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Mama Ludens Goes All-In

Gaming Mothers' Fun Lead the Ludic Revolution

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Gaming Mothers' Fun Lead the Ludic Revolution

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Abstract

This paper investigates gaming mothers' playing practices, trying to identify their ideas of fun and playfulness. It is a work in progress, the third in a series of empirical studies performed within the framework of the project "Gaming Moms: Juggling Time, Play and Family Life" (Enevold & Hagström, Lund University) undertaken with the aim to revise the usual constructions of gamer identities and examine the contested status of gaming in everyday life. The first paper produced in this project was a critical survey of representations of mothers in popular cultural gaming discourses (Enevold & Hagström 2008) that showed a rather conservative picture of "Mom" in relation to gaming. The dominant image of the mother in this public discourse is far from general notions of fun—she is the police who controls or condemns the playing of others. The second effort (Enevold, Hagström & Aarseth 2008) was a pilot study presenting findings from asmall number of interviews with gaming mothers that showed that their gameplay to a great extent involved gendered ideas of work and family roles, particularly time and place constraints. The emphasis lay very much on playing for the sake ofrelaxation while waiting for something else—for the pasta to cook, for the kids to come home, or in between dinner and putting the kids to bed. Going back to some of the interviews and including a number of new ones, this paper deals with that which was not explicitly or extensively discussed in those interviews, namely whatthese women think of fun and play. This is related to four themes of gendered sociality, representational exclusion and accessibility in terms of game content and time constraints of gaming - which is understood as a motor of fun – as represented in research, media and web material concerning mothers, fun and videogames. Based on all this material, I conclude that fun in most instances still means relaxation, having time to yourself, being mentally stimulated by a puzzle or a good story. I thus advocate ludic fun for all – do away with the gendered division of labor, play and gamer identity; redefine the concept of gamer once and for all; let gaming become mass culture and allow mothers all over the worldto relax "playing for keeps"; bring on the ludic revolution!

Who is Mama Ludens?[1]

Who is the (game)playing mother and how does she play? These are a couple of the questions that we try to answer within the framework of the project "Gaming Moms: Juggling Time, Play and Family Life" (Enevold & Hagström 2009, Lund University) undertaken with the aim to revise the usual constructions of gamer identities and examine the contested status of gaming in everyday life.This paper investigates a sample of gaming mothers' playing practices, trying on the one hand to identify some of their ideas of fun in relation to play, and on the other juxtapose these to ideas conveyed by the rhetoric and representations used about mothers, fun and play already circulating in various media, the industry and research texts. Based on these observations- tongue in cheek- it proposes a *ludic revolution* lead by *Mama Ludens'* inroad into gaming culture. But, who is *Mama Ludens?*

This paper is part of a work in progress. It is the third of a series of empirical studies being performed in which we try to define "gaming moms" in several ways from various perspectives using an array of different methods (see Enevold & Hagström, 2009). The first paper produced in the project was a critical survey of representations of mothers in popular cultural gaming discourses(Enevold & Hagström 2008) that showed a rather conservative picture of "Mom" in relation to gaming. The dominant image of the mother in this public discourse is far from general notions of fun—she is the police who controls or condemns the playing of others. The second effort (Enevold,Hagström & Aarseth 2008) was a pilot study presenting findings from a small number of interviews with gaming mothers that showed that their gameplay practices to a great extent involved gendered ideas of work and family roles, conditioned in particular by time and place constraints. The emphasis lay very much on playing for the sake of relaxation while waiting for something else—for the pasta to cook, for the kids to come home, or in between dinner and putting the kids to bed—that is, gaming was more or less integrated with activities that are not primarily labeled entertainment or fun. Going back to some of the interviews and including a number of new ones, this paper deals with the theme that was not explicitly discussed or extensively dealt with in those interviews, namely fun and play. What is the nature of the "fun" they had? What does having fun mean to the gaming mom? Let me hasten to add that

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[1] Vulgar Latin. The correct Latin would be *Mater*, but Mama sounds better and has associations to *Homo Ludens* including homophonic ones depending on what accent of English is spoken.

I am aware of the pitfalls of grouping women, moms, into a neat homogenous bunch. However, it is fairly safe to assume that women in general come to gaming differently than men, presumably being heavily situated by their feminine role, and even more so bytheir maternal role. It is not by accident that Mark Prensky's book about children's usage of computer games and parents' apprehensions about them is titled: *Don't Bother me Mom, I am Learning* (Prensky 2006). Society has a "clear" view of gendered parental roles. But do we have a clear view of parents' play? What do mothers do when they play, what do they say is fun and how does it impact their playing? These days when the family seems to be a targeted audience of game companies, I'd like to know if mothers are having fun yet.

What is ludic fun?

What is fun then? Ludic fun[2]– is there such a thing? Yes, of course, but talking about fun and games is a rather hopeless venture, if one is looking for a clear and unambiguous definition. Yet, weoperate with the notion of fun, in game design manuals (e.g., Koster 2005; Isbister 2005) investigating learner motivation (e.g. Malone 1980; Gibson, Aldrich & Prensky 2006) and reviewinggames, from amateurish to more professional endeavors. Take any Gamespot, any Swedish TV or newspaper game review or similar outlet and a significant term of evaluation will be degrees of fun.The EU project, FUGA –"The Fun of Gaming: Measuring the Human Experience of Media Enjoyment" is dedicated to laborating with the experience of fun (Ravaja et al. 2007). There are 4 kinds of fun to design for according to Nicole Lazzaro (2004) at XEO-design (www.xeodesign.com), and 8, if you consult Marc LeBlanc (2009) one of the contributors to the Game Design Workshop held at Game Developers Conference (www.8kindsoffun.com). Also Edward Castronova has gone about explaining the "Economics of Fun" pertaining to games and how to design a synthetic world according to its principles (2006).

What all the above-mentioned endeavors have in common is the assumption that games and gamingequal fun and that it is a productive term for describing content as well as being a guiding design principle and ultimate goal of games and gaming. In what follows, I look at a couple of articles thatalso have taken the notion of games=fun for granted while investigating social contexts. I also take into account a number of representations of mothers in relation to games. I bring up four themes that are discussed in relation to

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[2] I will return to this later in the paper.

women, games and fun: a) sociality, b) exclusion by way of representation, c) game content, and d) time constraints. All, specifically the last two, can also be grouped under the heading *accessibility*. These themes are discussed in light of what our interviewed mothers and the public discourses say about mothers, games and fun. The methods used include literature, news and blog surveys studied in the vein of discourse analysis and ethnographic material in the form of recorded interviews (9) and e-mail questionnaire answers (7) from gaming mothers and observations and informal chats with participants of the Game Developers Conference in San Francisco, March 2009. 15 of the women are between 35 and 45 and one is 59. Looking at all these different sources, is *Mama Ludens* having any fun? Does she want to?

Moms Just Wanna Have Fun? – the question of sociality

Kerr's 2003 study of PS2 marketing and players' usage of this console with respect to gender differences indicated that women played on their brothers' or dad's consoles and borrowed or bought used games rather than purchased their own. The women Kerr interviewed did not want to spend much money on games or gaming equipment. The paper's title stated that "women just want to have fun." As I understand it, this means several things, among others that women do not want tobe bothered with the technology or ownership of games and hardware, just play them. A traditional gendering of technology and technology consumption is rehearsed here. Another interpretation that can be added is that they do not want to engage with games as intensely as a pronounced hobbyist (a stereotypical fanboy?) would, and thus decline calling themselves gamers; being a (nerdy) hobbyist is not attractive and thus not fun – this leads into the issue of identification. Let me return to this later. Kerr also showed that once the girls were past a certain age they chose to go to the pubfor entertainment, hanging out with their friends drinking and talking, rather than playing console games at home or with friends. What does that tell us about their notion of fun? That if the women just wanted to have fun, gaming was not it? Their "people fun", to use a term from Lazzarro's 4 keys to fun, took precedence. Did the non-digital context beckon because their hormones raced earlier? Was pub fun more social fun or brought on by something else, another identity project? If we knew exactly where fun ended up discussing these issues, additional questions would need to beraised. Irish women between 18 and 35 would not necessarily entertain the same notions of fun andof leisure as would Scandinavian or American mothers over 35 whose life situations, experiences and world views differ in important ways. Alas, how can we say what women

want? More ethnographic studies, of course.

Hartmann and Klimt (2006) claim the degree of social involvement associated with a game determines females' game preferences. However, T.L. Taylor (2006) has warned strongly against reducing the notion of female players' preferences (at least in the context of MMOs) to simply social intercourse as it would mean drastically generalizing female player experiences and investments in gaming. Lazzaro's future-game predictions (for lack of a better word), uttered in response to an audience question at GDC 2009[3], would imply that social interaction is *the* thing to care about in order to make games hugely popular (viral even) – coupling downloadable Iphone games with Twitter and Facebook applications for tag gaming etc – and supposedly these would beengaging across genders and ages (Lazzarro 2009).

What if the gaze is turned away from online games like *Everquest* to offline single-player games and gaming practices? Will women run off to the pub when there is no social involvement? If you are a parent, you know this is not always the first available option. The gaming industry supposedlyhas given us the MMOGs and the Wii to take care of this. However, and so far, the majority of our respondents report playing single-player games; they may be online but not involve any social interaction: *Sudoku*, *Tetris*, *The Sims 2* (*TS2*) and *Mahjong* are big favorites. One mother reports playing on her phone while on the train. Another mother says that, even when playing *World of Warcraft*, she plays alone, having once been a part of a guild but it did not appeal to her. Monica, 40, practices *Guitar Hero* - alone. To play alone (which seems to be a goal) on *Guitar Hero* for example, she has to do it after the kids are off to bed or they will come down to join her. Only four of the respondents take part in some part of social interaction: one would make occasional forum posts on a *TS2* forum, three are members of *WoW*-guilds. But most of them play by themselves – toget away rather than to reach out or connect socially. The social situation is thus not as interactive as one may expect and does not seem to be the primary allure of gaming in most of these cases. Or when it is – the social takes the form of practicality or functionality – several of the mothers play living room games with their children or on special occasions when there are visitors at their house.

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[3] GDC is the world's largest Game Developer's Conference and in 2009 it was was held in in San Francisco, CA.

At GDC 2009 I came to talk to with a game developer in his late 30s early 40s about his wife, only to find out he has tried toconvince her to play *WoW* but that she gave it up at level 5. Supposedly she did not like learning allthe buttons she had to press to use the spells that would help her avoid being killed. When I asked him if she just did not find games or competition in general fun - whether they were digital or not - he said: "Oh, well my wife doesn't really play to have fun, just to be social" (personal comm.). As I understood it, she would pick up the controls to join an activity that filled some kind of function. Social seemed to end up somewhere outside "fun" on the scale.

Again, it should be emphasized that mothers' experiences or people's experiences or views of mothers' fun are looked at here without any intention of articulating a "theory of fun" or conviction that we can actually uncover a neat picture of "what women want" out of games – at least not withinthe scope of this short paper and limited survey. However, what is of interest is finding links to the everyday, what is it that conditions and shapes our practices and views. If we are under the impression that moms are not having much fun – like this game developer above- then I want to know why or how this impression is being reproduced. They could be having fun, but this view does not seem to resonate that loudly.

Not Much Fun? - gaming by proxy/ exclusion by way of representation

Bryce and Rutter's article "Not Much Fun" (2007) speaks of women being constrained, that is held back, from the entire context of gaming in a number of ways. Their vantage point is that gaming can be regarded as just another type of leisure, and the essence, if we are to take their title seriously,is that women players are being held back from *fun* since gaming has failed to engage male and female players equally. One would think this should be changing taking into account recent developments in the industry, which seems (in part) to work to widen its player base rapidly and consciously. Albeit, the voices heard about gaming still echo familiar stereotypes.

As was mentioned above, the social norms are firmly in place; one of the mottos I encountered when I walked into the career pavilion at the Game Developers' Conference last week was a booth maintained by THQ[4] (THQ 2009) that read: "Mom said it would never pay off to play computer games". A flyer with the same text was included in my GDC bag – a well spread message, as it were. Mom seems to be firmly positioned *outside*

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[4] THQ is a Californian video-game company founded in 1990.

the game industry.

Another example of this exclusion of mothers is the recent book of *Guinness World Records: Gamer's Edition 2009*. Studying the sample pages on the web, I get the impression that women seem firmly embedded in the culture of gaming now, being featured as happy players in pictures and text in several places and contexts (Guinness Book of World Records 2009 website). Reading areview about it by *JNews* (2009) I encounter the following remark about content management: "Aimed at 8–14-year-old boys interested in video games, or those classed as gamers, the book also had to appeal to an older male audience (core gamers tend to be between 18–30-year-old males)." The text continues: "bought largely by *mothers*, Itonic [the company that designed the layout] had to stay away from overly graphic or violent representation of video games (my italics).

It seems as if women in the shape of mothers just cannot be game culture consumers in more thanone sense. The policing mom strikes again. By proxy. Gaming moms are Hockey Moms (see Enevold & Hagström 2009). They are not fun; they do not play either; they mainly parent. Why? Asa familiar insult would have it - maybe she hasn't gotten any lately. Gaming, that is. Or as Bryce and Rutter would have it, fun.

All Work and No Play Makes Momma A Dull Girl? On Accessibility

Obviously, there is a need to keep sounding the game-cultural terrains not to get carried away by theseemingly endless flow of celebrations of the presumed democratization of gaming, from DS (Nintendo) girl fever to exercise for the elderly. Game designer Sheri Graner is one of those who

maintain a cool head in the midst of the alleged "liberation" of the gamer identity. In an interviewwith Chris Bateman, she reminds us that the game industry cannot relax because certain numbers now indicate that one can boast a grand female player base:

> There's definitely been an improvement, but like most lies, damned
> lies and statistics, the numbers are *very* misleading. The reason these
> numbers look so good is it's an *average* – the traditional game market
> is still less than 20% female.However, the "casual" game market is
> 70% female. Average those and you get 40% female audience overall.
> *But* that does not mean 40% of the players of *Gears of War* are female!
> (Bateman 2009)

Is the female audience still constrained? Perhaps, if we want them to play certain games not

just anygames. Are all equally barred from access, or just certain age groups? I do not attempt to answer these questions in any detail in this paper; perchance I venture a speculation or two. As said above, my emphasis lies elsewhere. Gaming, in "Not Much Fun", "Girls Women Just Wanna Have Fun" and other ventures as exemplified above, is interpreted implicitly as something *fun*, but something women have limited access to. Maybe mothers are not having enough fun?

Accessibility - Game Content

Bryce and Rutter (2007), Crawford and Gosling (2008) and Flynn (2003) focus on factors that are outside the game rather than in the game. Yet, game content reflects game design as a kind of cultural rhetoric, which is imbued with values and norms (Salen & Zimmerman 2004) and it influences play and is thus essential to an in-depth ethnographic cultural analysis (Enevold & Hagström 2009) and any game analysis (Aarseth 2003). In "Not Much Fun" it is suggested that game content such as gender stereotypes or war-themes do not play as big a role and that "gender asymmetries are due first to contexts and practices which are faced outside the game itself" (Bryce & Rutter 2007). New technologies – *Wii* controllers, dance mats, etc - are given more credit for making games more social and for that reason appealing to women (Krotoski 2004, qtd in Bryce & Rutter 2007) and games on mobiles are potentially more appealing because the device itself is less masculine and can be used to separate the woman from the public sphere and to manage socialinteraction (Moore qtd in Bryce & Rutter 2007). Technology rather than content is here connected to aspects of sociality and willingness to "interact".

Since our study, which so far comprises 9 in-depth interviews, 1 "pre-interview" and 6 rather long questionnaire answers, is focused on women who already play, game content as a deterring factor isnot so much an issue – these women already play. Obviously, "hardcore" games, as Graner calls them, did not deter these women from taking up gaming. Two of the informants used to take part inafter-hour office LAN's (Local Area Networks). The curtains were drawn, and they played FPS (First Person Shooter) games virtually killing the head of the department. Another started her playing career with *Doom*. A third mother only plays *Halo*, a fourth used to play a lot of *Renegade*, a fifth got hooked on gaming playing *Wolfenstein 3D* although she now only plays the "wardrobe challenge" on *goSupermodel*.

In the article "Hardcore Gamers Losing Their Edge," Andy Marken points out how the Wii has "helped women in general *and moms in particular* build demand for casual gaming." (Marken 2009, my italics). Of course, game content must play a part in attracting mothers to games – perhapsmore if they belong to a group of women who has not played at all before. But to say it only depends on the technology is only half true; you can play a double match of Tennis on the *Wii*, yes,but you can also play *Resident Evil 4*. The controls and the console design that I many times heard mentioned at GDC 2009 as making the console attractive as a living room consumer product must be matched by an enticing content.

Titles like *My Weight Loss Coach*, *Wii Fit*, *Wii Sports* and *Brain Training* (*Brain Age: Train YourBrain in Minutes a Day!)* introduce different kinds of content, and gameplay for that matter, and possibly they will draw completely new mothers to this fun of gaming. The last three months I have used Google Alert to scan news sites, blogs and websites for content with mothers (mom, mamma, etc) and gaming, mothers, computer games, *Wii Fit*, mothers, fun and play to name a fewof the keywords. Mothers are rarely mentioned in conjunction with fun other than *Wii Fit* or *GuitarHero* which seem to be the accepted new pastimes. And before I changed the keywords to include videogame rather than game, only female basketball players surfaced in the search results. Still, most searches yielded non-playing mothers -supporting or policing moms of all ages.

It can be confirmed that a lot of blogging mothers seem to "get a kick" out of Wii. Lots and lots of mothers who blog let their readers in on their weight loss chase, their physical recovery from pregnancy or the joys of not having to go outdoors to exercise. Important to note is that almost without exception all of these blogs are North American and British.[5] Scandinavian examples that match American ones are those about Silver gamers, for example, news of a Physical Therapist in Malmö, Sweden who got National coverage for introducing *WiiSports* at a Day Center for the elderly with mostly women participant (*Expressen,* 2009, Klintö 2009).[6] One reason that Swedish mothers' daily game exercises do not get blogged about in the same

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[5] Of course, I have not scanned German or Spanish etc. content. Every now and then a French or Spanish site surfaces inthe results since the word mama comes bundled with mamma and mother. Asian sites in English also appear but still nomaterial on mothers in this particular context has appeared in my searches.

[6] So far, I have found one Swedish gaming mother, "gamingmama", who plays all kinds of games, but, then again, she isa game reviewer for pricerunner.se and belongs to a younger group of moms (25 years-old).

way, may be due to the fact thatthere are, compared to the US, very few Swedish stay-at-home mothers. It would be fairly safe to say that in Sweden, women do not seem willing to advertize their status as stay-at-home moms. They go on maternity leave, of course, but after that they return to work, and increasingly Swedish dads take the opportunity to use the option to share the parental leave, although the numbers are stilllow according to the Swedish bureau of statistics "Statistics Sweden" (Statistiska Centralbyrån 2004).

On another content note, as Celia Pearce noted in her study of Baby-boomer gamers (2008) which nevertheless included both male and female players, baby-boomers miss their adventure games. So do our older moms, who started playing early. *Myst, King's Quest*, *Monkey Island*, and *Maniac Mansion*, are a few of the games they mention as fun factors. "They don't make such games anymore", laments Cecilia 45, a systems architect. Anna, our 59-year-old midwife/lecturer agrees and tells me stories of how she almost choked with laughter playing *Sam and Max Hit the Road* and*Simon the Sorcerer*. According to ESA (Entertainment Software Association), adventure games make up roughly 5 % of the market (ESA 2009). If the game industry is to heed to this group's desires, they might need to make something to replace their old favorites.[7] Baby boomers both in Scandinavia and the US will have a lot of time on their hands soon and they will have a lot of years at their disposal to play games that challenge them until they only need a Wii control to hurl a bowling ball. Stories seem to be an attraction also for the youngest of our group: Ylva, IT-pedagogue, 35, mother of one child aged 2, says her big favorite is actually strategy games (*Age of Empire* is one of the games she used to play a lot on the weekends), but "the story is not very often fun." If "the story holds" she likes that she can go on playing for a "looooong time".

Accessibility - Time Constraints

Talking about time; as far as constraining factors, judging by the majority of our empirical material, more than game content or representations, time-related issues seem to determine what mothers play and how. And knowing this I wonder, do they still have fun? The women in our studyare no longer girls. Ylva no longer has very much time to play. She prioritizes reading and being with her child. She plays sometimes while on the phone with people at work – puzzles and similar games, as a form of doodling. As Bryce and Rutter noted, it is

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[7] Some may partly have been replaced by MMOs where quest lines to an extent can serve as a substitute for those interested in narratives, puzzle-solving and clue-finding

difficult to say if women to a greaterextent than their male counterparts stop gaming as they get older, but what is possible to say is thatas they enter adulthood leisure time is not divided equally among men and women. As other researchers also have shown, women tend to have access to less "free time" than men do (e.g., Vanek 1974; Friberg 1990; Thrane 2000).

Mothers would appear not to fall under the category of underage restricted players, unlike the girls and boys that are held back from "hardcore games" by their parents or grandparents as shown by a study by the Solutions Group on behalf of PopCap Games (Brightman 2007).[6] Nevertheless, an important factor influencing their playing is their mother or parent status. Their families condition their playstyles and play time. Monica 40 has trouble getting access to the family's games, so she has to play after the kids have had their time. If we are to judge by the gendered content hypothesis,women shy away from hardcore games, if by that is meant titles like *Half Life, Halo, Gears of War* etc. True or not, if mothers (and very likely fathers, but that is a future study) are bound by time restrictions, gaming becomes truly conditioned. Then, what games are left that are not hardcore and that can be managed within reasonable time spans? Or, let me angle this question: what games can amother play that people around her does not find odd that she plays? Or even good that she plays? Games she can play with her kids or her partner. Or games that are "good for you", games that are functional – because that seems to be the accepted way for women to play games. Going back to theblogs, people rarely say anything bad about mothers who exercise on their *Wii Fit* or play with the kids – apart from adolescent insults about *Wii Fit* not being a game. But, what about when they play other games?

So far, a majority of the mothers in our study mentions no conflicts surrounding their gaming. Theireveryday routines nevertheless give away that they have adapted their playing practices to accommodate the rest of the family. Only three, who also play longer hours, report that they have still rings of the notion that one should feel bad about spending so much time on this activity. As at least one study now hasshown (AOL 2004) and according to articles in popular media (Barton 2009) mothers spend time playing late at night after doing chores and putting kids to bed. The concept of the *Racoon Mom* has emerged. This is supposedly a woman who has had her kids after a long career and independent life and who requires "me-time" that she schedules when she "should" have been asleep, making her slightly sleep deprived. But her need to play and email, Facebook

etc is more attractive to her than avoiding the look of the tired –puffy eyed mom (hence the name racoon). The attention this phenomenon is getting is interesting, since we do not see the same attention being paid to racoon dads, who most likely exist. Again, this is probably a US phenomenon and only future ethnographicwork can give us a hint whether this is the case also in Scandinavia. What this signals though is both a change in expected maternal behavior while at the same time relaying a rather traditional division of labor where women seem to end up on the domestic side of time use, and leisure ends up in the "third shift" (Enevold & Hagström 2008). This kind of play could be understood as generating different rewards than playing *with* the kids.

Thus, we come to the final part of this paper that needs to be brought into the discussion of the four main issues brought up here (the social, representational exclusion, the game content, the time constraints). What is significant is the fact that the first interviews we did said very little about the enjoyment of gaming at least in the terms that game designers and researcher talk about gaming, namely fun. So, I decided to ask them more directly.

What does having fun mean to you? Is playing computer games fun?

Below are some excerpts from the interviews and questionnaires performed with some of "our" Scandinavian mothers. All names are pseudonyms, and all translations are mine (from Danish andSwedish). They summarize a few instances where fun or enjoyment are mentioned and direct responses to the question what fun means to them and whether playing computer games is fun. Several answers by one person have been compiled into one so as to make the reading easier.

To play poses a challenge. Sure, playing computer games is entertaining, but it is not my first motivator. I don't think that I play games because it is fun, more because I want to get deeper intosomething, go on an adventure, express myself, get taken on a ride, that kind of thing" (Tine 35)

I don't play much these days. My job as a programmer replaces my need to play Sudoku, which is stimulating and relaxing to me. Playing *Halo* with the other people at the office was fun, but I don'thave time for that anymore. Playing alone is less fun. I think playing games is good to avoid dementia – keeping the brain healthy; that is a big reason for me. (Leena 38)

After all, I like reading more than playing, or write or watch a movie. I also enjoy thinking, which also can be done while I am out walking. When I do play the goal is to have fun, but relaxed fun- assoon as I start clenching my jaws and feel I can't quit, while playing Tetris for example, then I knowI need to stop (Ylva 35)

Computer games are fun because they are relaxing and challenging. Challenging, by that I mean that you either have to react fast or that you need to figure out the logic of the game. I prefer the lastpart, which I find particularly relaxing. I also used to play games to retrain my brain after suffering from burn-out syndrome (Ulrike 35).

I don't play a lot. Very seldom actually. I don't prioritize that. Fun, I have fun when I cook or when Ising. Is playing games fun – well…. I played a game of Wii Tennis with my partner the other day. Ialso play to hang out with the kids. (Nina 35)

I like sorting. That is fun. I like to figure things out, I can stay up really late just to finish. I like smart games with a good dialogue. I enjoy sitting by myself figuring things out having time just formyself. (Anna 59)

Way back, I started playing a MUD, the Cave [*Colossal Cave*]. It was not that fun really. But then came the PC andmy age of greatness. *Myst* and *Riven*, I was crazy about those! Sims isn't fun. Games have to have levels. (Cecilia 45)

I like to play by myself most of all. *Room Escape* on Gamershood is incredibly fun. Team Hospitalis fun. Puzzles are fun, yes really fun! And you relax completely and you can like think out and hit on the tricky stuff and you don't have to be so enormously focused the way you are on a lot of otherthings. I don't talk to people in WoW; solving quests in W*oW* is fun. (Josefine 40)

Do gaming moms just have Pragmatic Fun? Or did they just learn to view play this way? I need toask more questions to really find out. Judging by these answers relaxing or relieving tension still seem to take precedence. There appear to be practices of a sort of 'Relaxation-fun' which is achieved by being mentally challenged. There seems to be a need to get away from demands and other people more than connecting and bonding outwardly.

Bring on the Ludic Revolution!

Mothers obviously need de-stressors and "me-time" as the popular press claims. Allowing myself toplay around a bit with the ideas in Bob Black's manifesto "The Abolition of Work" (1985) which advocates "ludic fun" for all, I thus want to advocate a real "ludic revolution" that entails three mainsteps. Although part of this is humorous, there is a serious core in what I am proposing. It has to do with necessary changes in identity politics and everyday practices of gender and social roles. "Finally," Black writes:

> we must do away with far and away the largest occupation, the one with the longest hours, the lowest pay and some of the most tedious tasks around. I refer to housewives doing housework and child rearing /…/ The nuclear family as we know it is an inevitable adaptionto the division of labor imposed by modern wage work. (Black 1985)

Black wants to see full unemployment to "undermine the sexual division of labor". Putting the case slightly differently but analogously; as I understand it, gaming mothers are definitely affected by the status of the division of labor, even in supposedly equal countries such as Denmark and Sweden.Thus, doing away with the gendered division of labor is a necessary first step in the ludic revolution.

The second step also has to do with the title of this paper. *Mama Ludens* Goes All-In. It has to do with the economy and new gaming practices. Many have now commented on the global recession and the game industry's resilience in the deteriorating world economy. As Mama gets her mind on gaming, she brings a lot of money with her and with her family activities come daughters, and sonsand the rest of the family. Supposedly, families are resorting to in–home, repeatable game activitiesrather than going out to movies. *Wii-sports*, *Buzz* and similar games are often mentioned in this financial context. But, apart from bringing the whole family to gaming, it could be seen as doing something in addition, something that is crucial to revising a typical engrained gaming characteristic. Andy Marken's article on the topic, suggests an amusing possibility:

> When budgets are tight, it's great to know there are gifts can be bought, given, used, enjoyedby everyone. Christmas 2008 wasn't very rosy in a lot of market sectors and 2009 doesn't look much brighter. But at least you can go home this evening to play a game online or offline that blocks out the worries of the world…till tomorrow. It is a little humiliating though when you play your best and at the end your daughter smirks at you and repeats Gin's (Catherine Zeta Jones) statement…"oh come on! Ask me how I did it." They just takeall the masculine fun out of the game…

When the family goes in, masculine goes out? In that case we have won something. A necessary step is revising the gendered notion of games and gaming. What women gamers still wrestle with are common notions of what gaming is. *Wii Fit* gaming, is that still gaming, or do we here get a sharper distinction than ever between game and play? Judging by all the mean comments I have read about the *Wii Fit*, the blog-posting community definitely has a negative opinion about this typeof game and this type of gaming, and its

players are certainly not gamers.

This leads to the third step, to once and for all revise the concepts of the gamer – hardcore and softcore. To this belongs the question of playing time. A question that could be raised to the information about gaming mothers' playing given here is if playing time should not be taken into consideration when accounting for women's playing practices? In order to follow the ludic revolution, I must refuse this, because it is precisely that which encourages categorizations of thosewho play games into ranked subject positions, reinforcing the stereotyping of gamers and their status. Who is *Mama Ludens* – can she be something else but the mother playing with toys and kids – a gaming mother – a gamer? Even discussions on the DIGRA-list (*Gamesnetwork,* e.g., October 2008 and January 2009) show that some still seem to think Wii-gaming is a kind of play that does not count, whereas others fervently defend this "new" type of gameplay – mainly being entertained participants themselves. This rhymes with notions of gendering that can be found for example in professionalization theory – professions that house a lot of women or get increasing numbers of women tend to be downgraded but may also be upgraded as more men enter the field (Davies 1995;Witz 1992; Einarsdottir 1997). To be a physician is a low-status job in Russia where a majority of the practitioners are women; physical therapy used to be practiced by male officers and a high-statusjob but turned into a low-status female-dominated profession (Ottosson 2005), a similar thing happened with teachers (Florin 1987).

What it boils down to here is an emerging need or urge to redefine the concept of the gamer and tearing apart the categories of hardcore and softcore, and the impact of gender on this process will be interesting to study. It may very well be that gaming understood as a subculture that grew into aneveryday culture, will be pushed back to the status of subculture. It is perhaps the end of gaming as we knew it. *Mama Ludens* might very well be the player that brought the gamer down into the mainstream muck. According to Graner, the big money is still spent on titles that are not primarily aimed at non-white, older or female gamers, because games are still made by young, white males for young, white males, and only when the industry gets a diversified work force will this no longer be the case (QED, the need for step 1 above). As long as the implicit player is understood as the "hardcore player", *Mama Ludens* will never be seen as a gamer if she plays *WiiSports*, *Sudoku* and *Cooking Mama*. Perhaps not even if she plays *World of*

Warcraft. Because that is not a real game, isit, at least not if she is not raiding? Game content and play styles are to a great extent allowed to define matters. Hence, we must do away with gendered notions of game content, play styles etc thatdefine gamer identities. Gaming must be allowed to become everyday culture, mass culture even, without our turning our noses up. The gamer identity must be made available across identity categories. Gaming mothers symbolically lead this ludic revolution, and they seem to be having the right ideaabout ludic fun. They can (and should) go on doing what they are doing, play the way they are playing. I say: Mothers of the world – relax .[7] Bring on the ludic revolution.

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