

Fortnite and Gaming

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We live in a fast-paced technology driven society. It is thus understandable that our entertainment has also been taken over by technology. Few teenagers enjoy books the way previous generations have enjoyed them (for the few left, keep it up!). Let's consider how technology-gaming affects us as human beings. We will focus on the game Fortnite, simple because it is the most popular video/online game ever to have existed. However, much of what we will discuss applies to other games, and other forms of technology driven entertainment (videos, show-series, blogs/vlogs, etc.).

Fortnite has around 250 million registered users and around 80 million monthly active users.¹ There are many factors that come together to make this game so popular, as well as so addictive. One study suggests that playing Fortnite without restriction and limitation can lead to an addiction as powerful as a heroin addiction.² In fact, 5% of divorce petitions in the U.K. cite Fortnite as part of the argument for divorce.³ The World Health Organization (WHO) recently included gaming disorder in its International Classification of Diseases (ICD).⁴

Fortnite has multiple formats for players to use. One of the most popular is where the player's character drops into the game world and has to essentially kill or be killed. Alliances, betrayals, defenses (e.g. forts), and many other strategies are necessary to succeed. Epic Games, the maker of Fortnite (as well as many game companies) employ psychologists to help them attract and maintain users. This is a multi-billion-dollar industry. "Free" games (like Fortnite) offer very enticing opportunities to make purchases. People are spending significant money to better equip their characters, and even to simply personalize them. Adolescents have begun to self-identify with the "skins" or clothing their character wears. Social lives can begin to form around playing these online games especially through the ability to communicate via headset while you are playing.

One technique that Fortnite mastered is "loss by a little, win by a lot".⁵ This means that anytime a person loses (dies) he is shown the low life remaining in the other person's health bar. This is due in part to the way Fortnite lowers the health bar in response to an attack. In almost every case, when one loses, their initial feeling is, "I was so close!" thus making it so difficult to stop. Additionally, when a player survives a battle with another player, it is highly unlikely due to the vast size of the world, that another battle will ensue before that player has a good chance of winning again. These factors combine to make this game (and many other similar games), addictive.

There are frequent updates to the game that keep it fresh and current.⁶ The game can therefore make references to the season or time of year, and even to what may be going on in current events. These updates make it difficult for a person to stay away from the game for more than a few days since they do

¹<https://www.pcgamesn.com/fortnite/fortnite-battle-royale-player-numbers> Accessed, 5/29/19

²<https://www.vgr.com/fortnite-is-as-addictive-as-heroin-according-to-health-experts/> Accessed, 5-30-19

³<https://www.thesun.co.uk/tech/7275974/fortnite-destroying-4500-marriages-a-year-in-uk-divorce-papers-reveal/> Accessed, 5-30-19

⁴<https://www.npr.org/2019/05/28/727585904/is-gaming-disorder-an-illness-the-who-says-yes-adding-it-to-its-list-of-diseases> Accessed, 5-30-19

⁵<https://byrslf.co/how-fortnite-became-the-most-addicting-game-in-history-eea671592207> Accessed, 1/30/18

⁶<https://medium.com/ido-lechner/10-reasons-why-fortnite-is-designed-for-success-and-what-you-can-learn-from-it-902a22689e17> Accessed, 5/29/19

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not want to miss out (FOMO = fear of missing out). Players who begin to master the game skills, will need to continue to spend a lot of time with the game to continuously incorporate all the new updates. Epic Games can also track what players like (and spend money on) and what they don't like and adjust accordingly. Many new customizations can be introduced as well.

We must understand that in the same way that many addictive substances affect the balance of neurotransmitters in our brain, these games do as well. This means that not only can these games be highly addictive, they are addictive in the same way and through the same addiction cycle, as drugs. Inhaling, swallowing, and injecting are all ultimately portals to the brain through the cardiovascular system. Our eyes and ears are portals to the brain as well and can affect the brain just as much if not more. As a united community we have greater power to do something about all of this. If individual parents, or small groups of parents are able to withstand allowing such games, that is certainly the safest path to take. At the very least, not allowing the socializing and immediate interaction through these gaming platforms, can help. Finally, as I have mentioned in the past, if parents are going to allow anything in the realm of technology, it is wise to get to know the platform. Play it with your child to gain awareness of what exactly is going on. Ask questions about it and show interest. Even if the game itself is of no interest to you, your child and his interests, most certainly are.