



YMCA
 Youth Gambling
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 Program (YGAP)

YMCA
 Programme de
 sensibilisation aux
 jeux de hasard chez
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Summer 2015

Newsletter

New in Research
 & Gambling

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For our directory of site locations across Ontario: 1-877-5515 or ymcagta.org/gambling

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Brain Development & Addiction

Reported by: Katie Spears

The human brain reaches adult size just before puberty (around age 12). In several regions of the brain, grey matter (neurons or brain cells) increases until the onset of puberty and then decreases as neurons are eliminated through a “use it or lose it” process. This process contributes to the increasing efficiency of brain functioning during adolescence and to adolescents’ increasing ability to process complex information and learn new concepts. At the same time, white matter (myelin and axons) increases, speeding up the rate of signals moving between brain cells, also contributing to the brain’s increasing efficiency.

The area of greatest change after puberty is the prefrontal cortex. This area is associated with “executive” functions such as monitoring, organizing, planning, decision making, anticipating consequences, impulse control, and delay of gratification. The maturation of the prefrontal cortex is a slow process that takes place throughout adolescence and early adulthood. This maturation process depends to a large degree on experience—the executive functions are acquired and develop through practice. The resources and variety of experiences available to adolescents and young adults, as well as the ways in which they decide to spend their time, contribute to variability across individuals in terms of their brain development.

Often, children and teenagers don’t understand or acknowledge the consequences of their decisions. This can be very frustrating for

parents, but there’s a reason why this happens:

Our brains are not fully developed until we are in our early twenties.

That’s why teenagers may make irrational decisions that don’t seem to be logical to adults. Adolescents are more likely to take risks because the part of their brain that drives emotion and impulse develops before the part of the brain that processes complex information. As the brain becomes more able to consider all the details of a situation, then logic can help us make better choices.

When kids, teenagers and even college-age students begin gambling, emotions will drive their decision to gamble more, to be competitive, and to seek the “big win.” They’ll be more likely to take a gambling risk if they think they will benefit. Unfortunately, this also means young gamblers may risk relationships with friends and experience problems at school and at home

Sources:

- http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/youthopportunities/steppingstones/youth_policy_development.aspx

- <http://knowtheodds.org/blog/problem-gambling-kids-adolescent-brain-development/>

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Competitive High School Sports and Gambling

By: Ryan Starkweather

Have you ever played a game of poker and felt your heart racing? Have you ever stood at home plate with the game on the line and felt the same feeling? Well researchers have now found a correlation between those two types of activities in high school age youth. A new Tel Aviv University study published in *The American Journal of Addictions* indicates that high-schoolers involved in competitive sports are at an elevated risk of gambling.

According to the research, led by Dr. Belle Gavriel-Fried of TAU's Bob Shapell School of Social Work and conducted by TAU student Idit Sherpsky, in collaboration with Dr. Israel Bronstein of Bar-Ilan University, the participation of male high-school students in competitive sports is associated with problem gambling and gambling frequency, and female students who participate in competitive sports are at a higher risk of gambling frequency.

For the study, the researchers asked 316 high-schoolers, aged 14-19, from four high schools in Israel to fill out questionnaires to establish their involvement in sports and their gambling habits. "Intensive exercise" was assessed on a frequency rating scale. "Competitiveness" was rated by the number of competitive sports engaged in over the previous year, including varsity or junior varsity sports and other extracurricular programs.

They found a significant difference between youth involved in intense cardiovascular activity (for the sake of exercise alone) and those participating in competitive sports. The latter were more often engaged in regulated lotteries and scratch cards, gambling on other sporting events, poker, and other card games.



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Competitive High School Sports and Gambling (Continued...)

"Studies conducted on college-age athletes in relation to gambling might be misleading, because the university environment itself has been found to promote risk behavior," said Dr. Gavriel-Fried. "Here we made a distinction between youths involved in competitive sport and those involved in intensive exercise. The objective of competitive sports is to win as a team, whereas the objective of intensive exercise is to maintain your health and fitness".

There was a clear divide between the two groups. We hope that this study will redirect high schools to integrate gambling prevention programs for youths involved in competitive sports — in order to avoid sticking 'healthy heads in sick beds,' so to speak."

According to the researchers, due to their competitiveness, athletes as young as 14 should pay closer attention to the risks involved in "harmless" gambling practices, such as card games.

"For competitive athletes, there is an intrinsic impulse embedded within — to win, at all costs. This underpins gambling behavior as well," said Dr. Gavriel-Fried, who is currently researching high-risk behavior and addictions.

Source:

<https://www.aftau.org/news-page-psychology--psychiatry?=&storyid4706=2195&ncs4706=3>

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Resilience- the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties; toughness.

By: Stephanie Rayton

Why are some children able to overcome stressful situations and others not? Experts are looking at the links between video game play and resilience.

Resilience comes in four forms, mental, physical, emotional, and social. Studies have shown that gaming can build these through positive behaviors such as exercise, meditative techniques, and encourage social interactions. This can all lead to increased resilience to stress. The addition of gaming to a lifestyle has been proven to improve mental and physical health when used appropriately.

By developing a sense of mastery, the capacity to bounce back with second chance opportunities, the ability to connect, relate and enjoy positive feedback from others. These all add to our resilience. Looking at these aspects we can see how they relate to gaming.

For children who struggle in social situations a sense of mastery can be attained through video games. Improvement is visible; they can master the game through their own ingenuity, practicing, and learning from failure. Mastery can also help a youth identify their own interests by the style and content of the game. This can assist the youth to consider career choices and academic focus areas.

In many video games the player is given multiple lives, or chances. This allows the player to learn from previous mistakes and take a second opportunity at the same situation. This skill when ap-

plied to life adds to our resiliency. We can get up and try again. Being able to push through failures and not give up is a core component of resilience.

Social connection is something that we may be losing in society. However could it be that the face of social interaction has just changed? Feeling as though we belong to something or are a part of a team builds self-esteem and a sense of well-being. There are many social platforms in the gaming community including multi-player online forums and chats.



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To ensure gaming is happening in a safe and healthy way always be aware of the rating of the game, do not install video game consoles in the bedroom, set time limits, monitor all internet activity, and talk to youth about the games they play and the content. When a child seems to be struggling in a social situation such as school, ask about their gaming interests. Talk to them about their favorite game, how they got to the level they are on, how they connect with other players, their creative approach to the game, and their problem solving skills to get them forward in the game. By identifying these skills we can continue to prepare them for the stress and difficulties they may face in their lives.

Sources:

Dr. Randy Kulman- <http://learningworksforkids.com/2013/04/can-video-games-help-kids-to-cope-with-stress/>
Jane McGonigal- Reality Is Broken

Mark Katz, Ph.D- On Playing a Poor Hand Well
<http://www.jennsblahblahblog.com/10-tips-encourage-healthy-gaming-habits-kids/>

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Youth, Facebook and Poker: Making Sense of Taking Chances

By: Michelle Parks

In May, Youth Outreach Workers from the Youth Gambling Awareness Program took part in our annual training and professional development in Ottawa, Ontario. Among our many distinguished speakers was Jennifer Reynolds, a longtime friend and colleague of the Youth Gambling Awareness Program. Jennifer presented her latest research paper; Youth, Facebook and Poker: Making Sense of Taking Chances,” and left us with a lot to think about.

With the popularity of online gaming growing the question remains, is online or social gaming gambling? Social gambling is a 1.7 billion dollar industry and is defined (by Jennifer) as “Convergence between online (real-money) gambling and social (virtual-currency) gaming - predominantly found on social networking

sites or played on mobile apps.” The cause for concern is there is a low barrier to entry (age 13) which creates an early exposure to gambling and it is unregulated at this point in time.

Can playing poker on Social Networking Sites (SNSs) be deemed gambling? “Once one recognizes that a piece of silver in [the world of the game] can have value, just like the US dollar, one must realize that a silver piece is not merely like money – it is money” Source: Castonova (2005. p.47)



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Jennifer presented to the group her case study, “Adaptive Virtual Ethnographic Case Study ~ Zynga Poker.” Zynga Poker Launched in 2007 and is the 2nd largest App developer on *Facebook*. It was named top grossing App of 2012 (according to App Store Chart) and is currently ranked 15th (according to Daily Active Users (DUA) – as of March 29th, 2014) and is the top ranked social gambling game. Zynga Poker’s primary revenue source is sale of virtual currency.

Jennifer’s study proved to be very interesting to the Youth Outreach Workers of The Youth Gambling Awareness Program and focused on the following:

- What motivates youths to play poker on Facebook?
- How do the motivations to play poker on Facebook promote, or not, migration of youths’ play onto real-money internet poker sites?
- In what ways do Zinga Poker’s design elements promote, maintain, or decrease players’ engagement with the game?

Jennifer concluded in her findings that:

- Youth indicated that their motivation to play was based on escapism, social connection and skill development.
- Youth felt that it was a lower stakes form of gambling and didn’t consider poker on SNSs as gambling if one did not purchase chips with real money or if you played as a skilled player.
- That Zinga Poker actively incorporates design elements to make the game more “sticky”/ “engaging”.

Jennifer theorized that Social gambling is ubiquitous and serves to both shape and divert public consciousness in ways that:

- Weaken public understanding of gambling and gambling-related harms (e.g. is this gambling?);
- Blur boundaries (e.g. Las Vegas – Real World Rewards) between gambling and social gaming
- Increase social acceptability and contribute to the discourse that social gambling is a harmless form of entertainment with few negative consequences

Source:

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Safe Gambling Word Scramble

1. RudeoaHncm tir

2. a eTnshui oVlfg

3. ThooeyIncg

4. abnmgilG

5. haeCnc

Answers: 1. Harm Reduction; 2. Things of Value; 3. Technology; 4. Gambling; 5. Chance

A Reflection on Calvin & Hobbes - “Lucky Rocketship Underpants”

By Carly Smith

One of my favourite comic strips growing up was Calvin and Hobbes. I enjoyed the playfulness, the wit and of course the dynamics between Calvin and Hobbes. For me, the most notable strip is the one titled *Lucky Rocketship Underpants*. In this strip Calvin wears his lucky underpants to school in an effort to make his day go well, however his day did not go well at all. Calvin’s reliance on luck proves disastrous and his day is marked by a series of unpleasant experiences which include him being caught cheating.

Confronted with the fact that his reliance on his lucky underpants failed him and luck was not there when he needed it, he relays to his friend Hobbes: “You know Hobbes, some days even my Lucky Rocketship underpants don’t help” to which Hobbes replies “Well, you have done all you can do.”

Huh!?

Wait a minute...

Did Calvin do all that he can do?

Should he have relied on luck for his day to day decisions?

Could Calvin have chosen not to cheat on the test?

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If we are to imagine Hobbes as Calvin's subconscious anthropomorphized, we may get a glimpse of cognitive dissonance. Rather than changing his belief in his lucky underpants, or changing his behavior at school, Calvin, through Hobbes as his consciousness, concedes that "he has done all that he can do," bringing his perceptions in line with the results of his day and rationalizing by making himself feel better that he had made his best efforts.



Dissonance results when an individual must choose between attitudes and behaviors that are contradictory. In this way Calvin's belief in his rocketship underpants were at odds with his lived experience. It is posited that dissonance can be eliminated by reducing the importance of the conflicting beliefs; acquiring new beliefs; or removing the conflicting attitude or behavior. In other words, an individual can change their beliefs, change their actions or change their perceptions to relieve the tension created by dissonance.

The YMCA Youth Gambling Awareness Program offers developmentally appropriate, curriculum linked workshops that recognize and apply concepts of cognitive dissonance in order to support youth in making healthy and informed decisions related to gambling. Our activities challenge youth to consider their beliefs and actions with regard to what constitutes gambling; conceptions of luck; what it means to be the 'winner;' odds and randomness; independent events versus dependent events; and things of value. As youth outreach workers we facilitate learning through a gambling neutral lens, exploring both the negative and positive aspects of gambling through a harm reduction approach. We support youth in making healthy choices.

Sources:

<http://www.instructionaldesign.org/theories/cognitive-dissonance.html>

<http://www.simplypsychology.org/cognitive%20dissonance%20theory.pdf>

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Word Search

Q	Z	R	V	Y	G	F	A	R	E	S	E	A	R	C	H	K	M
L	X	B	N	C	T	L	S	K	G	N	I	T	T	E	B	S	O
A	D	B	A	M	M	S	F	Q	R	O	L	E	E	M	B	K	D
P	F	E	I	J	T	A	Y	N	I	A	R	B	I	B	P	I	N
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U	O	Z	B	S	R	U	Z	L	G	N	Y	C	C	H	G	O	O
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Social Gaming
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