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By: Laura Parker, GameSpot AU - Posted on April 3, 2009

What is video game addiction? What are its boundaries, its symptoms, its treatments? How wide is its scope? And is it even a medically recognised condition in the first place? In Part One of this GameSpot AU feature we speak to researchers, psychologists, medical bodies and gamers to gauge their thoughts on the cause and effects of video game addiction, the significance of it being recognised as such, and the potential for future research. In Part Two—which will launch next week—we'll look at this issue from the game makers' side, as well as explore some real-life cases of addiction.



Is a video game addict simply someone who likes to play a lot?

If asked to define 'video game addict', most of us would reply that a video game addict is someone who likes to play a lot of video games. But that definition is as close to the truth as 'someone who likes to inject a lot of heroin' is an accurate portrayal of a heroin addict. Our unfamiliarity with video game addiction stems not just from the ease with which the term 'addiction' is thrown around, but also from a vast misrepresentation of the issue in the mainstream press, with sensationalist headlines like 'Video game addicts are not just shy nerds' (June 5, 2008, Chloe Lake, NEWS.com.au) not an uncommon sight. Add to this a lack of medical and psychological research, and it's no wonder we think video game addicts are just people who like games too much.

### Defining game addiction

Before we explore whether video game addiction exists and in what form it takes, we need to know what it means to be an addict. At its core, addiction is a psychological disorder that affects the way the brain functions by impacting on chemical processes related to motivation, decision making, learning, inhibitory control and pleasure seeking. Behavioural addictions like gambling and sex are forms of psychological dependence; addictions to substances like drugs and alcohol are forms of both psychological and physical dependence.

An addict is defined by his or her psychological compulsion to carry out certain behaviours or consume certain substances that are often detrimental to his or her health or wellbeing. Although this repeated consumption often leads to other problems in areas of social and mental health, an addict cannot stop him or her self from recurrent use. The hallmarks of addiction are often an increase in time spent in the consumption of these behaviours or substances at the expense of other activities; recurrent failed attempts to stop; recurrent preoccupation and intense psychological urges or desires that are difficult to control.

Video game addiction is still a newcomer to the field of psychology, and is not yet medically recognised as a proper addiction due to the lack of research conducted into its cause and effects. So, while it's common for clinics to specialise in the treatment of drug, alcohol, gambling, sex and

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