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Pete Etchells On the Benefits of Video Games at the Edinburgh International Book Festival

“It’s not necessarily the case that gaming addiction - if it exists - looks the same as something like drug addiction or gambling addiction,” said Pete Etchells, speaking today at the Edinburgh International Book Festival. “We don’t know enough about what gaming addiction looks like to actually make a formal diagnosis,” added the psychology lecturer and video games researcher, speaking about his first book, *Lost in a Good Game*.

Etchells warned against diagnosing people with a gambling disorder with the same criteria as psychologists use for more recognised addictions; “You might risk missing some of the unique symptoms of gaming disorder. That also assumes that games are inherently harmful in and of themselves. So the excessive use of video games is a bad thing to do, in the same way that gambling too much or taking too many drugs is bad.

“Games are by their very nature hobbies, and designed to be entertainment, to be immersive, to be interactive so the standard criteria for these behavioural addictions, things like being preoccupied with them or doing them instead of doing other things, don’t seem to sit well with a benchmark for harmful behaviour. If you play games lots, it might just be because you like playing games and that’s absolutely a fine thing to do.

“If you’re diagnosing everyone who plays video games as being addicted, you will, by the very nature of that, miss the people who are suffering genuine harm from playing video games.”

He also downplayed fears of violent video games being inherent harmful to players. “The best evidence we have suggests so far is there might be a weak link between playing violent video games and aggression but it’s not something we really have to worry about and there’s no evidence that it causes people to go and commit murder or anything like that.”

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Instead he emphasised the positive aspects of gaming which he has studied; “So many people around the world value playing video games not just in their ability to help you escape, which can be a bad thing sometimes, but it’s really in their ability to help us to connect us with each other.

“One of the things I think is good about video games is that they allow us to explore different aspects of our personalities, to try out being different people in a relatively safe space.

“We can’t try out those emotional experiences in the real world without consequences.”