

Commentary

For alt.chi paper
*Games Against Health: A
Player-Centered Design
Philosophy*

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This paper's satirical arguments for Games Against Health (GAH) is both lighthearted and thought-provoking. Games are media for play, which according to Huizinga, is a form of activity that is interest driven and relatively inconsequential but also challenging to its players. Then, this begs a conceptual question for new research areas with derivative titles "Games for [anything but play]." That question is: how can you design a fundamentally playful and engaging activity, but embedded with consequential institutional agendas?

The authors used the notion of Dark Games as their satirical frame of reference, which is quite fitting in this context. According to the authors, Dark Games argued that some games are harmful to players because they are designed to encourage sedentary behaviors (such as sitting all day) by having players perform repetitive actions. While this concern may be valid from a healthcare's perspective, it is also conveniently built on a common societal prejudice and unfair imageries of a socially isolated gamer. A simple argument like this may miss other underlying social factors and complex constituents behind game play. In setting up an argument for GAH, the authors made use of several commonly used, but perhaps conceptually limiting, rhetoric in Games for Health to 'suggest' how "games may also be [thus] designed to promote unhealthy behaviors." For example, illustrating through a simple use of a point system, they wittily suggest rewarding players with "points" when they are eating junk food or not sleeping enough to promote unhealthy behaviors. Some people may question if this design is really going to work—but that is the point! Those who are familiar with video games may realize here that "points" are

often only mediating links, also highly visible design elements, but only to connect with the more engaging and invisible social settings, as well as rewards, behind game play (e.g., social status among geeks, distinction and reputation, indicators of mastery and competition, and so forth). We may then question how effective design interventions such as this could be? By rehashing arguments already quite commonly used to navigate research areas such as Games for Health, the authors set up a useful starting point for us to rethink some of these rationales.

For any satirical writings, which this paper is one, they quite effectively point out problems to the readers. And more often than not—these are problems we may find hard to acknowledge exist in more formal discourses. Satirical writings also often omit the solutions, which is fine here as their purpose is to foreground issues to be examined in future discussions and debates. And the authors in this paper surely have achieved this goal.