

Eudaimonia in Digital Games

Tom Cole
University of Greenwich
London, United Kingdom
t.cole@gre.ac.uk

Alena Denisova
University of York
York, United Kingdom
alena.denisova@york.ac.uk

Jo Iacovides
University of York
York, United Kingdom
jo.iacovides@york.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

The concept of eudaimonia in the study of video games has been the subject of increasing interest in recent years, especially as juxtaposed to the idea of hedonia which is often assumed as lying at the heart of most video game play experiences. However, there is a lack of consensus on what eudaimonia exactly is, how it manifests in the player experience, and what effect it could have on the emotional experience of game play. Additionally, discussion of this topic is often focused within the areas of psychology, HCI and media and communication studies. This workshop, therefore, brings researchers from across a broader range of fields, such as those represented at FDG, to discuss this emerging and important concept and create a cross-field research agenda that can further investigate this foundational concept of wellbeing within the field of digital games.

KEYWORDS

Eudaimonia, research agenda, player experience, wellbeing, video games

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1 BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

Digital games like *Gears of War* [9], *Assassin's Creed* [17] or *Call of Duty* [12] evidently provide a different kind of emotional experience to games, such as *Everybody's Gone to the Rapture* [16], *Papers, Please* [1] and *Journey* [15]. However, we stumble when we attempt to articulate exactly what that difference is. One area that provides promise is the idea of hedonia and eudaimonia from positive psychology, as applied to media entertainment.

Media research has explored the ideas of hedonistic vs. eudaimonic entertainment [2, 3, 19] as a means for understanding why viewers purposefully view 'difficult' films that do not necessarily give pleasure as it is commonly understood [14].

Whereas the purpose of hedonistic entertainment is to maximise enjoyment for the viewer (and is pleasure-seeking), eudaimonic entertainment aims to evoke a strong sense of 'appreciation' in the viewer (and is meaning-seeking). 'Appreciation' is defined by

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Oliver and Bartsch [14] as “*an experiential state that is characterised by the perception of deeper meaning, the feeling of being moved, and the motivation to elaborate on thoughts and feelings inspired by the experience*”. Hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment fulfil different need gratifications in the viewer – both of which can result in satisfying experiences and strong motivations for viewing.

Until recently, most games-related research focused on the hedonic gameplay experience. However, eudaimonia in video games is a growing field [6] and the processes that lead to this type of experience in games have begun to be investigated by scholars in Human-Computer Interaction (HCI). These experiences include the range of challenges possible in games [4, 8], hedonic and eudaimonic user experiences [13]; and how games can be used to convey more serious experiences [10], deal with ‘difficult life experiences’ [11] or prompt reflection [18]; and how emotionally impactful experiences can be designed for [7]. Recent work has posited the idea of a ‘eudaimonic gameplay experience’ as applied to digital games [5], to distinguish it from the ‘eudaimonic entertainment experience’ [19] as applied to film and moving image.

However, the eudaimonic emotional experience obtained from digital games remains difficult to accurately describe and ‘pin down’. Whilst there are areas of commonality, there still exists a wide range of interpretations and understandings of the concept [6]. Not only this, but much discussion is focused within the domains of psychology and media and communication studies, and less in other areas that could contribute and benefit such as artificial intelligence (AI), HCI, or other arts and design fields.

We, therefore, propose a workshop to bring together a wide range of academics – such as is represented at FDG, to share and discuss their own understandings and usages of the concept. We hope this will provide a stimulus not only for discussion, but for new lines of research, and providing a benchmark moment in the history of the concept of eudaimonia within digital games.

2 OBJECTIVES

This workshop will invite contributions from researchers across a wide range of fields who are interested in the eudaimonic emotional experience that can arise from video game design and play.

This workshop aims to:

- Identify areas of common ground and new gaps and opportunities for research into eudaimonia in digital games.
- Establish and develop agreement around issues and opportunities, and, in doing so, create a research agenda and common understanding in the form of a concrete document or documents.
- Provide a forum for researchers from disparate areas to share their knowledge and ideas with those they would not normally encounter in their research and learn from each other.

The overall vision for the workshop is that researchers from a wide range of fields come together to share and discuss their own take on eudaimonia and, in doing so, inspire and educate those in different fields to themselves in a reciprocal fashion.

3 PLANNED ACTIVITIES

We envisage this workshop being a full day workshop. This will allow full conversation, produce a relaxed atmosphere, and give time for ideas and results to be generated.

There will be four main sections:

- (1) 'Lightning Round': Participants will have 2 minutes (and only 1 slide, if using slides) to introduce themselves, their research, and their specific interest in the topic of the workshop.
- (2) 'World Cafe': A well-established activity for generating conversation and ideas.
 - (a) Potential common themes will be identified before hand by surveying accepted position papers.
 - (b) These common themes will be presented on large pieces of paper or whiteboards around the room.
 - (c) Participants will choose a theme which interests them and gather with others with like minded interests.
 - (d) Participants will then develop and expand upon the core theme presented for a short period of time (e.g. 15 minutes).
 - (e) At the end of this time, participants will move to another theme which interests them, leaving one member of the group behind to provide continuity to the next group and repeat the activity.

There will most likely be more themes than there are time slots, this will enable people to choose what they prefer and are most interested in. New themes can be suggested by participants and added to the activity.

In doing so, this will encourage workshop members to mix with a large range of people from the group and produce new combinations of participants to help enliven discussions.

- (3) 'Writing Period': During this phase participants will choose which theme most interests them and collaborate with others to create a shared document (e.g. on Google Drive) using headings provided by the workshop organisers. These templates will require sections such as:
 - A title,
 - A short description of the area of interest,
 - A rationale for why this area is important,
 - Key questions which remain open for research (and potential for sub-questions, if appropriate),
 - Potential next steps for study designs or other approaches to research.
- (4) Plenary: The documents from the 'Writing Period' will be presented to the rest of the group, feedback on workshop will be elicited and discussed (where appropriate), next steps for post-workshop results will be discussed.

There is also plans to bring in some keynote speakers. However, at this time, we have not had chance to arrange this. We would hope to have at least one near the start of the day, and potentially another nearer the end of the day.

4 BACKGROUND OF ORGANISERS

Our committee brings together expertise in eudaimonic experiences of digital games across a range of disciplines (psychology, game design and computer science).

Tom Cole is Lecturer in Games Development at University of Greenwich, London. His research explores how we can broaden and deepen emotional engagement in digital games, with an emphasis on rules, mechanics, systems and control schemes. In particular he is interested in the eudaimonic, mixed-affect emotional experience that can arise from game play, and specialises in the use of Grounded Theory Methodology for his research. Since 2016, he has organised AdventureX - The Narrative Games Convention, which is an international sell-out event of 600 people.

Alena Denisova is a Lecturer in Computer Science at the University of York (UK). Her research focuses on conceptualising, measuring and improving user experiences of video game players; designing and developing tools and methods for researching interactive experiences; and building educational and persuasive interactive media. In particular, her work explores emotionally impactful player experiences – how these experiences are shaped with the view to inform the design of games that promote these experiences.

Jo Iacovides is a Lecturer in Computer Science at the University of York, UK. Her research interests lie in Human Computer Interaction with a particular focus on understanding the role of learning within the player experience, and on investigating complex emotional experiences in the context of digital play. In addition, she is interested in exploring how games and playful technologies can be created for a range of purposes, such as education, citizen science, or wellbeing.

5 PUBLICATION PLANS

After the workshop, all materials generated will be shared using a password protected folder on a shared cloud drive. The results of the write-up session will be compiled into a single draft of a paper describing the results of the discussion at the workshop. Participants can choose whether to opt-in or not to collaborate further on this article and become co-authors of a draft journal paper.

We would also seek to work with a journal to produce a special issue on the topic of *Eudaimonia in Digital Games*. Participants will have the option to develop their position papers if they wish in preparation for publication in this special issue.

6 RECRUITMENT STRATEGY

A Wordpress site with details of the workshop structure, organising committee, and instructions for submitting will be established before Calls for Participation (CFPs) are issued.

CFPs will be sent to relevant email lists such as FDG, Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA), CHI, CHI Play, and others. CFPs will also be shared on social media platforms, including LinkedIn and Twitter, and people will be encouraged to share and distribute the CFP through their own local personal networks.

Participants are to submit using the EasyChair system. The organisers will review submitted position papers to select up to a maximum of 25 participants for the workshop. Participants will be selected based on quality of their submission, the diversity of topics

presented (i.e. so there are not several participants representing the same exact sub-field) and on how much we feel their contribution would bring to the workshop as whole.

Accepted position papers will be made available 4 weeks prior to the workshop to all participants from the workshop website, and will remain accessible afterwards. We will also be maintaining a website to document the ideas gathered during the workshop for other researchers who might be interested.

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