Virtual Neurosis: An Examination of the History, Symptoms and Motives Associated with Excessive Computer and Video Gaming from an Adlerian Perspective

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By:

Lori K. Brown

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to offer an examination of the computer and video game industry to counselors who lack familiarity to it, while incorporating approaches to recognize and treat clients suffering from neurosis associated with excessive gaming. This paper provides history and introduction to the gaming industry, with special attention given to massively multiplayer online computer role playing games (MMORPGs). Symptoms and motives for game play lay a foundation for treatment from an Adlerian perspective. Because some excessive players are adolescents, practical advice that mental health professionals can offer to parents is included. This paper demonstrates how computer and video gaming is a rapidly advancing part of modern culture, and that excessive gaming is a mental health concern in which counselors have a duty to recognize.

Keywords: MMORPGs, virtual world, real world, avatar, gamer, excessive gaming, surface symptoms, source motives, vertical striving, mistaken beliefs, inferiority, neurosis.
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Virtual Neurosis: An Examination of the History, Symptoms and Motives Associated with Excessive Computer and Video Gaming from an Adlerian Perspective

Computer and video games have grown to become one of the most popular forms of entertainment in modern culture. Games offer dazzling opportunities to explore, accomplish, socialize and escape life, especially massively multiplayer online role playing games (MMORPGs). While some individuals, including mental health counselors, have been playing computer games since they were first introduced, others lack even basic knowledge of the rapidly advancing phenomena of living virtual worlds. Mental health counselors, who remain uneducated about the link between excessive computer gaming and mood disorders, may fail to consider the influence that excessive gaming can have on a client. While not all clients are subjected to problematic game use, some may be. Mental health professionals may currently, and unknowingly, be treating excessive game players for various mental health disorders (which could include depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorders, and social phobias, to name a few), without ever having asked the clients history surrounding internet use and computer gaming.

This paper will assist counselors in recognizing the impact that gaming has on clients by providing current facts, the history of gaming, and specific commonalities found in highly addictive MMORPGs. For the purposes of this paper, a gamer is defined as a person who plays computer and video games, especially role-playing games more than 10 hours per week. Once the culture of gaming has been clearly defined, this paper will categorize researched based symptoms, with the goal of assisting the counselor in identifying excessive use in clients. For the purpose of this paper, symptoms have been coined “surface symptoms”, symptoms that are seen or heard, and often observed in external behavior.
This paper explains the purpose of gaming to counselors, while examining the neurosis that keeps some players hidden within the virtual world. Research based motives are then classified into foundationally Adlerian categories which are valuable in identifying the mistaken beliefs that block the gamer from living their real world life. For the purpose of this paper, motives are defined as “Source Motives” are the birthplace of the client’s neurosis at the unconscious level that reveals the core of the client’s internal maladaptive perception.

Treating problematic gaming in clients will be presented from the position of Adlerian Theory. Treatment will focus on the responsibility of determining game use on intake, along with a perspective on how Adlerian principles can be applied to treatment with an individual client. This paper will conclude with tips the counselor can offer to parents, and a brief peak into the future of computer and video games.
The Technology Era

Can you avoid knowledge? You cannot! Can you avoid technology? You cannot! Things are going to go ahead in spite of ethics, in spite of your personal beliefs, in spite of everything.
-Jose M.R. Delgado, Scientific American, October 2005

Years ago civilizations were comprised of hunter-gathers, moving where their prey moved in order to survive. With the development of agriculture came the ability to grow food, permitting societies to remain in one place. In cultural evolutionary terms, simple cultures existed prior to agriculture because “it was food production that made environments rich, secure, and expandable, thereby bringing the hunter–gatherer lifestyle and its presumed egalitarian ethos to an end” (Sassaman, 2004, p. 228). As societies and cultures evolve, so must the people living within them. In sharp contrast to the hunter-gatherer era, it is technology that is making a contribution to the richness, security, and expandability of today’s modern culture.

We are at a point in history where we are being impacted by new technologies at a greater extent than ever before. Our minds are now interacting on a daily basis with a variety of media: the internet, interactive television, instant messaging, social media, texting, email, Skype™, search engines, video games, DVRs, and YouTube™, to name a few (Turkle, 2011). We are living in a world where the most technologically advanced tools are being utilized equally effectively by both the youth, and the adults, of the world (Young, 2009, Turkle, 2011). In fact, the younger generations in today’s society have never known an existence without technology. Conceivably, this could be one of the first times in history that many adolescents have more technical knowledge than their parents. An example of this is seen in many families; before hiring outside help on technical issues, many adults first turn to their children, or even their grandchildren, with technological questions, or for assistance. Subsequently, “Like it or not, there has been an exponential increase in digital technology among children and adolescents.
It sometimes appears that the pace of technological innovation has surpassed the digital knowledge-base of many parents and educators” (Barreto, & Adams, 2011, p.1).

The days of leaving the house and being forced to locate a payphone in order to maintain human connection no longer exist. In today’s modern culture, relationships are able to be continuously maintained through various mobile devices which no longer even require us to talk. Internet use has been progressively integrated in the fabric of our societies (Fisoun, et al., 2001, p. 39). In her book Alone Together (2011), Turkle writes, “Technology offers us substitutes for connecting with each other face-to face. As we instant message, e-mail, and Twitter, technology redraws boundaries between intimacy and solitude” (p.11). Turkle offers additional insight to this dilemma when she writes, “Our networked life allows us to hide from each other, even as we are tethered to each other, we would rather text than talk” (p. 1). Disturbingly, texts and emails have given us the option of avoiding face to face conflict, often resulting in further conflict due to the receiver misreading the sender’s original intent.

Moreover, as we are bound to our mobile electronic devises, we now have the option of eluding boredom at all times, perhaps at the expense of personal reflection and mindfulness (Turkle, 2011). Not so long ago, when we had to wait for something, we waited (even if we were bored), but that is no longer the case. The internet is now instantaneously accessible in innumerable places. In this age of technology, our lives no longer have to pause. Turkle (2014) accurately points out that no longer do we have to read, think, or daydream in order to relieve involuntary tedious pauses in life. Working or waiting, we now escape boredom through our different technological devices. Even when we find ourselves in public, surrounded by our friends, family or co-workers, we can still choose to disengage, and be alone in our own personal networks (Turkle, 2011). Time will tell what happens to a society where people rarely pause to
take a moment and relate to themselves. We have yet to determine the psychosomatic effects of spending time on our electronic gadgets in favor of personal self-reflection, previously found in unexpected moments of solitude.

Within the ethos of the internet, lies video and computer gaming. Video and computer games have grown from being a part of our culture, to becoming a culture in and of itself (Dini, 2012, p. 496). One only has to look around to observe video games are being played in multiple environments such as; sporting events, checkout lines, church services, classrooms, work environments, and even restrooms. It is as if these places have become a new playground, and the players are vulnerably bound to their games (Turkle, 2011). This constant game play may be nothing more than using entertainment at its extreme, yet some players appear to act as if their personal responsibility to the game is real, and the game is an extension of their own self. The collective presence of video games in modern culture necessitates the counselor’s attention; not only to better understand the virtual worlds their clients live in, but to also directly aid clients in their difficulties (Dini, 2012, p. 496).

It is time to acknowledge the significant force of video and computer games in the entertainment industry. Michael D. Gallagher, president and CEO, Entertainment Software Association (2013) states;

No other sector has experienced the same explosive growth as the computer and video game industry. Our creative publishers and talented workforce continue to accelerate advancement and pioneer new products that push boundaries and unlock entertainment experiences. These innovations in turn drive enhanced player connectivity, fuel demand for products, and encourage the progression of an expanding and diversified consumer base.
Therefore, in order to fully comprehend the rapid expansion of the gaming industry, it is important to look back over the past 30 years. Games have advanced from initially being one dimensional, into virtually realistic, massively populated, and three dimensional games (Van Rooij, 2011, p. 8). Back in 1970’s, when computers first became popular, Pong™ was created as an innovative game in which a ball was bounced back and forth, similar to table tennis. Soon after, the Pac Man™ character popularly traversed through a maze, while it chomped yellow dots and dodged termination. In Donkey Kong™ game success meant achieving a higher score with each subsequent challenge by means of improved hand and eye coordination (Young, 2009, p. 356).

Games have developed powerfully in the last decade, as they have become increasingly more complex, diverse, lifelike, and social in nature (Granic, Lobel, & Engels, 2014, p. 1). Online computer games have now evolved into massive multi-player, autonomous societies. There are millions of video games, each bearing its own idiosyncratic theme and purpose. Unlike books, movies and television, “video games are interactive and can be played alone, or played collaboratively with thousands of other online players all playing together simultaneously” (Granic, Lobel, & Engels, 2014, p. 2). As a result of interactive entertainment, it is no surprise that people are not only investing their time in playing video games, they are also investing their money. Consumers spent $20.77 billion dollars on computer games and accessories in 2012 (ESA, 2012).

Popular games now deliver exciting virtual, infinite worlds which are packed full of ongoing challenges. Many of the currently popular games no longer offer the player the option of winning or beating the game. Instead, games are unending. Several games, specifically massively multi-player online role playing games (MMORPGs) are ongoing, and continue in real
world time, no matter if the individual player is playing or offline. Quintessentially, these virtual ongoing worlds exist parallel to the real world. It is conceivable that the lines between fantasy and reality, which differentiate the real world from the virtual world, might become blurred, especially by individuals who play games excessively (Young, 2009). “The rapid progression of the gaming genre has created unique psychosocial phenomena’s, many of which challenge the counseling profession. These phenomena, are unique in the sense that games are a relatively new entity in the lives of clients, leaving counselors with a limited base of experience from which to draw when dealing with the substantial mental health consequences that result from extreme play” (Parsons, 2005, p.1).

The Generational Gap

“Anything invented before your fifteenth birthday is the order of nature. That's how it should be. Anything invented between your 15th and 35th birthday is new and exciting, and you might get a career there. Anything invented after that day, however, is against nature and should be prohibited.”
-Douglas Adams

Video games have been progressively developing since the commercial introduction of the first video game consoles in the early 1970’s (van Rooij, 2011, p. 9). Since the late 1990s, the prevalence of massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) has grown precipitously (Dupuis & Ramsey, 2011, p.1). One only has to do the math to make the assumption that counselors born before the early 1960’s did not grow up in the computer gaming era. However, any mental health client born in the 1980’s and beyond, has been exposed to video and computer games their entire life. As a result, persons under the age of thirty have grown up tethered to a world of technology that is enormously diverse from childhood experiences preceding the 1980’s (Turkle, 2011). The crux of the matter is, when it comes to video and computer games, a generational gap exists.
While many counselors acknowledge the negative concerns associated with excessive game play, others may miss identifying gaming as a key contributing factor of a client’s neurosis. While many counselors are well versed in the gaming industry, many are not. Modern games are complex and challenging to master. Fundamentally, for any innovation there is a group of potential users that will either determine to become “adopters or non-adopters of technology” (Joseph, 2010, p.144). Robinson (2009) defines adaptation to technology as “something that takes place more often when it is easier to use”. Furthermore, Robinson adds, “simplicity of use is the degree to which an innovation is perceived as difficult to understand and use” (p1). New ideas that are simpler to understand are adopted more rapidly than innovations that require one to develop and learn new skills (Robinson, 2009).

Until recently, there have been relatively few uses considered for computer and video games beyond entertainment, even though other uses potentially exist (Mantia, 2010, p.4). Perhaps the assumption of uselessness, in regards to the virtual worlds of gaming, has caused some older adults, and thus counselors, to overlook the gaming world. Or, perchance even those who value entertainment have attempted to play a complex game but rendered the experience useless due to the difficulty of mastering the controls. In a related study on technological usefulness, Gu, et al. (2010) determined that ease of use has the most significant influence on intention to use. Intention of use was followed by perceived functionality, and perceived hedonic usefulness (pleasant or unpleasant sensations) sequentially. Thus, when it comes to involvement with gaming, “users will be strengthened in their behavior merely by ease of use” (p. 294).

Depending on age, an individual born prior to the introduction of games in the 1970’s may recall a time when computer and video games were the newest phenomenon. Those who
remember the introduction of the first few video games learned, and played, a game by conscious choice. Games were easy at first, due to their original simplicity, and required little more than whacking a ball or navigating a maze. Games have become harder to use in the last decade, and many who were around at the creation of video games, have given up game play due to the complexity, time required to learn, and perceived uselessness. In contrast, as a result of being born into a world with gaming already in it, today’s younger generations experience a greater ease of use due a lifetime of gaming exposure.

No matter the counselor’s age, experience, or current exposure to computer and video games, today there are compelling reasons to gain a more in-depth knowledge of the gaming culture. With billions of dollars spent on games and accessories, along with the large percentage of people playing, even the counselor who is unfamiliar with games has purpose to pause and take notice. Counselors who begin to catch up with the fast developing pace of computer games will discover how the excessive use is impacting clients. Multiple research studies conclude that excessive game play is linked to depression, social anxiety, suicide ideation, obsession, compulsions and a lower interpersonal relationship quality (Mentzoni, et al., 2011; Padilla-Walker, et al., 2010; Rehbeing & Kleimann, 2010; Wenzel, et al. 2009). Mentzoni et al. (2011) went on to confirm that excessive game players had lower scores on satisfaction with life, and that video games are associated with poorer health (p. 595).

Most counselors are trained to understand that learning, by definition, involves change, and have seen firsthand how a client’s behavior improves through knowledge gained by means of psycho-education. Continuing education assists the counselor in gaining knowledge as well. Attaining new insight requires counselors to explore new ideas, acquire new skills, and develop new ways of understanding old experiences, and so on. No one is the same after learning
something (Brookfield, 2006). The counselor, who learns the basic commonalities found in the gaming genre, combined with an awareness of the influences computer gaming can have on mental health, will experience a deep shift from an indifferent perspective. “When a new perspective takes hold, habits of mind become more open, more permeable, and better justified” (Cranton & Taylor, 2012, p. 201).

Benefits of Gaming

While counselors will be treating neurosis associated with computer games, it is important that the mental health professional still maintain a balanced perspective and consider the benefits video games offer. Game play, which may be harmful to one individual, may be beneficial to the other. Adlerian therapists are trained to recognize that anything can be different than it appears (Ansbacher, & Ansbacher, 1956). This basic Adlerian principle is particularly applicable to video games, even though it was accepted as part of Adlerian Theory long before the first video game ever existed. In a Ted™ video, McGonigal (2010) states;

Game play produces positive emotions such as optimism, curiosity, and determination, and stronger social relationships when we play with real life friends and family, especially if it is cooperative. Games can give us problem solving resilience so we can learn faster from our mistakes and become resilient in the face of failure.

Additional research indicates that positive use of video games offers real-world psychosocial benefits (Granic, Lobel, & Engels, 2014). While the many benefits of playing video and computer games are far too numerous to list for the purposes of this research, there is merit in highlighting a few in order to appreciate the numerous positive influences games provide.
Fitness

Video Games encourage physical fitness. “Game designers are wizards of engagement. They have mastered the art of pulling people of all ages into virtual environments, having them work toward meaningful goals, persevere in the face of multiple failures, and celebrate the rare moments of triumph after successfully completing challenging tasks” (Granic, Lobel, & Engels, 2014, p. 70). Individuals, groups, and families across the country can now be seen playing fitness games on Nintendo Wii™, and Xbox Live™, which offer an enjoyable variety of options in which to physically compete and exercise, while tracking each players physical progress. In comparison, trainers from the reality television show, The Biggest Loser™, are marketing their own virtual fitness games in order to assist in improving physical fitness and combating obesity.

Socialization

Video games encourage social relationships. While the days of children playing outdoor games with neighborhood friends are fading, video and computer games have grown to become the new social environments. In fact, research indicates that socializing over the internet delivers emotional support for the person who suffers from real world social anxiety. This is confirmed in a study by Yin (2011) which reveals, “Social anxiety among college students is lower during online interaction than during face-to-face interaction, especially in subjects with high social anxiety, depression” (p.11). MMORPGs encourage social relationships as players rely on one another for support in pursuing goals and coping with failure (Granic, Lobel, & Engels, 2014, p. 7). This point of view has been advanced by Ewoldsen (2012) whose research noted that “individuals playing, even violent games, as part of a team will engage in cooperative pro-social behaviors” (p. 278). Could it be that online friendships feel safe to the gamer who is experiencing real world social anxiety and/or depression?
Recovery

A variety of games have shown successful outcomes when used as rehabilitative therapy. For example, research findings noted that two-thirds of children suffering from acquired brain injury showed significant improvement in the amount of physical activity, speed of information processing, attention, response inhibition and visual-motor coordination during a twelve week study of playing video games (de Kloet et al., 2012). Pertinent to rehabilitation, research investigating Parkinson’s disease revealed use of the Nintendo Wii™ as an effective treatment strategy for improving balance, balance confidence, and fostering programmatic adherence among symptomatic patients (Holmes, Gu, Johnson, & Jenkins, 2013).

Video and computer games have a positive impact on many areas of the medical field. Research by Kato, et.al (2008) indicates that a video game entitled ReMission™ is helping pediatric cancer patients understand their diagnosis and adhere to treatment. In the game ReMission™, a robot battles cancer cells within the body while teaching children the intent, value, and importance of maintaining their medication regimen (Kato, et al., 2008). Developing games for rehabilitation purposes will only continue. For example, just this year PR Newswire (2014, January 9) recently announced testing of a mobile video game platform, Project EVO™, which was created to detect cognitive differences in healthy elderly people at risk of developing Alzheimer's disease.

Employment

A recent article by CBN news indicates that companies worldwide are now embracing drone technology. A drone is an unmanned aerial aircraft with a remote human pilot. Drones have previously been deployed for perilous military operations and security work, such as border and pipeline surveillance. Drones, outfitted with cameras are operated remotely, by a computer
or joy stick, and are able to enter even small places while capturing images. Captured images are useful in a variety of ways, including searching for and recovering injured disaster victims.

How do drones relate to computer gaming?

Research has concluded that long-time online gaming improved the sensory motor coordinate ability, due to the need to switch quickly from one task to another (Dong, Huang, & Du, 2012). In addition, Bavelier (2012), states that “gamers have a sharpened ability to see and resolve different levels of gray resulting from having to focus during excessive screen time”.

Because drones carry sensors and cameras, reading drone imagery demands someone who operates that sensor and can translate the data. Northland Community and Technical College in Northern Minnesota instructor, and former imagery analyst for the U.S. Army, Sterling Williams (2013), had this to say about gamers;

A lot of students that excel the most, play a lot of video games. It is easier for them to learn to see the ground. It is easier for them to learn and see things that are out of place in an image because that is what they have been trained to do playing video games.

Drones carrying sensors and cameras are now able to deliver packages, assist in precision agriculture, steer emergency management, and assist in new jobs that have yet to be created. (Gunderson, 2013). Gamers already possess the skills required to be efficient, with training, and to succeed in the newly developing field of drone imagery.

These few studies presented represent only a small portion of the vast array of positive influences the gaming industry has on individuals, and society. In fact, it is likely that video games will soon be a part of mental health. Limited literature on use of video games in mental health care indicates that games may even become useful in assisting young patients in becoming more cooperative and enthusiastic about psychotherapy (Ceranoglu, 2010).
Identifying Gamers

In 2013, the Entertainment Software Association (ESA) publicized that fifty-eight percent of Americans play video games (2013). Given this statistic, it is probable that a counselor will take on a gamer as a client. This may be done unknowingly, as the gamer may fail to mention their gaming activity when presenting their reasons for seeking treatment. It is imperative that mental health professionals learn to identify the psychosocial symptoms of some clients that are linked to spending excessive time gaming in virtual worlds. Understanding the gaming population and its nuances is a suitable place for the counselor to begin the learning process.

Gamers who play excessively can invest twenty hours per week or more gaming. Hence, the time committed to games is on par with that of a part-time job (Dupuis & Ramsey, 2011, p. 2480). Excessive gamers may display extreme behaviors of spending days and nights online without eating, sleeping, or even taking a shower in favor of staying joined to their current game (Young, 2009). Research reveals that the effects of excessive game play use often includes loss of sleep, strained relationships, and reduced levels of productivity in vocational and academic settings (Griffiths, 2000; Kandell, 1998; Morahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2000; Parsons, 2005; Young & Case, 2004). These effects are associated with not only the amount of time invested in playing games, but the prioritization the player gives to the game over and above their real life responsibilities.

Video games have become a ubiquitous part of American society, with 97% of children and teenagers playing for a minimum of one hour per day (Granic, Lobel, & Engels, 2014, p. 1). Accordingly, computer gaming designer, Jane McGonigal (2013) states, “The average 21 year old has spent 10,000 hours online, the equivalent to the amount of time spent in school from fifth
grade through high school graduation, without ever being absent (10,080 hours)”. To reemphasize McGonigal’s figures, the average young adult has spent as much time online as they have in school. In this respect, Dini (2012) adds, “It is rare to find an adolescent who has not played games” (p. 504).

Despite the alarming amount of hours youth spend online, video games are not solely played by children and teenagers. Specifically, the age of the average game player is actually thirty years old (ESA, 2013). Additional statistics reveal youth under the age of eighteen, make up only thirty-two percent of the gaming population (ESA, 2013). Reasonable interpretation concludes that the remaining sixty-eight percent of gamers are adults. In other words, the computer and video game industry is populated by more adults than it is by adolescents.

Adults have been playing video games for an average of fifteen years; with male’s averaging seventeen years of game play, and females average thirteen years (ERA, 2013). While these figures indicate an initial four years of male player dominance, the gaming culture is no longer as unequivocally gender specific. While the gender differences are not split exactly 50/50, there is only a ten percent gender differential (ERA, 2013). The actual gender breakdown is fifty-five percent male to forty-five percent female (ERA, 2013). Fascinatingly enough, Galarneau (2014) adds that “forty-five percent of female gamers are over the age of eighteen” (p3). Furthermore, as already stated, players over the age of fifty are most likely to be women (Delwiche, & Henderson, 2013).

It can be concluded as a result of these findings, that counselors cannot determine which clients are playing games based on a preconceived notion, or former bias surrounding a gamer’s gender or age. With the rapid growth of gaming and the amount of players playing games, it is challenging for a uniformed counselor to determine which clients are entering a virtual world on
a daily basis. Moreover, counselors ought to be wary to label any game as harmless, because game developers are continually finding new ways to profit from all types of games. For example, once a person is hooked into playing a game, advancement rewards are can be achieved faster by entering a credit card and purchasing rewards which ensure advancement and success. A client could be spending a great deal of money on their obsession to advance in even the simplest single player game. Even if a client is spending less than 20 hours a week playing a game, they still may be spending excessive amounts of money advancing in it, which may have negative impact on the client’s relationships, or quality of life.

Game Modes

Video and computer games have been created in a myriad of styles and genres, and there are many types of games and many games within each genre (Dini, 2012). Countless games exist; adventure, fitness, shooting, racing, music, sports, and role play, to name a few. Attempting to understand the details of every single game would be unproductive, as there are just too many. However, learning enough about the gaming genre in order to be acquainted with the virtual worlds one’s client is repeatedly entering into is not only possible, but can be very beneficial (Dini, 2011). While not all games are the same, games do share different commonalities which allow for classification. Accordingly, van Rooij (2011) categorized games into one of three basic and easy to understand modes: “Single Player, Casual Browser, and Multiplayer Online” Gaming (p10).

A single player game consists of one player on a local game system, playing alone (van Rooij, 2011). Many puzzles and word games fall into the single player mode. Solitaire™ is example of such a game, just as it was originally played alone with a handheld deck of cards long before computers ever existed. Many rehabilitative and therapeutic games are single player
which are oriented toward strengthening the individual player’s abilities. The game Lumosity™, for example, trains an individual’s memory and attention, while allowing the player to measure their progress and development.

Casual Browser games are single player games on a remote server (van Rooij, 2011, p. 10). Remote servers, such as Facebook™, offer an easy way for players to play against friends living near and far. For example, Word With Friends™ is similar to an old fashioned face to face Scrabble™ board game. The difference is that players who live across the globe from each other can now play the same game as if they are sitting in the same room. Comparably, even though Candy Crush Saga™ is played alone, the games remote server maps the scores of other players for everyone to see, creating competition. Casual browser games encourage players to keep playing the game so that they may rise to a higher ranking by bumping their friends down to a lower level, allowing the player to celebrate and pronounce their own superior achievement over their friends.

Massively Multiplayer Online Gaming (MMO’s) requires playing online with other gamers. Network relationships with other gamers are critical (Van Rooij, 2011). Hundreds of thousands of users are engaging in MMORPG’s throughout the world simultaneously (Kuss, 2011, p.79). MMORPGs offer a mixture of social interaction and never-ending game play (Mantzoni, et al., 2011). In 2007, CBS news did a segment on the game World of Warcraft™, which falls into this category, identifying MMORPGs to be highly addictive. Turkle, (2011) adds, that when MMOPRG’s came into existence, people moved from their windows, put away the paperwork and hassles from their real world lives, while favoring an on online persona” (Turkle, 2011, p.18).
MMORPGs

MMORPGs may be easier to comprehend by first sequentially establishing their initial development. MMORPGs, when originally created, were referred to as multi-user dungeons (MUDs). When they were initially developed in the 1979, by Roy Trubshaw and Richard Bartle, “a pattern was created for future MUDs and MMORPGs to expound on” (Parsons, 2005, p. 10). “The first MUDs were played without graphics, and the player received text-based directional cues such as walk north” (Sanchez, 2009b, p. 9). Trubshaw and Bartle’s game was “a fantasy based game, and allowed users to create an online persona, explore a virtual dungeon, kill creatures, acquire new abilities, and gather loot” (Parsons, 2005, p.10).

The next significant advance in MMORPGs came in 1989, when Carnegie Mellon University graduate student, Jim Aspnes, created TinyMUDs (multi-user dimensions) (Sanchez, 2009b; Taylor, 2006). “Players used TinyMUDs as a place to socialize and create objects instead of combat or adventure” (Taylor, 2006, p.23). Through their creations, “players were no longer consumers or actors in the environments; they became developers of their virtual world” (Sanchez, 2009b, p.10). TinyMUDs were a “cyberspace colony” players could visit or become a member of (Benedikt, 1994, p.12). For example, Benedikt described TinyMUDS as follows:

They (TinyMUDs) are not games. Instead, they are worlds. You can decide what you look like, you don't even have to be human, and you can also become an architect and build your own part of the world, like magic, for others to walk through or live in. You can meet people from all over the globe, form friendships, create landscapes or puzzles, and even start a game of pretend (called "roleplaying") where each participant assumes the personality of a character he creates. TinyMUDs exist completely as language. What you "see" you read. What you "do" you write (p.12).
Essentially, TinyMUDs used the influence of the written word in order to create a “mental head space” now known as a virtual world (Benedikt, 1994, p.12). Sanchez (2009a) confirms “TinyMUD represents one of the first breaks from virtual worlds as games, to virtual worlds as social spaces” (p. 10). Creativity and collaboration were now a part of virtual worlds, in addition to the traditional features of combat and competition (Sanchez, 2009b).

As computer and Internet capabilities increased, “software developers gained the ability to extend the features of MUDs, while eventually developing profitable online gaming systems. In 1996, 3DO Games shipped the first commercially viable MMORPG, dubbed Meridian 59, to stores across the United States” (Parsons, 2005, p.10). The outcome was a 3D virtual world that linked to the Meridian 59 servers allowing players the option to simultaneously play with thousands of other people, rather than alone, when they paid an additional monthly fee (Castronova, 2004; Parsons, 2005). The virtual world of Meridian 59 was a medieval-like setting, wherein “players generated their own character from thousands of different attributes, passed through different worlds, and interacted with other characters while at the same time they killed monsters, found treasure, deciphered puzzles, and bartered rewards” (Belleville, 1996; Ivory, 2012).

Moving on to 1996, the game Ultima Online™ was introduced and it “ultimately popularized” MMORPG’s (Parsons, 2005, p.11). Sanchez (2009a) describes how Ultima Online™ became a major technical inspiration for virtual worlds;

Developers and retailers literally and figuratively sold a game in a box. In the old paradigm, once a game was sold, the transaction was complete, and it didn't matter how often or if the game was being played. Ultima Online™ altered the game industry and set a precedent for the future of virtual worlds because it was not only sold as a packaged
game: it required players to continue paying a $9.99 monthly subscription fee to play the game (p.11).

In accordance with game tradition, Ultima Online™ had similarities to earlier games; players designed their own character, owned property, explored, gained abilities and formed teams, or “guilds” (Parsons, 2005, p.11).

Finally, “EverQuest™, a true MMORPG, was first launched in March of 1999, becoming an instant success” (Olsen, 2013). While EverQuest™ also charged a subscription; it was the first game to introduce the concept of team work and collaboration, which impacted the future of social virtual worlds (Sanchez, 2009a, p.11). Becoming a part of a small team, and playing regularly with one’s team, was necessary because teams advanced to higher levels in the game together, as a unit, not as individual players. As a result, when a team member dropped out, a replacement team member was recruited, often from real life friends in order to keep their crusades advancing (Sanchez, 2009b). Due to social networks, EverQuest™ extended beyond game play and was soon a part of online discussion forums and face-to-face conventions (Gentile, 2009; Sanchez, 2009b). In less than a year EverQuest™ became an uppermost game in subscription sales and now, several years later, “there have been 20 expansions to the original game, numerous offshoot games, and even graphic novels” which exist in the EverQuest™ universe (Olsen, 2014).

Modern day MMORPG’s have been identified as games in which a large population of players around the world occupy a single virtual realm simultaneously, become alternative personas, interact with one another in numerous ways, find an assortment of challenges, and experience rewards for continued play (Kuss, Louws, & Wiers, 2012, p. 480). Currently, there is a wide range of genres represented in MMORPGs, including fantasy, science fiction, historical,
and authentic war settings (Parsons, 2005, p.12). While it would be difficult to research the specifics of every MMORPG, they share several commonalities worth noting.

**Virtual Worlds**

A virtual world is essentially a persistent, ongoing simulated 3D environment which offers real time action as it exists independently from players. Virtual worlds are now vibrant and stunning self-contained societies. The design of a virtual world is predominantly based on the real world, with concepts of space and time similar to those in real physical environments. Young (2009) offers further description, “Online games evolved into more than games but rather they are living, self-contained, three-dimensional societies. Each game has its own scenery from forests, prairies, beaches, mountains, and towns. Players can immerse themselves and collectively evolve in these virtual worlds” (p. 357).

Virtual world scenery may be as equally enchanting as a real world exotic vacation, thus providing an exciting environment in which to escape. Imagine entering a new exotic environment filled with amazing scenery, surreal visual effects. As the reverberating sound track begins to play, the player becomes excited and their adrenalin starts to surge as they explore a new world, create a story and accomplish a task (Rumney, 2009). “Awash with feelings of pleasure and success, the player is easily seduced into wanting more. A game can be exhilarating and uplifting. It creates a high” (Rumney, 2009, p. 2).

There is no single, virtual world, but a multitude of worlds. MMORPG history reveals that players can not only play in the astounding, vibrant virtual worlds, they can become a part of them (Sanchez, 2009a, p.10). “A person can live among several worlds at once by simply changing a URL or browser, as if they are teleporting in real life from one city to another, with each virtual world focusing on a different type of experience for the individual” (Dini, 2012, p.
The longer a person spends in the virtual world, the more they acclimate to it (Turkle, 2011, Young, 2009). In truth, the player exists sometimes in the real world and sometimes the virtual one, and” the longer he invests time in this quantum state, the more acclimated he will become to this type of existence” (Dini, 2012, p. 49).

Avatars

In an old fashioned board game, each player chooses a game piece to represent them on the playing board. Similarly, an avatar is an online persona (character, or “toon”) which is designed and created by one player. Many times the Avatar created is a virtual version of its creator (Young, 2009). Chosen traits, including skill or class, are significant because they have an impact on achievement, especially when playing in a team. Avatars change and grow as more time is spent playing the game; their personality, gifts and acquired skills are continually under development (Turkle, 2011, p.158). Each avatar is an important element in the virtual world and they drive the game's dynamic story (Zahn, & Chan, 2012).

Avatars are social characters. Rumney (2009) describes, “The Avatar can become a part of a group (team, or “clan”), of other avatars. Playing as a group takes on the flavor of a real world team sport, except that team members are imaginary characters who appear on the screen to act with the equally imaginary character of another player” (p. 2). Real world players communicate with one another online “as they strategize the moves of their avatars against the enemy, thus success depends on the success of the team” (Rumney, 2009, p. 2). Consequently, the strength and design of the avatar is very important to both the gamer and his/her team.

An avatar is a representation of the player whom desires to be within the game (Parsons, 2005). Young, (2009) adds, “The player must decide a character's race, its species, history, heritage, and philosophy. The genres and themes vary, as a player could be a greedy business
type in one game, a strong warrior in another game, or an elf with magical powers in another” (p. 357). Creating an avatar is a fun way for the real world person to try on a new gender, identity, or become a fictional character. “Through their avatar, many players forget their actual reality and live out an alternate one” (Floros, & Siomos, 2012, p. 421). In creating a life like avatar to represent oneself in a game, “real persons are flattened into an online persona” (Turkle, 2011, p. 18).

Turkle (2011) suggests that in the course of a life, “we never finish working on our identity and we continually rework it with the materials at hand. From the start, online social worlds provided new materials” (p.158). A player, who is struggling with their own perceived inadequacies in the real world, can create an Avatar of strength in their virtual world. A failing, lonely, ashamed person can transform their own virtual identity into an avatar that is strong, proud, and powerful. Not surprisingly, each Avatar is given a name. Young (2009) explains, “Some players take great care and pride in determining just the right name. In fact, in some strange way, a character’s name seeps into the player over time. Players spend hours living as this “other person” and begin to identify with a character that feels more real and less fictional the longer they play” (p.357). In addition “When meeting another avatar in the game world, a player already has a conception of what the other person may be like based how they decide to play or display them self. It is a type of transference based in their own development both outside and inside the virtual worlds” (Dini, 2012, p. 499).

In order to have a prevailing character, the player must devote a great deal of their real world time to gain virtual world power. For example, “all avatars start at Level 1, and must gain experience points, by killing monsters or completing quests, to advance to higher levels” (Dupuis, & Ramsey, 2011, p. 2479). In some MMPORGS, avatars progress by gaining either
additional skill, or a higher social class the longer the game is played (Parsons, 2005). Some of these games force the player to choose between strength (power) and superiority (social class) when their avatar is created.

Since the game never ends, and the end goal of the game is to advance, the final choices a player makes in creating an avatar is a means by which the counselor can gain insight into the client’s values, namely, what traits the individual believes are required to be a success. Additionally, a client’s avatar may offer the counselor insight into the client’s ideal self, possibly opening a door for deeper discussion about real world issues such as shame, values, or conflict. In doing so, the counselor should bear in mind that the avatar itself has not been confirmed to be the cause of problematic gaming. Research done by Smahel, et al. (2008) found that the role-playing character of the game is not the main contributing factor associated with disproportionate use.

Social Systems

Socialization has historically been established as a key component of MMORPGs. It is beneficial for the counselor to understand how social systems work in MMORPGs in order to grasp how a client could find it hard to differentiate between fantasy and reality. Gamers initially make real world friends with other gamers as they help one another learn to play the game (Kolo, & Baur, 2004). As noted previously, each player’s virtual avatar interacts with another player’s virtual avatar, inside of a virtual world. Pause and consider that at the same time the virtual avatars are interacting with each other, the players themselves are interacting with other real world players. Teams attack and advance together, which requires a real world commitment to the virtual world (Young, 2009). Times of play need to be scheduled;
necessitating people leave their real world commitments in order to fulfill a commitment in their virtual world (Turkle, 2011).

Real time communication often occurs during game play, and “online and offline relationships develop between real world players” (Cole, & Hooley, 2013, p. 425). Research confirms that a high percentage of gamers make life-long friends and partners (Young, 2009, p. 359). In this respect, it was concluded that virtual worlds allow “players to express themselves in ways they may not feel comfortable doing in real life because of their appearance, gender, sexuality, and/or age” (Young, 2009, p. 359). “MMORPGs often have additional interactive features which offer various other places to virtually hang out, while chat channels allow gamers to send messages to each other or to groups of other players” (Parsons, 2005, p.15).

Furthermore, a few players exchange email, phone numbers, Skype™, or meet face to face.

Some, not all, MMORPGs allow for emotional and/or sexual intimacy, and even commitment. Virtual world wedding ceremonies are often a big deal, well planned and anticipated, just as they are in the real world. Other avatars are invited to attend or participate in the marriage of two avatars. Bewilderingly, individual, couple, and group sex are all possibilities in some MMORPGs as well. Notwithstanding, it is possible for real world spouses to be seated together on the same sofa, while one of them is emotionally absent, possibly even engaging in sex online with a virtual partner, under the guise of doing office work on a laptop (Turkle, 2011; Dini, 2012). The boundary between online and offline lives, it turns out, is more chaotic than we might have previously thought (Taylor, 2009).

Games with endless virtual social worlds, such as those found in the game Second Life™, fall in the MMORPGs category despite being more socially structured. Players become residents of social worlds and “tend to build, socialize, collaborate, and design as opposed to
participating in quests or engaging in combat” (Sanchez, 2009a, p. 11). Social world
MMORPGs are able to create their ideal identity and live their dream life in a virtual world in an
entrepreneurial essence (Sanchez, 2009a, p11). The virtual worlds of these games are still never
ending but “this virtual place has no winning; only living” (Turkle, 2011, p.158). According to
Turkle, players are able to “get an education, launch a business, buy land, build and furnish a
home, and, of course, have a social life that may include love, sex and marriage”. Turkle adds
that players “can even earn money - Second Life™ currency is convertible into dollars” (p. 158).

Although Second Life™ is now less popular than it was initially, it is still being played.
Second Life™ provides an excellent example of how real world relationships, including sex, are
emulated inside of a game. In an online article by Gibson (2011), an interviewee called only
‘John’ (age 21) answers the question: “What’s better about Second Life™ sex? What’s better
about real life sex?” In his answer, John euphorically describes what he experiences when his
virtual self participates in virtual sex with a virtual partner:

You're a little less insecure. So in many relationships, it's just one person thinking “Does
this person find me attractive? Am I doing well?” In Second Life™, you're just
interacting together, being honest and true in a way you don't really get in real life.
Plus sex is all a fantasy, really. You can really create the fantasy you want to believe
in Second Life™. Instead of dealing with the reality like, “This person might fart soon,
this person hasn't shaved, this person smells bad but I'm still going try to have an
orgasm. You can have the perfect fantasy in Second Life™, whereas in real life you're
just trying to make things okay. In Second Life™ it's all your dream, all the time.
John offers a clear example of why gamers, who spend a great deal of time playing role playing games, will recurrently admit that “their online identities make them feel more like themselves within a game, as opposed to their real physical world” (Turkle, 2011, p. 159).

Hopefully counselors are beginning to understand how virtually disruptive computer and video games can be for some individuals. Young (2009), describes potential disruption clearly: As gaming addicts form an important support group with each other and form intimate bonds, the damage is often done to marriages and real life relationships. Couples break up because the gaming addict neglects the relationship. Young people break up in high school or college. Married couples end in separation and divorce. Family stability is disrupted. The gaming addict stops interacting, stops participating, and stops feeling that these real-life relationships are as important. These once cherished family relationships and friendships only take time away from gaming friends. They only take time for being with the people that the gamer feels good about, creating the sense that real-life relationships are less fulfilling.

Fisoun, et al., 2012, states “over the last 15 years there has been a gradual increase of reported cases where the subject suffers significant adverse effects on social and professional life directly or indirectly attributed to their level of internet use” (p.39). How then, is the individual impacted by excessive play? When does excessive play become neurosis? Since brain studies reveal a great deal about many mental health disorders, the answer to these questions begins with how excessive gaming influences the brain.

The Addicted Brain

Just as rats run a maze in a research lab, seeking reward, the gamer responds to the brilliant reward systems offered within virtual worlds (Scott, 2011). Games offer new levels that
motivate the player to “keep playing the game, in order to advance, and keep up with other players who have more skills and abilities” (Scott, 2011). At each level the player earns more power and ability, and each new level takes a little longer to get through than the previous level (Scott, 2011). Reward schedules are created by game developers to keep the player engaged and “game designers use portability and data to make games compelling by offering rewards approximately 25% of the time” (Chatfield, 2010). Billions of data points are measured for each individual player, and if a player quits before they are rewarded, the rewards begin to come more frequently, increasing up to 75% of the time” (Chatfield, 2010). Excitement and anticipation exist because the gamer never knows exactly when, or what, reward they will win. Accurately, “being in the virtual world is an adventure; a rat in a box, seeking reward” (Scott, 2011).

When understanding the neurobiological correlates of addiction, it is usual to start with the brains circuitry (Karim, & Chaudhri, 2012). MMORPGs, and similar games, are addictive due to the fact that gaming affects pleasure centers in the brain, “arousing players desire to continue by releasing the mood regulating chemicals dopamine, and glutamate, in the brain” (Kuss, 2013, p. 130). Currently, dopamine is coined a “pleasure molecule” and an “anti-stress molecule” (Blum, et al., 2012, p. 135). Similar to chemical addiction research (Everitt, & Robbins, 2005), a gamer can develop a compulsion to continually play in order to duplicate euphoric feelings of excitement (Kuss, 2012).

Interestingly, observation by the Cocaine Administration indicates that cocaine provides this same type of dopamine high in the nucleus accumbens (Ivanov, et al., 2006; Doweiko, 2012), which is the same area of the brain where the gamer will experience their high (Kuss, 2012). When dopamine levels drop in the cocaine user, withdrawal symptoms occur (Ivanov, et al. 2006). Subsequently, a similar withdrawal reaction happens when the excessive gamer is
away from the game (Kuss, 2012). In view of that, the results of “MRI studies found gaming to share similarities with other addictions, including chemical dependence, at the molecular, neurocircuitry, and behavioral levels” (Kuss, 2012, p. 132). Similarities include changes in brain structure, impulse control, behavioral inhibition, and general cognitive function (Kuss, 2012).

Like other addictions, as the gamer begins to play excessively, parts of the brain (the anterior cingulate, orbitofrontal cortex, and the nucleus accumbens) develop a tolerance and physically change in such a way that gaming rewards eventually become less pleasurable (Kuss, 2012). “Over time, the way the nerve cells signal and respond to each other is reduced, resulting in some gamers suffering from long term depression, changes in the responsiveness of the sensory system, and behavioral sensitization” (Kuss, 2012, p.30). Notwithstanding, research supports a link between gaming and depression (Bartholomew, & Mason, year; Fisoun, et al., year; Wei et al., 2012; Young, 2009; Kuss, 2012; Blum, et al., 2012). It can be concluded from brain studies that excessive gaming alters the brain biologically, psychologically and physiologically (Dong, Huang, & Du, 2012; Bartholomew, & Mason, 2011; Fisoun, et al., 2012; Wei et al., 2012; Young, 2009; Kuss, 2012; Everitt, & Robbins, 2005; Karim, & Chaudhri, 2012).

Surface Symptoms

The notion of non-chemical behavioral addictions is gaining increasing support among mental health professionals (Parsons, 2005; Griffiths, 2005; Young, 2009). Examples of non-chemical addiction acceptance within the counseling profession, is evidenced by the common use of terms such as: “eating addiction,” “sexual addiction,” and “gambling addiction” (Parsons, 2005). Research over the past decade supports the newly emerging mental health diagnoses of an internet, and/or gaming addiction (Griffiths, 2000; Young, 2010; Kuss, Griffiths, & Binder,
2013). Neurotic gaming has been defined as “persistent and excessive involvement with computer or video games that cannot be controlled despite associated social and/or emotional problems” (Lemmens et al., 2011, p. 144). Persistent and excessive computer gaming is the external behavior, while neurosis is internal. The neurosis itself exists when playing a game assists the individual in hiding their inferiority in the virtual world, or pretending to be superior with no fear of detection. Yet, not everyone who plays computer games suffers neurosis. Neurosis exists when an individual gamer has a distorted self-perception that is driving them to stay hidden in the game, at the expense of their real world life.

Excessive gaming can result in a tremendous amount of negative consequences and functional impairment for the gamer (Wei, et al. 2012). “There is a potentially dark, compulsive side of games, especially MMORPGs, for some participants” (Bartholomew, & Mason, 2011). The consequences of gaming are still relatively new and counselors may overlook addictive symptoms in favor of other, more common, clinical diagnosis (Young, 2009). “Symptoms may also be masked by realistic and practical use of the Internet for home or work. This can not only be difficult for the spouse or parent to understand, but it can be especially difficult for the treating practitioner to assess, who may be unfamiliar with online gaming” (Young, 2009, p. 360). By grasping the following symptoms and warning signs, the counselor will be able to swiftly determine when a client’s inability to function in their real world life could be associated with excessive gaming. Surface symptoms are symptoms that are seen or heard, and often observed in external behavior. They are what can be seen on the surface of the individual. Grasping the following list of research based symptoms, coined here as “Surface Symptoms” will create a foundation that will guide the counselor in a direction to effectively interpret the etiology and dynamics behind a client’s excessive gaming.
Behavior Symptoms

- Preoccupation (Young, 2009; Bartholomew, & Mason, year; Petry, et al., 2014; Wei, et al. 2012). Thinking about the game even when not playing. Gaming becomes the gamer’s real world priority. The player is spending substantial amounts of time thinking and fantasizing about the game instead of concentrating on other real world concerns, resulting unfulfilled responsibilities (Young, 2009).

- Withdrawal (Petry, et al., 2014; Bartholomew, & Mason, 2011; Young, 2009). Unable to stop playing. “Withdrawal refers to symptoms that emerge when one is unable to engage in a behavior or is attempting to reduce or stop it (Petry, et al., 2014). The gamer becomes bitter and angry toward events, or individuals, that they perceive to be in the way of their continued play (Young, 2009). In addition, the gamer may express extreme or incongruous frustration if the internet goes out, or a server goes down (Turkle, 2011, Young, 2009).

- Tolerance (Petry, et al., 2014; Wei, et al., 2012; Young, 2009). Playing longer and longer over time. In most cases, the gamer plays longer than intended, or increases the amount of time spent playing, in order to feel the desired rush of excitement. Excessive time is invested in gaming, despite experiencing negative real world consequences (Petry, et al., 2014; Wei, et al., 2012). Some excessive players will play for several hours straight in a single gaming session every day, while struggling to even stop for a break. The words “just a few more minutes, can turn into hours as the gaming addict searches for the next conquest or challenge” (Young, 2009, p. 358). However, it should be noted that these reactions can transpire even for the first time player, and these behaviors in a new player
do not represent tolerance which, by definition, takes time and experience to develop (Petry, et al., 2014).

- **Salience** (Young, 2009; Bartholomew, & Mason, 2011; Nie, Hillygus, & Erbring, 2002; Fisoun, et al., 2012; Griffiths, 2010; Williams, 2006; Wei, et al, 2012; Hadley, et al., 2006; Grant, et al., 2013; Schwartz, 2013, Yee, 2006b). Reducing real world activities in favor of playing. The game dominates the gamer, creating a decline in other activities. Gamers lose interest in hobbies and activities they once enjoyed as they become more fascinated with living inside the game (Yee, 2006b). Gaming directs the player’s existence, and the player may remain homebound by choice (Petry, et al., 2014).

- **Complications at work and/or school** (Bartholomew, & Mason, 2011 Young, 2009, Chappell, et al., 2006; Kuss, & Griffiths, 2012; Hadley, et al., 2006; Grant, 2013; Schwartz, 2013). Finding it difficult to meet prior performance standards. Struggles at work may exist in the form of absenteeism (Bartholomew, & Mason, 2011), work impairment, or even a job loss. Struggles at school manifest as reduced school performance, lower grades, retaking classes, dropping out, or possibly giving up a scholarship in favor of gaming (Young, 2009).

- **Chemical use** (Mentzoni, et al., 2011). Using alone, in isolation, or to excess. While not all gamers misuse alcohol or drugs, when chemical substances are involved, it is frequently consumed in real world isolation.

- **Financial difficulties** (Hadley et al., 2006; Grant, 2013). Ignoring bills, or overspending on gaming. Ignoring bills, missing work, and excessive spending on computers, consoles, games, or equipment, can result in negative financial consequences.
Relationship Symptoms

- Isolation (Young, 2009; Yee, 2006a; Petry, et al., 2014; Shin, et al, 2011). Neglecting friendships and family in order to play. Some gamers experience personality changes the more hooked on gaming they become, neglecting relationships with friends and family result in the loss of real world relationships and social experiences (Young, 2009). A once outgoing and social individual becomes withdrawn from their friends and family only to spend more time alone in front of the computer (Young, 2009, p. 361). “The relationship between Internet addiction and social withdrawal seems to constitute a vicious cycle. Specifically, those experiencing difficulties in social adjustment and interpersonal relationships frequently attempt to gratify their affiliate needs via the Internet” (Shin, et al, 2011, p. 670). A normally contented college student becomes withdrawn and suddenly prefers making friends in the game, while the people that were once important in real life have become less important (Young, 2009).

- Secrecy, lying about use (Young, 2009; Bartholomew, & Mason, 2011). The gamer lies to friends and family in order to hide the extent of their play, creating a loss of trust.

- Verbal aggression (Bartholomew, & Mason, 2011; Young, 2009, Anderson & Bushman, 2001). Verbally lashing out when forced to stop playing. Family members who try to put time limits on the game may find the gamer becomes angry, irrational, and even violent. Gamers become defensive towards opposing family members due to an obsession to continue playing the game (Young, 2009; Wenzel, et al. 2009). Anger can become so intense that the gamer becomes irritable, anxious, or depressed when forced to stop playing (Leung, 2004).
• Damaged relationships (Turkle, 2011; Young, 2009). Choosing virtual world friends over real world friends. There are intimate relationships happening in MMORPGs, less overtly than dating sites. Friendships evolve into romantic relationships in the virtual world and eventually some players choose to meet in real life (Scott, 2007; Turkle, 2011; Young, 2009).

Psychological Symptoms

• Depression (Bartholomew, & Mason, 2011; Fisoun, et al., 2012; Wei et al., 2012; Young 2009). Feeling sad or blue most of the time for several weeks or more. Research indicates that “depressive symptoms increased in severity with excessive weekly gaming hours” (Wei, et al. 2012). In a research study by Li, et al. (2011) findings determined that depression is related to escapism, “Depression mediated the relationship between actual–ideal discrepancies and escapism, and escapism in turn mediated the relationship between depression and pathological gaming” (p. 538). It is well known that depression can result in suicide.

• Avoiding others (Wei, et al. 2012). Feeling self-conscious around others. “Players who suffer from social phobic symptoms are more likely to indulge in the virtual reality provided by online games as an attempt to avoid real life face to face social distress” (Wei, et al. 2012, p. 5). In some cases, gamers are introverts who have difficulties making real world social connections and turn to the game for acceptance (Young, 2009). These introverted players may also be experiencing a high degree of loneliness (Caplan, 2007; Fisoun, et al., 2012; Wei et al., 2012). In comparison, it should be noted that a research study by Yen, et al. (2012), concluded that “social anxiety is lower during online
interaction than during face-to-face interaction, especially in subjects with high social anxiety, and/or depression” (p.11).

- Low self-esteem (Griffiths, 2010; Grusser, et al., 2007; Ko, et al., 2005; Kim, et.al, 2008). Belief of being inadequate. The gamer escapes to the game in an effort to find the confidence they are lacking in real world.

- Impulsivity (Littel, et al., 2012). Behaving without regard to consequence. The gamer behaves without adequate thought. High levels of impulsivity are reported to incorporate deficiencies in error processing and response inhibition on the behavioral and electrophysiological level (Littel, et al., 2012).

- Obsessiveness (Young, 2009; Breeze, 2013). Being consumed with the game. Gamers keep on playing in order to give in to the tension that they might get a victory, reward or treat, without knowing when the anticipated reward will happen (Breeze, 2013).

- Neuroticism (Kuss, & Griffiths, 2011). Gamers can exhibit anxiety, worry, envy and jealousy in both the virtual and real worlds.

- Self-absorption (Kim, et al., 2008; Joeng, & Kim, 2010). Preoccupied with self over others. Successful players can create an audacious sense of self in the virtual world which can sometimes carry over into the real world as insensitivity (Joeng, & Kim 2010).

Physical Symptoms

- Somatic pain (Wei et al., 2012). While online gamers might not identify their depression, they identify many somatic symptoms such as headache, chest tightness, and muscle pain (Wei et al., 2012).
• Carpal Tunnel (Young, 2009). Numbness and tingling in the wrist and/or hands. This syndrome is the result of excessive pressure on the median nerve in the wrist. Overuse can lead to numbness, tingling, and muscle damage.

• Sleep difficulties (Bartholomew, & Mason, 2011; Dworak, et al., 2007; Kuss, & Griffiths 2012; Wenzel, et al., 2009; Schwartz, 2013). Trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or avoiding sleep. Some gamers sacrifice sleep and experience significantly reduced amounts of slow-wave sleep, declines in verbal memory performance, and report difficulty falling asleep (Dworak et al., 2007; Ng, & Wiemer-Hastings, 2005).

• Nutritional deficits (Bartholomew, & Mason, 2011; Schwartz, 2013; Young, 2009). The result of unhealthy eating habits. The player may be so caught up in the game that they fail to eat adequately, sometimes failing to even eat at all (Young, 2009).

• Weight fluctuations (Kuss, & Griffiths, 2012; Zahn, & Cahn, 2012; van Rooij, 2012). Weight gain or loss. Gamers tend to gain weight due to physical inactivity and poor eating habits. Skipping meals can result in weight loss.

• Deterioration of personal hygiene (Young, 2009; Kuss, & Griffiths, 2012). Gamers have been reported to go days without showering, shaving, brushing their teeth, or even changing clothes.

• Eye problems (Bartholomew, & Mason, 2011; Kim, et al., 2008; Young, 2009). Dry or strained eyes. Eye difficulties are a result of excessive time playing without breaks.

Not all of the above symptoms will exist in every gamer, but by learning the common traits, symptoms, and behaviors of the excessive gamer, a counselor is better able to correlate excessive gaming and disrupted mental health.
While it is important to recognize symptoms, “the counselor should not chase symptoms” (Reardon, 2014a, p. 4). Symptoms are surface behaviors. In actuality; symptoms are merely the arrows that point to the gamers self-created maneuvers to distract and protect them from being discovered as inferior. Surface Symptoms are symptoms those symptoms we have just described. Most of these symptoms are visible on the surface of the individual and are seen or heard, and often observed in external behavior.

Adler and the Purpose of Gaming

Rather than treat problematic gaming by focusing on stopping negative behavior, it is initially far more productive to determine how the client landed in such a disrupted state in the first place. Because many gamers live in the virtual world as a means of escaping real life, focusing on the negative outcomes of excessive gaming may just give a gaming client more reasons to hide deeper in their game. “Our present approach to addictions in this country is essentially negative in its orientation as we encourage the client to stop dysfunctional behaviors, and explore the means to stay stopped, but rarely consider what it is to begin” (Holder, & Williams, 1995, p. 1). To that end, Timothy Hartshorne (2012) states “Understanding the roots of a disorder is extremely helpful in its treatment” (Carlson, & Maniacci, 2012, p. 195). If the counselor focuses only on stopping the gamers use in order to alleviate disruptive symptoms, the whole person will not be treated. The Adlerian concept of holism proposes that “each person is an “indivisible unit” and that each person “needs to be understood in his or her totality” (Mosak, & Maniaci, 1999, p.14). Adler states, “The Individual Psychologist has to observe how a particular individual relates himself to the outside world. This outside world includes the individual’s own body, his bodily functions, and the functions of his mind” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1964, p.67).
Richard E. Watts (2012) defines Adlerian Theory as a relational theory which emphasizes that individuals are socially embedded and cannot be properly understood apart from their social context (Carlson, & Maniacci, 2012, p. 42). Alfred Adler believes that every person strives for superiority from birth, and “the degree of social interest that the person displays sets their direction for striving” (Mosak, & Maniacci, 1999, p. 21). While we all strive for superiority, the individual who embraces their own inferiority will horizontally strive for superiority by contributing to the lives of others. The result of this embrace enhances the individual due to the resulting empathy and compassion they develop towards themselves, and eventually others. Thus, this person who is horizontally striving more often experiences purpose and meaning in the world. Contrarily, the gamer who strives for superiority vertically, focusing solely on themselves in an attempt to hide their inferiority, is more likely to experience a state of neurosis.

Neurosis in relation to gaming is the manifestation of a gamers struggle to overcome feelings of inferiority, and the defective outward signs, symptoms, and consequences resulting from that struggle. At some point in the gamer’s life, an event happened, usually at a young age, which shocked them in such a way that they first became aware of their own inadequacy. “This shock leads up to the individual’s failures – which we know as neurosis, psychosis, etc. Significantly, the failure shows the same style as the individual” (Adler, 1935, p. 67). Adler relates neurotic behavior to a lack of courage resulting from the individual’s perception of being inferior. Because the gamer has now entered the self-absorbed mode of safeguarding, he/she becomes hyper-sensitive when connecting with others in the real world, and works hard at staying one step ahead of, or behind, others so that his/her perceived inadequacies will not be discovered. In essence, the gamer’s fictive goal of hiding their worthlessness by living in a virtual world, vs. the real world, is due to the belief of being inadequate and worthless. Adler
refers to the uniqueness of the individual when stating, “He sees all his problems from a perspective which is his own creation. He sees the environment which trains him with his own self-created perspective, and accordingly changes its effect on him for better or for worse” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1965, p. 67).

The neurotic lives in a state of anxiety in which they fear having their inferiority discovered (Reardon, 2014a). Social anxiety is the case for the excessive neurotic gamer. The desire to have a good life is contradicted by cautious, uncommitted, and retreating behavior to protect the worthlessness (Reardon 2014a, p. 1). Out of this deep fear, and abiding anxiety, the gamer determines that they will avoid having their worthlessness discovered. Thus, the gamer dealing with their own inferiority symptoms, retreats into the game where they can virtually hide and virtually succeed. Within the game the gamer can emulate self-confidence, and achieve perfectionism while hiding and disassociating from their own real world inferiority feelings. A gamer who lacks the courage to be imperfect in the real world contrarily experiences confidence in the virtual world where everyone can achieve success.

Gamers have admitted to struggles with social relationships, along with feelings of worthlessness. These feelings can be especially powerful among gamers who haven’t felt a sense of belonging in their real lives, and they consider their fellow gamers as their only friends (Young, 2009). Research on internet addiction confirms that “Internet addicts demonstrated an increased incidence of dysfunctional social behaviors” (Fisoun, et al., 2012, p. 39). Possibly without intending to, or realizing it, the gamer created a new goal of protecting, and hiding their worthlessness at all costs, and the game became the safe place to do so. The gamer now unconsciously believes they must play the game in order to survive outside of it.
Driekurs (1964) posted four mistaken goals of a discouraged child. Interestingly, symptoms indicate that gamers often cope with their own mistaken beliefs in a manner similar to Dreikurs discouraged child: seeking attention (insistence of being noticed); achieving power (dominating over others); seeking revenge (bitterness expressed through retaliation); and the display of inadequacy (behavior that reflects hopelessness despair). This form of striving the result of a mistaken goal: to protect the belief and feelings of worthlessness, and to remain undetected (Carlson, & Maniacci, 2012; Reardon, 2014a).

In order for the gamers worthlessness to remain undetected, the gamers desire to have a fulfilling life in the real world is denied. “Through the safe guarding tendency, the individual aims at getting rid of the feeling of inferiority” (Ansbacher, & Ansbacher, 1956, pp. 109-110). The gamers safeguarding is the result of a fear of failure. Fear of failure then rouses into a hesitating attitude towards completing what Adler defines as the three life tasks; work, friendship and intimacy. “Three problems are irrevocably set before every individual. These are the attitude towards ones fellow man, occupation, and love. All three are linked with one another by the first. They are not accidental, but inescapable problems” (Carlson, & Maniacci, 2012, p. 297).

The gamer that disappears into the virtual world is an excellent example of neurosis in full retreat. Perhaps the gamer hides in the virtual world in order to retreat from conflicts within the real world. Hartshorne (2012) states;

The neurotic turns his whole interest toward the retreat until it becomes an elaborate “Retreat complex”. Every step forward becomes for him a fall into an abyss, which seems full of all sorts of horrors, because he sees before him no possibility of success. With all his might, with all his feelings, with all his tested devices for retreat, he tries to
keep himself securely in the background. There are two things which permit him to cling to those securities which save him from defeat. The first of these is building up and glorifying of his shock experiences, to which he devotes all of his interest; at the same time, he turns away from one important factor, namely his fear of recognizing how far he is from his egotistical goal (Carlson, & Maniaci, 2012, p. 206-207).

Computer and video game developers have created the perfect place for the neurotic to hide, and stay in denial by living vicariously through their ideal avatar persona in a virtual world. Virtual worlds permit the player “to forget their actual reality and live out in an alternate one” (Floros, & Siomos, 2012, p. 421). The neurotic gamer has prioritized their virtual life above their real life.

In efforts to avoid the real world, the gamer comes up with ingenious excuses for not participating in it. Requests from friend and family are met with a hesitating attitude of “yes, but”. For example the gamer might say, “Yes, but I am playing online with other people who depend on me”, or “yes, but I just need a few more minutes to beat this level.” Nevertheless, when hesitating excuses fail to work, the individual is left no alternative but to become angry and respond with aggression (Reardon, 2014a). Eventually aggression even fails to work. At this juncture, the neurotic individual (in this case, the gamer) will begin to discount and exclude their real world friends, family, and documented realities since aggression is no longer working for them (Reardon, 2014a). The gamer is now in a conundrum; not only must he/she safeguard themselves from the discovery of worthlessness, they must additionally safeguard against real world people and events that pressure them to engage in real world responsibility. The lure of the game is that it provides an environment where perfection is attainable. When playing the game, the gamer escapes and becomes superior, fully denying their worthlessness.
As briefly described earlier, Adler refers to this hiding behavior as striving on the vertical plane of movement, otherwise known as vertical striving. “When individuals…feel weak, they cease to be interested socially but strive for personal superiority. They want to solve the problems of life in such a way as to obtain personal superiority without any admixture of social interest” (Ansbacher, & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 260). To reiterate, as a result of striving for personal superiority, the gamer hides, investing their real world time in a virtual world. Vertical striving can never bring true relief according to Dreikurs (1973) who quantified, “The vertical movement of self-elevation, regardless of the height it leads to, both in status and accomplishments, can never bring lasting satisfaction and inner peace. There is a constant danger of falling and failing; the gnawing feeling of real or possible inferiority is never eradicated, regardless of success” (p. 41). It is no wonder that so many gamers are struggling with symptoms and behaviors associated with mood disorders.

Adler devised the term lifestyle and defined it, in essence, as individual’s unique response to the sum of their guiding fictions (or mistaken beliefs for the purpose of this paper), the style of life by which they have chosen to live. The gamer’s patterns for living is established in childhood, often by the age of six. The child makes childlike sense of their experiences, and incorporates their conclusions into private logic. “A child’s opinion of life, which is at the bottom of his attitude to life and is neither shaped into words nor expressed in thought, is his own masterpiece” (Ansbacher, & Ansbacher, 1956, p.187-188). While the child’s private logic is based on childlike processing, the child’s conclusions become deeply engrained.

Mistaken beliefs are sparked by a shocking event, and are the self-created in attempt to hide ones sense of worthlessness (Reardon, 2014a). While mistaken beliefs are developed from the sense of worthlessness, the individual gamer’s response to their own worthlessness is still
unique. Just as a kaleidoscope mirrors the background of the direction it is pointed, a gamer’s mistaken beliefs will mirror and reflect their own unique perceptions congregated out of the backdrop of their own life experiences, social environment, family background, and individual characteristics. The counselor and the gamer must work collaboratively, prodding and poking at the client’s source motives (the birthplace of the client’s neurosis at the unconscious level, that reveals the core of the client’s internal maladaptive perception), in order to begin the process of uncovering the individual’s mistaken belief, and eventually reframe it into a positive belief or thought. The gamers Surface Symptoms (symptoms that are seen and heard, and often observed in external behavior) have identified that neurosis exists. Now the counselor must dig deeper to discover the motivations which are driving neurosis.

Source Motives

As previously stated, source motives are the birthplace of the client’s neurosis at the unconscious level that reveals the core of the client’s internal maladaptive perception. Some gamers look at gaming as entertainment. Some gamers look at gaming as life. Most gamers fall somewhere within the spectrum of these two extremes. “Although two individuals may equally over indulge in online gaming; the clinician should remember that they are still individual, with their own motives and distinctive surrounding environment” (Floros & Siomos, 2012, p. 417). Varying outcomes to excessive gaming have been confirmed by Griffiths (2010) in the presentation of two individuals who outwardly demonstrated extreme preoccupation with gaming; one did not experience any negative consequences, while the other did (Griffiths, 2010; Floros, & Siomos, 2012). The reason for opposite outcomes their underlying motives for playing, which differed considerably; “while the first had little to do socially and was killing time, the other player tried to escape from existing problems” (Floros & Siomos, 2012, p.417).
In regards to excessive gamers, “without the contradiction between symptoms and motivations; online games only serve as a way of extending or replacing satisfactions in the virtual world” (Wan, & Chiou, 2006). “Research indicates that providing the client with replacement alternatives, which offer more benefit and less negative effects, would result in a decrease in their problematic or addictive use” (Wan, & Chiou, 2006, p.765). “Once the client is able to get insights into their motivations in the unconscious level [which will allow them to identify and correct their mistaken beliefs] they can begin to break the chain of compulsive use” (Wan, & Chiou, 2006, p.765).

Within the gamers safeguarding lifestyle, undercurrents exist which identify the gamer’s specific movements to hide their own worthlessness (Reardon, 2014a). The gamer’s etiology, is composed of dynamics which they created to protect the feeling of worthlessness, and these dynamics are embedded in their mistake beliefs. Reardon (2014a) adds; “It is within the realm discovering motives that etiology of therapy begins. Grasping the etiology and uniquely individual dynamics of the client is the science of the therapy. Picking and pursuing the movement from symptom to symptomatic behavior dynamics, and on to encounter with the felt inferiority and worthlessness, is the art” (p. 5).

While a client’s motives for gaming are most often related to their personal cognitions (Floros, & Siomos, 2012), source motives are propelled by the gamers unconscious mistaken beliefs. Researchers (Floros, & Siomos, 2012; Kuss, 2013; Wan, & Chiou, 2006; Young, 2009; Hussain, & Griffiths, 2009; Hertlein, & Hawkins, 2012; Lee, et al. 2007; Ng, & Weimer-Hastings, 2005) have identified a variety of specific motives associated with excessive gaming; the sum of these motivations has been sorted and associated by this writer into four specific
categories of vertical striving: superiority; distancing; community; and experimental
apperception.

**Motivated by Superiority**

To reiterate Adler’s concept of striving for superiority, the human psyche has a tendency
to strive for superiority at birth. “When striving for superiority is done on the useful side of life,
it contributes to the human community” (Griffith & Powers, 2007, p. 99). Those who strive for
superiority on the useful side of life, have the courage to be themselves as they contribute to
interests of others. Adler states “the most sensible estimate of value of any activity is
helpfulness to all mankind, present and future” (Adler, 1964, p. 78). The person striving for
superiority on the useful side is contributing to the lives of others in a meaningful way, and as a
result they discover personal value within themselves. In the competition of life, the person
living on the useful side of life cheers for every person’s success equally.

To the contrary, the individual who is striving for superiority on the useless side of life
strives for personal superiority, and personal gain over that of community advancement. Again,
Adler called this living on the vertical plane of movement, which has already been identified as
vertical striving. The individuals “confidence grows in solidarity by minimizing others or by
being perceived as the better person” (Griffith, & Powers, 2007, p. 56). When the neurotic
individual feels inferior or weak they stop being interested in others, choosing instead to be
absorbed with themselves out of the “fear of being defeated on the useful side” (Ansbacher &
Ansbacher, 1956, p.157). Therefore, it could be said that the gamer, who is motived by
superiority, has “lost the courage to proceed on the useful side of life and has turned away from
the real problems of life” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 225).
The virtual world has been confirmed as an enchanting place with a rousing story. In the virtual world, everyone can be strong, intelligent, powerful, and retain a high ranking social class, and escape all perceived and real inferiority. “The gamer is in control of their destiny, guaranteed success, positive outcomes, and heroic wins” (McGonigal, 2010). Therefore, when the gamer logs into the game, they become a powerful master of their own universe. This client feels inadequate, inferior, unwanted, or worthless in the real world. The purpose behind the gamer’s unique intent of superiority must be examined collaboratively by the client and the counselor, but confirmed by the client alone.

Collectively, research (Floros, & Siomos, 2012; Kuss, 2013; Hertlein, & Hawkins, 2012; Ng, & Weimer-Hastings, 2005; Hussain, & Griffiths, 2009; Turkle, 2011) has determined several motivations that correlate to those gamers who are striving for superiority:

- **Status** (Floros & Siomos, 2012; Kuss, 2013). Being in a class above others, or ranked highly. As players level up in the game they achieve a higher status (Kuss, 2013). A player’s success is acknowledged by others in the game.

- **Mastery** (Kuss, 2013; Wan & Chiou, 2006; Floros & Siomos, 2012). To be successful, overcome a challenge, or outwit others. To vertically advance, or beat the game, to master a challenge (Wan & Chiou, 2006).

- **Achievement** (Kuss, 2013; Wan & Chiou, 2006; Floros & Siomos, 2012; Kuss, 2013). To be the best, or triumph. Achievement includes advancing in the game, to vertically be the best (Kuss, 2013).

- **Power** (Wan & Chiou, 2006; Kuss 2013). To have control, dominate, or get even.

- **Success** (Floros & Siomos, 2012; Kuss, 2013; Wan & Chiou, 2006). To vertically be the best.
• Competition – (Floros & Siomos, 2012; Kuss, 2013; Hussain, & Griffiths, 2009; Wan & Chiou, 2006). To win, vertically defeat, conquer or retaliate.

The superior gamer’s possible mistaken beliefs reflect vertical power and/or revenge:

In order to belong, be significant, and feel secure: “I must be in charge”; “People must act the way I want them to”; “I must get even”; “I need to dominate others”; “Life is a completion to be won and I must be number one”; “I demand respect”; “I am the best”; “No one can touch me”; “My way is the right way”, “I am tough”; “I am in control”; “I must always have my way”; “Those who hurt me will pay”; etc.

The superior gamer’s possible vertical aspirations:

In order to belong, be significant, and feel secure, I must have/be: power, revenge, superiority, dominance, respect, high rank, winning, success, outsmarting, overcoming, achieving, improving, authority, control, being right, or esteem, etc.

Samples of horizontal, realistic positive truths, and therapeutic goals for the gamer motivated by superiority:

In order to belong, be significant, and feel secure: “I can’t control others, but I can control myself”; “I accept myself”; “It would be nice if life always went my way, but it won’t”; “I have value even when I am not perfect (in charge, in control, the best, etc.)”; “I have something to contribute”; “Sometimes I win, and sometimes I lose”; “It is alright to be vulnerable”; “I can handle it when others are more successful”; “I can encourage others rather than control them”, etc.

Motivated by Distancing

A gamer that is striving by distancing has a hesitating attitude toward the real world.

This person lacks the confidence to overcome difficulties and advance in the real world, (Griffith
The gamer is discouraged and associates their worthlessness to being powerless, helpless, or flawed. The distancing gamer is likely vertically striving on the useless side of life, tethering their identity to their own perceived defectiveness. Adler (1952) states, “There is only one reason for an individual to side step to the useless side: the fear of defeat on the useful side” (p.157). “When the individual cannot decide whether he should do this or do that, one thing is certain, namely, that he does not move” (Adler, 1931, p. 93). To the contrary, in the virtual world, gamers do not just sit around, they dive in! “Epic wins are worth trying, and they are worth trying now” (McGonigal, 2010). “No one fails in the virtual world, for every effort is rewarded” (Perry, 2006). Rather than be involved in the challenges of the real world, the distancing gamer prefers to be in the virtual world where every challenge is achievable.

The gamer who enters a virtual world in order to escape the real world may be overwhelmed by real world responsibilities. On the other hand, this gamer may have a fear of failure, lack a sense of purpose, or lack direction for their life which has left them feeling stuck. Family members may often describe the distancing gamer as “lazy” when actually, “laziness indicated a hesitating attitude, and the client no longer believes he/she can advance” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, p. 391). To cope with their own fear of failure, the client has disengaged from the tasks of life. This client is safeguarding themselves by using the distraction of gaming to avoid the demands of the world and their perception of self. Perhaps this gamer has experienced criticism or failures in the real world. Encouragement, empathy, and understanding provide a feeling of care, which will allow the distancing gamer to safely open up during counseling sessions.
Collectively, research has determined several motivations which fall into the category of distancing (Floros & Siomos, 2012; Kuss, 2013; Wan & Chiou, 2006; Li, et al., 2011; Hussain, & Griffiths, 2009; Turkle, 2011; Young, 2009).

• Escapism (Li, et al., 2011; Floros & Siomos, 2012; Kuss, 2013; Wan & Chiou, 2006). Avoiding real world problems or finding an alternate reality. “To forget their actual reality and live out in an alternate one” (Floros & Siomos, 2012, p. 421). “Counselors need to help pathological gamers narrow the gap between their actual and ideal selves. They would need to have an empathetic understanding of the pathological gamers’ need to escape into the virtual world of videogames” (Li, et al., 2011, p. 538).

• Depression (Bartholomew, & Mason, year; Fisoun, et al., 2012; Wei et al., 2012; Young 2009). To seek respite, or relief. Research shows that depressive symptoms increased in severity with excessive weekly gaming hours, and severity of social phobia symptoms” (Wei, et al. 2012). It is well known that depression can result in suicide.

• Stress (Kuss, 2013; Hussain, & Griffiths, 2009; Wan & Chiou, 2006). To break from responsibility, or avoid annoyances. To relieve stress and annoyances (Hussain, & Griffiths, 2009).

• Anxiety (Kuss, 2013). To attain a calm, safe existence.

• Feeling Alive (Floros & Siomos, 2012). To be absorbed in the flow of the game.

• Adventure (Wan & Chiou, 2006). To explore an unknown territory, or engage in an unusual, exciting activity.

• Thrill (Floros & Siomos, 2012; Wan & Chiou, 2006). To find pleasure in a new experience. “Trying to forget their actual life predicaments and seek company in the game, and those non-conformers who prefer the thrill of flying away or becoming rock
stars to try something out that is unavailable to their everyday lives” (Floros & Siomos, 2012, p. 421).

- Boredom (Lee, et al. 2007; Turkle, 2011; Hussain, & Griffiths, 2009; Wan & Chiou, 2006). To avoid tedium, or a dull existence. Many players said their life would be “dark” and “boring” if there were no games (Wan & Chiou, 2006). “Lack of interesting entertainment outlets, and having lots of free time” (Hussain, & Griffiths, 2009).

- Entertainment (Wan & Chiou, 2006). To feel amused by recreation.

- Comfort (Wan & Chiou, 2006). To relax and unwind, or to console oneself.

The distancing gamer’s possible mistaken beliefs reflect a display of inadequacy:

I cannot belong, be significant or feel secure because: “I am a failure”; “I will fail”; “I can’t be perfect”; “I am not safe”; “I am powerless”; “I am weak”; “I cannot get what I want”; “I am worthless”, “I am defective”; “I feel ashamed”; “It is not safe to try”; “I must hide”; “I must not be noticed”; etc.

The distancing gamer’s possible vertical aspirations:

In order to belong, be significant, and feel secure, I must have: security, safety, excitement, trust of others, faith from others, calmness, harmony, acceptance, approval, confidence, etc.

Samples of horizontal, realistic positive truths, and therapeutic goals for the gamer motivated by distancing:

In order to belong, be significant, and feel secure: “I can make mistakes”; “I do the best I can”; “I am good enough”; “I can be trusted”; “I can (learn) to take care of myself”; “I am ok just the way I am”; “I can trust my judgment”; “I am safe”; “I have options”; “I can handle it, I’ve got this”; “I have the courage to be imperfect”; etc.
Motivated by Virtual Community

In Adlerian psychology, “the term community feeling incorporates the individuals awareness of belonging in the community and the cosmos of which it is apart, and by understanding his/ her responsibility for the way of the life of the community is being shaped by his/her actions” (Griffith, & Powers, 2007, p. 11). It has already been said that socialization in a virtual world emulates the real world; however, when community is attained solely behind the mask of an avatar is the gamer vertically striving on the useless side of life? In MMORPGs, gamers make friends, support and help one another adapt to the virtual community while trading goods and services. For some players, a community feeling is what drives them to stay engaged in the game (Young, 2009). Though a virtual world is similar to the real world, community is not the same. Turkle (2011) explains;

If lonely, you can find a continual connection. But it may leave you more isolated, without real people around you. So, you return for another hit of what feels like a connection. The Shakespeare phrase comes to mind; we are consumed by that which we are nourished by” (p. 207).

While a community gamer seeks community feeling within the game, they are doing so at the expense of real world community, sacrificing real world friendships.

Community gamers may be attempting to catch the community feeling that is absent in their real life, yet many have never physically met their online friends. Truthfully, the gamer can’t even be certain which gender their online friends really are. Perhaps these facts don’t matter because the gaming client lacks satisfying friendships in the real world, or fears rejection, and a virtual community of faceless friends feels safe. For example, a shy gamer can achieve virtual popularity, even attaining a celebrity like status among other gamers, while denying their
deep rooted shyness. Research reveals that gamers report being less inhibited when gaming, feeling safer to be their true self without judgment in virtual worlds (Ng & Weimer-Hastings, 2005). Furthermore, it could be this individual feels destitute, “I have said that in the psychoanalytic tradition, one speaks about narcissism not to indicate people who love themselves, but a personality so fragile that it needs constant support” (Turkle, 2011, p.).

The community gamer’s virtual friendships are with real people behind computers. Therefore, those friendships can physically exist in the real world. Everyday real world people meet, know, and love others they have online. The difference is that the community gamer has created a replica of community with no risk of being discovered as inferior, and therein lies the community gamer’s neurosis. Additionally, addictive cycles often have a co-dependent component. Co-dependency is just as difficult in the virtual world as it is in the real world when individuals mesh and lose their identity in one another. Leaving the game becomes that much harder when other gamers become angry at an individual for separating or establishing their own identity.

When it comes to developing real world friendships, the counselor may be able to prompt this client to define the skills they used to successfully make friends, and nurture friendships in the virtual world. Hopefully, the gamer will then apply some of their virtual community skills to their real life interactions.

Collectively, research has determined several motivations which fall into the category of community (Kuss, 2013; Floros & Siomos, 2012; Lee, et al. 2007; Hussain, & Griffiths, 2009; Young, 2009; g & Weimer-Hastings, 2005; Hussain, & Griffiths, 2009; Wan & Chiou, 2006; Lee, et al. 2007).
• Admiration (Schwartz, 2013; Kuss, 2013). To receive the praise of gaming peers and feel approved of, or appreciated.

• Positive or Negative Reputation (Kuss, 2013). To be noticed.

• Respect (Kuss, 2013). To be honored, or admired.

• Loneliness (Kuss, 2013; Wan & Chiou, 2006). To connect to someone.


• Popularity (Floros & Siomos, 2012). To be liked.

• Friendship (Floros & Siomos, 2012; Lee, et al., 2007; Kuss, 2013; Ng & Weimer-Hastings, 2005; Hussain, & Griffiths, 2009; Wan & Chiou, 2006). To feel connected to others. Interacting between gamers of different genders and various ages and backgrounds, gamers meet people they usually don’t interact with in the real world (Lee, et al., 2007, p. 213). Players report having more fun with online friends than the people they know in the real world (Ng & Weimer-Hastings, 2005, p.110-113). To feel connected to others.

• Codependency (Turkle, 2011). To be responsible to meet perceived expectations of the game or other players. Not wanting to fail the game because “that means you aren’t taking care of it” (Turkle, 2011, p. 42).

The community gamer’s possible mistaken beliefs reflect a desire for attention:

In order to belong, be significant, and feel secure: “I won’t be ignored”; “I must be liked”; “I have to please everyone”; “I must be accepted at all costs”; “I must keep everyone happy”; “I must be heard”; “I must be noticed”; “I cannot be alone”; “I must stand out”; etc.

The community gamer’s possible vertical aspirations:

In order to belong, be significant, and feel secure, I must have/be: Attention, acceptance, approval, status, recognition, prestige, understanding, prominence, acknowledgment, importance, distinction, confidence, care, or closeness, etc.

Samples of alternative positive truths, and therapeutic goals for the gamer motivated by community:

In order to belong, be significant, and feel secure: “I accept that not everyone will always like me”, “It is ok to take care of myself”; “I can’t please everyone all of the time”; “I am significant”; “I am worthwhile”; “No one is perfect”; “I am ok with myself just the way I am”; “I love and accept myself even when others don’t”; etc.

**Motivated by Experimental Apperception**

Apperception is the mental process by which a person makes sense of an idea by assimilating it to the body of ideas he or she already possesses. The gamer who is motivated by experimental apperception is using the game to experiment with ideals already existing within their mind, but perhaps they have not had the courage to act on in real life. Thus these gamers experiment and create their identity safely by hiding their apperceptions in the virtual world.

According to Griffith & Powers (2007), “the term antithetical mode of apperception entered individual psychology in association with the basic mistakes or interfering ideas of the life-style,
commonly experienced as possibilities set in dialectical opposition, and weighing on the person as goals or imperatives” (p. 5).

Perhaps internally, the gamer who is striving by experimental apperception wants life to be different in the real world. The apperception gamer is drawn to the polar opposite of what they perceive real-life acceptance currently requires; and as a result, they safeguard their private self. According to Adler “The apperception-schema of the patient evaluates all impressions as if they were fundamental matters and dichotomizes them in a purposeful manner into above-below, victor-vanquishes, masculine-feminine, nothing-everything, etc. (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956, p. 333).

An experimental apperceiving gamer may not feel free to be himself/herself in the real world and chooses an enhanced identity in the game, according to what they perceive their better identity to be. The gamer motivated by experimental apperception does not feel free to be himself/herself in the real world and therefore creates a character who is totally free. As a result, this gamer experiments with identity by operating off of a conviction or belief. A gamer, who rebels against rules, may want to grasp what it feels like to follow rules, and visa-versa. In essence, the gamer is trying on a new hat, or aiming for a new experience that does not currently exist for them in their real world. The counselor who identifies client’s motives under the category of experimental apperception, may want to ask purposeful questions that assist the client in identifying the traits, desires, or conclusions that they may believe are unattainable in their real world life. Research by Li, et al. (2001) concludes; “Counselors need to help pathological gamers narrow the gap between their actual and ideal selves. They would need to have an empathetic understanding of pathological gamers’ need to escape into the virtual world of videogames” (p. 538).
The counselor can learn a great deal simply by asking why the client chose to become a particular character. Why is it that the client hides themselves in the virtual world? The answer does not have to be complex. The client’s motive may be that of a “non-conformist who merely wants to feel the thrill of flying away or becoming rock stars, or to try something out that is unavailable to their everyday lives” (Floros & Siomos, 2012, p. 421). It is possible that the character reveals a mistaken conviction which the gamer is struggling to accept, or overcome.

To assist in identifying this gap between actual and ideal self, the counselor should listen as the client identifies in order to hear if the client is using words such as “should,” or “need to,” which would indicate the gamer is motivated by an outside source. If the gamer uses the word “must be” they are revealing compulsion. These words indicate client’s negative cognitions, which will be discussed more in the treatment phase. Only the client can confirm if what is holding them back is based on fear, lack of opportunity, expectations of others, or something else. In contrast, the words “want to” reflect a well-defined sense of personal power, which is preferred over “must”, “need” and “should”.

Collectively, research has determined several motivations which fall into the category of community (Kuss, 2013; Floros & Siomos, 2012; Lee, et al., 2007; Hussain, & Griffiths, 2009; Young, 2009; Ng & Weimer-Hastings, 2005; Hussain, & Griffiths, 2009; Wan & Chiou, 2006; Lee, et al. 2007).


Dissatisfaction with life (Hertlein & Hawkins, 2012).
• Ego (Floros & Siomos, 2012). To try on various versions of self, or rebel against expectations. “Trying on various beliefs to see how they fit, and demonstrate rebelliousness to those who stand in the way” (Floros & Siomos, 2012 p. 422).

• Breaking the rules (Floros & Siomos, 2012). To do something that is not allowed in real life.

• Following the rules (Floros & Siomos, 2012). To create structure, predictability.

• Gender swapping (Hussain, & Griffiths, 2009). To hide one’s gender while disguised as the opposite. Gamer’s gender swapped for reasons of interest, to experiment with playing a different gendered character (Hussain, & Griffiths, 2009).

• Sex. (Kuss, 2013; Turkle, 2011). To experiment with sexual fascinations. Sex accounted for 19% of use (Kuss, 2013, p. 126).

The experimental apperception gamer’s possible mistaken beliefs reflect despair:

I do not belong, and I am not significant because: “I am not free to be myself”; “I am not good enough”; “I am inadequate”; “I must hide who I really am”; “I am ashamed of myself”; “Others are ashamed of me”; “I must be perfect”; “I am stuck”; “I do not have any options”; “I am not allowed to be my true self”; “My opinion does not matter”; etc.

The experimental apperception gamer’s possible vertical aspirations:

In order to belong and be significant I must have: independence, confidence, freedom; acceptance, alternatives, self-determination, autonomy, sovereignty, emancipation, self-rule, pride, options, liberation, choice, etc.

Samples of alternative positive truths, and therapeutic goals for the gamer motivated by experimental apperception:
In order to belong, be significant, and feel secure: “I can be myself”; “I can trust myself”; “I trust my own judgment”; “My opinions count”; “I can make my desires known”; “I am OK just the way I am”; “I can have____”; “I choose to be happy”; “I am capable”; “I can determine my own life: “I have options”; “I am a great me”; etc.

Treatment Phase I

According to Lee, Yu, & Lin (2007) gamers are often presented as “people who have socializing problems in real life, or victims who have lost control of themselves and are in need of help from others. The voices of the gamers seem to be neglected, as gamers are only treated as helpless patients” (p. 212). In reality, gamers are merely striving for significance just like the rest of humanity. Clearly, gamers have talent! Gamers have mastered many skills: dexterity, quick reflexes, the ability to make instant decision, creativity, and perspective thinking, to name a few. Yet, these remarkable skills are rarely observed by friends and family in the real world. Instead, the neurotic gamer likely has well-meaning friends or family members labeling gaming behavior as “bad”, and thereby reaffirming the gamers inferiority feelings which caused their initial retreat into the game. It can be assumed that neurotic gamers have not enjoyed the real world consequences they have experienced from excessive gaming; nor have their family members. “People, whose behaviors in the course of their worsening addictions, are most often socially unacceptable. This shed light on the plight of those suffering from late-stage addictions and the nearly complete isolation it brings” (Holder & Williams, 1995, p. 5).

The terms safeguarding, superiority, distancing, experimental apperception, perfectionism and vertical striving are all systemically related. These are the many ways clients attempt to distract from the discovery of their perceived worthlessness. Gaming is the mask that hides their inferiority feelings. Just as the gamer created their own existence within a virtual
world, they can learn to construct their existence in the real world. Once the client develops “the spirit to overcome” [their vertical striving], they begin to embrace, rather than deny, their original shock of inferiority as a part of their identity (Reardon, 2014b). As the neurotic gamer is in recovery, and begins accepting their own inferiority, they will have less of a need to play the game for identity, and will begin to play for leisure purposes instead.

**The Responsibility of Intake**

Mental health professionals are trained to evaluate a client’s behavior within the context of the social system in which the client lives (Doweiko, 2012). A virtual world is a culture unique to itself, and just as with all cultures, the client benefits when the counselor understands his/her culture. With today’s clients “averaging 10,000 hours of online gaming by the age of twenty-one, and a billion gamers expected to play in the next decade” (McGonigal, 2010), it can be argued that now is time for counselors to routinely inquire about internet use and gaming when meeting with new clients. Ethical codes have long educated the mental health professional about both the responsibility and accountability to protect clients, along with improving professional practice by remaining relevant and culturally informed. The culture of gaming is no exception.

While excessive gaming has commonalities with other forms of addiction, the etiology of gaming remains distinctive from other additions, necessitating select clinician considerations. For example, research indicates depression and anxiety are linked to game use (Li, et al., 2011; Wei, et al., 2012; Yen, et al., 2012; Caplan, 2007; Cole, 2007). Because symptomatic gamers find solace in their game play, and gaming is an escape from troublesome symptoms, the client may fail to mention any level of involvement in a virtual world to the counselor. In fact, it may not even be the gaming client who admits to game use, but concerns may be expressed by family
members instead. On the other hand, rather than be silent, family members of disrupted gamers may enter the counselor’s office declaring that games are inherently evil, or that games are ruining the person they love. Yet computer and video games are objects, making it difficult to classify a game as either good, or bad. Doweiko (2012) offers an example using knives when he writes, “Knives have been used for thousands of years. If a person were to slice a turkey at thanksgiving with a knife, would it be an evil act? If a person were to commit murder, is the knife an evil thing?” (p. 347). The game is not the problem. The game is an object. The way the client relates to the game, and the significance they attach to it, is how neurosis is determined. To reiterate, the game itself is not the causing neurosis in a client’s life, but rather, neurosis exists when the client is able to hide their perceived inferiority within in the game at all costs. Within the game, the client hides their inferiority with a very low risk of being discovered. The client belongs and feels significant in the virtual world, at the expense of their own real world life.

Because the counselor cannot rely on the client, or their family, to disclose computer and video game use, the only way to find out if the client is an excessive gamer is to ask the client directly. Inquiring about game use during intake is important for the following reasons: a gamer’s mental health issues can be comprehensive, several possibilities exist for co-occurring disorders, and therefore creating a treatment plan for the gamer includes assessing gaming motives. The method of asking about game use is really up to the counselor’s preferred interviewing style.

If the counselor prefers unstructured interviewing, initially asking the client about internet use is a reasonable place to begin. If the client uses the internet, the counselor can use small talk to ask the client if they play any games. Because over 50% of Americans play computer and video games (ESA, 2013), odds are there will be something to learn. The
A counselor who prefers structured interviews can simply add Internet and game use to the addictions section on their intake form. If conversation during intake reveals the client identifies themselves as a gamer, learning specifics about the client’s game of choice could potentially build rapport, show interest, and contribute to a positive therapeutic relationship. Consequently, a good place to start could be by determining what game(s) the client is drawn to, and the client’s level of involvement in the game.

The questions on the following page have been created by this writer as an example of possible interview questions. Listen to the client with subjectivity. How the client answers may reveal to the counselor where neurosis is hiding.
# Virtual Neurosis: Purposeful Intake Questions
Lori K. Brown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Game – Identifies Preferences</th>
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<tr>
<td>What game are you currently playing? Say more about it…</td>
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<tr>
<th>The Rewards - Identifies Intentions</th>
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<tr>
<td>What do you like best about the game? What makes it exciting?</td>
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<tr>
<th>Time Invested - Identifies Commitment</th>
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<tr>
<td>How often do you play? For how long?</td>
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<td>Do you ever play late into the night instead of sleeping?</td>
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<td>What is the average amount of time you play before taking a break?</td>
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<td>Do you ever feel guilty after playing for an extended period of time?</td>
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<td>Do you ever rush through an obligation (homework, etc.) in order to return to the game?</td>
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<th>The Avatar – Identifies Personal Values and Ideal Self</th>
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<tr>
<td>What can you tell me about the character (toon, or avatar) you created?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How is your avatar like you? How is it different from you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your avatar have any special powers? What is your avatars social status?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What gender is your avatar?</td>
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<tr>
<th>Social Systems – Prioritizes Relationships</th>
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<tr>
<td>Do you play online with other people? Is it easier to make friends in the game, rather than in person?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have you ever met your virtual world in real life? Where, or how?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you have any really close friends in the game(s)? Say more…</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you ever share your thoughts, feelings or secret details about yourself with your online friends?</td>
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<tr>
<th>Real World Activities – Identifies Social Interest vs. Isolation</th>
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<td>What sort of activities, or fun, do you enjoy outside of the game? How often? With whom?</td>
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<tr>
<th>Motivations – Identifies Sensitivities</th>
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<tr>
<td>Do you ever play to escape problems in your real life? Which problems?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have you ever played because you were angry, or stressed (or another negative emotion)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What emotions do you feel when playing? (Happy, relaxed, powerful, etc.)</td>
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<th>Withdrawal – Identifies Drive</th>
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<tr>
<td>Is it ever hard to stop playing? Do you ever feel addicted to it?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does anyone ever get upset with you for playing? Then do you stop, or keep playing?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you get upset or angry if someone forces you to quit playing? How do you treat them?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you think about the game when you are not playing it?</td>
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<tr>
<th>Complications – Identifies Priorities</th>
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<tr>
<td>Have you ever neglected to attend an event, work or school in favor of playing?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have you ever adjusted your commitments outside of the game in order to play instead?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Have you ever lied about playing to avoid arguing with someone?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you ever get so into the game that you forget to eat, or even shower?</td>
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Hopefully, by determining gaming involvement on intake, and asking the client thought provoking questions, the counselor will begin to identify the client’s motives for excessive use. In addition, as clients listen to themselves responding to the counselor’s questions, they may begin to create a personal foundation from which to launch personal change. On intake, the boundaries between virtual and real worlds are unrecognized and often blurred for the gamer. As the client begins to recover, the boundaries between both worlds will become more defined. This type of healing cannot even begin if the counselor fails to ask if the client on intake if they have any favorite video, or computer games. In fact, given that computer and video games are now the most popular form of entertainment, counselor’s now have a duty to inquire about a client’s gaming practices.

**Therapeutic Alliance**

There has been considerable alliance research done in recent years, and researchers have found a positive therapeutic alignment to be a strong predictor of positive outcomes for clients (Crits-Christoph et al., 2009; Zuroff et al., 2010; Falkenström, et al., 2013; Whiting, et al., 2014; Fife, et al., 2014). A positive therapeutic relationship is developed out of the authenticity and caring manner of the counselor. “Effective therapy involves not only what counselors do, but who counselors are, and how counselors regard their clients” (Fife, et al., 2014, p. 23). Positive relationships, including the counselor-client relationship, incorporate mutual respect (Carlson, Watts, & Maniacci, 2006). A study by Fife, et al. (2014), affirmed that fact that “how one person feels toward the other often invites a reciprocal response. Intimate partners tend to respond in the way that they are treated. The therapist’s way of being may influence the way of being of the client” (p. 27).
Not only is the therapeutic relationship important at the onset of treatment, but it is a critical requirement of every session. A portion of research completed by Falkenström, et al (2013), analyzed the relationship between the therapist and the client in exclusion of the type of treatment and concluded:

It seems important for therapists to monitor and work with the alliance not only in the beginning of treatment but also in each session, perhaps especially if that patient has personality problems. The session-to-session effect of the alliance on symptom level points to the importance of continually monitoring the alliance throughout treatment. Our findings indicate that when the alliance is worse than usual for a given patient, symptoms are likely to get worse to the next session. Creating alignment creates safety for the client to self-disclose. (p. 326)

To affirm that last sentence; creating safety for the client is the counselor’s objective in securing client collaboration. The client must feel safe in order to self-disclose.

When client’s forward movement in therapy is interrupted by the clients safeguarding behaviors of exclusion, making excuses or becoming aggressive, instead of changing models or interventions, research suggests “that the counselor should first evaluate the quality of the alliance they have developed with their clients and consider whether there is a way to strengthen it” (Fife, et al., 2014, p. 27). In addition, the counselor may want to reevaluate their own inferiority feelings. Transference, counter transference and triggers may be taking place, and it would be beneficial to the client if the counselor pauses and evaluates if any of these concerns are present. It is the counselor who has learned to embrace their own inferiority that can be encouraging and compassionate.
During the interviewing process, the counselor will discover which game(s) the client identifies with. Once the client pinpoints a preferred game(s), it will benefit the therapeutic relationship if the counselor invests adequate time discovering a little more about each game. Even though MMORPGs have commonalities, each game is a little bit different. Becoming more informed about a specific game’s jargon and nuances will assist in creating an engaging environment where the client can feel valued and understood in future sessions. In addition to learning about the client’s favorite game, and if it is at all possible, try playing it.

**Treatment Phase II**

It is in this phase that the client begins to state their own inferiority. Gamers experience tremendous real world social anxiety perhaps because they are worried about being discovered as inferior. When they are in the real world they may feel anxious, and so they retreat to the game where they can comfortably hide behind a mask. Within the game they can be superior and no longer have to worry about having their inferiority discovered. Yet, don’t we all experience inferiority feelings? In reality, we all start in the same place. We are born into a world that requires struggle. As a result, inferiority feelings exist in each of us. The counselor can help the client to normalize inferiority feelings, and to discover the usefulness of embracing their own perceived worthlessness.

How can inferiority be useful? Inferiority is what drives compassion and empathy, which allows us to connect to one another. The gamer may need encouragement to recognize that rather than escape inferiority, which takes a great deal of effort, inferiority can be used in the subjective sense to develop empathy and compassion, which are significant components of meaningful real world relationships. Reardon (2014c) determines,
Ironically, it is in the embracing of our own “inferiority” and “subjectivity, and the honest and “common sense” struggle with both that we are able to choose and construct a “normal” life style. Further, in grasping and honoring both we can claim our deep humanness. In this deep humanness we are equals, companions, and people of compassion (we “feel with the others”). (p. 1)

**Confirm Surface Symptoms**

Once the therapeutic alliance has been established, the counselor and the client work collaboratively to determine which specific surface symptoms are disrupting the client’s real world life. In an ideal therapeutic world, the client will always identify their own symptoms without prompting. While the list of surface symptoms has been condensed as a reference guide for the counselor (Appendix A), all clients are unique and an individual may come up with an original surface symptom which is not on this list. A symptom originating with a client is completely valid, since the client is the only one in the room who is the expert on himself/herself.

As mentioned earlier, surface symptoms have been classified into categories: behavior, relationship, psychological and physical. Most clients will display surface symptoms that fall into more than one category. Excessive gamers can exhibit multiple symptoms. The counselor should bear in mind that it is likely that the client, who has already fought with friends and family about game time, will be inclined to safeguard. Thus it is important to remain empathetic, non-judgmental, and encouraging when assessing symptoms. The counselor will want to make sure they have personally let go of any preconceived, or media based, bias while remembering that the gamer, like all clients, is most open and honest when they feel safe and accepted.
Confirm Source Motives

Once surface symptoms have been identified, it is time to get down to the nitty-gritty of the grasping the clients etiology. Again, source motives are the birthplace of the client’s neurosis at the unconscious level that reveals the core of the client’s internal maladaptive perception. Determining why the client is motivated to hide in a virtual realm will reveal the clients fear priorities. At this stage, the client begins to clarify which source motives apply to their real world life. Each gamer has unique safe guarding lifestyle which is personally designed in response to their own life experiences and “the accumulated insults over a lifetime that became a disease in their inner world” (Doweiko, 2012, p.361). In safeguarding against their own worthlessness, the gamer determined that gaming, in the virtual worlds of MMORPGs, eased real world pain (Young, 2009; Turkle, 2011; Doweiko, 2012). Accordingly, research confirms that “a variety of motives” have been linked to excessive online gaming (Kuss, et al., 2012, p. 480).

Source Motives have been classified into four categories of vertical striving: superiority, distancing, virtual community and experimental apperception. Most clients will have motives that fall into more than one category. As with surface symptoms, source motives must be confirmed by the client and not presumed by the counselor.

Treatment Phase III

Affirm Positive Aspirations

In pinpointing motives, the client has begun the process of understanding what drove them to hide in the game. The client aspired to do something, be something, or change something they did not find achievable in the real world, and so they hid their inferiority in the virtual world, where their aspiration could be achieved. Adler (1959) stated, “out of the nature
of a feeling of inferiority there arises, depending on the unconscious technique of our thought apparatus, an imagined goal, an attempt at a planned final compensation and life plan” (p.6).

Essentially, Adler perceived an individual’s aspiration toward wholeness and personal superiority, as compensation for the primary feeling of inferiority. Once an aspiration or goal, is determined by an individual, they adjust the style of their life around the aspiration and “all the movements of its constitute parts will coincide with the goal or life plan” (Adler, 1959, p. 6). If aspirations are the basis of all human activity, then it is imperative at this stage to determine which aspirations contributed to the individual’s movement.

If the client had a positive aspiration, the counselor affirms the client by pointing out that the purpose of the clients motivation, thus their behavior (even if negative) was actually the result of a positive aspiration or goal. Perhaps the client longed to be seen, heard or accepted. Often a client’s aspirations are an attempt to belong, be significant or have a place in the world. For example, perhaps a gamer never felt approved of by his father. Perhaps his father was inconsistent with expectations, and pleasing his father was perceived as unattainable by the child. Eventually the child became discouraged, believing he could never measure up to his father’s expectations, yet in the virtual world experienced success. Desiring the approval and love of a parent is not a negative aspiration. Wanting to be acknowledged and affirmed by ones father is a positive aspiration or goal. Perhaps the client will never receive his father’s approval, but he can learn to love and accept himself.

Lying beneath the clients motives the counselor finds the goal the client was aspiring to reach. Use the motives as a tool to uncovering the client’s aspirations, and positively affirm them. What was motivating the gamer to retreat into the virtual world and abandon the real one? What does the client wish for? What does the client wish was different. Which of the client’s
deep values were driving their motivations? While not all of a client’s aspirations are positive (such as dominance, or control), in many cases the creative counselor can still affirm the client by acknowledging that the client had the aspiration to take care of themselves the best way they could, with the knowledge they had at that time. We all do the best we can in life, and when we know better, we do better.

**Confirm Mistaken Beliefs**

A mistaken belief is that which the client has concluded about themselves and the world. These beliefs have been individually designed in order to survive in their own environment, and each client’s mistaken beliefs are unique to them. Mistaken beliefs are uncovered by identifying patterns in motivations which generate insight into the unconscious. An example of a mistaken belief would be a child, who never received his father’s approval believing he can never be good enough at life, or for anyone. His aspiration was to be loved, but his mistaken belief is that he is an unlovable failure.

Perhaps a child had an angry mother, and life was only peaceful for the child when the mother was happy. In this case, the mistaken belief guiding the child may be, “I must always keep everyone else happy”. Another example could be the client who grew up in an unpredictable environment and as a result determined “I can only rely on myself”, or “I must be in control at all times”. When a gamer is struggling to interpret their mistaken beliefs, taking an early recollection may be helpful as it will most likely coincide with the client’s symptoms and motives. Taking an early recollection involves asking the client to bring up a childhood memory, preferably before the age six or seven. The early memory they select will become a subconscious metaphor that will reveal the world as they interpret it today (Holder, & Williams, 1995). If a client cannot recall a childhood memory, ask them to make one up. A made up
childhood memory will still be a truthful metaphor. The accuracy of the memory is not what matters; it is the client’s view that is important.

Another means of getting a client involved in the process of understanding their motivations is the “empty chair” technique (Carlson, Watts, & Maniacci, 2006, p. 139).

1. Ask the client to choose a surface symptom.
2. Ask the client to match it to a source motive.
3. Determine with the client the purpose of their behavior behind the combined chosen surface symptom and source motive.
4. Set up two chairs. Explain to the client that one chair represents their real world self, and the other chair represents their virtual world self. Ask the virtual world self to tell the real world self why they have that struggle.
5. Have the client change chairs and respond from both perspectives of the real world self, and the virtual world self. During this movement, the client’s convictions (mistaken beliefs) will begin to emerge.

“Once the client’s mistaken beliefs are uncovered, the client will make one of two choices a) change, or b) not change” (Carlson, Watts, & Maniacci, 2006, p. 16).

Reframe Mistaken Beliefs

The client’s core belief of worthlessness led to maladaptive interpretations of how they should act and behave in the world. For example, believing they are unlovable and defective, the individual sees difficult experiences of life as confirmation of their belief. Others may have rigid or extreme beliefs about how the world must be for them to function in it, creating the tendency to make catastrophic interpretations of minor events (Henriques, 2012). Who wouldn’t want to
escape from a life that was guided by mistaken beliefs and the urge to overcome them? Adler states,

Language is inadequate to express the full range of interpretations of what “overcoming” means. The interpretation varies with each individual because the goal of striving for each individual is different. If we say that such a striving is for “power” or “force”, or a “running away from reality,” we have made typical generalizations which do not give a clear insight into a particular, individual case. But we have gained one point. We have illuminated the field under consideration, and must then narrow down the meaning so that we are able to perceive the particular direction of movement of the individual in question. (Carlson & Maniaci, 2012, p. 220)

At this stage of treatment, the client has begun to recognize maladaptive thinking. Mistaken goals kept the gamer neurotic, and when they are realistically reframed, the client begins to make the switch to common sense. The client’s insight and self-awareness has grown through the therapeutic process, and that which was buried in the subconscious has surfaced. Now is the time to reframe the mistaken beliefs that have been steering neurotic lifestyle. Assumedly, a gamer, who was able to create an entire alternate virtual life, has already proven to have excellent creative adaptation skills. Reframing the clients mistaken beliefs into realistic positive truths is, in essence, the opposite of the neurotic gamer creating a false identity in a virtual world.

Reframing creates a different sense of reality (Young, 2009). For example, the controlling client may change a mistaken belief from “I must control everything” to “while I like to be in control, I still accept myself when others are in control”. Another example of reframing could be a client who believes “I am a disappointment”. A realistic positive truth in response is;
“I love and accept myself just the way I am, even when it feels like others do not approve of me”. As realistic positive truths become the common sense that replaces the client’s mistaken beliefs, the client’s social interest will grow, and in the end, the client will gain a better sense of belonging (Carlson, Watts, & Maniacci, 2006).

Treatment Phase IV

For some excessive gamers, reframing mistaken beliefs into positive truths may not be enough of a motivation to permanently change behavior. It is important for the counselor to bear in mind that it would be a big leap for a client to go from changing in behavior to abstaining from gaming. Thus van Rooij (2011) confirms that a client may be willing to be inventive in self-control, abstinence is often undesirable. The gamer has invested a good portion of their life to get to their current level. Games are mesmerizing, and some games even penalize them for leaving (Smith, 2014). MMORPG’s are designed to pull the player into the game and motivate them to keep them playing. The evolution of computer and video games indicate that game developers have no intention to stop creating new games or incentives. More is needed for the client to stay committed to playing in moderation, or to permanently quit gaming (if the client desired).

Generate Positive Wants

At the positive want stage of treatment, the client has begun to understand their mistaken beliefs and started replacing them with realistic positive truths. A discouraged gamer, who escaped into the game to avoid their own feelings of worthlessness, may have been contributing to their own neurosis in the words they internally spoke to themselves. As previously noted, defeating self-talk is prefaced with negative cognitions of “I should”, “I need to” and “I must”. For example, “I should spend less time gaming”; “I must get off the computer”, “I need to just
beat this next level”; “I should start eating better”; “I need to get more sleep”, to name a few. These prefaces, when spoken to oneself, reaffirm to the client that there is something wrong with them. In turn, then not to have done what one “should have”, “must have”, or “needed to” just reaffirmed the client’s assumption of being inept, or even a failure. Because hiding their inferiority in the game what motivated the neurotic gamer to play excessively in the first place; odds are that continuing in negative self-talk will result in a return to problematic gaming.

In the end, the client is going to do what the client wants to do. It is a matter of personal power. Negative self-talk creates a conflict that is like a trick. Whatever is naughty will win. The client may say to himself/herself “I can’t, and therefore I will return to gaming, where I am comfortable.” Interestingly enough, “it was Alfred Adler who observed, identified, and constructed this earthbound, optimistic, and self-determined psychology that we are privileged to practice. In laser like fashion, and with some wit, he was able to see and state how we as humans are consummate tricksters” (Reardon, 2014c, p. 1). In essence, all of us as individuals, gamers included, will use guess work to adapt to life. Out of our guesswork, we adapted to what we guessed and then used tricks which are based on instinct, reflex and intuition (Reardon, 2014c). Examples of a trick are found in some of the source motives which were previously discussed: escape, superiority, pleasing, power, or perhaps even helplessness. For many gamers, the trick may have been as simple as creating a different identity in the virtual world.

Since all of us as humans are excellent at using our tricks, it becomes imperative for the counselor to assist the client in reframing their negative self-talk (which is tricking them into choosing negative behavior), to positive cognitions. A positive want, is something the client will select as a desire for their future. It is out of positive wants that motivations for change are born. This premise is based on the successful outcomes of Perceptual Adjustment Therapy (P.A.T)
which grasped the art of incorporating what is coined “positive intents” in treating chemical addictions. Holder and Williams (1995) state, “one of the cornerstones in working with P.A.T. is that counselors must acquire and expect that human behavior is purposefully and positively directed” (p. 2). Positivity offers strength and hope to beyond discouragement or despair.

Many of the gamer’s prior motives were negative and “if we focus on the negative, we achieve the negative outcome; if we focus on the positive, the chances of obtaining positive results are enhanced greatly” (Holder & Williams, 1995, p. 5). Switching from negative self-talk to realistic positive cognitions ties to accepting inferiority. How is this achieved?

1. The counselor begins by asking the client “What will you do once all gaming has changed (or stopped). What do you want to stop or change?” (Holder & Williams, 1995).
2. Do not allow the gamer to focus on what they “can’t do”, or what they are “giving up”, but rather, focus on what the client actually wants. For instance a client may say, “I want to stop spending so much time in the virtual world”. This is a negative statement. It requires giving up something. “Our minds have a particular way of deleting words and focusing only on the last idea or two (Holder & Williams, 1995, p. 5). Avoid creating a trick.
3. Instead redirect the client back to what they want by asking “What would you rather have happen instead? (Holder & Williams, 1995, p.5). An example of a positive want would be: “I want to invest more of my time in the real world”.
4. The counselor then affirms but digs even deeper by asking, “What would that look like?” Answers will vary according to the individual. Example are: “I want to sleep”; “I want to eat”; “I want to exercise”; “I want to be engaged in the world today”; “I want to develop physical relationships”; “I want to embrace myself as I am”; “I want to spend time with
my children/partner/friends”; “I want to find a job, garden, or volunteer at the zoo; etc. Can there ever be too many? Don’t stop the client after they have named one or two, but encourage more!

5. Once the client has identified new motivational goals towards the useful side of life. When thinking changes to “I want” there is now positive motive. The client is now focusing on other common sense values and implementing them, rather than denying themselves something they can’t have/do and obsessing over it until they fail. The counselor can now assist the client in recognizing triggers, or overcoming barriers, while the client begins getting to the business of putting their new plan for movement into place.

Client Closure

Closing involves summarizing treatment and making a plan to live on the useful side of life in the future. Don’t focus on never playing the game, but focus on the client’s higher values and goals.

- Confirm the clients understanding of neurosis “using life style to safeguard in order to remove the threat of being discovered as inferior due to a feeling or belief of worthlessness” (Reardon, 2014b, p. 5).

- Identify past triggers for playing, and set options in place for new responses. For example, “when I feel inadequate I will remind myself that I am adequate”, and “I want to engage in the real world activities of _____, instead of gaming”. A player who is not completely giving up gaming may determine, “when I do game I want to set a timer, rather than get lost in a game for hours, because I want to honor my real world commitment of _____” (an activity, responsibility, goal, or relationship, etc.).
• Explain how neurosis can be self-identified in the future by periodically reflecting on habits, emotions, relationships, defenses, making catastrophic interpretation of minor events, and negative cognitions (Henriques, 2012).

• Remind the client that grasping and “owning their own inferiority is a sign of health” (Reardon, 2014b, p. 2).

• Affirm the client’s strengths, resiliency, and/or other genuine and unique positive attributes.

• If possible, provide or refer the client to a gaming support group.

Additional Considerations

Offer Ongoing Support

Group support following addiction treatment is ideal for any addictive behavior. Finding group support following treatment may be difficult since treating gaming is still a new phenomenon. If a support group can be located in the gamer’s community, refer the client to it. If a gaming support group does not exist, can one be created? If no, schedule a follow up appointment a few weeks out with the client, and let them know they can call anytime they experience any struggle to come in sooner.

Bear in mind that group support is more effective in the physical world (Lee, Yu, & Lin, 2007). While it is not always possible, group therapy is preferred over online gaming blogs and forums, although those do offer the supportive piece. Lee, Yu, & Lin (2007) researched gamer’s responses to other gamers in blogs or forums and noted:

What was very interesting and worth noting about these postings [in gaming forums] is that while they give advice or tell about their own ways, they seem to have paralyzed the self, treating the addicted self as a patient, and examine what’s going on to the self.
During the process, sometimes the mind of the gamer seemed to be split, while a part of him/her desires to play on, the other part keeps guardian over him/her and tells him/her to stop playing.

Consequently research (Lee, Yu, & Lin, 2007) concluded that online game forums are not the equivalent of a physical group recovery program, where there are therapists and advisers who can point the gamer in the right direction. What forums did offer was a space for sharing feelings with other gamers who have been through similar struggles, and doubts and fears can be expressed without fear of being stigmatized (Lee, Yu, & Lin, 2007).

Group support in a clinical setting is ideal because now that the gamer is aware of how excessive online gaming has impacted their life, and relationships with others, some begin to question their relationship with MMORPG’s (Lee, Yu, & Lin, 2007). Research investigating gaming recovery over time revealed that when a client rises to a new self-conscious, many doubted game experiences with thoughts such as “Why did I spend the whole night trying to hide from a stupid spider?” (Lee, Yu, & Lin, 2007, p. 216). With few exceptions, interviews with gamers revealed that some clients will “go through a self-questioning process after they initially take notice of their addiction” (Lee, Yu, & Lin, 2007, p. 216). Many gamers will turn to other gamers to normalize fears or find answers to their questions. “Group settings are often employed in treating addictions because they foster a supportive, nurturing, and non-judgmental environment” (King, et al., 2012, p. 1193).

Adolescents

When working with adolescent gamers, family support and involvement is critical. Research by Lemmens, Valkenburg and Peter (2010) determined, “If signs of pathological gaming are not handled properly, this progressive condition may cause serious problems as these
gamers progress into young adulthood, when they are expected to become independent from the parents, find employment or attend higher education. It is possible that family functioning influences and propels an adolescent’s mistaken beliefs. If the family system stays the same, it is presumed that the adolescent stay the same too. Online gaming is a component of internet addictions. A study by Betul, and Serkan (2011) confirmed that “the emergence of social self-esteem and family home esteem were found to be predictors of internet addictions” (Betul, & Serkan, 2011, p. 5).

In terms of ensuring ongoing stability, assessing the way the family functions is beneficial, especially for adolescent gamers (Young 2009). Continuing this point, Young (2009) adds that once the counselor has developed a therapeutic alliance with family members, considerations for the counselor to address during a family session(s), includes evaluating how the family handles conflict externalizes problems, and if there are family problems not being discussed in the home for which a child could be overcompensating. Other patterns in family therapy to observe are enmeshment, triangulation, or disengagement (Minuchin, 1974; Young, 2009). If interacting patterns that allow, or encourage, problematic behavior are identified, then education on positive parenting and encouragement may help the family reframe their maladaptive dynamics. Parents and guardians may benefit from integrating Dreikurs’ Four Mistaken Goals of Misbehavior into the family system, by use of the Mistaken Goal Chart.

**Advising Parents**

While the adolescent gamer needs parental support, many parents and even counselors wonder where to begin. Some parents need permission to be parents, while others want advice on setting boundaries. Being a positive parent requires investing time and patience into encouraging and teaching a child. Even when parents are overwhelmed or busy; it may do well
for the child if the parent reminds themselves that their vulnerable child is not an inconvenience to be plopped in front of a pseudo babysitter existing in the form of a television or computer screen. Children want to know two things; 1) “Do you see me?” and 2) “Are you there for me?” (Wright, 2014).

In her dilemma of establishing technological boundaries for her children, Rachel Smith (2014) insightfully wrote on her blog:

I sat down my oldest at age 9 and told him that the internet is big and deep, and full of things that he could not defend himself against. As his parents, we wanted to teach him to swim, and because we loved him, there would be no way that we would drop him off in the middle of the Atlantic without a boat, life vests, or knowing how to swim. (Elementary school, the Internet, and safety (oh my!), para 4)

The concept of comparing unsupervised internet use to dropping ones child off in the ocean offers a concrete picture for parents to easily identify with, and hopefully remember. In terms of learning how to navigate the vast sea of computer and video games, how does a parent “start in the shallows” (Smith, 2014).

**Check the temperature.** Before allowing a child to dive into a game, check it out. Most parents control what their child watches on television, and gaming should not be any different (Griffiths, 2003). Learn about a game before permitting children to play.

- What is the game rated? Boxed video games have ratings summaries. Games are rated by category, content, and interactive elements.
- Is the games content age appropriate?
- Is the game educational?
What are the games rewards which can pull a child deeper into the game, or penalize them for exiting?

**Teach children to swim.** Teaching a child to swim usually requires the instructor to get in the water. Dive into the game.

- Play new games together.
- Discuss the positives and negatives of the game (Zu, Tso, & Yang, 2001).
- Show children how to locate the “this is offensive” button located on most games (Smith, 2014).
- Have fun.

**Swim with a buddy.** Many online games, even apart from MMORPG’s, are based on social activity and working collaboratively. Research has consistently publicized that the foremost reason for game play is for the social aspect (Cole & Griffiths, 2007; Young, 2009). Rather than always allowing a child to play a game as a solitary activity, encourage social skill building.

- Encourage children to play with a friend (Griffiths, 2003).
- Encourage group play (Griffiths, 2003).

**Be a life guard.** A lifeguard ensures safety by noticing that no harm comes to participants. Life guards provide warnings, and occasionally deny access. Protect children by:

- Observing them play (Smith, 2014).
- Pay attention to potential hazards by observing player to player online chatting allowed within many games (Smith, 2014).
- Set time limits (Griffiths, 2003).
- Customize each child’s access to their requirements by setting logins (Smith, 2014).
• If a child needs to be pulled from a game, intervene calmly, without becoming overdramatic (Smith, 2014).
  
  o Calmly explain to the child why they are being pulled from the game.
  
  o Redirect the child to a new activity by offering alternative choices. Example: “It is time to stop playing. I understand you are disappointed. Would you like to turn off the game, or shall I? What would you like to do instead?”

**Be a safe harbor.** A safe harbor is a place that offers refuge and protection from peril. Children want to know you see them, and that you are available for them. When children run into tempests such as player conflicts, offensive content, offensive conduct, or other distresses, they want a safe refuge (Smith, 2014). Let children know that you are available, and when they seek refuge:

• Respond gently. Allow the child to hear your loving protection, and presence.

• Connect to a child through close proximity, eye contact, or even a hug.

**The Future is of Gaming is Happening Now**

When games were first introduced, people wondered if games even had a future. Based on all of the research presented thus far, counselors would do well to consider that perhaps gaming is the future. This should not come as a surprise, given the rapid development of computer and video games, especially in the past decade. Games have now become more than just something to be played. Watching other people play has become an official sport. Video and computer games have turned into real time professional strategy competitions, known as eSports. Major League tournaments provide live broadcasts of the competitions while offering cash prizes to the winners. Total prize money can amount to millions of dollars a year (Goldfarb, 2012). Because eSports are a very recent phenomenon, going from about 10 tournaments in
2000, to about 260 in 2010 (Popper, 2013), research is still limited concerning potential effects on mental health. Research by Lee and Schoenstedt (2012) confirmed that competitiveness and peer pressure had a positive influence on eSports game playing, and skill building, for playing the actual sport itself; however the amount of time spent on eSports had a negative impact on players.

People will likely get drawn into games even more in the years to come. A year from now, many of the games and much of the research listed in this thesis will be outdated. By 2022, graphics will have improved to such an extent that it will be impossible to tell what has been filmed in real life and what has been created by a computer, thus making graphics and reality indistinguishable (Priggs, & Bates, 2012). Kim Libreri, visual effects supervisor at Industrial Light & Magic, indicated that it will become difficult to tell the difference between something that is interactive, and rendered in real time, from something that was done for an animated TV show, or live action (Priggs, & Bates, 2012). In addition to graphics, as handheld devices become more universal, and projection technology becomes more accessible, interactivity will undoubtedly be able to jump off screens with astounding projected visualizations. Counselor, beware! The influences of technology are only going to increase.

Final Recommendations for Counselors

**Remain Current**

Become familiar with computer and video games, and stay current. Gaming is the fastest growing form of entertainment and continually changing. When you are at an electronics store, take a walk down the gaming isle. Try playing a display game. Familiarizing yourself with what is current will help build rapport with gaming clients.
Recognize a Gamers Neurotic Movement

Gaming is not a problem for everyone who plays. Games can promote healing and provide relaxation. Neurotic movement in gaming exists when gaming has disrupted a client’s ability to function or engage in relationships and life tasks in the real world. Depression, panic, and social anxiety (among other mental health disorders) present with similar symptoms. Inquire about computer gaming and internet use. If the counselor does not ask, the gaming client may not even think to mention it.

Abitinence vs. Balance

Abstinence will work for some clients but not all. If the client choses abstinence, then abstinence becomes their choice, which should be respected. Remember that gaming has been established as a growing part of modern culture. The client has invested a great deal of themselves into a game, and requiring abstinence may merely promote discouragement and failure. Success in treatment will be reflected in a return to balanced gaming; where gaming becomes merely a recreational outlook, rather than a deep rooted means of surviving life.

Summary of Treatment Phases and Protocols

For the excessive gamer, the virtual world has become a mask they must wear. A key part of Adlerian treatment is for the counselor and the client to determine together what is driving the client’s behavior. Remember that the gamer may be protective, avoidant, and is hiding their inferiority feelings within the game. Determining why the client is motivated to hide will reveal the clients fear priorities. This can be achieved in an encouraging environment where the client avoids experiencing humiliation and embarrassment.

Therapy begins by first recognizing the client’s symptoms and then determining the motives which are driving their symptoms. This process allows the client to identify his/her
unique inferiority feelings, and understand their own private logic, so that they can make common sense of it. Embracing inferiority feelings generates empathy and compassion for oneself and others. As the client identifies their mistaken beliefs, these beliefs are reframed into even more common sense. As a result, a safe path is created by which the client can walk, re-joining their real world life. Acknowledging their positive aspirations, the positive wants they desire from life, creates a new motivation for continuing on the new path. Living horizontally, on the useful side of life, a sense of belonging is generated, personal significance is understood, and the client begins to endorse their place in the real world.

1. Treatment Phase I
   a. Inquire about gaming on intake.
   b. Establish a positive therapeutic alliance.

2. Treatment Phase II
   a. Confirm surface symptoms (symptoms that are seen and heard, and often observed in external behavior).
   b. Confirm source motives (Source motives are the birthplace of the client’s neurosis at the unconscious level that reveals the core of the client’s internal maladaptive perception).

3. Treatment Phase III
   a. Affirm Positive Aspirations
   b. Confirm Mistaken Beliefs
   c. Reframe Mistaken Beliefs

4. Treatment Phase IV
   a. Generate Positive Wants
b. Client Closure

**Handouts**

The following handouts have been generated and can be found as follows:

Appendix A: Interview questions for the counselor.

Appendix B: Surface Symptoms guide for the counselor.

Appendix C: Source Motives guide for the counselor.

Appendix D: Parent handout

**Conclusion**

This paper has introduced mental health counselors to the culture of video and computer games by offering current statistics, providing historical data, and defining commonalities found in MMORPGs. Counselors who knew little about the culture of gaming gained a basic knowledge of the gaming culture while learning the responsibility of identifying gamers immediately on intake. Counselors were made aware of the gaming specific treatment modalities to treat the whole person, rather than merely alleviate mood symptoms, or reduce the amount of time spent gaming. In treating the whole person more gamer’s will be able to find belonging, significance, and purpose on the useful side of life, according to Adlerian Theory. Problematic gaming is rapidly increasing, and at the rapid pace game developers are making new games, it is imperative that all counselors begin to not only catch up, but keep in step with technology’s rapid pace. The greatest concern for the mental health counselor is not the games themselves; but to avoid respond to gaming clients with yesterday’s outdated logic.
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### Appendix A

**Virtual Neurosis:** Purposeful Intake Questions  
Lori K. Brown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Game – Identifies Preferences</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What game are you currently playing? Say more about it…</td>
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<tr>
<th>The Rewards - Identifies Intentions</th>
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<tr>
<td>What do you like best about the game? What makes it exciting?</td>
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<tr>
<th>Time Invested - Identifies Commitment</th>
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<tr>
<td>How often do you play? For how long?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you ever play late into the night instead of sleeping?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is the average amount of time you play before taking a break?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you ever feel guilty after playing for an extended period of time?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you ever rush through an obligation (homework, etc.) in order to return to the game?</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Avatar – Identifies Personal Values and Ideal Self</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What can you tell me about the character (toon, or avatar) you created?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How is your avatar like you? How is it different from you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your avatar have any special powers? What is your avatars social status?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What gender is your avatar?</td>
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<tr>
<th>Social Systems – Prioritizes Relationships</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you play online with other people? Is it easier to make friends in the game, rather than in person?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever met your virtual world in real life? Where, or how?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have any really close friends in the game(s)? Say more…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you ever share your thoughts, feelings or secret details about yourself with your online friends?</td>
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<tr>
<th>Real World Activities – Identifies Social Interest vs. Isolation</th>
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<tr>
<td>What sort of activities, or fun, do you enjoy outside of the game? How often? With whom?</td>
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<tr>
<th>Motivations – Identifies Sensitivities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you ever play to escape problems in your real life? Which problems?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever played because you were angry, or stressed (or another negative emotion)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What emotions do you feel when playing? (Happy, relaxed, powerful, etc.)</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Withdrawal – Identifies Drive</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is it ever hard to stop playing? Do you ever feel addicted to it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does anyone ever get upset with you for playing? Then do you stop, or keep playing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you get upset or angry if someone forces you to quit playing? How do you treat them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think about the game when you are not playing it?</td>
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<tr>
<th>Complications – Identifies Priorities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever neglected to attend an event, work or school in favor of playing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever adjusted your commitments outside of the game in order to play instead?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever lied about playing to avoid arguing with someone?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you ever get so into the game that you forget to eat, or even shower?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Virtual Neurosis: Surface Symptoms

Symptoms that are seen or heard, and often observed in external behavior.

**Lori K. Brown**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior Symptoms</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preoccupation</td>
<td>Thinking about the game even when not playing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal</td>
<td>Unable to stop playing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolerance</td>
<td>Playing longer and longer over time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salience</td>
<td>Reducing real world activities in favor of playing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complications at work or school</td>
<td>Finding it difficult to meet prior performance standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemical use</td>
<td>Using alone, in isolation, or to excess.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial difficulties</td>
<td>Ignoring bills, or overspending on gaming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship Symptoms</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolation</td>
<td>Neglecting friendships and family in order to play.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secrecy</td>
<td>Lying about playing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal aggression</td>
<td>Verbally lashing out when forced to stop playing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damaged relationships</td>
<td>Choosing virtual friend over real world friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Psychological Symptoms</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>Feeling sad or blue most of the time, for several weeks or more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding others</td>
<td>Feeling self-conscious around others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low self esteem</td>
<td>The belief of being inadequate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impulsivity</td>
<td>Behaving without considering the consequences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obsessiveness</td>
<td>Being consumed with a game.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>Anxiety, worry envy, and jealousy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-absorption</td>
<td>Preoccupied with self over others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical Symptoms</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somatic pain</td>
<td>Experiencing headaches, chest tightness, or muscle pain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpal tunnel</td>
<td>Numbness and tingling in the hands and/or wrists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleep Difficulties</td>
<td>Trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or avoiding sleep.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutritional deficits</td>
<td>The result of unhealthy eating habits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight fluctuations</td>
<td>Weight gain or loss.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignoring personal hygiene</td>
<td>Refusing to shower, change clothes, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eye problems</td>
<td>Dry or sore eyes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Virtual Neurosis: Source Motives**

Source motives are the birthplace of the client’s neurosis at the unconscious level that reveals the core of the client’s internal maladaptive perception.

**Lori K. Brown**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivated by Superiority</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>To be in a class above others, or ranked highly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mastery</td>
<td>To be successful, overcome a challenge, or outwit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>To be the best, or triumph.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
<td>To have control, dominate or get even.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success</td>
<td>To advance, accomplish, or complete.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>To win, defeat, conquer, or retaliate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivated by Distancing</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Escapism</td>
<td>To avoid problems or to find an alternate reality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>To seek respite, or relief.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>To break from responsibility, or avoid annoyances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>To attain a calm, safe existence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling alive</td>
<td>To be absorbed in the flow of the game.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventure</td>
<td>To explore unknown territory. To engage in an exciting activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thrill</td>
<td>To find pleasure in a new experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boredom</td>
<td>To avoid tedium, or a dull existence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>To feel amused by recreation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort</td>
<td>To relax and unwind, or to console oneself.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation by Virtual Community</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Admiration</td>
<td>To feel approved of, appreciated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive or negative reputation</td>
<td>To be noticed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>To be honored, or admired.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loneliness</td>
<td>To connect to someone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td>To feel needed. To belong to a team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popularity</td>
<td>To be liked.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship</td>
<td>To feel connected to others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Codependency</td>
<td>Feeling responsible to meet the perceived expectation of others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimacy</td>
<td>To share affection, closeness.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivated by Experimental Apperception</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ideal self</td>
<td>To mask insecurities by creating a fake social identity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ego</td>
<td>To try on various versions of self, or rebel against expectations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breaking the rules</td>
<td>To do something that is not allowed in real life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following the rules</td>
<td>To create structure, predictability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender swapping</td>
<td>To hide ones gender while disguised as the opposite.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>To experiment with sexual fascinations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D

A Parental Guide to Navigating the Vast Sea of Gaming:  
Encouraging a Positive Adolescent Gaming Experience  
Lori K. Brown  
Adapted with permission from Rachel Smith http://anchorformysoul.blogspot.com/

“I sat down my oldest at age 9 and told him that the internet is like an ocean - big, deep, and full of things that he couldn’t defend himself against. As his parents, we wanted to teach him to swim and because we loved him there was no way we would drop him off in the middle of the Atlantic without a boat, life vests, or knowing how to swim. So we would start in the shallows.”  
–Rachel Smith

Check the Temperature
Before allowing a child to dive into a game, check the rating. Most parents control what their child watches on television, and gaming should not be any different. Learn about a game before permitting children to play.

- What is the game rated? Boxed video games have ratings summaries. Games are rated by category, content, and interactive elements.
- Is the games content age appropriate?
- Is the game educational?
- What are each games rewards which can pull a child deeper into the game, or penalize them for exiting?

Teach Children to Swim
Teaching a child to swim usually requires the instructor to get in the water. Dive into the game.

- Play new games together.
- Discuss the positives and negatives of the game.
- Show children how to locate the “this is offensive” button located on most games.
- Have Fun.

Swim with a Buddy
Many games are a social activity which requires working collaboratively. Rather than always allowing a child to play a game as a solitary activity, encourage social skill building.

- Encourage children to play with another friend or family member which requires taking turns.
- Encourage group play which requires waiting patiently and supporting the efforts of another.

Become a Life Guard
A lifeguard ensures safety by noticing that no harm comes to participants. Life guards provide warnings, and occasionally deny access.

- See your children. Observe them as they play.
- Pay attention to potential hazards by observing player to player online chatting allowed within many games.
• Set time limits. Don’t be afraid to set a timer.
• Customize each child’s access by setting age appropriate login preferences.
• If a child needs to be pulled from a game, intervene calmly, without becoming overdramatic.
  o Calmly explain to the child why the child is being pulled from the game.
  o Redirect the child to a new activity by offering alternative choices.

Example: “It is time to stop playing. I understand you are disappointed. Would you like to
turn the game off, or shall I? What would you like to do instead?”

Be a Safe Harbor

“When children run into tempests such as player conflicts, offensive content, offensive conduct, or other
distresses, they want a safe refuge.” –Rachel Smith

A safe harbor is a place that offers refuge and protection from peril. Children want to know you see them,
and that you are available for them. Let children know that you are available, and when they seek refuge:
• Respond gently. Allow the child to hear your loving protection, and presence.
• Connect to a child through close proximity, eye contact, or touch.