Katharina Kinder-Kurlanda*, Michele Willson

Chapter 4. Facebook Social Games

Abstract: The popularity of Facebook social games is usually attributed to factors in the three areas of *social interaction*, *play experience* and the possibility for easy, *casual play* (Kinder-Kurlanda, 2012). It is, however, unclear, how these factors relate to the everyday lives of the largest user group, namely female players over the age of 35. An exploratory study of Australian players of Facebook social games was conducted to shed some light on gender-specific play behaviour in everyday circumstances (Willson, 2015a, 2015b). A similar study is planned for the German context.

Keywords: Facebook; social games; gender; everyday; casual games; domestication of technology.

Introduction

This chapter explores some of the ways in which players engage in Facebook social games, reasons for this play and investigates how game play is situated within players' everyday lives. Facebook social games such as Farmville are online games that are accessed and played through the Facebook social network site. These games first gained attention around 2009–2010 when they started attracting millions of players within a relatively short timeframe. Since that time, these games have undergone considerable development driven by a competitive market and by new ideas being adopted at a rapid speed: Once a new gaming idea is successful, clones and adaptations of the game idea quickly follow. At the same time as there has been a rise in Facebook social games, there has also been a rise of mini-games on mobile devices, as games such as Candy Crush Saga, reminiscent of the 1980's games arcades, have become popular. Such games often also can be linked to Facebook and its various features for social interaction. The Facebook social gaming market is therefore also influenced by the rules of mobile app generation and distribution. This has caused some difficulties with appropriate nomenclature – these games are variously referred to in the literature as social

***Corresponding Author: Katharina Kinder-Kurlanda**, GESIS – Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences, Cologne, Germany, Katharina.Kinder-Kurlanda@gesis.org
Michele Willson, Department of Internet Studies, Curtin University, Australia, M.Willson@exchange.curtin.edu.au

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games, social casual games, and social network games. This paper is adopting a very particular focus on Facebook accessed games (i.e. games that are entered via the Facebook social network site) and therefore will use the term, Facebook social games.

The first wave of Facebook social games, and especially Farmville, were greeted both with success and with some scepticism. Attempts within the literature to explain Farmville's success mainly focus on the three aspects of *sociality*, *play experience* and a *casual* character of the gaming experience (Di Loreto, 2010). Explanatory models assume that games such as Farmville require the maintenance of social relationships and thus serve as focal points for the generation of online fan communities (e.g. Rao 2008). At the same time, the games enable – through clever design strategies – short term experiences of self-efficacy and an uncomplicated integration of play into everyday life (Juul, 2010). Within these discussions, however, there has been little sustained attention to the question as to why it might be that the largest group of Facebook gamers, according to user statistics, appear to be women, usually over the age of 35 (Kuittinen et al., 2007; Consalvo & Begy, 2015). A look at the everyday circumstances of use for these women could explain which aspects of enabling social relations, providing a play experience and facilitating casual gaming make Facebook social games so attractive to them.

While traditional motivations for gaming such as immersion and achievement clearly play a role in the popularity of any game, Facebook social games are special because of their embeddedness in a specific social network platform, namely Facebook. Drawing on theories from the literature on Facebook gaming and a preliminary study employing questionnaires we explore what 'social interaction' means in the context of Facebook social games: Often interactions are in fact not simultaneous but asynchronous (e.g. gift-giving), occur with in-game characters, or are extremely formalized and limited (Consalvo, 2011) with criticism about the instrumental nature of many interactions (Rossi, 2009). On the other hand, gamer communities have started to evolve both on forums and in-game.

In this chapter, we frame Facebook social gaming as a 'domestication' of technology (Silverstone & Haddon, 1992) allowing us to better understand how social interactions and Facebook gaming experiences are integrated into everyday life. Social games on Facebook are part of a complex regime of social interaction and creative identity work (Willson, 2015b). They satisfy a specific need for staying in contact via small gestures such as gift-giving and thus have a particular place in users' management of friendship networks (Kinder-Kurlanda, 2012). They are also able to be played in ways that complement or accommodate everyday life practices and routines.

Who is playing Facebook social games and why?

The success of Facebook social games, which at least at first glance seem to be less complex than 'traditional' computer games, has increased popular and academic attention to playing within internet facilitated social networks and also to the rise of so called 'casual' games (Williams, 2006; Di Loreto et al., 2010; Juul, 2010). Partly as a result of growth in casual games and Facebook social games and the demographics of those who play them, computer gaming is no longer merely seen as the sole domain of young male players (Shaw, 2012).

Female players and players of 'casual' or 'friendly' games are seldom the target of research although this is beginning to change (see, for example, Consalvo, 2011). Concerning gender and age the statistics in this follow typical usage patterns of casual games (Berry, 2010). Demographically, casual games in fact appeal to various groups of people, but a very large group is reported to be women over the age of 35 (Kuittinen et al., 2007). Juul (2010) noted in his study of casual gamers more broadly, that 93 per cent of his respondents were female with an earlier study in 2006 noting that the majority of female players were over the age of 35 years. It is therefore frequently said that, "the average female social gamer is a 43-year-old woman who plays more frequently than men" (Tellermann, 2010). Consalvo and Begy (2015) however caution against oversimplification of players and their motivations based on players' gender. Rather, they show that players, for varied reasons, enjoy diverse aspects of those games that go against traditional game tropes, and rather focus on friendliness and caretaking.

While casual gaming often is seen in opposition to hard core gaming, many casual games fans spend long intervals of time playing and repeatedly return to the game. A study already showed in 2009 that while casual gamers only played about half as long as "hardcore gamers", their play time still amounted on average to 31 minutes per gaming session.[1] More recent research on the casual game "Angry Birds" have shown that players spend as much time on it daily as on watching television shows.[2] Especially early adopters spend a large time of their free time playing casual games and then become ambassadors within their networks and experts for the game facilitating prolonged and enduring success of the game (Tellermann, 2010).

1 http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/consumer/report-americans-serious-about-casual-game-play

2 http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/video-games/8303173/Angry-Birds-the-story-behind-iPhones-gaming-phenomenon.html

Commentators have already partially taken these observations into account when analysing the success of Facebook social games. However, there are also contradictions and gaps in current theorising. An investigation of the various users, user groups and of the everyday situated nature of casual game play may be able to further understanding as to why Facebook social games are so successful. In the following some theoretical groundwork shall be laid – also as a foundation for future research – to answer the question of what is so fascinating about playing games on Facebook. What makes games such as Farmville so successful? To answer this question, the three attributes that distinguish Facebook social games from other computer games and that have found recognition within the literature shall be discussed, namely the focus on *social* interactions and cooperation, the specific type of *play* experience and the fact that the games are seen as *casual* games (see also Kinder-Kurlanda, 2012).

Social interactions – or are they?

Often Facebook social games' success is attributed to its successful integration of existing social relations within the Facebook network. In many of these games, players are encouraged to build up and maintain social relations in the form of a network of in-game friends in order to progress: While it is possible to play many games without interacting with other players, having 'friends' or 'neighbours' is usually rewarded in some way. In Farmville, for example, most elements such as animals, trees or special collection items can be bought with Farmville money. These items are very expensive. However the game design allows these types of items to be given free as daily gifts to others. In addition, the player is reliant on neighbours for other advancements and improvements in the game, for example, to increase the size of the farmable plot. Players are thus motivated to encourage others to also play in order to increase the number of their friends or neighbours in the game (Rohrl, 2011). Indeed, players are not only encouraged to ask others to also play the game, but, once they have joined the game, they may feel obligated to continue playing for the sake of companion players. This could partially explain why players repeatedly return to the game.

Additionally, Rao (2008) has researched how social gaming applications serve to establish a playful mood and thus encourage and initiate Facebook use, thereby establishing Facebook as a virtual 'third place' (Oldenburg, 1997). A third place in this conceptualization is a space which exists outside of both work and the home and which, like a transient version of a café, serves as a place for recreation and meeting others (Rao, 2008) and thus constitutes a focal point for

the emergence and maintenance of communities (Williams, 2006). Third place theorizing arose mainly out of the experience of US American sub-urbanisation in which non-virtual third places lost their importance. As a result of humans finding few real-world outlets to meet their desire for community and social interaction, it has been suggested that certain social ties have moved online as part of a virtual community (Williams, 2006, p. 15).

Facebook social games, by enabling a location for meeting online, thus not only contribute to making the Facebook space more attractive and interesting but also define it as a third place in which relaxation and socializing outside of either home or work become possible. Di Loreto et al. (2010) even postulated the emergence of so called 'new tribes' in the electronic age, a concept borrowed from Maffesoli (1996). Accordingly, tribes are appearing in social games on Facebook where social ties are fostered that make the player return to the game application repeatedly. An increase in the importance of a feeling of community for the players is the result (Di Loreto et al., 2010). The tribes are unstable, small, affective and arise outside the parameters of 'modern' society and we are even witnessing "... the tendency for a rationalized 'social' to be replaced by an empathetic 'sociality', which is expressed by a succession of ambiences, feelings and emotions." (Maffesoli, 1996, p. 11). The network is held together through common focal points: The shared focus on the gameplay creates a line between insiders and outsiders which allows the emergence of communities in Facebook social games. The exchange of gifts, for example, enables players to create a feeling of belonging together within a tribe, which is held together through the practice of gift-giving (Di Loreto et al., 2010).

Critics have claimed Facebook social games are not social: that games position player's friends purely as resources, and that the possibility for in-game communication is extremely limited raising questions about the types of sociality enacted (Bogost, 2010; Rossi, 2009; Consalvo, 2011). Flanagan and Nissenbaum note the contradictory values embedded in the game mechanics design: "First, *Farmville* relies on community, trust, and friendship, but the game also involves the exploitation of these values, and this exploitation often negates the positive values" (2014, p. 28). While this might be the case, there is also growing evidence that Facebook social games do indeed act as a mechanism to allow people to stay in contact and to enact phatic communication practices easily (Burroughs, 2014; Wen et al., 2011). Kelly Boudreau and Mia Consalvo (2014), for example, note that social games offer a way for families to stay connected through their activities in game in a way that also means they do not have to undertake separate and possibly intense direct communication. Facebook game activity also does not stay entirely inside the game itself: Achievements and activities are noted on a

Facebook user's profile, and often broadcast to a user's Facebook friends thereby encouraging broader conversations (Wen et al., 2011; Willson, 2015b).

As Flanagan and Nissenbaum (2014) note, Facebook game developers explicitly aim to further or even force player collaboration. Developers argue that players use Facebook out of a desire for communication and only find games attractive if these facilitate or enable relationship maintenance:

> The player is coming to the website to build and enjoy relationships with friends, not to play games. So, when a game helps players take care of their main social networking goal – building relationships with their friends – players will stay with the game longer and are more likely to evangelize the game to their friends. (Rohrl, 2011, p. 59)

Developers thus often seem to assume that Facebook users are mainly interested in social interaction. Developers are also interested in profiting from the possibilities for social interaction while enabling them. Brian Reynolds, game designer at Zynga (a social casual games developer whose offerings include Farmville) goes even further in postulating that games offer better opportunities for maintaining social contacts than other means of communication such as, for example, e-mail: "...there's all these different levels of social interaction that you can have, and these games provide tools for people to have those interactions." (Nutt, 2010)

There may be other, underlying reasons connected to the financial benefits of collecting consumer data on social networks which contribute to game providers furthering players' linking games with their social network on Facebook (Willson & Leaver, 2015). This happens even in those cases where the game is not per se a Facebook only game (as is the case, for example, in iPad app games such as Candy Crush Saga or Hay Day where players are regularly asked whether they would like to link the game with their Facebook account to gain certain in-game rewards). In any case game developers assume an important role in generating communities and in enabling communication and social interaction. Multiple strategies are applied that are intended to further collaboration between gamers such as the possibility to click on friends' game-related messages in the Facebook stream to gain a game-specific reward.

Paradoxically both designers and researchers assume that many interactions in the game do not constitute 'real' collaboration. A typical example of a game designer's position is Rohrl's (2001, p. 60) explanation that offers of collaboration in the game merely serve to give players the 'feeling' of interaction. Both Rao (2008) and Di Loreto et al. (2010) have argued that interactions in Farmville are merely representations of interactions. Players are not actually able to influence the game behavior but rather representations are offered which can be interpreted in various ways but cannot be changed through player interactions (Rao,

2008). Seen like this the presence of other players is a symbolic representation of others within the game experience in which actual game interactions do not take place: "the presence of friends seems more a symbolic representation worth the aim of giving a feeling of community and participation without actual co-presence or interaction." (Di Loreto et al., 2010, p. 80)

Results and interactions in the game are, however, published on Facebook. This contributes to the creation of the user's Facebook identity without requiring interactions with other Facebook users. Players who surf onto the Facebook page looking for social interactions are given the illusion of community and activity on Facebook becomes possible without others' input and is pre-structured through playful elements. It is worth mentioning that although many opportunities for interaction and in Farmville can be seen as fictional representations, other forms of collaboration, for example, the exchange of gifts, are not of a fictional character.

To summarize, in the literature various reasons can be found that attribute Facebook social games' success to their sociality. Requests for game-specific actions and replies engender both the spreading of the game and its repeated use. Additionally, Facebook social games serve as focal points of shared interest and enable easy communication and interaction between players. While some interactions are only 'fictional', the asynchronous, not simultaneous and partially interactive nature of interactions may satisfy a demand of players for uncomplicated maintenance of specific social contacts.

Play experience

Some authors (e.g., Kuittinen et al., 2007) have suggested that the play experience in casual games does not only refer to the actual game experience itself. For Facebook applications a multitude of playful experiential spaces is noticeable which cannot be reduced to narrow game sessions or even originate in these (Kuittinen et al., 2007). Social interactions or playing 'on the side' while engaged in other activities indicate that important influences on the game experience can be found outside of the actual game sessions or at least outside of the narrow frame of actual interaction with the game application. Different users with their individual motivations, abilities and resources are attracted to different elements of the game experience (from easy accessibility all the way through to various elements of the game itself). Which elements are attractive to which user groups for whatever reasons requires further investigation.

Game developers seem to usually assume that specific game mechanics and design elements contribute to the success of a Facebook game. For example, Rohrl (2010) suggests various recipes for success à la Farmville as promising strategies for casual games design. Two examples are 'timed re-engagement' (i.e. encouraging taking up the game at a later point in time) and 'limiting game-play' (i.e. setting a limit to the possible play actions per session).

In Farmville players are encouraged to return to the game at a later point in time, for example, by the fact that crops planted on the farm will have grown after a certain period of time and then can only be harvested within a specific time interval. After this time period plants will wither and cannot be harvested anymore. Rohrl (2010, p. 14) writes: "This has become a potent device for encouraging users to make a commitment to playing the game and to returning over and over."

The second strategy, i.e. to limit possible interactions within the game sound paradoxical but is also intended to ensure that players return to the game. Only a certain number of game tasks can be accomplished in one session. After that players need to wait for plants to grow, for gifts to be returned and so on, which encourages them to play long-term and repeatedly.

Psychological studies of players' desire for self-efficacy show how such strategies can be successful. Self-efficacy refers to experiencing one's own direct-causal influence on the game occurrences as a feeling of success (Klimmt, 2006). Why players find these experiences in social casual games specifically is not entirely clear. The brevity of game sessions and the fact that small experiences of success can be achieved easily may contribute to an especially accessible and uncomplicated way of experiencing direct-causal influence. One can assume that the specific type of playing offered by Facebook social games occupies a very specific role in players' complex everyday home and work environments.

'Casual' play (to fit in with other everyday activities)

Facebook social games can be played while being busy with other activities that require time and attention. 'Casual' games or playing refers to the way in which play may happen in short intervals or not be given full attention. Facebook social games can thus be played 'on the side' while engaged in other activities. Juul (2010) indicates that one of the attractions of casual games is their interruptibility which means that they can be played episodically: "Casual games just fit in better with my life." (Juul, 2010, p. 12). Casual playing also allows realizing a

social component, which becomes possible though so-called 'asynchronous multiplay' (Bogost, 2010). Facebook social games (like Facebook itself) allow social networking through asynchronous conversations that do not rely on simultaneous presence: Two players do not have to be online at the same time to be able to interact with each other. Game events are communicated to the player through game messages or symbolic means and they can reciprocate or react later on. The resulting breaks in the game allow the player to fit in both game requirements and everyday offline needs and obligations (Rao, 2008). The asynchronous game mechanics and the mechanisms of time-delayed re-engagement further Facebook social games as games 'on the side' to be played casually and easily fitted around other activities.

Open questions

From the literature we can conclude that there are three areas, namely social interactions, play experience, and the casual nature of the games, where reasons for the games' attractiveness are likely to be found. Questions remain in all three areas:

a) Social interactions: How do players view the possibilities for interaction? What kind of friendships and networks are emerging?
b) Play experience: What do experiences of self-efficacy look like when playing Facebook games? Are they different from other games?
c) Casual Gaming: What roles do casual games fulfil in the context of daily life and work?

How are these questions related to the everyday domestic and work lives of female players over the age of 35? Are the attractions of Facebook social games a particularly good fit to many of these female players' situations and interests? Further light can only be shed by empirical investigation of players' everyday playing practices within the context of their daily lives. Facebook social games are part of the 'domestication' of new technologies in which players actively work at integrating them into their daily lives, making them fit with other demands and interests and may even use them in ways not intended by the developers (Silverstone, 1992, Sørensen, 2005). Media use is thus always embedded in the everyday situated context of everyday communication and interaction (Bausinger, 1983).

Facebook social games thus can play a multitude of functions according to a range of different factors within people's everyday lives, depending on individual life situations and needs (Wohn & Lee, 2013). It follows that not only the specific

content or nature of the games is important in order to understand people's interaction with them but also the cultural context of the situations of use. From the situated dimension of concrete use, a more general dimension of meaning can be distinguished. These meanings are influenced by the knowledge the user possesses, for example, about the general view of the used technology in the media (Beck, 1997). Social casual games are thus, for example, connected to discourses around privacy and 'low' culture or smut. Different discourses can be important, depending on where the players live. In Germany, for example, new technologies tend to be viewed with far more skepticism than in many other countries (Bausinger, 2000).

Social, individual and design aspects of playing need to be studied within the various (differing) cultural contexts. In addition, the examination should pay special attention to the largest user group of female players over the age of 35. It should be clarified which of their characteristics make Facebook social games so appealing to this group in particular, which of them are shared with other user groups, and which are idiosyncratic for this group.

As a first step towards answering the questions above we can ask whether there are any observable differences in the play patterns of male and female players with regard to time, place and reasons for playing that might serve to further our understanding of why people play. As the following section shows, doing so highlights some first insights that may in a next step be exploited to further understanding of play motivations.

Some answers from a study in Australia

An exploratory study was conducted in Australia to discover how social games played with others through social network sites such as Facebook are situated within the everyday. Australian game players were asked about their management and integration of game play within the everyday and the results were analysed with a particular focus on gender. The results – while preliminary – show that social games perform a range of interactive and integrative functions across and within people's lives.

According to a study in 2015 of 1274 Australian households and the 3398 individuals (of all ages) living in those households, 83 per cent of game households now use a PC for games (this is up from 53 per cent in 2013 – explained by the authors as a result of growth in content delivered online), 66 per cent of game households use mobile phones, while tablet computers have shown significant increases from 26 per cent in 2013 to 55 per cent of game household use in 2015

(Brand et al., 2015). The study noted that 68 per cent of all Australians play video games, of which social games form a subset, with 98 per cent of households with children under 18 years of age having computer games.

An exploratory study was conducted in 2014 that investigated the ways in which Australian social games players integrate game play into their everyday routines and practices. An online survey was distributed over a two-month period using a snowball sampling technique (More details on the survey, the method of sampling and the analysis can be found in Willson, 2015a). Once the data was collected, it was analysed according to gender to see whether there were noticeable differences in social games practices or patterns of play, and motivations. Differences might suggest that social games may be instantiated in the everyday in different ways and for different reasons in people's lives in part according to their gender. The survey was intended to identify areas worthy of further investigation.

Participants were asked to complete a short online survey on social games and the everyday. 154 responses were collected altogether with 94 of the respondents being female. The survey was addressed to both players and non-players of social games. The first questions were largely demographic and included questions about age, gender, education level achieved, household arrangements, size of household and questions about game enabled device ownership (i.e. tablets, smart phones, consoles etc.).

The next section asked about social game play: Of the 154 responses, 82 identified as players, 65 said they didn't play social games, three were unsure and four did not respond at all. On closer inspection, the three who were unsure all indicated they played games that could be classified as social games but included the possibility of accessing the game from outside of social network sites. Given some of the ambiguities around social and casual games in terms of definition and their shifting use in terms of platforms used and ways accessed (Deterding et al., 2010), this lack of surety is understandable. However, because this particular paper focusses specifically on Facebook social games, these three respondents have been excluded from the following analysis and discussion.

Players were asked to list the games that they most commonly play (a later question asked about what aspects of game play they enjoy). Of the total respondents, there were 69 respondents who identified as Australian players. The remaining questions were directed to understanding social game play in the everyday in Australia: questions as to who people play with; what devices they use; how often they play; where they play and so on were asked in order to get a sense of how social games might sit within the fabric of people's everyday lives, routines and practices.

The age of survey respondents ranged from 17 years or younger, to over 60 years with the majority (62 per cent) falling within the 30–49-year age group.

When non-players were removed from the dataset, this percentage increased to 86 per cent. There was a high proportion of female respondents overall (94 females to 58 males, two other/do not want to specify gender). When the data was focussed on just Australian players, this higher response rate was still evident with a total of 49 female players, 19 male players and one other completing the survey. Females in the age bracket of 40–49 formed the largest proportion of respondents (37.73 per cent or 18 out of 49 respondents. The next highest proportion was the 50–59 age group with 20.41 per cent or 10 respondents).

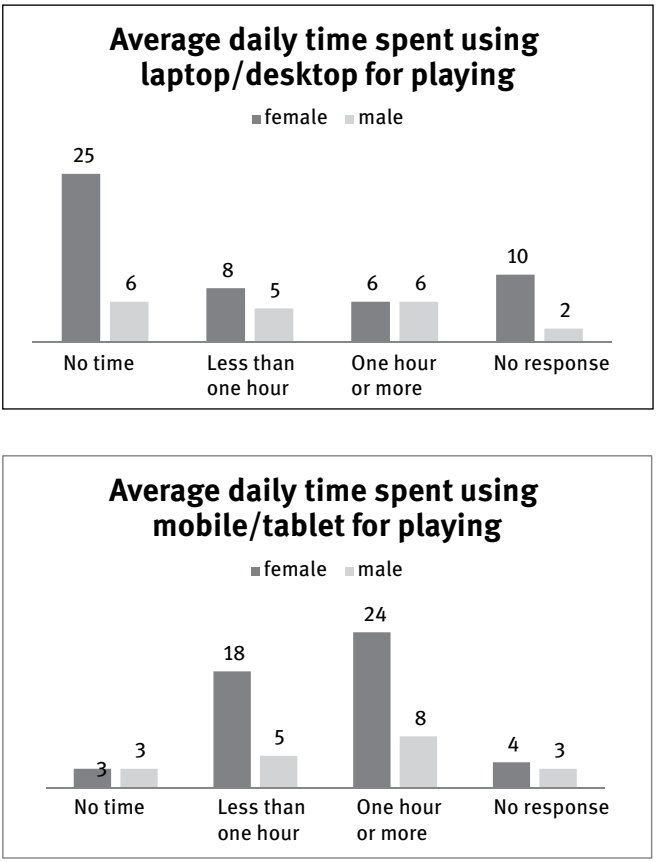


Figure 1: Average daily time spent on laptop/desktop or mobile/tablet for play of number of female and male players.

When the data was analysed on the basis of male and female gender, a number of noticeable differences in game play preferences and patterns became evident.

First, the amount of time spent on various devices differed. Respondents were asked about their social game use in relation to the amount of time they spend on various devices (desktop/laptop and mobile/portable devices) for their game play. Females in the study overwhelmingly used portable mobile devices for their game play with 25 respondents noting they spent no time at all on desktop or laptops for game play on average whereas only four females spent no time on mobiles. This contrasted strongly with male respondents whose time was more easily spread across devices (with the exception that half of the male respondents spent more than one hour/day on mobile/tablets).

There are obvious difficulties in assessing time spent on game play given that many people may multi-task with games running in the background while they are busy with other tasks or duties. Self-reporting of time spent playing may also be influenced by possible negative connotations associated with playing, e.g. feeling of too much time being 'wasted'. Although both genders typically under-report time spent, researchers note that women's underreporting is significantly more extensive: Williams et al. (2009) found that female players underreported their playing time roughly three times more than male players.

When linked with other survey data about when people are likely to play and where, these differences point to different allocations of time and types of activity undertaken within everyday routines. As Paavilainen et al. (2013, p. 810) note, "Social games fit into the players' daily rhythms. The appointment (offline progress) mechanics enable the player to schedule their playing to fit their weekly schedule." Consideration of gendered play differences point to the likelihood of different weekly schedules and everyday practices.

Play patterns

Differences were also noted in terms of locations where people play their games. When asked where they most commonly played (tick all that apply), and given a list of locations, females overwhelmingly nominated 'on the couch' at 84.8 per cent as their most common location. This differed noticeably from their male counterparts who nominated equally 'in my room' and 'in my study' as the most common locations, with 'on the couch' receiving less priority at 33.3per cent. While females also ranked 'in my room' higher than the males at 47.8per cent, it is the contrast in locations in relation to the popularity of couch play, that is most startling (see table 2 below). This difference would indicate a range of possible reasons and differences in everyday life practices and the ways in which social game play is undertaken within this.

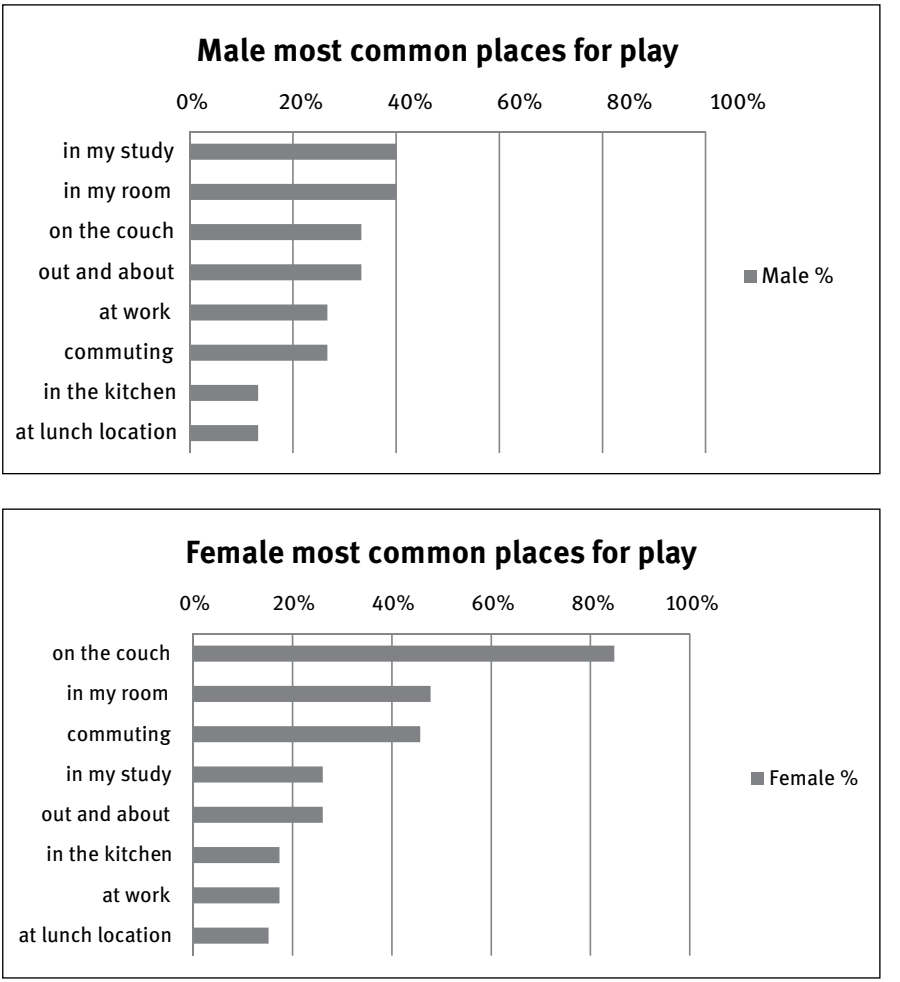


Figure 2: Female and male most common places for play.

There are a range of possible reasons as to why this might be the case – differences might indicate as early studies on television viewing indicated (Walker, 1996), that women have less control over the programming choices made for the main television screen in the house; it might be that all members of the household could be using multiple screens but the women are choosing social game activities as they indicate that they play for different reasons than their male counterparts; or they are undertaking more activities generally in the lounge area (while supervising children, for example). However, these rationales are all purely speculative and further study is warranted. It is worth also noting that

playing on the couch is enabled more readily by play on tablet or mobile devices (correlating with females indicating a high allocation of play time undertaken on these devices).

Respondents were asked about their play patterns in a typical day, trying to find out whether the fact that the games, as 'casual' games might be easier to fit around everyday activities indeed was a factor in the games' attractiveness, especially for women. The responses when given a range of options as to when people are most likely to play were interesting and somewhat difficult to interpret. As indicated in Table 3, the female players' highest responses were noted as 'while waiting', whereas male players nominated 'in-between tasks'. This is an interesting differentiation. While perceived differences between what constitutes waiting and what constitutes in- between-tasks could arguably be suggested to infer the same or similar activity, the deliberate differences in the choices made by both genders raises some interesting questions about everyday activities and how these might map onto gender roles in Australian society.

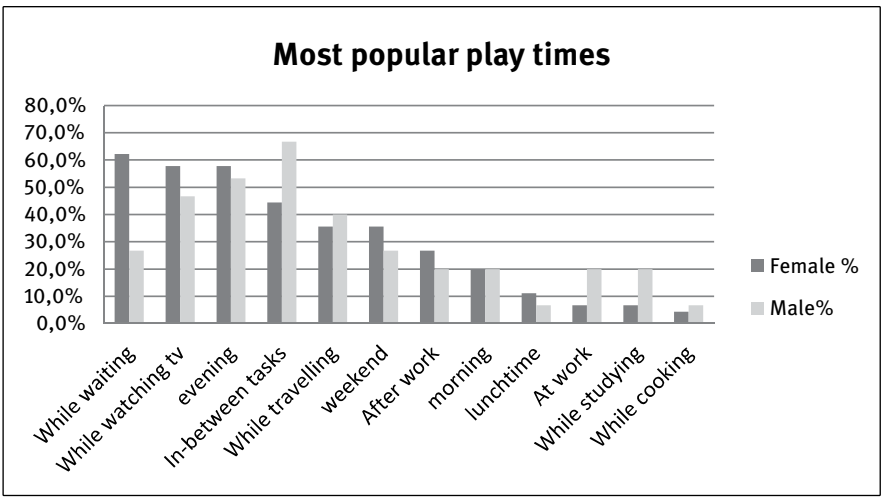


Figure 3: Most popular play times of female (45 answered, 4 skipped) and male (15 answered, 3 skipped) players.

Passing Time or Building?

Respondents were asked what aspects of game play they enjoy most and given a range of options to choose from in order of preference. These choices were dis-

tilled from previous studies alongside observations drawn from consideration of the various activities made possible within these games. Differences again were noted in terms of the responses given by male and female respondents as noted in Table 4.

Table 1: What aspects of the games do you enjoy most? The table shows the aggregated 'enjoy most' (ranked 1) responses.

	female	male
Quests	2	3
Designing, maintaining building activities	3	4
Interaction with others	4	0
Competition	3	2
Passing Time	12	2
Relieving Stress	11	0
Mental Stimulation	9	2
Sense of achievement	2	1

According to Wohn and Lee (2013) 'coping' is the only motivation that they noted as having significant gender differences in social play as female players played games to cope more than males. The results in this Australian study would seem to accord with the finding that women play social games more often to cope (here represented within the categories of relieving stress and passing time), or at least this is the aspect of the game they enjoy most, whereas their male counterparts indicated they enjoy the elements of quests and building (whereas relieving stress did not receive any first preference responses). Importantly, this assertion is made on the basis of a relatively small sample and therefore the inferences that can be drawn are limited. However, it is notable that none of the male players noted relieving stress as one of the most enjoyable activities (again possibly pointing to different gender stress relief practices).

With regard to the question of sociality, the study also showed that sociality in terms of the people with whom the respondents played was a less commonly noted activity. When asked who they most commonly play with, males noted that they play equally by themselves (26.67 per cent) and with family they live with (26.67 per cent), whereas women overwhelmingly chose by themselves (40 per cent) and then friends elsewhere (26.09 per cent). This suggests possibly different gender role patterns in terms of the ways in which games are instantiated in

everyday routines. One interpretation would be that the males may be using the games as a way of building relationships with family members at home, while the women keep in contact with their broader social network of friends through playing the game.

Players were also asked about how they found out about games. The answers reflect how socially these games are embedded in the everyday: both genders nominated word of mouth as the most common way they find about social games (64.7 per cent [11] male, 63.94 per cent [29] women). Extending the finding recounted above about who they play with, women also note invitations from friends more highly (52.17 per cent [24] female) than their male counterparts (29.4 per cent [5] male).

Other indicators of the ways in which the games are embedded in social interactions is reflected in the fact that of the 26 women who noted that they discuss their game play with others, it was overwhelmingly conducted face to face (96.3 per cent), of the 10 men, they noted this slightly less at 90 per cent: both figures indicating that the majority of discussion players undertake with others about social game play takes place in a face to face context outside of the game or Facebook environment.

Discussion

Wohn and Lee (2013) examine gendered play practices in social games and note that gifting and space customisation practices are practiced more commonly amongst women than men. Similarly, they note that women play 'to cope' more frequently than men. Williams et al. (2009) also note sufficient differences in gender play practices to argue that they are a significant area of research and thus that gender considerations should be included in games research. The survey findings recounted here point to some noticeable differences in the ways in which Australian male and female respondents engage with social games and how they fit their game play into their lives and everyday routines.

Adrienne Shaw's work suggests that some of these differences may be a result of the expectations and behaviours that are built into socialised and cultural understandings of particular genders. Drawing on Judith Butler's work on performativity and identity, Shaw (2013) writes,

> People are not simply playing parts in different social contexts. Rather, for Butler the performance of gender is like much more like a speech act (Austin, 1962). The performance of gender is what constitutes gender. These performances must draw on a broader system of meaning which helps render those utterances, those performances, intelligible.

The research recounted here as result of this exploratory study points to sufficient differences across Australian gender play of social games being evident and therefore warranting further investigation.

Taking these factors into account, it is worth revisiting the open questions posed earlier to ascertain if answers can be found.

a) Social interactions: How do players view the possibilities for interaction? What kind of friendships and networks are emerging?
   It is clear from the survey responses that social games are a mechanism for social engagement whether enacted within the game as a way to engage with family and friends; or as something to talk about in other external (i.e. not in-game) contexts. The survey results indicate that gender might also be a factor as to whether family or friends are predominantly played with and also the location (whether co-located or living elsewhere) where these other players are situated may make a difference. Whether these differences might be a result of different types of relational and bonding practices is something to consider. Given the small numbers examined (particularly in relation to male players) this is not able to be determined here but it is certainly something that warrants further examination and consideration.
b) Play experience: What do experiences of self-efficacy look like when playing Facebook games? Are they different from other games?
   As demonstrated in the survey responses, Facebook social games can be easily fitted into everyday routines and practices. This can be seen in terms of intermittent play practices, with short play periods being possible, and also the capacity to play on mobile devices and thus being always-on-hand. Waiting, in-between tasks or watching television were indicated as the most popular times to play, seemingly often while sitting on the couch. These descriptions all indicate the use of Facebook social games as a mechanism to enhance a situation, to address a (possibly unavoidable) otherwise 'empty' or unrewarding experience: as a way to claim a space and activity or refashion it in a way to suit an individual's experiences and desires. These are different types of responses and experiences than we might expect to see from players who may be playing console based games which require either players to be locked into particular static locations for their play activities, or which often require involved and lengthy game play sessions.
c) Casual Gaming: What roles do casual games fulfil in the context of daily life and work?
   Jesper Juul (2010) and many others note that the ways in which daily lives alter over time result in changes in work and family responsibilities and related time demands and availabilities. These changes impact on the types of games

that people want to play, the time and other resources that they can allocate to game play and also the way in which games are situated within their social and familial networks. Casual games, of which Facebook social games form a subset, are able to meet and circumvent or accommodate a range of these constraints in ways that are clearly attractive to a large number of people, and particularly it is suggested, to women in the over 35 age demographic. The survey results recounted here suggest that Facebook social game players turn to social games as a way to relieve stress and boredom, and to keep their minds active, as a mechanism to facilitate social and familial engagement, and also to fill their time (and possibly even to gain some control over their time) when they may be unable to do other things because they are waiting for events, people or circumstances to happen. Understanding what the different responses on the basis of gender might indicate about these relationships with time, families and friends' warrants more detailed investigation.

Outlook and Future Work

In Germany Facebook has received much criticism for infringing on users' and non-users' privacy. Gulyas (2013) has shown that German social media users tend to view social media as more problematic than in other countries. Journalists in her study were more concerned with privacy issues preventing them from using social media than, for example, journalists in England. A study with a translated questionnaire is planned for the German context in order to investigate German users' specific motivations and situated ways of domesticating Facebook social games in their everyday lives. A comparison with the Australian results may help better understand motivations as related to play experiences situated in typical everyday situations.

Acknowledgements: The Australian study reported here was funded by an Australia Research Council Research Linkage Grant (ARC Linkage LP11200026).

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