

Why We Play Games

Thanks to having a fantastically complicated biochemical makeup, humans are fantastically complicated creatures. However, these complications can be boiled down to a few simpler ideas, if one takes time to think about where behaviors and desires may stem from. Perhaps the first and most basic idea about humans is that we are social creatures—some more than others, but it's still something in our nature. Another core element is that we are curious. We are curious enough to wander into dark hallways in abandoned mansions, and we are even curious enough to watch bad horror movies featuring the aforementioned, despite critics' warnings. Through both of these, we hope to gain a positive end result; this end result comes in two flavors. One of the flavors is something tangible that we have placed value on, the most obvious being money. The other flavor is the not-so-tangible personal, psychological feeling of victory that sends a positive vibe to the pleasure sections in the brain. It is the combination of humans' desire for social interaction, curiosity, and the two kinds of rewards that bring us to create and play games.

Just about everybody plays games. One cannot really define what kind of a person a game player is because it could be anybody. The young, the old, and everyone in between play games of some kind. There are certain kinds of games that specific demographics are keener on playing, but there are so many kinds of games that all demographics are covered in some respect or another. From today's modern first person shooters to the ancient dice games of Ur, there is some kind of game out there for everyone. Variety in games is not the only reason why playing games is such a widespread phenomenon. The most important factor perhaps is that the reasons why we play them are so universal.

As stated, humans are complex, but we are all complex in similar ways, each having minor differences. If that is the case, then we are all the same at the core, and those four basic elements apply to the vast majority of people throughout the world. Long ago when men were throwing sticks into the river or rolling bones around, they were doing it for those four reasons. They needed another human to be around, even if not just for the sake of company. They needed the socializing for the sake of challenge and competition, which is essential to just about any game. They also were curious about how the dice would fall or where the river would take their sticks. When the game finished, the winner received the two end consequences, a wager and victory.

It's hard to imagine any kind of person who hasn't or wouldn't play games. Such a person would have to be one entirely occupied mentally and physically for the duration of his or her day. He or she wouldn't have any of the natural ambition or drive that makes a person want to compete in the first place. This person would also most probably have to be antisocial and in a deep state of poverty. To imagine such a person is almost unimaginable because he or she would not possess the same four basic traits that bring humans to play games in the first place.

For the most part, we create games for the same reasons why we play them. The reason to begin doing either is basically the same. People are unhappy with their current level of activity, so they search for a new way to spend their time. Also, the four factors explaining why people *play* games can apply to why people *make* games. There is definitely an intrigue or puzzle factor in how to make this

means of entertainment, and the social aspect often comes out of necessity. People are needed to help create the game, be it a silversmith to make the pieces or a friend to help playtest the game. The two rewards of gaming are also the same. A game maker gets praised and feels good when he or she makes an effective game, which is the mental reward; he or she may get paid for this job as well, which is the tangible reward.

The people who make games are just as unique and different as the people who play them. Because of the many different aspects that go into making games, there is a wide range of skills needed in order to make games. Stretching way back, games required people who worked with stone and precious metals. They were some of the few people who understood basic forms and shapes required to logically put a game together. They understood numbers and a certain amount of geometry. They were craftsmen by trade. Other game creators of this time period may have been the common worker, maybe having only a knife and a source of bones. They did not have the finest skills in the actual creation of the game, but their simple contributions to creating an interesting social activity would not be for naught.

Continuing further into more recent history, game creators then began taking to other more practical materials such as wood, ivory, or certain gems to create different kinds of games. These were games that required more strategy to play. As military operations became more advanced, so did games, for the games sought to replicate the kind of strategies seen in the battlefield, changing the reason for game-playing slightly. Instead of just earning a pot of money or simply winning, people became more interesting in learning a certain kind of strategic skill, which may have slightly changed the demographic of people who played games.

The demographics change and expand the more technology changes and expands because more kinds of games can be created. When there are more kinds of games to be created, there are more people who can become involved in the process. Today games can consist of well over a hundred people involved in the creation and testing of games. These jobs encompass many, many aspects, including programming, art, design, music, sound, acting, researching, and so much more. Of course, all of these big figures do not stop the average person from making a simple game at home that requires only dice or pen and paper—or even nothing at all, maybe just people.

There are many different kinds of people who play games, but there are fewer kinds who take the time to create games. That being said, the types of people who make games are the people who do have the time. They are also the people who have the inclination to actually do something productive or active with the time—as opposed to just using that time for sleeping. In society, these are the people who either do not have jobs or who have jobs with a lot of downtime, which most likely results in boredom. Additionally, they have access to some kind of materials with which to make games or money—possibly both in some cases.

Perhaps one of the biggest and most widespread demographics of game creators throughout history, and even still in present day, is kids. They do not have jobs, have a lot of energy, and with their developing minds and bodies, they usually have a tendency to want to be active in some way. Getting a group of them together usually results in some kind of game occurring. Often times they come up with

some kind of roleplaying game with rules that get added as the game goes on and are never fully agreed upon by everyone in the group. Some examples of these are when children pretend to be animals or members of a family. They usually set goals like gathering leaves which they might pretend are ingredients for a pretend dinner. These are not exactly lasting kinds of games, but this *means* of game creation in itself is lasting. Several generations of kids come together to make up and play such games, looking to entertain themselves with this homemade brand of fantasy fun.

One of the unique things about children's games is that, while they do try to create their own little games, they have a whole set of kids' games that have remain unchanged for many, many years. Games such as tag, hide-and-seek, dodgeball, and duck, duck, goose are very popular children's games that have remained the same for quite some time. Interestingly enough these games all rely on the same set of mechanics, tagging and avoiding. One would think that games that feature all the same kind of actions would become unpopular fast, but that has not been the case with these games. In fact, they are still being played the way they were since being created.

There are several possibilities as to why they have been static for so many years. One of the main possibilities, and perhaps the most important, is the simplicity factor. These are not hard games to explain to children, which makes their spread very easy. Their spread has been almost completely oral. One very rarely *reads* the rules of tag or hide-and-seek before playing. Writing them down would actually be fairly useless as a good portion of the children playing these games are not yet of reading age anyway. Another factor in why these games are so widespread is that these games take several children to play, like tag or dodgeball especially. When you require large groups of people to participate in an activity, then things get spread faster—not unlike disease in a zombie apocalypse. Thus, these simple games get passed around between large numbers of children of varying ages, and the games do not get changed due to their simplicity and orally passed transmission—also not unlike disease in a zombie apocalypse.

Today, people have a lot of reasons why they play games. Some say they do it as a way to relax, and some say that they do it because their friends do it. All these reasons can really be boiled down to one of the four main reasons previously mentioned. Relaxation is something we want to achieve mentally. The attainment of this worry-free state is not at all unlike getting that victory feeling. A lot of games are created to specifically reach out and touch gamers' minds in a certain way, and gamers like this. Another element is the artistic value. This was something that was done to board games long ago but was reserved for the highest of society. Artistic and beautiful games reach to all of society today and can spread inspiring messages as well through visuals, audio, or story.

One of the interesting things is how certain types of games influence one another and technology's role in this exchange. The physical activity of sports and playground games is slowly working its way into the video game market. All kinds of new peripherals are being created in the industry to somewhat blend the physical world with the digital one. Another interesting twist is the use of technology in physical sports as well. Things like laser tag or paintball are games not unlike the children's games of the past that are centered around a few basic elements of gameplay, tagging and avoidance.

From both ends, this use of technology in games is a fascinating leap forward for technology. It is most likely one of the main areas that is going to see great advancement in the near future. These kinds of simulations exist not just for the wow-factor but for the enjoyment of getting to play something physical with a sort of imaginative lens over all the action. The intrigue becomes much greater when a player feels involved, and this kind of interactivity may be just what the industry needs to set off a whole new technological revolution, which would lead into a design revolution. With each new stride in the hardware field comes a thousand new opportunities to create something totally original and give the world a whole new set of reasons of why we should play games.