

UNB research: fighting World of Warcraft addiction

by Josh O'Kane

To some, video games are a pastime. To others, video games run their lives. UNB student Cory MacLeod has lived both scenarios.

Now, he's working on a psychology honours project to curb video game addiction.

An undergraduate researcher with the Nicki Research Group in UNB's Psychology Department, MacLeod has helped with other studies of behavioural addiction. In his own study this winter term, MacLeod hopes to curb addiction to the endlessly popular 'World of Warcraft,' a 'Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game,' or MMORPG.

World of Warcraft has been no small part of MacLeod's life.

"I've been playing RPGs for a while," says MacLeod. "I started off playing 'Diablo,' then I played the original 'Warcrafts.' They were online too, but it was a different game. When World of Warcraft came out I couldn't wait to get it. It was a lot different of a playing experience."

Having seen the detriments of playing the game too frequently, MacLeod decided to study the possibilities of ending such drastic game play. The game, he says, requires an immense dedication and investment to play.

MacLeod thus designed a project based on two former studies done by the Nicki Research Group. The first used a technique called "stimulus-exposure response-prevention" to extinguish Video Lottery Terminal (VLT) addiction, by Brent Symes and Richard Nicki. This method repeatedly immerses a person in the environment where they would perform their addiction, without having them perform the addicting behaviour. The technique proved successful in extinguishing VLT addiction.

The other previous study was performed by Jordan Kinden of the Nicki

Research Group, who studied variables that affect World of Warcraft play for an undergraduate honours project.

With these two previous studies in hand, MacLeod designed his to extinguish World of Warcraft addiction.

"My study is based on the principles of learning," says MacLeod. "When a person engages in a behaviour, they become conditioned to environmental stimuli around them, and their physiological reactions. In the absence of the stimuli of playing, they can actually still experience these conditioned responses."

He likens the experience to the original conditioning experiment performed by Pavlov to make dogs salivate to the sound of a bell.

"Think about what happened when he took the food away and continually exposed the dog to the bell. The dog would salivate, but it would decline until it wouldn't happen at all. In terms of World of Warcraft, you can take away the game but present the stimuli, and make them pay attention to stimuli. After a while, the person would not feel the urges to play anymore."

MacLeod plans to find three UNB students for his experiment, to be able to effectively monitor progress and to examine the efficiency of the process on World of Warcraft addiction versus VLT gambling or smoking addiction. Stimulus-exposure response-prevention has been effectively used to cease addiction of those two actions in the past.

Dr. Richard Nicki is in charge of the research group, which is interested in why certain behaviours occur at an excessive rate. He says that gaming addiction is one that certain individuals have a hard time overcoming.

"We're interested in why certain behaviours occur at an excessive rate," explains Nicki. "Through personal experiences at counseling services, there are indeed some individuals who play that game and other games like it to an excessive degree... With respect to Cory's project, we were looking to see if we could reduce some of this excessive play in people who were afflicted with

a behavioural addiction."

Nicki hopes that the procedure and the application of the response prevention will not be too trying on participants.

"We're just hoping for a positive outcome and we hope that we can normalize this play of World of Warcraft, and other games like that. The outcome isn't necessarily that participants would never play the game, but maybe we can actually reach a level where the level of play is more controlled."

MacLeod says that in some cases, players of World of Warcraft and other MMORPGs let the game take over their lives.

"People flunk out of school. Some people leave their microphone on, scream and tell their children to shut up and go to bed while not leaving the game. I've heard of people peeing in a bottle while doing a 25 or 40 man raid rather than stopping the raid to go to the washroom."

"That's what made me think it's a bad thing to do... There are a lot of negative effects it can have on social relationships, your own health, everything in your life."

MacLeod still in fact considers himself to be addicted to World of Warcraft, but has learned to take it in stride, and only play when he has the time – and knows when to stop. The situation is different than it was in the summertime, though.

"In the summer, I worked an eight to five job, and I didn't have too much else going on since my girlfriend was home for the summer. I would play from when I got home from work until two or three in the morning... I don't like looking at the numbers."

The game allows players to see how many actual days of play they have logged with the characters they create. MacLeod's two main characters have 25-35 days logged on each – which to some players, is child's play.

"One guy has 280 days on his warrior. And the game's only been out 4-5 years now. That's a good chunk of his life."

50 Years of Aitken



Andrew Meade / The Brunswickian

Various residents and alumni of Aitken gathered Saturday afternoon for a career fair that was part of the house's 50th anniversary celebrations. After the house faced closure last year, the Men of Aitken had a lot to celebrate last week.

by Josh O'Kane

Almost a year ago, Aitken House was on en route to be converted into a Student Services building. Emotions were high as 100 people faced the fact that they were losing their home. As a house with strong spirit, Aitken fought back, and after several months of doing so, the house remained open.

This year marks two milestones for the house. Not only has it been okayed by UNB Res Life to stay open for more than just this year, Aitken is also celebrating its 50th year as a UNB residence.

Last week, men of Aitken of the past and present gathered for a weekend of sharing traditions and memories. Brian Beaudette, President of Aitken House for this 50th anniversary year, says it was an incredible time shared by all.

In fact, the Friday night event, where Aitken residents and alumni filled the Social Club, was "definitely my greatest night at UNB," says Beaudette.

"It was just ridiculous, the amount of people. Aitken guys back and forth, singing our chants, introducing people from the 1970s... There was one guy who was president at the 40th anniversary, he said it was the best night he's had in 10 years – the last time was when he was here, doing the 40th."

Beaudette estimates that there are at least 150 Aitken alumni in town for the weekend's events.

The week began with traditional house week activities for residents of Aitken, including a special history of Aitken event where residents got to learn about the house, the namesake, the traditions, and more. The alumni events kicked off Thursday with a house versus alumni hockey game, where the alumni narrowly edged the residents out 5-4 in overtime.

Friday began with registration and an open house where alumni could retrace their steps, followed by dinner and a UNB-STU hockey game. Afterwards, the group headed to the Social

Club to mix and mingle. Saturday had a career fair, where Aitken alumni's companies could show off what they had to offer and give residents and alumni chances to work with other alumni.

Beaudette says he's working with various alumni to establish a website where Men of Aitken can post job opportunities and résumés, so that they may continue to network and offer opportunities to other Men of Aitken.

An open mic night was also held Saturday night, where the alumni and residents were able to share their greatest memories of Aitken. Beaudette says that weekend meant a great deal to everyone involved.

"This will probably be the weekend they'll remember throughout their entire university career," says Beaudette of residents' experiences at the anniversary.

Aitken is no longer at risk for permanent closure, at least in the next few years. James Brown, Executive Director of Residential Life, Campus & Conference Services, says that the permanent closure of another residence is not in the immediate future.

"We're looking at a number of options, but we're not looking at an option that includes a permanent closure of Aitken," says Brown.

The Daily Gleaner incorrectly reported on January 23 that the decision to keep Aitken open had been recently made. However, in the first issue of this school year's volume of The Brunswickian, Brown was quoted as saying that Aitken would remain open beyond this academic year. The Gleaner article also stated that Aitken's fate was to be boarded up, when in fact its intent was to become rededicated.

Brown says that in the future, "there could be cuts with another building... but I don't have any particular prospects for that now. The one prospect that was present was the university's need for Student Services space. That opportunity has already been filled."

Jones House is currently being rededicated as the new Student Services Building. After a year of closure in 2006-07, it was announced the building would no longer function as

a residence.

If another residence building were to be considered for closure, Brown says that he would need to run through another extensive consultation process with the university.

"I have projections for enrollment for next year; we've already done a preliminary budget and in the preliminary budget there are no closures," says Brown.

"The university projections are that UNB enrollment would be down by about 200 full-time equivalent students from this year. That would drive a reduction by about 40 applicants to residence; that's not a large enough reduction to drive a building closure."

Brown is currently involved in preliminary discussions about how to restructure residence – without permanently closing a building – to compensate for the steadily declining enrolment at UNB and in residence.

In the meantime, Beaudette says that the celebrations last week have had a tremendous emotional impact since Aitken was saved from closure.

"It's everything we fought for," says Beaudette; "the emotions that ran last night were ridiculous."

"Now that we're open, we have a very, very positive outlook... I talked to President McLaughlin at an awards banquet, and he said he felt he made a good decision. I said, 'We'll still have good news for you for years to come, and we should start planning for the 100th anniversary.'"

He says the alumni have said they feel the years they spend away from the house go by in the blink of an eye, and that when they can come to events like this, it's more important than their everyday lives.

"It may sound hokey, it may sound stupid, but what this house does to people is unreal."

Beaudette, whose presidency ends soon, still wants to give back to the house when he's done.

"I'm applying for proctorship and I'm trying to advertise as much as possible that I want to live in Aitken. That would be the next role I'd be able to take in the house. It's my last year at the school, and I'd like to end it there."

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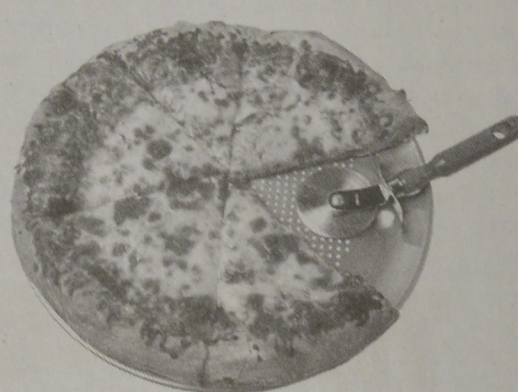
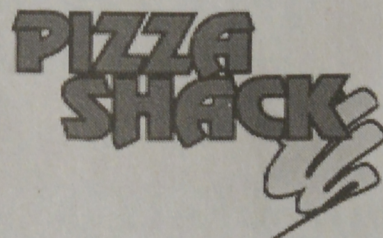
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