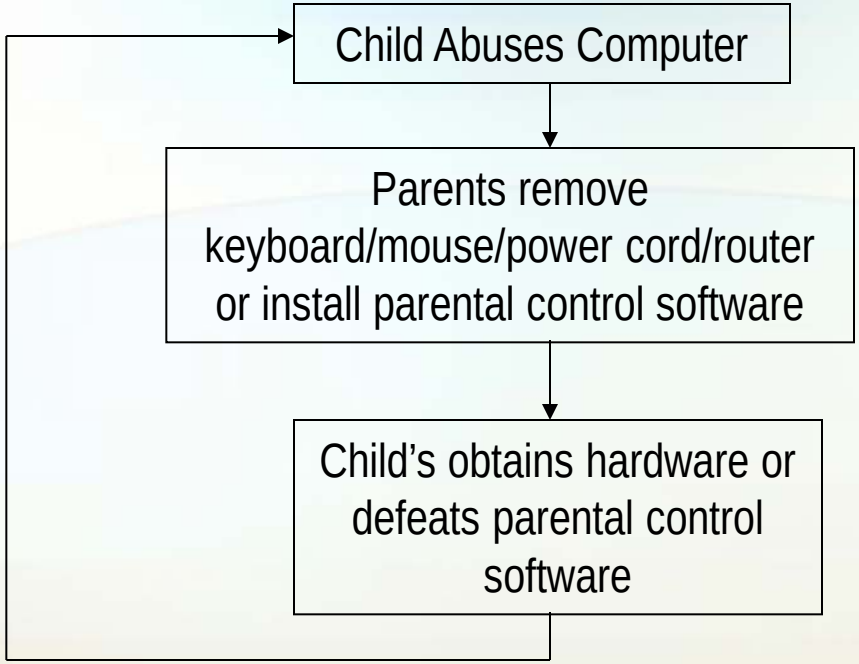
Is this a Parenting Problem?

- Yes and No. Adults can become addicted however...
- Technological Divide makes parents vulnerable
  - "I know he spends too much time gaming but he is a computer genius - it will help his future career."
- Relatives, friends have lots of advice - they tell parents: "Just take away the computer!" , Why can't you control your kid? , Just tell him to knock it off!
  - Shame prevents parents from seeking professional help
- Parents have no experience in dealing with an addicted (previously compliant) child: lies, denial, sneaking around
- Rationalization - "At least he is not using drugs"
- Professional advice can be conflicting and confusing

Attempts at Controlling Excesses



Period of escalating anger, poor school performance, sleep issues

Child challenged to find <u>covert</u> solution to bypass control

Repeated cycles damage relationship

Options:
1. Parents give up
2. Remove computer from home
3. Seek professional tx

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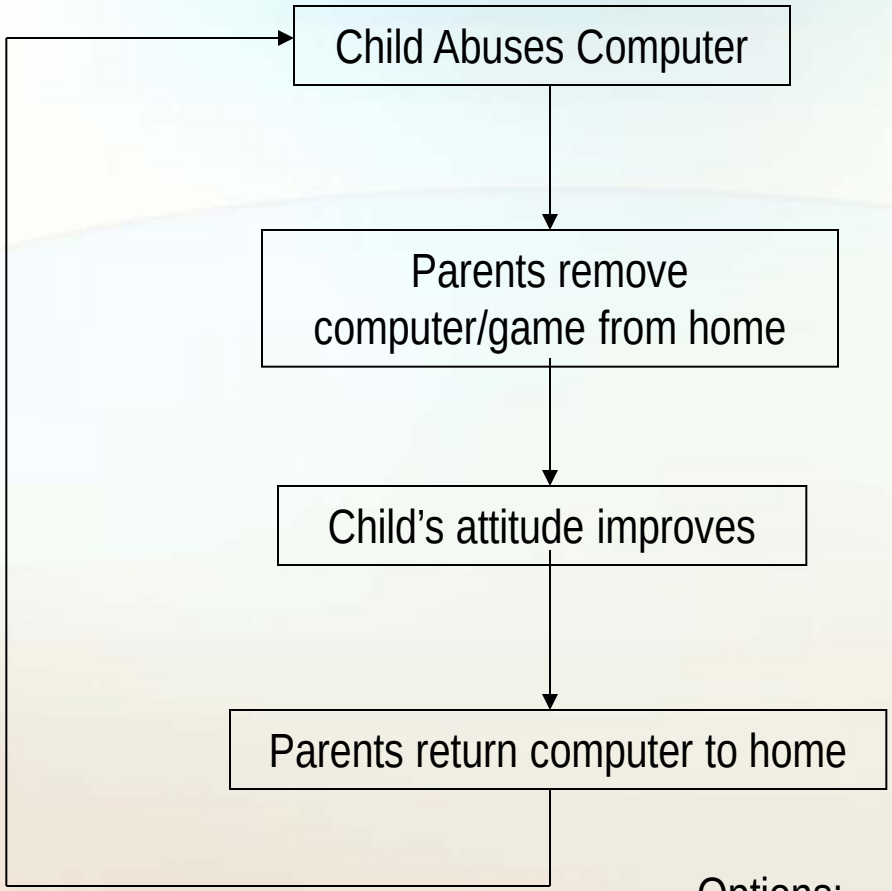
Abstinence / Relapse Cycle



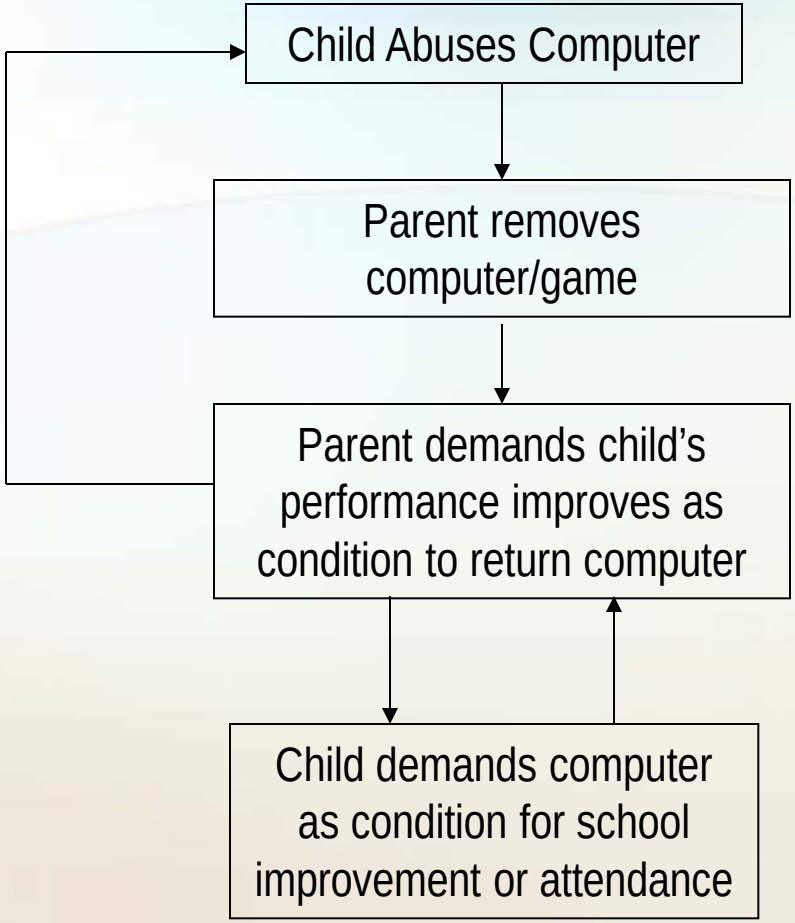
Period of escalating anger, poor school performance, sleep issues

Repeated cycles damage relationship

Period of child working to get computer back

Options:
1. Give up
2. Remove computer longer term
3. Seek professional tx

Parent-Adolescent Power Struggle



Longer term cycle

Period of escalating anger, poor school performance, sleep issues. Parents finally have had enough! Sometimes this is encouraged by mental health professionals.

Period of parents and child locked in power struggle

Options:
1. Give up
2. Seek (new) professional tx
3. Send child to RTC

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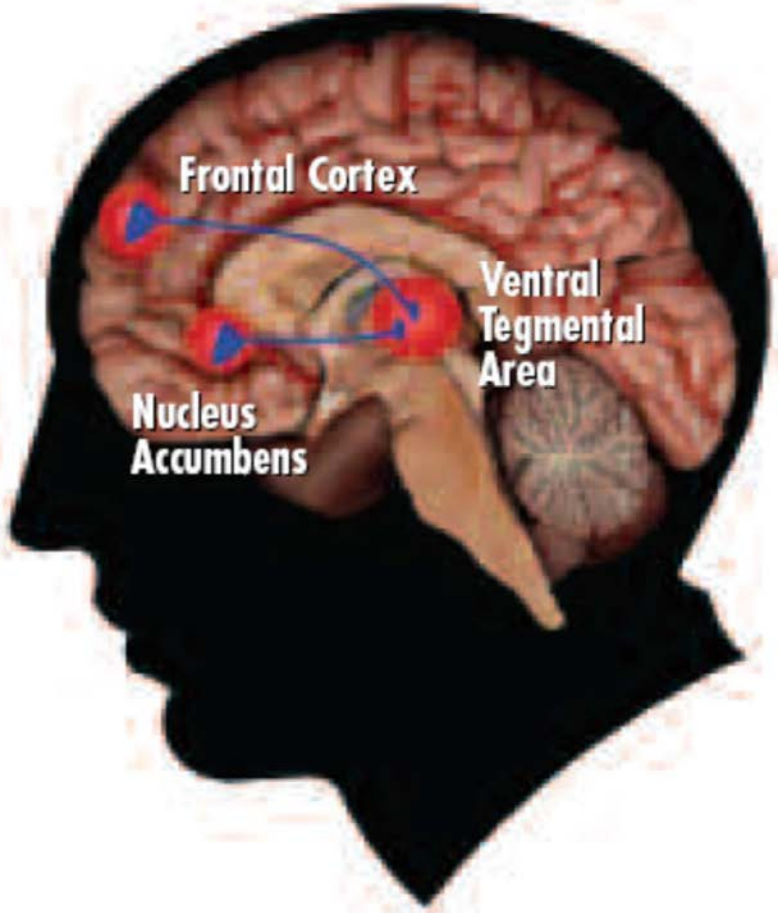
Treatment: The Science of Addiction

Brain reward (dopamine) pathways



These brain circuits are important for natural rewards such as food, music, and art.

Reward Pathway Guides Behavior

Addictive Behaviors

Gambling
Computer/Video Gaming
Eating/food
Shopping
Sexual

Sum of Learning
Reward Pathway

Pleasure
Novelty
Reinforcement
Meaning

Life's Rewards

Academics
Athletics
Career
Relationships
Success
Spirituality

TREATMENT

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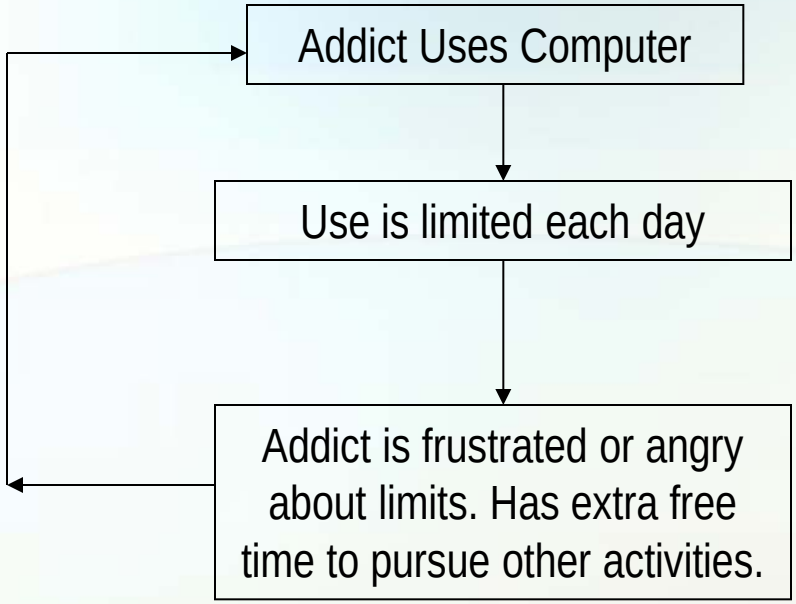
Harm Reduction Treatment Model



Repeated daily cycles + real world rewards

= addiction broken

Reduce amount of ALL computer time according to agreed upon limits on a daily basis.

Addict learns to tolerate feelings of frustration cravings, while accruing significant real-life rewards

- Reduce gaming rewards through reduction of game play time
  - Rate of reduction and end use limits based on individual's goals
  - Reduces chance of serious abreaction, depression, self-harm
- Psychotherapy to gain mindfulness and acceptance skills
- Enrichment activities to increase real-life rewards

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Parental Limit Setting Treatment *and* Prevention

- Decide on and implement usage limits - Set Rules
  - Limit when and for how long your child is allowed to use the computer for each day of the week. Don't allow unlimited time on weekends.
  - Set use contingent on responsibilities - homework, chores
  - Reward with extra computer time for good attitude, compliance and pro-social activities
  - Expect complaints, don't expect children to self-monitor computer use
- Get parent counseling/help if you are unable to maintain limits!!!
- Use parental controls/limit setting tools - consistent, deflects anger/frustration, reduces violence
- Be careful when taking games away completely or during play
  - Suicidal behavior or violence against others or property

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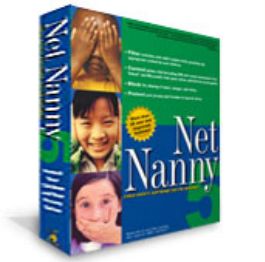
Limit Setting Tools (with limits)



- Parental Controls for the Game or Application
  - Limits application time (i.e. World of Warcraft)
  - Playstation, XBOX and other consoles
  - Limited to application (pseudo play?)
- Router Control Applications
  - Downloaded streamed content?
- Parental Control Software with Time Limit Features
  - Parents must be System Administrator, potential for hacking
- Windows 8+ and Mac OS allow when and daily limit settings
  - Limits use, Parents/Significant Others are System Administrators
- Self-Limiting Software Tools
  - *Rescue Time, Stop Procrastinating*

Tip the Scales toward Real World Rewards

- Identify areas needing help
  - Academic, social, family relations, etc.
- Seek additional professional help as needed
  - Individual, family therapy, technical help to set limits
- Parents / Significant Others must work aggressively
  - Encourage a success identity- real life rewards
  - Work to improve family relationships - quality time
- Parents / Significant Others must be patient
  - Withdrawal can be minimized, however irritability, depression, anxiety are possible issues to emerge
  - Game rewards have overtaken real life rewards - it will take time for new learning
- Parents / Significant Others must be consistent
  - Stick with behavioral interventions to the letter
  - Clear message to child / significant other

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Life Balance Worksheet

Recommended Changes to Balance Life's Rewards For

_____

TV, Internet and Computer/ Video Gaming

Real-life rewards

List Media Interests

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Key:
+ increase
- decrease
x remove
* no change

__ Academics / Education
__ Athletics / Exercise
__ Career Goals and Success
__ Close Friendships
__ Family Relationships
__ Financial Success
__ Other Hobbies and Interests
__ Romantic Relationships
__ Spirituality / Philosophy
__ Travel
__ _____
__ _____
__ _____
__ _____

Credits / References / Resources

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US Based Computer Addiction Treatment Programs

Hillarie Cash, Ph.D. - Internet/Computer Addiction Services
Redmond, WA. 98052, (425) 861-5504

Kenneth Woog, Psy.D. - Computer Addiction Treatment Program
Lake Forest, Ca 92630, (949) 422-4120

Kimberly Young, Ph.D. - Center for Internet Addiction Recovery
Bradford, PA 16701, 814-451-2405

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Questions?