

# The *Washington Post*

## Video-game addiction a real problem, study finds

About 8.5 percent of youths affected, according to researcher

By Donna St. George  
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WASHINGTON — A new study concludes that children can become addicted to playing video games, with some youths skimping on homework, lying about how much they play and struggling, without success, when they try to cut back.

In what is described as the first nationally representative study in the U.S. on the subject, researcher Douglas Gentile of Iowa State University found that 8.5 percent of American youths ages 8 to 18 who play video games show multiple signs of behavioral addiction. "For some kids, they play in such a way that it becomes out of balance. And they're damaging other areas of their lives; it isn't just one area, it's many areas," said Gentile.

To get at gaming addiction, he adapted diagnostic criteria for pathological gambling into a series of questions about video game use. The questions became part of a 2007 Harris Poll survey of 1,178 children and teens. Gamers were deemed "pathological" if they reported at least six of the 11 symptoms.

—Symptoms included spending increasing amounts of time and money on video games to feel the same level of excitement; irritability or restlessness when play is scaled back; skipping chores or homework to play; and lying about the length of playing time.

Gentile said he started his research with doubts about the possibility of addiction.

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"I thought this was parental histrionics—that kids are playing a lot and parents don't understand the motivation, so they label it an addiction," he said. "It turns out that I was wrong." What he found, he said, was that pathological gamers did worse in school, had trouble paying attention in class and reported feeling "addicted." Four times as many boys as girls were considered pathological gamers.

The study found that 88 percent of the nation's children ages 8 to 18 play video games. With 45 million children of that age in the country, the study would suggest that more than 3 million are addicted "or at least have problems of the magnitude" that call for help, Gentile said.

Gentile's research findings leave many questions unresolved; for example, whether pathological game-playing causes poor school performance or whether "children who have trouble at school seek to play games to experience feelings of mastery."



# Chicago Tribune

## More people escaping to world less ordinary

*Virtual alter egos called avatars are growing in popularity—and creativity*

March 11, 2008

BY RICK MONTGOMERY

MCCLATCHY-TRIBUNE NEWSPAPERS

Avatar, in Hindu philosophy, refers to the embodiment of a higher being in earthly form, usually as a human or animal. On the Internet, the meaning gets reversed as humans assume otherworldly forms. Worldwide, at least 9 million 3-D avatars exist in the Second Life site, a virtual world where users can customize an avatar in order to socialize and connect with others using voice and text chat as well as explore alternative life paths. In this virtual world, avatars buy islands, race cars, raise pets, attend church, and meet friends. The fantasy role-playing game World of Warcraft boasts more than 10 million subscribers.

Avatar Bryan Mnemonic can fly. His suit never wrinkles, and his chiseled body never bruises—not even if he crashes into trees.

His human counterpart, Bryan Carter, wishes he could afford Mnemonic's diamond cufflinks. But a mouse click makes it possible for Carter—Mnemonic's maker—to indulge a little in the virtual world.

Pixel by pixel, Carter created an online alter ego, an avatar mostly in his own image. True, Mnemonic's goatee lacks the gray hairs in Carter's. The waist is tighter, the biceps beefier. Understand that where avatars dwell—and there are millions of them—vanity alterations are expected.

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into trees.*

Some avatars dance. Some educate or perform concerts, perhaps in the form of an ogre or a large squirrel. Some annihilate armies of other avatars. They are whatever you wish to be in a cyber-land that doesn't exist, yet does.

"An avatar is your embodiment in virtual worlds and virtual game spaces," Matthew Falk, an Indiana University researcher, said of what he and others call "synthetic worlds."

Between people and their avatars, gender reversal is nothing. Ethnicity, too, is a matter of choice. Children with physical disabilities can heave boulders.

Students at the University of Kansas School of Medicine learn how to prepare someone for surgery by logging onto the Second Life site and transporting to the hospital's "island," where an avatar patient awaits on a gurney.