

and school-aged children who have little or no experience with playing in the rain, digging in the sand, making mud pies, balancing on logs, dancing under the trees, and making their own hideouts. Implementing suggestions in this book could enhance both the joy of childhood and the emotional, social, physical, and cognitive development of children.

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### **Cheating: Gaining Advantage in Videogames**

*Mia Consalvo*

Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007.  
Endnotes, references, and index. 228 pp.  
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As many scholars have noted, play activities commonly exhibit both order and disorder. On the one hand, people at play routinely establish and abide by rules that detail how they must behave if they want to sustain the event. On the other hand, players are commonly encouraged to be rebellious, impertinent, and otherwise disorderly in their behavior. Ready to take either of the two different directions, people play with the implements and game pieces that are objects of their endeavor. Frequently, they play with one another. And sometimes they play with the rules.

Playing “with” rather than “by” the rules is the theme of Mia Consalvo’s book on cheating in video games. A professor of telecommunications, Consalvo explores what constitutes unfair or improper play in electronic entertainment. Who defines these matters: the producers of the games

or the players themselves? Do players have different understandings of cheating and different rationales for these understandings? How is cheating policed? Focusing on such questions, the author aspires to show how moral order in games is always a precarious affair and how participants must work to establish and maintain procedures that foster fair play.

The first section of the book offers a cultural history that traces the rise of video gaming from about 1980 to the present. Consalvo focuses her discussion on the development of what she and others call *paratext*, the range of ancillary information that explains to potential players not only how to set up and play the game but also what it means to be a good player, why skill in this format is valuable, and how those skills might be most quickly developed. Especially important in this regard have been industry magazines like *Nintendo Power* that articulate preferred visions of games and game players, including descriptions of the general logics of games, helpful maps, suggestions for strategy, ways to rate games as good or bad, information about forthcoming products, and so forth. The rise of independent strategy guides has dramatically expanded this process of consumer education. It is now a major industry producing nearly 250 new books a year and a wide range of magazines. Less clearly controlled by commercial interests but tremendously important as well has been the growth of online resources of many different types and of game devices manufactured by independent producers. With an eye on this growth, the author discusses various technological enhancers—genies, sharks, chips, and codes. A battle has emerged in gaming culture between the manu-

facturers of games, who wish to control the experience of players and sustain the revenue streams of their products, and external agents, who wish to subvert that control and profit in their own ways. In the middle of this tug-of-war are the players themselves who wish to develop “game capital,” that is, to acquire the skills, equipment, and knowledge that will make them become—and be recognized as—good players or even power gamers.

The second part of the book focuses on the experiences of players, including their definitions of cheating. Although Consalvo addresses solitary play (which raises interesting questions about *who* or *what*, exactly, gets cheated when a player uses aids and codes to move to higher levels more quickly), she emphasizes the “social” forms of cheating that occur when people participate in online, multiplayer games. She bases her conclusions on intensive interviews with twenty-four gamers, a survey of another fifty gamers, her own experiences as a committed player of one online game, and her more general knowledge gleaned from many years of game play. On this basis, she establishes three types of players: purists, who view cheating as the use of any external source (other than the help of a friend) that helps a player get through a game; moderates, who use walk-throughs and guides as acceptable aids; and hardcore players who believe that you cannot cheat a game (or its makers), only other players. Whatever the proclamations of players about these matters, most players give themselves permission to cheat at times, which include periods of boredom, assessments of unfair difficulty, time stuck at certain levels, or just stretches of “bad games.” At such moments, cheating becomes a way for busy people to move quickly to the better levels or even to

play God within the limited world of the game.

The remaining portions of the book delve into the blatant forms of cheating, how people defend themselves against accusations of cheating, and how game manufacturers and game communities try to develop procedures that keep transgressors from ruining other gamers’ play. In the largely anonymous world of online game play, many players troll the Internet looking for “bots,” “hacks,” “macros,” and other devices that rewrite the codes of games. Some players write these executable codes; others buy in-game resources with real money so that they have pronounced advantages over other players. Encounters with players who possess these questionably obtained forms of capital typically end the fun of a game for less-skilled (or simply rule-abiding) players. This kind of deviance constitutes a profound threat to the gaming industry. Not surprisingly, an elaborate system of game managers, security specialists, and antichecking software has sprung up to apprehend and expel the violators.

Not infrequently, the qualities that make a book strong are the very qualities about which it can be criticized. *Cheating* is a fascinating look at the meaning of moral order in a major portion of the play life of modern societies. Its author thoughtfully explores the various definitions and justifications of unfair advantage in the electronic world. Consalvo focuses well on the interplay between those who would control the behavior of players and those who would evade and manipulate the system for their own benefit. The reader of this book becomes aware how definitions of morality are always battles between differentially placed actors seeking different ends and how technological

developments inevitably change the terms of the controversies.

Play scholars with more general interests will probably wish that the author had made more explicit the connections between video play and other forms of play and between morality in this often nearly anonymous setting and in others. For the most part, the reader must make such connections—including connections to many other writings on video games. More importantly, perhaps, the author's descriptions of morality do not question the world of video games in general, a world where players commonly pursue individual quests against clearly recognized adversaries through a series of preestablished, increasingly difficult challenges. Her discussions of morality do not question the propriety of this antagonistic—and sometimes point-and-shoot—world but only the strategies that would allow one to be successful within it. There emerges a picture of a largely technocratic morality that does not investigate the broader goals or meanings of the activity. Such expansion of the meaning of morality might not be significant in itself; it becomes so to the extent that individuals cultivate their ideas of what is moral by playing online video games then applying those lessons to an e-trading, casino-capitalism model of human relationships—a model that celebrates success as a series of level-busting moves and says little at all about individuals' responsibilities to one another. To be sure, most of us submit ourselves to the "games" of our societies; the real challenge of play, as Johan Huizinga argued, is to determine the character of those societies.

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### **The Erosion of the American Sporting Ethos: Shifting Attitudes toward Competition**

*Joel Nathan Rosen*

Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2007. Figures, appendix, notes, bibliography, and index. x, 294 pp. \$35.00 paper. ISBN: 9780786429172.

Reflecting approvingly on the ancient Greek gusto for antagonism in *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1994, first published 1887), Friedrich Nietzsche affirmed that "if we take away competition from Greek life, we gaze immediately into that pre-Homeric abyss of a gruesome savagery of hatred and pleasure in destruction" (p. 193). For Nietzsche, competition, athletic and otherwise, was a practice that led humans to flourish. As he clarified, without "competitive ambition, the Hellenistic state, like Hellenic man, deteriorates. It becomes evil and cruel" (p. 194). In spite of Nietzsche's praise, ancient Greek athletics were criticized by their contemporaries. Xenophanes, for one, thought that successful athletes received a disproportionate number of honors and rewards.

The narrative of *The Erosion of the American Sporting Ethos: Shifting Attitudes toward Competition* keeps at its core a structure that underscores the tension between defenders and condemners of competition. As Joel Rosen explains, the book is a "comprehensive analysis of the nature of competition in contemporary American sport in response to a perceptible withdrawal from the more traditional American competitive spirit" (p. 1). Much like Nietzsche, American supporters of the traditional competitive ethos emphasize its progressive character. By contrast, its detractors point to competitive sport's