

BUSINESS

ARBOR OUTLOOK

Video games and economic participation



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“Found my way downstairs and drank a cup And looking up I noticed I was late” — from “A Day in the Life,” as performed by The Beatles

Repeated studies reveal that the longer someone is unemployed, either due to downsizing, because of a lack of skills, or by the individual’s failure to seek a job, the less likely they are to regain employment later on. With millions of able-bodied millennials and teens

worldwide eschewing gainful employment in favor of playing video games, should we be concerned?

Evidence suggests that we should. A recent study by the National Bureau of Economic Research states that American men in their 20s worked 12 percent fewer hours in 2015 than they did in the year 2000. And while certain traditional male-dominated industries like construction have suffered since 2000, there are jobs available. A certain portion of younger workers just won’t take them, and it’s primarily because of their commitment to gaming.

Not only are young American men working less hours than they did a generation ago, some 15 percent in this age group did not work at

all in 2015, according to the same NBER study. Perhaps not surprisingly, 35 percent of men in their 20s live at home or with a close relative, a double-digit increase over the last decade or so.

Young men obsessed with video games are putting aside nothing for retirement, building no Social Security benefits, and generally failing to engage with others. Nor are they contributing to GDP. In short, they’re barely participating in the economy.

The problem is epic in East Asia.

Millions of young Chinese people are so addicted to a popular game played on smartphones that, at the urging of the government, the game manufacturer had to impose time limits

on children playing its own product. This is tantamount to a car manufacturer selling you the latest model, but restricting your time behind the wheel lest your addiction to driving ruin your life.

Japan’s gaming addiction takes a different form. It’s estimated that 1 million Japanese youngsters, mostly young men, are hikikomori, a term that roughly means “withdrawn.” They virtually live in their rooms and will not leave. Video gaming is a huge portion of the hikikomori lifestyle.

Proponents of video games say that moderate play can in fact enhance cognition and foster online socialization experiences through team building. For some this may indeed be true. But it’s increasingly

apparent that’s not the case for most. A 25-year-old American man who won’t apply for a job because of his gaming schedule may regret that decision later in life. Working allows one to become economically independent. It also offers in-person socialization and behavioral experiences that can’t be absorbed in the basement of your parents’ house.

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