Life is a Social Game
Lessons Learned Bringing The Sims to Facebook

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— Hi everyone, welcome to: Life is a Social Game: Lessons Learned Bringing The Sims to Facebook

— My name is Ray Mazza, and I'm a creative director with EA Playfish

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About Me

- Lead Designer, Worldwide for Playfish

- 9 Years on The Sims

- Co-Lead Designer on The Sims 3;
  Lead on Expansions

- New to Social Gaming 1 Year Ago
  (When I joined The Sims Social)

— I'm their Lead Designer across all Playfish studios

— I've spent 9 years working on The Sims games and have been Lead Designer on the more recent ones.

…so I've worked on a few Sims games

(this is a subset)

— And then 1 year ago I switched over to social gaming when I started working The Sims Social.

— This was **completely new territory** for me, and this is why I'm really excited to **share my perspectives** with you all today.

Quick disclaimer just in case I say something outlandish…

— **My views and those contained in these slides** are entirely personal and do not represent those of my employer.

— You don't need to take notes

— These slides are available on my website; I'll give you the link at the end of the talk.

My Personal Mission
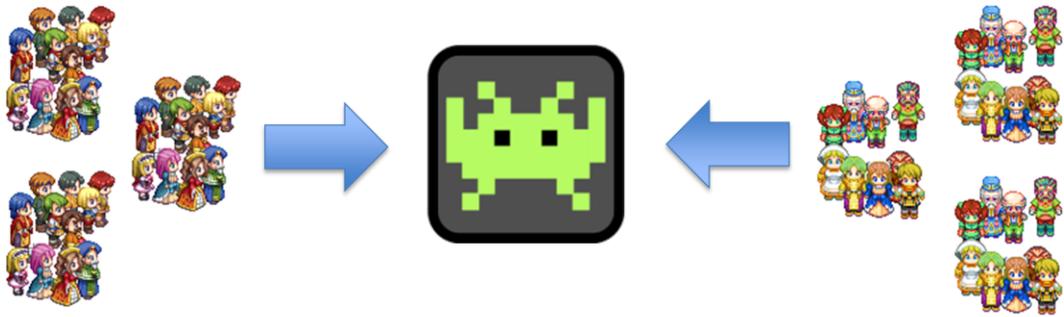
— Before we get started, I have a personal mission to share.

— As a newcomer to Free to Play games, I was stepping into a space that hadn't really captured me yet **despite having tried plenty of games**.

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— So when I joined the social space, I did so **with the mindset** that I wanted to make Free to Play games…

***

…that **appealed to their existing mass market**… (which is really important)

***

…but also to convert players such as myself by adding more depth and creative gameplay.

— My journey over the past year has been to see if that's possible.

Overview

- 7 Lessons

- Relationships & Social Interaction

- A Look to the Future

- Mixed in: 3 Bold Claims

I'll start the talk with a **quick intro** to The Sims Social, then…

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—— I'll share **7 discrete lessons** about designing in the social space, some of which also apply to core gaming.

***

—— Then we'll spend the 2nd half of the talk **really digging into relationships and social interaction** and we'll see some interesting effects these have on players.

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—— Then I'll wrap up by asking where social gaming might go next.

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—— And throughout the talk I'll also be **stepping out on a limb** and making 3 bold claims about the social space.

— The Sims brand has been around for 12 years.

The Sims 2

— And it's evolved in countless ways.

— And in that time, we've **sold over 140 million copies** of Sims games.

— Then **The Sims Social comes along**, and in only six months **it has had over** 70 Million **unique players**.

— It looks very much like **The Sims (1)**, but the gameplay is **fitted to the social space** and you can **play with your friends**.

— For those who haven't played or seen it…

— It's an **energy-based — asynchronous — home-building game.**

— You make money through building skills and completing quests, and **if you're in a good mood** while you do it, your earn extra money **to spend on decorating** your house.

— You can form relationships with your friends' Sims and **help each other out** around your respective homes.

The Sims Social Accolades

- Gamasutra:
  A "Top 5" Social Game of 2011

- GameIndustry.biz:
  "Product of the Year"

- Raptr:
  "Most Played Social Game of 2011"

- IAAs: "Social Networking GoTY"

RAPTR AWARD
Most Played Social Game of 2011

— It's won a handful of awards


- Accolades:

  - Gamasutra: A "Top 5" Social Game of 2011

  - Raptr: "The Most Played Social Game of 2011" (by play time at launch)

  - GameIndustry.biz: "Product of the Year"

  - A top game on App Data

- Also, Sims Social was 5x more viral than any other Playfish launch according to our metrics

Raptr Data:

Total Relative Playtime
(Launch Month)

Avg. Playtime per Player
(Launch Week)

The Sims Social, CastleVille, Empires and Allies, Diamond Dash, Mafia Wars 2
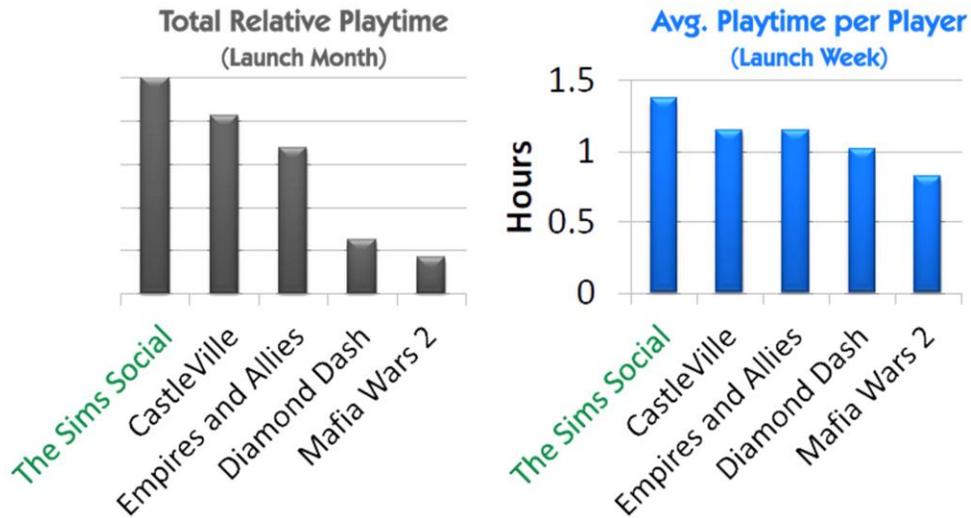
— According to Raptr, Sims Social was the **most-played** social game of 2011 when looking at **respective** launch week and launch month data.

— So, it's done well.

- Graphs show total playtime (opening month, 2011) and Average Playtime per person (Opening Week)

- Data on how one launch can affect traffic to other top games:

- Sims 3 & Pet Society play time dropped by 50% when TSS released.

- Average weekly play time for Farmville and Empires & Allies dropped 25% since TSS launched

We Need to Evolve (Soon)

Social Gaming is at a **turning point:**

- Our growth isn't keeping up with Facebook.

- Differentiation and creativity will be critical.

But we all need to **evolve**. We're at a **critical point in social gaming** where **mechanics and themes** are becoming overused…

***

—— Players may be catching on.

—— **The social gaming audience** hasn't been keeping up with Facebook.

—— Facebook grew **30% last year**, but the social gaming audience **only grew 11%.**

—— No game has been as successful as **CityVille**, and that was released nearly a year and a half ago, which is practically 3 generations of social gaming.

***

—— Going forward, a **greater focus** on differentiation and creativity will be **critical to success** in F2P gaming (where it really hasn't been in the past).

- (Social gaming growth of 17% from 2010-2011, then dropped to 11% from 2011-2012.)
- (Facebook growth was 44%, then 30%)

Data: Social Games Players: 53MM in 2010, 61.9MM in 2011, 68.7MM in 2012. ("Play at least once per month.") source: emarketer.

Size of FB audience: 450MM in 2010, 650MM in 2011, 845MM in 2012. Source: http://www.benphoster.com/facebook-user-growth-chart-2004-2010/

— We need to evolve or **drown in a sea of clones and rising costs**.

— According to AppData, there are over 16,000 Apps on Facebook. **Thousands** of those are games. Plenty of them are good, **but that's not enough**.

*** *** *** *** *** *** ***

— They just keep showing up and the only major innovations – if any – **tend to be in the theme**, not gameplay or social mechanics.

- Amazing Zoo – 200 MAU
- Dream Zoo – 180,000 MAU
- Zoo Paradise – 480,000 MAU
- Tap Zoo – 60,000 MAU

- Tap Zoo 2 – 90,000 MAU
- Zoo Story 2 – 500 MAU
- Tiny Zoo – 2000 MAU
- Zoo Kingdom -- ???
- Zoo Story 2 -- ???

(Data as of 1/17/2012)

Now, enough of that...
Let's talk design.

— But enough of that.

— Onto the **interesting design decisions**, **data**, and **lessons learned** throughout development.

Lesson #1

You have 5 seconds to capture and keep attention.

— Lesson #1: In social games, **you have roughly 5 seconds** to capture someone's attention

— And **after you have their attention**, it only takes 5 seconds to lose it.

Time Compression

- Average attention span is 5 seconds

- 10 Years ago, it was 12 *minutes*

- Never make a player sit for 5 seconds without mental stimulation

Attention span reference here

— The average attention span today is roughly 5 seconds long.

***

— Ten years ago, it was **12 minutes**. (And this according to research.)

— There are so many things competing for our attention today that it's actually changed our brain structures. Our brains are essentially prediction engines, and now they're expecting **tweets** and **status updates** and **emails** and **texts** and **lolcats** so often, that if we don't engage our players' minds for 5 seconds, they're likely to **wander off and forget we exist.**

***

— Especially so for facebook games because you're **on your computer** with so many other things to do.

— On top of that, players are playing these games with **the intention** of **investing smaller amounts of time.**

— To address this, we compressed the **Minute to Minute** gameplay of The Sims 3 into **Second to Second** gameplay in The Sims Social.

— Most interactions take only a few seconds.

— **Initially** (when we were building the game) **they were much longer**, but they just **felt** too long.

— One of the **longest interactions we have** is sleeping in bed. That's about 15 seconds **at the most**. Way too long all by itself.

— But we make sure that about every 5 seconds, **a mood icon reward pops out** so you feel satisfied something is happening, and it gives you something to interact with while you wait.

How Long...

- ...are your load times?

- ...does it take for your character to get somewhere?

- ...are your reward gaps too wide?

Attention span reference here

You have to ask yourself…

***

—— Are your load times longer than 5 seconds? If so, **you're losing players unless** you have rotating visuals or text on the screen to engage them, and even then, that only works for a little while.

***

—— Does it take your character longer than 5 seconds to get **from point A to point B**? Speed it up. Players will forgive **inhumanly quick route speeds** and skating. They won't forgive your game wasting their time.

—— We've had to increase our walk speed **twice** so far, and even then, I don't think our Sims move quickly enough all the time.

—— We also launched with a **ninja character trait** which speeds up your Sim and sometimes teleports you instantly – and this helps solve the problem without totally breaking fiction.

—— It's the **most popular trait** we have next to the Great Kisser trait.

***

— And how spaced are your rewards?

Lesson #2

Simplicity is Key
(Compartmentalize your Complexity)

—— Lesson# 2: **Simplicity is Key** in social games, especially with your interface.

—— Because when your player **hasn't paid** for your game yet and has **just started out**, they have nothing invested in it. That means they will have no problem **walking away** at the slightest point of friction.

—— If your game seems too **complicated** or like it will take **effort** to figure out, you will lose players.

— Your game must **be simple and easy** to grasp on the surface, with **a clean interface** and **clear concepts**, and only **hint at depth…**

…depth that players will **uncover** and that will **keep them engaged** as they begin to explore your game.

— And you can do this by boxing up your **content, UI, and systems** into **bite-sized quanta** rather than giving it to players all at once in a **tidal wave**.

— Let's look at an example.

Simplicity & Depth in Socializing

The Sims 3 — Sims Social

— Here are the **social interaction menus** from The Sims 3 and The Sims Social.

— This is what shows up when you click another Sim to interact with them.

— Notice the difference?

— Sims Social has **nearly as many** social interactions as The Sims 3 behind the scenes, yet we only show you **6 to 8 at a time**.

— What you're looking at here for The Sims 3 is **actually already a sub-menu**. This is the friendly sub menu.

— The level above this had other options leading to other sub-menus
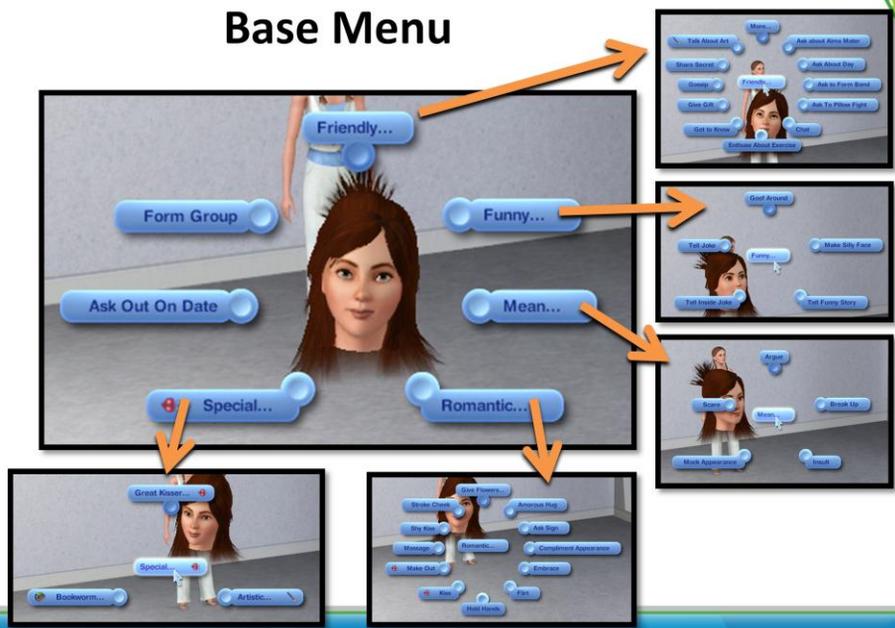
…like "funny" and *** "mean" and *** "romantic" and so on.

Friendly Sub-Menu

— And some menus have a more option

***

— Which means there are multiple pages
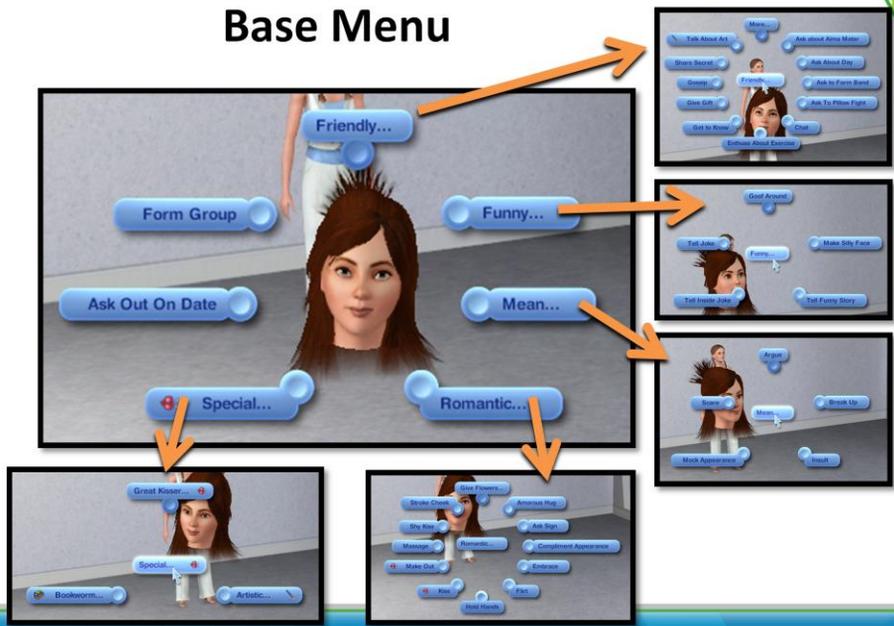
…So this actually looks more like…
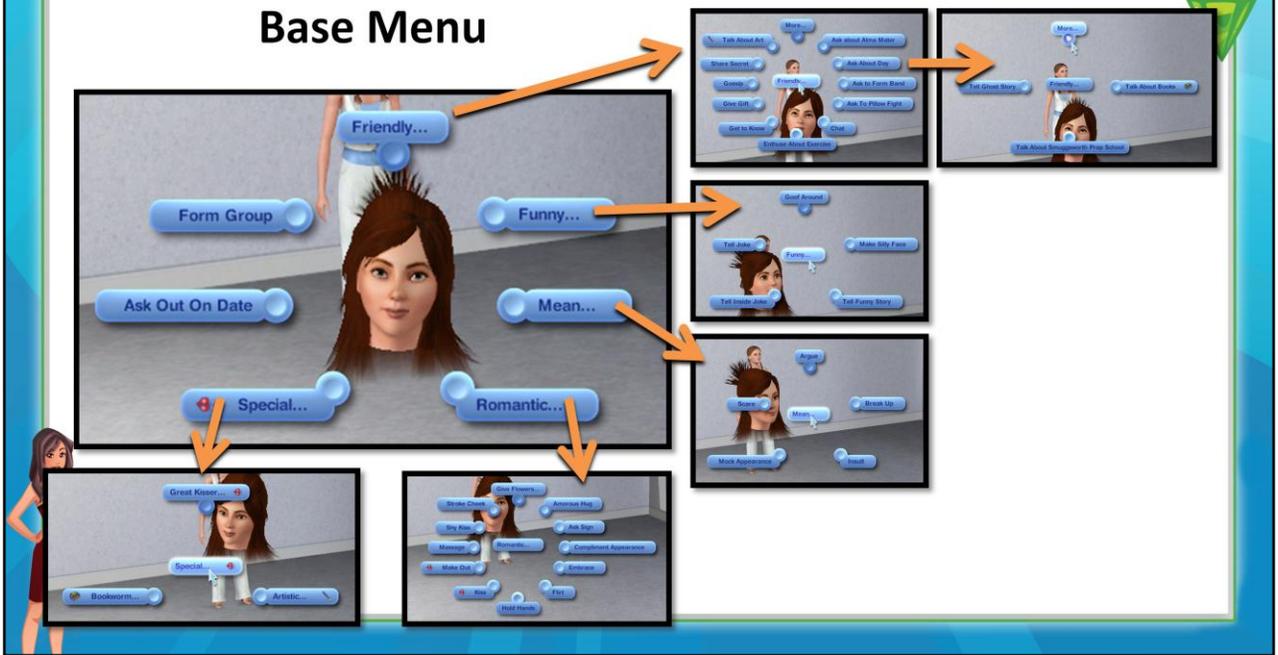
…that. ***
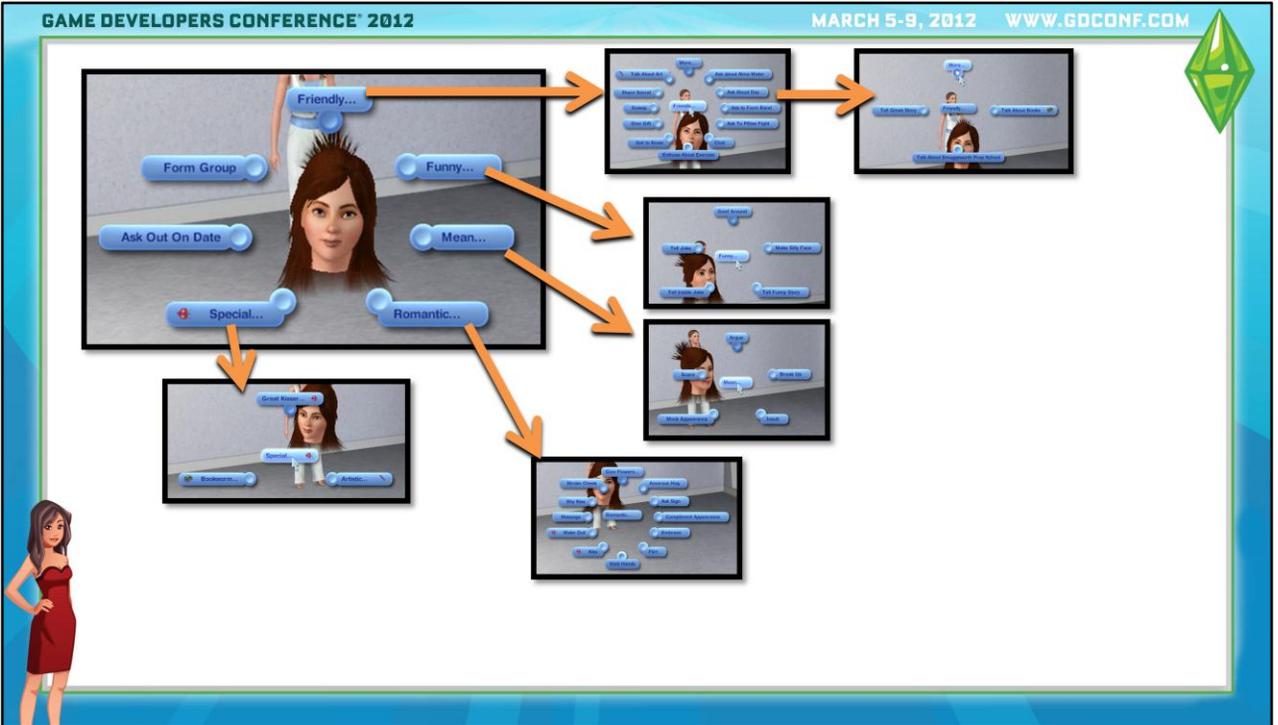
— Some sub-menus also have a sub-menus of their own.
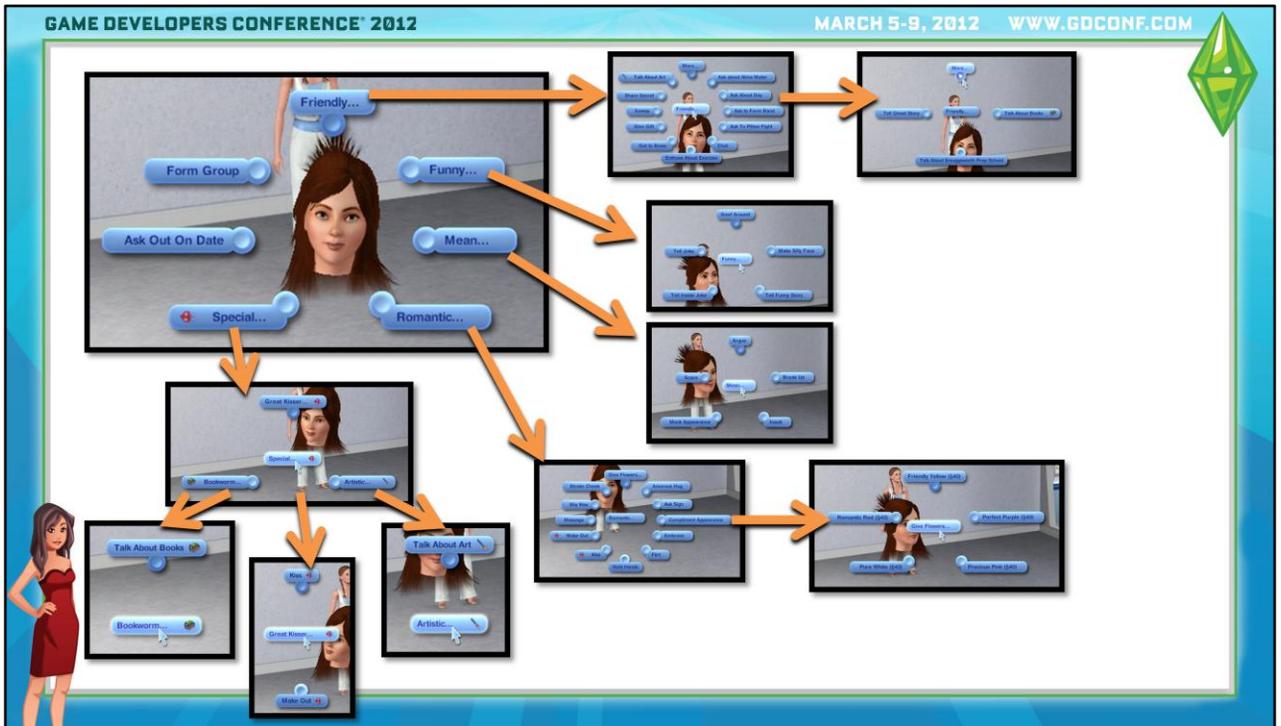
— And this is **constantly changing** as you play.

— This **works very well for our PC Sims games** where players have more time to spend learning the system. Once you figure it out, **it's great** because you can have a **powerful storytelling experience** since you're able to choose very specific options at any given time.

— But seeing this the first time is **intimidating**, **using it takes effort,** and it often **requires many clicks!**

— And so it's **not appropriate** for the F2P space because it can scare players away.

— That's why you need to take deep content like this and **box it up** into bite-sized chunks.

— So in The Sims Social we **compartmentalized these interactions** by hiding them behind a **much smaller sliding window** – it reacts to the flavor of interactions you're doing -- and we **cycle in new options** to replace ones you've just chosen.

— This way the player **never has to cope** with sub menus or pages of options, **but we keep the depth of content**.

— In a way, I like this limited window system better because it is **more exploratory**. And our players tell us they like "finding new actions" with their friends **as they progress.**

Lesson #3

— Now let's look at monetization and how that effects design.

Lesson #3

Metrics favor shortsighted decisions.

— Lesson #3: **Metrics** -- **favor – shortsighted** -- **decisions**.

— When I say "metrics" I mean **telemetry** – the data that your game **automatically collects** about what players are doing.

— This isn't a problem if you're only focused on engagement like in the paid space, but when **microtansactions** enter the equation things get tricky

— This is a struggle that I've dealt with repeatedly.

— Let me be clear – metrics are **fantastic to have.**

— But what I'm saying is that often they are taken at **face value** and interpreted in potentially destructive ways.

— Let's talk about this for a bit.

Product Managers??? (PMs)

- In charge of the business & economy of your game.
- Model & predict your game economy.
- Design & PMs often butt heads because goals conflict: **Fun vs. Make Money**

— First, what the hell is a PM?

    — **Raise your hand** if you know what a product manager is

— I had no idea PMs even existed before joining Playfish.

***

— At Playfish, PMs are in charge of the business and economy of your game.

***

— They paw through metrics and wrangle them to make suggestions for increasing monetization, virality, engagement, and retention.

— Now, PMs and Designers… **they sometimes butt heads**, because often their **top goals conflict**: Make Money vs. Fun

— Every time you **inject monetization** into a feature, it becomes **less fun**.

— But you NEED both; and **really…** both PMs and Designers **want to make a great game** that succeeds and profits.
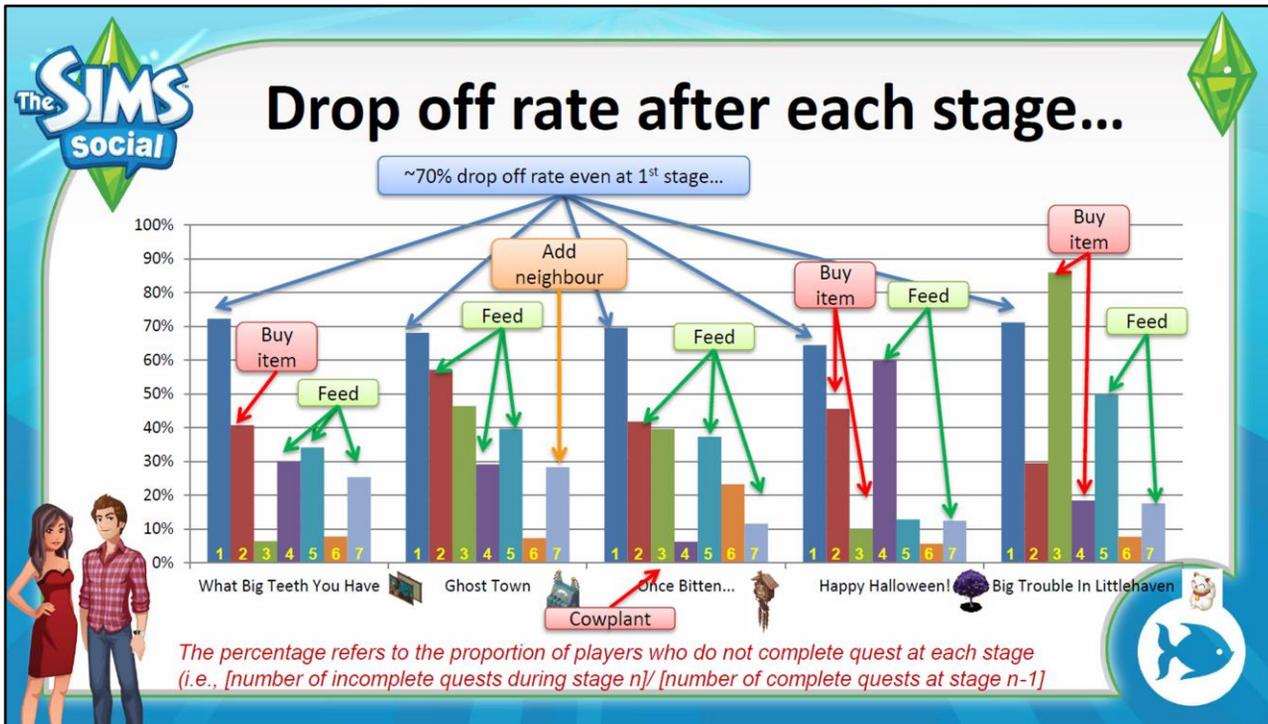
— And to help do that, PMs give us awesome data like this. This is pasted directly from a **PM presentation**.

— I don't want to make you stare at that data, but it was showing us the **drop-off rate** of players for **each quest** in a series of **5 different quest chains**.

— And this helped us realize that hey – **very few players** are engaging in our weekly quests… because certain requirements of **purchasing items** or **needing to ask friends** for help are too frequent or too difficult.

Design vs. Data

- In December, we made quests easier.
- More players completed them.
- Players had more fun.
- We made less money.
  (fewer players paying to skip objectives)

The Revenge of The Simch!
Complete the new quest and unlock this magic Rockadeer, Sims love rocking!

So in response…

***

— …we **made quests easier** in December.

— The resulting community sentiment was **summed up by our community leader** as follows: *It was amusing, fast, inexpensive and with a beautiful and fun reward (Rocking Reindeer). The majority of people prefer their limited quests fast and easy.* **Great! So…**

***

— More players completed the quests. (As shown by our data.)

— Players had more fun. (They told us.)

***

— **But** we made less money, because **fewer players** --- paid to skip objectives.

— Would you consider it a **success or a failure?**

— Do you stick with easy quests that more players **engage in and enjoy**, but make **less money**?

Hypothetical Engagement Differential
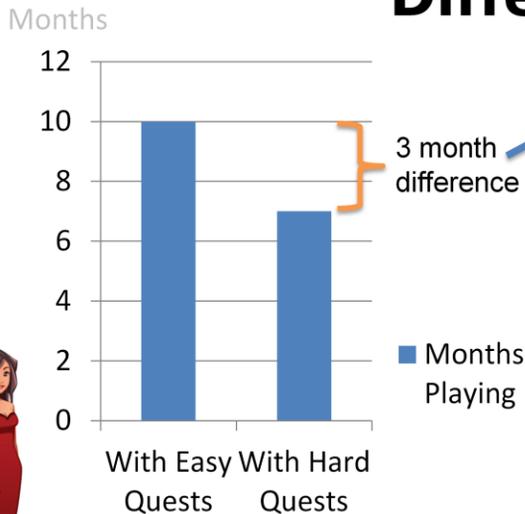
In **3 extra months** of play…
- Do the **spenders** cover losses from easy quests?
- Do **all players** create **viral** and **social** activity that **engages or acquires** players who cover losses?

— We'll never know unless we can measure how **easy quests** contribute to retention and the resulting ripples of that retention.

— Here's a **hypothetical situation**. Let's pretend that **if we had easy quests**, players would play our game for **3 months longer** than if we had hard quests.

*** ***

— So in this 3 months extra of play, we need to know:

***

— …do the **spenders spend enough** to cover our losses from the quests?

***

— But it's not as simple as just that. You also have to ask, for **all** players, do they create enough **viral and social activity** that it acquires new players **who then spend** and help cover our losses?

Hypothetical Engagement Differential

Cannot measure these things!

In **3 ext**[...] [p]lay...
- D[...] **penders** c[...] [...]ses [...] easy que[...]?
- [...] **all play**[...] [c]reate[...] [...] [...] **social** ac[...] th[...] e[...] [...]es or acqu[...] playe[...] [...]osses?

— But we can't measure these things.

***

— There are **too many variables changing too quickly** and it's a question asked over **too long a period of time**.

— By the time you've **measured it with an A/B test**, you're game, players, and audience have changed and it's too late.

Metrics help you find local maxima, not the highest point in the possibility space

— Raph Koster

— But it's easy to make a graph that **shows declining revenue** and argue for tougher quests.

— And the thing is, we **can't prove** that's the wrong decision. We don't **even know** it's the wrong decision.

— And this is why, unless we're careful, we'll tend to make the shortsighted decision **every time**, which is "more money, right now"

***

— Raph Koster sums this up nicely when he says: **{read quote}**

— What to do then?

— There's no easy answer, and every game has different considerations.

— But if you know what your **goals** are for **short term revenue** vs. **long term revenue and retention** (and you **should** have those goals), then reflect on them to try and find a compromise **based on intuition** and how your **current retention & revenue** numbers are trending.

— By the way, on a side note -- studies have found that if a player is fully engaged **before they spend money**, they end up spending 25% more in the long run.

— Think about that.

— And be careful when you decide to start blocking your players with monetized gates.

Metrics Cannot Measure Fun

- **Why** a feature is fun.

- Or *if* a feature is fun.

Metrics **also cannot** measure Fun:

***

— You can't measure *why* a feature is fun, or **why anything** for that matter. Metrics cannot get inside a **player's mind.**

***

— We can't even really measure *if* a feature is fun.

Does this mean skills are fun?

Distribution of Energy Spent

Relationships 16%

Quests, Cleaning, & Fixing 8%

36% Skills

40% Yard, Gardening, Pranks, Other
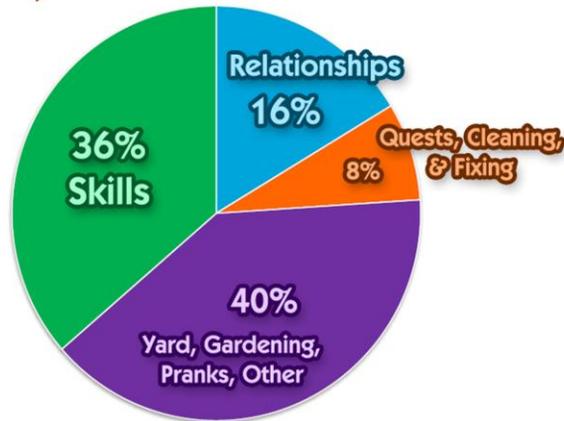
— Data can show us, for example, that **players spend 36%** of their energy engaging in skills, far more than any other singular feature.

— (That 40% down there is a **combination of leftover features** – not a single feature.)

— But this doesn't mean skills are **intrinsically** fun – even though that's how **some people would equate** this.

— Players may only engage in skills because they **need to earn money** and they're willing to put up with it.

— This brings us to the next lesson…

Lesson #4

Supplement Metrics with Player Surveys

— If you want to understand a feature **qualitatively or emotionally**, you need to ask your players.

— You have their email addresses.

— Ask them to take surveys, and reward them if they do.

— We sometimes get tens of thousands of responses.

Fun of Features Rating −1 to 7 (Likert)
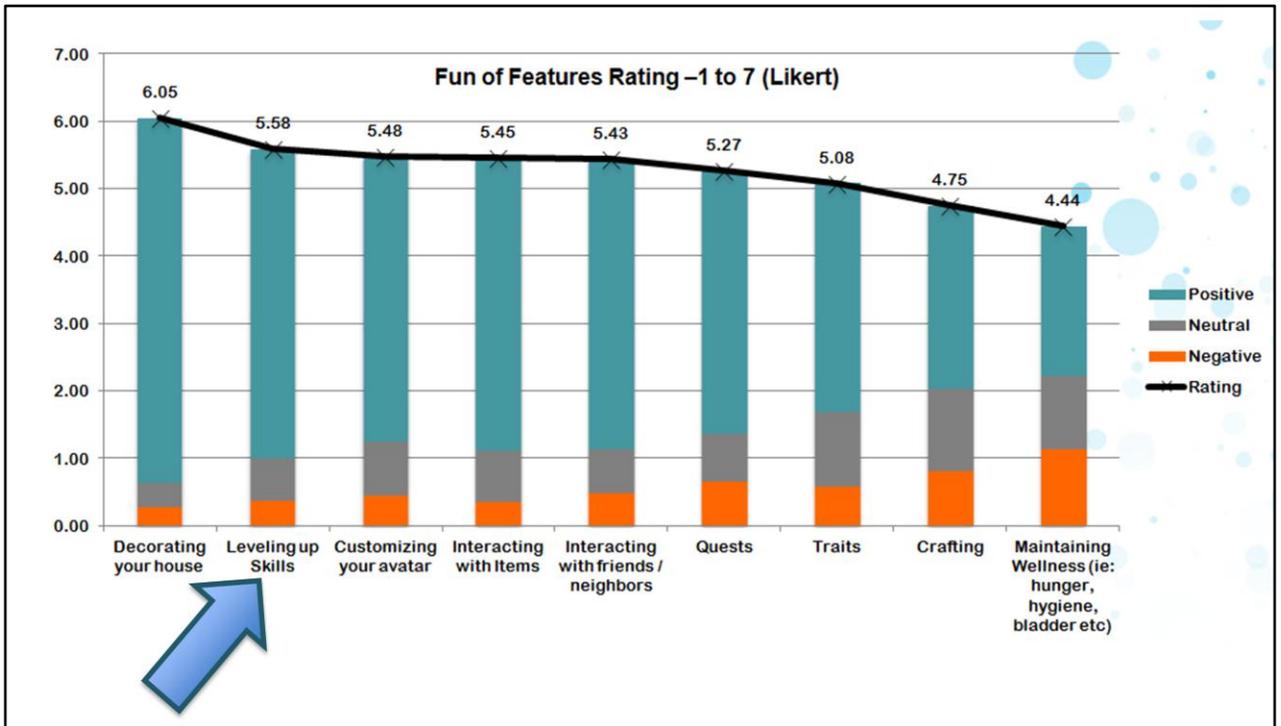
— When asked, players rated skills as the **second most fun** of our major features.

— Great. Verified. So they do like skills. Which is good, because it's a **major facet** of our core loop.

Surveys: The 2nd Kind of Data

- 69% of Players: "I am running out of space for my things."

- New top priority: Land Expansion

"A plan is just a list of things that don't happen."
– Parker, The Way of the Gun

— Survey data affects our trajectory in many ways.

— Here's an example: before launch, we had a **long list of post-launch features** all prioritized and ready for the design/production pipeline.

　　— And then we release, and we ask our players: **what are your largest POINTS of PAIN when playing?**

***

— The top answer – 69% of players said **"I am running out of space for my things."**

— **Alarm Bells** go off because once they run out of space, it's essentially an end game scenario -- they stop purchasing objects and my stop playing altogether.

***

— So our new top priority became **a way to expand your land.** And that was the first major feature we released post-launch.

— Here's a quote I love…

— **"A plan is just a list of things that don't happen."**

— And that's so true when **transitioning from closed beta to live**. Your plans will often change drastically **once you see** how players really engage with your game.

Having closed betas helps, but it's never a **full indicator** of what you'll learn when your game is out in the wild.

— Now let's move on to a different sort of data. The kind of data **players use** to gauge their progress against each other.

— Social games **often rank players** to create competition.

— Most commonly, it's by player level. This is an example, where the highest level players are on the right.

***

— Level is often indicated by **a star and your level number** as shown here.

— Typically, each action **that costs energy** will drop experience points, so **a player's level is really just an indicator** of how much you've played. **It's seniority.**

Lesson #5

Players should be ranked by a core mechanic. (Not Level.)

...because competition drives monetization.

— Nobody ever told me this, so I don't know if it's prevailing knowledge, but **I'm telling you now** because plenty of games haven't caught on.

— Player level **does nothing to motivate engagement** in your core loop. It's a passive metric.

***

— Instead of ranking players by level – **find a core mechanic** they can *choose* **to play toward**.

***

— It will create stronger competition and drive spending.

— We rank our players by House Value.

— Because as designers, we wanted decorations to do more than just sit around and look pretty

— They should tie into a system – especially when **the majority** of your objects are decorations!

— And houses like this
— The player should be rewarded for making houses this awesome!

— Here's how it works:
— Every item in the store has some **house value rating** on it

You **buy the item** and **place** it

And **house value loot pops out**, then flies to the meter in the upper-left, which is ever present and **beckoning to you** to fill it.

Fill the meter, move to new neighborhood
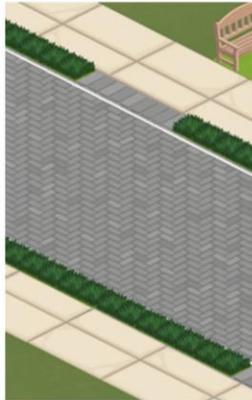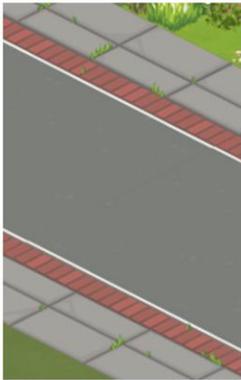
At certain milestones, you get a **new street and sidewalk** outside your home

— The fiction is you've moved into a "new neighborhood"

— In the beginning you **start in the dumps**, but it quickly begins to look nicer and nicer

And, our **cash items give extra** house value.

***

— This, in turn, motivates spending.

— This is a great example of how **design and monetization** should go **hand in hand** – we wanted a fun and motivating system, but we also wanted to pay the bills.

***

— It's also worth noting that **stored items** (all the stuff you shove in your inventory) still count toward home value, which **encourages creativity** in your home designs rather than min/maxing.

— When we asked players **why they spent money** (real hard cash) on house objects, this was their #1 answer:

***

— Because "the item increased my house value"

— This is a huge deal! Big source of revenue.

— **If instead we'd ranked by player level**, the gameplay would be less fun, AND we'd also be making less money

— Here's an interesting side effect. One contingent of players absolutely loves to spend money on new clothing for their characters.

— However, **there's another contingent of players** who are so competitively focused on raising home value that they **never purchase new clothing** because it **doesn't** increase home value.

— So you have to be careful what you **leave in and out of these loops** – for us it would probably make sense to give home value with clothing even though it's a fictional stretch.

Here's what makes a strong ranking system:

>   *** — 1st. **More granularity** (—It lets players pass each other more often, creating healthy competition.)
>
>   *** — 2nd. **No Cap** (—You don't want your best players bunched up around the top like you get with a level cap.)
>
>   *** — 3rd. **Tie it to core gameplay**
>
>   *** — 4th. It should be a mechanic the player can opt to play toward (you want them to have agency), **so that it will…**
>
>   *** — **Drive monetization**

— A good example besides The Sims Social is:

***

— CastleVille, which gives you **"CastlePoints" for building more castle pieces.**

— So if you don't have a **suitable metric** that fits these categories, design one!

Lesson #6

Give players lasting value with purchases.

— Here's a good lesson while we're talking about purchases, and it can be **applied to any game with microtransactions:**

— Give players lasting value with their purchases.

Buyer's Remorse

↑
- 👕 Clothing
- 🗄 Appliances
- 🌼 Decorations
- 👝 Crafting Materials
- 🪑 Furniture
- 🚪 Build Mode Items

↓
- ⚡ Energy
- 🔨 Room Building Help
- 🔨 Object Building Help
- 👧 Quest Skip

— We asked our **1st time purchasers** how likely they were to **make another purchase** after buying these things you see here.

— This is an important question because converting players from **1st-time spenders to repeat spenders** is one of our biggest hurdles.

— These items are ranked from **highest likelihood to repurchase** at the top there with clothing and appliances, all the way down to the items they're **least likely to repurchase**.

— Players who bought the items on the top of the list **felt more positive** about their purchase, and those who bought **from the bottom** felt **less positive**.

— And there's a clear trend here:

Buyer's Remorse

Clothing
Appliances
Decorations
Crafting Materials
Furniture
Build Mode Items

- Higher likelihood to buy again
- Permanence

Energy
Room Building Help
Object Building Help
Quest Skip

- Lower likelihood to buy again
- No permanence

— Everything at the top of the list (except for one) is a **permanent item** you get. **It last forever.**

* * *

— And everything at the bottom **is transient**. You click a purchase button, you move forward a little **in the endless march of progress**, you have nothing of lasting value to show for it.

— And it tends to give players a case of buyer's remorse.

Buyer's Remorse

Clothing
Appliances
Decorations
Crafting Materials
Furniture
Build Mode Items

- Higher likelihood to buy again
- Permanence

Energy
Room Building Help
Object Building Help
Quest Skip

BEST REVENUE!

— By the way, these transient purchases are also the **best revenue generators** for us thanks to repeat spenders. So it's important that players are happy with these purchases!

— Here's my design suggestion to those of you who let players **pay to buy energy, skip quests, or otherwise** make a transient purchase:

Add Permanent Value

⚡ **Energy**
🔨 **Room Building Help**
🔨 **Object Building Help**
🙋 **Quest Skip**

}

- Make these purchases come with lasting value
- Try reward programs, exclusive objects, progress to other milestones

— Find a way to add Permanent Value to those purchases.

— For example, **the first time a player buys energy**, give them a unique item along with it, and have subsequent purchases make progress toward earning other exclusive items.

— There are plenty of possibilities.

— The Sims Social **hasn't tried anything like this yet**, but now that we have this data, we'd like to.

— And you should, too, because it would **strengthen the economy** and players would be **happier about it.**

Bold Claim #1

Our highest grossing players only spend as little as they do b/c we don't make it easy to spend more.

— While we're on the **subject of value and purchases**, here's my first bold claim of the day.

— Our highest grossing players only spend as little as they do because **we don't make it easy or rewarding enough** for them to spend more! We're leaving money on the table.

— First of all, **I'm not saying** we should raise our standard prices. We shouldn't. We already charge enough.

— But the thing is, we're **not catering to our top tier** in the right way. We need to address them separately from our normal audience.

— And by top tier, I mean the very small fraction of a percent of spenders at the very top.

— People like this, who love money, have plenty of it, and love to spend it.

— When those players pick up our games it's **like a multi-millionaire** walking into a casino that **only has penny slots.** To have real fun, that multi-millionaire wants to **sit at a high stakes table** and slap down a fat wad of cash.

— There's a small, **but very real audience** out there that *wants* to pay a lot for **exclusive items** that separate them from the pack.

— Just a few months ago, a man in China paid **$16,000 for a unique sword** for an MMO called Age of Wulin. A few other items in the auction also went for thousands.

— By the way, this game wasn't even out yet.

— If you have a large enough audience, you have a handful of spenders that **would prefer to be super spenders** if only we would let them.

— Another benefit of these special items is that **they generate buzz** about your game, and they become **lore and story** for the community!

— The only reason I knew about Age of Wulin was because this was **newsworthy** and someone sent around an article.

— This can and should be more than a few one-off items. We can set up an **entire structure to harness super-spender power**, and we can do it in a way that doesn't sideline or aggravate the average spender. I can't get into specifics now, but I hope to one day have data to share.

Lesson #7

Avoid strict choice early on. Fuzzy choice is better.

— This next lesson relates to creativity.

— We all love to give our players choices – it makes them feel creative and it adds depth to your game. In fact, without choices, you can barely even **have** a game.

— But you should **avoid** giving your players **strict choices early on**. There's a different kind of choice – fuzzy choice – which works better.

73

Strict vs. Fuzzy Choice

- **Strict:** Feels high stakes and restricting.
- **Fuzzy:** Feels open-ended & creative.

VS.

— What does this mean?

***

— Strict choices are ones that tend to feel **high stakes** and **limited**:

***

— …take the red pill **or** the blue pill. You **have** to pick one, **and** you have to pick it now.

— Before players understand your game, these choices can make them feel **uncomfortable** and cause them to leave.

— And **fuzzy choices** are ones that feel open-ended, relaxed, and creative.

***

— Here's a pill. **Paint it** whatever color you want.

— In most cases players wouldn't think about painting something **as making a choice** even though the **possibility space** is many times higher than with strict choices.

— Here's an example of how strict choice **can be a problem**.

— What you see here was originally the entry point to The Sims Social. **You won't find it anywhere** in the game that we launched – we cut it, and here's why.

— It would load you up into **a park with a bunch of random Sims** walking around, and your instruction was to "Choose a Sim". You could use the arrows to swap to new randomized groups.

     — After you picked a Sim…

— …we'd drop you into Create-A-Sim where you could **customize** to your heart's content.

— And players **overwhelmingly hated this** in tests.

— They said things like:

- — "Are there only 6 Sims?"
- — "What if I pick the one my friend picks? I want to look different."
- — "But I don't want any of these."

— This is a stressful decision! Players **don't know anything about the game yet**, and they're being told to pick one of these characters. It's a choice that feels like it has **consequences**. Even if we tried to explain more by saying, "you will be able to customize your Sim" they'd have more questions – **how much** will I be able to customize my Sim? **How does my choice** here affect that outcome?

— Games aren't supposed to be stressful.

CUT

- 80% felt negatively about it.
- In the beginning I'm "insecure in my knowledge of the game, therefore uncomfortable"
- 24/30 players in this playtest felt this way. The other 6 just liked it because they thought they could get started more quickly and didn't want to bother with the creative aspect.

Maru the Cat

— Some of these players **would have quit** to go watch funny videos and Maru that cat **sliding around in boxes**.

— A better approach is to eliminate this strict choice altogether and **only** give players the **fuzzy choice** of Create-A-Sim where everything feels **open-ended and relaxed**.

— That's what we **ended up launching with**.

— Strict Choice is great to have, but later in the game once players are more invested and feel more **secure in their knowledge** of the mechanics and **can trust themselves** to make "the right decision".

Relationships & Social Interaction

(The Human Element)

A Key Factor in
The Success of Sims Social
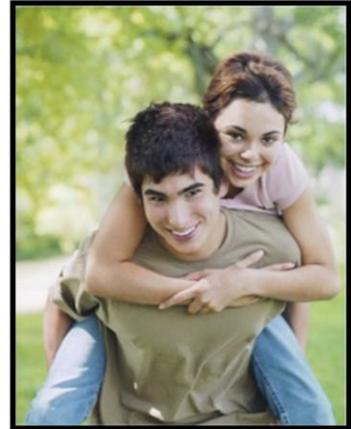
—— Now we're going to **shift gears** away from discrete lessons and talk about a more squishy and emotional subject.

—— **Relationships and Character Interaction**.

—— Relationships are the **biggest innovation** Sims Social brings to the space, and in my opinion, it's the **most powerful feature** we have – so it's worth **digging into it** and seeing some of the interesting ways that players interact.

Chasm of Potential

— In most social games, you develop an **implicit** relationship with your friends based on how you play with them, but that **doesn't really develop** and games **don't acknowledge it**.

— You **ask for help** and you get help, maybe you **compare scores** on leaderboards, but that's about it.

— Which is a HUGE **chasm of potential** waiting to be filled!

1 character in a game is lonely.

Two characters are **10x better** because suddenly you can have a relationship – which **casts a new dimension of interaction** across all your gameplay.

—— 3 characters are better still because now there's **opportunity for choice and conflict** and lets players experience better stories (**or *tell*** better stories if you give them control, like in the Fable series.)

—— In **games**, multiple characters are great…

...especially when your friends are the other characters!
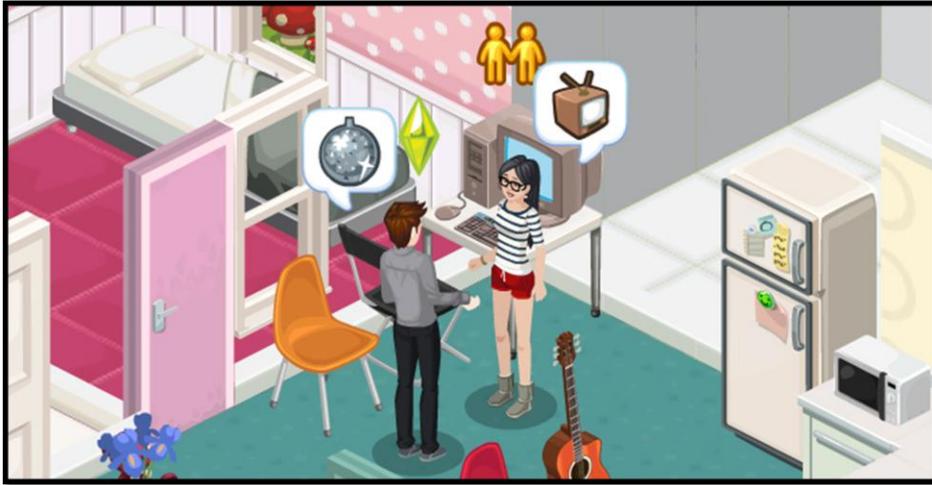
— The Sims Social **takes advantage of this** by making relationships real and building gameplay around them – **creating shared goals between players**.

— Not only is this fun, but it **multiplies gameplay** because it turns each one of your friends into **a new goal** with its own **systemic progression**…

— …and that progression can react to you in a **meaningful way** because there's another human behind it.

— This interaction moves beyond the standard of **just clicking on objects** at your friends' places to collect a simple reward.
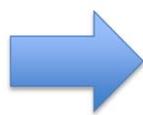
— We took the **binary state** of either being "Neighbors" or "Not Neighbors"…

***

***

— and turned it into a **multidimensional web** of **23 states**.

— **Each one** comes with **new social interactions.**

— This means you could potentially have 23 neighbors, each in a different relationship state, **each with different gameplay** at any given time.

Social Interaction

— For those who haven't played yet, I've got a video clip here that demonstrates how this works.

{play video}

— You can pick a nice action, and your Sims will chatter back and forth.

— But if I now go and pick a flirty option, momentum will start to build in that direction and… now when I click on her an extra flirty option has replaced one of the friendly options.

— And if you do this enough, you'll eventually **reach a new relationship state** as **indicated by the bar** at the top of the screen.

— If I now pick a mean option, it will switch my momentum again. Something to notice is that if I'm mean, the other Sim acts upset, but then goes back to smiling. This is important. More on this in a second.

— And you can also click on certain objects like stereos and TVs to kick off paired interactions. And then we let you share these actions.

- Now, see how this Sim **looks happy** even though I'd just been insulting her and didn't even apologize?
- This is important to note. It's not an oversight. It's on purpose.
- Being mean **isn't a truly evil act** in The Sims Social.
- The majority of players *want* **to be nice** to each other in the social/casual space, so we made the mean relationships more of a **funny rivalry**.

— The last thing you want is players logging in to **find their creations and characters** have become a **smoking pile of rubble**.

— Unless, perhaps, your entire game is built around destroying your friends' things, like in Monstermind. (This is **my** beautiful town.)

— But even then – this is going to **turn away a lot of players** and capture a more niche audience.

Motivating Social

— So we make **mean** interactions **rewarding** for both parties

— This picture, by the way, is one Sim reacting to a fake spider the other Sim put on the toilet.

— **Not creepy or destructive**, but light hearted and funny.

— Everything is in good fun, whether you're **peeing on someone's bushes** or implying their mother is a llama.

— Still, some players are **naturally hesitant** to try mean content.

— So you need to **design motivators** to push players to try it out.

— We use quests to **encourage exploring** friendly, mean, and romantic relationships

— And the **three flavors of social interaction** each have their own collectible that you need for various skills and projects.
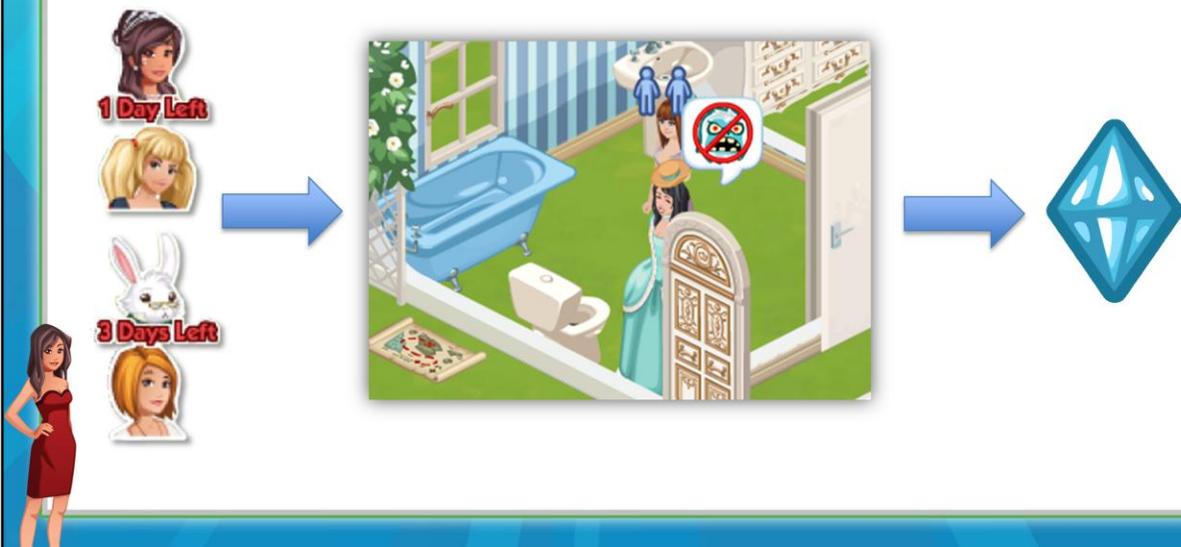
— We also **drop a social currency** to motivate **ALL** social interaction, which you can use to purchase **unique social items** in the shop – like double beds and hot tubs – items you can **use with other players.**

— It's a self-reinforcing gameplay loop.
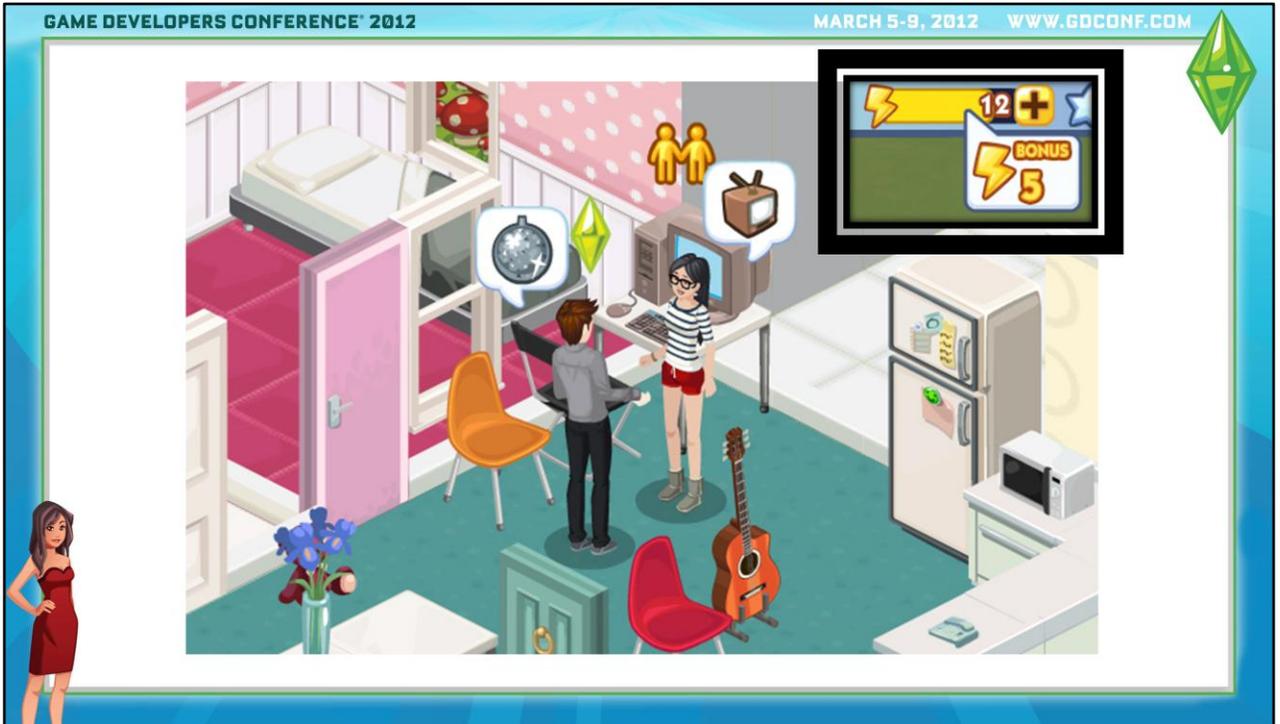
— Because we've added all of this social gameplay, the **natural next step** was to let you spend **as much energy** as you want at your friend's place.

— Instead of getting a **set amount per day** per visit (which is the **current standard**), you get a bonus, but then can **freely spend** the rest of your energy as well.

— I believe it's where energy-based games will go **once stronger social mechanics** become commonplace. It's just a natural evolution.

— This is **CastleVille**. It's a **fantastic game.**

— The art style is **gorgeous**, it's got a **huge audience**, the **exploration** is fun, and you can build some really **cool looking castles**.

— And just **look** at all the stuff on the screen to interact with when you visit your friend's place. Just **look** at it! It's **incredible**!

— You can click on just about anything when you're visiting a friend.

Where is Social Interaction?

— **Except** for your friend **themselves**.
— I'm using **CastleVille** as an example because it's a top game and they can take it.
— But this is a gaping hole in **many games.**

Where is Social Interaction?
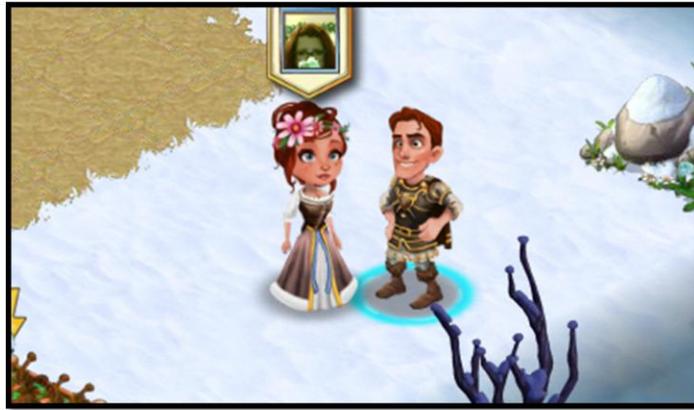
— Where you can **walk right up** to the other Player's character and they **stare right through you**.

I See Dead People

— Sometimes I feel like a **ghost**, calmly wandering around **touching my friends' things** so they might be able to **get the message** that **I still exist**.

Cognitive Dissonance

"Cognitive dissonance is a discomfort caused by holding **conflicting cognitions** (e.g., ideas, beliefs, values, emotional reactions) **simultaneously**. [It] proposes that people have a **motivational drive to reduce dissonance by altering existing cognitions** or adding new ones to create consistency."

— Here's a crazy theory I have.

— I believe that forging Relationships in the game **can bring players closer in real life**, and it relates to **cognitive dissonance theory**.

— I'm **not going to read this**, but the gist of it is that if our brains are holding conflicting beliefs or emotions about something, our brains will **try to resolve them** in some way, possibly by shifting closer to one of those beliefs.

— In other words, if someone you're **connected with on facebook** becomes your neighbor in The Sims Social, and if in real life you're really just **light acquaintances**, but then your Avatars – your Sims -- become best friends with each other, you may begin to feel **closer to each other in reality** because you're projecting your selves into the Sims, and **if they are such good friends**, shouldn't you be **in real life**, too?

— Or **at the very least**, shouldn't you be a bit more friendly around each other **next time you cross paths** in the office kitchen or at the coffee machine?

— In a way, relationships in The Sims Social **are a lens** through which players can explore and play with their real life relationships.

— And as the game **affects your real life thoughts & beliefs about each other**, it increases your engagement as well, in a cycle that becomes a bit of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

— This isn't powerful for everyone, but it **at least has a subtle effect** on our subconscious.

…which brings me to Romance

— This is by far the most intriguing aspect of gameplay because it **connects with us on a deeper level**, although it comes with **consequences**.

— Romances are **exclusive**. We wanted players making **meaningful choices** here.

— And we make sure to **always have your status visible** – always there in the bottom left of the HUD.

— And when you're at a friend's place, **theirs is visible as well on the right.**

— Because we want to remind you that **while your Sim is getting a flirty massage** from another Sim…

...**that you are single**, and this is an opportunity for you...
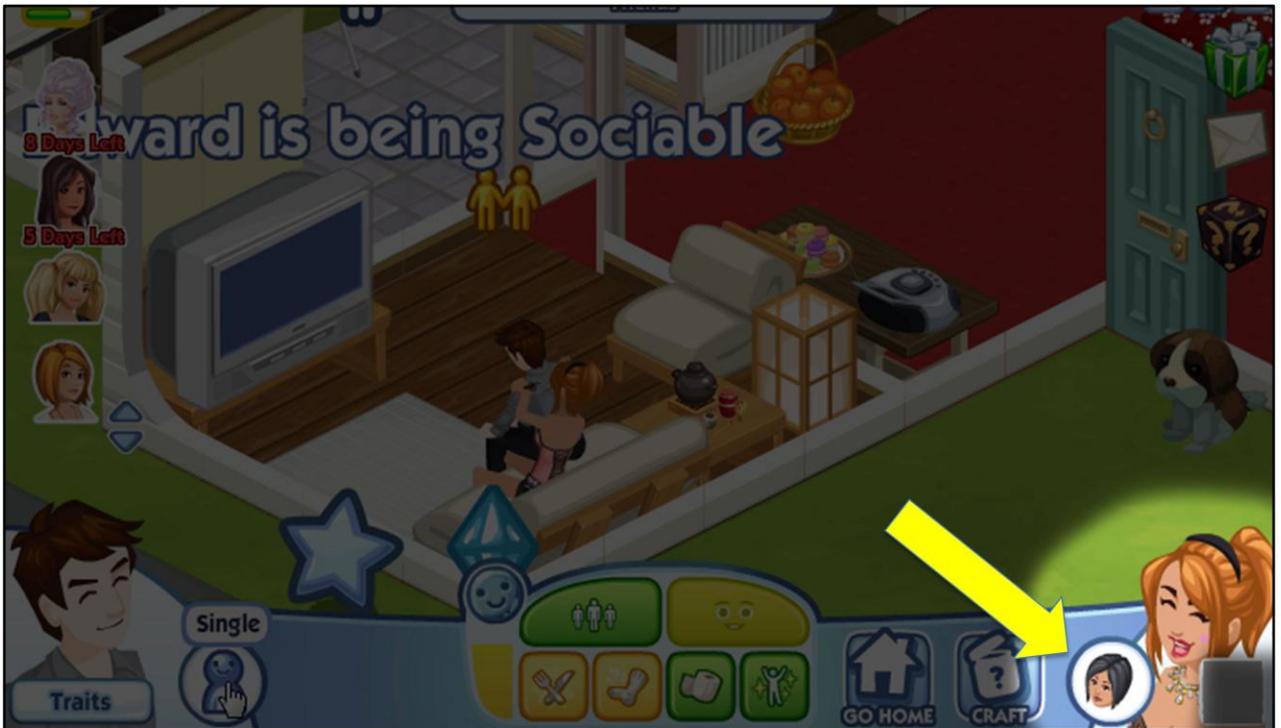
…if only the other Sim weren't already tied into a relationship.

— And we do **let you hover** over that icon **to see who** that other player is (if they're a mutual facebook friend.)

— And if they **are** a mutual facebook friend, this **creates an opportunity to gossip** outside of the game (and you want players to do just that).
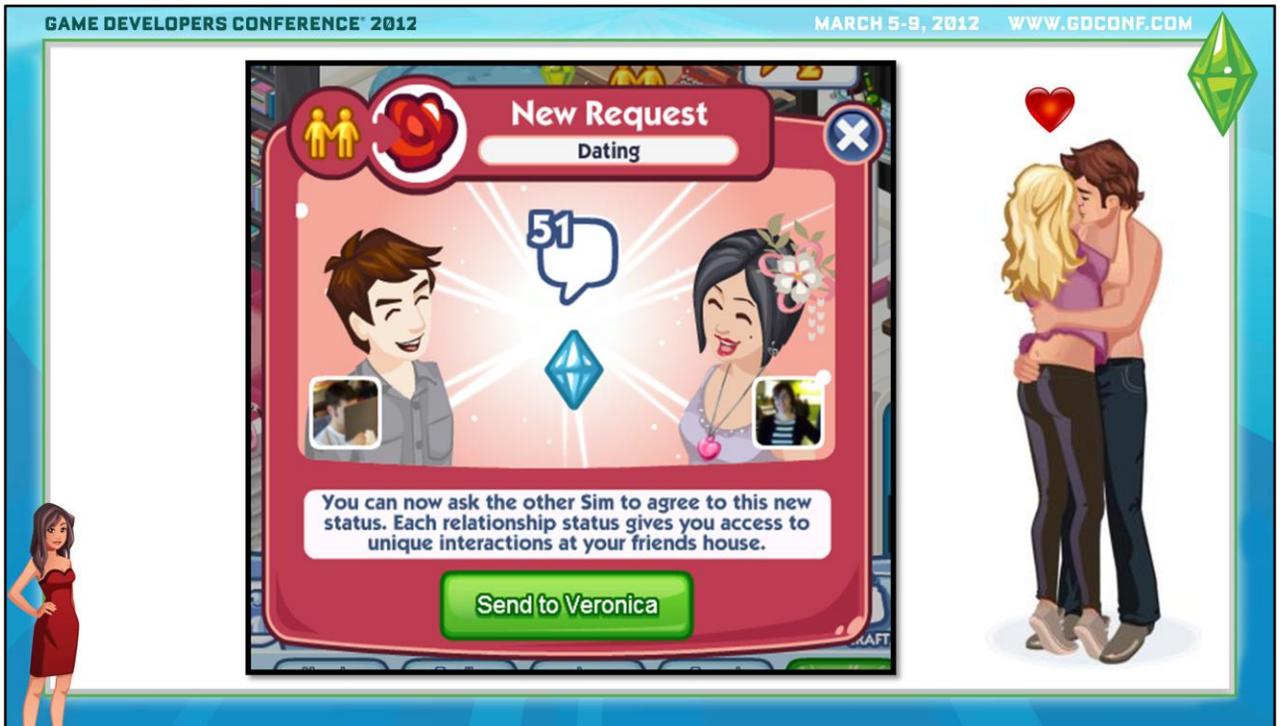
- **If the other Sim is single**, you still **both have to agree** that you want to be in the relationship.
- Here's an example of a dating request I sent to my Co-worker Veronica.
- Notice how although it has pictures of our Sims and the label "Dating", **it also has pictures of US.** This is part of what contributes to **cognitive dissonance** that can bring people closer in real life. If we're dating in the game – I mean, if **our Sims** are dating – then our subconscious may try to reconcile the gap, even if just a little.
- I actually felt like **I had to ask Veronica's permission in real life** before I sent this request – which I wouldn't have felt the need to do for **someone I was closer with** in real life already.
- There's an **unspoken social protocol** at work here.
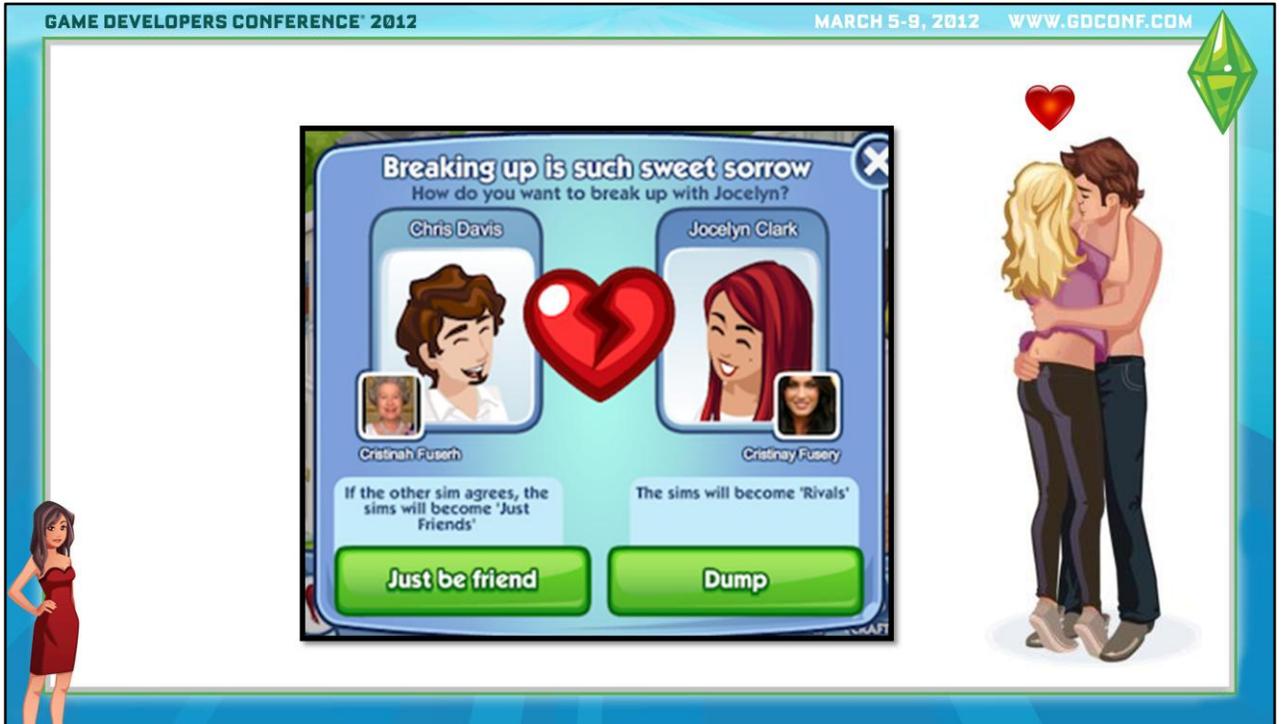
— Now, if there's someone you want to date **who's already in a relationship**, you can also **ask that person to break up** so they can **date you**.

— This adds real social conflict that **extends beyond the confines** of your PC screen.

— Let's look at how all this can affect people.

Social Protocol

Amanda Glasser ▶
It's SO ON.

My Sim wants a relationship with ▮'s Sim but can't while their Sim is with somebody else in The Sims Social... it's decision time!
Will your Sim be my Sim's Sim?

Just click the link to play the game and decide!

◆ 19 hours ago via The Sims Social · Like · Comment · Play Game

47 minutes ago

I totally would accept your request, but my fiance' would kill me... 😬

Sorry! ;_;

AJ Glasser / Inside Social Games (article here)

— Here's a personal experience from AJ Glasser that **she posted in an article** on Inside Social Games. She asked her friend to break up, but her friend responded: *** **"I totally would accept your request, but my fiancé would kill me…"**

— **One of the unspoken rules of the social protocol** is that if you and your significant other both play, then **you cannot date other Sims**, you must date each other.

— And roughly **50% of players adhere** to this protocol.

— I started a thread on the forums to investigate this, and it quickly got over 1000 views and pages of replies.

— Let's look at a few.

Social Protocol

"…I would never, ever feel comfortable with my bf dating a different girl's Sim, nor would I date another guy's Sim."

The rest of the quote continues: "… If you reallyyyyy need a date then just get one of the same gender, or with a fake Sim. Then there won't be any issues at all."

111

Social Protocol

"my college friend… dated my sim. This freaked my bf out… I then dated my girlfriend for a while and of course my bf didn't care then =_= "

Social Protocol

"I set up a sim for my hubs..."

Exclusive relationships are an effective way to acquire guys via "girlfriend pressure."

— Quite a few players **make Sims** for their **significant others** or, better yet, **convince them to start playing.**

— And they do this specifically because they need someone **to fill the role** of that exclusive relationship – preferably someone they can peer pressure daily to play and fulfill their Sim's needs.

***

— Trust me, this is a **great force** to have going for your game – I recommend it.

— **Any kind** of **in-game, exclusive relationship** will do to get this kind of peer pressure going.

— It does not have to be romance -- you could be **exclusive Adventure Allies** in a safari game, for example.

Social Protocol

"...this is just a game... so do what you have to in order to progress... I'll massage and sing to anyone!!"
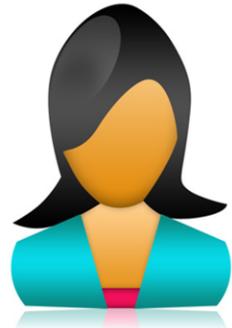
— Even though consistency with real life relationships is the **sentiment of half the players**, the others are fine outside these bounds. Those players commonly **justify it by saying**, "it's only a game", like this person here.

— What's interesting is, the only time you hear the **stricter side** stating "it's just a game", it's usually worded, "I **know** it's just a game, **but**..." ..*that's totally unacceptable and you're a scumbag if you do it.*

— Though they sometimes **make an exception** if their spouse won't play enough to fulfill their needs.

— For example, if a husband and wife are playing and the **wife logs in twice as much**, it's okay for her to find another female for her Sim to date. The husband can't get jealous about that.

- -------------------------------
- {Anecdotes about how players feel in romances when they have a significant other in real life / forum conversations and responses} {http://forum.playfish.com/showthread.php?t=2747914 – in less than 2 days, 42 replies and almost 1000 views}

GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE® 2012

Gender Balance

- **70% Female**
- **30% Male**
- Strengthens Community
- Sim Online Dating?

		I need a new boyfriend or girlfriend! LaurenLovexo
		Active player seeks friends and boyfriend LaMiaVita
		Boyfriend T'Meeka
		How do I turn a close friend into a boyfriend? dskuam
		Needing boyfriend or girlfriend kylie.wilson
		Juliet (my sims name) need an boyfriend julietlove
		my sim needs a boyfriend sexyPrincess
		Looking for a Sims boyfriend right now :) gwendylion
		my sim needs a boyfriend sexyPrincess
		Boyfriend? EliseKathryn
		Need Boyfriend Danni3T
		Boyfriend needed! Friends will also be accepted kaybabezz
		Need a Sim Boyfriend Socd85

— This is a good time to mention that our audience is **70% female**

— There just **aren't enough good men** to go around!

— And this is what happens…

***

…this screenshot is from our forums and is **only one of many pages** of female players looking for Sim boyfriends.

— Some of these threads have hundreds of views!

— **So, guys**, if you're looking to **meet a nice girl** over a social game, **this is your place**.

— So this can be a problem. On the one hand…

***

…it generates **a lot of talk** outside the game, it **creates new friendships**, and it **strengthens** the community.

— But it makes romances **harder for a lot of female players.**

— When there's this much talk about any one thing within your community – you probably want to consider **making a change**.

— So looking at this, my response is – how could we channel it into a game feature **without destroying** this great momentum?

***

— **Why not** let Sims use **online dating** over their computer to connect with other players of similar needs!

— I think that would be an **incredibly strong social feature** that would help push the boundaries of "social" into next gen.
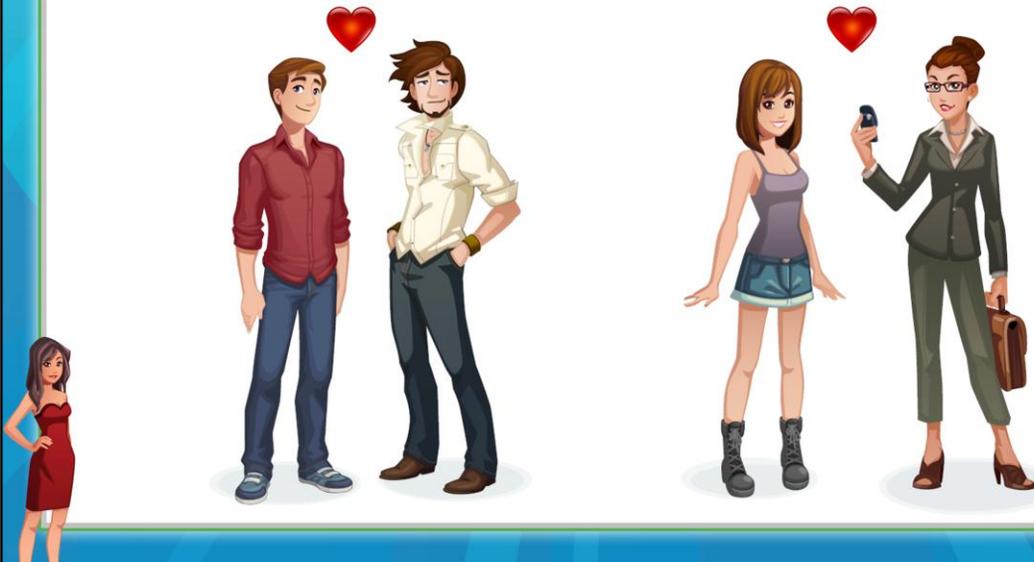
— The Sims, by the way, doesn't distinguish between same sex or opposite sex couples. It's all allowed.

— Though players tend to want to **play in line with their own sexual orientation**, which doesn't help the gender imbalance.

WooHoo

- Light-Hearted

- 680K times/day

- Tell better stories
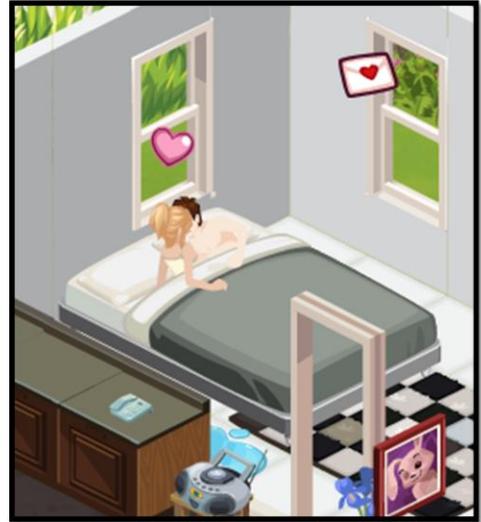
— Now let's **talk about Sex.**

***

— We call it "WooHoo" to keep with the **light-hearted nature** of The Sims.
— And it's **cartoony** – the Sims kiss for a while, then disappear under the covers and the bed bounces around.

***

— But, players love it. Sims **WooHoo nearly 700,000 times** per day, they can WooHoo in beds, showers, hot tubs, igloos, tents, natural springs, and so on.
— We get **constant requests** to let Sims WooHoo in new places.

***

— It gives players an **aspect of real life** they don't get in other games and it also allows them to **tell more interesting stories** with each other.

— Just so that you can see what all the rage is about, I've got a video for you that I think you'll enjoy.

{play video}

— I'm trying to flirt here and it's not going so well. But then I recover.

— And I can click on the bed for the option to WooHoo.

— They do their thing…

— You get an option to share with the world.

— And then there's also an option to share with the other player.

WooHoo is... Viral

— So you saw in the video that you get a chance to share that you've WooHooed, and it's perhaps the **strongest wall post we have.**

— In a presentation Facebook gave on **best practices**, they pointed to this as **the** prime example of something **meaningful** to post from your game.

— Because ultimately you're **not trying to just get your game on someone's wall.**

— What you're **trying** to do is to **get the player** to **write something interesting** ******* along with their post, because that's where the **true value** exists for their friends.

— We need to start choosing only the best things to share… **not just because it's the courteous thing** to do, but because posts are becoming harder to use as a viral mechanism.

Referrals

- **93% from Ticker**
- **7% from Feed + Timeline**

*In a study of over 750,000 referrals

But at 3 months old, this data is ancient and unreliable.
FB says the ticker not a high source of traffic. May kill it.

— We found that **93%** of our referrals came from the **ticker** up in the corner of facebook.

***

— **Only 7%** came from the Feed and Timeline combined. A minor amount.

***

— But at 3 months old, this data is ancient and unreliable.
— FB says the ticker isn't a high source of traffic (perhaps they mean for new games). Either way, they may kill it, and they're constantly changing.
— But we can still take a lesson from this – that people are **tuning out** our mass quantities of feed posts, or just can't find them.
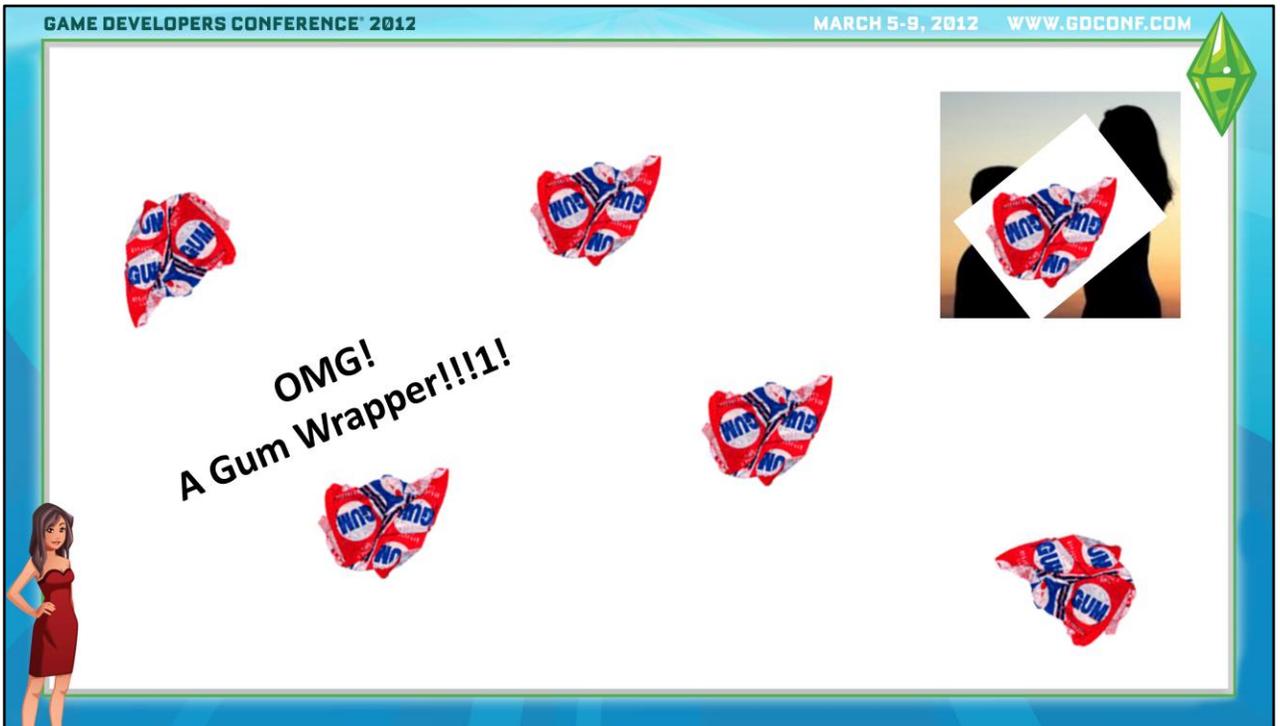
- — All the *** level-ups and *** quest completes and *** I just collected a red gum wrapper nobody cares posts are **getting in the way** of finding the ones that are **truly moving**.
- — And ultimately it's going to change from a **competition for eyeballs by spamming facebook walls** to a competition for interest by **only choosing posts** that are **meaningful and effective**.
- — What I've learned is that we want to see **drama** between players, we want to **see amazing creations**, and we want to **hear what's really on players' minds** when they're making these posts.

— Back to WooHoo – these posts are **about drama** and they **create drama**.

— Thought not always in a totally positive, comfortable way.

— Some of it comes from either **disobeying the tacit social protocols** of gaming relationships

— …or **creating cognitive dissonance** for others based on your actions which may have overstepped those boundaries

— Here's one example I came across.

— It starts innocently enough. **Female Player** posts "I just WooHooed with **<male player's>** Sim"

Create Drama with Posts

"Hooray! We won the game! (Or is this only level 1?)"

— And then male player responds happily.

Create Drama with Posts

"@ 👤 : 👤 's husband here. Can I please have your wife's fbook info? I'd like to play a game of Sims Social with her! :-)"

— But then the husband of the female player pops onto the thread:

— "At <male player>, this is the husband here… can I please have your wife's FaceBook info? I'd like to play a game of [The] Sims Social with her! (smiley)"

Create Drama with Posts

"I've never had these dilemmas playing FarmVille…"

— Male player replies with…

— And the husband says…

Create Drama with Posts

"Yeah, you never 'scored a home run' with anyone's wife in FarmVille."

— Frowny face.

Create Drama with Posts

- Don't strive to create negative drama

- But if it happens on occasion, you know you've got a game with interesting social mechanics

---

— Don't intentionally create negative drama.

— But if you have good social mechanics, **some uncomfortable drama** will be **unavoidable.**

— It means you're coming closer and closer to **real human interaction** – whether players are **arguing over a word** you played in **Words with Friends** or complaining about some exam questions you made up for them in a university game.

***

— If something like this happens from time to time, **you're on the right track**.

What Gossip do YOU Have?

- Give players reasons to talk about your game when they aren't playing.

- **This is the best viral marketing!**

— All this **drama and relationships and exclusivity** and so on creates a lot of chatter outside the game.

***

— You want to give your players **all the reasons you can** to talk about your game and gossip with each other when they aren't playing it.

***

— **Forget facebook channels** – this is the best viral marketing. Everybody started playing Minecraft because **nobody would shut up about it.**

— Spamming facebook channels is a crutch, not a solution.

— Design **this** stuff into your game.

— What can you give your players **so they won't shut up** about it when they're away from the keyboard?
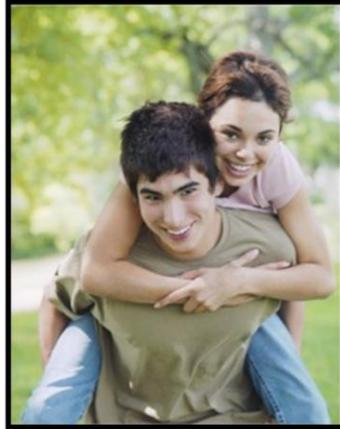
— Coming back to relationships, I have to ask, as a broader space, **why aren't we doing more of this?!**

— Why aren't we **emphasizing relationships** and encouraging players to **develop them**?

— The **stronger the bond** your players have, the more invested they will be, and the **longer they will play**.

- We have the pieces, we're not using them!
- **We've got the players.**
- So we should be rewarding them for interacting with each other on a **prolonged basis.**
- Let's **give them incentive** to build toward something meaningful **with each other**.
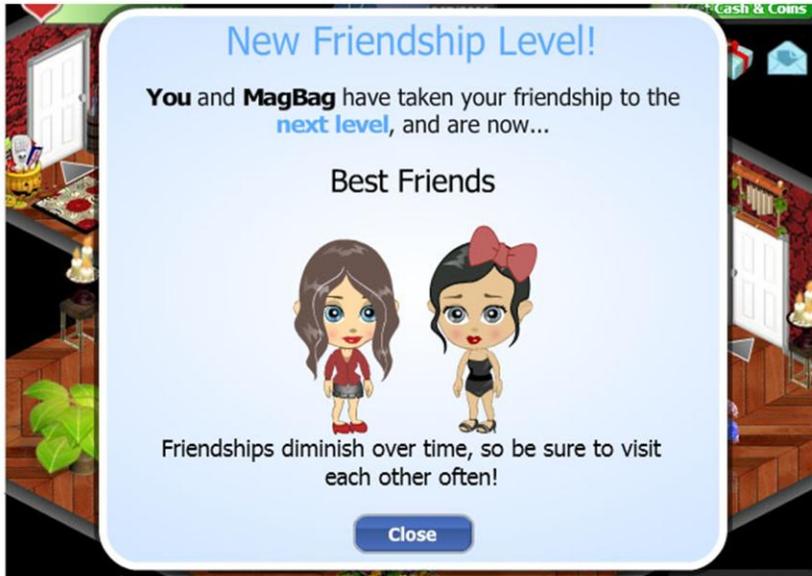
YoVille

— I was happy to see that after three years YoVille added a light form of relationships.

New in Town

— And as I was polishing my slides, Digital Chocolate released New in Town, which also lets you have some **limited relationships with friends**.
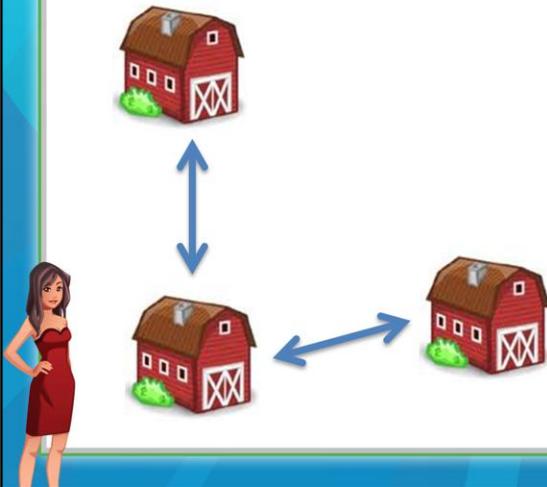
- But you don't need Sims or even avatars to do this.
- Farms can have relationships.
- How much have I tended your crops?
- How often do you drop manure on my barn doorstep?
- If we get our relationship really high maybe we can **unlock new ways to help each other**, or perhaps I can **harvest more for you** when I visit.
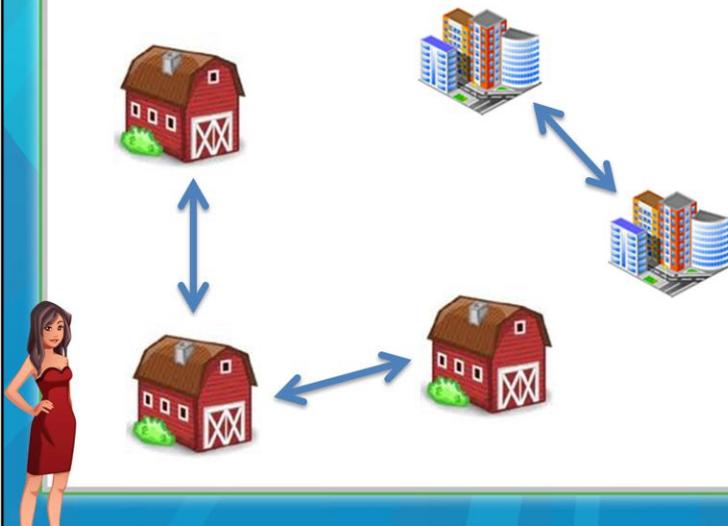
— Cities can have relationships.
— They certainly do in real life, whether they're **helping each other out with trade** or **rioting** about rival sports teams.
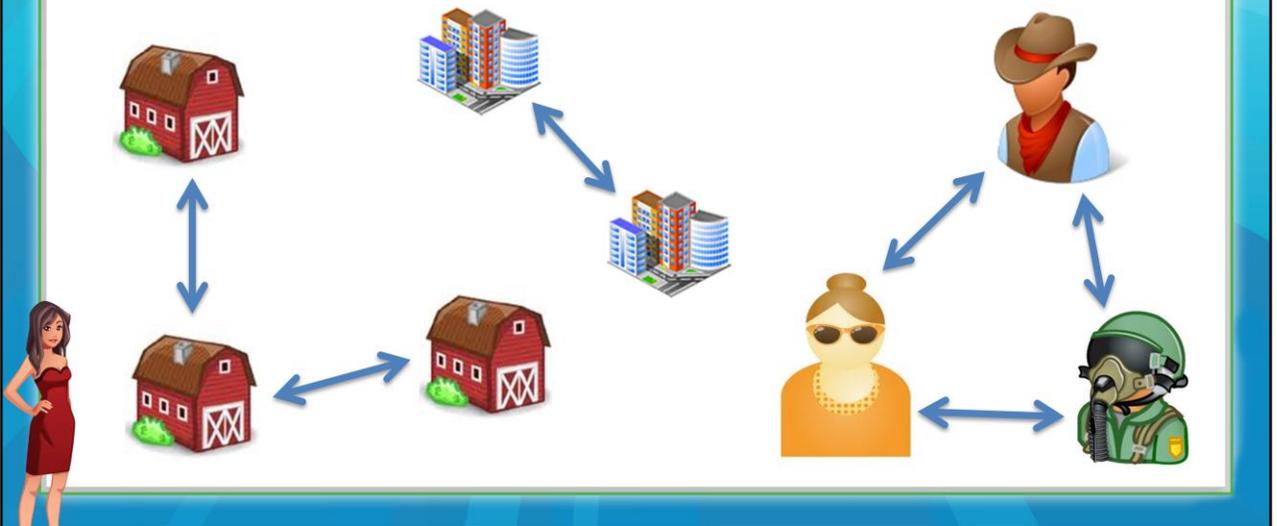
— Or the **players themselves** can have relationships.

— Like I said, to a degree that's how our Sims players **interpret the relationships** between their characters anyway.

— Any form of relationship that gives players **meaningful goals** with each other will raise retention.

— And it doesn't matter what game you're playing.

— Even Words with Friends could *** label your relationship **based on how many games** you've had with each other or **your balance of wins & losses**, and evolve gameplay based on that.

Missteps in Relationships

- Progression too quick
- Lacks larger reward
- Needs unifying goals
- Still not social enough!

—   I've talked up relationships a lot, but they're **not perfect** in Sims Social. If you've played, chances are that you had a lot of fun with relationships for a while, but for some of you, you weren't engaged over the long-term.

—   Here are a few things I'd improve:

***

—   **The progression is too quick.** Players can hit the end of a relationship in two weeks. We need more states, and we need to make sure that the last ones take months to progress through.

***

—   **There are no large strategic motivators.** There's nothing I can bring back to my home life **because you and I are best friends** – and you have nothing unique to offer me. We need to solve that problem.

—   And we need an overarching goal structure that gives players a reason to have **deeper relationships with all of their friends.**

—   And finally, I may think this is **one of the most social features** in social gaming today, but…

…it still isn't social enough!

— We could let players live together at high relationship levels

— We could let them get married – and when they do, choose friends to officiate

— We could give players public spaces to start clubs, strengthened by good relationships

— Or we could do simple things like letting you **hang pictures of your Sim's significant other**

— These are solvable problems, and there are plenty of possibilities.

— Really, I believe this is **only the birth** of relationships in social gaming, so I'm going to wrap up **this part of the discussion** with a bold claim.

Bold Claim #2

Relationships are going to be one of the next big trends in social games.

And here it is:

***

— Relationships are going to be **one of the next big trends** in social games.

— Hopefully I've convinced you of their **utility** and their **potential**; now we just have to see when the rest of the space catches on.

140

— Now I want to take a few minutes to divine what the future may have in store for social gaming.

Beautiful & High Quality

The Sims Social — CastleVille — Galaxy Life

— First, the **quality bar** will **continue to rise**, with more beautiful art and **higher fidelity** animations and sound.

— I point to Sims Social, CastleVille, and Galaxy Life as the current bar.

F2P Core Games

Drakensang

Online

— But we'll also see high quality, **core games**, free to play with social mechanics.

— Studios like **Rumble games** and **U4iA** are already building them. And these will start appearing **very** soon.

— This screenshot is from Drakensang Online, a **3D diablo-esque game** – it's not on Facebook, but it **is** a F2P web game that uses Facebook Connect, and this is indicative of what we'll soon see directly on facebook.

And... the Casual Space?

Monster World

— But what about the more **casual space?** Where is that going?

— If I find a social game that I like and invite someone to play, I say, **"This is fun. You should play too,"** but it feels wrong to say, **"Let's *play together*."**

— That phrase makes sense with poker and **Scramble** with Friends, but our most successful games **aren't there yet** because we're just scratching the surface of social interaction.

— Players want **Community and Togetherness**, and this is where the **brightest future** of social gaming lies.

- — We'll see higher adoption of Synchronous play (to complement Asynchronous play).
- — Some games do this already.
- — It's what players want. Many of our players say this is **what they had expected** out of The Sims Social were disappointed we didn't have it.

— We'll see more Relationships of all kinds in games.
— And they'll have **worthwhile meaning**.

Shared & Public Spaces

YoVille

— We'll see Shared Spaces, where players can live & play together.

— And along with that, we'll see **more games with public spaces** where characters can meet each other – **so the game doesn't end** when your friends stop playing, because you can easily find new people to play with.

— In a prospective player survey, **meeting other players** was the **2ⁿᵈ most popular social feature request.**

— And **36% of players** in Social Gaming **already say** they play with strangers – but most have to find each other on **forums** or **facebook groups** outside the game. Let's make it easier.

— But let me stress that it has to be **safe and friendly.** If you can go right up to someone and say whatever you want to them, **that's scary** in social/casual space. We need to work on this.

Groups & Group Goals — FarmVille

— And once we can play together, we'll see **group goals** – things we can work toward as a community.
— **Co-Op farming** in Farmville is just a small start.
— And we'll want to enable **self-forming organizations** like clubs and guilds to strengthen this community.

— We'll see better creativity tools.

— In games about decoration, they need to be a **central feature.** (Games that cultivate this will win.)

— And then we'll see **systems for sharing these creations with everyone**, and for surfacing the best ones and categorizing them.

— If you make this **awesome Ice Fort** in The Sims Social, everyone should be able to see it *** and upvote it.

Upvotes > Stars

Restaurant City

— BTW, Restaurant City tried a **rating system based on Stars**, but stars are bad in the causal space because then you can explicitly tell someone that **what they made sucks.**

— You don't want that. Pure Upvotes are better.

— Restaurant City also made the mistake of **rewarding players** for ranking others, which **takes the intrinsic reward** out of the system, making it meaningless. Don't do that.

- So maybe you can **tour anyone's farm** and give it an Upvote if you like it.
- And then see the best ones on leaderboards, and visit those.
- Perhaps you can **search** for the most popular, say, **sheep farms**.
- And we'll see rewards **for being recognized by the community** – like elite objects and so on that will help make you even **more of a spectacle…**

...because **we want to make a spectacle** of our players.

— We want to make it easy for the best players to draw lots of attention. To become **idols** and to **create followings**.

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What is The Future of Social?

— What all this amounts to is a **breaking down of social barriers.**

— Imagine **YouTube** if you could **only see** what your friends had recorded.
— Imagine **twitter** if you could **only follow people** that agreed to follow you, too?
— Imagine all the **worldwide charity programs**… where you could **only help people** you were already acquainted with.

— We need to go further than that. This is just a taste of where I believe the space is going.

Conclusion

Final Bold Claim

The WoW of the social space hasn't arrived yet.

But soon, it will.

— I'd like to close with one final bold claim. Here it is.

***

— The World of Warcraft of the social space hasn't arrived yet.

***

But soon, it will.

We are on the cusp…

- CityVille: ~100MM peak MAU
- Facebook: 800MM and growing
- We can do better

— I'm not talking about genre or specific game design, I'm talking about **size and retention of audience.**

***

— The most successful social game, CityVille, had just over 100 Million monthly players at peak.

***

— Facebook has over 800 Million users and still growing aggressively.

***

— I think we can do better!
— Here's the analogy I like to make…
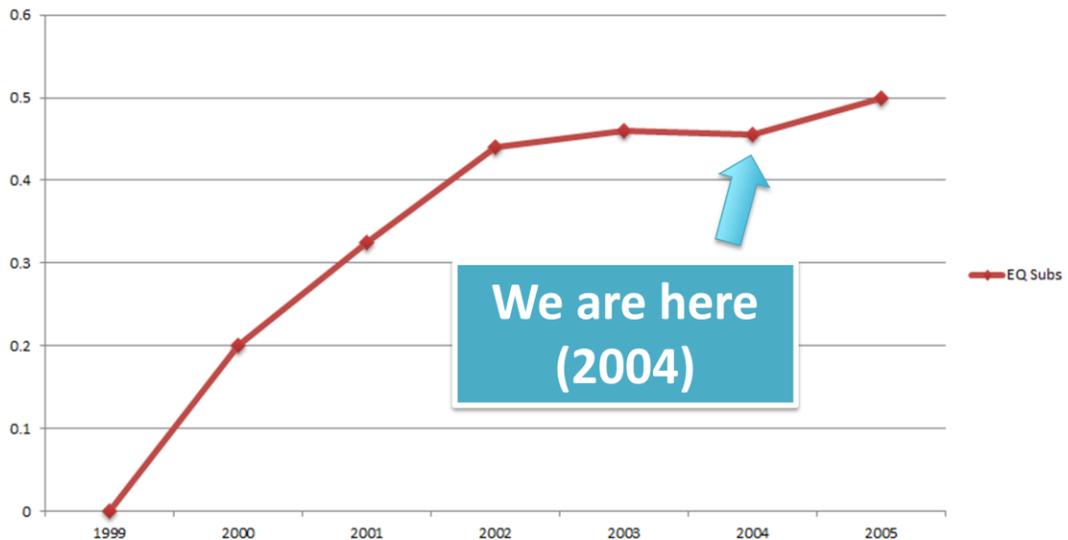
— In 2004, when MMOs were a **few years** into success, they were a **hot topic** much like Social Games are now

— In the US, we looked at **Everquest** as the **current bar**. It had hundreds of thousands of subscriptions. (Maybe we looked at Runescape in Asia, with a few Million.)

***

— That's where I think we are now with social games.

— So that was Everquest.

— And then WoW comes along…
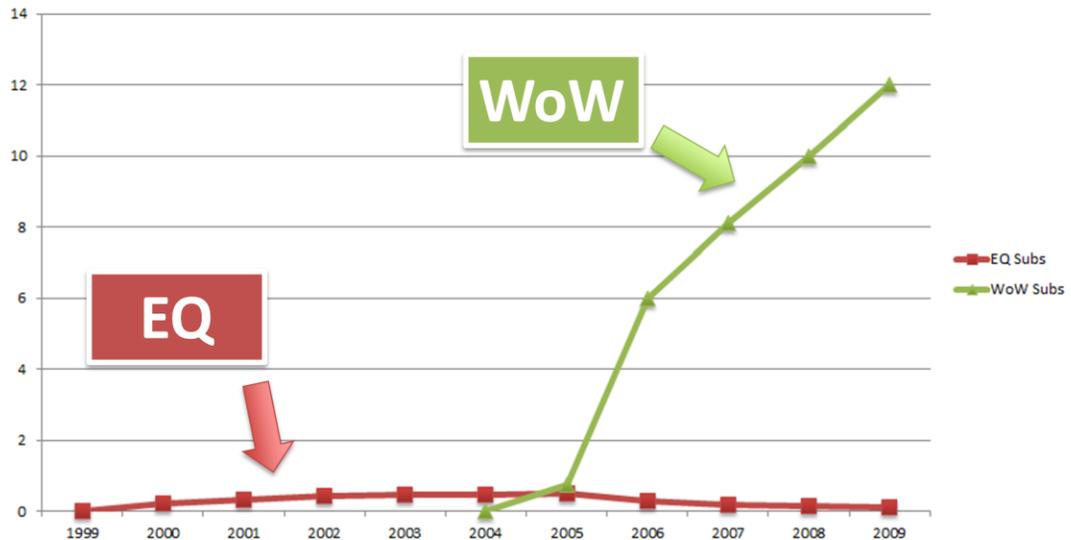
— …and **obliterates** that **high bar** *** with 12 Million subscribers, and **rewrites our understanding** of what makes a compelling MMO experience

— …not the least of which was accessibility (particularly to non-masochists.)

EQ vs. WoW Subscriptons (Millions)
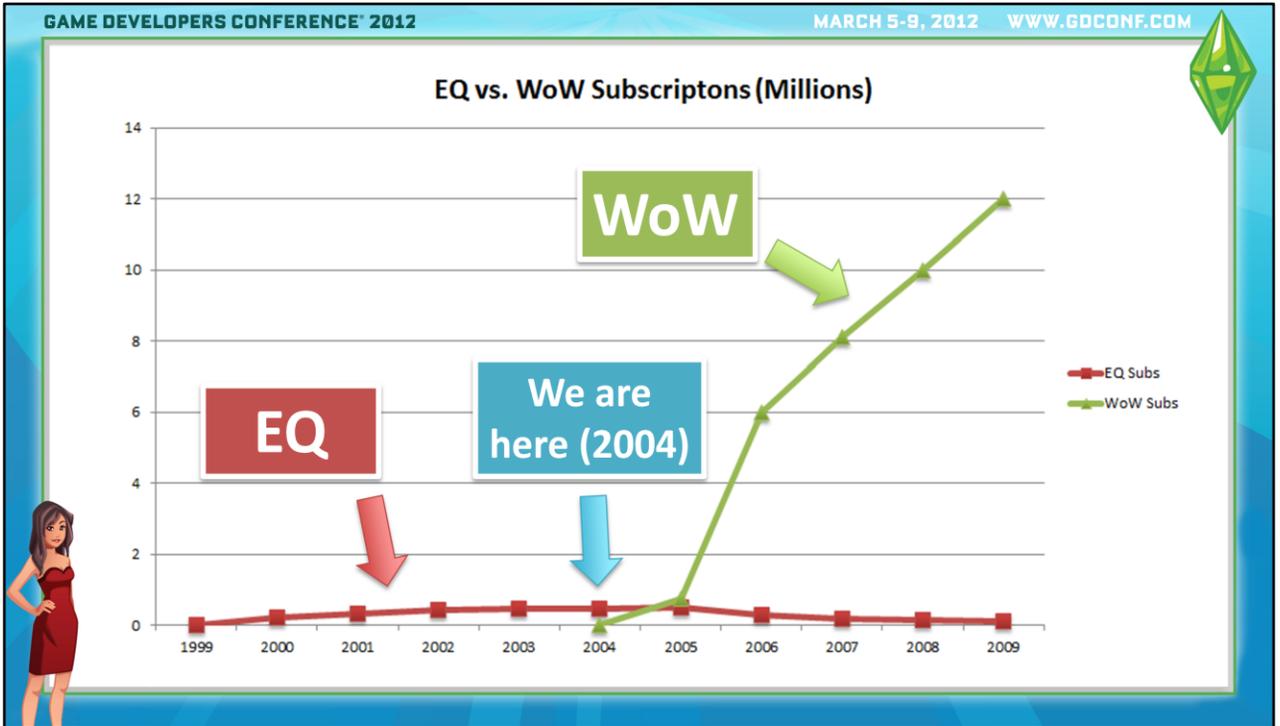
— **We're still here.**
— And this is the **unexplored promised land** that awaits us.

- Vastly **larger audiences**
- …Who stay engaged **far longer**
- …And spend **more money**

— And it's worth pointing out that one of Everquest's faults was that it **scared people into being social.**

— Wander around alone, and you die and will probably never get back to your corpse again.

— World of Warcraft, on the other hand, made it **first and foremost** a **fun and friendly** place for **solo players**.

- But it was so fun and friendly, in fact, that it's a place you *wanted* **to be with your friends.** And so you brought your friends there, and you *made* friends there, and then could go on even grander adventures together. And the rest is history.

- Maybe you hear me saying this, and you think that **I still don't understand** the social game space.

- There's a **hint of truth** to that. In fact, I think none of us really understand the social game space entirely yet. We've **found some patterns that work** – hell -- they pay out big – but we're **clinging onto them** to a fault.

- But soon, we're going to let go of that and begin to **find true social interaction**, and it's going to come hand in hand with true understanding of the social space and with **greater success**.

- The next few years will be **transformative**. We're going to witness incredible change.

- Which ones of you **will be the ones** to take us there?

Thank You

www.raymazza.com/gdc2012.html

- If you could take 5 seconds to fill out the evaluation forms when they arrive in email, I would really appreciate it
- I'd love to get your feedback.

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Slides: www.raymazza.com/gdc2012.html

- Feel free to email me or send me questions or just tackle me in the hall, I'm actually quite friendly.