

The Dangerous Love Affair of the Gaming World

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An addict, as defined by the *Webster's Standard Dictionary*, is “one given to an obsession, to devote oneself to, or to be dependent on” (“Addict”). Although common addictions in today’s society include cigarettes, alcohol, and drugs, there is a new addiction that is quickly taking over the world—Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (hereinafter, MMORPGs) (Reynolds 42). MMORPGs are not easily recognized as a threat; in fact, they initially seem to be incredibly harmless activities. However, the addiction to these role playing games is beginning to have a dangerous and negative backlash on individuals and the productivity of our society as a whole.

Today, there is a \$25 billion gaming market that generates \$5 billion annually in subscription fees alone (Reynolds 42). To participate, the consumer buys the initial start-up game and then pays a monthly subscription fee to continue to play the games online. These games include World of Warcraft (WOW), Everquest, Halo 2, and Diablo. Each player then creates a character and encounters various tasks and missions, which allows his character to build up experience points and rank. As the player continues to increase his character’s levels, he begins to experience feelings of power and prestige. This elation becomes the grip of the addiction, and the problem escalates because of the on-going nature of these games (Reynolds 42). For example, when asked, “What is it about the online role-playing games that are so enjoyable?” Ronald Collins, an avid gamer, answered, “The games do not end. They create a sense of

adventure that you can't get in real life. It's like reading a book except you can determine the outcome of the main character which happens to be you" (Collins).

As proof of the increasing problem, the MMORPG phenomenon that once was dominated by teenagers now is over run by grown men with families and careers (Munro 50). As their addictions become stronger, the gamers begin spending more and more time in the game and less time in their own realities; for instance, gamers often will play until late in the evening, depriving themselves of sleep and causing them to be less productive in their work environments. Moreover, spouses, children, religion, work, and personal hygiene all become minimal priorities in their lives. The spouses of the gamers often feel abandoned and resent that a game can take over and change their significant others (Munro 50). However, when confronted about their excessive game time, some players have exhibited a violent defensiveness of their addiction (Reynolds 42).

To alleviate this growing problem, more attention currently is being placed upon MMORPGs through the Internet, media, and scientific community. For instance, online support groups recently have been created by neglected spouses and families; widows of WOW, and gamerwidow.com are among the many support groups designed specifically for the wives who have been neglected due to their spouse's addictions (WOW_widow.com). Also, Elizabeth Wooley created a twelve step program for addicts called On-Line Gamer's Anonymous after her own son became a tragic victim of his own gaming addiction (Munro 50). His body was found in front of his video game computer, after he shot himself at the age of twenty-one (Munro 50). Further, Dr. Jerald Block, a psychiatrist in Portland, Oregon, began a campaign to treat MMORPGs as a potential health problem, since an increasing number of adolescent and adult men are compulsively playing these games at a great cost to their careers and social lives; but,

Dr. Block notes, “By the time they get to me, they’re already quite isolated and unsuccessful” (Munro 50) and likely have lost nearly all that was important in their lives. Related to Dr. Block’s campaign, *The New Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, which is set for production in 2012, will put pressure on health insurance companies to treat excessive gaming as a real addiction that should be treated by professionals, not by consumers (Munro 50).

The gaming industry is addressing the issue of MMORPGs extremely cautiously. First, they feel that individuals should have enough self-control to limit their own gaming (Munro 50). They also are invoking their free speech rights to fight against the lobbyists’ arguments for time constraints on the role playing games; these time limits would only allow gamers to play a few hours a day and would force them back into reality (Munro 50).

Nevertheless, the questions remain: who should draw the line, and where does it need to be drawn? While the video game industry is making billions of dollars each year, families are being torn apart, social anxieties are developing, and, in extreme cases, people are dying. In five years, health insurance companies may have to cover this backlash of the gaming addiction phenomenon, creating higher insurance premiums for everyone (Munro 50). For the lackluster addicts who cannot seem to put down the controllers and confront their realities, the Widows of Warcraft support group motto seems fitting—“Stop leveling, and start living!” (WOW_widow.com).

Works Cited

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Ms. Cutrer’s Comments: *This English 101 assignment was an introduction into the use of MLA documentation and format. Layla, a nontraditional student, took a personal situation and turned it into a positive research and problem-solving project. Not only does she successfully fulfill the requirements of the assignment, in doing so she lends insights and practical help to others with the same genuine concerns so clearly expressed in her paper.*