

Continuing Risk of the Gaming-Gambling Convergence



“A Supercharged Behavioral Loop”



27th Annual Statewide Conference

March 19 – 20, 2026
Waukesha, Wisconsin

James W. Schreier, Ph.D., SPHR

3

Continuing Risk of the Gaming-Gambling Convergence



- Explore the psychological and behavioral traits of gamers.
- Assess risk trends using strategic foresight techniques like the Implications Wheel.
- Reframe the issue through the lens of paradigm shifts.

4

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Through hands-on exercises and collaborative analysis, attendees will learn to:

- Identify emerging risks.
- Apply prevention strategies.
- Tailor interventions that reflect the evolving digital landscape.

5

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Online sports gambling in 2025 is smarter, faster, and more immersive than ever before. Whether it's AI-crafted odds, blockchain-verified bets, or VR-enhanced experiences, the industry is **leveraging every technological edge** to boost user engagement and safety.

*Expect a continued **convergence of gambling, gaming,** and entertainment—creating a future where betting is no longer a side activity but a fully integrated digital experience.*

6

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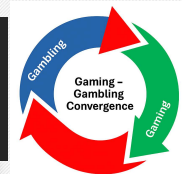


That's a powerful question—and one that highlights a growing and under-recognized risk. The convergence of online sports gambling and addictive elements from non-gambling online gaming (e.g., strategy, role-playing, competitive progression) could have several significant implications, especially considering that both domains already pose their own risks for compulsive behavior.

Combining gambling's monetary thrill with the dopamine-driven mechanics of video games (rewards, achievements, avatars, etc.) creates a supercharged behavioral loop that escalates the risk of addiction—especially among younger users.

7

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New Forms of Behavioral Addiction

The convergence may create a **new hybrid addiction**, blending symptoms of both gambling disorder and internet gaming disorder, posing a challenge for diagnosis and treatment.

The convergence of online gaming and sports gambling isn't just a digital fad—it's a **new behavioral ecosystem** that mixes competition, dopamine, money, and identity. Just like how sugary snacks became the fast food of mental stimulation, these platforms are becoming the **"junk food" of our attention and financial systems.**

8

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Exercise #1

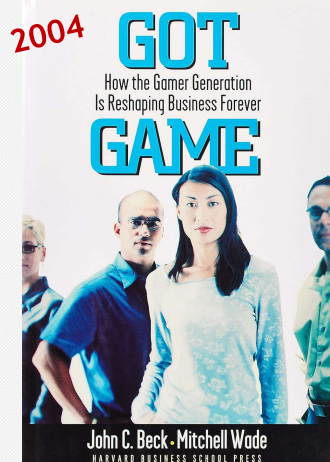


Leadership Assessment - 10 Factor Profile



9

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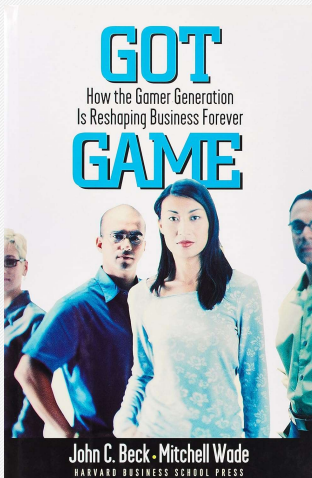


Key Characteristics of the Gamer Generation

- **Tolerance for Failure**
 - Gamers expect to fail repeatedly before succeeding.
 - Failure is feedback, not defeat.
- **Strategic Thinking**
 - Games require both short-term tactics and long-term planning.
- **Immediate Feedback Loop**
 - Gamers are used to real-time feedback and adapt quickly.

10

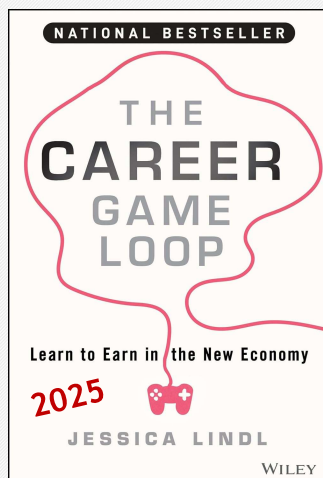
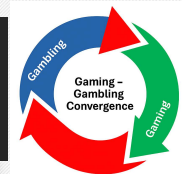
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- **Multitasking and Information Management**
 - Many grew up managing complex HUDs, multiple objectives, and real-time data.
- **Competitiveness and Achievement**
 - Motivated by progress, rankings, and skill improvement.
- **Comfort with Complexity and Ambiguity**
 - Gamers thrive in chaotic, dynamic environments.
- **Collaborative Orientation**
 - Especially in MMOs and team-based games, collaboration is critical.

11

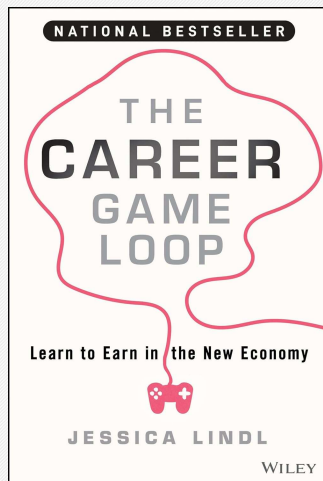
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- **Learn**
 - Acquire new skills or knowledge.
 - Can involve formal education, online courses, mentorship, or self-study.
- **Practice**
 - Apply what you've learned in a real or simulated environment.
 - Practice builds fluency and confidence.
- **Build**
 - Create tangible outputs to show your skill.
 - "Proof of skill" is essential in a career loop.
- **Share**
 - Promote what you've built and connect with others.

12

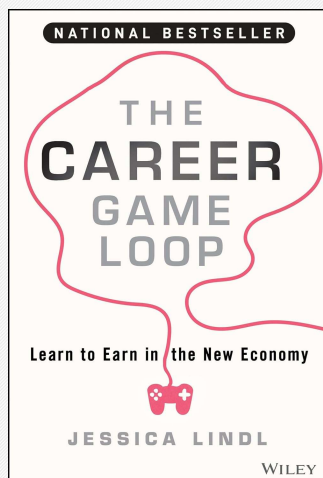
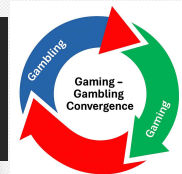
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- **Persistent and Resilient** - Willing to grind, retry, and improve
- **Self-Directed Learners** - Constantly acquire new skills and systems
- **Action-Oriented** - Prefer doing over theorizing
- **Creative Builders** - Enjoy making, modding, and customizing
- **Digitally Fluent** - Naturally navigate digital tools and interfaces

13

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- **Explorers and Problem-Solvers** - Like discovering hidden solutions or paths
- **Rule-Testers** - See rules as guidelines, not absolutes
- **Fast Decision-Makers** - Comfortable making quick, informed choices
- **Enjoy Sharing** - Engage in streaming, forums, and peer learning

14

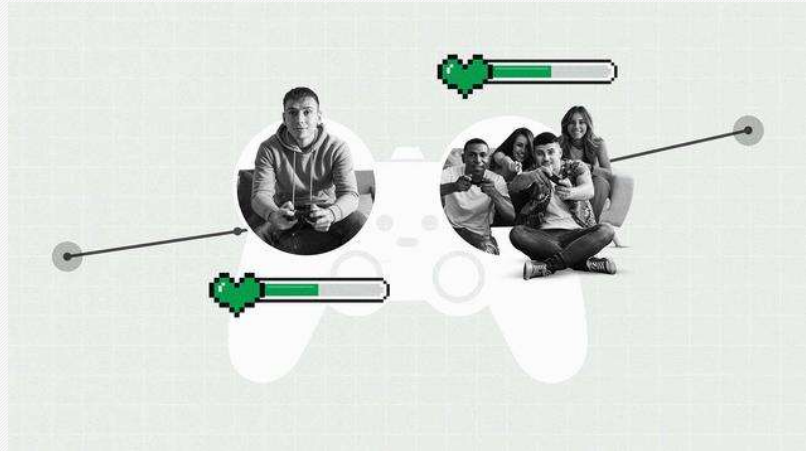
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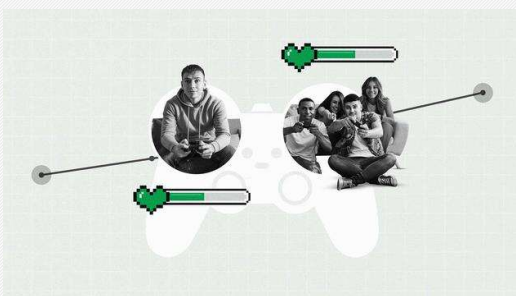
Video Games and Wellbeing:

Playing Together Matters



15

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- 48% of U.S. adults play video games.
- The more frequently adults play video games, the less likely they will be thriving in life.
- **The social setting matters.**
- ***Playing with friends and family has highest wellbeing.***

16

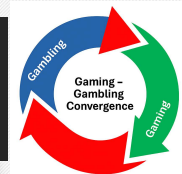
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Why 90s Kids Think Differently Than Gen Z

17

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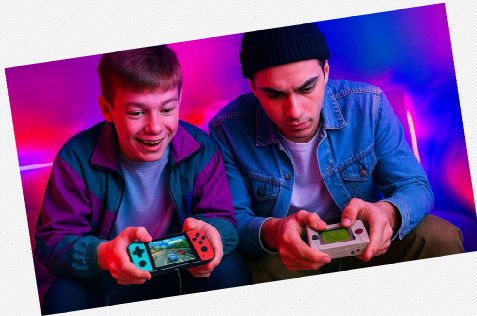


- 90s: Fail-Retry Gen Z: No real failure
- 90s: Memory-Recognizing Patterns
Gen Z: Guided Navigation
- 90s: Finish Gen Z: No final level

***“My son never knows when to stop.
The game ends him – he doesn’t
end the game.”***

18

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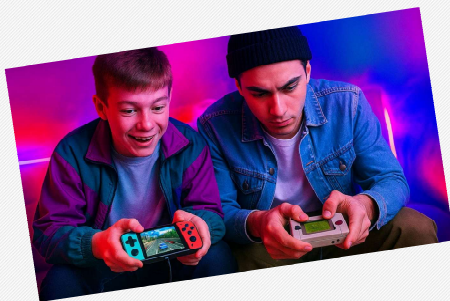


*This isn't nostalgia.
It's neuroscience.*

90's Games Demanded	Gen Z Games Demand
Resilience	Efficiency
Patience	Connectivity
Navigation	Stimulation
Problem-Solving	Guided Systems
Tolerance for Frustration	Low Tolerance - Frustration

Social Gaming
From Sofa Co-Op to Solitary Headsets

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Cognitive Shift	Gambling Risk
Constant rewards	Higher engagement loops
Fast recovery from loss	Loss-chasing
Guided systems	Over-trust in platforms
Multitasking attention	Impulsive betting
Digital normalization	Blurred line: play vs. wagering

Today's youth may be more neurologically and psychologically primed for it.

BENEFITS OF PLAYING GAMES

Cognitive Growth & Mental Agility

- ✓ Improves Problem-Solving
- ✓ Boosts Memory & Focus
- ✓ Enhances Strategic Thinking
- ✓ Encourages Creativity



Social Connection & Teamwork

- ✓ Builds Communication
- ✓ Teaches Cooperation
- ✓ Fosters Empathy
- ✓ Strengthens Relationships



Stress Relief & Relaxation

- ✓ Reduces Stress
- ✓ Boosts Positive Mood
- ✓ Sense of Achievement
- ✓ Fun & Escapism



21

DANGERS OF PLAYING GAMES

Overuse & Time Displacement

- Reduced Sleep
- Neglects Responsibilities
- Less Physical Activity
- Difficulty Setting Boundaries



Risk of Addiction & Compulsive Behavior

- Dopamine-Reward Loops
- In-Game Purchases
- Gambling Mechanics
- Hard to Stop Despite Harmful Effects



Social & Emotional Impact

- Social Withdrawal
- Irritability & Mood Swings
- Toxic Online Behavior
- Less Face-to-Face Interaction



22

BENEFITS OF GAMBLING



Entertainment & Excitement

- ✓ Provides Thrill & Anticipation
- ✓ Adds Excitement to Events
- ✓ Social Fun at Casinos
- ✓ Offers Recreational Activity



Economic Contribution

- ✓ Generates Tax Revenue
- ✓ Creates Jobs & Tourism
- ✓ Funds Public Programs



Strategic & Cognitive Engagement

- ✓ Involves Skill & Strategy
- ✓ Supports Data Analysis
- ✓ Requires Risk Assessment
- ✓ Encourages Critical Thinking

23

RISKS OF GAMBLING



Addiction & Loss of Control

- ✓ Hard to Stop Once Started
- ✓ Increasing Bet Amounts
- ✓ Chasing Losses Despite Harm



Financial Harm

- ✓ Loss of Savings & Assets
- ✓ Accumulating Debt
- ✓ Borrowing & Bankruptcy



Social & Emotional Impact

- ✓ Strained Relationships
- ✓ Increased Stress & Anxiety
- ✓ Irritability & Mood Swings
- ✓ Workplace Performance Decline



24

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Exercise #2

Distraction, Debt, and Declining Performance



25

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Exercise #2


Distraction, Debt, and Declining Performance

The Twist



26


Characteristics of Gamers



Exercise #2 **Recovery Challenge or Recovery Motivator**

Select 3-4

Distraction, Debt, and Declining Performance



- A characteristic that might make recovery “challenging.”
- A characteristic that might be used as a “motivator.”
- Your reasons...

“No Right Answers” *“Possibilities - Discussion”*

27

Continuing Risk of the Gaming-Gambling Convergence






“A Supercharged Behavioral Loop”


Implications and a “Paradigm” Perspective

28


National Council on Problem Gambling's 20th Annual Conference


St. Paul, Minnesota - June 2006






“Internet Gambling is the ‘Elephant in the Room!’”







Joel A. Barker

“Futurist, Author, Film Maker”

“The Implications of Internet Gambling”


29

PARADIGM PERSPECTIVE on Gaming-Gambling Convergence

— Manipulation of Digital Behavior —

Merging Gaming & Gambling Mechanics


Blurring the lines between gaming and gambling



Addiction, Financial & Privacy Risks

Creating compulsive habits and privacy concerns





PARADIGM PERSPECTIVE
Gaming-Gambling Convergence

— Manipulation of Digital Behavior —

User Experience Optimized to Maximize Spending

Total Immersion that Turns Players into Lucrative Gamblers

Persuasive Design & Behavioral Psychology

Exploiting psychological triggers and reward systems



Hyper-Personalized Betting Algorithms

Leveraging player data to tailor irresistible offers



30

Paradigms and Paradigm Shifts



If you don't understand the subtleties of paradigm shifts, you can't explore or prepare for the future.

When a paradigm shifts, *"Everyone Goes Back to Zero."*

"Your past success guarantees nothing in your future."

31

Paradigms and Paradigm Shifts



Paradigm Shift: From "Game as Leisure" to "Game as Financial Ecosystem"

Old Paradigm:

- Games are primarily seen as a form of entertainment or leisure with clear boundaries from financial systems.

Emerging Paradigm:

- Games now serve as **financial microcosms**, players trade, bet, speculate, and invest using in-game currencies, NFTs, or real money.

32

Paradigms and Paradigm Shifts



Paradigm Shift: From Passive Consumption to Gamified Risk Engagement

Old Paradigm:

Viewers of sports or media content are passive consumers. Gambling is a separate, opt-in activity with clear distinctions.

Emerging Paradigm:

Gamification and real-time betting blur lines between **spectatorship and participation**. Users are now active, risk-engaged participants.

33

Paradigms and Paradigm Shifts



Paradigm Shift: From Regulated Adult Activity to Normalized Youth Exposure

Old Paradigm:

Gambling is an **adult-regulated activity**, separated from spaces frequented by youth.

Emerging Paradigm:

The gamification of gambling and gambling-like features in games (e.g., loot boxes, skins trading, NFTs) normalize betting behavior **within youth-friendly ecosystems**.

Platforms use **entertainment and socialization as Trojan horses** for exposure to risk-based behavior.

34

Paradigms and Paradigm Shifts



Paradigm Shift: From Skill vs. Chance to Skill-Chance Hybrids

Old Paradigm:

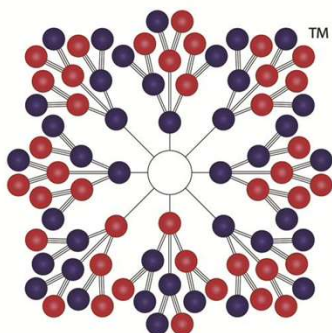
Games involve skill; gambling involves chance. Clear line between cognitive effort and luck.

Emerging Paradigm:

The rise of fantasy sports, esports betting, and competitive games with monetary stakes introduces **hybrid experiences**, skill informs outcomes, but chance dictates rewards.

35

Joel Barker's

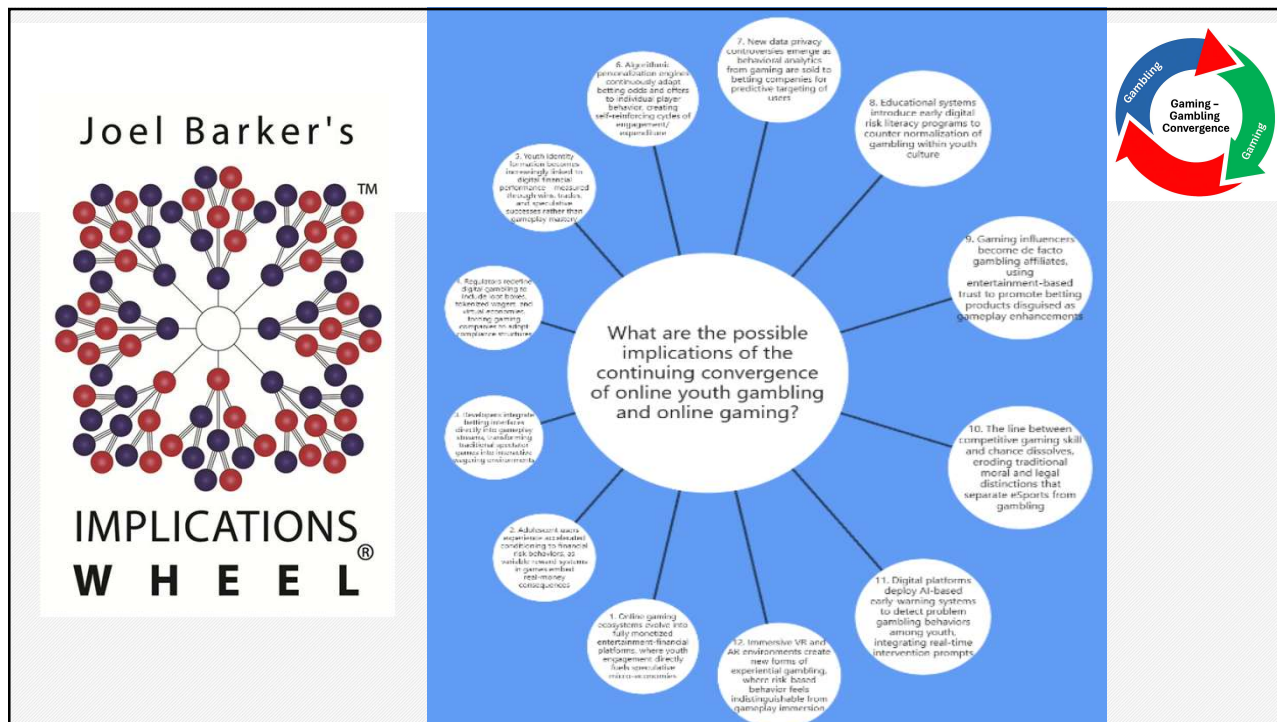


IMPLICATIONS[®]
W H E E L

What are the possible implications of the continuing convergence of online youth gambling and online gaming?



36




37

First-Order Implications

Exercise # 3

Strategic Exploration is a decision-enhancing tool for leadership. In your role as a leader, which of these first-orders would you “prioritize” for further exploration?

Select 3-4, choosing at least one positive and one negative from your personal perspective.



Exercise: Here are **first-order implications** of the continuing convergence of online youth gambling and online gaming, drawn directly from the dynamics and paradigms described in the background document.

- One possibility is** that online gaming ecosystems evolve into fully monetized entertainment-financial platforms, where youth engagement directly fuels speculative micro-economies.
- One possibility is** that adolescent users experience accelerated conditioning to financial risk behaviors, as variable reward systems in games embed real-money consequences.
- One possibility is** that developers integrate betting interfaces directly into gameplay streams, transforming traditional spectator games into interactive wagering environments.
- One possibility is** that regulators redefine digital gambling to include loot boxes, tokenized wagers, and virtual economies, forcing gaming companies to adopt compliance structures similar to financial institutions.
- One possibility is** that youth identity formation becomes increasingly linked to digital financial performance—measured through wins, trades, and speculative successes rather than gameplay mastery.
- One possibility is** that algorithmic personalization engines continuously adapt betting odds and offers to individual player behavior, creating self-reinforcing cycles of engagement and expenditure.
- One possibility is** that new data privacy controversies emerge as behavioral analytics derived from gaming sessions are sold to betting companies for predictive targeting of young users.
- One possibility is** that educational systems introduce early digital risk literacy programs to counter normalization of gambling within youth culture.
- One possibility is** that gaming influencers become de facto gambling affiliates, using entertainment-based trust to promote betting products disguised as gameplay enhancements.
- One possibility is** that the line between competitive gaming skill and chance dissolves, eroding traditional moral and legal distinctions that separate eSports from gambling.
- One possibility is** that digital platforms deploy AI-based early-warning systems to detect problem gambling behaviors among youth, integrating real-time intervention prompts or spending limits.
- One possibility is** that immersive VR and AR environments create new forms of experiential gambling, where risk-based behavior feels indistinguishable from gameplay immersion.

38

First-Order Implications



- **One possibility is** that youth identity formation becomes increasingly linked to digital financial performance—measured through wins, trades, and speculative successes rather than gameplay mastery.
- **One possibility is** that algorithmic personalization engines continuously adapt betting odds and offers to individual player behavior, creating self-reinforcing cycles of engagement and expenditure.
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39

Implication Scoring



Exercise # 4

Scoring POV's

Other than the “obvious three,” youth, parents, gambling sites, **what are some other possible scoring “points-of-view” for this exploration?**




The implications in an exploration of possibilities are scored – from a *specified point of view* – for **“Desirability”** and **“Likelihood.”** Scoring indicates:

- Areas of Agreement
- Points of Conflict
- Opportunities to Build Bridges
- Opportunities to Construct Barriers

40


Implication Scoring



Type of Implication	Avg. Youth Score	Avg. Parent Score	Avg. Gap	Interpretation
Risk/Monetization Trends (#1–3, #6–7, #9–10, #12)	-1.4	-4.7	+3.3	Youth see these as more normal or even exciting; parents see major harm.
Protective/Regulatory Trends (#4, #8, #11)	+1.0	+3.7	-2.7	Parents value safeguards more; students view them as restrictive.
Identity & Psychology Trends (#5)	-2.0	-5.0	+3.0	Youth less alarmed by digital self-worth measures, though still negative.

41

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“A Supercharged Behavioral Loop”

Solutions and Prevention Strategies

42

Solutions and Prevention Strategies



1. For Individuals & Families
2. For Schools & Educators
3. For Mental Health & Addiction Professionals
4. For Industry Players (Gaming/Gambling Companies)
5. For Regulators & Policymakers

43

Solutions and Prevention Strategies



For Individuals & Families

- **Digital Literacy Education:** Teach people how games and gambling apps are designed to manipulate behavior (e.g., variable rewards, streaks, FOMO).
- **Time and Money Limits:** Encourage use of app-based tools that limit screen time and cap spending.
- **Family Conversations:** Normalize discussions about gambling risks the same way we talk about drugs, alcohol, and internet safety.
- **Watch for Red Flags:** Track changes in mood, sleep, spending, or academic/work performance that might signal problematic use.

44

Solutions and Prevention Strategies



Exercise # 5

In each category, select:

#1 Recommended (R)

#2 Most Challenging (C)

1. For Individuals & Families
2. For Schools & Educators
3. For Mental Health & Addiction Professionals
4. For Industry Players (Gaming/Gambling Companies)
5. For Regulators & Policymakers



“No Right Answers” *“Possibilities - Discussion”*

45

Continuing Risk of the Gaming-Gambling Convergence






What are the possible implications of the Continuing Risk of the Gaming-Gambling Convergence?

Joel Barker's
IMPLICATIONS WHEEL

The Implications Wheel® will give you a substantial advantage in finding, recognizing, and securing your future.

Joel Barker



Gaming – Gambling Convergence

“A Supercharged Behavioral Loop”

2026 Update

A Paradigm/Implications Perspective

James W. Schreier, Ph.D. SPHR



To ignore the power of paradigms to influence your judgement is to put yourself at significant risk.

Joel Barker

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46

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“A Supercharged Behavioral Loop”

Thank You

47

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48