Abstract

The doctoral dissertation focuses on the issue of constructing identity narratives by video game users, immersed in a culturally created reality—encompassing the digital environment, virtual avatars, and meanings shaped in player narratives. The theoretical background for the research was the narrative paradigm in psychology, while the perspective of anthropological psychology provided a basis for viewing the gaming world as a culturally constructed reality. A review of research related to video games indicates that engagement in this area has the potential to trigger personally significant, emotionally engaging experiences that may be shared by other players.

The literature discusses the potential of video games to create a space for the emergence of emotionally charged experiences perceived as personally meaningful and to foster a unique gamer culture—sharing narratives and reflections surrounding the gaming world. However, there has been no analysis of the significance these experiences may have for shaping players' identity narratives. To explore this issue in depth, a qualitative study was planned using the method of reflexive thematic analysis.

Participants in the study were adult video game players aged 18 to 48. The analysis of the collected material allowed for the identification of themes within the narratives, such as the hero archetype as a form of internalized cultural script, the experience of immersion, games as a form of therapy, skill training, eudaimonic experiences, nostalgia and excitement during gameplay, escapism, life stories and the meaningful role of video games in them, relationships with avatars, and the exploration of identity through gaming.

The findings appear to demonstrate how significant the experience of engaging with video games can be for some individuals. The meanings assigned to this experience may contribute to identity narratives related to personal development, values, gender identity, and career, with numerous aspects of this process captured in sub-themes that reveal its breadth, depth, and diversity.

Keywords: video games, identity, qualitative research, avatar, narrative psychology