

The Gameful World is an essential collection for researchers investigating the social and political shifts implied by the emergence of pervasive game-like practices and the potential applications and issues connected with these phenomena. While different chapters present radically contradicting versions of what the gameful world is, the introductory sections—both the editors' introduction and Deterding's "The Ambiguity of Games," inspired by Sutton-Smith's *The Ambiguity of Play*—help frame the debate around games and everyday life as one where rhetorics and applications, as well as politics and economics, are in constant negotiation. Just as a well-played game may reframe our understanding of what play is for us, this book may not provide final answers to important questions, but it certainly helps readers embrace a different perspective on the ever-evolving map of the gameful world.

—Riccardo Fassone, *Università degli Studi di, Torino, Italy*

**The Video Game Debate:
Unravelling the Physical,
Social, and Psychological
Effects of Digital Games**

Rachel Kowert and Thorsten Quandt, eds.
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During U.S. Senate hearings in 1954, legislators warned the public of the sado-masochism being taught to our children

in colorful comic book pages by Wonder Woman, the dangers inherent in Superman, and the homoerotic perils posed by Batman. Thirty years later, Senate hearings focused on the hazards of Cyndi Lauper's "She Bop" and Madonna's "Dress You Up." Politicians and lawmakers have now shifted their focus from paper comics and pop music to video games. In the past twenty years, dozens of laws have been passed, federal hearings have been held, presidents have expressed their fears, and cases have been presented before the U.S. Supreme Court in an effort to protect our society from the digital menace. In many ways, *The Video Game Debate: Unravelling the Physical, Social, and Psychological Effects of Digital Games* presents a rebuttal to the rising moral panic surrounding video games. Editors Rachel Kowert and Thorsten Quandt have gathered a group of top scientists in order to create a book with ten chapters addressing a diverse selection of related video game topics. Written primarily for an academic audience, this book is packed with references, theory, research, and statistics.

The Video Game Debate starts off strong with a discussion about the history of video games. This is no ordinary history lesson; instead, the author of this chapter presents a very compelling and original discussion about the evolution and intermixing of video games and other forms of media that have occurred over the last forty years. The remaining chapters maintain this level of insight and focus on issues that are often of concern to the public, such as gaming addiction, online game play, education, cognitive skills, physical health, and violence.

It is worth noting that none of

these chapters sensationalizes the topic it addresses. In fact, all of the chapters hold that worries about video games are overstated (e.g., there is little evidence to suggest a link between video game use and body weight) or that such fears are simply wrong (e.g. playing *World of Warcraft* will probably not harm your interpersonal skills or “real world” friendships). Although such carefully written chapters are appreciated, the reader should be cautioned that *The Video Game Debate* does not offer much of a debate. Absent from the book are dissenting opinions and, because the chapters themselves are self-contained, the different authors never engage in a debate among themselves. A book with this title probably should have included chapters from both scientists who have expressed skepticism about the negative effects of video games and researchers who have made careers out of warning the public about the dangers of this media. Given the overall strength of the book, however, this minor concern should not dissuade anyone from picking it up to learn about some of the latest research in the field. Readers just need to be aware that this book primarily presents one side of the video game debate.

There is little doubt that *The Video Games Debate* will have an impact on the scientists who study video games. While the vast majority of media researchers do not believe video games pose a serious threat to the public (e.g., they are not linked to school shootings, violent rampages, and similar events), a small but vocal group of mostly older researchers have vilified this medium for years. Some of these more senior researchers have gone so far as to refer to this media as a

“murder simulator” and have even argued that such media contributes to up to 30 percent of all societal violence. As indicated in the book, one reason these video game scholars might be so fearful of video games is simply because of their age. In short, they are old. This vocal group of anti-video game researchers did not grow up around video games and are not gamers. In contrast, most of the authors who contributed to *The Video Game Debate* are younger scholars who grew up surrounded by Atari 2600s, Super Nintendos, Sega Dreamcasts, and Sony PlayStations. This age difference is probably one of the main contributing factors that gives the authors of this book unique insight into the world of video games. Within each chapter it is clear that not only do these scientists understand video game research, but they also “get” video games. In this manner, *The Video Game Debate* is not only an insightful book about the science of video games but also signifies an important cultural and generational turning point for video game research. In much the same way that very few people today actually worry about the dangers of comic books or Cyndi Lauper, *The Video Game Debate* will likely make an important contribution to ending the current moral panic surrounding video games.

—Patrick M. Markey, Villanova University,
Villanova, PA

**Getting Gamers: The
Psychology of Video Games
and Their Impact on the
People Who Play Them**

Jamie Madigan