VIDEO GAMES AND WELL-BEING

KOWERT, R. (ed.): *Video Games and Well-being. Press Start*. Cham, Switzerland : Springer Nature Switzerland AG, 2020. 166 p. ISBN 978-3-030-32770-5.

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Playing video games has become part and parcel of our lives. An average person spends around six hours a week[1] playing online or offline on a phone, tablet, or TV. Furthermore, such consoles as PS4 and Xbox are on everybody's A-list. Even though video games seem to be ubiquitous, the word "video game", or "gamer", is traditionally conceived rather as a potential peril covering addiction, seclusion, depression, and violence. The book is focused on debunking this myth that has grown up around video games shedding light on their nature, which are "not "good" or "bad" – they follow the design and intentions of their producers as well as the use of the gamers" (p. 15). Hence being the tool, video gaming can redound (?) to our psychological well-being. This book fosters the largely unexplored psychological benefits of gaming and advances our understanding of the positive effects of video games on our mental health by helping to reduce stress, mitigate anxiety and escape from interpersonal problems. The chapters in this volume are written by leading researchers in the field of game studies and integrate insights from academia, psychology, the video gaming industry, online communication, and mental health practices. The editor of the book Rachel Kowert is a research psychologist who has been studying video game effects over the past ten years and concomitantly she is the Research Director of the US mental health organization "Take This" that provides information to the gaming industry. It all contributes to the feeling that the book is written based on hands-on experience.

The book consists of eleven chapters and a foreword. Rather than being a theoretical work on video games, the volume can be considered as guidance for both children and adults that shows how game play can boost psychological well-being by teaching skills associated with happiness and life satisfaction, namely self-realization, personal growth, solution-focused thinking, mindfulness, resilience, and positive interpersonal relationships. By the same token, multiple vivid examples and life situations are interspersed throughout the book. In the first chapter, the author substantiates the need for changing the presumption about negative outcomes of game play, espousing the inevitable link to three types of well-being: hedonic, eudemonic, and social. The second chapter, entitled 'Press Reset', immerses the reader into another perspective on gaming as a tool helping to overcome behavioural barriers. In an attempt to elaborate on the impact of in-game decisions on real-world actions, the research is substantiated by a number of experiment results. In the following section of the book 'Explore the Map' the author draws a parallel vis-à-vis the real world again: "in a game, the map can lead to cool armor and treasure" (p. 39) whilst in the real world "to a life where the person is more open to try new experiences" (p. 39). What is seemingly the most insignificant in game play is brought into focus here, which is another strong point of the book. Thus, for instance, your avatar, through which you interact and participate in virtual activities, turns out to be a marker of identity. Hereby, the author gives practical pieces of advice on how to develop new skills through the avatars we play. One of them is to play a character radically different from yourself (p. 61). Interested why? Grab the book and find out!

The next chapter examines how feedback provides the foundation for a growth mindset. Based on that, chapter six addresses a solution-finding approach in order to understand our strengths and improve our well-being, in particular our resilience, by using video games, which is logically connected to chapter five as there is no growth without challenge. The following section of the book, including chapters seven to ten, deals with specific facets of well-being. Chapter seven explores mindfulness as a method of improving well-being in close connection with flow, the state of mind one achieves when completely absorbed in game play. The research conducted shows that a great number of video games induce flow and the latter in its own way can lead to mindfulness. At the same time, games such as Playne improve mindfulness straight away, being initially developed to serve this goal. In addition to the above mentioned skills, authors also speculate how solving in-game puzzles, such as defeating a Lynel in Breath of the Wild or beating Super Mario Brothers 3, and overcoming cognitive dissonance within a hard game can transfer to even more difficult challenges in real life. For better understanding the author raises the question: What is the secret to persisting through seemingly insurmountable challenges?

The focus of the next two chapters is persistence as a key correlate with life-satisfaction and happiness that is with our well-being. Chapter nine examines how the narratives of the stories can facilitate persistence through the Hero's Journey. While role-paying this journey, through iterative processes of trying, failing, and trying again players can gain a new skill without any repercussions or adversity as exists in the real world. Chapter ten 'Extra Lives' delved deeper into the benefits of video games so long as they provide the opportunity to experience fictional trauma events. In this way, video games give the chance to explore our own vulnerabilities. Moreover, this chapter pinpoints factors of resilience in overcoming posttraumatic reactions. The last, eleventh, chapter contains concluding comments and summarizes the main points of the book. This may be perhaps the least exciting part of any book, but here, on the contrary, it deserves precise attention and gives you an overall view of the structure of the book. If there is any weakness in the book, it may be the impression that the book is just a set of separate articles, though it is the last chapter which sorts it out. Taken together, the book 'Video Games and Well-being' is a reaction to numerous admonitions that video games are making players aggressive, violent and anti-social. But, as the author himself states, instead of looking for flaws in "a remarkable feat of human innovation, we can show a healthy and constructive utility of gaming, the benefits of which are unique and plentiful" (p. 90). If you are a staunch and longtime devotee of video gaming, or an indefatigable educator who has taken up the gauntlet to prioritize kids' well-being, in this regard the book is worthwhile reading as it provides you with a solid understanding how video games can help us grow, learn, thrive, and acquire new skills. It is a must-read book for parents who are perturbed with their children being confirmed gamers. "Instead of descending into a moral panic about screens, digital content, and online interaction" (p. vi) take the book and learn how to implicitly turn a game into a tool to achieve your goals. Last but not least, the book should be considered a good choice for game developers who want to understand how to entice people into buying a brand-new game and at the same time to push up the value of it.

1　For more information, see: *The state of Online Gaming – 2018*. *Market Research.* [online]. [2020-03-22]. Available at: <https://www.limelight.com/resources/white-paper/state-of-online-gaming-2018/>.

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