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Finding Time for Tabletop: Boardgame Play and Parenting

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Abstract

Hobby boardgaming is a serious leisure pastime that entails large commitments of time and energy. When serious hobby boardgamers become parents, their opportunities for engaging in the pastime are constrained by their new family responsibilities. Based on an ethnographic study of serious hobby boardgamers, we investigate how play is constrained by parenting and how serious boardgamers with these responsibilities create opportunities to continue to play boardgames by negotiating the context, time, location and medium of play. We also examine how these changes influence the enjoyment players derive from boardgames across the key dimensions of sociality, intellectual challenge, variety, and materiality.

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INTRODUCTION

Both digital and tabletop games attract committed aficionados – passionate insiders or serious leisure practitioners who devote seemingly limitless time and energy to their hobby (Stebbins, 2012, p. 70). Such fans are found across the gamut of analogue games (Woods, 2012, p. 17): traditional games like *Chess* have Grand Masters (Murray, 1986); mass market games celebrate the *Monopoly* or *Scrabble* champion (Tostado, 2010). Hobby boardgames are by definition targeted to the hobby boardgamers, distinguished by a "degree of enthusiasm for board games" (Woods, 2012, p. 120) that “engenders … a desire to pursue the activity beyond the time or the money (if not both) available for it” (Stebbins, 2012, p. 39). Hobby boardgamers are not just people who play hobby boardgames; they are serious boardgamers, placing value on “active participation within the hobbyist culture, the acquisition and accumulation of games, and a degree of evangelism for the hobby.” (Woods, 2012, p. 120).

In this paper we present findings from a study of serious boardgamers. These are people who approach board gaming as a hobby and as a form of serious leisure (Stebbins, 2012). In particular, we examine how adults with various responsibilities negotiate the time and opportunity to continue to engage in the serious pursuit of boardgames while also managing their other commitments, particularly as parents: “somewhere in there I’ve got to exercise and get dinner and spend time with the kid … there’s just not enough hours in the day” (P3). Using data from interviews and online posts, informed by our own personal experiences and observations as researchers, parents and boardgamers, we investigate the ways in which tabletop play is curtailed by the commitments of parenting, as well as the strategies that parents use to carve out time for boardgaming.

Literature on game players tends to focus on their motivations to perform particular in-game actions or engage with in-game structures such as guilds (Williams, Ducheneaut, Zhang, Yee, & Nickell, 2006). This paper describes players not by the way they behave in-game (Bartle, 1996; Yee, 2006) but by the ways in which they reconcile their devotion to their hobby with their responsibilities to their families. It understands gaming as an experience influenced by both the game itself and the gamer's commitment to the game and play experience (Björk, 2008).

BACKGROUND

Digital and analogue games have similar elements, in that their rules describe both "the actions players take and the outcome of those actions" (Salen & Zimmermann, 2004, p. 149). The essential difference is the medium. Analogue, or tabletop, games typically have tangible pieces and are played face-to-face in a social setting. Woods (2012, p. 17) categorises them as either classical or traditional (e.g. *Chess*, *Mahjongg* or *Backgammon*, “passed down from antiquity”), mass-market (e.g. *Monopoly* or *Scrabble*, “the common perception of commercial board games”), or hobby games – “those games that are not targeted towards the general mass market but to a specific group who can be termed hobby gamers”. Digital games, by contrast, include "arcade games and games played on computers, consoles, and cell phones" (Juul, 2012) as well as on tablets and other devices.

Passionate boardgamers are serious leisure practitioners: the “buffs” as opposed to the “consumers” (Stebbins, 2012, p. 70). Serious leisure places significant demands on its adherents: it “often borders on being *uncontrollable*. It engenders … a desire to pursue the activity beyond the time or the money (if not both) available for it” (Stebbins, 2012, p. 39). Hobby boardgamers are not just people who play hobby boardgames; they are serious boardgamers, who place value

on “active participation within the hobbyist culture, the acquisition and accumulation of games, and a degree of evangelism for the hobby.” (Woods, 2012, p. 120):

> Actually, playing the durned things is only a small part of the hobby. There’s collecting, searching for bargains and rare games, discussions of strategy, reading reviews, writing reviews, written session reports and verbal post-mortems, rule-lawyering, designing and discussing variations, deconstructing designs to see how the masters go about their craft, anticipating new releases, going to cons to talk with designers and see the latest stuff, making player aids and travel kits, making homemade copies of hard-to-find games, even creating your own games. There are a hundred ways to play with games when you can’t actually play the games themselves. (Designer Rick Holzgrafe, 2006, as cited in Woods, 2012, p. 128).

Unlike serious mass-market or traditional game players, the serious hobby boardgamer does not generally focus on one particular game but rather values “diversification and accumulation” (Woods, 2012, p. 132) and a wealth of associated activities; it is the boardgaming hobby, rather than a specific boardgame, that they are serious about.

The serious videogamer is similar in their devotion to the medium rather than to a particular game: "Between the arcade games of the early 1980s and today, video games have matured as a medium, developed a large set of conventions, grown a specialised audience of fans … and alienated many players." (Juul, 2012, p. 2). Many modern videogames require and valorise a significant and ongoing time commitment from players (Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell, & Moore, 2006; Yee, 2004); they are uncontrollable in that they expand to fill, and often exceed, the player's available time; they require the player to allocated dedicated time to play as they cannot be interrupted (Juul, 2012, pp. 59-60). This commitment is rewarded within the game world – with glory, sustenance, access and/or facility (Hallford & Hallford, 2001, as cited in Salen & Zimmermann, 2004, p. 346). Highly motivated or capable (video)gamers may even achieve a "leisure career" (Stebbins, 2012, p. 81), for example through "celebrity status that enables them to find employment in the games industry" (Kücklich, 2005). Similarly, tabletop gaming is characterised by a flexible and participatory culture where participants may simultaneously be both players and designers (Woods, 2012, pp. 138-140). Boardgame players

can contribute to a game's development through playtesting – 272 playtesters are named in the rules to *Le Havre* (Rosenberg, 2008), and significant contributors may be acknowledged in rules or components – the English rules for *Agricola* (Rosenberg, 2007) and *Le Havre* use names of production team's children in examples; ship cards in *Le Havre* bear the names of team members' wives; *Le Havre*'s production tokens bear the names of the game's translators and their families (white ships with red text), boardgamers who volunteer as teachers for the German publisher (grey ships with white text), and memorials to deceased game designers (grey ships with yellow text).

Figure 1: Agricola rules example; *Le Havre* rules example; *Le Havre* ship cards and production tokens.

More recently, crowdfunding campaigns and boardgaming websites have offered opportunities for more gamers to put themselves into games by name (e.g. naming a street on the *Mutant Meeples* board (Alspach, 2012)), by image (e.g. BoardGameGeek members' avatars on the box of *The BoardGameGeek Game* (Breese, 2009)), or as a designer of an element of a boardgame or expansion (e.g. *Small World* II Kickstarter (Keyaerts, 2009)). Being part of a boardgame – whether by contributing to its development or through a more personalised acknowledgement – can be a tangible expression of a boardgamer's involvement in their hobby.

Themes of work, relationships, home ownership and family responsibilities all influence adult players' engagement in both physical and digital games. Although for some, these present a barrier to play or at least to playing certain types of game (Juul, 2012, p. 147), for serious boardgame players these pressures seem more to dictate the choice of game or timing/frequency of sessions than to drive them away from the hobby – "[W]ith a demanding job, a wife, a home … and a child … I could only play a 5+ hour game once or twice a year" (Hamburg, 2005, as cited in Woods, 2012, p. 125). Although boardgamers' time is restricted, their desire to pursue the hobby through active engagement in its culture remains strong.

Whilst Juul (2012) has discussed the casualisation of videogame play, there has been little attention given to any similar experience amongst players of boardgames. Woods (2012, pp. 124-125) notes that choice of game style or genre may be influenced by players' life stages, with modern European boardgames "easier to fit into a player's life" due to their limited playing time. It is notable, however, that these players typically engage with boardgaming as a hobby, rather than with a single game.

Although there has been considerable research into digital games, as well as historical research into traditional games, modern boardgames are comparatively under-represented in the research literature. As well, the role of changing life stages in shaping boardgamers' involvement with their hobby is largely unexplored.

METHOD

We conducted a series of in-depth, one-hour semi-structured conversational interviews with self-identified boardgame enthusiasts, recruited through a forum post on Boardgamegeek.com as well as through an email list focused on modern European boardgames. These groups were selected for our ability to reach them, as well as for their broadly

representative nature within the hobbyist community; Juul (2012) has described the relative difficulty of reaching casual gamers as opposed to serious gamers. The aim of this study was to gain a deep understanding of the experiences of a representative group, rather than to provide a quantitative overview of an entire cohort. The number of participants was selected to achieve data saturation and to generate a manageable quantity of data, with all relevant themes identified (Atkinson & Flint, 2001).

Weiss (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006) describes interviews as "a virtual window on experience". This method of data collection engenders a deep understanding of the identified issues, allowing the researcher to follow up on and test themes and feedback through a contextual inquiry approach where the researcher tests the accuracy of their analysis during the interview (Gubrium & Holstein, 2012, p. 30). Beyer and Holtzblatt (1995) support this view of interviews as an opportunity for researchers and interviewees to co-construct research data, "a social encounter in which knowledge is actively formed and shaped" (Roulston, deMarrais, & Lewis, 2003, p. 645). Although this approach lacks the statistical validity of surveys, that is not its intent: the purpose of the interviews is to describe and examine the participants' motivations and experiences, generating deep, qualitative, context-driven data that is specific to the situation being studied.

Eleven interviews were conducted with participants from Australia (6), Europe (3) and the USA (2), aged from mid 20s to early 60s. All identify as "boardgamers" and work or have worked in white-collar jobs. Four interviewees are female, and seven are male. All interviews were conducted by the first author of this paper, face-to-face or by Skype or telephone, with participants in Australia, the USA and Europe. Initial questions explored participants' engagement with gaming as a hobby focusing on time, financial commitments, and participants'

emotional engagement with the hobby (Woods, 2012, p. 120), reflecting Stebbins' observation that serious engagement “engenders … a desire to pursue the activity beyond the time or the money (if not both) available for it” (Stebbins, 2012, p. 39). The goal of the interviews, which covered a range of topics including the participant’s history as a gamer, their preferred types of games, frequency of gaming and what they like or don’t like about games, was to establish the role that boardgames play in participants’ lives and to understand their attitudes towards digital and tabletop games, as well as to elicit general demographic data. In total, seven of the participants were parents or step-parents; none were grandparents. Participants’ children are aged from seven to young adult (20+); all participants alluded to the impact that children may have on someone’s participation in the gaming hobby and communities. Interviews were analysed using an iterative coding process (Muller, 2014, p. 37) to identify themes which were common across interviews. Once we had completed and coded the interviews, we explored the “Gaming with Kids” subforum on BoardgameGeek.com to better understand the different approaches described in interviews. This process consolidated and extended the set of behaviours identified through the interview process.

Insider research and Reflexivity

It has been suggested that one can only appreciate the aesthetics of a particular culture if one is actively involved in it (Woods, 2012, p. 12) and, more specifically, that "Researchers of games should play the games they are studying" (Williams et al., 2006, p. 342). Dahlskog, Kamstrup, and Aarseth (2009, p. 3) note that a game analyst must progress in a [digital] game in order to understand it. Brown (2015) has discussed the importance of reflexivity in conducting ethnographic research, particularly when the researcher is in some way an ‘insider’ in the field, in the context of research into computer games:

> Reflexivity means both having the capability and language necessary to justify the methodological, theoretical and practical/pragmatic steps undertaken during data collection and analysis (Mason, 2002), and also the awareness of the researcher's relationship to the field. For computer games research, this type of reflexivity requires acknowledgement of when the researcher is, and is not, an embedded member of the community being researched. (Brown, 2015, p. 80)

The first author of this paper has been an active participant within the global boardgaming community (and sometimes industry) since 2003. As a consequence, all interview participants have been known to her, or she to them, through participation in local gaming groups, attendance at national and international events, participation in Boardgamegeek forums and associated social media activity. In some cases, researcher and participant have met in person; in others, they have known of one another through mutual involvement in gaming communities. Some participants spontaneously discussed her family during interviews; one described playing games with her husband and child, another discussed having met her husband at an international boardgaming event; others described their desire to "visit Melbourne". "When one is already, at some level, an insider in their field, it is probable that they have pre-established friendships – often close friendships – in that field and it is also probable that such close friendships will shape the researcher's work and influence their positioning within the field." (J. Taylor, 2011, p. 8). The researcher's reputation and involvement in the hobby helped to recruit participants by giving them confidence that this insider research would be conducted from a position of knowledge and understanding of boardgame genres, boardgamers and boardgaming mores.

There are risks associated with insider research, which Hodkinson (2005) has discussed in the context of research into youth cultures. Like Brown (2015), Hodkinson notes the importance of reflexivity in understanding both the advantages of insider research, which include shared language, perceptions of trust, and willingness to participate and disclose personal information, and its potential disadvantages, which include over-complacency, perceived

familiarity with content and context, and perceived pressure to conform to “dominant thinking within the group” (Hodkinson, 2005, p. 17). Similarly, J. Taylor (2011) describes conducting insider research in queer cultures, referencing the value of “unlearning” as a means to provide distance between the researcher and participant (Bennett, 2003). “Researchers should consider whether an insider or outsider position will serve their purposes more effectively in interviews, depending on the topic at hand.” (Cote & Raz, 2015, p. 105). Although these interviews were conducted by an insider in the boardgaming community, respondents were occasionally asked to explain a particular concept or behaviour “as you would to a non-gaming neighbour or friend”; this provided context around an interviewee’s interpretation of an activity or expression, allowing for deeper understanding. Additionally, interviewees were offered the option of reviewing the transcript of their interview in case they later wished to redact material or add to it.

SERIOUS BOARDGAMING

To Paglieri, the "true players" are those for whom "enjoyment is the *motivation* for play" (Woods, 2012, p. 191). The players we interviewed demonstrate this commitment to the implicit social contract of enjoyment while playing, even over the more explicit goal of winning (Bergström, 2010; Woods, 2009). Our research has highlighted four key dimensions that our interviewees consistently describe when discussing what they enjoy about boardgames: sociality, intellectual challenge, variety and materiality. These echo, but do not exactly replicate, the “pleasures of play” described by Woods (2012, p. 167); this may be explained by different research methods. Respondents to Woods’ online survey were asked the open-ended question, “From what aspect of play do you derive the most pleasure generally?” and were able to enter a free text answer; our conversational interviews asked, “What do you like about playing boardgames?” without focusing on degree of enjoyment.

It is beyond question that the sociality of gaming is a key part of participants' enjoyment; interviewees observe that the social framework extends beyond the actual play experience: "I've had occasions where I've gone for "an evening of gaming" where no actual gaming took place because we just started talking and had a fun evening" (P5). Moreover, our interviewees speak positively of the intellectual challenge that play provides. Both of these dimensions are identified and discussed in Woods's findings. In conversation, however, our interviewees pointed to two further dimensions which are, we believe, under-represented in Woods's findings, possibly because they are secondary to the overt sociality and challenge of play. These are variety, primarily in the selection of available games but potentially also in gaming opponents and partners, and materiality – the physicality of and sensory joys afforded by boardgames (Rogerson, Gibbs, & Smith, 2015b, 2016) . These four dimensions have informed our understanding of the different approaches that we describe in this paper, as each approach has potential to transform the play experience across one or more of these dimensions.

BOARDGAMING THROUGH DIFFERENT LIFE PHASES

Our interviews suggest that there are patterns of engagement with games that are seen across different stages of a player's life. After playing "the usual" games as a child, many boardgame hobbyists discover boardgames during secondary school or at university, with a period of relatively intense play that may continue into their early career but at some stage is reduced due to the demands of work. Entering into a relationship typically triggers either a reduction in gaming or, for those whose partner also plays games, an increase both in playing games and in talking about them – as well as in acquiring games: "I think we've gone from the 20 something games that [partner] had … when I first started seeing him - to our collective collection is about 300." (P3)

The arrival of children typically triggers a dramatic reduction in gaming time, which may continue until they are in their teens or later, when the parents feel ready to re-engage with outside groups. Both parents and non-parents identify children as a factor that impacts on the time available for the hobby: “I don’t have kids - and I live very close to where I work. I therefore have an enormous amount of spare time. … So I have a lot of time to devote to this hobby.” (P4)

With both mothers and fathers spending more time in childcare activities than in the past (Craig, 2006, p. 261), and with a majority of employed men and women working more than 40 hours per week (Abramowitz, 2014, p. 3), the resulting time pressures are evident. Our research suggests that controlling the context, time, location and medium of play may be critical in enabling parents to continue to engage with their hobby despite these conflicting pressures.

CHANGING CONTEXT: REFRAMING GAMES AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR CROSS-GENERATIONAL PLAY

Many parents see games as an opportunity for cross-generational play, particularly within the home - “As a father, I want to share with my kids the things I enjoy doing” (Howell, 2015). Boardgamers embrace the opportunity to evangelise their hobby, and the idea of “built-in” gaming partners is appealing; parents – especially fathers – often choose to share their hobbies with their children. One of our interviewees, who does not have children, described this boardgame utopia:

> I was staying with friends earlier in the month, who have two grown-up kids who love playing games, so I’ve had built in people to play games with! Wow! That changes everything! Oh my God, the people who have built-in players in their lives, that is amazing! I’ve never had that before. I’ve always had to go and organise it or join groups or be part of people’s regular group. But when you’ve got people who live in the same house who you can just play games with whenever you want - Oh my God that is precious! [laughs] Oh my God that is so good, that is so good! (P2)

At a time when time allotted for family bonding is decreasing (Petrick & Durko, 2013), a shared hobby can strengthen family interactions. Boardgamers who are new parents look forward to playing with their children; many have unrealistic views of parenthood as an extended playtime with their children as enthusiastic participants. This can lead to conflict with their children, who may prefer to select their own activities, especially as they become teenagers, as well as with their partners: Craig (2006) has shown that fathers spend disproportionate amounts of "child care" time playing with their children, as opposed to providing hands-on everyday care (washing, cooking, shopping etc).

> I do lots of stuff with the kids. Reading, when they're little tiny ones. Lego is a big, popular thing. Games, my main hobbies, really. Drawing and games. (P10)

This interest is reflected clearly in the way that discussion of children is framed, particularly within boardgaming communities where the majority of participants are male (Woods, 2012, p. 122). Birth announcements on BoardGameGeek.com typically ask for advice on how soon the child can be expected to start gaming:

> "[My son] was born on the 22nd of December, and just arrived home yesterday. 4.2 kilos of needy high maintenance.
>
> Now, time to start stocking the games cabinet for the coming years. I sort of know that Haba and Selecta make games for children. Any suggestions for the son of a gamer dad?" (Adams, 2008)

A scan of the "Gaming with Kids" forums on BoardGameGeek reveals further thread titles like "Being a Disappointed Gamer Dad", where a father bemoans that his child is "only" capable of age-appropriate behaviour: "My 3.5 year old daughter can barely put the last completely square piece of a puzzle in place. She sure as heck isn't capable of playing *Dominion*. And it's not for a lack of trying on my and my wife's part." Similarly, threads like "king of new york for a 5 year old?", where boardgamers discuss introducing adult games to very young children, surely contribute to confusion over what games are appropriate for what age child. Indeed, many boardgamers bypass children's games entirely, instead introducing their children

to simpler games from the parent's preferred genre. Those boardgamers that embrace them find that children's games typically lack the strategic depth and intellectual challenge that attracts many to the boardgame hobby and therefore fail to provide the mental stimulation that boardgame enthusiasts seek, however much they may appeal to children and create an opportunity for family bonding. Although this change in context allows for more playing time, and children's games frequently exemplify the focus on boardgames' materiality, with younger children this approach restricts not only the intellectual challenge but also the variety of games that are available to play. The sociality it offers is focused on the child and family setting. Playing games with young children adds a level of enjoyment to family settings but does not deliver the same type of sociality as playing games with friends.

Participants' opinions on the relationship between early exposure to high quality boardgames and ongoing engagement with boardgaming as a hobby were mixed. On the one hand, building a shared hobby may strengthen ongoing parent-child relationships and ultimately develop the "built-in player" of our interviewee's boardgame utopia, framing a new adult relationship; on the other, those children may exercise their power of veto and refuse to play boardgames with their parents. "Are they gamers, yes. But their game of choices are videogames, for the most part." (P6). One of our participants described her daughter's refusal to play games as a teenage rebellion and concluded that, "Lining that up against possible options of sex, drugs and rock n roll, I'm kind of OK with that" (P3). Research into intergenerational play between grandparents and grandchildren has found that it is focused strongly on phatic exchanges (Vetere, Davis, Gibbs, Francis, & Howard, 2006, p. 1476): play has a strong role in strengthening social bonds and building relationships (Osmanovic & Pecchioni, 2016). Although parents hope that playing boardgames with their young children might produce a long-term

boardgaming opponent, in practice, it seems that the pleasures of playing games with children should be enjoyed for what they are – a shared social experience –without an expectation of future return.

CHANGING TIME: GAME WHILE THE CHILDREN SLEEP

Simultaneously caring for children and boardgaming with other adults splits parents' attention both from the game at hand and from the children's needs, leading to an experience that satisfies nobody. An alternative is to restrict gaming to times when children are not present, at least while they are very young - "I am looking forward to when they are old enough that my wife and I, or my friends and I, can play a game without having to wait until the kids are in bed." (Wilder, 2015). This is typically understood as a hurdle that will be overcome as children grow older: whether the children choose to join in with the games or not, parents understand that they will not always require the same levels of supervision.

One interviewee described his experience of spending the working week away from his family in a major city, where he played games four nights a week due to the lack of other demands on his time. He contrasted this with his time at home with his family, stressing (as did other interviewees) that spending time with family is not something that he sees as a chore:

> [My son] is seven, and he's definitely our last. I just love being with him. The idea now, of actually saying, "Do you know what? I'm going to go off and do four nights' gaming", like I did before is just not even in my head … when I was working away, it's purely practical because if I wasn't out gaming, I'd probably go out drinking. If I didn't go out drinking, I'd be sat in my room being utterly miserable because I wasn't at home. Now, I'm home. It's where I really want to be. (P10)

A further advantage of timing boardgaming for child-free times appears to be that it does not restrict the choice of games to those suitable for children, opening up broader strategic depth and greater competitive or confrontational play. The variety of games played is still restricted by the host's library or by the games that opponents choose to bring, but the pleasures of sociality, intellectual challenge and materiality are generally undiminished.

CHANGING LOCATION: GOING OUT FOR GAMING

Boardgamers who prefer to play with adults frequently negotiate reciprocal "time off" with a spouse to pursue their hobbies in tandem – "it's like poker night" (P9), although this approach is less cost-effective for couples who wish to play together, or for single parents who require childcare. There is a sense that cost may be a more significant factor for boardgamers with young children than for those with older families or without dependents: "One of the other guys has got a young family so he tends to not pick up as many games" (P3) (see Carter, Gibbs, & Harrop, 2014, p. 136). This increases boardgamers' reliance on friends and gaming partners to supply access to new games, and may encourage them to go out to events rather than stay home to play games from their own collection.

Acknowledging that frequent absences are disruptive to home life, fairness and equity in providing childcare were important to our interviewees: "I discovered another group that meets weekly, that I attended about monthly until fairly recently, when my sons were old enough and it didn't put such a burden on my wife for me to be gone on a weekly basis for one night out of the week." (P5). Another interviewee was invited to a local gaming night but was unable to attend as his sons went to boy scouts that night – "But as fate would have it, that boy scout troop started shrinking and they switched over to another troop which met on Thursday nights so it was like, Ah! I've got Tuesday nights free now! Maybe I could check this out!" (P6); fifteen years later, he still attends that same weekly game night.

Despite frequently engaging with gaming as time apart from family, interviewees' priorities clearly put family harmony ahead of their participation in the hobby. One interviewee, however, felt that her ex-husband's insistence on continuing to host and participate in game nights despite having a young baby was a factor in her marriage breakdown. She saw this

insistence as a symptom of her former partner's mental health problems - "he just wouldn't grow up" (P9) – rather than as an inherent problem with the gaming hobby, and named several other people who had successfully combined their hobby with parenthood.

A side-effect of going out to game is that it removes gaming from the home and creates additional demands on time, particularly when hobbyists travel to attend boardgame conventions and other events, often in a form of "girlfriend getaway" or "mancation" (Petrick & Durko, 2013). This itself may be a limiting factor: "When I go on vacations, a weekend is one thing but – I'd rather take my wife with me" (P6). Particularly in the US, limited leave provisions restrict interviewees' ability to attend longer or out-of-town events, although many interviewees saw an opportunity to combine gaming with family vacations. "As a family, we went to the Essen games fair in Germany." (P1). Of course, this is a more successful approach when both parents are equally engaged with the hobby: "For years, I'd been saying, I need to wait until we're doing a family trip and then I'll just stop in Essen on the way. And then I thought about just how miserable that would make my wife [laughs] and decided that that was a really bad idea." (P5).

Our research has also found scattered examples where parents have taken their children out of school and other scheduled activities to attend gaming events, either within their immediate area or those involving travel. As with playing children's games, this delivers a different experience than attending in adult company, but remains preferable to not attending at all.

> When I am there with the family, it tends to draw me away from the game floor more. ... So, my younger son and I went to Gulf Games a couple years ago … and one of the things that we did was to visit Ruby Falls which is a large underground waterfall right on the Georgia-Tennessee border. And that was a lot of fun. … And so, that's - it makes things a little different. It's something that I really enjoy but it's - it tends to make gaming conventions with the family more like other vacations with the family. (P5)

Voluntary absenteeism is a sensitive topic that is often presented as negatively affecting children's education, particularly in the mainstream press and in policy documents (C. Taylor,

2012); however these participants recognise that travel offers opportunities for situated and experiential learning (Minnaert, 2012) as well as for deeper benefits including family bonding (Petrick & Durko, 2013).

Changing locations to game, whether locally or travelling more widely, offers enthusiasts social interaction and intellectual stimulation and enhances the variety of games that are available to them. Moreover, broader travel may allow them to bring new games back to their regular gaming groups and thus introduce additional variety there.

CHANGING LOCATION: MOVE BOARDGAMING ACTIVITIES FROM PUBLIC SPACES TO THE HOME

Although many boardgamers choose to go out to play games with a broader group of people, others choose the convenience of playing in their home. This often starts as an attempt to control the timing of play – to game while the children are asleep, without incurring babysitting expenses –"I got out of the habit of going to club events as the kids were growing up … more common is to have a friend or friends come over to play" (P1). This interviewee also observed that the money that he would have spent on babysitting if he and his wife had gone out together to play games would easily buy them a new game.

Playing games at home may be part of a broader tendency for players to seek like-minded people to play with and, more specifically, to avoid people that they don't want to play with. Despite their appreciation of the sociality of gaming, our interviewees, when asked about what they don't like about boardgames, invariably talked about people: "I go to organised gaming groups and there are one or two people at all of them with whom I would rather not spend time." (P4). Playing games in the home allows a more consistent experience of play, as well as a focus on the games rather than on a (potentially uncomfortable) social situation. Players have control

over environmental aspects such as lighting, noise levels and even heating or cooling. Playing at home may also extend the time available for gaming: “We do most of our gaming at home. It’s the convenience of inviting people to our house and then we don’t have to go.” (P3), however it may reduce access to a range of game titles, with the host’s collection becoming the group’s default library.

Not explored in our interviews was the sense of being in someone’s territory when playing in a home. Steinkuehler and Williams (2006) have shown that MMO videogames can serve as a virtual “Third Place” (Oldenburg, 1999); the same is true for boardgaming cafés (Jonsson, 2012, as cited in Eklund, 2012, p. 26) and our experience and observations suggest that this extends to boardgaming clubs and events. The home environment is not neutral, however, with one or more players taking the role of host, and this has implications for the gaming experience that extend to choice of game, timing of play and even whether or not food and drink comprise a part of the evening. An advantage, however, at least to those invited, may be that the group is selected rather than open:

> In any given group, there are people you want to play with and there’s people you don’t want to play with. And at the organised … groups - when you find the people you like to play with, there’ll often be whispers aside, going, ‘come round to my house.’ And then you start going to each other’s house and don’t go back to the group. So the good players stop going to the group. The people with social skills, who get on with people and play nicely with others, often start playing outside the group and never go back to the public group. And that’s very common - and in fact it’s happening now in some of the groups I’m in. Which is a shame because if new players come in - … it makes me feel guilty not being there to welcome those new players. (P2)

Moving the location of play to the home allows players to play deeper, intellectually challenging games without the need to conform to a commercial premises or limited availability of the space, although the sociality may change due to a player’s “ownership” of the home environment. Play in homes may offer reduced variety in the overall choice of games, however it also offers full access to the host’s game library rather than to the subset that they choose to carry to a gaming event.

CHANGING MEDIUM: GO DIGITAL

Whilst these strategies of changing context, time or location focus on finding or creating opportunities for face-to-face play, digital devices like smartphones, tablets and computers also offer an outlet for the serious boardgamer. Many people devoted to the hobby of boardgaming embrace digitised boardgames as a means of engaging with games even when restricted to the home. Digitised boardgames remove the restrictions of time and location as well as of opponent availability and collection size, although there are tensions as digitisation may change or transform the experience of play (Rogerson, Gibbs, & Smith, 2015a). As well as single player modes, digitised boardgames frequently offer multiplayer modes against known and unknown players. Opponents need not be in the same place; asynchronous, turn-based games ensure that opponents need not even be online together - "you get notified when the other people have had their [turns]. I prefer that sort of computerised boardgame - I'm not interested in having to make the time commitment to real-time games on computer." (P1). Gaming platforms like boiteajeux.net, Yucata.de and Brettspielwelt.de (BSW), as well as smartphone apps, offer hundreds of games for little or no cost. Just as serious leisure quilters relocate their quilting activities to enable them to sit near their families (Stalp, 2006; Stalp & Conti, 2011), serious leisure boardgamers engage with digitised games even whilst spending time with their children or spouse: "When [family] want to sit and watch television, and they want me with them, well then I'll sit and do that [and play a digitised boardgame at the same time.]" (P3). Despite a sense that digitised games are somehow less real - "it's just really filling a gap if I haven't played [*Agricola*] in a while." (P2) - we have found that parents may adopt digitised boardgames to maintain a connection with their hobby and even with distant friends: "you get to play with people which you're not going to be able to physically play with" (P1). Anecdotally, we have

heard parents describe using digitised boardgames as a “sign of life” from a travelling (adult) child who consistently remembered to take their turn in online games.

It is not only in playing games that digital devices allow parents to participate in the gaming hobby. Stenros, Paavilainen, and Mäyrä (2009) have shown that the sociality of gaming is not limited to direct in-game interaction but extends beyond the immediate game situation to generate social and gaming capital. Value is placed on active participation within hobbyist communities (Stebbins, 2012; Woods, 2012): it is not just the play that matters but the broader activities, the pastimes and sociality that surround it (Carter et al., 2014; Harrop, Carter, & Gibbs, 2013). Digital gaming platforms, as well as websites and social networks focused on games, have the capacity to build social capital (Trepte, Reinecke, & Juechems, 2012) and function as Third Places (Oldenburg, 1999), in much the same way as Massively Multiplayer Online games (MMOs) (Steinkuehler & Williams, 2006, p. 886) and boardgaming clubs and events. For the parent whose mobility is limited by childcare responsibilities and limited time and money, digital boardgaming platforms and community sites like boardgamegeek.com offer a path to games and gaming information.

Platforms like Yucata.de, boiteajeux.net and BSW offer more than simply gameplay. BSW offers real-time gameplay with live text-based chat, as well as a “metagame” structure of towns and guilds. Yucata and boiteajeux both offer turn-based play with different player-to-player messaging options. All offer persistent user accounts that can build up a history of the player’s activity, recognising gaming cultural capital through ranking and even prizes and contests.

Although the play experience of boardgames on digital devices lacks the materiality that boardgamers value and transforms the sociality of the play experience, playing digitised

boardgames offers variety and intellectual challenge. Further, this approach offers an additional means to customise the location and time of play to accommodate parenting and other family responsibilities.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Serious leisure boardgamers have developed a host of strategies to continue their engagement with their hobby as the responsibilities of parenthood intervene. Our research identifies a range of strategies for enabling play which each impact on the four key dimensions of enjoyment that players derive from boardgames.

The sociality of play experienced around a table is transformed when players change the context of play to include children, change the location of play from a neutral space into the home or vice versa, or change the medium of play by engaging with digitised rather than physical boardgames. Boardgamers value the sociality of spending time with other adults, but also seek to spend time with their families. Social capital in boardgaming is earned through many different types of engagement with boardgames even beyond the play experience, as has previously been demonstrated for digital games (Eklund, 2012, pp. 7-8; Stenros, Paavilainen, & Mayra, 2011).

The intellectual challenge offered by boardgames – the sense of solving a puzzle and understanding the game's underlying engine – is most valued in play with other adults. Children's games do not offer the same level of intellectual challenge; interviewees also suggest that digitised boardgames may not deliver the full depth of strategic experience. Users' comments that automation of a game's chores and removal of material components in the digital medium reduce their need to understand the rules highlight the importance of these small manual tasks for understanding the game's underlying engine (Pape, 2012; Rogerson et al., 2015a; Xu,

Barba, Radu, Gandy, & MacIntyre, 2011) and demonstrate the different ways in which boardgamers experience digitised and physical games.

Changing the context, location and medium of play can also impact the variety of boardgames that are available to be played. Moving play to a player's home restricts the choice of games to those owned (and, possibly, enjoyed) by the residents; moving play outside the home may limit the available games to those that are easily carried. Playing with children restricts the choice of games to those whose rules, mechanics, components and/or subject matter are considered appropriate. Playing boardgames on digital devices limits the choice to games that have already been digitised on the player's preferred platform. Of course, in some of these instances the choice may be broader and more variety may be available, particularly when players visit game stores, clubs or conventions but also when they engage with digitised boardgames. Yucata.de currently offers 109 boardgames (2 in Beta testing) and BrettspielWelt.de offers 51 multiplayer games; hundreds of games in the iTunes store have been categorised by their developers as boardgames. Although many of our interviewees own hundreds of boardgames, significant numbers of games, including new titles, are available to play online. Both location and medium affect the variety of games that are available at a given time.

The materiality of play is not constrained by changes in location and time. The pleasures of seeing, touching, smelling, holding and hearing a boardgame are broadly unaffected by whether it is played in a home or a public space, during the day or after children's bedtime; it is when the medium changes to a digital device that the game loses essential material aspects. Although the digitised game typically reflects the form, components and artwork of its physical counterpart, its players cannot touch and arrange the game pieces, smell the printer's ink or

weigh the game box in their hands. Several interviewees described enhancing the experience of play by crafting new components and player aids, enhancing their enjoyment of the game through "pleasures of production" (Tanenbaum, Williams, Desjardins, & Tanenbaum, 2013) which are not available in the digital game medium.

In this paper, we have described hobby boardgaming as a serious leisure pastime that demands large commitments of time and energy. Increases in the amount of time that parents spend on childcare have created new time pressures that restrict the time available for leisure activities. We have shown that serious hobby boardgamers who become parents are able to negotiate the context, time, location and medium of play in order to successfully reconcile their desire to enjoy their hobby with the need to attend to their new family responsibilities. Becoming a parent may curtail and transform the experience of boardgaming, but it does not prevent it.

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