Modern Motivators of Play

Cheryl Platz

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The Game Development Strategy Guide

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Do you REALLY know why people play your game?

It's surprising how much we take for granted as game developers regarding what players want – many of our assumptions are based on out of date or partial understanding.

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If you don't know what motivates your players to keep playing your game, how do you know you're making the right decisions?

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Micro-Agenda

- What's a motivator?

- Where do motivators come from?

- Six classic motivators

- The three modern motivators

- How motivators are changing and what to do about it

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What's a motivator?

A **motivator of play** is one of the core psychological needs that a player seeks to fulfill when choosing to play a game of any kind.

These may be conscious or unconscious, and players may have one or more at a time per game. A single game may serve multiple motivators.

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Where do **motivators** come from?

Raph Koster's "A Theory of Fun" talks about player motivation and several of the motivators of play.

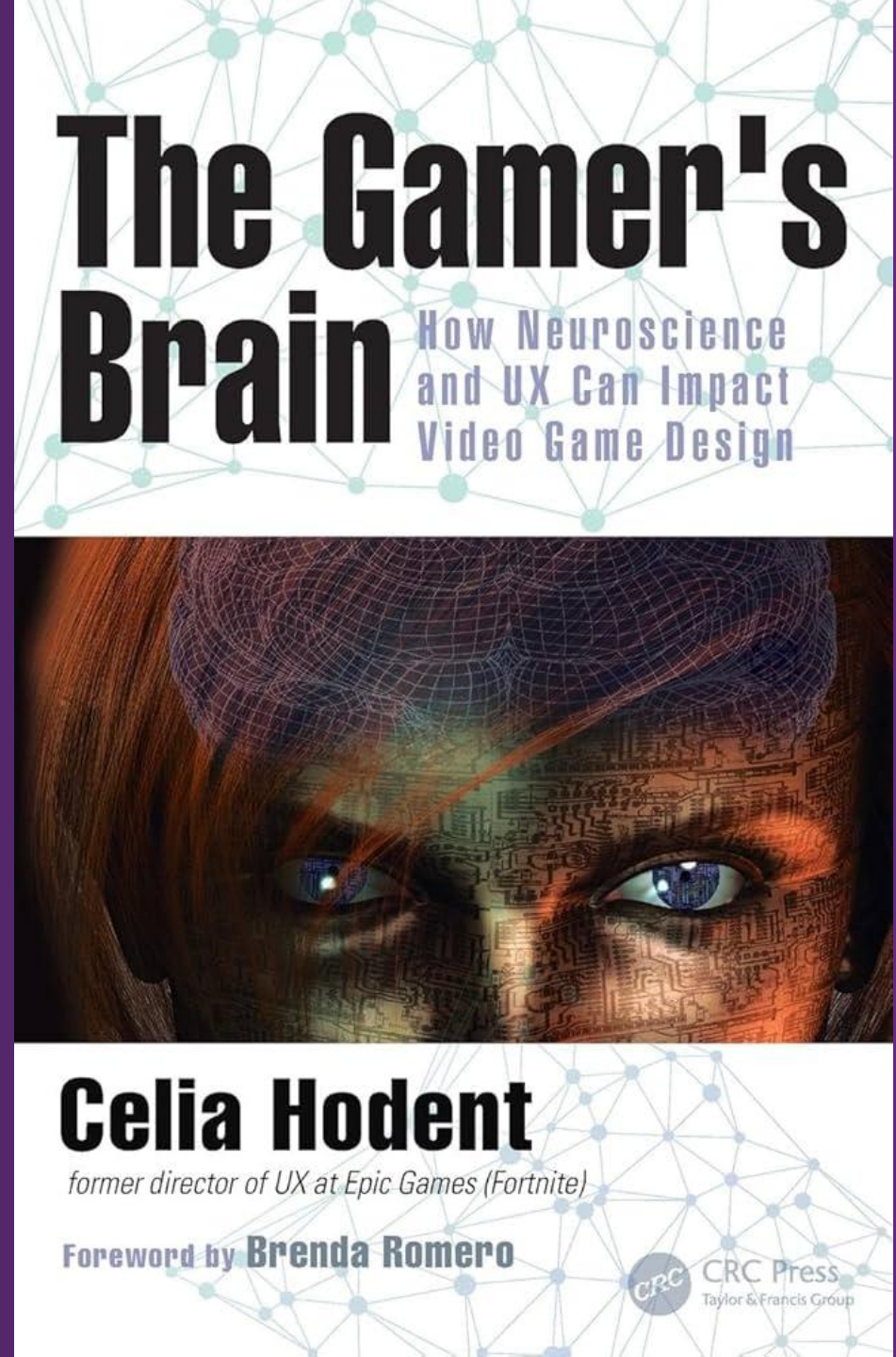- In particular, Raph spends a lot of time exploring the subjective concept of "fun."

- Mastery and competition are also explored as a key driver of human behavior.
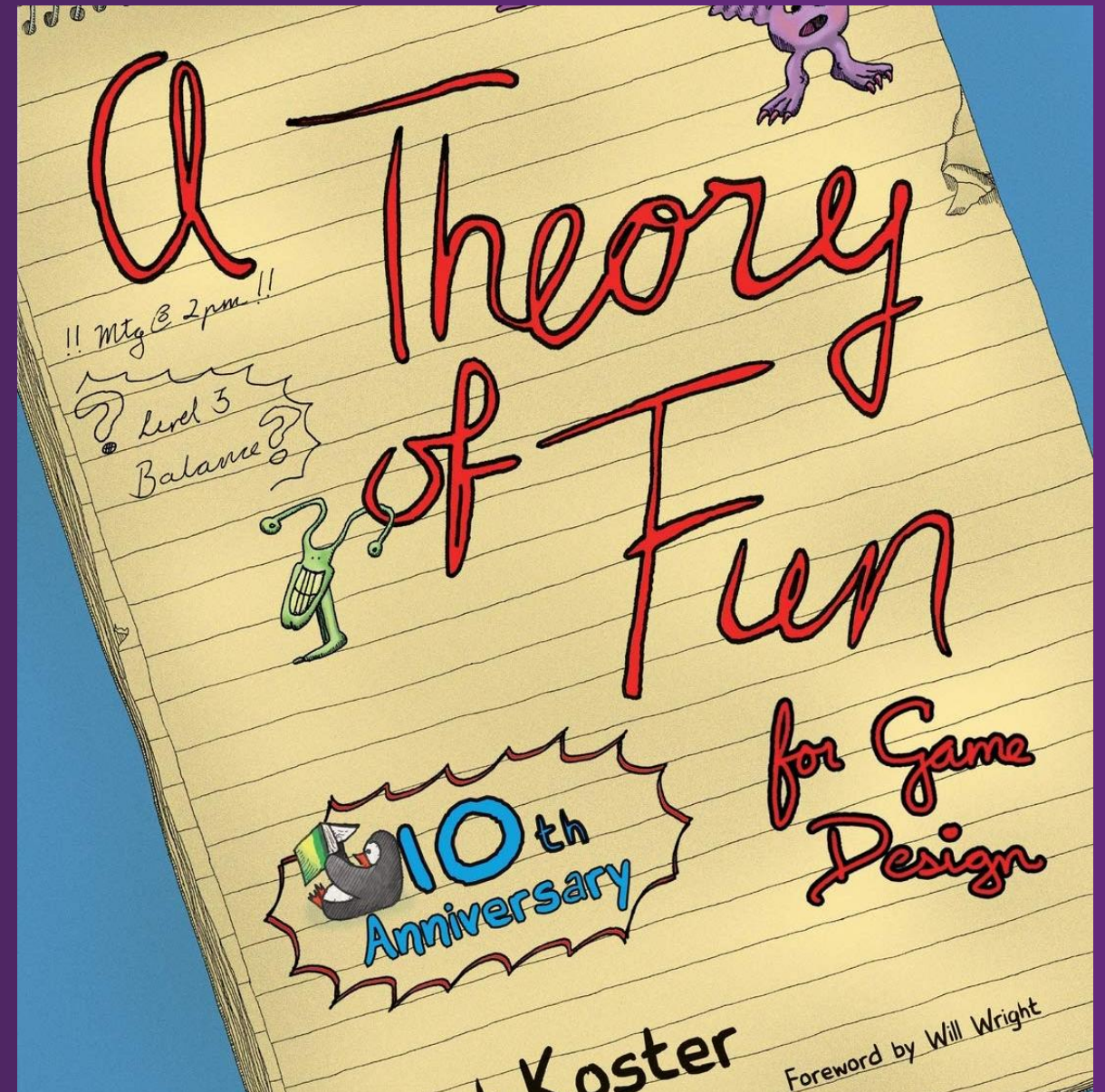
Where do **motivators** come from?

In The Gamer's Brain, Celia Hodent explores the fundamentals of motivation:

- **Extrinsic motivation**
  Rewards and recognition

- **Intrinsic motivation**
  Goals and growth

The Gamer's Brain
How Neuroscience and UX Can Impact Video Game Design

Celia Hodent
former director of UX at Epic Games (Fortnite)

Foreword by **Brenda Romero**

CRC Press
Taylor & Francis Group

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Where do **motivators** come from?

Celia also explores self-determination theory (SDT), which features three fundamental needs that can explain player behavior:

- **Relatedness**

- **Competence**

- **Autonomy**
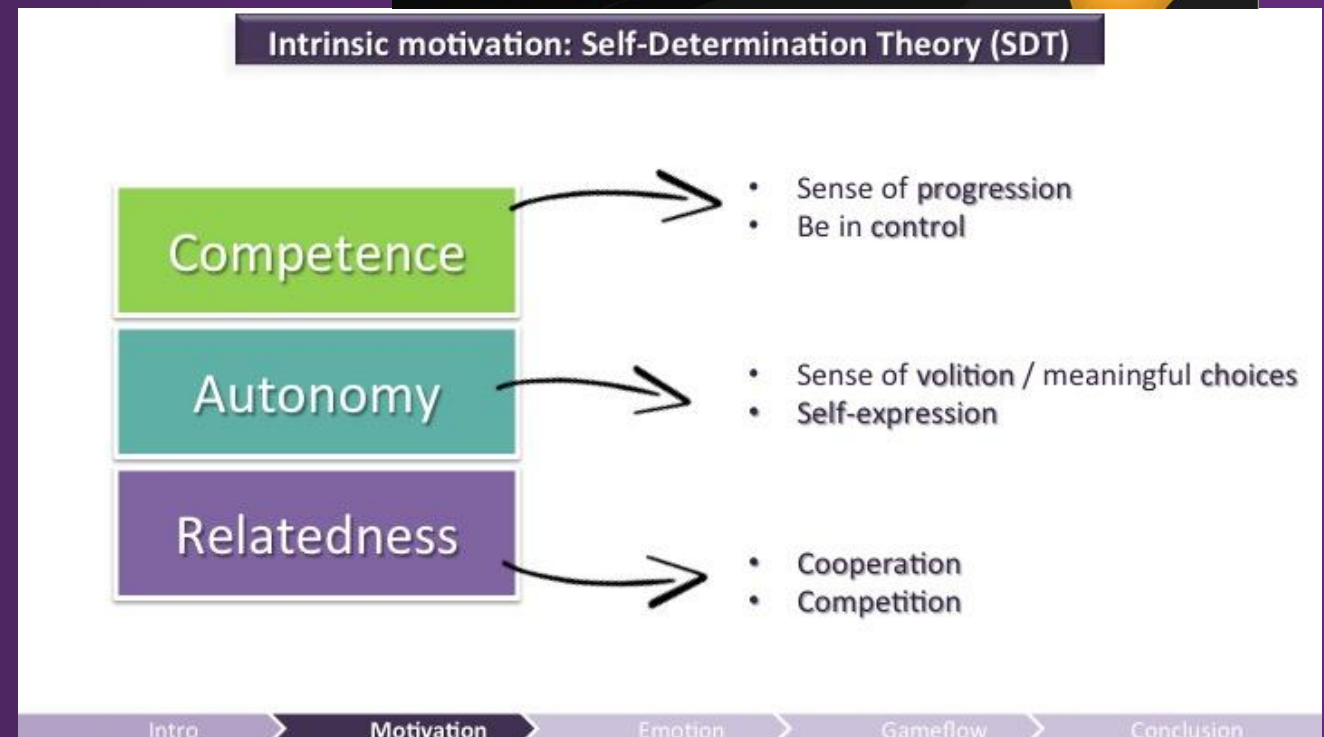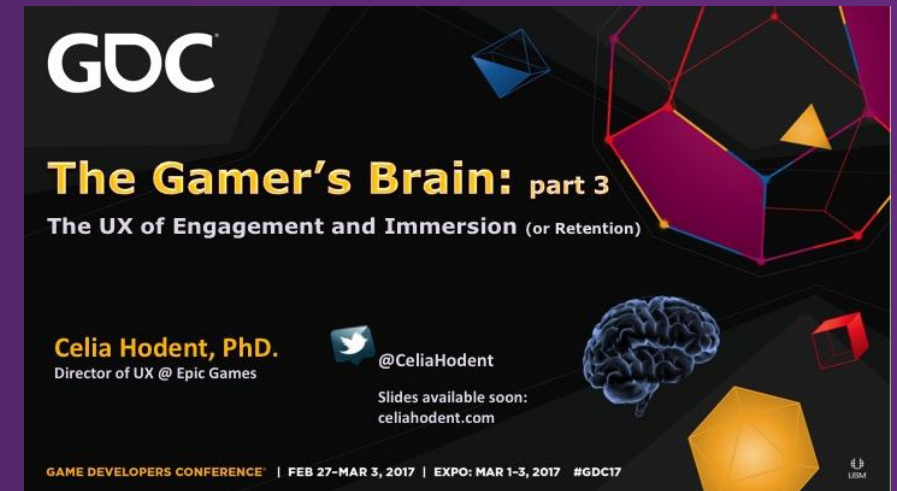
More about the psychology of player **motivation**

Hear more about self-determination theory, the ethics of game monetization, and much more directly from Celia Hodent in Episode 1 of Enduring Play , my new game dev podcast.

"It's a profound human need to **collaborate or to compete** as well. But any activity where we can be together and build something together and win together and also be complementary for one another is very important. That's why some of the most popular games are multiplayer. And yes, they can be **competitive**. There's a lot of emphasis in that, especially in our Western society. But **collaboration** is really important. So if you're playing in a squad, yes, you can compete against the other squads, but you're **cooperating within your own squad**."

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Enduring PLAY
a game development podcast
hosted by Cheryl Platz

CELIA HODENT
Using UX Strategy to Put Players First
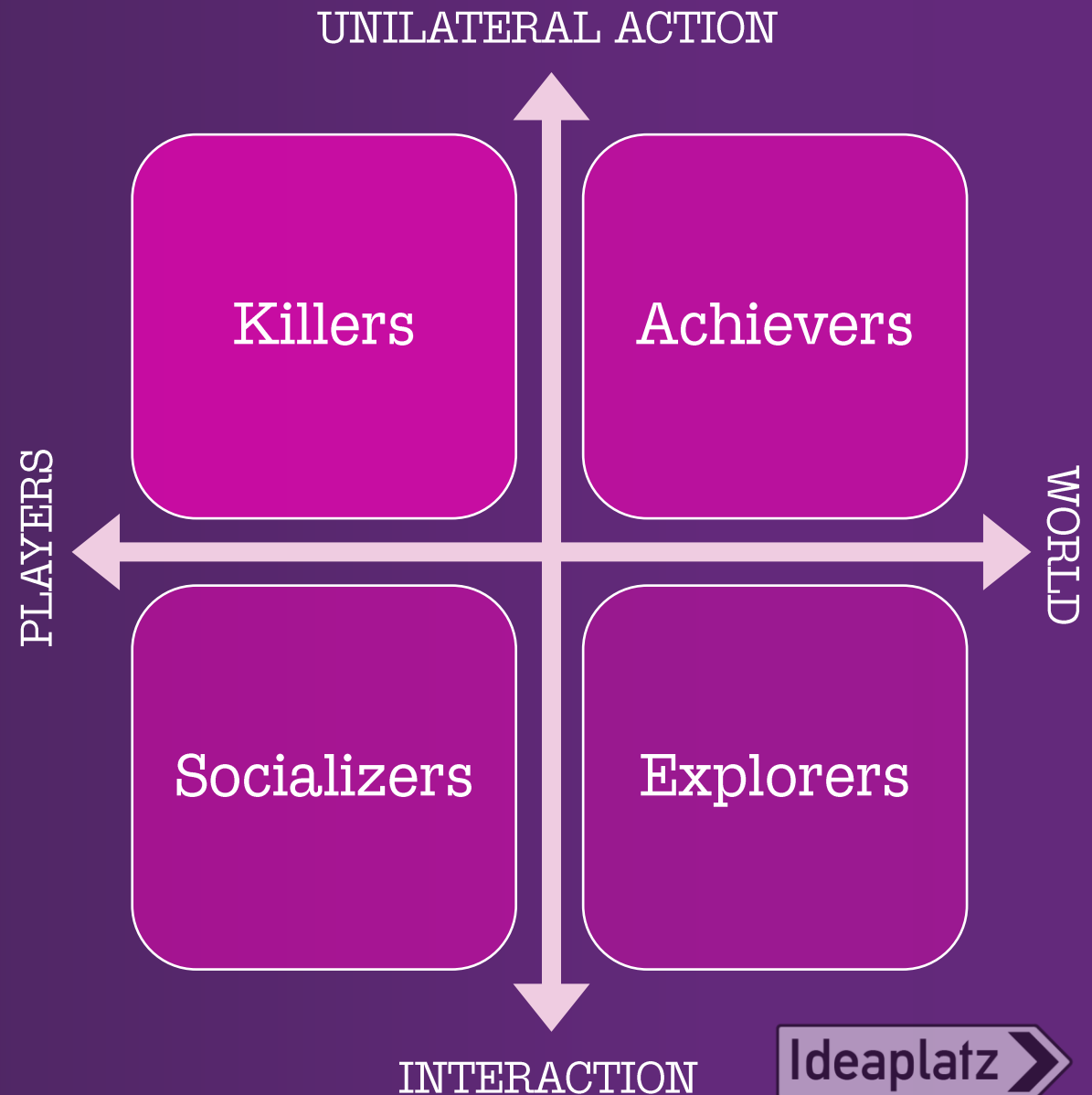
Season 1 Episode 1

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Where do **motivators** come from?

Richard Bartle's 1996 taxonomy of player types explores a character theory around preferred actions in game mapped against two spectrums of motivation:
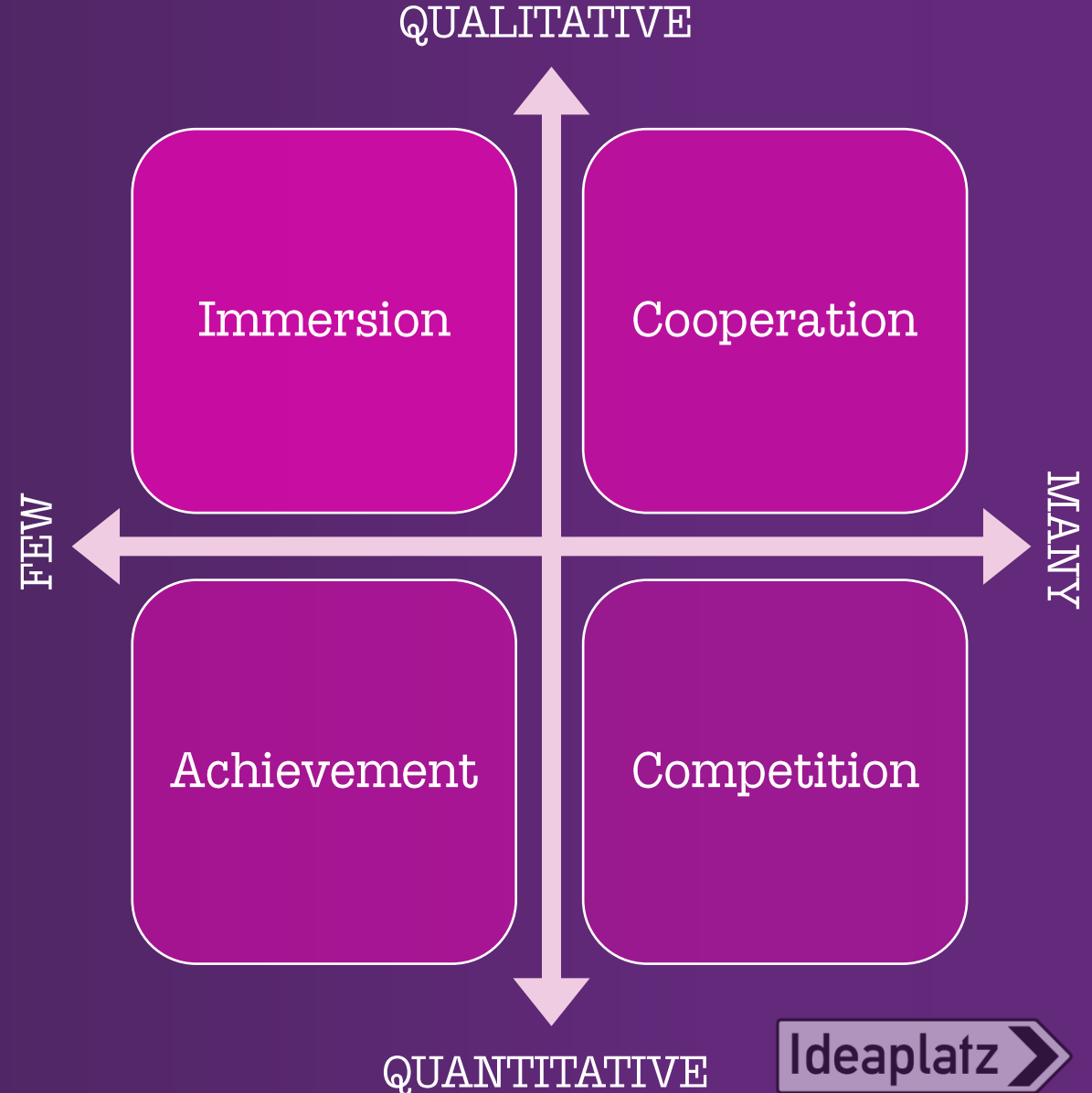
- **Multiplayer vs World Interaction**

- **Interaction vs Unilateral Action**

UNILATERAL ACTION

PLAYERS

Killers	Achievers
Socializers	Explorers

WORLD

INTERACTION

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Where do **motivators** come from?

In 2011, Jon Radoff observed in his book Game On that the Bartle model was no longer scaling, and proposed an alternate approach that introduced the concepts of immersion and cooperation – but this does assume a game has a 'win' state.

- **Number of players (Horizontal)**
- **Method of 'Winning' Communication (Vertical)**

QUALITATIVE

Immersion	Cooperation
Achievement	Competition

FEW

MANY

QUANTITATIVE

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These are just **some** of the many frameworks. I couldn't even fit all of these into the chapter.

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The Six Classic **Motivators of Play**

Fun

Mastery

Competition

Immersion

Meditation

Comfort

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But broadband and smartphones further changed what constitutes good gaming.

Players have new expectations forged by highly responsive, constantly updated, massively multiplayer worlds constantly at the ready in the palm of their hands.
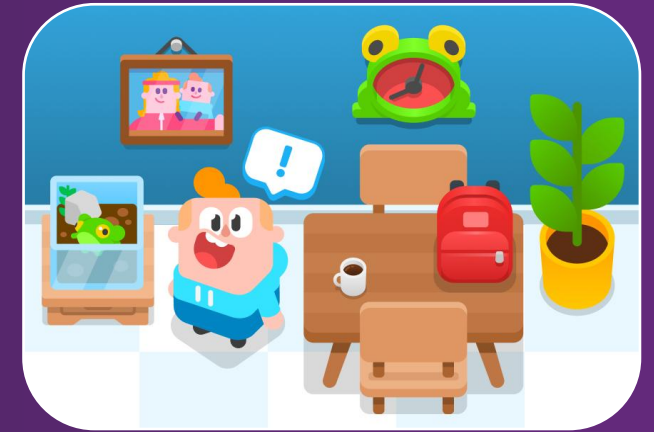
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The Three Modern
Motivators of Play

Self-Expression

Companionship

Education

All three of these motivators rely on broad scale of either player base (to which one expresses or connects) or data (from which one learns or expresses) that wasn't possible 15 years ago.

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But how much has REALLY changed?

Aren't players still seeking competitive mastery-driven experiences?

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While all of those are true....

According to Fandom's Inside Gaming 2024 study of 5,000 gamers globally cross-referenced against their platform data… the results may surprise you.

Top Reasons Why People Game

Reason	Percentage
Unwind & Stress Relief	54%
Creation, Imagination & Self-Expression	46%
Achievement & Rank	40%
Social Connection & Community	39%
To Escape	37%
Challenge	33%
To Kill Time	31%
Exploration	31%
Intellectual Stimulation	20%
Competition	18%
Control & Ownership	10%

Meditation and Comfort are big in an overwhelmingly stressful world.

Self-Expression is shooting up the charts.

+10% INCREASE YOY

Why so many PvP games if only 18% of players want them?

It seems like we as a game industry aren't in sync with today's player needs.

NOT ENOUGH OF...

- **Calming and meditative** games

- **Cooperative** games

- **Companionship, community,** and social experiences

- **Intellectually stimulating** games

- Passive **time-killing** games

TOO MUCH OF...

- **Competitive** games

- **Complex** games

- Active **time-demanding** games

- **Mastery-focused** games

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How might you think about **your players** differently?

Can your existing game support a **new motivator?**

How might your game studio best serve the **unmet needs** reflected in current trends?

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If you don't know where to start, try prosocial gaming.

The **Thriving in Games Group** is a consortium of passionate gamers from a variety of game studios, indie through AAA, who have come together to create free resources on crafting video games that encourage positive social interactions. They've also partnered with the Sesame Workshop to bring these insights to kids.

Digitalthrivingplaybook.org

thrivingingames.org

ti**gg**

Welcome to the Digital Thriving Playbook!

A resource for creating online spaces that help people thrive

Find a Method

GUIDE

Getting Started with Digital Thriving

New to digital thriving? Let's cover all the things you need to know before you begin exploring!

Read More

CORE CONCEPTS

Explore Digital Thriving Core Concepts

Trying to find everything you can about a specific subject? Core concepts are what you need!

Belonging   Collaboration   Creativity

DEI   Digital Thriving

Disruptive Behavior   Group Dynamics

Mastery   Measurement

More about thriving communities and prosocial gaming

Hear more about the Thriving in Games Group and prosocial gaming from a cofounder of TiGG, Carlos Figueiredo, who is now the Director of Player Trust and Safety at Mojang Studios (Minecraft).

"**Prosocial behavior** is something that's actively contributing to a thriving community. So then we could look at some examples of what prosocial behavior might be. When you see a player **helping somebody else**, that's really cool. They're helping a new player. There is that element of community, of a community of belonging like that. Players take pride in that community and they're **welcoming to other people coming** and joining the game. So they want to make the lives of new players a little bit easier. That's really cool. Or maybe they **teach other players** how to do certain things in the game, or they ask other players to play with them and form teams and form bonds and friendship."

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Enduring PLAY

a game development podcast

hosted by Cheryl Platz

CARLOS FIGUEIREDO

Safe and Thriving
Gaming Communities

Season 1 Episode 2

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Press **record** in your brain and keep these motivators handy.

Use them as a razor when making game design decisions.

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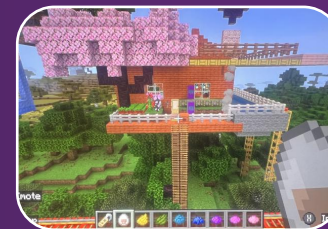
The Six Classic Motivators of Play

The Three Modern Motivators of Play

Fun

Mastery

Competition

Immersion

Meditation

Comfort

Self-Expression

Companionship

Education

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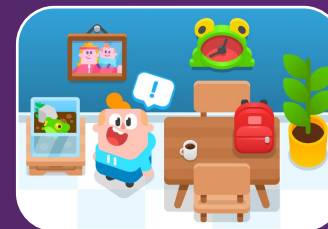
The Nine **Motivators of Play**

Fun

Mastery

Competition

Immersion

Meditation

Comfort

Self-Expression

Companionship

Education

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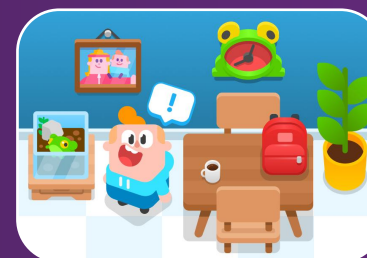
These topics are covered in The Game Development Strategy Guide in more detail!

- **Chapter 1:**
  What Makes Us Play?

  - The Motivators of Play

- **Chapter 6:**
  The Why of Multiplayer

  - Multiplayer motivations

- **Chapter 8:**
  From Emergence to Prosocial Gaming

  - Prosocial gaming and preventing disruptions

  Plus 12 other chapters on topics like game design essentials, narrative design, video game graphics and art, a primer on video game job disciplines and processes, video game economies and ethics, and so much more.
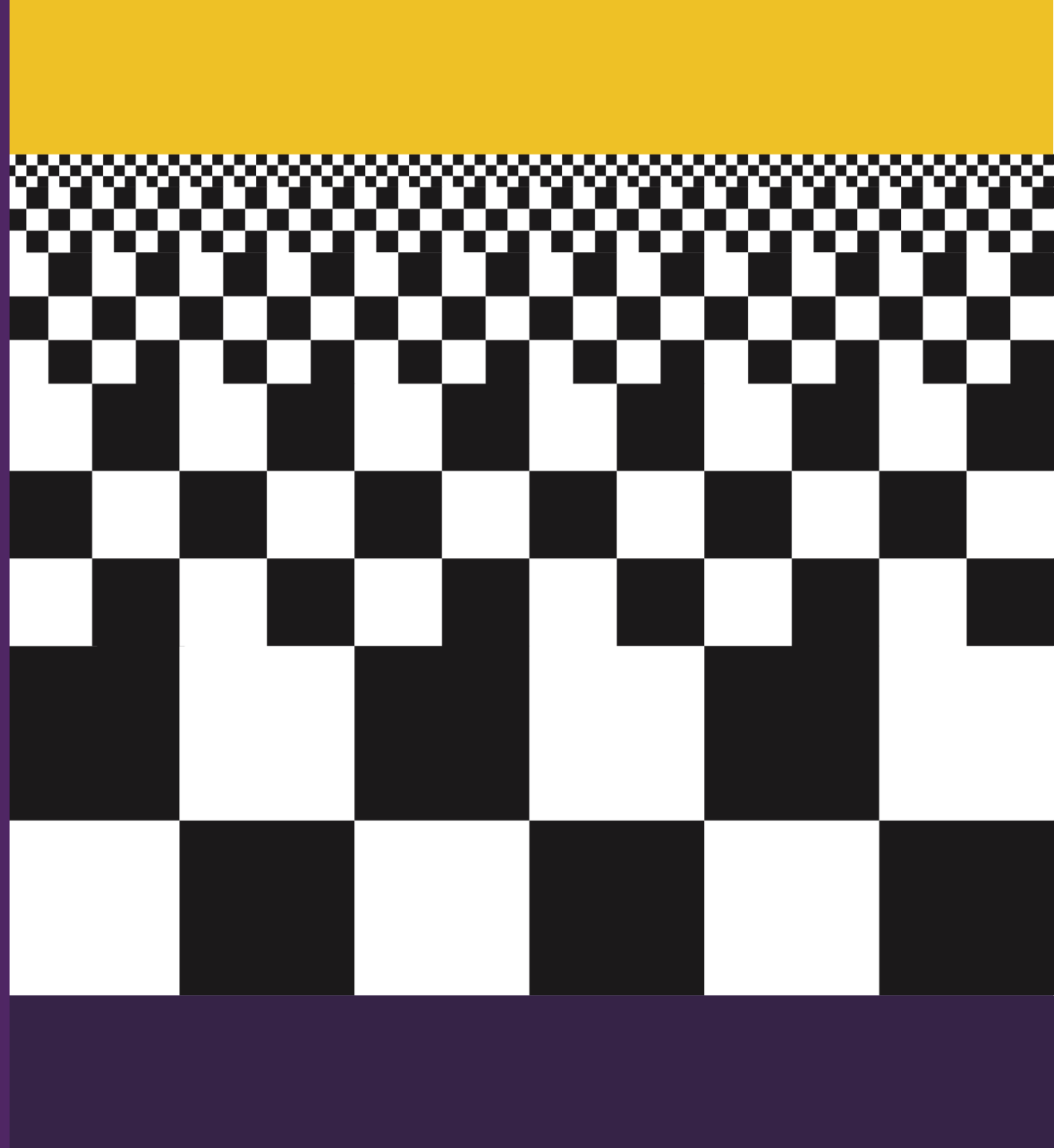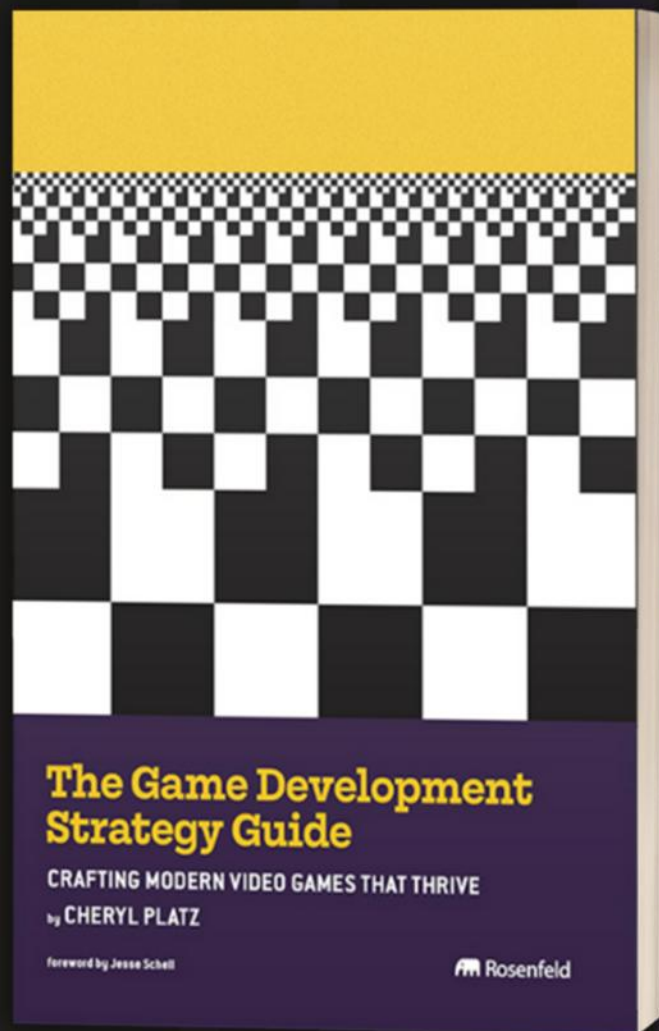
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When you design for player motivation, your games are more likely to thrive.

GLHF!

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TODAY…
while supplies last

Enduring **PLAY**
a game dev podcast

Enduring **PLAY** : A Game Dev Podcast

Enduring **PLAY**
a game dev podcast
hosted by Cheryl Platz

enduringplay.com   Ideaplatz
build games that don't just survive, but thrive

Come say hi and get a free mini **glitter sticker** for my new podcast, Enduring Play!

Show me a receipt for my book from any seller to get a free autographed bookplate sticker sheet!