The Impacts of Passion for Esports on Wellbeing

Jessica Formosa
Queensland University of Technology
jessica.formosa@hdr.qut.edu.au

Daniel Johnson, Selen Turkay
Queensland University of Technology
dm.johnson@qut.edu.au, selen.turkay@qut.edu.au

Regan Mandryk
University of Saskatchewan
regan@cs.usask.ca

Keywords
Videogames, Esports, Wellbeing, Self-Determination Theory, Dualistic Model of Passion, Motivation

INTRODUCTION
The discussions around the wellbeing outcomes of videogames in the literature is extensive. While historically there has been a focus on possible links to aggression this has more recently moved to greater focus on problematic gaming habits (Anderson and Bushman 2001; Griffiths et al. 2017; Verheijen et al. 2018). Conversely, there are those who argue that links between videogame play and problematic outcomes are non-existent or extremely small (Ferguson 2015; Ferguson and Kilburn 2010; Przybylski and Weinstein 2019a; Przybylski and Weinstein 2019b). There is also substantial research arguing for the benefits of gaming, such as enhanced social skills and improved wellbeing (Granic et al. 2014; Vella and Johnson 2012). Additionally, while there is evidence to suggest that videogame play has a significant impact on the wellbeing of players, there is a distinct lack of research regarding the wellbeing outcomes of different types of gaming.

Esports is a highly successful and popular area of entertainment, which is generally defined as competitive online gaming (Reitman et al. 2019; Steinkuehler 2019). The competitive nature of esports comes with a variety of challenges for players. These include dealing with the professionalisation of the industry, the intense cognitive demands associated with the gameplay and players having to cope with the toxicity involved in the activity (Steinkuehler 2019). Despite the challenges faced by esports players, there is little knowledge on how their engagement in esports gaming impacts their wellbeing.

Previous research exploring recreational videogame play has utilised Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and the Dualistic Model of Passion (DMP) in an attempt to understand the motivational perspectives of gameplay and how gaming passion impacts the wellbeing of players (Formosa 2018; Lafreniere et al. 2009; Przybylski et al. 2009; Ryan et al. 2006). SDT is a theory of human motivation which posits that, in order to experience optimal functioning, individuals must satisfy three important psychological needs: autonomy (free decision making), competence (the ability to

Proceedings of DiGRA Australia 2020

effectively deal with ones' own environment) and relatedness (meaningful relationships; Deci and Ryan 1985; 2000). In the context of videogame play, research has shown that the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs is more likely to be linked to positive outcomes, such as greater game enjoyment, post-play mood, vitality and self-esteem (Ryan et al. 2006).

The DMP is a theory that provides a motivational perspective on passion and describes two kinds of passions: harmonious passion (HP) and obsessive passion (OP; Vallerand et al. 2003). According to the DMP, these two passions are adopted differently, leading to different motivations for engaging in the individuals chosen activity. For instance, HP is characterised by an autonomous internalisation, which leads to balanced engagement of an activity. Conversely, OP is characterised by a controlled internalisation and often leads to rigid and compensatory engagement in the individuals' passionate activity (Vallerand 2010; Vallerand et al. 2003). Research has shown that both harmonious and obsessive passions for videogame play result from an individuals' ability to meet their basic psychological needs (Formosa 2018; Przybylski et al. 2009). For instance, Przybylski et al. (2009) found that players who were able to satisfy their basic psychological needs in general life were more likely to experience the more optimal form of passion for gaming: HP. Conversely, failure to satisfy these needs was more likely to result in an OP for gaming, which was in turn, more likely to result in lower wellbeing.

This study extends previous research of SDT and the DMP in the context of videogame play to understand the motivations, passions and wellbeing outcomes of different types of videogame players. To do so, it investigates the relationships between need satisfaction through different sources (e.g. through gaming and important life aspects), passion for gaming and wellbeing outcomes for recreational and esports players. The findings will provide novel insight into how player wellbeing is impacted by their engagement in videogame play. They will further contribute vital knowledge on the differences that exist between recreational and esports players, in terms of their motivations, passion and wellbeing, to the field of games research.

BIO

Jessica Formosa is a PhD student at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) within the School of Computer Science. Her PhD thesis explores the motivations, passion and wellbeing of videogame players, particularly in regards to the differences between recreational and esports players. She has a background in Psychology, having completed her undergraduate and honours degree from QUT's School of Psychology and Counselling and is passionate about applying a psychological perspective to videogame research.

Daniel Johnson is a professor from QUT's School of Computer Science and leads the QUT Games Research and Interaction Design Lab. His PhD explored the psychology of human-computer interactions and videogames, and he has research expertise on videogames and wellbeing, motivations of videogame play, the player experience and gamification.

Selen Turkay is a Lecturer in QUT's School of Computer Science. She completed her PhD at Columbia University and has expert knowledge on information systems. She also has extensive knowledge on developing surveys and analysing large sets of data within this field of research.

Regan Mandryk is a Professor of Computer Science at the University of Saskatchewan, in Canada. She pioneered the area of physiological evaluation for computer games in

her PhD research on affective computing at Simon Fraser University with support from Electronic Arts. She continues to investigate novel ways of understanding how people experience interactive technology in partnership with multiple industrial collaborators, but also evaluates games for health (including for special populations such as children with neurodevelopmental disorders and the elderly), interactive technology that fosters interpersonal relationships, and novel interaction techniques.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anderson, C. and Bushman, B. 2001. Effects of Violent Video Games on Aggressive Behavior, Aggressive Cognition, Aggressive Affect, Physiological Arousal and Prosocial Behavior: A Meta-Analytic Review of the Scientific Literature. *Psychological Science.* 12(5), 353-359. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9280.00366.

Deci, E. and Ryan, R. 1985. *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior*. New York: Plenum. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4899-2271-7.

Deci, E. and Ryan, R. 2000. The "What" and "Why" of Goal Pursuits: Human Needs and the Self-Determination of Behavior. *Psychological Inquiry.* 11(4). 227-268. https://doi.org/ 10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01.

Ferguson, C. 2015. Do Angry Birds Make for Angry Children? A Meta-Analysis of Video Game Influences on Children's and Adolescents' Aggression, Mental Health, Prosocial Behavior, and Academic Performance. *Perspectives of Psychological Science.* 10(5). 646-666. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691615592234

Ferguson, C. and Kilburn, J. 2010. Much Ado About Nothing: The Misestimation and Overinterpretation of Violent Video Game Effects in Eastern and Western Nations: Comment on Anderson et al., (2010). *Psychological Bulletin.* 136(2). 174-178. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0018566.

Formosa, J. 2018. *Passion for Video Games and its Effect on Player Wellbeing*. (Unpublished honors thesis). Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane.

Granic, I., Lobel, A. and Engels, R. 2014. The Benefits of Playing Video Games. *American Psychologist.* 69(1). 66-78. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0034857.

Griffiths, M., Kuss, D., Lopez-Fernandez, O. and Pontes, H. 2017. Problematic Gaming Exists and is an Example of Disordered Gaming: Commentary on: Scholars' Open Debate Paper on the World Health Organization ICD-11 Gaming Disorder Proposal (Asrseth et al.). *Journal of Behavioral Addiction.* 6(3). 296-301. https://doi.org/10.1556/2006.6.2017.037.

Lafrenière. M., Vallerand, R., Donahue, E., and Lavigne, G. 2009. On the Costs and Benefits of Gaming: The Role of Passion. *Cyberpsychology and Behavior.* 12(3). 285-290. https://doi.org/10.1089/cpb.2008.0234.

Przybylski, A. and Weinstein, N. 2019a. Investigating the Motivational and Psychosocial Dynamics of Dysregulated Gaming: Evidence from a Preregistered Cohort Study. *Clinical Psychological Science.* https://doi.org/10.1177/2167702619859341.

Przybylski, A. and Weinstein, N. 2019b. Violent video game engagement is not associated with adolescents' aggressive behavior: evidence from a registered report. *Royal Society Open Science*. 6(2). 171474. https://doi.org/10.1098/rsos.171474.

Przybylski, A., Weinstein, N., Ryan, R. and Rigby, C. 2009. Having to Versus Wanting to Play: Background and Consequences of Harmonious Versus Obsessive Engagement in Video Games. *Cyberpsychology and Behavior*. 12(5). 485-492. https://doi.org/10.1089/cpb.2009.0083

Reitman, J., Anderson-Coto, M., Wu, M., Lee, J. and Steinkuehler, C. 2019. Esports Research: A Literature Review. *Games and Culture.* https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412019840892

Ryan, R., Rigby, C. and Przybylski, A. 2006. The Motivational Pull of Video Games: A Self-Determination Theory Approach. *Motivation and Emotion.* 30(4). 344-360. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-006-9051-8

Steinkuehler, C. 2019. Esports Research: Critical, Empirical, and Historical Studies of Competitive Videogame Play. *Games and Culture.* https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412019836855

Vallerand, R. 2010. "On Passions for Life Activities: The Dualistic Model of Passion." In *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, edited by M. Zanna, 97-193. San Diago, CA, US: Academic Press. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(10)42003-1

Vallerand, R., Blanchard, C., Mageau, G., Koestner, R., Ratelle, C., Léonard. M., Gagné, M. and Josée, M. 2003. Les Passions de l'Ame: On Obsessive and Harmonious Passion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.* 85(4). 756-767. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.85.4.756

Vella, K. and Johnson, D. 2012. "Flourishing and Video Games." In *Proceedings of the 8th Australasian Conference on Interactive Entertainment: Playing the System*, edited by D. Cermak Sassenrath, C. Walker and C. Tan. Auckland, New Zealand: ACM Press, Aotea Centre. https://doi.org/10.1145/2336727.2336746

Verheijen, G., Burk, W., Stoltz, S., van den Berg, Y. and Cillessen, A. 2018. Friendly Fire: Longitudinal Effects of Exposure to Violent Video Games on Aggressive Behavior in Adolescent Friendship Dyads. *Aggressive Behavior.* 44. 257-267. https://doi.org/ 10.1002/ab.21748