

A vibrant, psychedelic border surrounds the central text. It features thick, swirling lines in shades of yellow, orange, red, and pink. Interspersed among these swirls are stylized flowers: a green daisy-like flower with a white center in the upper left, a white daisy with a yellow center in the lower left, a yellow flower with a dark blue center in the upper right, and a white daisy with a yellow center in the lower right. Small white and orange dots are scattered throughout the pink background.

Min–Maxing Relaxing:

*Playtime and Privilege
in the Post–Pandemic*

AUTHORS



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HOW IT ALL STARTED

- ★ *Baldur's Gate 3 (2023, Larian Studios)*
- ★ *Astarion (my love)*
- ★ *failing to progress beyond Act 1 (shameful)*
- ★ *And then failing to return to the game for 1.5 years...
(worse?!)*

RELAXING TAKES WORK, BUT WHY?

- ★ *Historically, leisure was seen as a sign of class and gendered power (Chess, 2018).*
- ★ *Leisure (generally) necessitates time taken away from wage-earning and/or life-maintaining labour (Soderman, 2017). Cultivating and protecting playtime, then, is a labour in itself.*



RELAXING TAKES WORK, BUT WHY?



- 01** *Content creators, power, gender, privilege.*
Who signify “playtime” activity even as they are labouring
 - 02** *Gaming platforms are changing playtime dynamics*
Which elevate the social capital of playtime
 - 03** *Technical and emotional upkeep and maintenance*
The labour required to sustain one’s capacity for playtime
- 
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LITERATURE

SHIRA CHESS (2017)

- ★ Games developed for women repurpose women's leisure practices into digital play.
- ★ The idea of what "women gamers" are is oversimplified into a "**designed identity**."
- ★ As such, girl games have tended to be narrative-driven rather than based on skill and mechanics.

AMANDA COTE (2020)

- ★ "**Hardcore**" games: skill-based, and *"prioritize a version of hegemonic masculinity based on an ideal of toughness, aggression, and dominance."*
- ★ Casual games are not included, but **neither are emotionally demanding games**. Emotionally demanding games aren't – by Cote's definition – *"hardcore."*



METHODOLOGY

Autoethnography with discursive analysis

I was starting to make sense of my own experience using **autoethnography** (critical reflection on my own experiences) and **discourse analysis** (looking at media in social contexts). I was starting to get somewhere...

...and **then—**



Streamer breebun spent over 21 hours in character creation for *Dragon Age: The Veilguard* (2024, Electronic Arts).



Content Creators, Class, Gender, Power, Privilege & Leisure

- Content creators flaunt their playtime as a sign of social capital and class.
- Yet, “playbour” and livestreaming scholars remind us that streamers occupy a different position in gaming culture: they reshape our values, conversations, and how we idealize play (even though most of us can’t spend 21 hours in a character creator). (Ruberg et al., 2023; Tran, 2024).



Post-Pandemic Context

The pandemic created a vacuum of socially interactive spaces, which we built replacements for online using platforms such as Discord, Zoom, Twitch, etc.

When we returned to in-person spaces, these online spaces were not displaced or dissolved, but sustained.

Now we endure compounding pressure to stay engaged!



Game Platforms Are Changing Playtime Dynamics

- ★ Discord tells your friend what you're playing and how many hours you've played.
- ★ Steam has peripheral sites that tell you how much backlog debt you have.
- ★ Twitch makes gaming fundamentally social, even if the game is "solo."
- ★ Community practices revolving around 300+ hour game investment

Baldur's Gate 3 Upkeep & Maintenance

MODS!

PATCHES!

CONVERSATIONS!

HARDWARE!

*(Mostly because I want to see
Astarion's pores in 4K)*

UPKEEP + SUSTAINED ENGAGEMENT = DEVOTION

DON'T BELIEVE ME? CHECK OUT GAMECHAT!

"All Together, Anytime, Anywhere."



PATIENT GAMING AS A (PARTIAL) SOLUTION



- ★ /patientgamers community on Reddit that waits to play games at least six months after release.
- ★ Rather than exhausting oneself to keep up, gamers could take their time guilt-free or reframe a backlog of games as a stockpile of leisure time and embrace patient gaming (Scully-Blaker, 2023).
- ★ What about the community and social engagement with the game?

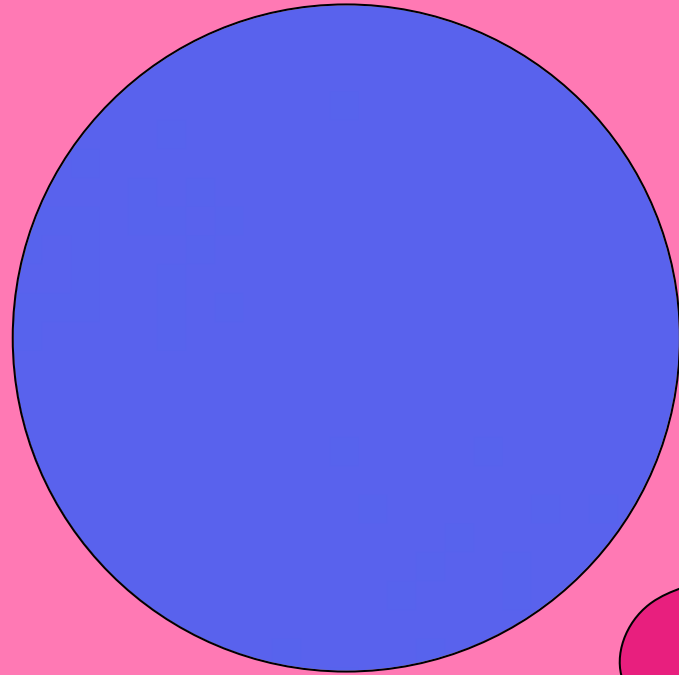
"I want access and inclusion without the demand of being engaged all the time."



SO, WHAT DO WE DO?

Critically, we can:

- Challenge these platforms and the way they inscribe dynamics of social power around leisure and playtime
- Unravel the affective impacts of anxiety, guilt, and FOMO.



SO, WHAT DO WE DO?

As humans and academics, there are a few things we can try:



**FORM A GAME CLUB
WITH BOUNDARIES**



**DETERMINE WHAT YOU
WANT OUT OF THE GAME**



**PROTECT YOUR
ANTI-SOCIAL GAMES**

WHAT I'M DOING



ACT1RS UNITE
(let's be friends!)



SOCIAL VS. SOLO



GETTING CLOSURE
(for Astarion!)

THANKS FOR LISTENING!

If you'd like to chat more, please contact me!

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I also teach at MacEwan University in Professional Communications!

If you want to know why this slidedeck is vintage Barbie inspired, ask me about my thesis research!

