

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.

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

Jamie Madigan

Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016. Acknowledgments, introduction, conclusion, notes, and index. 320 pp. \$38.00 cloth. ISBN: 9781442239999

Cognitive dissonance theory, social comparison theory, social identity theory, social learning theory, self-determination theory, self-perception theory, self-categorization theory, deindividuation, priming, psychological reactance, emotional contagion, Asch phenomenon, law of diminishing sensitivity, loss aversion bias, status quo bias, benign versus malicious envy, ego depletion, variable schedules of reinforcement, big-fish–little-pond effect, anchoring effect, Dunning-Kruger effect, and reciprocity effect, Zeigarnik effect. If you took Psychology 101 in college you no doubt recognize at least a few of these terms, and if you followed that up with a midlevel course in social psychology you may recognize most of them. Jamie Madigan defines and uses all of these terms, quite appropriately, in his delightful book, *Getting Gamers*.

This is a book about how basic principles of psychology can be applied to an understanding of the playing, making, and marketing of video games. If you are a video gamer, the book's insights may help you appreciate the games all the more; help you become more rational in your choices of games and manner of playing them; and make you less likely to fall for gimmicks designed to part you from your hard-earned, real-world money or trap you into game routines that are ultimately more tedious than fun. If you are an old-fogey skeptic who believes that video games are at best a waste of time and at worst a cause of obesity, social iso-

lation, violence, and brain atrophy, you will find the research evidence reviewed here to be a challenge to your prejudices. If you are a student or would-be student of psychology, you will find here accurate, fun-to-read descriptions of basic psychological theories, principles, and research findings, along with their applications to video games.

Although this is a serious, thoughtful, well-researched book, it is written in a refreshingly breezy, often humorous style. Here's the book's tongue-in-cheek opening sentence: "The history of video games started in a small Norwegian village during the 1680's, when a precocious young fisherman named Billy 'SadPanda42' Jackson created *Call of Duty 3* out of sticks and moxie." Madigan's descriptions of classic experiments in psychology are especially amusing.

Here are samples of the major questions that Madigan addresses in the book, along with hints concerning his answers.

- Why do some players use abusive language in the chat accompanying online games, and what can be done to reduce such inappropriate behavior? (Here's where the concepts of deindividuation and group norms come into play.)
- Why do some people become so fiercely committed to particular games or varieties of games and so ready to denigrate others? (Madigan discusses this in terms of cognitive dissonance theory and social identity theory.)
- How do games get us to keep score and compete? (Social comparison theory helps us understand the initial drive to see how our performance compares to others, and that, then, leads to competition.)

- What are the basic human drives that make video games so compelling? (Here we are treated to a discussion of self-determination theory, which posits autonomy, competence, and relatedness as fundamental human needs. Games attract and hold us to the degree that they satisfy such needs.)
 - How do games make us feel immersed (spatially present) in imaginary worlds? (Madigan discusses this in terms both of the video technology and the game mechanics that draw us in.)
 - How do games and apps get us with in-game purchases? (Here we have a discussion of basic sales tricks as applied to games.)
 - What is the appeal of violent video games? (Research suggests that it is the emotional excitement, action, and skill involved in such games that make them attractive; nonviolent games created to contain these same characteristics appear to be equally enjoyable.)
 - Do violent video games increase real-world violence? (Madigan presents a balanced summary of the evidence relative to this much-researched question. The short answer is that violent games have been shown to increase temporarily, through priming, scores on various laboratory measures of violence, but to date there is little or no evidence that they increase real-world violence or have any long-term effects on one's disposition toward violence.)
 - Do video games make us smarter? (It depends on how you define smarter. Madigan reviews research showing, quite convincingly, that some games—especially high action, first-person shooter games—increase performance on some well-defined cognitive skills involving spatial perception, attention, and memory.)
- In his “Conclusion” (p. 257), Madigan writes: “Psychology should be a part of every curriculum at schools and universities aiming to teach people how to make games, and video games should be used as a context to illustrate lessons in every psychology class.” The book makes a compelling case for this conclusion.
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- Peter Gray, *Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA*