

## Video Games Causing Divorce



They must learn to be in control of their behavior. The rewards are out there, waiting for them...

### Experts Say Gaming Can Become as Addictive as Alcohol and Cause Divorce

She's a gamer widow. That means he gets more pleasure playing with his joystick than cuddling with her. As for any real conversation, well, she can just forget about it. He'd much rather engage in a Barrens Chat with his fellow [World of Warcraft](#) gamers then to ask her about her day in the real world.

No wonder she's about to call it quits.

But if he thought a killing blow was the worse that could happen to him, wait until he gets to divorce court. No amount of fire resistance can offset the trauma of a failed marriage. Here's the sad part: he won't be alone.

According to the research firm Park Associates, an estimated 34 percent of America's adult Internet users play video games online. MMOGs and MMORPGs — or massively multiplayer online games, some with roleplaying components, like WOW, [Everquest](#) and [Second Life](#) — are now just as pervasive in our society. And they're just as debilitating to marriages, as gambling, sex, Internet porn and other behavioral addictions.

The journal entries appearing on blogs for and by "gamer widows," like the aptly named [GamerWidow.com](#), speak volumes as to how gamers' spouses feel about this phenomenon.

So, how does gaming become an obsession? "We have a society where things aren't going to well," explains psychiatrist Michael Brody, M.D., who has written extensively on video game compulsions. "We're mired in an unpopular war, and a depressed economy. Many gamers, who are in their twenties and thirties, feel politically disenfranchised. Gaming is an escape, a way to decompress."

Beyond that, says Brody, online gaming allows its members to be active participants. "This generation wants to participate, which is why gaming — along with social networking venues like [Facebook](#) and [MySpace](#), and handheld wireless devices such as [Blackberries](#) — is so popular, as opposed to movies or TV, which are passive activities."

Another advantage, says Brody: gaming allows you to take on a different, more impressive personality. "Most gamers don't look like celebrities, but like so many people, they want to be celebrities. With gaming you can try on a new identity — or multiple identities, and the other players don't know this. It's anonymous."

In many ways, addiction is built into game play. Says Brody: "Videogame companies spend millions of dollars to produce these games — and they are purposely designed to be compulsive. Repetition creates habits, and these games challenge motor skills and cognitive skills, by rewarding players with harder and harder levels. You can't stop; you are motivated this way to go on to the next kill."

Another reason that, by its nature, explains Brody, gaming does not lend itself to intimacy. "When someone is caught up in a compulsion, he or she leaves other things out, even their relationships. When a compulsion goes on, week in and week out, it's because the gamer would rather be caught up on that, than address any of their life's problems — including the issues in their marriage."

No wonder so many marriages are feeling the strain. That said, Brody does not feel that video game play, in and of itself, can be the death of a marriage. "People use many things to keep away from addressing their true marital issues. Any compulsive gaming is just acting as a distraction. There would have to be underlying problems in the marriage."

Maressa Hecht Orzack, Ph.D., a Harvard researcher and the Director of Computer Addiction Study Center at McLean Hospital in Massachusetts, agrees with Brody and counsels strongly for a true assessment of what may be going on in the gamer's life that has him — or her — living in a virtual Utopia. "The first step is always a clinical evaluation, to determine if and why the gamer may be depressed, or feels left out. The answer could be [Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome](#), or perhaps memories of a bad situation. And if so, we have a clue as to why the gamer loses him or herself in video games."

Such an assessment could bring one, or several prognoses, explains Orzack, including anxiety, attention deficit disorder or obsessive-compulsive

behaviors. Talk therapy is an important component to the evaluation, too, says Orzack. "I'd ask, 'What is going on in your life?' and 'Are you anxious, or sad?' The answers range from 'I don't have enough money to do the things I want to do' to 'I don't feel in control.'"

According to Orzack, the question that brings them to life is this one: What do you expect to find when you turn on the computer? "By playing these games, they get a sense of belonging, explains Orzack. "They are 'present' in the situation, in this virtual world. When they are part of a virtual world 'guild,' they feel as if they belong to something. They go on a 'quest' — or mission — and participate in 'raids,' which are scheduled for certain times of the day. The more you stay on, the more points you get. It's a ratioed response. They up the bar. The games are constructed to keep players tantalized. The husband misses out on real life events, because his schedule revolves around the gaming."

And when his virtual world is more important than his real one, divorce is all but inevitable. "You're not happy with your own life if you're looking to put on a different personality," says psychologist Shannon Myers, of San Rafael, California. "Creating a different reality is a short-term fix to the unhappiness in your life. Gaming is not always something you want to — or can do — with your partner. If he or she is doing this in lieu of talking, then you're not working through your issues together."

The first step, explains Myers, is to tell him how you feel it is affecting your view of the relationship. "He gets really engrossed with his gaming. Time passes, he's not aware that his spouse is waiting for him, that it's affecting her feelings of intimacy. He needs to hear all that from her. The earlier these concerns are identified, the sooner they can begin to head down a different path."

If he agrees that gaming is getting in the way, then together the couple should work out a schedule as to when it's appropriate. Says Myers: "Brainstorm things you can do together, that you both enjoy. He doesn't have to stop playing entirely. He just has to put it into perspective with the rest of his life."

Of course, there has to be a readiness on the part of the gamer to change, explains Orzack. "They must learn to be in control of their own behavior. The rewards are out there, waiting for them: their job, their family. It is within their ability to change, if they want to do so."

## **10 SIGNS THAT MARRIAGE TO A GAMER IS TROUBLED**

1. He would rather play video games than attend to his relationship with you, his health, and his job.
2. He'd rather play than sleep — let alone have sex, or even a conversation with you.
3. He refuses to discuss his moods and feelings.
4. He refuses to admit he has a problem.
5. He refuses to limit his playing time.
6. He forgets his commitments to things that take him away from the game.
7. He consistently breaks promises he's made to spend more time with you and the life you share — and less in his Second Life.
8. He lashes out at you for "not understanding," no matter how you approach the topic of his gaming compulsion.
9. He won't consider joint counseling to discuss his issues, and others affecting your marriage.
10. He won't consider therapy to control his gaming compulsion.