

## COMPUTER DEPENDENCE AS A PHENOMENON OF WAY OF LIFE REPLACING THE LIFE ITSELF

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### Abstract

*In this article the author describes the problem of computer dependence and particularly of the Internet and computer games dependence. Problems, reasons and character of this dependence are determined. Computer games are divided according to influence extent on personality. Besides influence of the Internet on the personality development is examined. The mechanism of "entering" the game and identification with computer character is described in details.*

Dependence... What is it and when does it occur as pathology? All people depend on something, essentially or from time to time: on other people's opinion and their own fears, stereotypes, on conception of what and in what way must be in life, on information or game.

Dependence as a phenomenon is strict obedience of personality. A person begins to live for satisfaction of needs and satisfaction of needs becomes the life itself.

The main activity of people with Internet or game dependence is work on computer. Their circle of social contacts is very narrow, the rest of their activities are directed only to surviving, to satisfaction of physiological needs.

Certainly, that this characteristic is completely suitable only for people whose keenness on computer is close to pathology.

Most of them are people with certain psychological problems: unregulated personal life, dissatisfaction of themselves and hence losing of sense of life and normal human values. The only value for them is a computer and everything connected with it.

Plenty of information and great amount of created standards of prosperity make many people aim at them, but it is impossible to reach everything immediately. Thus, consequently, sense of dissatisfaction or even sense of personal inferiority can appear. Psychological problems become more acute, because variance to ideal becomes more and more notable.

Of course the Internet makes work with information much easier. In case of using the Internet with certain aim the person can hardly plunge into virtual reality, as the only his motive is getting of information. If staying in the Internet turns from aim into motive, informational networks allow the person to plunge into virtual reality – integral, active and autonomous habitat – for rather long time. The Internet as sphere lightens the solution of certain circle of personal problems and frustrated needs, satisfaction of which is impossible in life because of some reasons.

#### **Among such problems there are:**

- peculiarities of people's self-appraisal – understated as a rule;
- tendency to "going away" into virtual reality of the Internet;
- unrealistic and undifferentiated concept of themselves, their own value and their own place in life;
- insufficient involvement in communication with other people;
- problems with acceptance of their physical "self". That is negative attitude to physical component of "self" image that makes the main contribution to the problem of self-appraisal. Displeasure of appearance is mostly typical for juvenile age, as well as involvement in the Internet networks and computer games which is the most in this age;
- emotional sphere of such people is characterized by instability and depressive reactions;
- most of them suffer from sense of loneliness, spacing and feel impossibility to achieve the understanding from other people [1].

Computer games and the Internet are the ways of reaching what people want very easily, without any difficulties, limitations or changing of themselves or their way of life. Plunging into new reality where everything is good the person can get into dependence on such imaginary prosperity.

The Internet-addictions are mostly understood as the following dependences:

- dependence on computer, i.e. obsessive passion to work on computer (games, programming);
- "informational overload", i.e. compulsive navigation, search for information, aspiration for getting more and more new data. The leading sense is a sense of involvement into general system; the dominating process is a process of searching for the information but not the information itself.
- compulsive using of the Internet, i.e. pathological attachment to the gambling games, on-line auctions or e-shopping mediated by means of the Internet. Mostly this aspiration is caused by wish of suppressing "the inner emptiness", the person aspires to buy or win something to feel relief, but as a rule he feels even worse: the cause is not eliminated, and fight with consequences sucks in.

- dependence on "cyber-relations", i.e. on social using of the Internet: on communication in chats, group games and teleconferences, that can lead in result to replacing of family and friends existing in real life by virtual ones. The relations given above are the most dangerous, because the person just refuses of real world and it is almost impossible to prove him something as there are virtual characters supporting him. Such dependence is mostly typical for shy, anxious, lonely and naturally reserved people. Such relations for them are psychologically safe. They are not seen by anyone, they can be who they want to be, they can easier meet and communicate, breaking up of such relations is less painful, because there is no leaving of certain person but his pseudonym (nickname), social evaluation is impossible. Such relations retain psychological borders: a person is a part of the whole network and at the same time he is in himself. However, prolonged communication of such kind makes the person lose his skills to create normal social connections.
- dependence on "cybersex", i.e. on pornographic sites in the Internet, on discussing of sexual topics in chats or special teleconferences "for adults". Besides described above is often a defence from real frustrating relations or compensation of lack of any relations in real life.

The Internet, especially computer games, gives the opportunity to reach everything by means of characters. They create an illusion of possibility of reconstructing of people's life, creating their own world, where they will be the owners both of life and the characters with which they identify themselves and, though it seems strange, will not depend on anybody. During the game the identification with the character happens very quickly and the person emotionally lives character's life as well as the character lives the person's life, taking much time and forces. [1]

If the person does not feel satisfaction of his life and does not see any sense of his life, it is very difficult for him to be "here and now", so there is probability of his going away into virtual world where he will be who he wants to be.

Different strategic games are good illustration: the person in such games can decide everything beginning with where there will be a city and finishing with number of population and social processes in the country – such behavior can be called God's role.

During more aggressive games an emotional relaxation also can happen. Aggression which cannot be reacted because of some reasons is restrained by the person in society and is expressed by general aggression of the game and the characters.

Weak personalities who do not have any purpose and who feel some pressure of society often cannot manage all problems and they find it easier to go away into other, easier reality in the form of the game. Complexity of the dependence is in returning to the reality which is out of control, difficult and does not correspond the wishes and expectations. This returning is very hard and sometimes even impossible because of fear of threatening reality which cannot be controlled or restarted as non-passed level.

Any game, to a greater or lesser extent, influences on psyche. According to influence force they are divided into role and non-role.

Role computer games are such kind of games during which a playing person assumes the role of computer character, i.e. the game itself makes the person act in the role of certain or imagined computer hero. Role computer games influence on the person's psyche itself – this happens during the process of person's "entering" the game, a kind of integration the person with computer and in clinical cases – a process of losing the person's individuality and his identification with computer character. Psychological dependence of such games has the most powerful influence extent on personality of the playing person because it creates the new reality. The person mentally and psychophysiologically (palpitation and reflex movements are synchronous with the character), lives all events with his character and unknowingly identifies himself with it.

The criteria of belonging of computer game to the class of role games.

- role game disposes the playing person to "entering" the role of computer character, creating the atmosphere and the plot;
- the game is made in such way that the leading motive is a process of game itself but not a hazard of winning or going to the next level. Though any computer game has a hazard element, in the role game this factor does not have the main importance. This makes the game infinite, because there is no final itself (uncompleted gestalt). [3]

According to the Shmelev's classification there are the following games and their influence on psyche:

## I. Role computer games

Their main peculiarity is the most influence on psyche of the playing person, the deepest "entering" the game, and also the motivation of playing activity based on needs of accepting the role and going away from the reality. There are three subdivisions according to their character of influence on the playing person and the extent of psychological dependence. [3]

**1. Games with view of the first person of "own" computer character.** They have the most force of "skinning" or "entering" the game. View of hero's "eyes" provokes the playing person to complete identification with computer character, to complete entering the role. In a few minutes of the game (time can be varied

depending on individual psychological characteristics and playing person's experience) the person begins to lose the connection with real life, entirely concentrating his attention on the game, transferring himself to the virtual world. The playing person can really seriously perceive the virtual world and consider his hero's actions as his own ones. The person starts feeling the motivational entering the game plot. The person enters the game so strong that during critical seconds of his hero's life he can become pale and begin to fidget on the chair, trying to escape the blows or shots of computer "enemies".

**2. Games with view from the outside on "own" computer hero.** This type is characterized by less force of entering the game comparing with previous one. The playing person watches "himself" from the outside, controlling this hero's actions. Identification with computer character is not so strong, that is why motivational entering and emotional manifestations are also less expressed comparing with games of view "from eyes" type.

**3. Directing games.** In these games the playing person has the right to manage the activities of subordinating computer characters. In this case the playing person can play the role of the leader of many different specifications: the commander of spetsnaz group, the commander-in-chief of the armies, head of the country, even "God", who manages the historical process. At the same time the person does not see on the display his computer hero, he thinks out his role himself. This is the only class of role games, where there is no certain role; it is imagined by the playing person. Hence only people with great imagination will have the essential deepness of "entering" the game and their role. However, motivational entering the game process and mechanism of forming the psychological dependence on the game are not less strong than in the case of other role games. Playing person's accentuating on games of such type can be used at diagnostics, as it can be understood as compensation of needs of dominating and power.

## II. Non-role computer games

Non-role computer games influence on the psyche much less, though some identification of the playing person with the game hero can happen. However, firstly, the game does not dispose the playing person to complete "entering" the role; secondly, playing motivation in this case as in all non-role games is based on the hazard – the main motivational factor is accumulation of more points, getting additional "lives", bonuses, going to the next level of the game – in other words, the playing person is more orientated to the result of the game than its process. [3]

In this type of games the playing person does not assume the role of computer character; hence the psychological mechanisms of forming the dependence and influence of the games on the person's personality have some specification and in general are less strong. Motivation of the game activity is based on the hazard of "passing" and (or) accumulating the points. Games of such type do not cause such strong influence on the psyche and dependence on them as a rule has a short-term character.

So role computer games let the person the greater possibility of "entering" the virtuality, get rid of reality (at least during the game) and enter the virtual world. Hence role games cause an essential influence on person's personality, solving the problems of "saving the mankind" in virtual world the person gets the problems in real life. Mechanism of forming the game dependence is based on partially unconscious intentions, needs – going away from the reality and entering the virtual world. These mechanisms work independently on the person's conscious and character of playing activity motivation. That is mean that independently on what manages the person in the beginning of the game the following mechanisms of forming the dependence begin to act.

**Going away the reality.** The base of this mechanism is person's need in "getting rid of" everyday businesses and problems and relaxing. Going away from the reality is not the displacement of some separated facts out of life, but going away from objective reality in general, "entering" the other reality – virtual. The person psychologically tends to get rid of different problems and troubles, connecting with everyday life. Role game, the Internet is a simple and available way of modeling of other world which is different from the reality. This is the simple way of having a live in other life where there are no problems and so on. Hence it can cause the danger of not temporary but constant renunciation of reality, forming of very strong psychological dependence on computer.

**Accepting of the role.** The base of it is need in the game itself which is peculiar to the person and also tendency to accepting the role of computer character which lets the person satisfy his needs that can be satisfied in real life because of some reasons. The mechanism of forming the dependence is based on need of accepting he role.

After the person has visited the world of the Internet or world of virtual games once or several times, he realizes that his computer hero and virtual world itself let him satisfy his needs that are not satisfied in real life [2]. This computer hero is respected; his opinion is considered and so on. Then the more time the person spends in virtual world the more contrast he feels between "real himself" and "virtual himself". This attracts the person to virtual reality in more extent and, thus, more and more renounces him from real life. Virtual reality turns into means of compensation the problems of life; the person begins to realize himself in playing but not real world. This causes serious changes in personality structure; often it makes destruction of personality, because it is

impossible to transfer the character's power and success into real life. Both mechanisms are based on the process of compensation of negative life experiences. The same mechanisms are applied at dependence on the Internet: the person accepts the role, enters the certain reality, creates his own world (name, page and so on) and starts to interact with other people who are the same.

People with schizoid features of character are mostly subjected to computer dependences. This is determined by their mentality: as a rule, they are introverts, living in their world and badly contacting with people. It is difficult for them to perceive people because they are too plunged in their feelings, which are, as a rule, concerning past or future and very seldom to "here and now". It is easier for schizoid people to work alone according to their plan and in harmony with their inner world. However, human is a social creature, who needs information and communication. Thus, the Internet, games and any indirect communication with the world suit for them much better. Naturally that games, the Internet and virtual life in general are a projection of the person's inner world and the way of communication with outer world. Schizoid, as a rule, does not leave the world, but lives in such world.

People with schizoid features who do not have the Internet dependence are usually fond of creative work, philosophy and some activity which lets them reveal their inner world. When people inclined to renunciation come to social conditions which are not acceptable for them (e.g., aversion of society), then the computer can be a defence from traumatic situation, but after some time the defence can turn into threat.

Everyday society forms dependences and reflexes – fashion, standards of beauty, way of life, even way of thinking. All this structure is similar to the bed of Procrustes: people who suit these standards become dependent on social opinion, and people who could not adapt to them feel themselves out of edge of normal life.

The Internet dependence as well as other dependences is often a consequence of attempts to prove the person's belonging to a society. For example, chat is fashionable, convenient and it widens circle of communication. There is much information, everybody says whatever he wants, and at the same time people cannot see each other, so people become franker, they show their dark sides because they know they are not seen by anybody. This is a complete freedom in the borders of the cage: the person in the Internet represents himself as he really is, but simultaneously he feels renunciation and complete defence, because everyone is not seen and they do not evaluate certain person. The only existing thing is a name.

The person who cannot realize himself in the real world, considers himself or is considered a loser, can easily find friends in the Internet, who will accept him and communicate with him. They are often as lonely and shy people as he himself, who can seldom bring themselves to meet personally, even after prolonged communication on computer. This is their shield both from the outer world and themselves.

Qualitative changes of personality in conditions of modern informational time are natural; however, force of such influence on personality is not natural at all.

The Internet creates "social virtual reality", which spreads according to M. Cole (1997) to "the fifth dimension" and is divided into relatively closed subspaces. [4] Any person can choose his own reality from the range of similar ones. Choosing one of the realities, the person begins to follow blindly social rules, make actively social contacts, and also become too sensitive to any events inside this space. Different innovations, advertisements, auctions, shopping are adopted reflectively, after the virtual crowd. Such model of behavior leads to complete loneliness in real world, if only loneliness was the reason of such behavior.

The process of beneficial influence of virtual world is the following: the person "goes away" to virtuality for some time to relief the stress, look aside the problem and so on. In pathological cases an inverse process happens: the person "goes away" the virtuality for some time and enters the real world not to forget how he looks like and to satisfy his natural needs. The rest part of the needs pyramid is moved to virtual reality and is satisfied in it. [3] The real world begins to seem strange and full of dangers because in real world the person cannot do everything he is allowed to in virtual one. Constant going away from the reality leads to strengthening of this intention, to appearing of steady needs of runaway of the reality.

It can be said that the problem of dependence is a consequence of dissatisfaction of real life. When moving the standards and rules the dependence on virtual reality can be changed on the interest to real valuable life.

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