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**The Chicago Journal of Sociology (CJS)** publishes excellent undergraduate work in the social sciences, while giving student editors experience turning coursework into publishable academic articles.

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**Editor’s Note**

It’s no secret that University of Chicago undergraduates devote colossal efforts into their studies. Yet despite our collective care for academics, very rarely do we critically engage with one another’s intellectual work. In fact, we rarely even read each other’s papers, let alone study their arguments. The pinnacle example of this scholastic culture is the BA thesis. While some seminars try to encourage peer review, at the end of the day, most BA papers are dropped into an adviser’s bin and are never to be seen or read again.

Our mission is premised on the value of peer collaboration and engagement, including reading, improving, and preserving undergraduate papers. It is thereby our pleasure to present Volume 2, a collection of diverse research projects spanning qualitative and quantitative methods, theoretical orientations, and sociological imaginations.

This volume opens with Tovia Siegel’s nuanced theory of time and incarceration in her ethnography of youth police-stops in Chicago. The inequalities facing disadvantage communities on the South Side are further highlighted in Sarah LeBarron’s novel model of transit deserts in Chicago, and Bohannon’s mixed-method analysis of social capital and collective efficacy in South Chicago. With Andrea Haidar, we get a picture of how Arab Americans utilize narrative processes to tell a specific Arab American “story” to mobilize and manage stigma in Dearborne City. Sumaya Bouadi’s paper takes the same location, and provides new data on the voting patterns in Dearborne, illustrating the political reactions of Arab Americans to increase stigmatization by the Republican Party after 9/11. The volume concludes with Bea Malsky’s Marxist-Feminist inspired critique of a duo of smartphone games. I hope you find something in this volume that engrosses you.

Sincerely,

Tim Juang  
CJS Executive Editor

# Table of Contents

Doing Time on the Streets of Chicago’s South Side TOVIA SIEGEL	4
Modeling Transit Deserts: A Case Study of Chicago SARAH LEBARRON	16
The Effect of Social Capital on Neighborhood Collective Efficacy XIAO (ANGEL) BOHANNON	32
Narrative Strategies of Stigma Management and Panethnic Mobilization: A Case Study Examination of the Arab American National Museum ANDREA HAIDAR	52
The Effects of 9/11 on the Arab American Vote SUMAYA BOUADI	71
Managing Hearts with Kim and Flo: Casual Games, Affective Labor, and the Postindustrial Work Ethic BEA MALSKY	80
Index	91

# Managing Hearts with Kim and Flo: Casual Games, Affective Labor, and the Postindustrial Work Ethic

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Casual games *Diner Dash* and *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* are representations of workplaces—in the service and entertainment industries, respectively—that center on affective labor, the often-gendered management of the comfort and emotions of others. Considerations of affective labor, originally conceptualized in narratives of domesticity centered around the feminine provision of care—the management of feelings by the mother, the midwife, or the nurse—must now be expanded in an economy increasingly far from Fordist industrialism and its rigidly defined, economically moored gender roles. Studying what games tell us about labor and leisure can offer insight into how players wish to understand their own work at borders where the often-porous membrane between the two breaks down. Through both narrative and mechanics, *Diner Dash* and *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* build a dissonant and sentimentalized ideology of affective labor, serving as idealized reimaginations of a fraught gendered work ethic while valorizing immaterial labor through its literal quantification.

## Introduction

At the opening of the game *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*, the player learns how to fold a shirt. You, as a bright customizable cartoon avatar, learn to tap on your smartphone’s touchscreen a few times to straighten a disheveled clothing display. Soon, fortuitously, just as you’re closing the shop at which you work, an avatar of Kim Kardashian appears. She needs a dress. The text on-screen does not offer a choice, but in-game your avatar decides to give it to her free of charge. This is the first step in your charmed journey into *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood’s* world of fashion and celebrity, where you can climb your way toward becoming an “A-List” star like Kim through a successfully managed career of modeling and maintaining social connections.

In the game *Diner Dash*, a similar tale of rags to riches is set up from the beginning—this time a pre-named avatar, Flo, is unhappy in her bureaucratic office job before deciding to make the leap into small-business entrepreneurship. She opens a diner, which, depending upon the player’s skill, can evolve into an ever-fancier diner through in-game success at serving customers. In some versions of the game, after enough accomplishment and gradually rising difficulty in gameplay, Flo is awarded transcendence in the form of a third arm: a wry bit of humor from the game allowing her to better perform her job as a business-owner-turned-waitress.

*Diner Dash* and *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* are examples of “casual games.” Following the definition of the Game Developers Conference Summit of 2004,

*If we’re talking about the corruptive influences of gaming on young minds today, Kim Kardashian: Hollywood is likely far worse than any game where you can chainsaw an alien’s head off. The central lesson is that your entire life should be dedicated to yourself.*

PAUL TASSI FOR *FORBES MAGAZINE*, “LESSONS LEARNED FROM A WEEK WITH ‘KIM KARDASHIAN: HOLLYWOOD’”

casual games can be learned in less than a minute, are forgiving of mistakes, are short but highly replayable, and are inexpensive or free (Chess 2009). The form is popular and profitable: in 2010, according to the Casual Games Association, the industry had revenues of nearly \$6 billion on mobile, iPhone, social networks, PC, Mac, and Xbox platforms and an estimated player base of 200 million. They’re distinguished by low time commitment, easy access, and a return of the form to mass culture and its origins in the arcades of the early 1980s. In their simplicity, casual games are also typically highly repetitive.<sup>1</sup> Through encouraging fragmentary engagement, casual games subtly pervade the lives of their players—they’re built to fit in pauses of getting a snack at work or sitting on the bus during a commute. What makes casual games “casual” is the way they fill in the empty spaces of their players’ lives, never capturing an extended period of full attention but also never receding fully into the background of awareness.

Both *Diner Dash* and *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* are representations of workplaces—in the service and entertainment industries, respectively—with certain aspects of the work’s drudgery, tedium, and frustrations abstracted away. They model a distinctly feminine mode of labor: media theorist Shira Chess writes that *Diner Dash* “re-enacts complex relationships that many women have with work, leisure, empowerment, and emotions,” (83) and, amid a flood of Kardashian think pieces coinciding with her real-world rise to celebrity,<sup>2</sup> Brooklyn Maga-

zine noted that “Kim Kardashian is what getting paid for ‘women’s’ work looks like” (Curry 2014). The mode of labor represented in both games centers on managing the comfort and emotions of others. Considerations of affective labor, originally conceptualized in terms of narratives of domesticity centered around the feminine provision of care—the management of feelings by the mother, the midwife, the nurse—must now be expanded in an economy increasingly far from Fordist industrialism and its rigidly defined, economically moored gender roles. According to cultural theorist Aubrey Able (2013), casual games set in the workplace are “sentimental in that they speak to a longing for a different, less fraught, relationship to labor.” Studying what games tell us about labor and leisure—especially casual games, which often conflate the two—can offer insight into how players wish to understand their own work at moments when the often-porous membrane between work and play breaks down, as play comes to resemble work. “Our play is both incidental and taking over our lives,” Able continues. “Casual games seem too banal and too significant to analyze.”

In this paper I offer an analysis of how the narrative and procedural rhetoric<sup>3</sup> of *Diner Dash* and *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* represent their players’ work, arguing that both games treat affective labor, the apex of a postindustrial and distinctly feminine work ethic, as central. Through both narrative and mechanics, *Diner Dash* and *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* build a roman-

1. Some argue that casual games are tedious by design. Ian Bogost (2014) compares playing these games to trying to fix a stubbornly broken drawer or playing with a badly built toy, while Sam Anderson (2012) writes of *Tetris*: “It is bureaucracy in pure form, busywork with no aim or end, impossible to avoid or escape. And the game’s final insult is that it annihilates free will. Despite its obvious futility, somehow we can’t make ourselves stop rotating blocks. Tetris, like all the stupid games it spawned, forces us to choose to punish ourselves.”

2. This paper will not focus on Kim Kardashian West’s rise to celebrity or public persona, and will only detail her involvement and character in the game to the extent that it influences player experience; analysis of the intersection of celebrity culture and videogames will be left to a separate project.

3. Ian Bogost coined the term “procedural rhetoric” to refer to “the practice of persuading through processes in general and computational processes in particular.” In *Persuasive Games* (2010), Bogost outlines his theory of how the mechanics of games can form arguments about systems and proposes a theory of “unit operations” for games grounded in a convergence of literary theory and object-oriented programming theory. The concept will be expanded on in the methods section of this paper.

ticized and sentimentalized ideology of affective labor, serving as idealized reimaginations of a fraught gendered work ethic while valorizing immaterial labor through its literal quantification. In the following sections, I argue that both *Diner Dash* and *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*, and casual games as a category, offer their players a complex rhetorical argument for how to relate to the emotionally focused work within the games and, by extension, the work in their lives.

## Literature

There is a robust history of scholarship regarding affective labor and its relation to postindustrial capitalist economies, which has been linked with games and media theory to a limited extent. In the following sections I will clarify definitions of games, play, leisure, and labor; sketch a history of competing narratives of immaterial and affective labor in Marxist feminist theory, sociology, and political theory; and review how these ideas have been applied to videogames in general and *Diner Dash* and *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*, two wildly popular casual games, in particular.

### *Games with and without Play*

It is a history of games as pure play that allows them to covertly blur the distinction between labor and leisure. Kathi Weeks (2011) defines work as “productive cooperation organized around, but not necessarily confined to, the privileged model of waged labor” (8). Parallel to how I am taking work to be a form of organized labor, I am considering leisure to be organized play as defined by Roger Caillois: “(1) free, (2) separate, (3) uncertain, (4) unproductive, (5) regulated, and (6) fictive” (1963: 43).

In “Games Without Play,” David Golumbia cautions against conflating the form of a game with the action of play and notes the lack of available vocabulary to place videogames that aren’t, at their surface, playful. In his analysis of *World of Warcraft*,<sup>4</sup> Golumbia notes that the

game encourages and necessitates behavior “as repetitive as the most mechanized sorts of employment in ‘the real world’” (190) by letting players specialize in professions such as mining or crafting. Golumbia locates the pleasure of this kind of grinding, repetitive gameplay in the satisfaction of binary task accomplishment, where goals are “well-bounded, easily attainable, and satisfying to achieve, even if the only true outcome of such attainment is the deferred pursuit of additional goals of a similar kind” (192). In an analysis of gamification’s seepage into what Golumbia considers “the real world,” Patrick Jagoda (2013) observes that to be a player of *World of Warcraft* “means to be a laborer and a manager,” citing “aspiring to a higher rank, following instructions, engaging in war making, and accumulating private property” as the first skills a player is taught to value in-game, and “team building, managing a guild, and administrating resources” as higher-level skills that a player must acquire to excel (121). Golumbia writes that these repetitive, goal-oriented games create a managerial class much in the way military simulators create soldiers, ending on a sinister note: “If they simulate anything directly, that is, games simulate our own relation to capital and to the people who must be exploited and used up for capital to do its work. But it is overly simple to call this activity simulation: a better term might be something like training” (194).

More optimistically, Jesper Juul (2013) theorizes that the feeling of working past failure—of learning new skills, solving puzzles, and accumulating resources—is central to the pleasure and redemption of playing a game. “This is what games do,” he writes. “They promise us that we can repair a personal inadequacy—an inadequacy they produce in us in the first place.” Good games are “designed such that they give us a fair chance, whereas the regular world makes no such promises” (7). By allowing their players to work through failure in a safe environment, games encourage risk-taking and experi-

mentation, bringing them back to Callois’s definition of play.

Casual games are historically coded as feminine and have taken longer than their masculine counterpart—the subject of Golumbia’s analyses, the hardcore game<sup>5</sup>—to garner academic attention. This is in part due to femininity’s historical link to popular and mainstream media, itself long considered unfit for close analysis (Huyssen 1986; Vanderhoef 2013). Aubrey Anable (2013) places casual games in a history of mass media specifically geared toward women and a life built around domestic labor, the soap opera being a key example—both are fragmented, repetitive, and built to “correlate with women’s work in the home.” Casual games, as a form, lend themselves easily to representations of women’s work; Anable pinpoints casual games’ interruptability, steep learning curve, and short levels as reflections of the always-working mode of the domestic laborer. Shira Chess (2011) similarly connects casual games to a distinctly feminine style of leisure, one that collapses the boundary between work and play. Chess draws on Arlie Hochschild’s concept of the second shift (1989), the double burden of mothers both working and caring for children, which casts the home as a site of both work and leisure, simultaneous and fragmented.

### *Affective Labor and the Work Ethic*

Paralleling the mechanism through which casual games trouble the boundaries between work and play, affective labor makes the categories of labor and leisure vulnerable to confusion. Theories of affective labor grew from second-wave socialist feminist analysis, which conceptualized it as part of the “invisible labor” of women’s reproductive and domestic work (Dalla Costa and James 1975; Federici 1975; Hochschild 1989). These feminist accounts were concerned with the relevance (and lack thereof) of domestic work and motherhood to the mainstream capitalist economy, and ways in which

exploitation along gendered divisions of labor became historically naturalized as part of the female character. In 1975, Silvia Federici wrote that housework had “been transformed into a natural attribute of our female physique and personality, an internal need, an aspiration, supposedly coming from the depth of our female character” (2). Federici’s *Wages against Housework* is a polemic,<sup>6</sup> and these early conceptualizations of affective labor served as a call-to-arms for housewives to think critically and resist the economic conditions imposed upon them by the social constructions of the nuclear family under Fordist industrialism.

In *The Managed Heart*, sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild (1983) traces the estrangement of airline attendants from their own affective labor as an example of the commercialization of emotion in the global marketplace. Through a careful account of training processes and worker experiences, Hochschild demonstrates the ways in which these airline employees are expected to manufacture a sense of well-being and ease for their passengers while making the hospitality appear effortless and innate. To show that this warmth takes effort—to show struggle or fatigue, to let the labor “show in an unseemly way”—is to fail to do the job of promoting effortless ease, at the risk of damaging “the product: passenger contentment” (8). She describes the process of “transmutation,” when “emotion work, feeling rules, and social exchange have been removed from the private domain and placed in a public one, where they are processed, standardized, and subjected to hierarchical control” (153). Hochschild works within a Marxist framework, recalling the young wallpaper factory laborer in *Capital* who works for sixteen hours a day on a machine, becoming “an instrument of labor” (Marx 1977: 358) as he produces wallpaper under brutal working conditions. The common ground between the airline attendant and the factory worker, writes Hochschild, is the requirement from their labor that they mentally detach them-

4. *World of Warcraft* is a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) released in 2004 by Blizzard Entertainment.

5. The distinction between “hardcore” and “casual” games includes not just the content of the games but also modes of engagement, with “hardcore” connoting greater devotion and prolonged engagement. John Vanderhoef (2013) writes that hardcore games are linked to a “white, hegemonic masculinity” actively working to maintain a closed community: “Together, sectors of commercial culture and core gaming culture work to position casual games as first feminine and then, tacitly if not vocally, as inferior and lacking when compared to masculinized hardcore video games. As a culture established upon a vulnerable masculinity with anxieties of infantilization and illegitimacy, hardcore gaming culture perceives these feminized casual games as a threat.”

6. Following Catherine Lord’s definition: “To write a polemic is a formal challenge. It is to connect the most miniscule of details with the widest of panoramas, to walk a tightrope between rage and reason, to insist that ideas are nothing but lived emotion, and vice versa. To write a polemic is to try to dig oneself out of the grave that is the margin, that already shrill, already colored, already feminized already queered location in which words, any words, any combination of words are either symptoms of madness or proof incontrovertible of guilt by association” (135).



selves from their products: “the factory worker from his own body and physical labor, the flight attendant from her own feelings and emotional labor” (17). Once this thread is drawn, Marx’s theories of worker exploitation and alienation gain a new meaning in relation to Hochschild’s twentieth century emotional laborers, leading her to ask:

When rules about how to feel and how to express feelings are set by management, when workers have weaker rights to courtesy than customers do, when deep and surface acting<sup>7</sup> are forms of labor to be sold, and when private capacities for empathy and warmth are put to corporate uses, what happens to the way a person relates to her feelings or to her face? When worked-up warmth becomes an instrument of service work, what can a person learn about herself from her feelings? And when a worker abandons her work smile, what kind of tie remains between her smile and her self? (89)

Hochschild does not offer simple answers to these questions, but works to bring emotional laborers at risk of becoming estranged from their own affects into the sphere of Marxist inquiry on worker alienation and liberation.

A quarter century after the initial publication of *The Managed Heart*, Kathi Weeks (2007) identifies in retrospect a disciplinary split in the discourse surrounding affective labor, one that can be aligned with the difference between Federici and Hochschild. The former, Weeks notes, is part of an effort to add the reproductive labor of the mother and the housewife to feminist Marxist understandings of productive labor. Hochschild’s project, more deeply embedded in sociology, seeks to add accounts of emotional labor to understandings of the burgeoning white-collar service industry. Weeks writes that efforts to integrate reproductive labor and productive labor in post-Fordist economies rely too heavily on essentialized understandings of gender “in a situation in which the binaries of productive versus reproductive, waged versus unwaged, and with them, ‘men’s work’ versus ‘women’s work’ are increasingly inadequate” (239).

Further, Weeks takes issue with Hochschild’s assumption of a pre-alienated working self, “our estrangement from which constitutes a compelling crisis.” Weeks is skeptical of the existence of an “unmanaged heart” which the socialized subject is only later taught to manage, writing that Hochschild is too reliant on “nostalgic ideals of work” and “essentialist models of the self” (244).

Michael Hardt places affective labor more explicitly in a history of capitalist development. He defines affective labor as “immaterial, even if it is corporeal and effective, in the sense that its products are intangible: a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, passion—even a sense of connectedness or community” (1999: 96). In building his argument concerning the relevance of affective labor to postindustrial capitalist production, Hardt theorizes that the economic development of the dominant capitalist countries since the Middle Ages can be understood in three stages: the agricultural economy, the industrial economy centered around the production of durable goods, and our current “informational” economy, where “providing services and manipulating information are at the heart of economic production” (90). Hardt defines economic modernization as the move between the first two stages, and postmodernization as the move between the latter two. Hardt argues that in this postmodern state, immaterial labor, and particularly affective labor, is at the “very pinnacle of the hierarchy of laboring forms” (90).

In *The Problem with Work* (2011), Weeks traces the history of what she terms the “privatization of work,” the process of tethering work “to the figure of the individual” (3–4), making labor movements difficult in sectors requiring high levels of affective labor. Weeks draws a distinction between the industrial and postindustrial work ethic, describing both as “mechanisms of subordination” (58) through ideology from the middle class over the working class. The industrial work ethic, she writes,

is predicated on the promise of upward social mobility, while the postindustrial work ethic has a “new emphasis on work as an avenue for personal development and meaning” and christens “work as a practice of self-realization” (60). This postindustrial ethic creates workers internally motivated to produce and manage affects as part of their laboring lives, a life’s work which promises a rejuvenated personhood if performed correctly. Through its troubling of the boundary between public and private life and between leisure and labor, affective labor—variously associated with domestic work, social reproduction, and the service industry, always already gendered—offers a link between practices of leisure and the work ethic, particularly in its interiority-obsessed postindustrial mode.

*Diner Dash and Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*

Both Anable and Chess discuss affective labor and use the *Diner Dash* franchise as a case example with which to analyze the relationship between casual games and work. Chess notes that the main character, Flo, is presented within a story of entrepreneurial hope—the player of *Diner Dash* finds their avatar sitting at an anonymous office desk at the game’s start, before she opens her own restaurant. The narrative of *Diner Dash* is one of empowerment and self-determination, though the entire mechanics of the game involve serving others. “Through Flo, the player is constantly being forced to conflate work and play,” Chess concludes (90). Ian Bogost (2011) declares *Diner Dash* kitschy, in the sense that it deploys “occupational sentimentalism” with its entrepreneurial rags-to-riches narrative, as protagonist Flo starts her own shabby business and builds a thriving empire. “In *Diner Dash*,” he writes, “sentimentalism is accomplished by invoking the moral fortitude of hard work. It’s a game in which a good work ethic, careful attention, and persistence always yield success. All of the other factors that make the work of a restaurateur such a thankless, risky position are abstracted” (86). The appeal of these mundane games is the promise of a resolution to the real-world stress and powerlessness of the menial and unrewarding job. Anable describes the importance of affective labor in casual games:

Time management games, in particular, stage the affective work of being a woman worker (what it feels like)

as well as the work of being a subject who longs to feel differently in relation to work during a time when affective and immaterial labor has become the model for most work regardless of gender.

Chess argues along the same lines that time management games offer training and a sense of satisfaction for workers exhausted by their emotionally managing jobs, placing *Diner Dash* in a class of games that enact “simulated productive play,” which “are not productive in the real world, yet mimic real world productivity” (2009: 124).

*Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* has limited scholarship linking it to the above academic discussions; Ruth Curry (2014) writes for *Brooklyn Magazine* that Kim Kardashian “has figured out how to make a fortune on the countless hours of emotional labor most women are expected to perform for free: smiling, looking pretty, being accommodating, being charming, being a good hostess,” and while Megan Garber (2014) admires her for the way she “refuses to sell anything but the image of herself:”

Kim takes Hollywood’s basest expectations about women—its treatment of them as, essentially, walking sex dolls—and doubles down. Was this what you wanted? [...] By laughing at herself, she also laughs at a system that allows for a Kim Kardashian to exist in the first place.

The full field of scholarship on *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*, however, perhaps unsurprisingly, remains largely unwritten. In the following analysis, I will argue for a more nuanced understanding of the messages surrounding work and leisure in the game, as well as build on a sociological understanding of *Diner Dash* begun by Anable, Chess, and Bogost.

**Methods**

My data consists of a close reading of two casual mobile games, *Diner Dash* (2007) and *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* (2014). Both are currently available in the iTunes and Android app stores, and were released by Glu Mobile Inc. I chose these games as two of the most popular casual games currently on the market,<sup>8</sup> though a similar analysis could be made with any number of recent games that represent a workplace.

The academic field of game studies has been divided between narratology, which holds that games should be studied through methods of close reading developed

7. Hochschild draws this distinction between different levels of consciously managing one’s own feelings: “In surface acting, the expression on my face or the posture of my body feels ‘put on.’ It is not ‘part of me.’ In deep acting, my conscious mental work [...] keeps the feeling that I conjure up from being part of ‘myself’” (36). Kathi Weeks would later write that this concept is central to Hochschild’s argument: “The question that guides Hochschild’s investigation, and which remains critically important today, is about what happens to individuals and social relations when techniques of deep acting are harnessed by and for the purposes of capital” (2007: 241).

for literature and film, and ludology, which argues that games should be studied as unique media objects, purely through their rules, mechanics, and elements. Jim Bizzocchi and Joshua Tanenbaum offer a useful method for the close reading of gameplay experiences as texts, drawing on literary theory to build a set of techniques for the analysis of digital media. Working from Geoffrey Winthrop-Young's assumption that narrative is a media technology, Bizzocchi and Tanenbaum describe an oscillation between two levels of engagement. Academic analysis of gameplay must come from a player who is at once engaged—"the scholar enacts the play of a naïve gameplayer"—and detached, aware of the experience as it unfolds—"she plays the game in a state of hypermediation" (275). Following this, it becomes possible to analyze both simple and complex games as both a reader and a player. Henry Jenkins (2004) suggests understanding video games "less as stories than as spaces ripe with narrative possibility" (119).

Procedural rhetoric, as defined by Ian Bogost (2010), operates parallel to this narrative-based rhetoric and forms a basis for the ludic method of games analysis. This method treats a game as a machine and aims to analyze its internal logic and the arguments it constructs about its world—the assumptions the player is forced to make to succeed. In Bogost's construction, game engines and frameworks serve as forms in the same way that the sonnet and the short story do in literature; with this understanding, a Newtonian mechanics simulation is akin to a limerick. In the same way, games have procedural genres similar to literary genres, and identification of these can lend a useful understanding of tropes. Common genres include the platformer, the first-person shooter, the infinite runner, and the turn-based adventure game. Aspects of this method entail appreciating a game as a computer executing set rules, and is a more technical and mathematical approach. The ludology strain of games analysis, with its consideration of games as complex systems, aims to investigate the usefulness

and success of games in communicating their inner logic to the player.

The analysis I present here represents an attempt to combine these two methods in order to best approximate the player experience by taking into account time, difficulty, and engagement. My intention is to also tease out moments of ludonarrative dissonance, points when narrative and gameplay do not line up in rhetoric.<sup>9</sup> In constructing this analysis, it was my aim to consider the views of both the naïve and critical player. To do this I played both *Diner Dash* and *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* every day over a period of three months in the summer of 2014, investing as much time as each game would allow, and taking detailed notes after each session noting affect, events, changes in game mechanics, and narrative progression.

### Analysis

I have divided my analysis into three sections. The first two offer a close reading of each game individually: I place *Diner Dash* in the historical context of a Fordist work ethic during Hardt's process of postmodernization, and align *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* with a postindustrial ethos as defined by Kathi Weeks. I follow with an analysis of the representations of affective labor, time structures, and currencies that underlie the two games and their parallel ludonarrative dissonance, arguing that *Diner Dash* displays a tense transition between industrial and postindustrial understandings of social mobility and the place of affective labor, and that *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* creates a narrative of continuous social progress without reflecting this in the mechanics of the game. Both create a promise of self-actualization through labor without following through with any experiential change. It is not my intention to present every possible piece of evidence generated by each game. Rather, I attempt to create an overview of each with illustrative examples.

### *Diner Dash, the Industrial Work Ethic, and Social Mobility*

In *Diner Dash*, the end goal of each level is to earn enough money to progress to the next. This is obtained by pleasing customers enough with good service that they tip highly and pay without leaving in exasperation. As Flo, players must place customers at a table, with the opportunity to gain additional satisfaction by matching the color of the diner's shirt with the color of their seat. Flo must wait for them to decide what they want, then take their orders. She must then deliver the order, wait for the chef to make it, deliver the food, wait for the customers to eat it, bring them their check, and clear their dishes. Depending on the difficulty of the level, the player must move through this process simultaneously, without neglecting any single group of customers, for four to ten tables. Flo has two hands, and can carry two items—orders, food, checks, dirty dishes—simultaneously. Customers have hearts over their heads indicating how happy they are, and these diminish if Flo doesn't complete any of these tasks in time.

As Flo, the player is presented within a story of entrepreneurial hope and a tale of class optimism in line with Kathi Weeks's definition of the industrial work ethic's "focus on work as a path to social mobility" (60). The player of *Diner Dash* finds their avatar sitting at a desk at the game's start, before she opens her own restaurant. The narrative of *Diner Dash* is one of empowerment and self-determination, though the entire mechanics of the game involve serving others. There is a story of progress in *Diner Dash*, as successful gameplay allows Flo to customize her restaurant and move to higher-class spaces. After the final level Flo is rewarded with enlightenment, which comes in the form of a third arm, presumably so she can work even more efficiently. *Diner Dash* emphasizes the importance of entrepreneurship and agency, forcing its player to value time management skills and efficiency. It simultaneously removes agency from the player, allowing only a limited range of action and

portraying the emotions of customers without offering an interiority to the player character past energized and exhausted.

### *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood, Postindustrialism, and Self-Actualization*

*Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* depends on a rags to riches narrative in line with what Weeks calls "the postindustrial emphasis on work as a practice of self-realization" (60), asking the player to work toward self-actualization in the form of celebrity. At the game's start, the player is working retail and approached by Kim Kardashian, who recognizes the avatar's worth and invites her into her world of public celebrity. The rise from retail to stardom is portrayed as sharp then gradual—the game's first moments show the player's sudden induction into Kim Kardashian's social set, and the rest of gameplay is a slow rise toward "A-level" stardom, the in-game height of fame, obtained via the turn-based accumulation of various resources. The narrative of *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* portrays the entertainment industry as a pure meritocracy, and offers no separation between professional work (booking advertisements, appearing at photoshoots and red carpet events) and social leisure (dating, attending parties).

Fame, measured by in-game Twitter followers, can be gained by completing photo shoots and fashion shows, making appearances at events, dating celebrities already at higher levels of acclaim, and buying new clothes, accessories, and properties. *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* offers no real opportunities for insubordination<sup>10</sup> or exploratory play. Like Flo in *Diner Dash*, the avatar in *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* are women without families, offering a mythology of success without attachments, self-determination without personal history. While Adrienne Rich observed in 1980 that "heterosexual romance has been represented as the great female adventure, duty, and fulfillment" (124-5), Glu Mobile advertises *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* as a "red carpet

8. In May 2015, Think Gaming estimated that *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* has an average of 35,184 daily installs, \$52,598 daily revenue, and 2,384,872 daily active users, while *Diner Dash* has 24,563 daily installs (<https://thinkgaming.com/app-sales-data/8141/kim-kardashian-hollywood/>).

9. Clint Hocking, a former creative director at Ubisoft (now LucasArts), coined this term in 2007. Of Bioshock, Harding writes: "The leveraging of the game's narrative structure against its ludic structure all but destroys the player's ability to feel connected to either, forcing the player to either abandon the game in protest (which I almost did) or simply accept that the game cannot be enjoyed as both a game and a story, and to then finish it for the mere sake of finishing it."

<sup>10</sup> In *Testo Junkie*, Beatriz Preciado (2013) make a similar observation of Paris Hilton and her media empire: "Despite her seeming proclivity for vice and idleness, the Paris Hilton phenomenon exhibits no insubordination against the capitalist economy. On the contrary: her entire life and sexuality are being transformed, by devices of extreme surveillance, into work—into digital images that are transferable worldwide. Her triumph is having known how to recover her body and her sexuality as ultimate values on the global-exchange market of pharmacopornographic capitalism" (280).



adventure” where the ultimate aim is not familial and financial stability but fame and acclaim.

#### *Immaterial Resources and Ludonarrative Dissonance*

Both *Diner Dash* and *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* represent and require the management of affect in the non-player characters (NPCs) and the central avatar, and give energy, customer satisfaction, and relationship health a solid materiality alongside resources used to collect goods in-game. In both games, the resources that must be managed are a mix of material—money, furniture, and clothes—and immaterial—energy, happiness, social capital, and cultural capital. The quantification of these resources—dividing material goods, human health, and affect into similar units—serves to flatten them each into comparable and exchangeable currencies. In *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*, the player has multiple running resource bars: energy, which replenishes over time; money, which is awarded at many small moments throughout the game when certain actions are taken; a level bar indicating experience points that accumulates with actions; and silver stars, which can be purchased for real money. In addition, there is a section of “achievements” that can be unlocked with certain actions, giving players a combination of the four other resources.

The currency in *Diner Dash* is less varied—successful completion of a level comes with a cash reward, which can be used to improve the restaurant of the game’s setting to better complete future levels, and energy is used up with gameplay and replenishes over time, limiting the amount that the game can be played in any one session. Each level involves attempting to serve customers in a series of ordered tasks, and if these are not completed fast enough the customer’s happiness, represented by three red hearts, begins to decrease and the amount of their final monetary tip decreases accordingly. Both games allow their players to circumvent the wait by purchasing one of these currencies—stars in *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* and energy in *Diner Dash*—with real-world currency.

Both fall into a category of “time management” games, meaning that many of their mechanics emphasize the use of resources or actions limited or controlled by time. To be asked to manage resources under time restrictions is feel a sense of urgency, but also tedium—

time management games are tied up with work, a mad hustle alternating with periods of waiting. They emphasize action, reflexes, decision-making, and efficiency. Both games fill their screens completely, demanding their players’ full attention. *Diner Dash* employs the element of continuous time within each segment (level) of gameplay, meaning that its play progresses in real time, requiring the engagement and the full attention of the player. This is in contrast with the discrete (or turn-based) time in *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*, which emphasizes control, choice, rationality, and calm. Time management games require their players to make both the correct choices—being a smart player—and quick choices—being a skilled player.

From the outset of *Diner Dash*, Flo is cast as an entrepreneurial hopeful, a cunning businesswoman building an empire. The actual action of the game, however, shows Flo almost entirely as a waitress, seating and serving others between simple menu choices of shop improvements between levels. This is ludonarrative dissonance, a lack of agreement between what *Diner Dash* communicates as a story and what it communicates as a game. The rhetoric of *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* contains a similar dissonance. The player is offered boundless opportunity at the game’s start, before embarking on a gradual rise toward success through effective management of networking and relationships. Although the game promises ascension toward fame and fortune, gameplay does not ever change and there is no final conclusion or moment of victory—playing as a D-List celebrity is essentially the same as an A-List celebrity.

Though the two games differ in the meanings they ascribe to the work represented within the gameplay, both build a narrative of change that is unsubstantiated in the static mechanics of the game. There is no real end to the quest for A-list status in *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*, as attaining the top rank means the new imperative to maintain it, with actions that are identical to the social climbing necessary to gain that position. To remain an A-list celebrity you must tap on the screen to stay attentive during photo shoots, which is exactly how your avatar got there. Similarly, *Diner Dash* offers a “endless shift” mode for those tired of the process of constructing up the diner—instead of building up resources, on an endless shift Flo serves customers until the player

is overwhelmed by the speed and volume. The dissonance here is the central irony of both games: though they promise redemption through hard work—a true win-condition—no change ever comes. Nevertheless, Kim and Flo must play on to manage their worlds.

#### **Conclusion**

Games offer a way to simulate and view complex systems from the outside; to pick them up and play with them as a child might play with a toy machine, to understand what they are able to do and where they are broken. The process of coming to understand the levers and gears of a game—its procedural rhetoric—is an opportunity for cognitive estrangement from familiar systems of labor, a way to understand dynamic networks and nuanced relations with a fresh set of eyes.

Quietly and perhaps unintentionally subversive, *Diner Dash* and *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* approximate a first step toward naming and honoring the processes by which affective labor is extracted from workers. Even in their simplicity and mundanity, the games operate as instruction manuals. They train their players, as Golumbia’s *Warcraft* players were trained in office drudgery, how to relate to the emotionally demanding work in their lives. By blurring the boundary between work and play, including the literal quantification of affect in hearts and happiness meters, Kim and Flo teach their players to value immaterial forms of labor alongside the production of objects, feminist work akin to the manifestos and pamphlets that the International Wages for Housework Campaign was spearheading in 1970s Italy. When Silvia Federici wrote *Wages against Housework*, she wasn’t calling for hourly wages for housewives as an end in itself—she wanted recognition of housework as labor specifically to bring it into the realm of things that can be refused and revolted against. To radically reorganize affection, love, and care in the labor market is no simple task, and *Diner Dash* and *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* certainly offer no optimistic or easy solutions. What they do offer is a first suggestion, incredible in its existence on a mass-market scale: to make affective labor count, to think critically about our fraught relationships with our work, and to playfully reimagine what might be.

Identifying the tensions between labor and leisure,

work and play, gives rise to any number of interesting academic projects. As games become more widespread and sophisticated, and casual games continue to casually pervade their players’ lives, the imperative to understand them will only grow. Games scholarship is beginning to find a foothold in the humanities, but there is much potential for more research following sociological methods, especially those based in ethnography and interviewing. In addition, my same question could—and should—be approached with alternative methods such as interviewing players and studying gameplay in order to write about casual games from a more experiential perspective. Untangling the rhetorical complexities of low media, often coded and dismissed as feminine, is an ongoing job for both sociology and cultural studies.

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# Index

2006 Social Capital Community Study, 37

9/11, 73

African American

    youth, 5, 42

Arab American, 52

    group boundaries of, 61

    immigration, 64

    narratives, 54

    relationship with Islam, 62, 72

    voting patterns of, 76

Arab American National Museum (AANM), 56

Auyero, Javier, 6

buffer analysis, 18, 22

capitalism, 84

casual games, 81

Chicago

    churches, 44

    police, 5

    public transportation, 16, 21

    racial disparities, 21

    South Chicago, 42

collective efficacy, 36

crime, criminalization, 11, 14, 42

    penal dragnet, 12

    sidewalk sentencing, 10

    extended emergency, 12

cultural organizations, 54

Dearborn, MI, 56, 72

Diner Dash, 81

ethnicity. See race

    panethnicity, 55, 62

food desert, 17

formal and informal ties, 36

Foucault, Michel, 6, 10, 14

Goffman, Erving, 56

Hispanic, 24, 54

    youth, 5

Hochschild, Arlie Russell, 83

Islamophobia, 64, 74

Kim Kardashian: Hollywood, 85

labor and leisure, 82-83

ludonarrative dissonance, 86

Marx, Karl, 83

network analysis, 18, 26

poverty, 12, 23, 34

power, 6

procedural rhetoric, 86

race, 44, 53

self actualization, 87

social capital, 33, 35

state, 7

    postmodernization of, 84

stigma, 56, 64

time

    control over, 6-8

    time management games, 88

transit desert, 20

Wacquant, Loïc, 12



DOING TIME ON THE STREETS OF CHICAGO'S SOUTH SIDE — SIEGEL

MODELING TRANSIT DESERTS — LeBARRON

EFFECTS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL ON NEIGHBORHOOD COLLECTIVE EFFICACY — BOHANNON

NARRATIVE STRATEGIES OF STIMA MANAGEMENT AND PANETHNIC MOBILIZATION — HAIDAR

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