



Psychology of games

Part 2: Intrinsic motivation

Aalto University's Game Analysis course, 2024

Prof. Perttu Hämäläinen

Some of the material contributed by Prof. Elisa Mekler (ITU Copenhagen)

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Fill in this questionnaire

- <https://urly.fi/2SEL>
- We will continue 13:35

Introduction

- Yesterday: How to optimize reward schedule, presentation, intensity?
- Today: What to reward the players with? What do people desire, feel, need? What is the impact of individual differences between players?

Game design = motivation design

As designers, we want our players to play our games voluntarily, because they want to and feel motivated to do so.

=> Understanding motivation is foundational to game design.

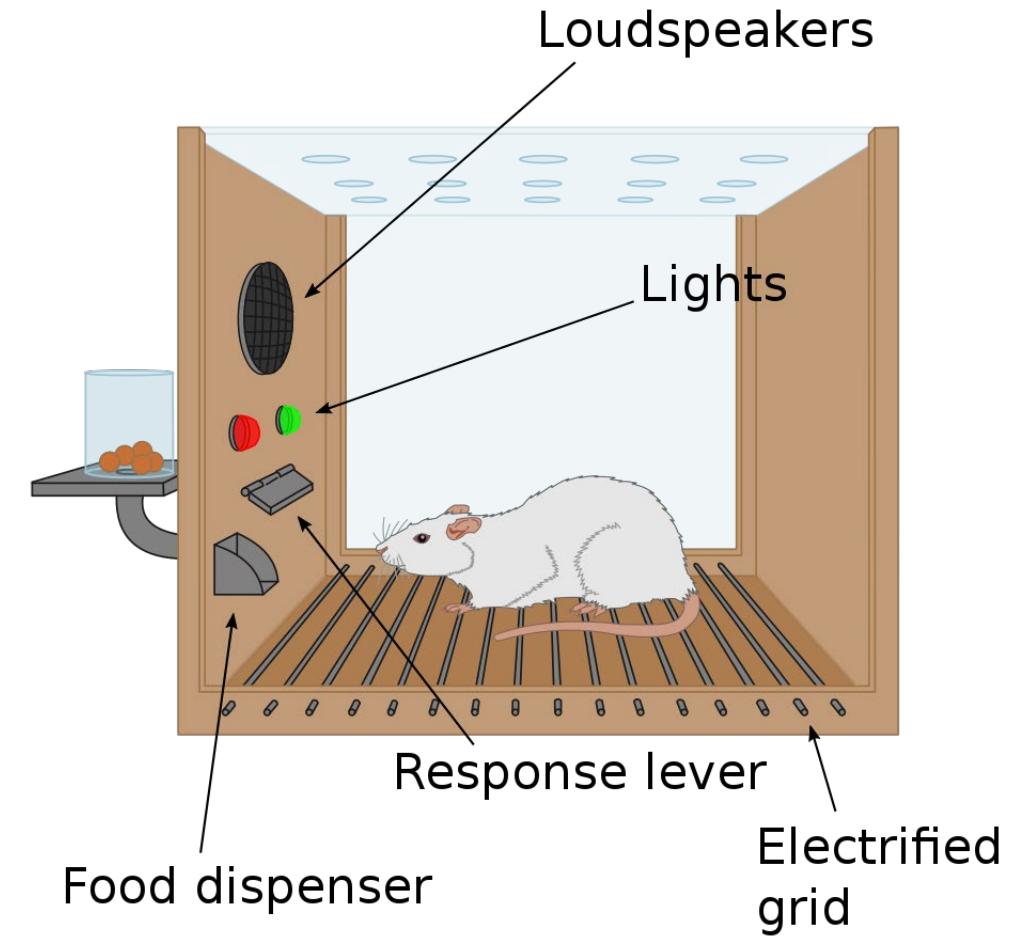


What Is Motivation?

The *energy* to take action, as well as the *direction* in which this energy is then moved

Motivation Research: The Early Days

- Focused on Observable Behavior Only
- No Consideration for Intentions, Experience or Wellbeing





Skinner's Box – The Game?

Score: 700'000'000'000'000 pts

Earn 100'000'000'000'000 pts

Press the button to earn 100'000'000'000'000 pts



<https://tanttinator.itch.io/mort>



Intrinsic & extrinsic motivation

- Extrinsic motivation: motivation by external elements, such as fame, winning a prize, earning a salary, scoring in an exam.
- Intrinsic motivation: doing something for the sake of it, e.g., practicing something because it is inherently enjoyable and interesting

Intrinsic motivation

“Inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one’s capacities, to explore, and to learn.”

“Children, in their healthiest states, are active, inquisitive, curious, and playful, even in the absence of specific rewards.”

“Natural inclination towards assimilation, mastery, spontaneous interest, and exploration that is so essential to cognitive and social development and that represents a principal source of enjoyment and vitality throughout life.”

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in games

- Extrinsic motivation: score, leaderboards, achievements...
- Intrinsic motivation: curious exploration, self-expression, empowerment, friendship-supporting social features, also rewards and feedback if properly designed to support the feeling of competence



Intrinsic motivation, need satisfaction, and Computational Rationality

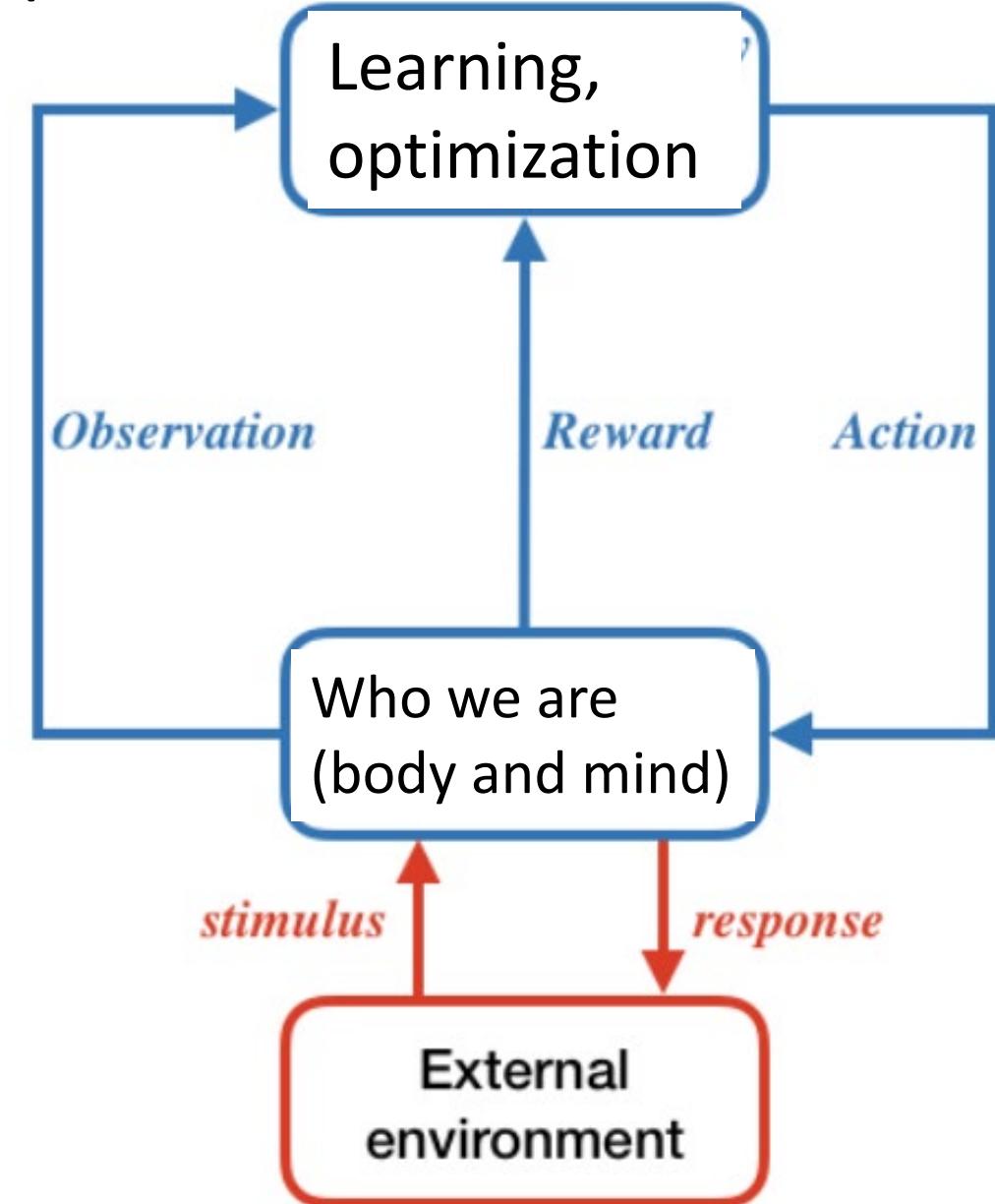
- Psychology of intrinsic motivation: Intrinsically motivating experiences facilitate satisfaction of **basic psychological needs**
 - Games: Satisfaction of basic psychological needs predicts game enjoyment, playing persistence, and improved wellbeing
- Computational Rationality: motivation emerges from rewards

=> To reconcile the two perspectives, one can define a reward function with "intrinsic rewards" that originate from inside the brain and represent need satisfaction.

Intrinsic Motivation and Computational Rationality

Viewing intrinsic motivation as seeking intrinsic rewards is useful for:

- Utilizing general reward design principles: randomness, anticipation, breadcrumbing...
- Implementing intrinsically motivated AI, e.g., for playtesting or NPC:s

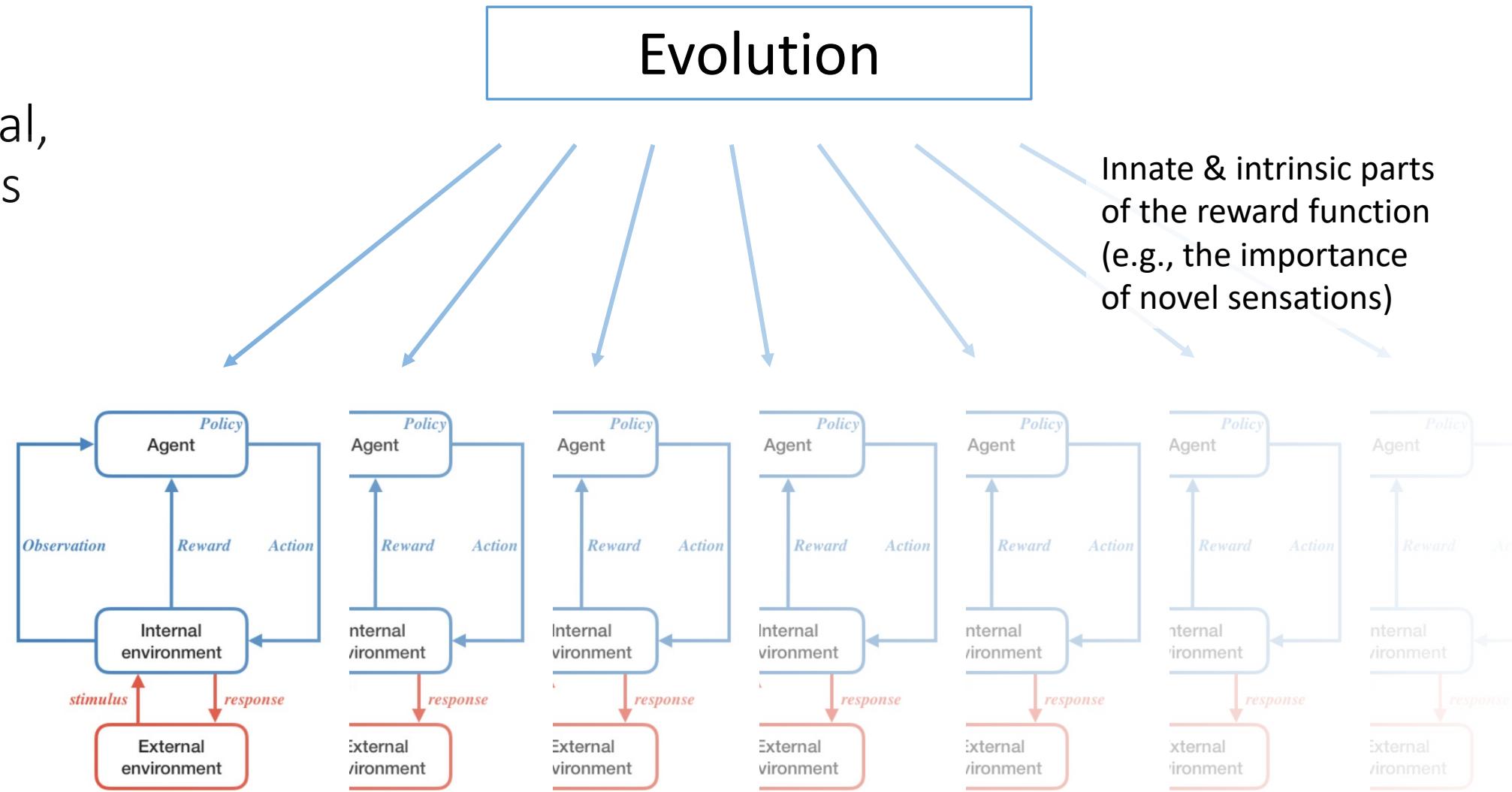




The big picture: Two nested optimization processes

Evolution:
Optimization of
genes for survival,
over generations

Computational
Rationality:
Optimization
of behavior
during each
individual's
lifespan



CR limitations defined by evolution: cognitive architecture, innate preferences and other System 1 biases...

Nature vs. nurture

- Obviously, genes don't determine everything
- What we value (our internal reward function) is also affected by family, education, media, religion...



A General Model: Rewards based on needs

$$r = w_{novelty} \ r_{novelty} + w_{food} \ r_{food} + w_{pain} \ r_{pain} + \dots$$

- The total reward = sum of multiple components, each based on a need
- Including both psychological and physiological needs
- The weights w define one's “personality” or “player type”
- The weights are modulated by both genes and environment
- The weights may change dynamically and contextually

How to determine the weights?

Active research area:

Inferring reward function weights and components based on observed human behavior

Amortized Inference with User Simulations

Hee-Seung Moon^{1,2}, Antti Oulasvirta², Byungjoo Lee¹

¹Yonsei University, Republic of Korea

²Aalto University, Finland

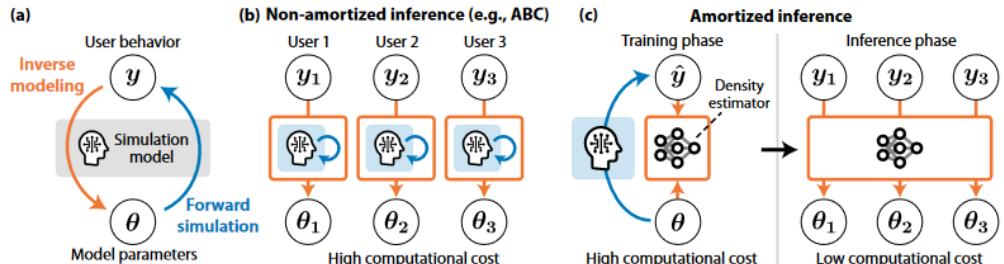


Figure 1: (a) *Inverse modeling* is the process of inferring parameters of user-simulation models from given user-behavior data. (b) Previous inverse modeling approach (e.g., approximate Bayesian computation, or ABC) requires iterating behavior simulations to seek those parameters best describing the given dataset. The iteration comes at a high computational cost (consuming even several days) and must be repeated each time a new user behavior is added. (c) In contrast, *amortized inference* enables rapid inference for every new user behavior. In the one-time training phase, a neural-network-based density estimator learns the probabilistic relationship between the model's parameters and simulated behaviors, at high computational cost. Then, in the inference phase, the trained density estimator takes the user-behavior observations as input and infers the posterior distribution of the parameters, at low computational cost: less than a second.

ABSTRACT

There have been significant advances in simulation models predicting human behavior across various interactive tasks. One issue remains, however: identifying the parameter values that best describe an individual user. These parameters often express personal cognitive and physiological characteristics, and inferring their exact values has significant effects on individual-level predictions. Still, the high complexity of simulation models usually causes parameter inference to consume prohibitively large amounts of time, as much as days per user. We investigated *amortized inference* for its potential to reduce inference time dramatically, to mere tens of milliseconds. Its principle is to pre-train a neural proxy model for probabilistic inference, using synthetic data simulated from a range of parameter combinations. From examining the efficiency and prediction performance of amortized inference in three challenging cases that involve real-world data (menu search, point-and-click, and touchscreen typing), the paper demonstrates that an amortized-inference approach permits analyzing large-scale datasets by means of simulation models. It also addresses emerging opportunities and challenges in applying amortized inference in HCI.

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<https://doi.org/10.1145/3544548.3581439>

CCS CONCEPTS

- Human-centered computing → User models;
- Mathematics of computing → Density estimation.

KEYWORDS

simulation models, inverse modeling, amortized inference

ACM Reference Format:

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1 INTRODUCTION

Simulation models of human-computer interaction (HCI) are computer programs that produce moment-by-moment predictions of an interactive user's action (e.g., [30, 31, 49, 51, 54, 68, 74]). In technical terms, they consist of *model parameters* and executable *mechanisms*, which together produce simulations. The mechanisms represent the processes that underlie user behavior, whereas models' parameters in general describe cognitive, physiological, or biomechanical characteristics of a simulated user. For example, parameters in a model of point-and-click behavior [15] characterize the noise of the human visual and motor systems, and a model of menu-search behavior [10] has parameters linked to memory recall. Such parameters are latent (not directly observable) and differ in values between individual users [34] or user groups [69]. Through finding

<https://dl.acm.org/doi/full/10.1145/3544548.3581439>

Physiological needs

- Energy (blood sugar)
- Body temperature
- Sleep
- Games: relevant to game addiction, not so much to game design

Psychological needs central to games

- Self-determination theory: competence, autonomy, social relatedness/connection
- Psychology of curious interest: novelty
- Transformative games: Self-actualization

Self-Determination Theory

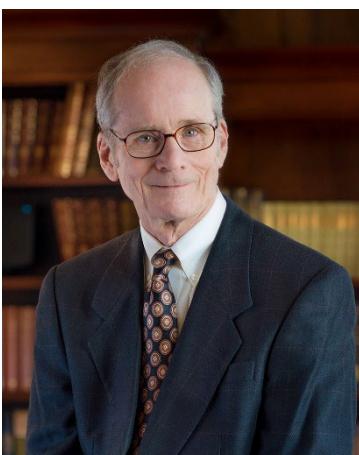
- A popular psychological theory of motivation
- Intrinsically motivating experiences facilitate satisfaction of basic psychological needs: Competence, autonomy, relatedness



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A?

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Edward Deci

Self-Determination Theory

Basic Psychological Needs in Motivation, Development, and Wellness



Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci

Increasing Prominence of SDT in the Games Industry



Breaking the Rules of Game

Design: when to go against Autonomy,
Competence, and Relatedness

Kaitlyn Burnell

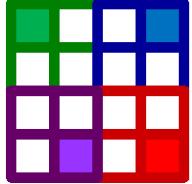
Programmer, Naughty Dog (ideas for
this talk developed at CCP)

GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE
SAN FRANCISCO, MARCH 5-9, 2012
EXPO DATES: MARCH 7-9

Engines of Play



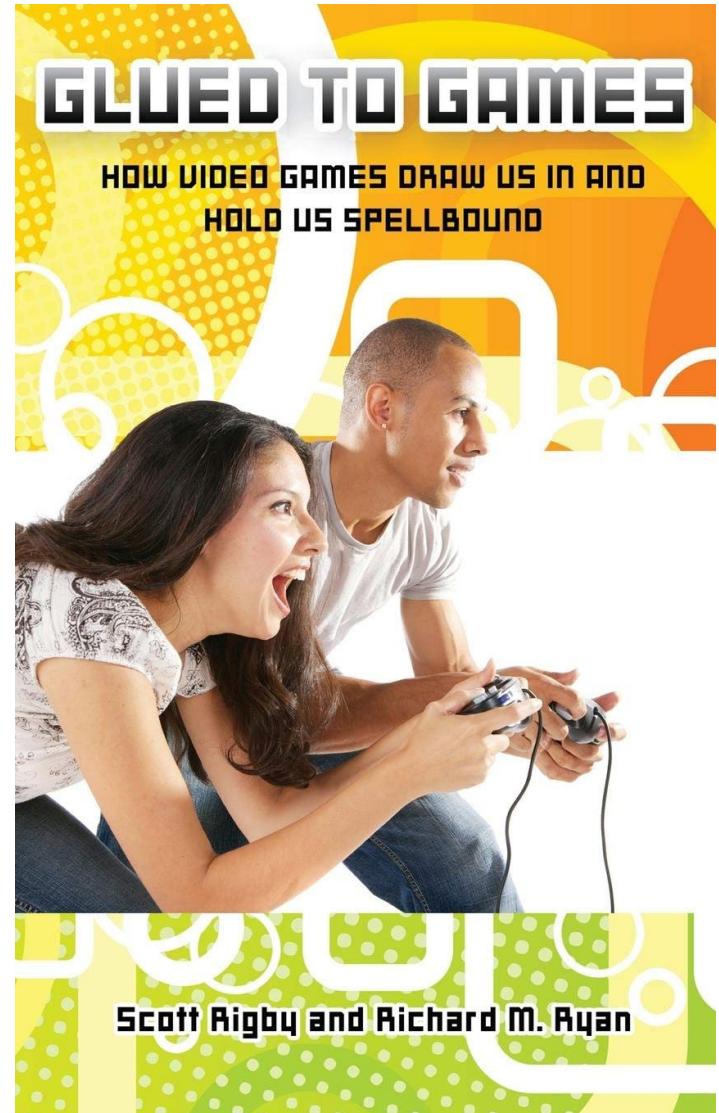
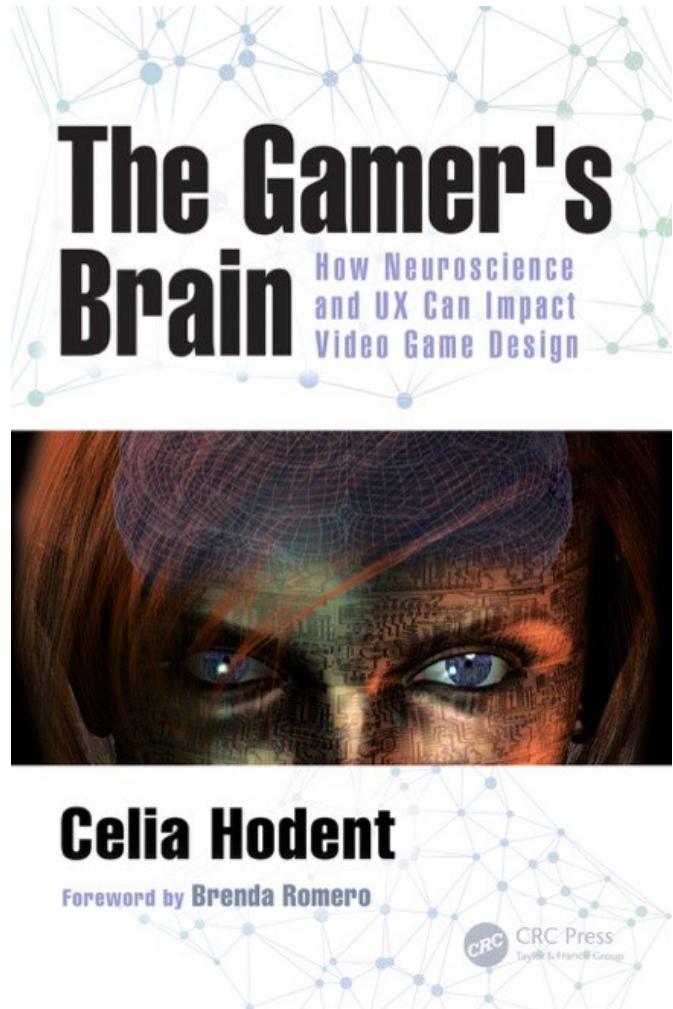
Jason VandenBerghe
Creative Director



Increasing Prominence of SDT in the Games Industry



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What Makes Games Motivating?



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ORIGINAL PAPER

The Motivational Pull of Video Games: A Self-Determination Theory Approach

Richard M. Ryan · C. Scott Rigby · Andrew Przybylski

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Abstract Four studies apply self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000) in investigating motivation for computer game play, and the effects of game play on well-being. Studies 1–3 examine individuals playing 1, 2 and 4 games, respectively and show that perceived in-game autonomy and competence are associated with game enjoyment, preferences, and changes in well-being pre- to post-play. Competence and autonomy perceptions are also related to the intuitive nature of game controls, and the sense of presence or immersion in participants' game play experiences. Study 4 surveys an on-line community with experience in multi-player games. Results show that SDT's theorized needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness independently predict enjoyment and future game play. The SDT model is also compared with Yee's (2005) motivation taxonomy of game play motivations. Results are discussed in terms of the relatively unexplored landscape of human motivation within virtual worlds.

Keywords Computer games · Motivation · Self-determination theory

Over the last decade, technology has made possible increasingly sophisticated simulated environments and the ability to use these environments for entertainment, education, and social interaction. The exponential increase in computing

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power, coupled with the integration of the Internet into mainstream society, has given birth to numerous gaming environments and "virtual worlds," that are increasingly complex, immersive, engaging, and enabling of a wide range of activities, goals, and social behavior.

Of particular relevance to the research we present in this article are those computer environments associated with *gaming*. Participation in video games has become the fastest growing form of human recreation. Attesting to this, annual revenues from video games have surpassed those of Hollywood (Yi, 2004), making them the world's largest entertainment medium. Moreover, participation in gaming is commonplace across a variety of demographic groups, capturing an ever-increasing proportion of both youth and adult leisure time. Whether they take the form of traditional video games, online communities, or "massively multiplayer online" (MMO) adventures, computer games comprise a large and growing share of people's time and energy.

This increased participation in games is not, however, occurring without controversy (Kirsch, 2006). Some scholars have argued that participation in computer games may foster a number of negative effects, including increased tendencies toward violence, lower psychological and physical well-being, lower achievement and productivity, and more impoverished personal and familial relationships (e.g., Anderson & Bushman, 2001; Healy, 1990; Gentile & Anderson, 2003; Setzer & Duckett, 2000). In contrast, other scholars have argued that psychological benefits can be derived from game experiences, including a sense of efficacy and power over one's environment (e.g., Jones, 2002), as well as improvements in learning (Gee, 2003; Johnson, 2005). Given the variety and complexity of computer game activities, it seems evident that games have the potential to yield both psychological harms and benefits to players.



Autonomy

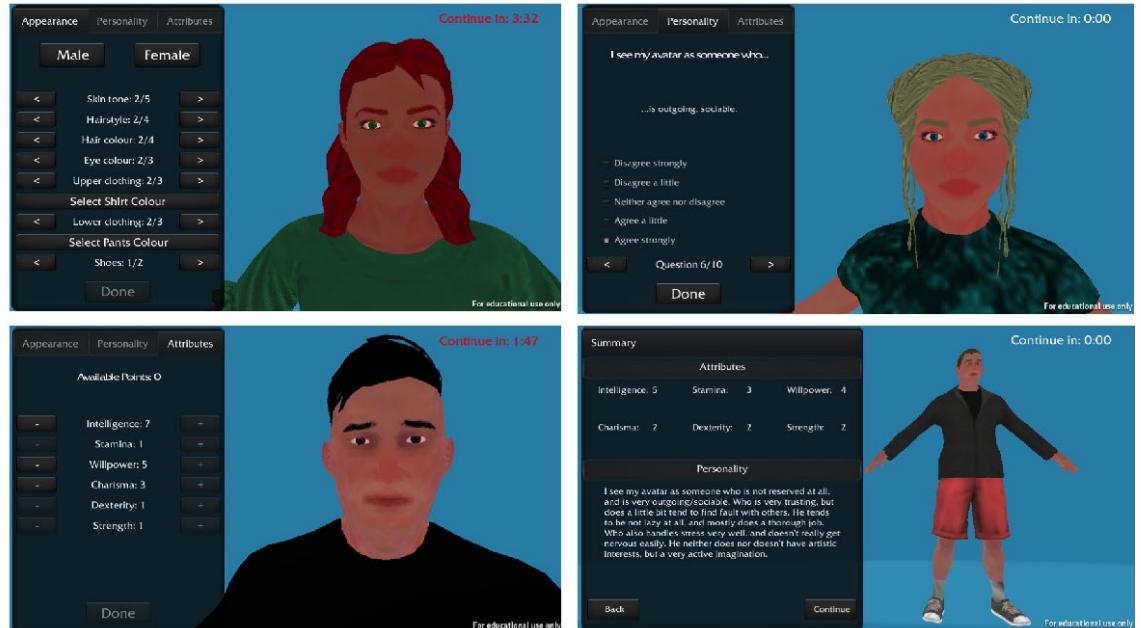
«I have the choice»: Sense that Actions Are Self-Endorsed and Performed Willingly



Autonomy



Choice Supports Autonomy



Fostering Intrinsic Motivation through Avatar Identification in Digital Games

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ABSTRACT

Fostering intrinsic motivation with interactive applications can increase the enjoyment that people experience when using technology, but can also translate into more invested effort. We propose that identifying with an avatar in a game will increase the intrinsic motivation of the player. We analyzed data from 126 participants playing a custom endless runner game and show that similarity identification, embodied identification, and wishful identification increases autonomy, immersion, invested effort, enjoyment, and positive affect. We also show that greater identification translates into motivated behaviour as operationalized by the time that players spent in an unending version of the infinite runner. Important for the design of games for entertainment and serious purposes, we discuss how identification with an avatar can be facilitated to cultivate intrinsic motivation within and beyond games.

Author Keywords

Games; Avatar; Investment; Player Experience; Motivation

ACM Classification Keywords

K.8.0. General: Games

INTRODUCTION

When people are intrinsically motivated to complete a task – that is, they do so based on the inherent satisfaction derived from the action itself [52] – there are many benefits. Broadly speaking, intrinsically motivated people are willing to invest more effort into a task and derive more enjoyment from it [16]. In the case of interactive technology, fostering intrinsic motivation with our applications should translate into more effort invested in the task at hand and more enjoyment as a result of using the application [52]. This increased engagement has implications for both the designers and consumers of interactive technology. For example, consider an educational application designed to help people learn a language; increased effort invested by the user could

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translate into improvements in language learning. Or consider a citizen science application in which people contribute to finding new proteins that cure diseases such as HIV/AIDS, Cancer, or Alzheimer's [15]; increased enjoyment using the application could translate into more use, and thus a more complete database of proteins.

Because of the potential benefits of increased engagement, creators of interactive technology should ask how they can foster intrinsic motivation through design. One place that designers can look for motivation is digital games. Recent estimates suggest that more money is spent purchasing games (\$92b) than music (\$18b) and movies (\$62b) combined [3]. Four out of five American households own a device that is used to play video games and 115 million Americans play games [1]. Internationally, the global game market is expected to exceed \$102 billion by 2017 [2]. Although people sometimes assume that it is highly immersive console and computer games that drive the game industry, 35% of those same revenues are expected to be generated through smart phones and tablets, on which people tend to play games that are more casual in nature. With so much time and money being spent (by choice) on digital games, researchers have questioned what it is about games that make them so motivating to play [52] and how we can translate these motivating features into non-game environments – a process known as gamification [18]. Serious games – games that leverage this ability to motivate behaviour and retain attention in serious contexts – have been effective at encouraging behaviour change and fostering activities that lead to learning [50].

There are various theories that explain why games are engaging [59,10]; the most prevalent arises out of self-determination theory (SDT) [52]. Being self-determined describes a state in which people have their basic psychological needs for perceived competence (i.e., demonstrating mastery over challenges), autonomy (i.e., doing so under their own volition), and relatedness (i.e., doing so while feeling connected to others) satisfied through the activity. Satisfying these needs leads to people who are intrinsically motivated to perform the activity. Designing with need satisfaction in mind is one way that we can design better games [61]; however, this solution works on the level of the game itself – it helps us build a better interactive application. There is also an argument for seeking ways to foster motivation through methods and approaches that apply across a range of applications.

Evolutionary basis for the need for autonomy

Clearly, the lack of autonomy impedes making choices that help the survival of one's genes

Relatedness

- «I have peers I care about»
- A sense of belonging with people we care about (and that care for us)
- Multiplayer, livestreaming



Relatedness



A

Relatedness & Game Characters





Relatedness and autonomy

Contextual Autonomy Support in Video Game Play: A Grounded Theory

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ABSTRACT

Autonomy experience constitutes a core part of the intrinsic motivation of playing games. While research has explored how autonomy is afforded by a game's *design*, little is known about the role of the *social context* of play. Particularly, engaging with serious games or gamified applications is often obligatory, which may thwart autonomy. To tease out contextual factors that affect autonomy, we conducted a qualitative interview study that compared gameplay experience in leisure and work contexts. We found that leisure contexts, particularly solitary play, support autonomy through a time and space shielded from outer demands, the license to (dis)engage with and configure the situation to fit one's spontaneous interests, and a lack of social and material consequence. Thwarted autonomy occurs *both* in leisure and work contexts when players' spontaneous interests mismatch socially demanded gameplay. We discuss implications for entertainment and applied gaming.

Author Keywords

Games; play; video games; motivation; autonomy; context; gamification; self-determination theory.

ACM Classification Keywords

H.5.m. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI): Miscellaneous; K.8.0. Personal Computing: Games.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, serious games, gamified applications, and other forms of applied gaming have tried to harness the motivational pull of game play for non-entertainment purposes across various contexts [3,40]. The underlying logic is simple: games are intentionally designed to afford engaging play activity. Hence, redesigning (presumed) non-engaging activities in contexts like work or learning into a game or infusing them with the 'active' ingredients of game design should make them more engaging as well [10].

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One immediate question regarding this endeavor is whether these various contexts themselves affect the desired motivational pull of gameplay: In the eponymous 1876 novel, Tom Sawyer famously convinced his friends pay him for the privilege of whitewashing Aunt Polly's fence in his stead because he made said chore appear to be something he *wanted* rather than *had to do*, suggesting not just that "Work consists of whatever a body is *obliged* to do, and that Play consists of whatever a body is *not obliged* to do" [49] – but that this lack of obligation itself is part of what makes play appealing. If that were the case, it would cast a gloomy light on applied gaming that turns voluntary play into obligatory homework or job tasks.

Indeed, play is commonly defined as "voluntary", "free", or "autotelic", it's own goal [1,2,21,32,52], unlike formal schooling, work, and other applied gaming contexts. Several scholars in human-computer interaction (HCI) [8], informatics [31], and game studies [58,59,61,63] hypothesize that mainstream forms of gamification – behavior tracking, quantitative progress feedback, and reward systems – might thwart rather than support the openness, inconsequentiality, and voluntariness characteristic for play. And evidence suggests that forced serious game play results in negative affect and reduced performance [19], and that worker consent moderates whether imposed workplace gamification results in positive or negative affect [29].

Such potential demotivating effects of play contexts and their (lacking) voluntariness are relevant for entertainment game design as well: Journalists and ethnographers of massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) for instance observed that "instrumental play" – play that is work-like in its repetitive tedium and instrumentality, or even performed as obligatory wage labor – is sometimes described by its players as not enjoyable or play at all [11,30,46,51]. Social network games have been repeatedly critiqued for their "dark patterns" [62] that coerce players to play through timers or social pressure, with presumed negative effects on play experience. A recent survey [60] indicates that solitary and multiplayer playing differ in autonomy experience. Yet existing conceptualizations of the voluntariness of play have remained quite muddled and definitional [23]: they merely state *that play is voluntary by definition*. They do not provide a systematic theorization of "voluntariness", nor functional explanations *how* this quality comes about.

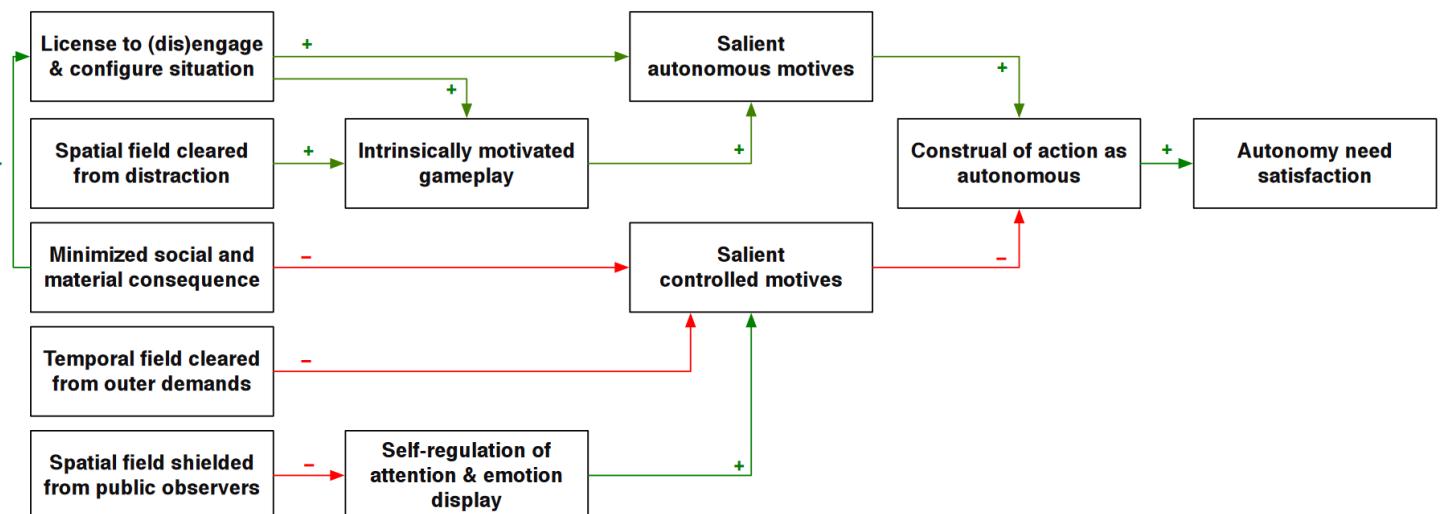
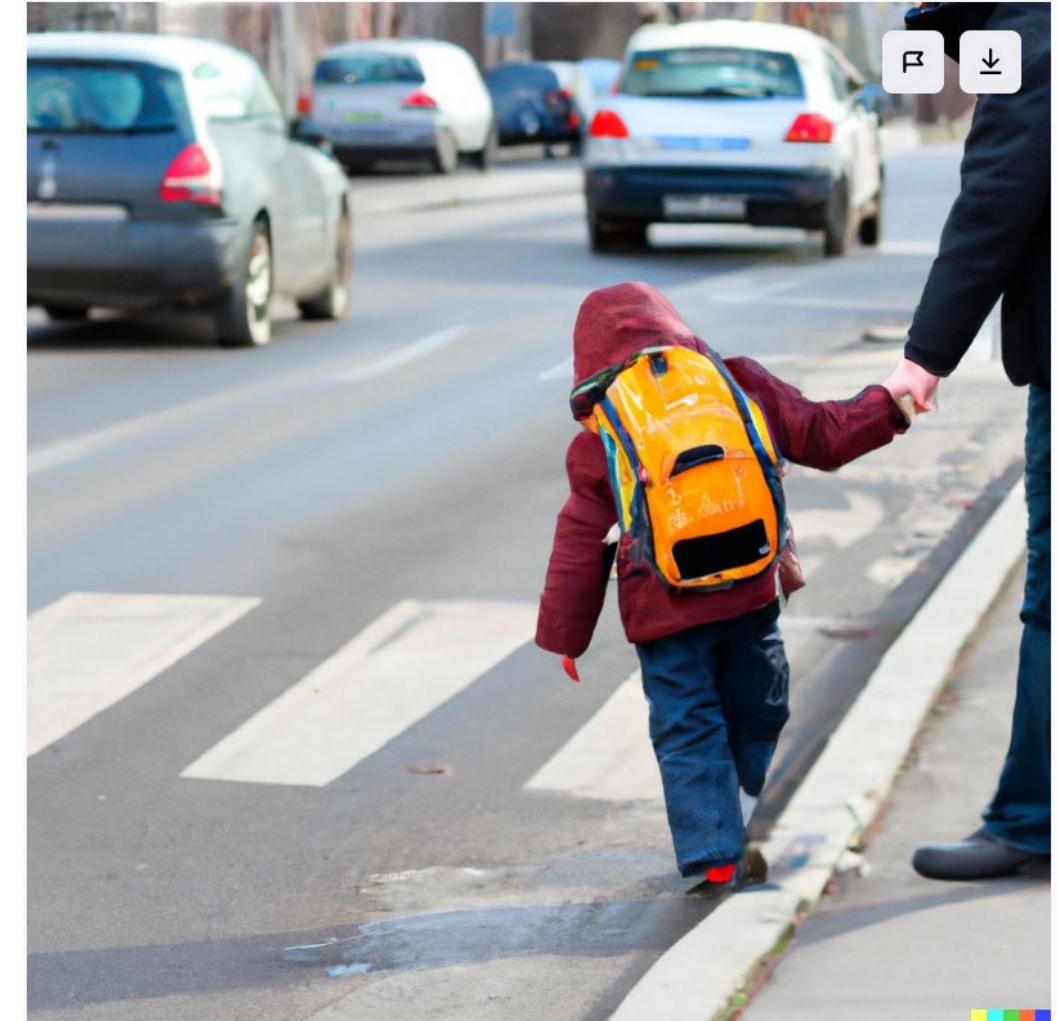


Figure 1. Integrated model of contextual autonomy support in leisure play contexts

Evolutionary basis for the need for relatedness

- For the survival of genes, we need to also care about others
- Parents demonstrate correct behavior and foster and protect children until they are ready to act autonomously



Evolutionary basis for the need for relatedness

A single human is weak but communities are strong – close-knit teams and communities are a survival advantage

Reciprocal altruism: Sharing of resources enables specialization of individuals: hunters, spear makers, teachers...





Reciprocal altruism: 30 years later

ROBERT TRIVERS

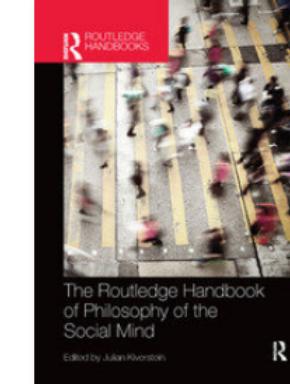
“Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up the other: but woe to him that is alone when he fall-eth; for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevails against him, two shall withstand him; and a three-fold cord is not easily broken.” (Ecclesiastes 4, 9–12; King James Version).

4.1 **Introduction**

A little over 30 years ago, I had the good fortune of publishing my first scientific paper on reciprocal altruism, a subject that had not yet been addressed from an evolutionary standpoint. Hamilton’s (1964) great work on kinship and altruism made it clear that in humans there existed a major form of altruism that could not be explained by kinship. Its elaboration was responsible for the complex economic systems in which we now live and its regulation could plausibly be explained by a system of interconnected human emotions, including feelings of friendship, gratitude, sympathy, guilt, moralistic aggression, a sense of justice and (I would now add) forgiveness.

I brought no great talents to this enterprise, beyond a willingness to take the evolutionary problem seriously and to model evolutionary logic on easily inferred psychological facts regarding our own behavior (for a description of how the paper was written, see Trivers 2002). The paper was certainly timely. My 600 reprints were quickly exhausted and the evolutionary idea was off and running. There now exists a very large literature on the subject and many subareas have advanced far beyond my original paper.

The purpose of the present paper is to provide a personal review of some major developments since my paper. These include the Prisoner’s Dilemma (PD) as a model for reciprocal altruism, other models and third-party observer effects. I concentrate on the human sense of justice and the selective forces likely to have molded it. In the process, I discuss recent empirical work (using economic games) that bears on our sense of fairness and what seems to me the most plausible way to interpret these results. I neglect many important topics, for example, discrimination against cheaters in symbioses (see Sachs et al. 2004).



Chapter

The evolution of tribalism

By [Edouard Machery](#)

Book [The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of the Social Mind](#)

Edition 1st Edition

First Published 2016

Imprint Routledge

Pages 14

eBook ISBN 9781315530178



From a tribal competition perspective, it's rational that we care about others who we identify as "in-group" but don't care and even de-humanize the "out-group" => political polarization, xenophobia, war, genocide etc.

ABSTRACT

Tribalism is a complex psychological phenomenon: It involves emotions – such as disgust and sometimes hatred at the members of outgroups or outrage when their behavior violates ingroup norms – preferences – typically, but not always, a preference for interacting with the members of one's own groups – stereotypes and prejudices – which underlie expectations about ingroup members' interactions with outgroup members – and normative cognition – people often have different norms governing interactions with ingroup and outgroup members. It is also a socially important phenomenon, which fuels between-group conflicts in the contemporary world – from genocides such as the genocide in Rwanda to unrelenting conflicts such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – and possibly within-society cultural phenomena such as racism. Improving our understanding of tribalism may give us more tools for dealing with between-group conflicts and within-society cultural phenomena, for example by allowing better training of mediators involved in between-group conflicts.



Intrinsically Motivated General Companion NPCs via Coupled Empowerment Maximisation

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Abstract—Non-player characters (NPCs) in games are traditionally hard-coded or dependent on pre-specified goals, and consequently struggle to behave sensibly in ever-changing and possibly unpredictable game worlds. To make them fit for new developments in procedural content generation, we introduce the principle of *Coupled Empowerment Maximisation* as an intrinsic motivation for game NPCs. We focus on the development of a general game companion, designed to support the player in achieving their goals. We evaluate our approach against three intuitive and abstract companion duties. We develop dedicated scenarios for each duty in a dungeon-crawler game testbed, and provide qualitative evidence that the emergent NPC behaviour fulfils these duties. We argue that this generic approach can speed up NPC AI development, improve automatic game evolution and introduce NPCs to full game-generation systems.

I. INTRODUCTION

Dogmeat from *Fallout* or Ellie from *The Last of Us* or the pet from *Nethack* – memorable companions are an important part of our gaming experience. But companions can also be a great source of annoyance, especially when their behaviour fails miserably [1]. The vast majority of companions are hard-coded by means of e.g. finite state machines or behaviour trees, and consequently struggle to produce believable or even plausible behaviour in unforeseen contexts ([2], [3]). More advanced companions can adapt their behaviour by means of planning, or by learning a policy via neural networks or traditional reinforcement learning. Nevertheless, they require intense training or pre-specified rewards, which again renders them inflexible especially in sandbox games where players with a large choice of options can change a dynamic world. In the future, the demands on non-player character (NPC) AI in general are likely to increase further [4]. This is particularly

in the agent’s sensorimotor relationship with the world [8], so changes to the world or the agent’s embodiment are reflected in potentially new behaviour. A curious mouse and a curious bird would consequently behave differently, moderated by their embodiment and environment. In this paper, we will work with the intrinsic motivation of *empowerment* [10], a measure of how much an agent is in control of the world it can perceive. We have previously argued [11] that empowerment reflects an agent’s drive to maintain its own precarious existence, and allows them to adapt to changes in their embodiment and environment. But while empowerment might be very useful to produce an intrinsically motivated *general NPC*, we have to look specifically into how to turn it into a good *companion*.

Players seem to expect a companion to behave differently than a general NPC. For instance, in a qualitative study on companion behaviour, a player said “I dislike that [the companion] prioritises getting to the exit herself over helping [me] first” [1], stressing the delicate balance between support and independence. McGee and Abraham [12] argue that the NPC must account for the player’s goals as part of coordinated decision-making, possibly incorporating uncertainty. To guide our approach, we identify the following three companion duties, which should generalise across a range of game genres:

- 1) *Player Integrity*: Ensure that the player can continue playing the game. Act against any limiting force.
- 2) *Support*: Support and do not hinder the player in achieving their goals. Maintain *operational proximity*, i.e. act towards states where you can support the player.
- 3) *Companion Integrity*: Secure your own existence and ability to act in order to support the player long term.

Competence

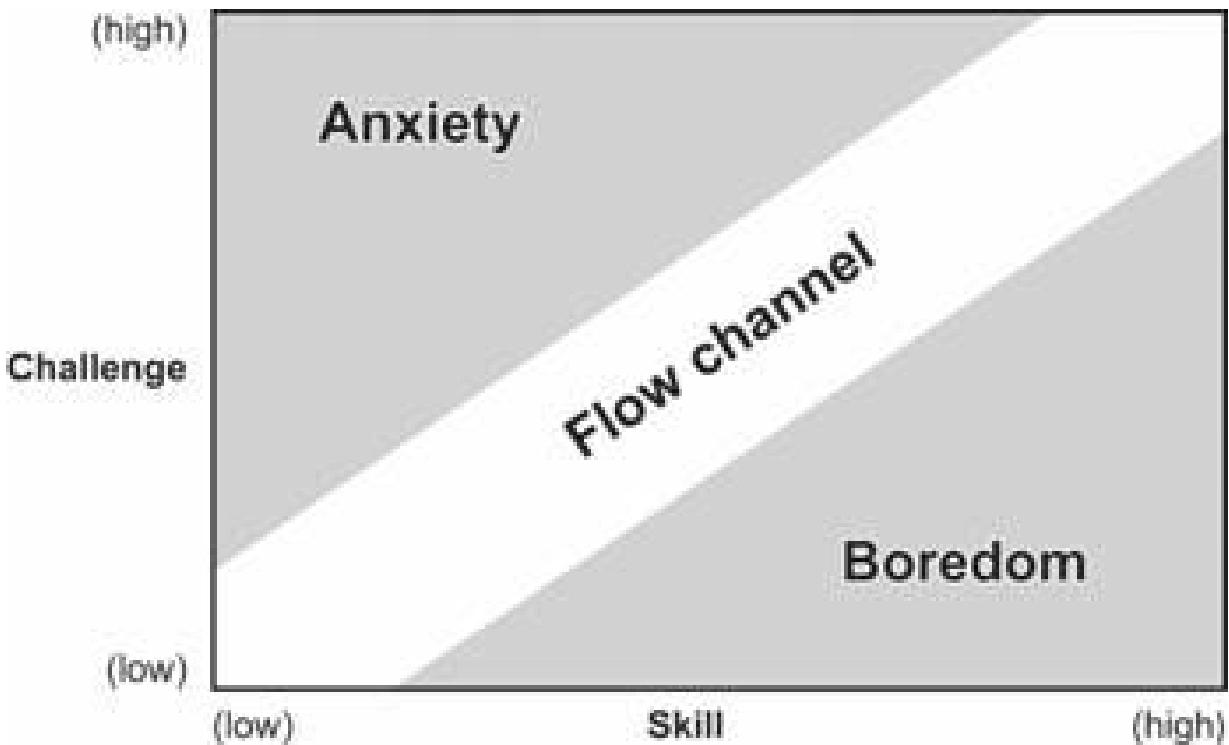
- «I can do it»
- Sense of Effectance and Mastery, Feeling Competent
- Requires **Challenge** and **Feedback** about mastery of the challenge (Rigby & Ryan, 2011)

Evolutionary basis

A drive to learn and master new skills and challenges is obviously a survival advantage.

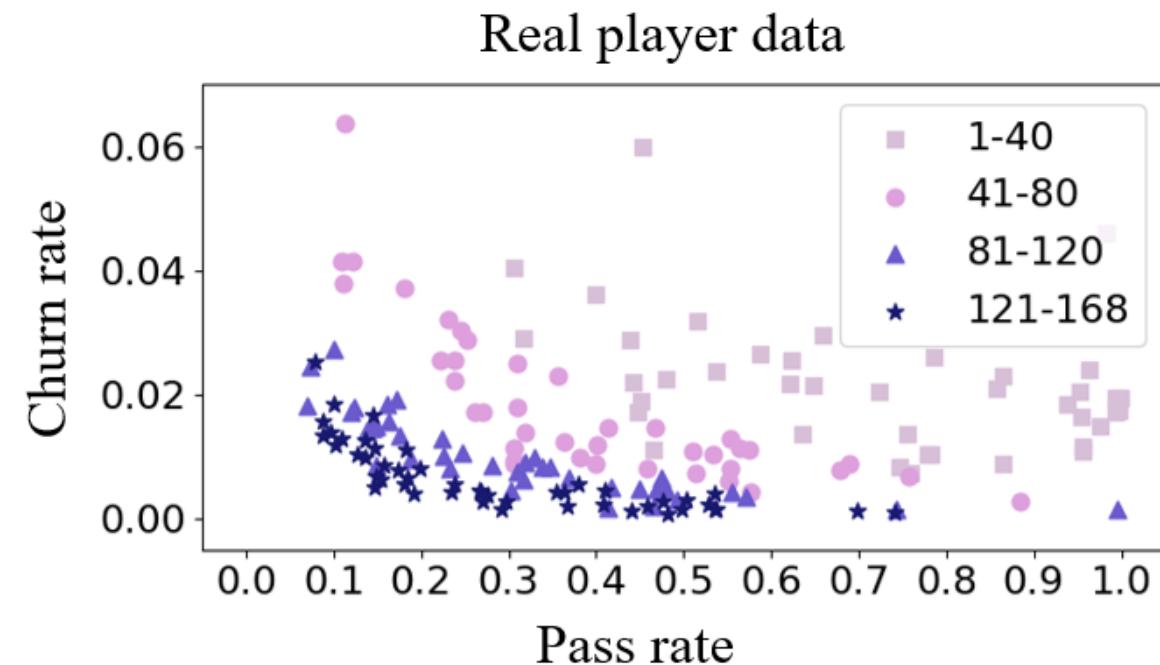
Optimal challenge level?

Flow theory: Skills and challenge need to be balanced to keep the player in the “flow channel”



Optimal challenge level?

- Problem: Too high challenge hurts player retention (causes churn)
- **Probably better to make a game too easy than too hard**, at least initially
 - Especially if your business model requires high retention (F2P, games freemium)
 - If high challenge desired, it's safer to ramp it up later in the game, when the players are more invested and willing to tolerate it



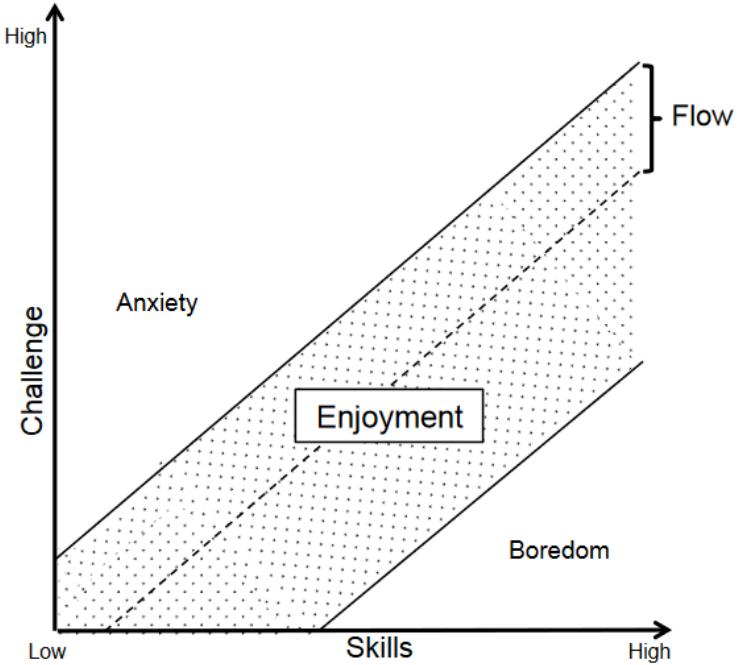


Figure 1. Flow results from the balance of game challenge and player skills. Less challenging gameplay may still be experienced as enjoyable.

A Systematic Review of Quantitative Studies on the Enjoyment of Digital Entertainment Games

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ABSTRACT

Enjoyment has been identified as a central component of the player experience (PX), but various, overlapping concepts within PX make it difficult to develop valid measures and a common understanding of game enjoyment. We conducted a systematic review of 87 quantitative studies, analyzing different operationalizations and measures of game enjoyment, its determinants, and how these were related to other components of PX, such as flow, presence and immersion. Results suggest that game enjoyment describes the positive cognitive and affective appraisal of the game experience, and may in part be associated with the support of player needs and values. Further, we outline that enjoyment is distinct from flow in that it may occur independently of challenge and cognitive involvement, and argue that enjoyment may be understood as the valence of the player experience. We conclude with a discussion of methodological challenges and point out opportunities for future research on game enjoyment.

Author Keywords

Digital Games; Enjoyment; Player Experience; Flow

ACM Classification Keywords

K.8.0 Personal Computing: Games; J.4 Social and Behavioral Sciences: Sociology, Psychology

INTRODUCTION

Digital games offer some of the most intense, rich and engaging experiences of all interactive products. Not only are they steadily increasing in popularity [1], but their growing importance as a medium for education, persuasion, and self-expression [12], as well as the different cultural practices that have formed around them (e.g., let's play videos, modding, game journalism, etc.) make games an immensely fascinating topic for the HCI community to study.

People play games for the experience they create [47]. However, the experience of being entertained through games is not well understood yet from a psychological perspective [83, 89]. Various concepts have been discussed, such as immersion [39], flow [59] or presence [78], making it difficult to

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http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/2556288.2557078

decide upon which psychological concepts are best suited to study the player experience (PX) [8]. Meanwhile, enjoyment has been characterized as the core experience of all entertainment media [83] and games in particular [58, 77], and has previously been identified as a key motive for why people play games (for an overview refer to [13]).

Unfortunately, the definition of game enjoyment is fuzzy [77] and not well differentiated from other potentially related psychological components of PX, such as flow [58]. This raises the issue of how the experience of playing digital games can be effectively operationalized and measured [16, 89]. Moreover, many models of PX often neglect previous findings and/or are based on little empirical grounding [58, 89]. For these reasons, a common terminology for discussing and measuring PX and game enjoyment is still lacking, making it difficult to compare study findings and assess which factors contribute most to enjoyable game experiences.

Synthesizing and building upon existing knowledge on game enjoyment may improve the validity of measures, which in turn strengthens our understanding of what makes games so enjoyable. Hence, the present paper aims to provide a comprehensive review of previous quantitative research on game enjoyment. We take stock of the different conceptualizations and operationalizations of game enjoyment currently employed, in order to gain a clearer understanding of how the experience of enjoyment when playing digital games may be adequately measured. We also investigate how other psychological components of PX relate to game enjoyment, in order to further clarify the concept. Finally, we identify and categorize relevant determinants of game enjoyment and uncover opportunities for further research. We believe that by elaborating what constitutes game enjoyment, we may not only get more insights on how to properly measure the construct, but also gain a clearer understanding of the overall player experience.

RELATED WORK

Enjoyment describes an individual's positive response towards media technology and its content [83] and has become a central concept within HCI research [11], as well as one of the most frequently assessed dimensions of user experience [5]. The enjoyment of websites, for instance, has already been well conceptualized and operationalized [49], but may not be readily applicable to assess players' enjoyment of digital games, as websites generally serve some utilitarian goal, whereas the *single most important goal of games* is enjoyment [77].



The Eighty Five Percent Rule for optimal learning

[Robert C. Wilson](#) , [Amitai Shenhav](#), [Mark Straccia](#) & [Jonathan D. Cohen](#)

[Nature Communications](#) **10**, Article number: 4646 (2019) | [Cite this article](#)

86k Accesses | 26 Citations | 923 Altmetric | [Metrics](#)

Abstract

Researchers and educators have long wrestled with the question of how best to teach their clients be they humans, non-human animals or machines. Here, we examine the role of a single variable, the difficulty of training, on the rate of learning. In many situations we find that there is a sweet spot in which training is neither too easy nor too hard, and where learning progresses most quickly. We derive conditions for this sweet spot for a broad class of learning algorithms in the context of binary classification tasks. For all of these stochastic gradient-descent based learning algorithms, we find that the optimal error rate for training is around 15.87% or, conversely, that the optimal training accuracy is about 85%. We demonstrate the efficacy of this 'Eighty Five Percent Rule' for artificial neural networks used in AI and biologically plausible neural networks thought to describe animal learning.

Assuming that the need for competence originates from an evolutionary drive to learn and master survival skills, it is probably experienced most when learning is the most efficient.

=> The 85% rule of optimal learning is probably a good default for game design.



Then again...

Some players do enjoy a very high challenge.

“I finally got the dragon head and torso stones for the first time in a souls-game [...] There is no joy like the satisfaction of finally getting to do something that you’ve waited to do for years.”

Somewhat of a balancing act: mild experiences of mastery for many (Candy Crush) or intense experiences for some (Dark Souls)

A Good Reason to Die: How Avatar Death and High Challenges Enable Positive Experiences

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ABSTRACT

Appropriate challenges and challenge-skill balance are usually key to positive player experiences. However, some games such as the successful series *Dark Souls* are notorious for their excessive difficulty. Yet, there has been little empirical investigation of why players enjoy games they constantly struggle and fail with. We surveyed 95 participants right after the release of *Dark Souls III* about their experiences with the game, employing both open questions and different player experience measures. Players generally enjoyed challenging play sessions and mostly reported positive experiences, with achievement and learning moments strongly contributing to positive experiences. However, these factors themselves were enabled by negative events such as difficulties and avatar death. Our findings showcase that negative events bear a potential for forming positive and meaningful experiences, thus expanding previous knowledge about the role of challenge and failing in games. Moreover, the significance of hard-earned achievements extends present design conventions.

ACM Classification Keywords

J.4 Social and Behavioral Sciences: Sociology, Psychology;
K.8.0 Personal Computing: Games

Author Keywords

Games; Player Experience; Failure; Challenge; Avatar Death; Enjoyment

INTRODUCTION

Video games are played for the interactive experience they provide. Challenge is ubiquitously seen as one of the most important components of this experience: an unchallenging game will likely be perceived as shallow or boring and thus might not be a particularly enjoyable experience [19, 23, 36, 38]. Although challenge and competition have been found to increase enjoyment in general [27, 34, 42], they can also be excessive and lead to negative experiences when players fail and feel less competent [35]. According to the theory of flow [11], a key characteristic of an optimal experience is the

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balance between challenge and skill. Hence, if challenge demands imposed by the game are too high or too low in regard to the player’s skill level, playing the game leads to anxiety or boredom. The significance of an ideal challenge-skill balance is strongly emphasized in current research [3, 4, 13, 23, 33, 37], where adjustable and adaptive difficulty mechanics play an integral part in keeping this balance [8, 14, 35, 39]. Moreover, balance and accessibility represent two key notions of the *casual revolution*, a design trend towards making games more accessible by removing perceived barriers, penalties and frustrations and targeting much broader audiences than games used to over roughly a decade ago [20, 22]. In conclusion, challenge in current literature and modern game design has to a large extent been treated as a *Goldilocks factor*: The difficulty of a game should be neither too demanding nor too low in order to avoid negative experiences and frustrations.

In light of present design conventions, some exceptional games stand out, ignoring most of the conventional balancing efforts by implementing very high challenges and high consequential avatar death in their core design: For example, the popular action role-play series *Dark Souls*, which became notorious for its high difficulty as well as for its harsh penalties resulting from failure. The series in some respects acts the complete opposite way in comparison to the above mentioned trends: Challenges and demands imposed by the game are steep from the very beginning and players will constantly fail throughout the progression of the game. There are neither adaptive mechanics nor adjustable difficulty levels and still, the game series gained increasing popularity over the last years [30].

Although the appeal of punishing or unfair games has received some attention in current research [2, 27, 43], empirical evidence is yet scarce. Given the crucial role of challenge-skill balance in shaping positive experiences, we aim to examine this seemingly contradictory situation of players enjoying a game defined by high challenges, numerous frustrations and punishing avatar death. We therefore asked 95 participants to report an outstanding experience with *Dark Souls III* right after the release of the game. Participants were split in two groups, depending on whether they reported a positive or negative experience. By analyzing experience reports and employing various psychometric scales, we explored common gameplay themes and events, how they are associated with each other and how they contribute to positive experiences. Our findings suggest that negative events such as avatar death and difficulties bear a potential for enabling positive experiences. Moreover, we identified moments of learning and achievement, evoked and characterized by failures and difficulties, as being crucial

<https://dl.acm.org/doi/abs/10.1145/3025453.3026047>

Catering for different challenge preferences

- **Carefully manage the challenge and learning curve at least until you're ok with players churning**
 - What is the minimum viable experience your players are satisfied with?
- **Players who like hard challenge should be provided it without too much delay**
 - Difficulty selection
 - Adaptive difficulty
 - Achievements/trophies for beating a challenge “the hard way”
 - Optional competitive content
 - Ability to choose quests/challenges of varying difficulty (harder ones typically with higher rewards)
 - Skill tests that unlock content / allow skipping tutorials and easy content (mostly in learning apps – any notable game examples?)

Well-designed challenge from the lense of SDT

- **Competence: Fair & suitable for the skills and abilities of your players**
- **Autonomy: Choice of challenges & completion strategies**
- **Relatedness: Co-op challenges (with fellow players or NPC:s)**



Competence and challenge: Fairness



Malenia, who many consider the hardest but also the most satisfying boss of Elden Ring

Competence and challenge: Telegraphing





r/Eldenring • 2 yr. ago
Monkey2089

...

mohg is the definition of a bullshit boss

Game Help

Title....im on my 10000+ try of this assclown and have gotten him to roughly 10% but then it's just whack, whack, blood, death. Nothing I do seems to work so im turning to reddit for advice.

↑ 5 ↓

0 9



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timestalker78 • 2y ago •



Pretty much one of the best bosses in the game and one of the fairest as well. Get the Purifying Crystal Tear, and if you really need extra help, get Mohg's Shackle. Then learn how to dodge his attacks.



↑ 14 ↓

0 Reply

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Tenrilutous • 2y ago •

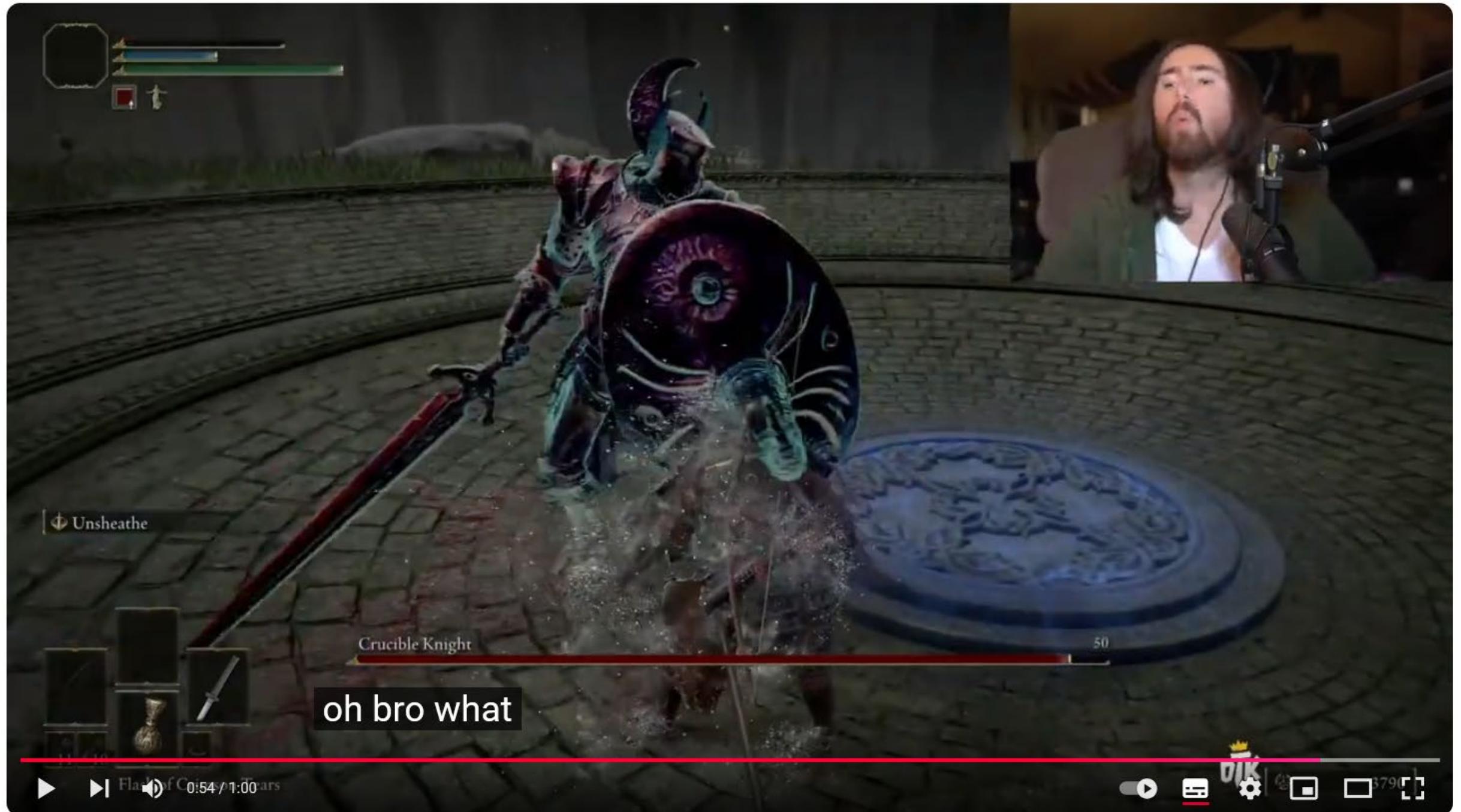
BadRedMan

Mechanically he is the best boss in the game, Everything he does is punishable and fair. His entire moveset encourages close quarters aggressive engagement and requires good spatial awareness of his bloodflame in phase 2.

↑ 3 ↓

0 Reply

...



Elden Ring - Crucible Knight Boss Encounter - Asmongold Stream

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9XFwGWmthY>



Crucible Knight parry only - Elden Ring

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=n0DcT96WjTw>

Autonomy and challenge

Elden Ring does a good job:

- Supports many playstyles and character builds
- Open world allows one to choose among many challenges

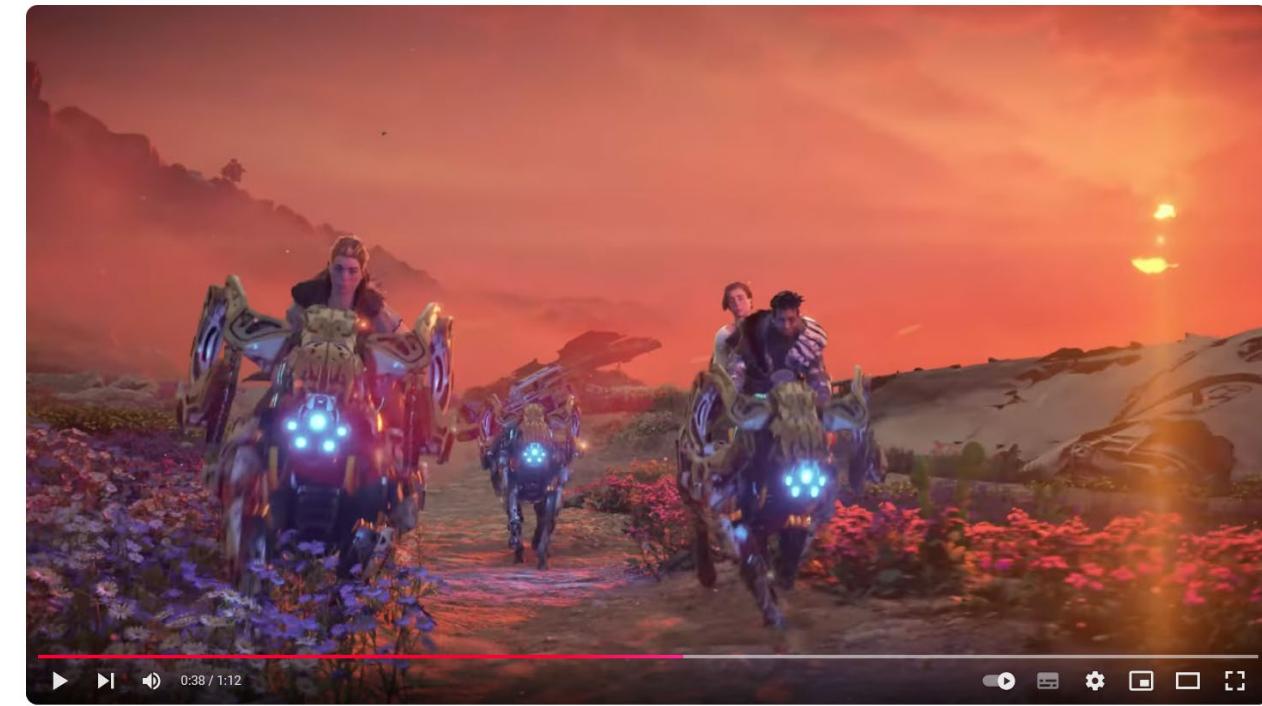




Relatedness and challenge: co-op with other players and/or NPCs



Horizon Forbidden West - Gemini (In the Flood) [Game Cutscene - Video and Music Only]



Horizon Forbidden West - Gemini (In the Flood) [Game Cutscene - Video and Music Only]

Challenges and feedback

- Feedback about mastering the challenges is essential

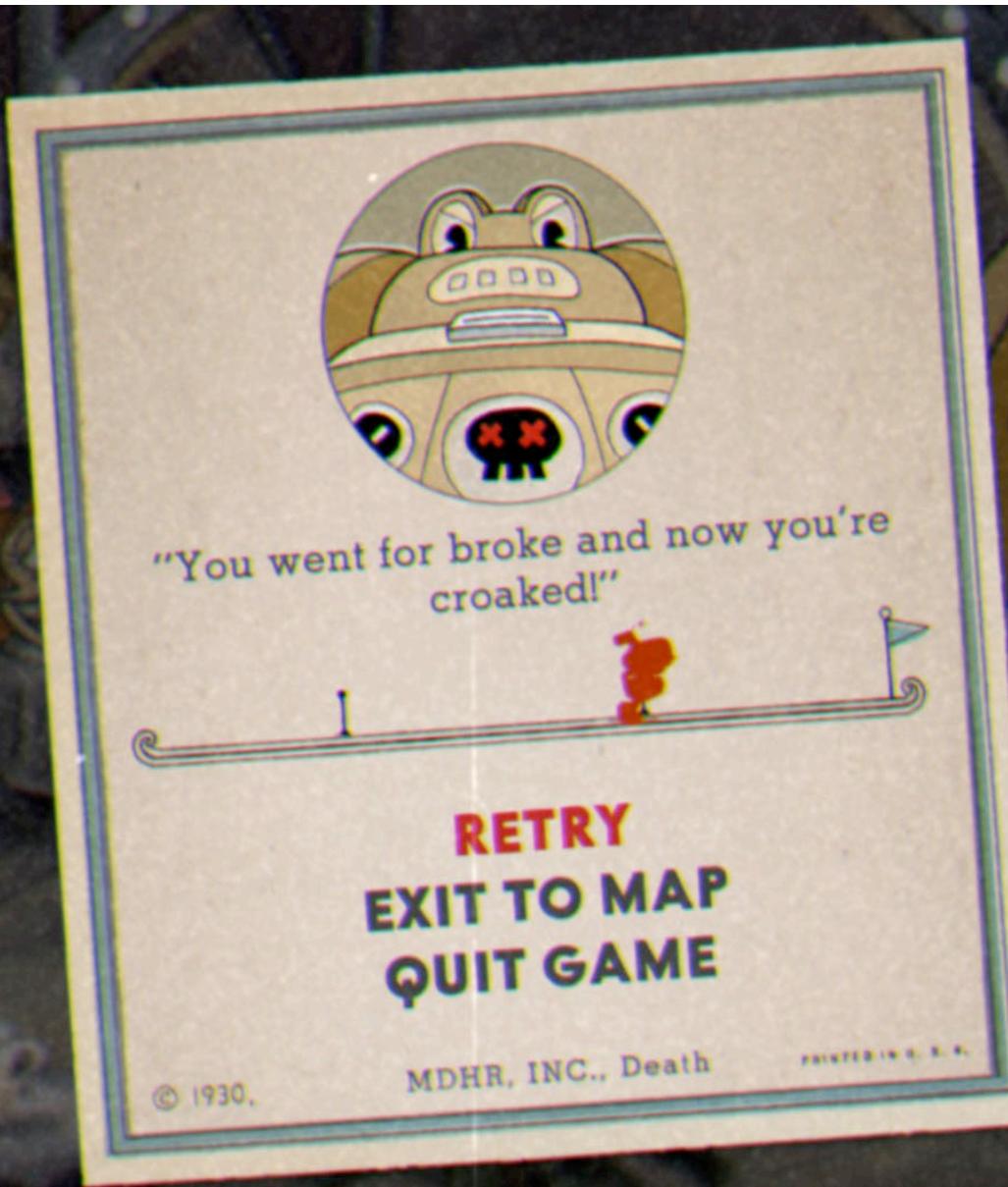


Positive feedback promotes feeling of mastery



Devil May Cry

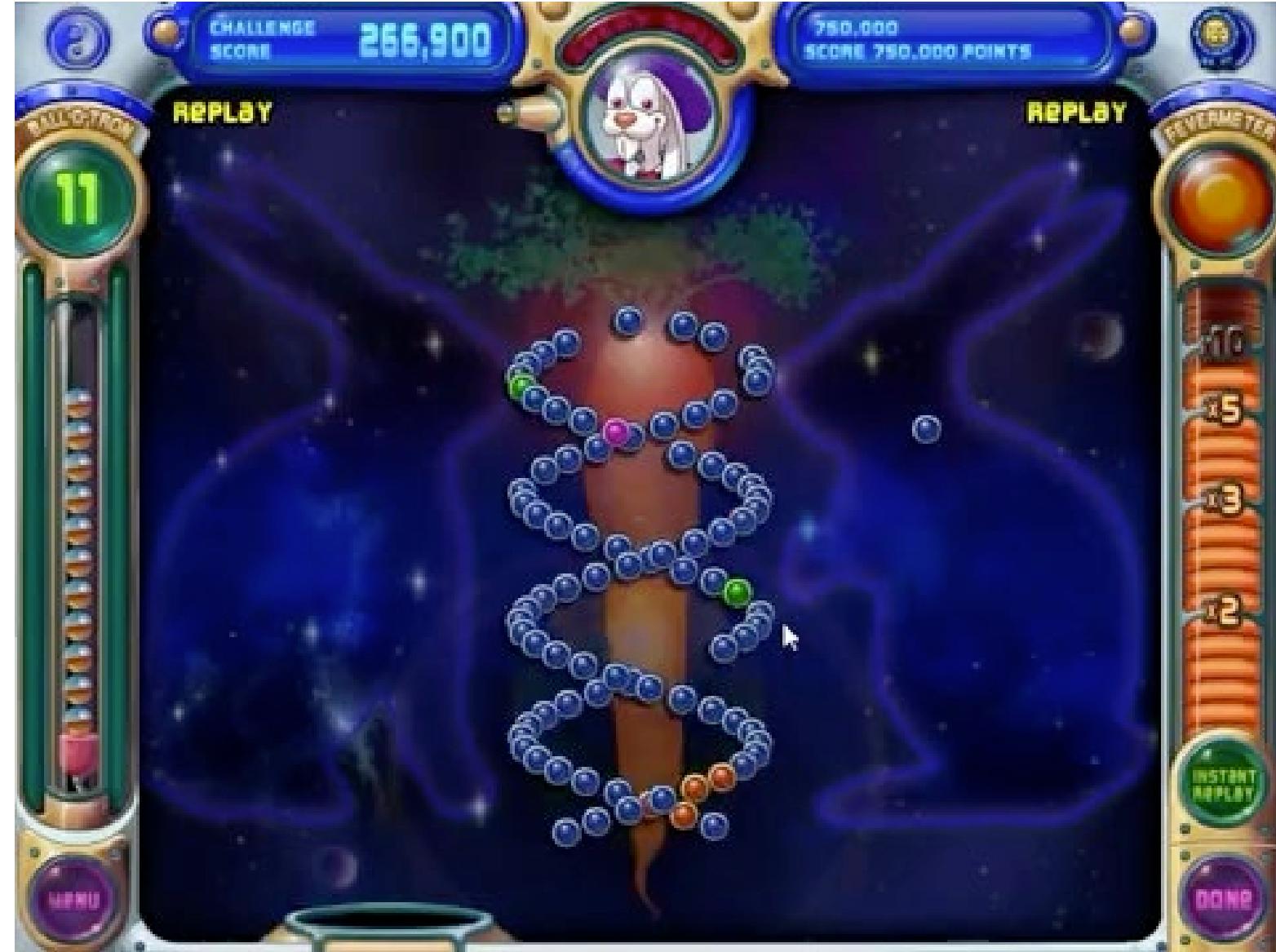
Informational f Indicates how close we are to mastery





Juicy Feedback

“More is more”

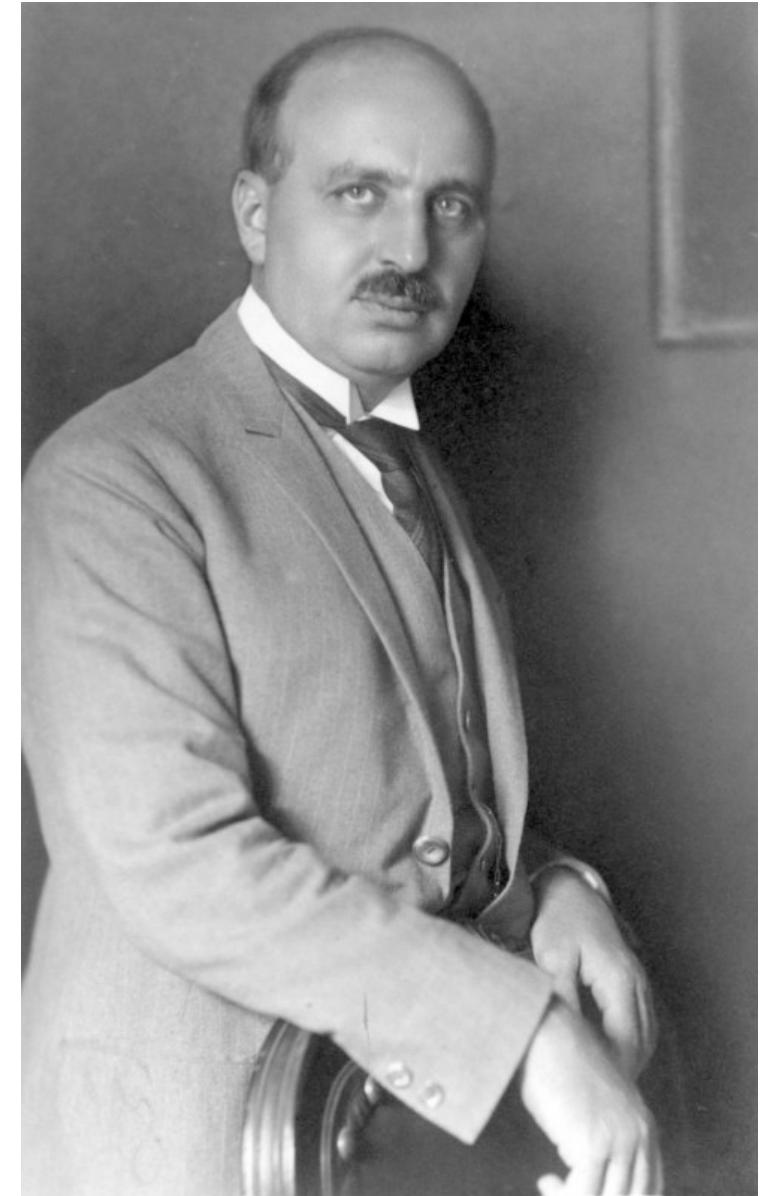


Iwglwsss "Peggle 23.66 million Shot ! New World Record !"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QnCZs-TJkJ8>

Curiosity

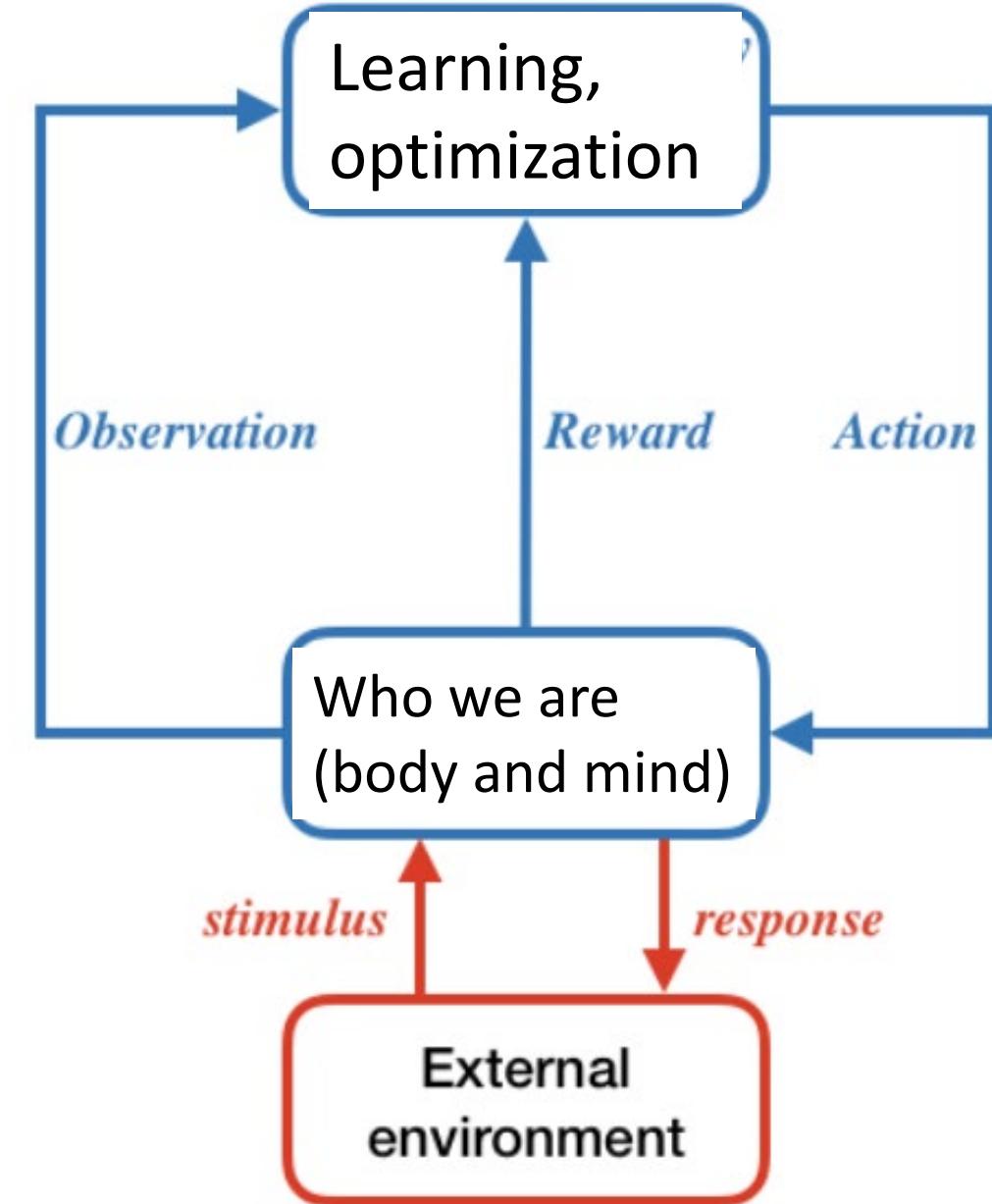
Karl Bühler argued that children experience pleasure while playing, because they can observe how their actions impact the environment -> curiosity for the consequences of their actions and for what happens in the environment

Relevant: Schell's Lense of Toy



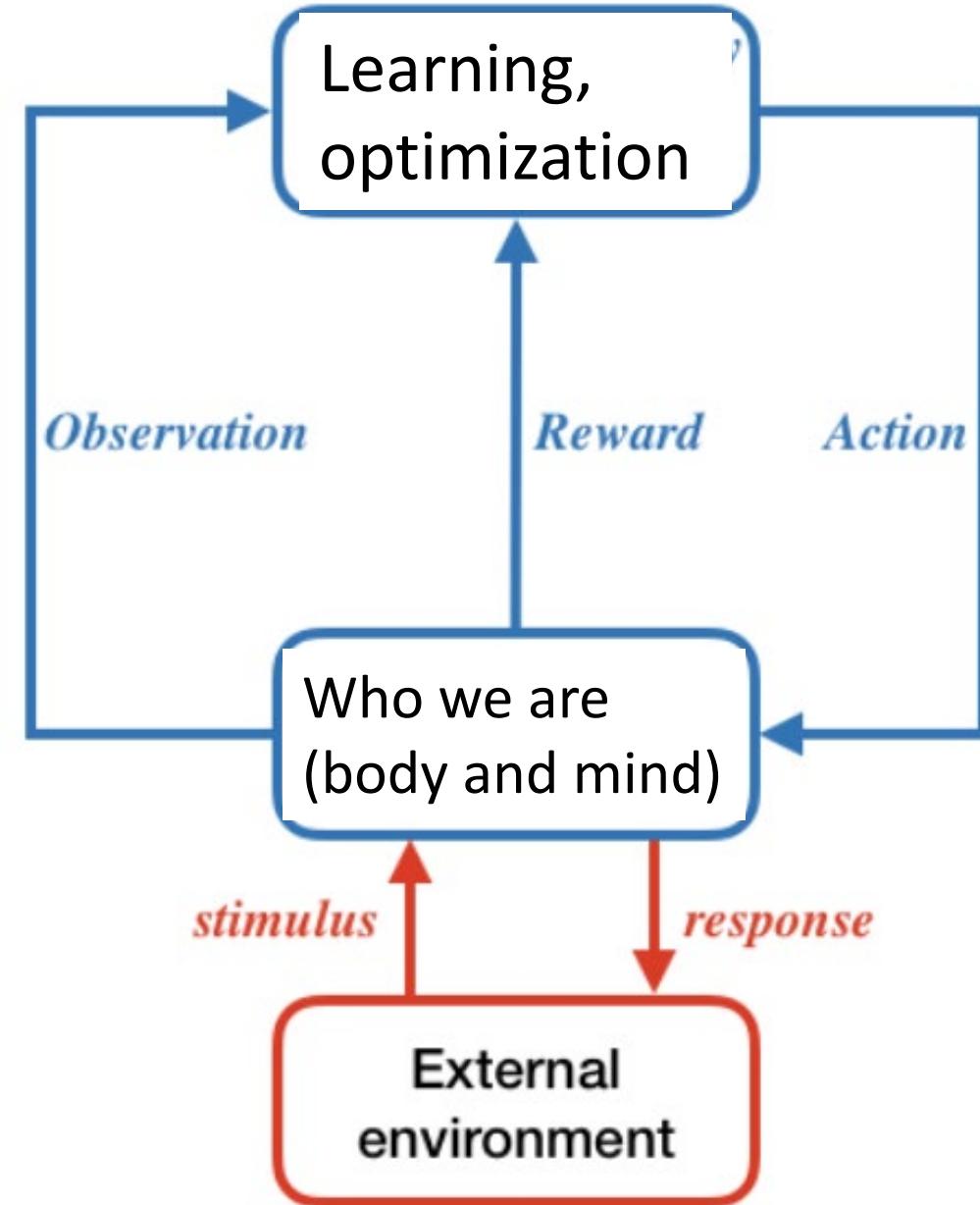
Evolutionary basis for curiosity

Evolution: We care
about survival



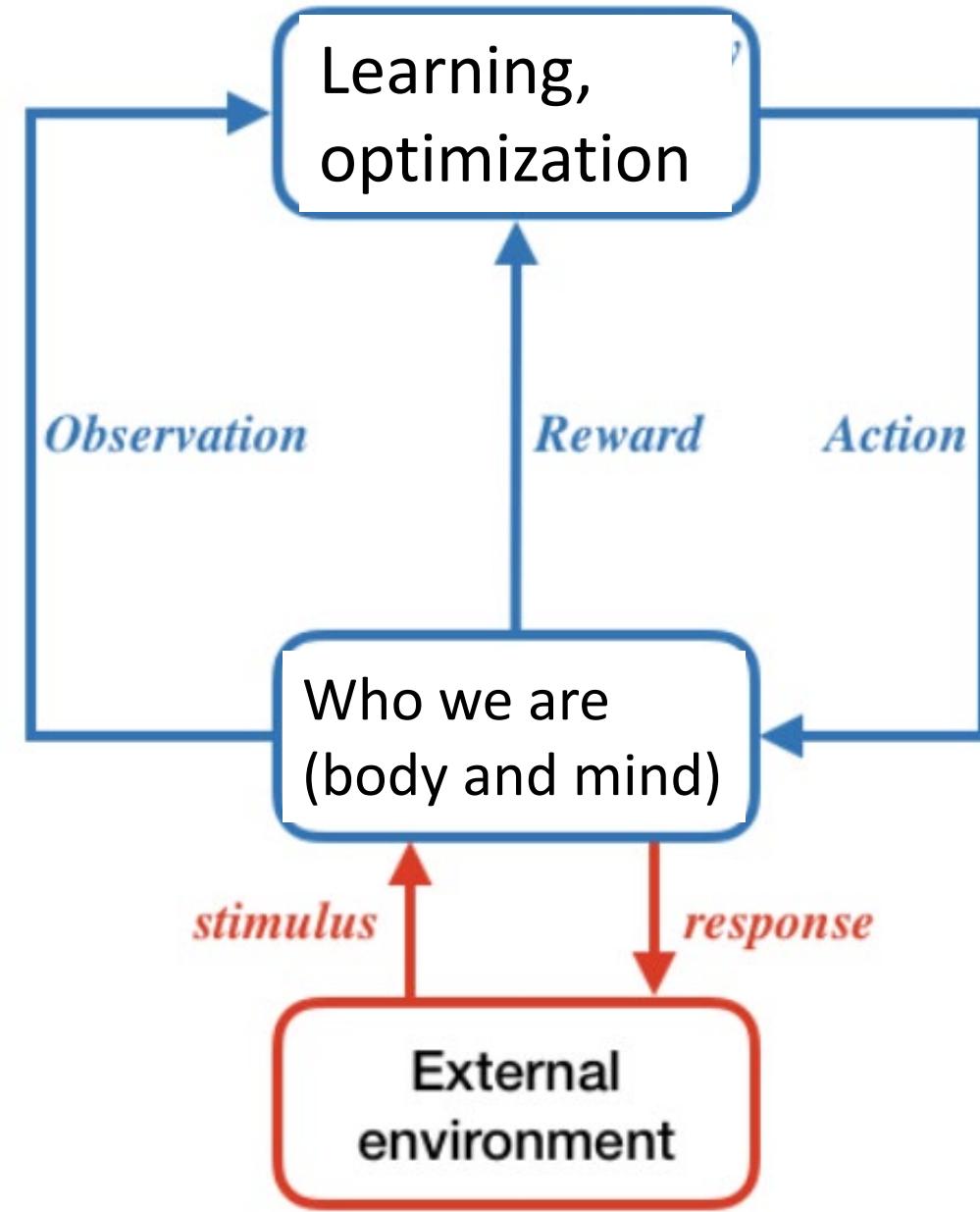
Evolutionary basis for curiosity

Problem: The world is unpredictable and dangerous => can't simply learn through trial and error.



Evolutionary basis for curiosity

Solution 1: Things that provide a survival advantage may be intrinsically and innately rewarding/satisfying



Innately rewarding: Calories

- During the most of our evolution, energy has been a scarce resource
- High-calorie foods have provided a survival advantage => we're genetically built to seek them and experience them as rewarding

JOURNAL ARTICLE

Sweet taste preferences are partly genetically determined: identification of a trait locus on chromosome 16

Kaisu Keskitalo, Antti Knaapila, Mikko Kallela, Aarno Palotie, Maija Wessman, Sampo Sammalisto, Leena Peltonen, Hely Tuorila , Markus Perola

The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, Volume 86, Issue 1, July 2007, Pages 55–63,
<https://doi.org/10.1093/ajcn/86.1.55>

Published: 01 July 2007 Article history ▾

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ABSTRACT

Background: Humans have an innate preference for sweet taste, but the degree of liking for sweet foods varies individually.

Objective: The proportion of inherited sweet taste preference was studied. A genome-wide linkage analysis was performed to locate the underlying genetic elements in the genome.

Design: A total of 146 subjects (32% men, 68% women) aged 18–78 y from 26 Finnish families evaluated the intensity and pleasantness of 3 suprathreshold solutions of sucrose (3.0%, 7.5%, and 18.75%) and plain water and the intensity of filter paper impregnated with 6-n-propylthiouracil (PROP). The subjects also reported the pleasantness and the use frequency of 5 sweet foods (chocolate, candy, ice cream, sweet desserts, and sweet pastry) and completed a food-behavior questionnaire that measured their craving for sweet foods.

Results: Of the chemosensory functions, the pleasantness rating of the strongest (18.75%) sucrose solution and the intensity rating of PROP yielded the highest heritability estimates (41% and 66%, respectively). The pleasantness and the use frequency of sweet foods (both variables calculated as a mean of ratings for 5 food items) and the craving for sweet foods showed significant heritability (40%, 50%, and 31%, respectively). A logarithm of odds score of 3.5 ($P = 0.00003$) was detected for use frequency of sweet foods on chromosome 16p11.2 (marker D16S753).

Conclusions: Sweet taste preferences are partly inherited. Chromosome 16p11.2 may harbor genetic variations that affect the consumption of sweet foods.

Innate aversion (punishment, negative rewards)

Volume 25, Issue 3, 2 February 2015, Pages R120-R129

Review

Aversion and Attraction through Olfaction

Qian Li, Stephen D. Liberles  

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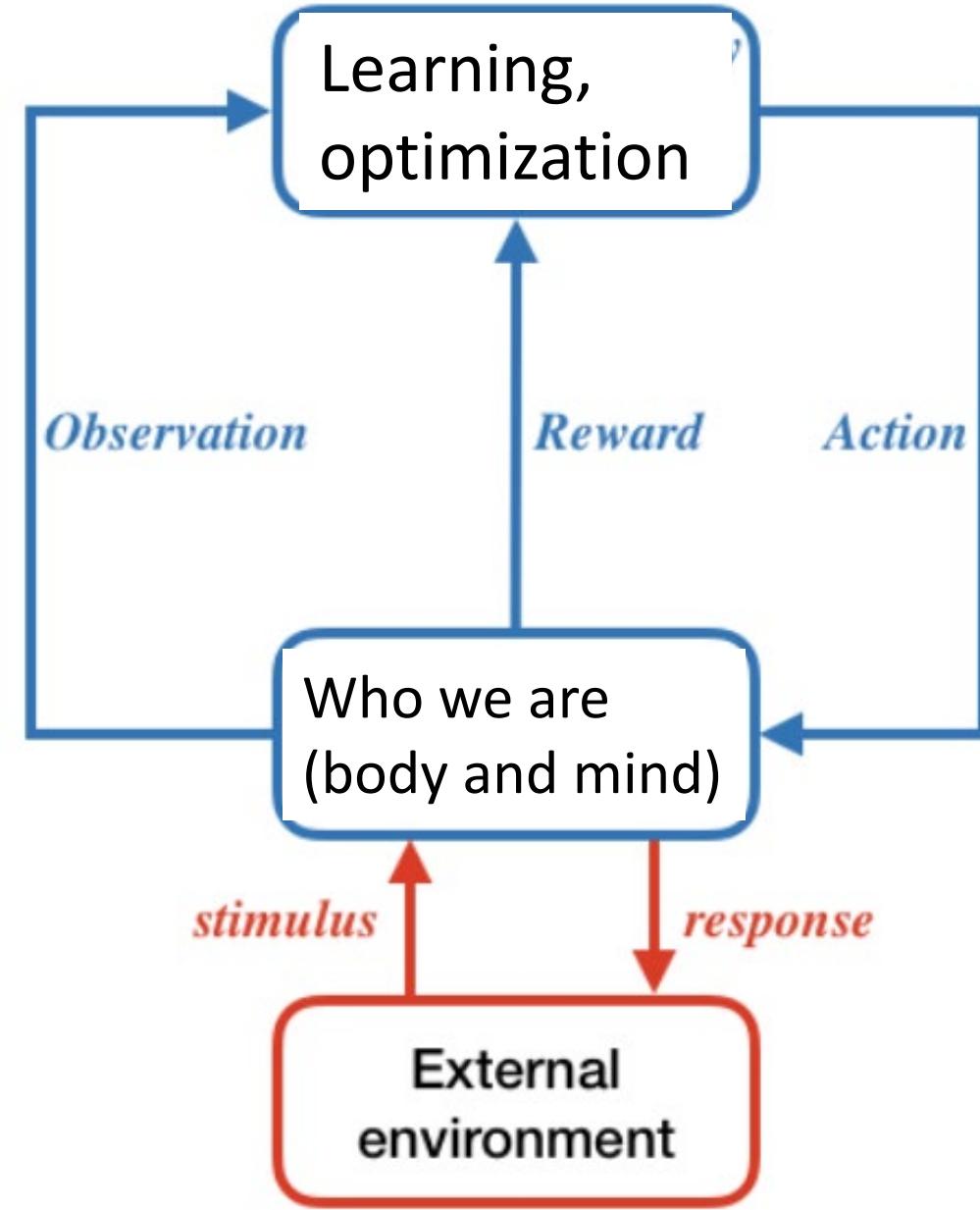
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Sensory cues that predict reward or punishment are fundamental drivers of animal behavior. For example, attractive odors of palatable food or a potential mate predict reward, while aversive odors of pathogen-laced food or a predator predict punishment. Aversive and attractive odors can be detected by intermingled sensory neurons that express highly related olfactory receptors and display similar central projections. These findings raise basic questions of how innate odor valence is extracted from olfactory circuits, how such circuits are developmentally endowed and modulated by state, and how innate and learned odor responses are related. Here, we review odors, receptors and neural circuits associated with stimulus valence, discussing salient principles derived from studies on nematodes, insects and vertebrates. Understanding the organization of neural circuitry that mediates odor aversion and attraction will provide key insights into how the brain functions.

Evolutionary basis for curiosity

Solution 2: We are driven to explore the world—novel and yet unexplored things in particular—to construct a rich mental model that allows us to predict the results of our actions without actually trying them out.





Toys 1

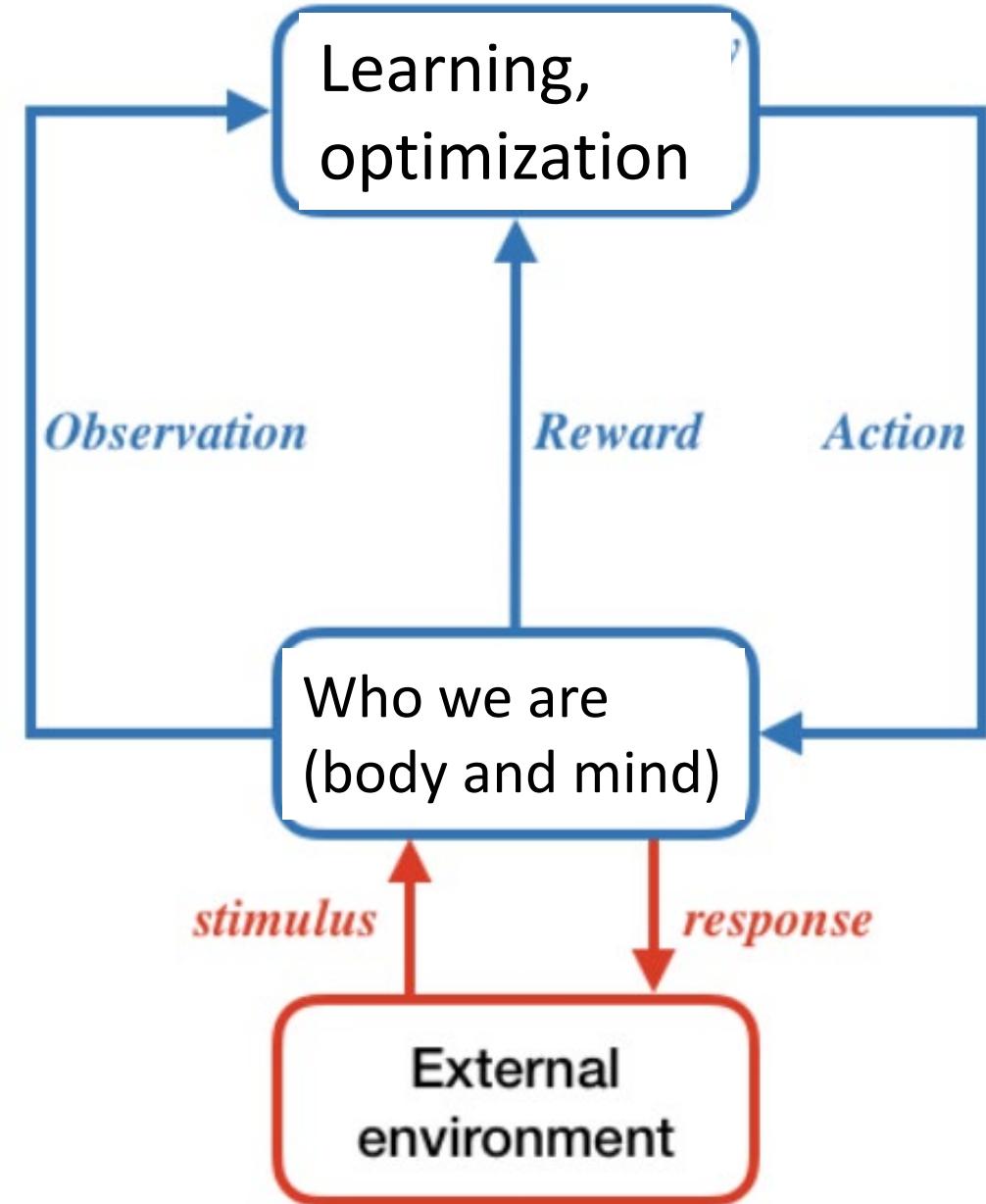
<https://youtu.be/9FizCJdJDec>

Random Things 5



Evolutionary basis for curiosity

What intrinsic rewards
would make such
exploration behaviors
emerge?





Curiosity Driven Exploration by Self-Supervised Prediction

ICML 2017

Deepak Pathak, Pulkit Agrawal, Alexei Efros, Trevor Darrell
UC Berkeley

Curiosity and interest

- Silvia: Interest is the “curious emotion” or state of feeling curious towards something
- Interest elicited through: complexity/novelty, comprehensibility/coping potential
- Novelty also considered a basic psychological need

Interest—The Curious Emotion

Paul J. Silvia

University of North Carolina at Greensboro

ABSTRACT—Despite their interest in why people do what they do, psychologists typically overlook interest itself as a facet of human motivation and emotion. In recent years, however, researchers from diverse areas of psychology have turned their attention to the role of interest in learning, motivation, and development. This article reviews the emerging body of work on the psychology of interest, with an emphasis on what contemporary emotion research has learned about the subject. After considering four central questions—Is interest like other emotions? What functions does interest serve? What makes something interesting? Is interest merely another label for happiness?—the article considers unanswered questions and fruitful applications. Given interest’s central role in cultivating knowledge and expertise, psychologists should apply research on interest to practical problems of learning, education, and motivation.

KEYWORDS—interest; curiosity; exploration; emotion; learning

Humans are curious creatures: They devote a lot of effort and brainpower to the things that interest them. How much money would it take to persuade an indifferent person to memorize a team’s baseball statistics, compile a four-volume encyclopedia of Danish furniture, learn to play the banjo, or spend a career studying an obscure academic topic? As a source of intrinsic motivation, interest plays a powerful role in the growth of knowledge and expertise (Kashdan, 2004; Sansone & Thoman, 2005). The psychology of interest dates to the 1800s, and it has flourished in the last 10 years. Researchers who study emotion, personality, aesthetics, education, vocations, motivation, and development have taken a new look at what interest is, what it does, and how it works (Silvia, 2006). In this article, I’ll review what emotion psychology has learned about interest, the curious emotion.

IS INTEREST AN EMOTION?

Interest is an eccentric emotion. Many theories don’t include interest in their lists of major emotions, and a few theories reject interest as an emotion altogether. Nevertheless, interest has a proud history in emotion psychology. In his landmark book on emotional expression, Charles Darwin (1872/1998) described emotions related to learning, thinking, and exploring. Darwin’s terms—*abstracted meditation, perplexed reflection, and stupefied amazement*—seem quaint to modern readers, but his ideas remain ahead of their time. Many decades later, modern emotion psychology doesn’t know much about what I’ll call *knowledge emotions*: states such as *interest, confusion, surprise, and awe*.

A good case can be made for viewing interest as an emotion. Modern theories of emotion propose that emotions are defined by a cluster of components. Typical emotional components are physiological changes, facial and vocal expressions, patterns of cognitive appraisal, a subjective feeling, and an adaptive role across the lifespan (Lazarus, 1991). Interest appears to have these components: It has a stable pattern of cognitive appraisals (Silvia, 2005b), a subjective quality (Izard, 1977), and adaptive functions (Sansone & Smith, 2000). Interest’s physiological and expressive components, not surprisingly, are associated with orientation, activation, concentration, and approach-oriented action (Libby, Lacey, & Lacey, 1973). Interest lacks the smiling and eye-crinkling expressions of happiness. Instead, interest involves movements of muscles in the forehead and eyes that are typical of attention and concentration (Langsdorf, Izard, Rayias, & Hembree, 1983; Libby et al., 1973; Reeve, 1993). When interested, people often still and tilt the head, which aids in tracking objects and sounds (Reeve, 1993). Interest’s vocal expression involves a faster rate of speech and greater range in vocal frequency (Banse & Scherer, 1996). Taken together, interest appears to have the features typical of emotions.

WHAT DOES INTEREST DO?

Address correspondence to Paul J. Silvia, Department of Psychology, P.O. Box 26170, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Greensboro, NC, 27402-6170; e-mail: p_silvia@uncg.edu.

According to functional approaches to emotion, emotions help people manage fundamental goals (Lazarus, 1991). Interest’s function is to motivate learning and exploration. By motivating people to learn for its own sake, interest ensures that people will develop a broad set of knowledge, skills, and experience. The



Abstract

A fundamental tenet of self-determination theory is that the satisfaction of three basic, innate psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness is necessary for optimal functioning. The aim of this research was to propose novelty as a basic psychological need in self-determination theory and develop a new measure to assess novelty need satisfaction, the Novelty Need Satisfaction Scale (N NSS). Two studies were performed, one at the global lifestyle level (Study 1: general adults, $N = 399$, $M_{age} = 31.30$ years) and the other at a contextual level in physical education (Study 2: first-year post-compulsory secondary school students, $N = 1035$, $M_{age} = 16.20$ years). Participants completed the N NSS alongside measures of psychological needs and regulation styles from self-determination theory and psychological well-being. The six-item N NSS showed adequate psychometric properties and discriminant validity with other psychological needs in both studies. Novelty need satisfaction predicted life satisfaction (Study 1) and intrinsic motivation in physical education (Study 2) independent of the other three psychological needs. Results provide preliminary evidence that need for novelty is a unique candidate need alongside existing needs from self-determination theory, but further confirmatory and experimental research is required.

Keywords: basic psychological needs, motivation, well-being, curiosity



Understanding the need for novelty from the perspective of self-determination theory

Author

Gonzalez-Cutre, David, Sicilia, Alvaro, Sierra, Ana C, Ferriz, Roberto, Hagger, Martin S

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Abstract

This paper investigates the plausibility of novelty-variety as a potential basic psychological need in a series of three studies. Using criteria proposed by Baumeister and Leary (1995) and Ryan and Deci (2017) to establish a motive as a basic human need, we focus on those criteria where evidence is lacking. Specifically, we examine whether novelty-variety is distinct from other needs in Basic Psychological Need Theory (BPNT) proposed by Self-Determination Theory (SDT), whether its absence results in adverse effects and its satisfaction uniquely predicts well-being outcomes, and whether the effects are different across age and personality. In Study 1, participants (N=202) rated novelty-variety and needs from BPNT (competence, autonomy, relatedness) in three domains to assess its independence from these needs and the extent to which novelty-variety uniquely relates to domain-specific well-being. In Study 2 (N=414), the fulfillment of novelty-variety and two BPNT needs (autonomy and relatedness) was experimentally manipulated in work-related vignettes, further showing that unsatisfied novelty-variety is related to lower well-being. Finally, the third study (N=599) accounts for some of the limitations in Study 2 and examines the criteria of universality. Based on the examined criteria, all three studies provide support for further considering novelty-variety as a potential basic psychological need.

Keywords: Psychological needs; novelty; variety; well-being

Novelty-variety as a candidate basic psychological need: New evidence across three studies

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Self-actualization

- “Fulfillment of one’s greatest potential”
(<https://www.britannica.com/science/self-actualization>)
- Relevant to transformative game experiences
- Maslow: Fulfilling the need of self-actualization is associated with:
 - Increased acceptance of self and of others
 - Deeper and more profound interpersonal relationships
 - Enhanced appreciation of life and newfound perspectives on it
 - Loss of self or transcendence of it

Author Jaakko Väkevä

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Abstract

Art is often hailed for its capacity to produce deeply profound experiences that can transform us as persons and alter our perspectives on life. This thesis sets out to explore, in the form of an autoethnography, how such a transformative power could manifest itself in the evolving digital medium of video games. For the study, I played through five critically acclaimed game titles in an attempt to detect and record transformative experiences by collecting both introspective and retrospective personal data of my game experiences in the form of field notes, reflective journals, and memos; the five games included in the study were *God of War*, *Doki Doki Literature Club!*, *The Stanley Parable*, *Bloodborne*, and *The Beginner’s Guide*. I perceived my emotionally profound experiences of *Doki Doki Literature Club!* and *The Beginner’s Guide* as transformative; both game experiences greatly widened my understanding of games as a medium, but also provided me with newfound perspectives on topics such as depression and creativity, as well as increased my capacity for empathy and self-understanding. Closer analysis and interpretation of the personal data resulted in identifying four overarching themes distinguishing my transformative game experiences from non-transformative ones; these themes can be characterized as follows: (1) a heightened state “cognitive and emotional involvement”, (2) a conception of “playing as myself”, (3) an impression of “unconventional game design”, and (4) post-play “re-engagement with the game experience”. I then examined these themes in a wider context, discussing their relations to existing literature and their possible broader implications regarding transformative game experiences. It seems that several aspects of my personal transformative game experience could potentially correspond to concepts that in the field of empirical aesthetics have been used to model transformative art perception outcomes, but further research is required.

Successful games support many needs

- **Competence** through character progression, adaptive difficulty, progressive hints, properly tuned difficulty curve
- **Autonomy** through providing choice and agency, and tools for user-generated content, especially in sandbox games such as Minecraft
- **Social relatedness** through community features and multiplayer
- **Novelty** through emergent dynamics, user-generated content, live ops content updates & events...
- **Self-actualization** through deep interpersonal relationships (fictional or real, e.g., WoW, Life is Strange, Undertale) and newfound perspectives (e.g., This War of Mine, That Dragon Cancer, Doki Doki Literature Club)

Note: limits of motivation models like SDT

- Motivation models are typically based on factor analysis of questionnaire data
- Factor analysis identifies questions whose answers are highly correlated and thus form a "factor"
- Factor analysis cannot identify factors that are not represented by the questions or the data – thus, a motivation model may miss factors if the researchers did not come up with the correct questions or only focused on particular games



What Is Satisfying About Satisfying Events? Testing 10 Candidate Psychological Needs

Kennon M. Sheldon
University of Missouri—Columbia

Andrew J. Elliot and Youngmee Kim
University of Rochester

Tim Kasser
Knox College

Three studies compared 10 candidate psychological needs in an attempt to determine which are truly most fundamental for humans. Participants described “most satisfying events” within their lives and then rated the salience of each of the 10 candidate needs within these events. Supporting self-determination theory postulates (Ryan & Deci, 2000)—autonomy, competence, and relatedness, were consistently among the top 4 needs, in terms of both their salience and their association with event-related affect. Self-esteem was also important, whereas self-actualization or meaning, physical thriving, popularity or influence, and money-luxury were less important. This basic pattern emerged within three different time frames and within both U.S. and South Korean samples and also within a final study that asked, “What’s unsatisfying about unsatisfying events?” Implications for hierarchical theories of needs are discussed.



Most satisfying event. At the beginning of the questionnaire, participants read the following:

Now, we ask you to consider the past month of your life. Think back to the important occurrences of this period of time. What we want you to do is bring to mind the *single most personally satisfying event* that you experienced during the last month (emphasis in the original). We are being vague about the definition of “satisfying event” on purpose,



Table 2

Study 1: Mean Salience of Each Candidate Need Within Participants' Most Satisfying Experiences of the Last Month

Candidate need	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Self-esteem	4.08 _a	0.90
Relatedness	3.99 _a	1.13
Autonomy	3.98 _a	0.87
Competence	3.74 _b	0.98
Pleasure-stimulation	3.53 _c	1.08
Physical thriving	3.25 _d	1.13
Self-actualization-meaning	3.23 _d	1.13
Security	3.03 _e	0.90
Popularity-influence	2.89 _e	1.02
Money-luxury	2.37 _f	1.08

Does it apply to games?

- In 2023 and 2024, a total of 52 students filled in a version of this questionnaire presented as:

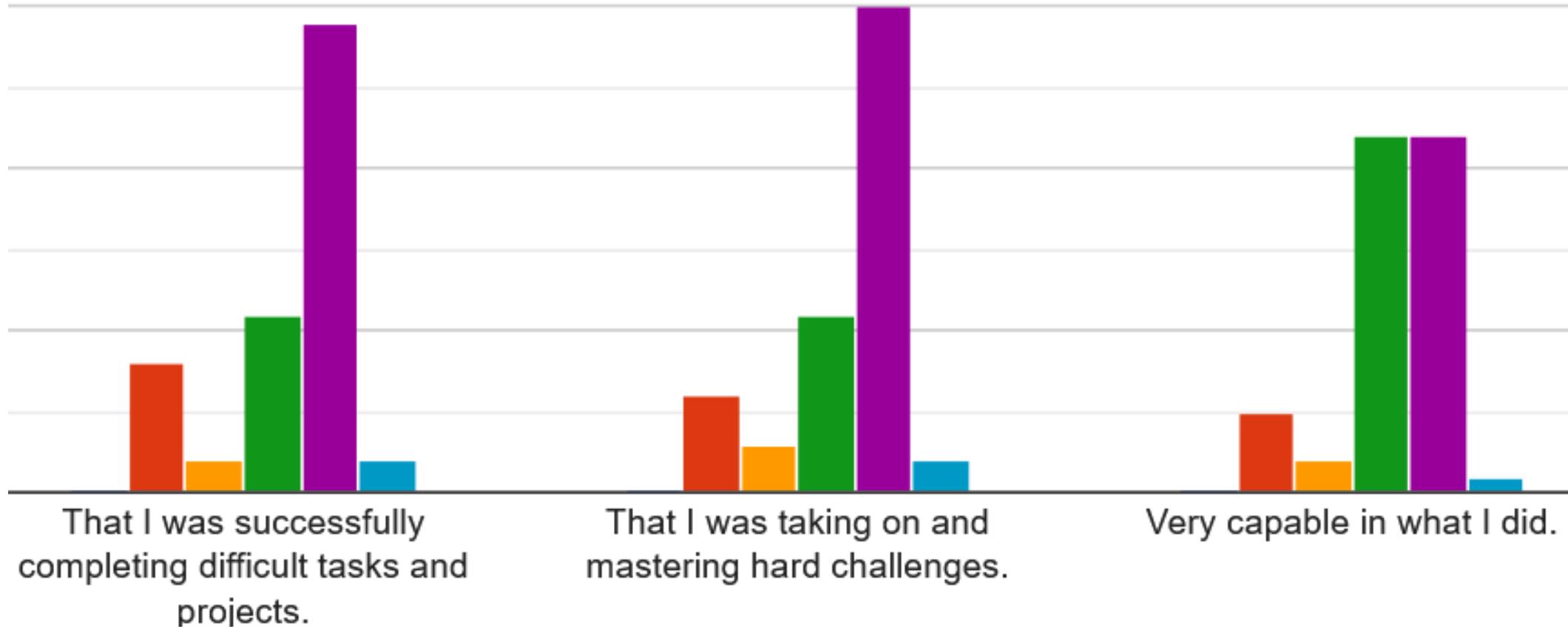
Please think of your most favorite game or one of your favorites if you have many. Then rate the following statements.

Note: Please answer as yourself, i.e., thinking of how the game makes you feel. Depending on the game, this may or may not align with other points of view such as the how the player character feels in the game's story.

The Binding of Isaac Repentance	planet zoo	Neva
Dark Souls 3	Deus Ex	Sleeping Dogs 2
Dark Souls	The Witcher 3	Detroit become human
Returnal	Death's Door	Journey
Inscription	Disco Elysium	Persona 3 Reload
Zelda: Breath of the Wild	Cyberpunk 2077	Witcher 3
Dont Starve	Valheim	Dishonored
Minecraft	Dark Souls	A Short Hike
Disco elysium	Psychonauts 2	Geocaching
Half-Life: Alyx	Valorant	Civilization 6
Elder scrolls / fallout	Outer Wilds	Disco Elysium
Skyrim	Bloodborne	League of legends
Machinarium	Shadow of the Colossus (2005 and remake)	Baldurs gate 3
The Witcher	Overwatch	Hollow Knight
Dark Souls 3	Ori and the Will of the Wisps	KartRider Rush+
Apex Legends	Inside	Celeste
Guild Wars 2		Hollow Knight
		Skyrim
		V RIsing

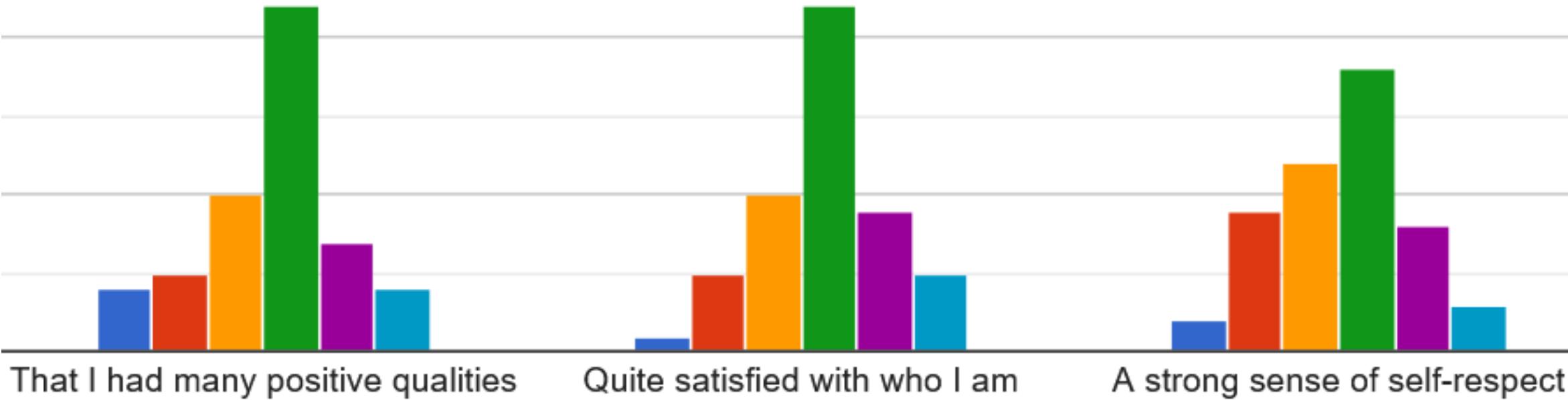
Competence: salient to almost all the favorite games

Not at all Not that much Hard to say Somewhat Very much Not relevant to the game



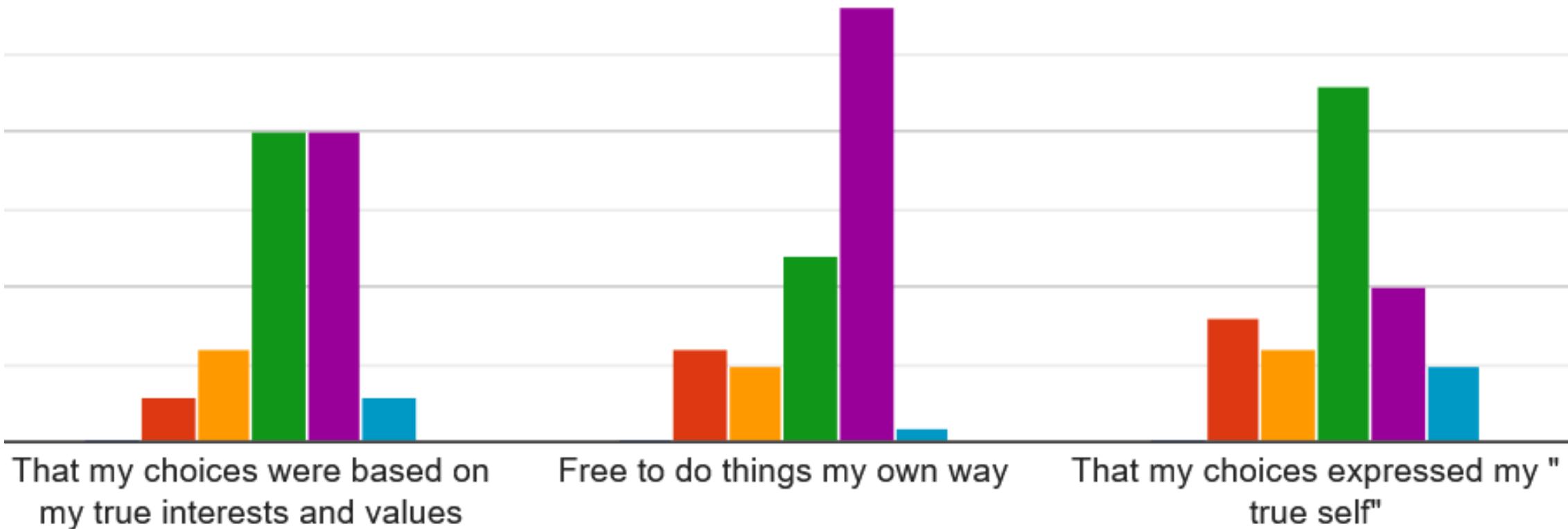
Self-esteem

Not at all Not that much Hard to say Somewhat Very much Not relevant to the game



Autonomy

■ Not at all ■ Not that much ■ Hard to say ■ Somewhat ■ Very much ■ Not relevant to the game



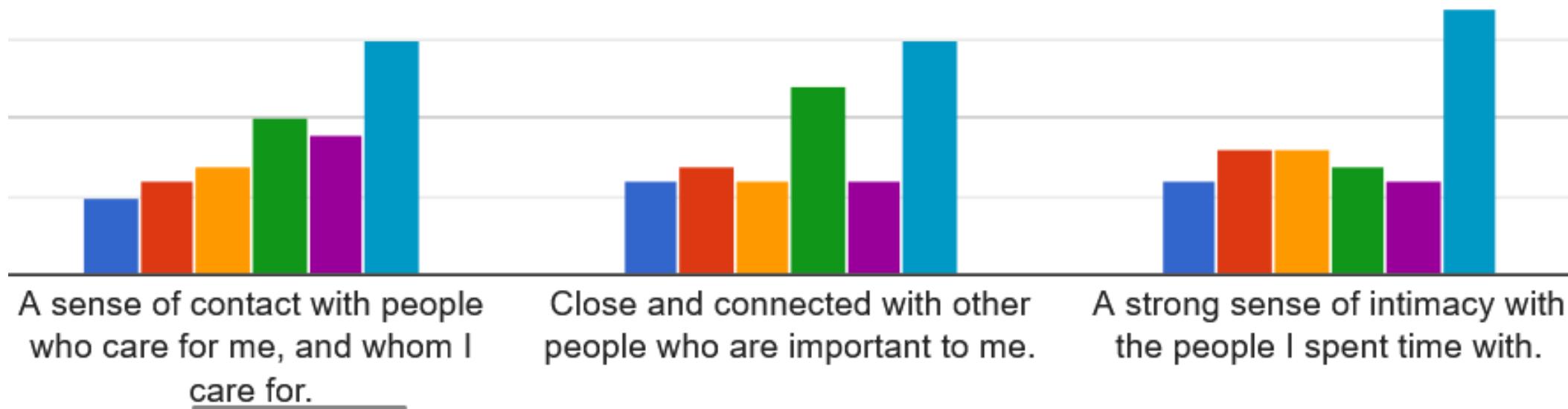
Pleasure-stimulation: novel experiences matter (interest, curiosity)

Not at all Not that much Hard to say Somewhat Very much Not relevant to the game



Relatedness: not relevant for every game or every player

Not at all Not that much Hard to say Somewhat Very much Not relevant to the game





This summit aims to bring light and love to a somewhat controversial subject in games; even though romance, love and sex are some of the most natural aspects of human behaviour, it is not portrayed very often, or very well in games. We want to bring artists, developers, sound artists and creatives from inside and outside the industry together to celebrate, discuss and create within these marvelous topics.

<http://lyst-summit.org/>

GDC Game Design Patterns for Building Friendships



0:00 / 1:02:44



Game design patterns for building friendships

In many online multiplayer games, players enter as strangers and remain strangers. We can instead design systems that actively encourage friendship formation. A Project Horseshoe report.



Daniel Cook

Blogger

February 21, 2017



In November of 2016, a small group of veteran game designers got together in a remote portion of Texas for a think tank called [Project Horseshoe](#). Our workgroup dug deep into how design can help build meaningful relationships within games. You can read the other reports here: <http://www.projecthorseshoe.com/reports/>

Our group consisted of:

- Daniel Cook, Spry Fox
- Yuri Bialoskursky, Electronic Arts
- Bill Fulton, Microsoft
- Michael Fitch, Betterrealities.com
- Joel Gonzales, Wargaming.net

Introduction

The issue

In many online multiplayer games, players enter as strangers and remain strangers. Due to a variety of unquestioned logistics, economic and social signalling choices, other human beings end up being treated as interchangeable, disposable or abusable. We can do better.



When we throw players into a virtual world without understanding the cascading outcomes of default human psychology, we are little better than an unethical mad scientist replicating Lord of the Flies. As game designers, we've been building destructive dehumanizing systems. We should take responsibility for the bullying, harassment and wasted human interactions that inevitably results.

Let's instead design games that help strangers form positive pro-social relationships.

<https://www.gamedeveloper.com/design/game-design-patterns-for-building-friendships>



Intrinsic motivation, need satisfaction and rewards

- Question: What are your favorite in-game rewards and why? What needs / motivation factors do they support?

Phillips et al.

Reward Taxonomy

- Rewards of Access: Autonomy
- Rewards of Facility: Competence
- Rewards of Sustenance: Virtual physiological needs?
- Rewards of Glory: Competence, social influence, Self-actualization
- Rewards of Praise: Competence
- Rewards of Sensory Feedback: Novelty, Pleasure-Stimulation

ABSTRACT

The aim of our research is to iteratively refine and begin validating a proposed videogame reward typology and its associated definitions. A mixed methods approach has been taken so as to best evaluate and refine the taxonomy. The views of an expert focus group have been explored and considered. Separately, a review of the videogame rewards observed within recreational videogames has been undertaken and analyzed. The collective findings of both the focus group and the videogame reward review have prompted the redesign of an existing videogame reward taxonomy, resulting in more robust definitions with increased applicability.

Author Keywords

Reward; videogame; motivation; player experience

ACM Classification Keywords

K.8.0 Personal Computing: General- games; H.1.2 User/Machine Systems: Software Psychology.

INTRODUCTION

Rewards are a defining characteristic of videogames. Whether a player is leveling up, looking for ammo, or just generally trying to win the game, videogame rewards play a guiding role in the player experience. As well as providing information about the state of play, videogame rewards provide players with feedback of success that is thought to promote positive affect. Research investigating the impact of videogame rewards has largely been context specific; examining a distinct class of reward that appears within a single game or gamified application, such as the impact of cosmetic items (e.g., hats) (Moore, 2011), badges (Denny, 2014), achievements (Mekler et al., 2013) and point based leaderboards (Denny, 2013; Mekler et al., 2013). Such research has led to interesting insights, though the generalisability of this approach represents a small sample of the reward diversity within recreational videogames.

By examining various types of videogame rewards,

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/2838739.2838782>

including those that are largely unrepresented, researchers and developers may discover that certain reward forms have distinct impacts on the player experience. Understanding the impacts of various videogame reward types will allow researchers and developers to take a more informed approach to game design. For example, rewards that increase enjoyment could be used in recreational games; rewards that create increased user engagement could be a point of focus for the developers of educational games; and rewards that promote positive affect may be emphasized to create mood management games.

Further, by using a reliable categorization system for videogame rewards, researchers could assess videogame rewards in a more generally applicable way; allowing for a broader understanding of the impacts and effects of videogame rewards on the player experience. However due to the scarcity of research in this domain there is currently no reliable method for categorizing videogame rewards (Phillips et al., 2013). This study seeks to address the lack of reliable videogame reward typologies by further exploring the current usage of videogame rewards in games, and evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of existing videogame reward categorization methods. Our previous research in this field, which examined existing videogame reward typologies and described a revised system for classifying videogame reward types (Phillips et al., 2013), is expanded upon by conducting an expert focus group, as well as a review of the videogame rewards that have been observed within 60 recreational videogames. Results from these studies have been analyzed and subsequently assimilated within the emerging videogame rewards taxonomy. These studies are part of a larger program of research that is focused on producing a valid and reliable videogame reward type taxonomy. The development of such a taxonomy will give researchers the ability to assess the impact of videogame rewards in a generalizable and expedient manner.

BACKGROUND

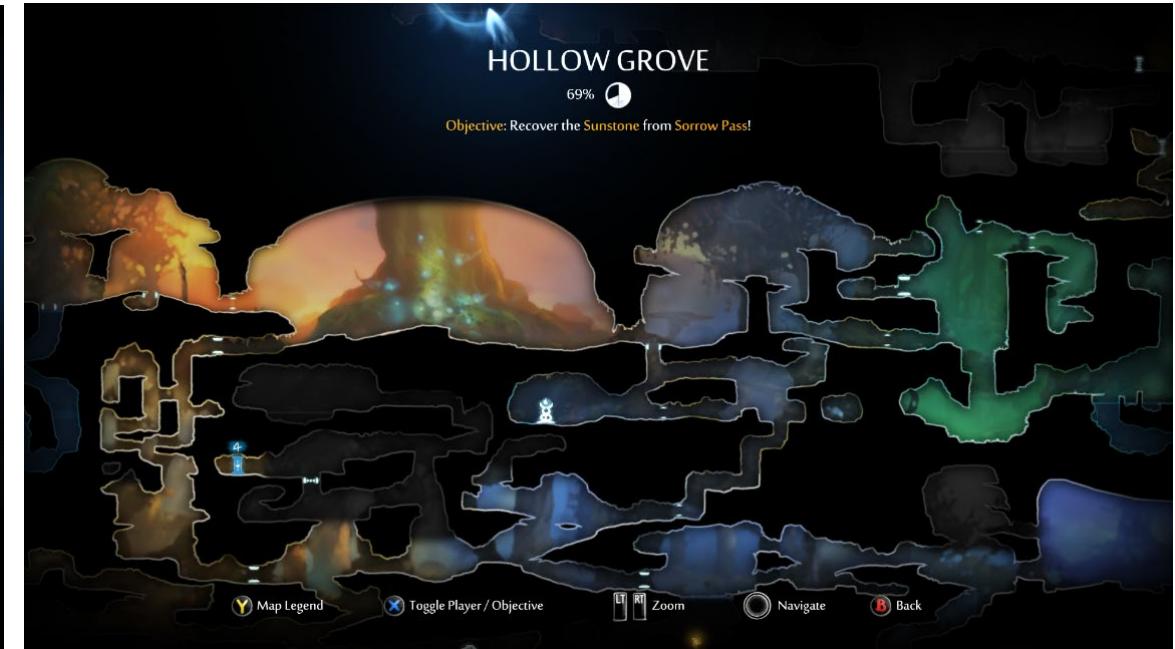
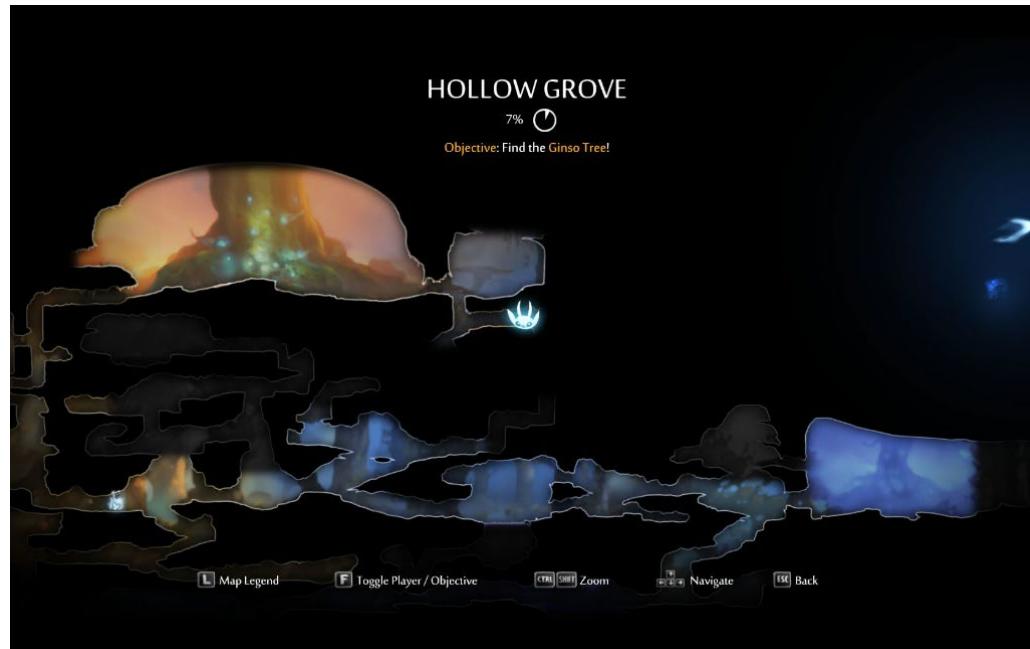
Rewards are often classified as either intrinsic or extrinsic depending on the way that an individual perceives and attains a reward (Cameron et al., 1994). For example, money made by playing the piano as part of an orchestra would be considered to be an extrinsic reward, while the achievement of playing a difficult song is an intrinsic reward. Research has demonstrated that rewards impact on motivation (Ryan et al. 2000a; Ryan et al. 2000b). Rewards that promote feelings of competence may increase intrinsic

Rewards Taxonomy

(Phillips et al., 2013, 2015)

Rewards of Access: Unlock new levels, items, gameplay modes that were previously inaccessible

Psychological need satisfied: Autonomy, competence



Rewards Taxonomy

(Phillips et al., 2013, 2015)

Rewards of Facility: Player becomes more effective and powerful in the game

- Weapon unlocks, level-ups
- Psychological need: Competence, Autonomy



Rewards Taxonomy

(Phillips et al., 2013, 2015)

- *Rewards of Sustenance*: Health and ammo pickups, prolonged game experience
- Least memorable according to Phillips
- Hard to think of a basic psychological need satisfied

Rewards Taxonomy

(Phillips et al., 2013, 2015)

Rewards of Glory: Don't actually influence the game status, „bragging rights“

- Leaderboards
- Video captures of Souls game challenge runs
- Psychological need: Competence, Influence



Rewards Taxonomy

(Phillips et al., 2013, 2015)

Rewards of Praise: Praise for the player

- Devil May Cry Combo
- Psychological need: Competence



Rewards Taxonomy

(Phillips et al., 2013, 2015)

Rewards of Sensory Feedback: aesthetic feedback, which is sensorily pleasing to the player

Psychological need: Novelty, Pleasure-stimulation





Combined rewards: Access & Sensory feedback



Reward design outside games: Gamification

- Gamification = applying game design thinking in non-game contexts
- Usually, the goal is to increase motivation
- Often centers around reward design
- Naive gamification only facilitates extrinsic motivation – slap on leaderboards, badges, trophies etc.
- Successful gamification often manages to facilitate intrinsic motivation too

Bottle Bank Arcade



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zSiHjMU-MUo>



Sight (2012): A utopian or dystopian vision?



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H1TRosKxhg0>

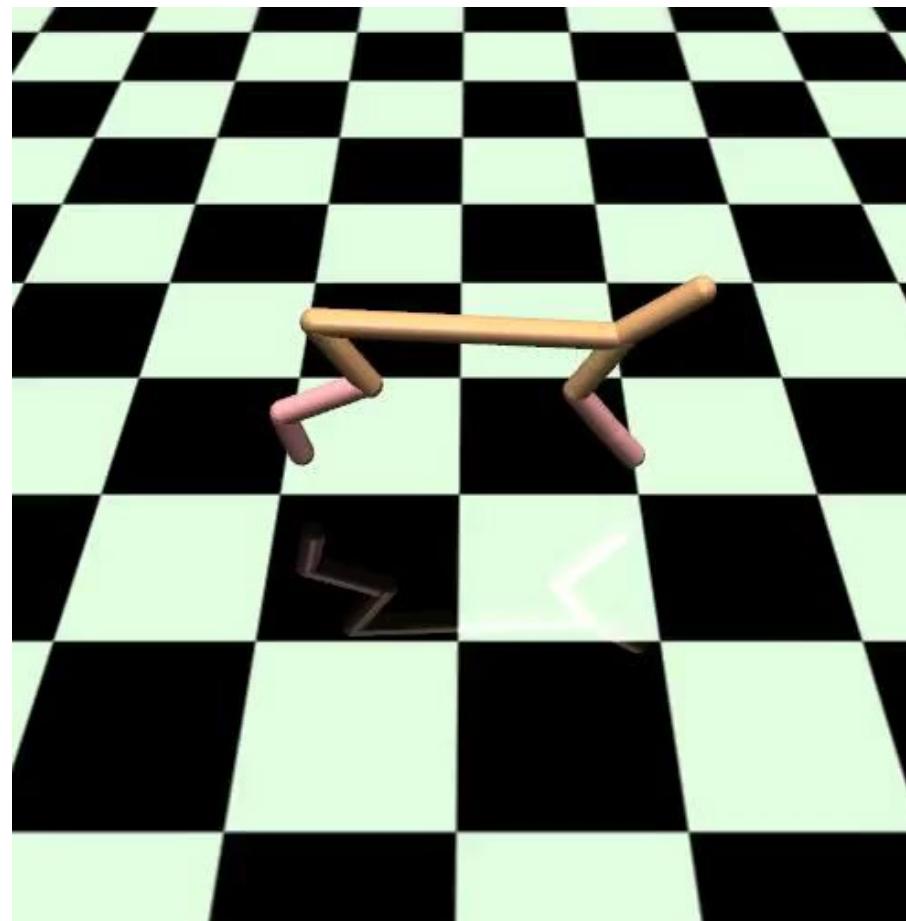
Dangers of extrinsic motivation

- Intrinsically motivated workers put in a lot of hours and excel because they love what they do
- Adding extrinsic motivation such as organization KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) can change one's motivational profile towards more extrinsically motivated, and decrease intrinsic motivation
- Extrinsic motivation people are more prone to cheating and backstabbing (e.g., in sports and education)
- Basic rule of gamification: you get what you measure and reward, often at a hidden cost.

You get what you reward: Clickbait

- Traditional good journalism: The header or title summarizes the news
- Journalism incentivized and optimized based on click analytics: The news is held back.
- One gains clicks, but does one really gain loyal readership, positive effect on society etc.?

You get what you reward: AI





Do leaderboards support competence?

SALES LEADERS
OF DEALS CLOSED

1	Stuart Neighbours	20
2	Derek Edwards	20
3	Kevin Scheid	18
4	Ryan Blair	16
5	Carrie Smith	14
6	Bill Powell	10
7	Bob Brauer	9
8	Dave Dorsey	1



DEREK EDWARDS
2ND PLACE

Daily rewards revisited

- Daily rewards can be motivating, but may also be perceived as obligations or chores.
- Which basic psychological need might explain?

Daily Quests or Daily Pests? The Benefits and Pitfalls of Engagement Rewards in Games

JULIAN FROMMEL, Utrecht University, Netherlands and University of Saskatchewan, Canada
REGAN L. MANDRYK, University of Saskatchewan, Canada

Many games use engagement rewards as incentives for players to engage, e.g., daily login rewards, repeatable challenges, or seasonal rewards like holiday skins. These rewards may serve players by facilitating enjoyment or motivation; however, they may also be considered differently by skeptical players, e.g., as dark patterns that do not benefit players, and may detract from—or even harm—player experiences. As they are widely prevalent in a variety of games, it is important to understand how such rewards are experienced by players to inform potential pitfalls, such as when they are negative for gaming experience or lead to unhealthy gaming behaviours. 178 participants completed a mixed-methods survey and described such rewards in games they play, the tasks required to acquire them, and their experience qualitatively and with validated scales of motivation regulation and passion orientation. We found that players perceived these rewards as beneficial (e.g., as motivation), as negative (e.g., by promoting fear of missing out), or even as an obligation or chore. Quantitative results further support the dualistic experience of such rewards. We contribute findings and design recommendations that are useful for understanding and designing widely used but potentially detrimental reward mechanics.

CCS Concepts: • Human-centered computing → Empirical studies in HCI; • Applied computing → Computer games; • Software and its engineering → Interactive games.

Additional Key Words and Phrases: games, reward, daily, quests, engagement, motivation, passion, lootbox

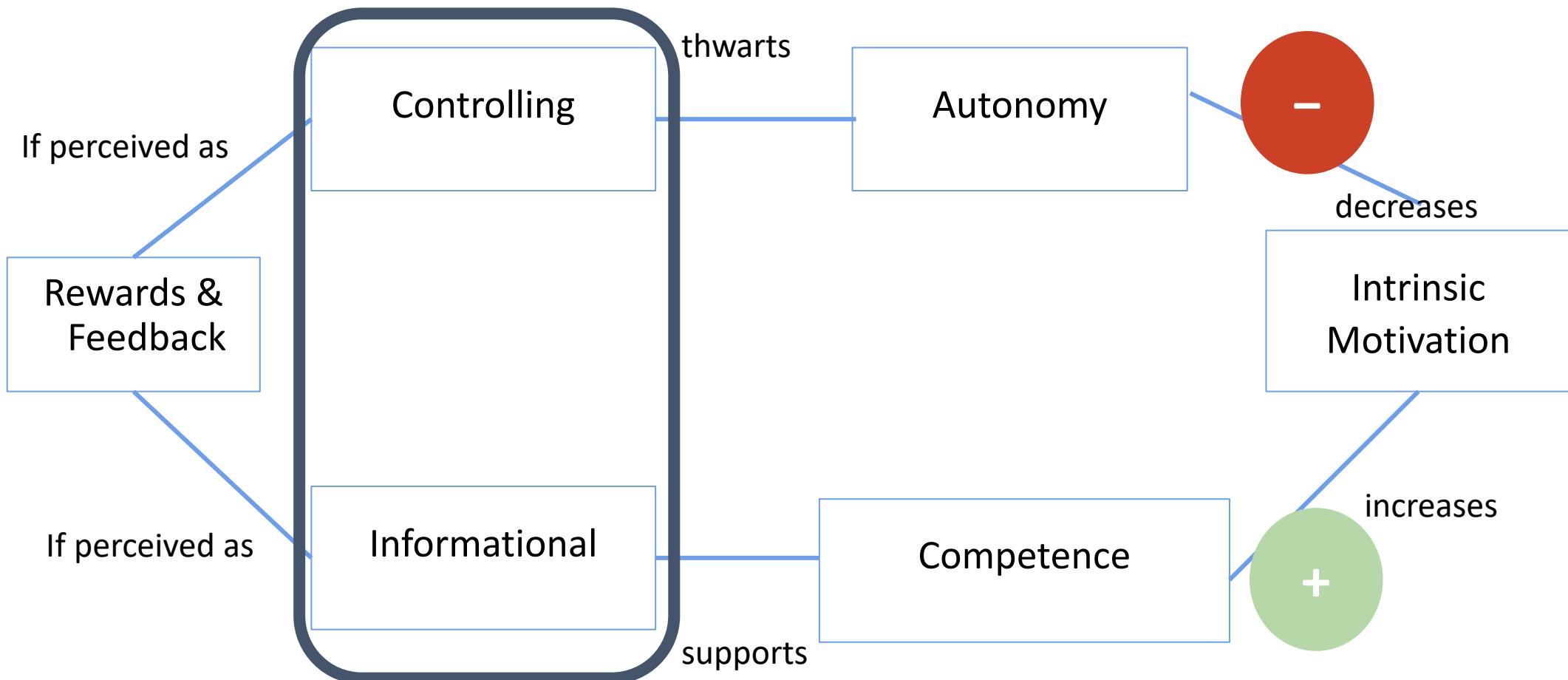
ACM Reference Format:

Julian Frommel and Regan L. Mandryk. 2022. Daily Quests or Daily Pests? The Benefits and Pitfalls of Engagement Rewards in Games. *Proc. ACM Hum.-Comput. Interact.* 6, CHI PLAY, Article 226 (October 2022), 23 pages. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3549489>

1 INTRODUCTION

Many current games use *engagement rewards*, i.e., rewards that aim to entice players to engage with the game by providing motivation to login and play. For example, games may use daily login rewards, such as for simply logging into the game client (e.g., *Guild Wars 2* [4]), rewards for generic repeating in-game challenges or quests that are renewed daily, weekly, or monthly (e.g., “Win

Cognitive Evaluation Theory



Ryan, Richard M., Valerie Mims, and Richard Koestner. "Relation of reward contingency and interpersonal context to intrinsic motivation: A review and test using cognitive evaluation theory." *Journal of personality and Social Psychology* 45.4 (1983): 736.

Some other motivation models

Story/narrative as a motivator?

- Some intrinsic motivation research lists fantasy as its own motivator (E.g., Malone 1981)
- A simple example: Giving a child the official shirt, ball or cap of a famous athlete can motivate through a form of power fantasy (boosts perceived if not actual competence)

Story/narrative and psychological needs

- A good story is novel and not too predictable (curiosity/interest), and creates a feeling of connection with the characters (relatedness)
- Probably, narrative framing can also heighten the feelings of competence and autonomy elicited by a game
- A narrative that provides a new perspective or makes one reflect about one's self-growth can also satisfy the need for self-actualization
- Narrative can also be rewarding/motivating through *emotional gratification* (discussed in part 3 of this lecture series)

Flow (Csikszentmihalyi)

- Flow is a model of an optimal experience – e.g., total absorption, losing track of time. “A feeling of complete and energized focus in an activity, with a high level of enjoyment and fulfillment.”
- Flow is experienced in *autotelic* activity (having a purpose in and not apart from itself)
- Origin of flow is in Csikszentmihalyi’s study of athletes and artists
- Autotelic persons: internally driven, with curiosity and sense of purpose.
- Closely related to intrinsic motivation (autotelic ≈ intrinsically motivated)



Elements of flow

- Clarity of goals and immediate feedback
- A high level of concentration on a limited field (no distractions)
- Balance between skills and challenge
- The feeling of control
- Effortlessness
- An altered perception of time
- The melting together of action and consciousness
- Autotelic experience

Flow channel revisited

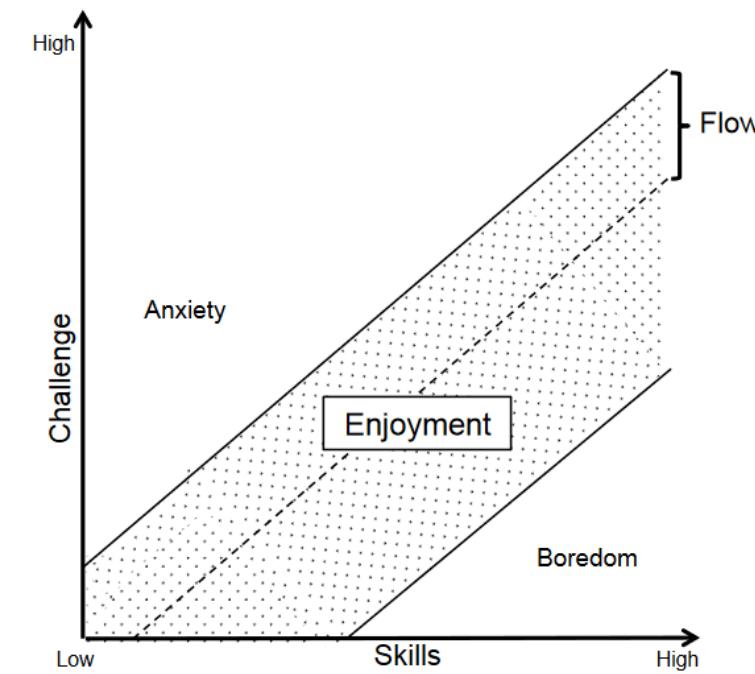
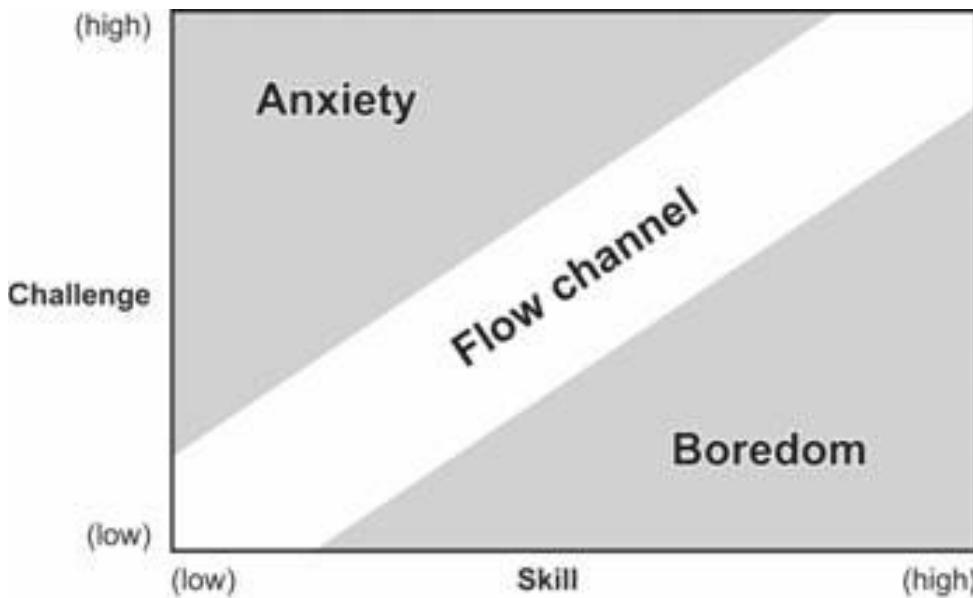
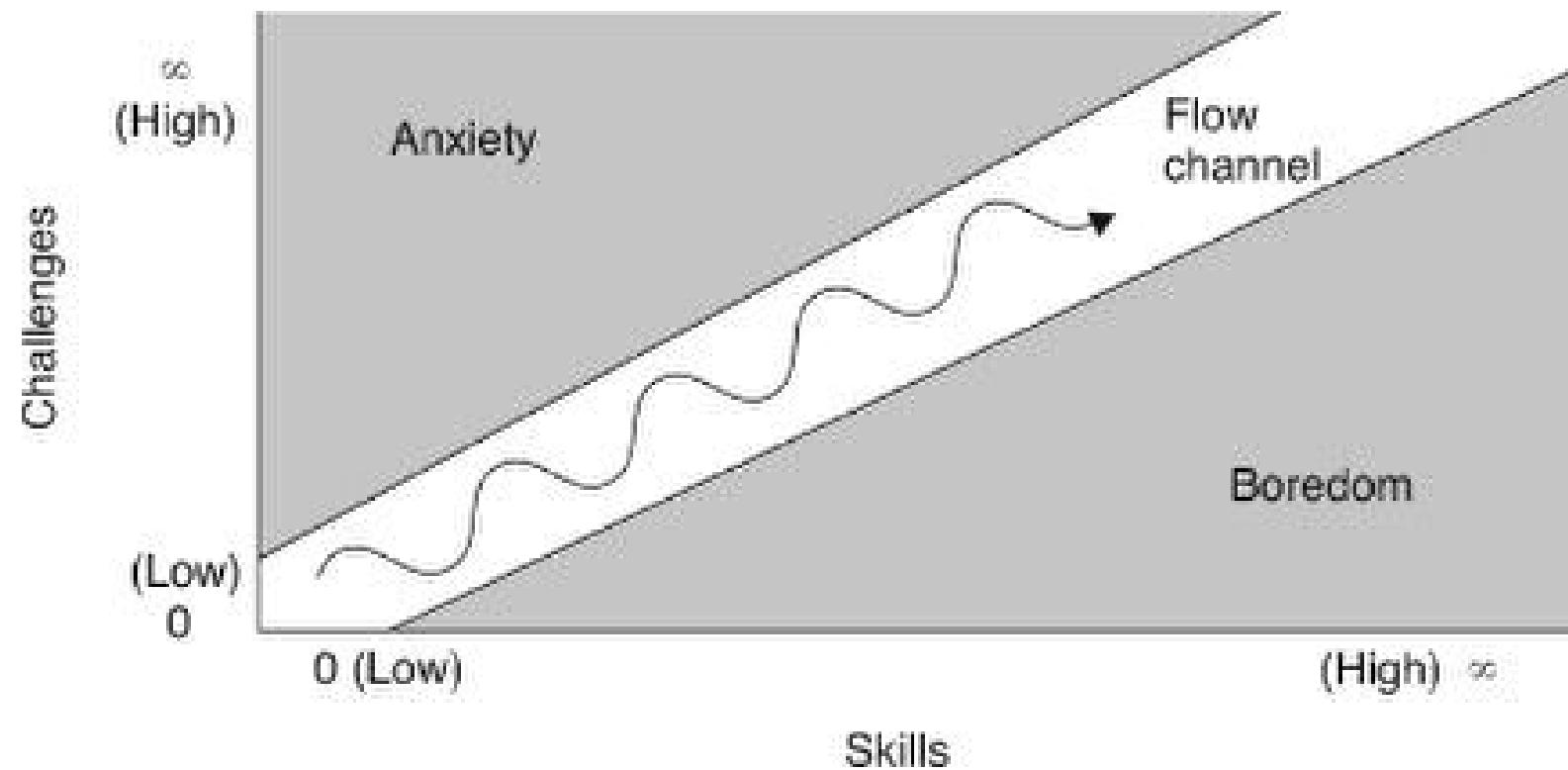
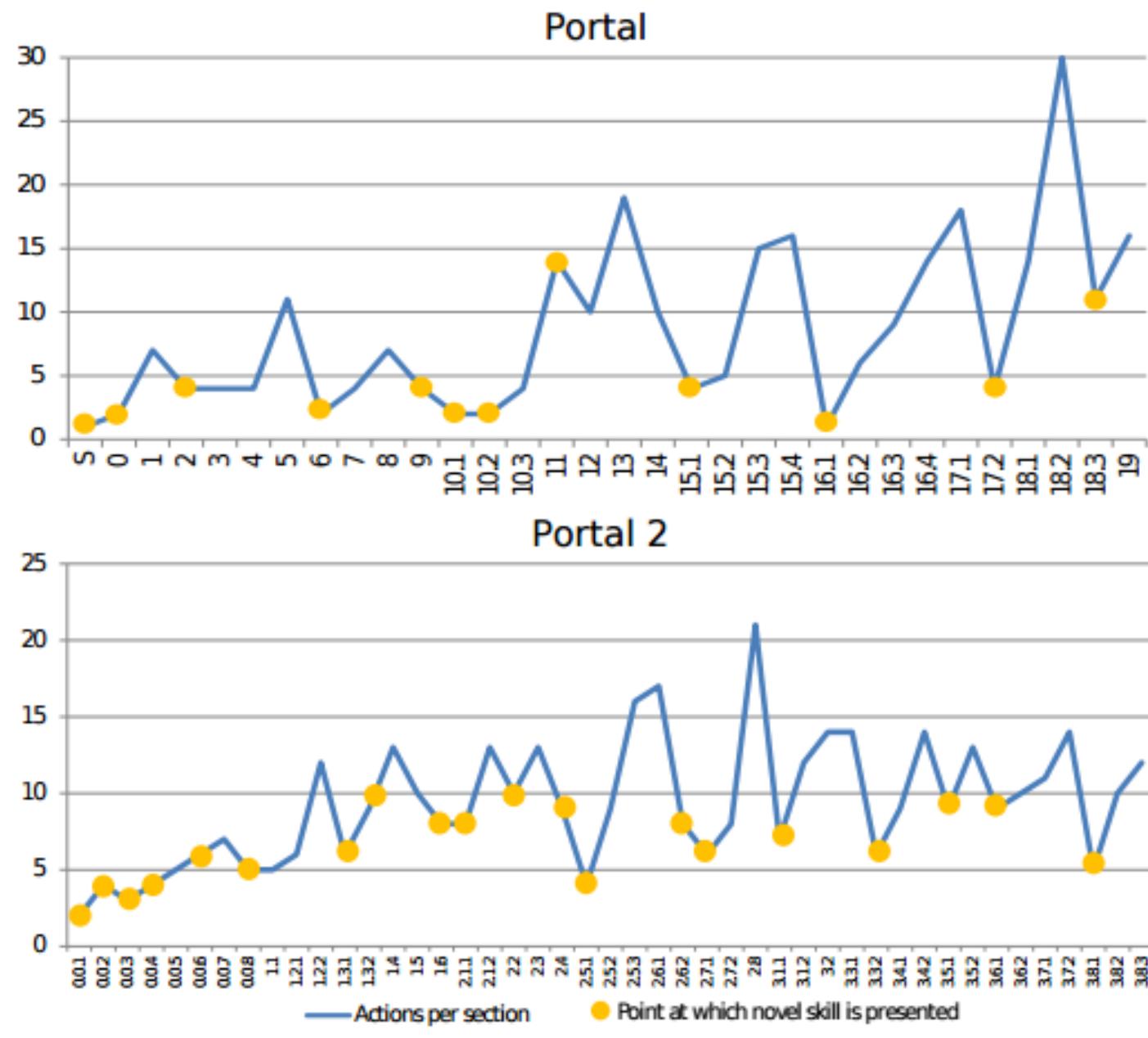


Figure 1. Flow results from the balance of game challenge and player skills. Less challenging gameplay may still be experienced as enjoyable.

Flow channel in games, according to Schell



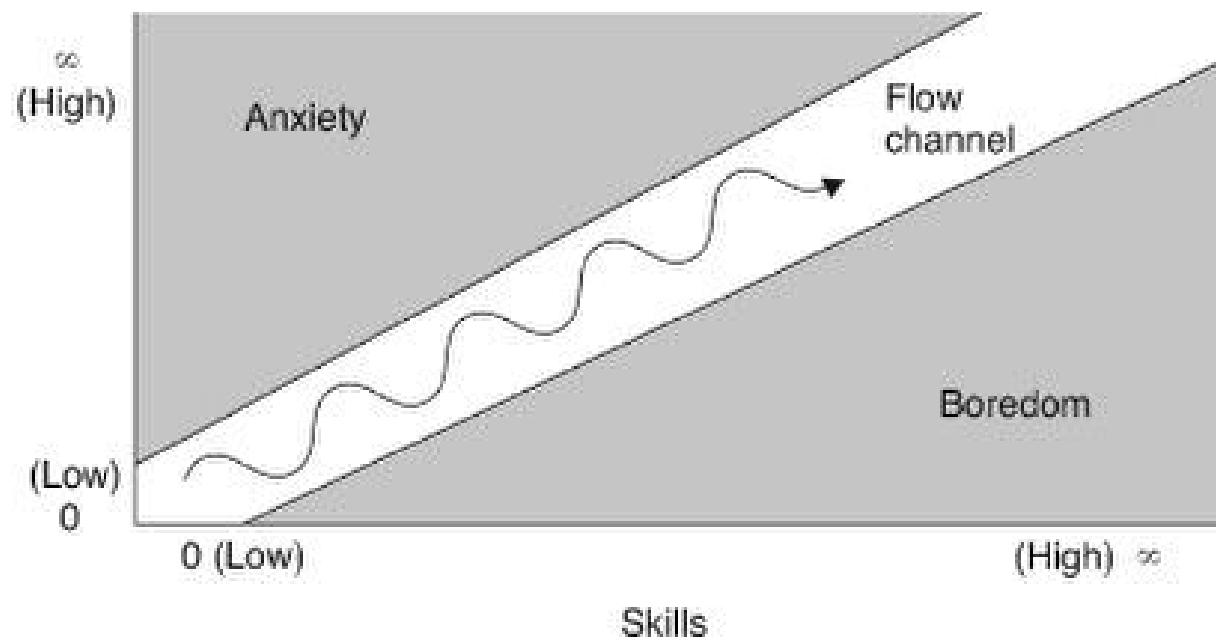


Flow channel & novelty

- The sawtooth curve of successful games is a logical outcome of attempting to satisfy both
 1. Competence (skills and challenges balance)
 2. Novelty (avoiding too much repetition by gradually introducing new mechanics)

Flow channel & novelty

Skills & challenges balance only



Also supporting novelty

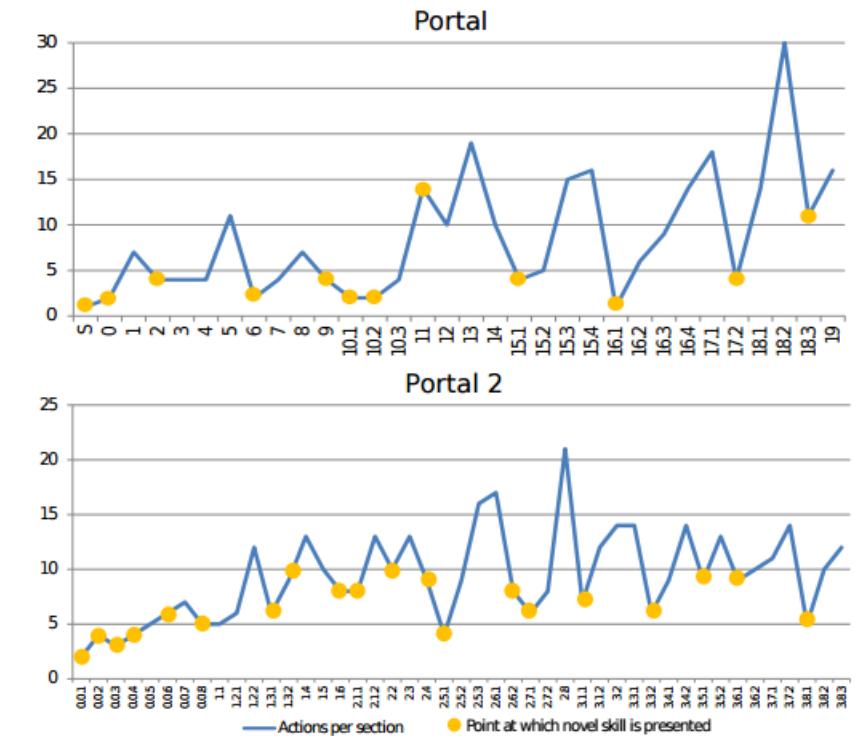
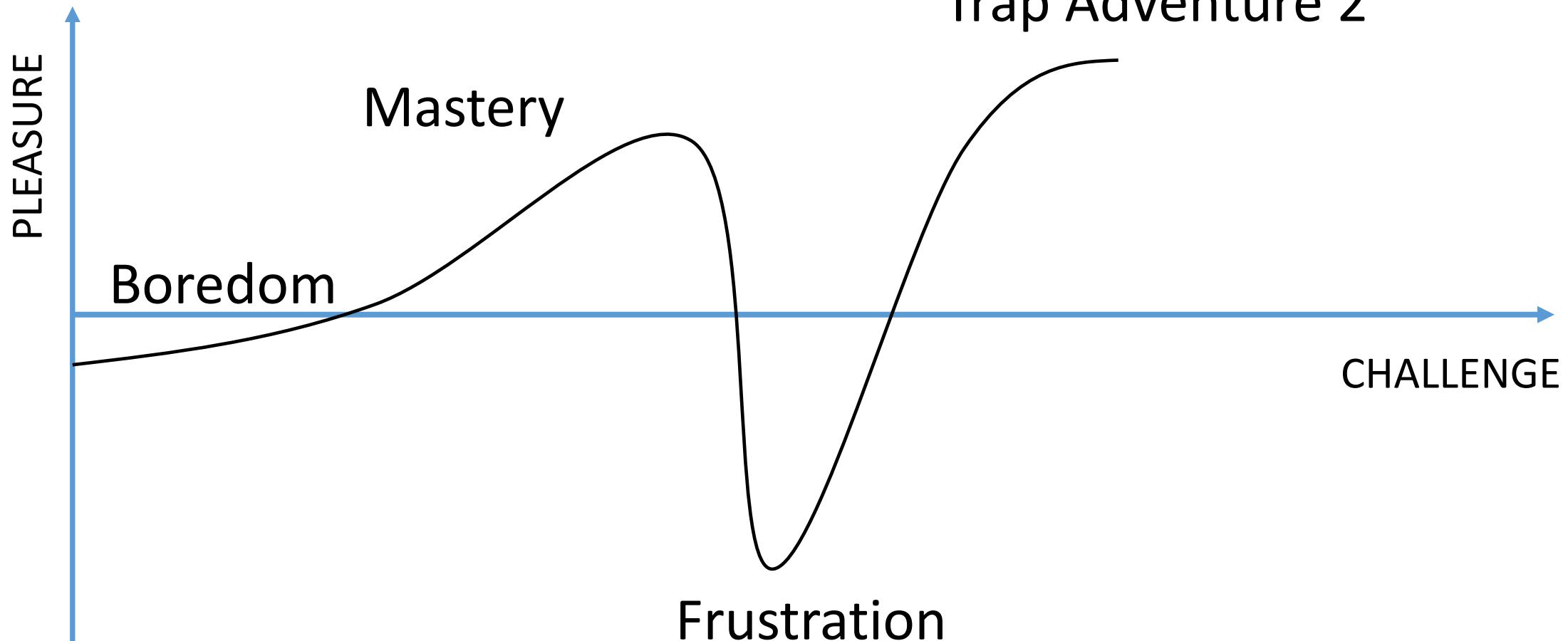


Figure 1. Minimum number of player actions required to solve successive puzzles in Portal (top panel) and Portal 2 (bottom panel).

Extending the flow channel theory: The Frustration Valley

QWOP, Flappy Bird,
Trap Adventure 2



Individual differences

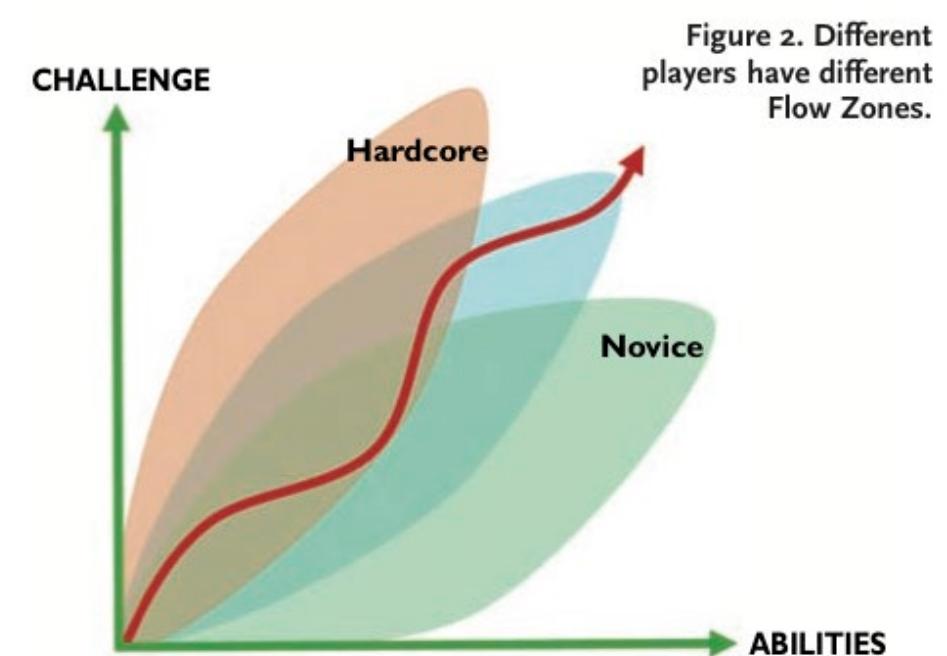
In reality, no single model of motivation applies to all people or players.

There are considerable individual differences.

Flow and expertise

Jin 2012 study, N = 307, Racing vs. Action vs. Medical Simulation games

- Experienced players reported strongest sense of flow when challenge high
- Mediocre players reported most flow for moderately challenging gameplay
- ***Novices experienced no flow***
 - Focused on learning controls, instead of challenge

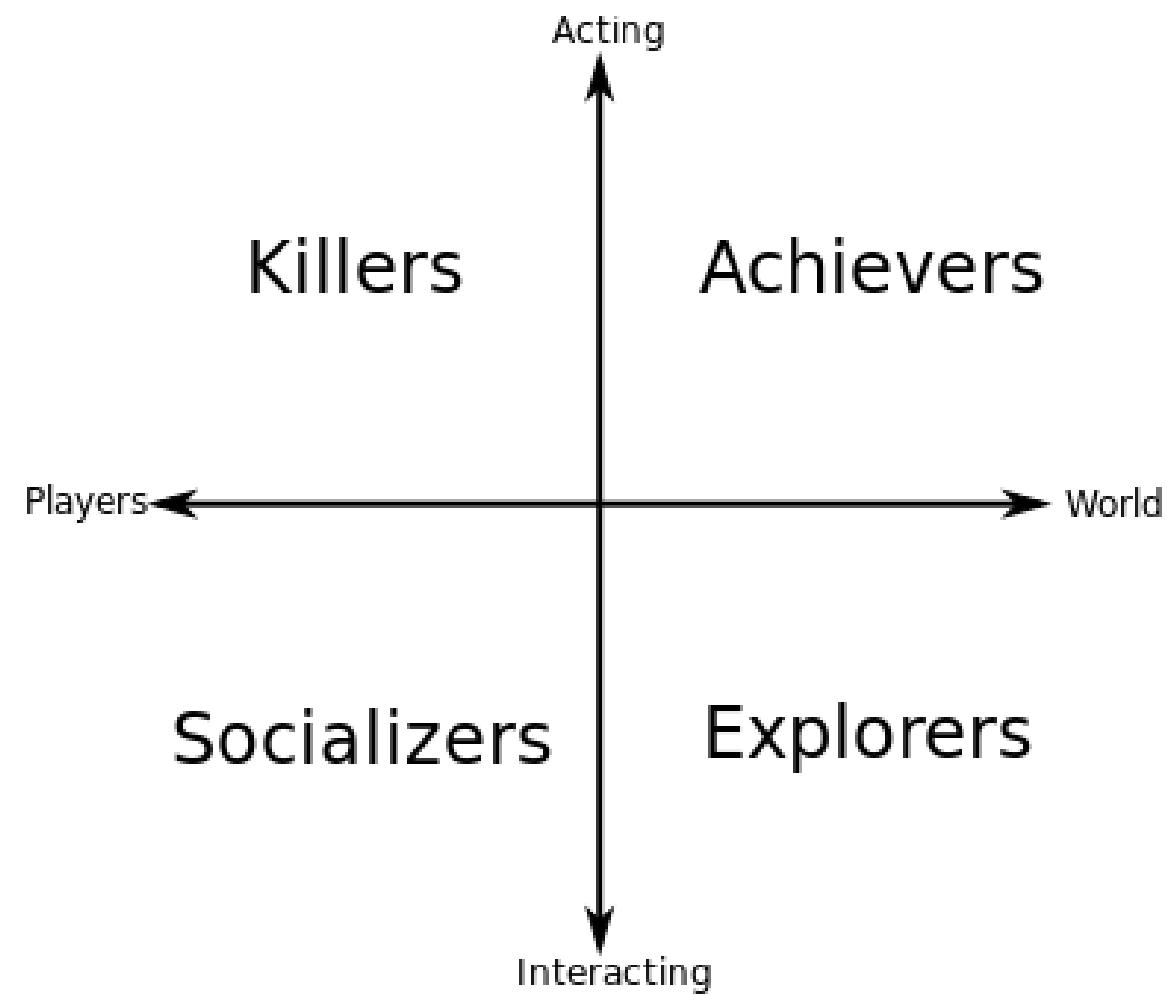


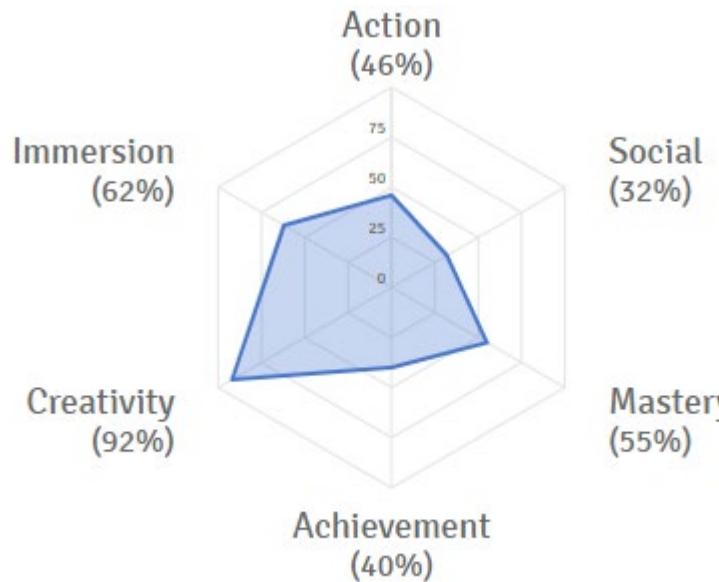
<https://www.jenovachen.com/flowingames/p31-chen.pdf>

Individual differences

- Motivational profile of a player: The relative importance of different motivations and psychological needs
 - Computational rationality: the weights of need-based reward function components
 - Player types: Motivational profile stereotypes. Can be useful for discussion, but danger of oversimplifying

Bartle's player types





Get Your Gamer Motivation Profile



After filling out a brief survey (5-7 minutes), this profile tool will generate a customized report for you. The report will describe the traits that were measured, and how you compare with other respondents. You will also be given a link to share your results. Based on your motivation profile, our Game Recommender Engine will suggest games you may like. Your responses may be used to refine the algorithms that generate the profile, and aggregate findings may be published in public or commercial reports. [More Information](#).

New to Quantic Foundry?

You will have the option to create an account after taking the survey.

[Take The Survey](#)

Already Have An Account?

Please sign in so we can attach your results to your account or to see your existing profile.

[Sign In](#)

See what a Gamer Motivation Profile looks like by clicking a user below:



Rodrigo
33 years old
Hardcore Gamer



Caner
29 years old
Hardcore Gamer



Becky
23 years old
Core / Mid-Core Gamer

Player types / preferences can change

  r/Eldenring · Posted by u/Henpenney 5 months ago 

2.5k **Did Elden Ring ruin other games for you?**

 [Discussion & Info](#)

I finally beat the game on Friday after playing for about six months. About 200 hours. I'm not good; I'm a casual player, but I beat Malenia and did the Ranni ending all on my own. I loved it all—even though it was stupidly hard for me.

Here's what I've noticed since then: other games feel childishly easy. Diablo IV, TotK, etc. Games I was looking forward to playing (I pretty much do one game at a time until I finish it) have all felt like the stakes are so low that I can barely take them seriously.

Has FromSoftware just ruined me? Is there a way back into these other games?

What is about a FromSoftware game that has this effect on me? Is it just the difficulty level/challenge or is there more to it?

Thoughts?

EDIT: This received a crazy amount of responses. I can't even read them all let alone reply. I appreciate your thoughts. I've really enjoyed this community for the last little while. Thanks, folks.

 1.2k Comments  Share  Save ...

https://www.reddit.com/r/Eldenring/comments/14pt0wt/did_elden_ring_ruin_other_games_for_you/

DISCUSS

- What games have “ruined other games” for you, or considerably changed your preferences? (Presemo)

Recap: Practical implications

- The theories, taxonomies, and typologies provide checklists against which you can critique one's game design.
 - Does it support all the central basic psychological needs?
 - Have you considered all the types of rewards from the Phillips taxonomy?
- Alternatively, one can decide to optimize a game for a specific player type or motivational profile.
- Currently being researched: effective ways to classify a player's type or otherwise gather data that can be used to personalize a game
 - Already works in practice: customized IAP advertising, although now hampered by data privacy restrictions
 - Recommendation systems of Netflix, Tiktok, Amazon etc.

Recap: Psychological needs that every game designer should remember and consider

- Competence
- Autonomy
- Relatedness
- Novelty

Some games also support: Self-actualization (transformative game experiences), physical thriving (exergames)

Exercise: Gamification, intrinsic & extrinsic motivation

1. Pick a physical activity (sport, exercise, cleaning, whatever) that you do not find motivating. Analyze it from the point of view of both intrinsic motivation (competence, autonomy, relatedness, curiosity, self-actualization) and reward & feedback design principles from today (positive, informative, juicy, Phillips taxonomy) and yesterday (the checklists used for the previous homework). Can you identify any problems related to these?
2. Can you fix the problems by modifying, adding, or removing elements to better support various motivations?

Alternative: If this is too hard in real life, can you think of a digital game that would be interesting for people who hate the activity? A good example:
<http://whatthegolf.com/> (The golf game for people who hate golf)

Submit via MyCourses. Use at max 1h. This exercise is not graded.

Optional exercise: identify your player type

- Take Quantic Foundry's gamer motivation profile test:
<http://apps.quanticfoundry.com/lab/gamerprofile/>



Optional exercise: learn to understand other player types

- Get into a random breakout room. Discuss games you like and your motivational profiles. Do you like the same games? If not, considering the motivational profiles of someone else, how could you modify your favorite games to make them interesting for them?
- Report your discussions as at least one slide per group. See the template:

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/12K3UvFYBA7t42dljFCmXuMCqRph9FNS-nHu7W-jFiAM/edit?usp=sharing>