
LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Does “forced abstinence” from gaming lead to pornography use? Insight from the April 2018 crash of *Fortnite*’s servers

In April 2018, the servers of the popular video game “*Fortnite*” crashed for 24 hr. During this period, Pornhub (a popular pornographic website) analyzed trends in pornography access, finding that: (a) the percentage of gamers accessing Pornhub increased by 10% and (b) the searches of pornographic videos using the key term “*Fortnite*” increased by 60%. In this letter, we discuss these observations in the context of ongoing debate regarding the validity of “withdrawal” when applied to problematic involvement in video gaming and the potential use of pornography as a “compensation behavior” during the periods of “forced abstinence” from gaming.

Keywords: gaming, *Fortnite*, withdrawal, compensation behaviors, pornography

Gaming and pornography viewing are prevalent behaviors, yet little is known regarding their overlap. On April 11, 2018, the servers of the video game *Fortnite: Battle Royale* crashed for 24 hr, providing potential insight into “forced abstinence” behaviors. Pornhub, an online platform for pornography, subsequently released statistics about online gamers’ pornography consumption during this period (Pornhub, 2018).

Pornhub reported that when servers were down, the percentage of gamers (identified using affinity data provided by Google analytics) accessing Pornhub increased by 10% and the term “*Fortnite*” was used by 60% of people more frequently in pornographic searches. These patterns of pornography consumption were limited to the “forced abstinence” period and returned to baseline when *Fortnite*’s servers were fixed.

Caution is necessary when interpreting these statistics. Nonetheless, they provide potentially valuable ecological data about how gamers may deal with periods of “forced abstinence.” These observations may be relevant to ongoing debates regarding the validity of “withdrawal” or “craving” constructs when applied to problematic involvement in video gaming (Starcevic, 2016). Specifically, *Fortnite* gamers’ pornography consumption patterns resonate with recent research (Kaptsis, King, Delfabbro, & Gradisar, 2016; King, Kaptsis, Delfabbro, & Gradisar, 2016), suggesting that some gamers deal with distressing symptoms (such as those provoked by a “forced abstinence” period) by employing a “compensation” strategy, i.e., seeking other activities related to their favorite game. Activities such as researching information about video games in forums or watching gaming videos on *YouTube* have been described as compensation behaviors. In the current context, the statistics published by Pornhub suggest other compensatory behaviors: consumption of *Fortnite*-related pornographic materials. Indeed, when searching Pornhub with the term *Fortnite*, one may find parodies where actors perform sexual scenes dressed as *Fortnite* characters, couples engaging in sexual intercourse while playing *Fortnite*, or *Fortnite*-related hentai (anime) videos. Given the recent inclusion of

both gaming disorder and compulsive sexual behavior disorder in the World Health Organization’s (2018) ICD-11, further research is required to understand interactions between gaming and pornography consumption at problematic and non-problematic levels. Furthermore, the extent to which “forced abstinence” may promote switching of potentially problematic behaviors, and the mechanisms by which this may occur, warrant further investigation.

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