

Addiction vs. Fascination

December 2018: I read this essay and added commentary for Editor's Break 123 of the EVC podcast.

The word “addiction” is sorely overused in our society. Any time someone spends an inordinate amount of time on something, those who are annoyed by it will call it an “addiction” and proceed to, in one way or another, shame the person. This seems foolish.

I believe that addiction is a real thing, that people can form physical or mental dependencies on particular substances or activities, the removal which can cause adverse effects. But it doesn't follow that every time someone is into something, they are addicted. Here's a better non-stigmatizing word to use: fascination.

I listen to a lot of podcasts, not because I am addicted to podcast listening, but because so many podcasts are fascinating to me, and I have time to listen. (I used to read a lot more than I do now, also.) My son plays a lot of video games, not because he is addicted to video gaming, but because so many video games are fascinating to him, and he has time to play them. My daughter makes a lot of YouTube videos, not because she is addicted to producing videos, but because producing videos fascinates her, and she has time to do it.

Before disrespecting people's fascinations by labeling them an addiction, determine whether they are just something that fascinates them more than whatever else they could be spending their time doing. I don't think that the problem of addiction should be considered unless this fascination is having the effect of causing the person to shirk legitimate responsibility, leading toward self-destruction.

There are so many fascinating things in this world. When a person has the time and resources to devote to them, that can be a very beautiful thing. Imagine if the world's greatest inventors, philosophers, scientists, entrepreneurs, and artists, in every field, were shamed as having an addiction to their craft. Sometimes we let our preferences about how other people should spend their time blind us to the wonder that they are engaged with.