eludamos
Journal for Computer Game Culture
Vol. 16, No. 2 (2025)

eludamos.org

Curled Up With a Good Game

A Study on Personality Traits and Game Motives of Cozy Game Players

Rowan Daneels and Kato Maes

Eludamos: Journal for Computer Game Culture
Volume 16, issue 2 (2025), pp. 185–215

Curled Up With a Good Game

A Survey Study on Personality Traits and Game Motives of Cozy Game Players

ROWAN DANEELS AND KATO MAES

Abstract

Cozy games, risen in popularity since the COVID-19 pandemic, are generally characterized by their easy mechanics, prosocial narratives, lack of violence, and overall feelings of comfort, safety, abundance, and softness. While academic research primarily focuses on defining cozy games and exploring their impact during the pandemic, little is known about who plays them and why. Therefore, we conducted an online survey of 277 cozy game players, examining players' game motives and their Light and Dark Triad personality traits. Results show key reasons to play cozy games, including *moral self-reflection* (i.e., seeing cozy gameplay as a morally sensible activity), *agency* (i.e., having the freedom and control to make decisions and pursue actions according to players' own desires or goals), *escapism* (i.e., escaping from daily reality into a safe virtual environment), experiencing *eudaimonic emotions* (i.e., feeling moved, awe, and having elevating or heartwarming or feelings), and an interest in the game's *narrative*. Additionally, players scored significantly higher on Light Triad personality traits, with those scoring high on Humanism being more motivated by eudaimonic and social reasons. This study provides novel insights into the study of cozy games, the (eudaimonic) motives to play them, and cozy game players' personality traits.

Keywords

Cozy games; eudaimonia; game motives; Light and Dark Triad; survey

---

The lights are dimmed and you are curled up in your favorite chair. You start playing a game where you design your home, clean up your inherited farm, pack your belongings, climb mountains, or surf the oceans. Doing this, chances are high that you are playing a *cozy game*. Cozy games are characterized by feelings of comfort, empathy, meaningfulness, relaxation, safety, abundance, softness, and the absence of violence (Boudreau et al., 2025; Short et al., 2018; Wäppling et al., 2022; Waszkiewicz & Bakun, 2020). While this type of game has existed for some time (e.g., *The Sims*; Maxis, 2000), the term *cozy games* emerged only recently. Such games gained

Eludamos Vol. 16, No. 2 (2025), pp. 185–215
https://doi.org/10.7557/ejcgc.v16i2.7938

popularity especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, as they allowed players to move to a peaceful parallel world where social interactions with others were still possible, temporarily escaping the harsh and lonely reality of the pandemic (Pearce et al., 2022). Even after the pandemic, the popularity of cozy games continues.

Although scholarship is limited, researchers have started examining cozy games alongside their growing player base. The main focus of this research is occupied with conceptualizing cozy games (Boudreau et al., 2025; Wäppling et al., 2022; Waszkiewicz & Bakun, 2020)—analyzing, for example, the *coziness* in this type of game (Andiloro, 2024; Simond & Klös, 2024)—and investigating what impact they had on players during the COVID-19 pandemic (Lewis et al., 2021; Pearce et al., 2022; Zhu, 2021). However, little is known about why players choose to play cozy games and whether their personality traits relate to their play motives for this particular game type.

Prior research has already distinguished plenty of reasons to play games, such as fun, competition, or as a pastime (De Grove et al., 2016; Scharkow et al., 2015; Sherry et al., 2006). Recently, Possler et al. (2024) determined that players are also motivated to experience meaningfulness, intense emotions, and self-reflection (i.e., eudaimonic experiences); all experiences that cozy games can elicit based on their characteristics (Wäppling et al., 2022; Waszkiewicz & Bakun, 2020). However, eudaimonia has mainly been studied as experiences during gameplay, not as motives before gameplay (Daneels et al., 2021, 2023). Therefore, by examining (eudaimonic) game motives for cozy games, the current study intends to contribute to this innovative line of research on eudaimonic gaming. Furthermore, players' personality traits have previously been studied in relation to game motives. For example, de Hesselle et al. (2021) found that personality traits from the Big Five model (i.e., openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism; McCrae & John, 1992) were related to specific gaming motives. However, personality traits of individuals playing cozy games and how these relate to players' game motives remain understudied. Therefore, this study aims to examine the motives behind players' selection of cozy games and determine whether players' personality traits relate to these motives. An online survey among 277 cozy game players was conducted to investigate this topic.

Cozy games

Cozy games is a subjective term to describe all games that provoke a feeling of warmth, safety, and comfort among players (Boudreau et al., 2025; Wäppling et al., 2022; Waszkiewicz & Tymińska, 2024). Short et al. (2018) referred to the *coziness* of these games as feelings of safety, abundance, and softness. Safety relates here to the absence of violent content present in many other (types of) digital games as well as the ability for players to play at their own pace. Abundance refers to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, where cozy games frequently offer players an abundance

of in-game food and energy (i.e., fulfilling basic needs). By relinquishing the need for survival, cozy games allow players to focus on higher-level needs such as self-realization and the initiation of deeper relationships (Wäppling et al., 2022; Waszkiewicz & Bakun, 2020). Finally, softness can be understood as the slow pace and achievable tasks in cozy games that induce calmness in players (Short et al., 2018). Boudreau (2024) recently framed this softness as a lack of challenge or 'demands', showing that cozy games typically present little to no challenges in terms of, for instance, complex input controls (physical demands) or difficult puzzle mechanics (cognitive demands).

Given that these defining elements involve subjective feelings that differ between individuals, meaning that any game can potentially be seen as a cozy game (de Pan & Bosman, 2024; Boudreau et al., 2025), cozy games are not considered a distinct game genre but rather a type or style of digital game (cf. recent research questioning the merit of genre labels in modern digital games due to their complexity and hybrid forms: Bowman et al., 2024). This relates to recent scholarship on the growing incorporation of *coziness* elements into traditionally more violent or non-cozy game types, such as horror games (Waszkiewicz, 2024), first-person shooters (Smith, 2024), open-world survival games (Gnat, 2024), and historical games (Vandewalle, 2025).

In addition to subjective feelings, cozy games often have several in-game features that, on their own, are not unique to cozy games but, when combined, set cozy games apart from other types of games (Boudreau et al., 2025; Campbell, 2022; Short et al., 2018; Wäppling et al., 2022; Waszkiewicz & Bakun, 2020; Waszkiewicz & Tymińska, 2024). These characteristics include stylized and less realistic graphics, soothing soundtracks, easy control and pause mechanics, narrative themes focusing on helping others and generosity, educational elements, social interactions with other players and non-playable characters (or NPCs), meaningful play (i.e., players practicing real-life skills in a safe environment as well as satisfying needs such as mastery, self-reflection and connectedness), and the absence of stereotypical task divisions (i.e., each player can perform any activity regardless of gender or other demographic characteristics, including cooking, fishing, harvesting, and falling in love). *Stardew Valley* (ConcernedApe, 2016) exemplifies this last feature, where a character's gender is virtually irrelevant to clothing options, physical characteristics, or romantic relationships.

Besides conceptualizing cozy games, scholarship has examined the growing popularity of cozy games through societal changes such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Negative events such as the pandemic evoke individuals' need for safety and social, positive, and heartwarming experiences; all of which can be provided by cozy games (Waszkiewicz & Bakun, 2020). For example, Pearce et al. (2022) showed through interviews that parents played *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* (Nintendo EPD, 2020) to cope with their pandemic-related stress. The game allowed players to psychologically detach from their stressful reality. It also provided relaxation, offered players feelings of accomplishment by achieving in-game goals, and gave players a sense of

control when playing. Cozy games also offered a virtual world during the pandemic, where players could find both spiritual comfort and the ability to maintain social contact with friends and family despite physical separation (Lewis et al., 2021; Pearce et al., 2022; Zhu, 2021). While research has investigated the role of cozy games during the pandemic, little is known about why players are motivated to play these games beyond the pandemic context.

Digital gaming motives

Individuals' motives to play digital games have been studied extensively, mainly through three fundamental frameworks. Via the self-determination theory or SDT, prior research has shown that players' needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness motivated their game use (Reinecke et al., 2012; Ryan et al., 2006). The social cognitive theory or SCT poses that players' motives are fueled by their expected outcomes of playing (e.g., performing well or playing to pass the time), which are based on players' own previous experiences, observations of other players' behavior, and their sense of self-efficacy (De Grove et al., 2016; van Rooij et al., 2017). Finally, the uses and gratifications theory or UGT assumes that players actively select games to satisfy their needs (similar to SDT), identifying a variety of motives such as escapism, fantasy, role-playing, social interaction, diversion, competition, and challenge (Scharkow et al., 2015; Sherry et al., 2006).

These theories have different explanatory mechanisms for game motivation but often identify similar reasons why people play games. This is shown in syntheses of existing game motivation research (Holl et al., 2024; Scharkow et al., 2015), coming up with a range of game motives such as wanting to play games to explore, for escapism, to make new friends or to experience a game's narrative. However, these overarching game motivation scales fail to include normative motives to play games, nor do they account for unconscious selection processes (cf. an often-made critique of the UGT active selection approach: Ruggiero, 2000); both aspects the Digital Games Motivation Scale or DGMS (De Grove et al., 2016) accounts for. The DGMS is a validated measurement instrument based on the SCT that consists of eight different dimensions to explain players' gaming motives:

1. Agency: playing games to do what you want to do.
2. Narrative: playing games to experience a convincing story and characters.
3. Escapism: playing games to temporarily escape reality.
4. Pastime: playing games to alleviate boredom and kill time.
5. Performance: playing games to make progress in the game.
6. Social: playing games to interact with others.

7. Moral self-reflection: playing games because you feel gaming as an activity is morally correct.

8. Habit: playing games as a routine.

Connecting these motives to cozy games' characteristics, escapism might be a key motive, as cozy games rarely include violence and provide players with a relaxing and safe virtual environment (Waszkiewicz & Bakun, 2020). This has previously been found in studies linking cozy game play to times of crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Pearce et al., 2022). Moreover, similar to casual games, cozy games have a softness to them that translates into achievable tasks, easy mechanics, and overall less demanding player experiences (Boudreau, 2024; Short et al., 2018), making it easier to progress or perform in a game. Finally, cozy games often include deeper, meaningful storylines as well as the ability to socially interact with other players and/or NPCs (Boudreau et al., 2025; Wäppling et al., 2022; Waszkiewicz & Bakun, 2020), which was especially useful during Covid-19 (e.g., Pearce et al., 2022). This implies that individuals might be motivated to play these games for their narrative and for social reasons. This leads to the following hypotheses:

H1: Escapism will be an important motive (i.e., the average score of this motive will lie above the scale's midpoint) for cozy game players.

H2: Performance will be an important motive (i.e., the average score of this motive will lie above the scale's midpoint) for cozy game players.

H3: Experiencing the narrative will be an important motive (i.e., the average score of this motive will lie above the scale's midpoint) for cozy game players.

H4: Having social interactions will be an important motive (i.e., the average score of this motive will lie above the scale's midpoint) for cozy game players.

Interestingly, most of the DGMS motives have been connected both theoretically (Klimmt & Possler, 2021) and empirically (Possler et al., 2020) to hedonic game experiences of fun and enjoyment, implying these motives can be categorized as more hedonic-oriented motives. Considering that cozy games often include emotional narratives and meaningful play (Boudreau et al., 2025; Wäppling et al., 2022; Waszkiewicz & Bakun, 2020), it is also important to consider eudaimonic game motives, such as seeking meaningful experiences, intense emotions, and self-reflection (Possler et al., 2024).

Hedonic and eudaimonic gaming motives

Scholarship has traditionally explained media selection in terms of people seeking pleasure, fun, and enjoyment. Zillmann's mood management theory (1988), for example, suggested that individuals tend to choose fun media content to regulate negative emotions and stress. This focus on hedonic experiences of pleasure, comfort,

enjoyment, and positive emotions (Vorderer et al., 2004) is also prevalent in games research. Digital games, especially in their earliest forms, were mainly designed to elicit enjoyment and distraction among players (Ivory, 2016). More recently, scholars found that media entertainment can elicit more profound, deeper experiences that are personally meaningful, emotionally moving, or thought-provoking (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010). These experiences were categorized under the term *eudaimonia*, stemming from Aristotelian philosophy to describe experiences "reflecting virtue, excellence, the best within us, and the full development of our potential" (Huta & Waterman, 2014, p. 1427). Translating this to games, Daneels et al. (2021) showed that players can have eudaimonic experiences while playing games that can be described as personally meaningful, emotionally moving, self-reflecting, socially connecting, and nostalgic.

Beyond experiences, research has investigated eudaimonic reasons such as seeking meaning and personal growth when selecting different media entertainment, next to the prevalent hedonic motives (Oliver & Raney, 2011). However, recent literature reviews have shown that studies on eudaimonic reasons to play digital games specifically are virtually absent (Daneels et al., 2021; Holl et al., 2024), instead mainly examining eudaimonic game experiences (Daneels et al., 2021, 2023). To remedy this research gap, Possler et al. (2024) explored players' eudaimonic gaming motives by extending a gaming motivation scale (Scharkow et al., 2015) with a set of eudaimonic motives based on eudaimonic game research (Daneels et al., 2021) and positive psychology (Huta & Waterman, 2014). Eudaimonic reasons included, for example, wanting to play a game to grow as a person, reflect on themselves, or experience something meaningful to players' own lives (Possler et al., 2024).

These eudaimonic game motives have yet to be studied in a cozy game context. Through their characteristics, cozy games have the potential to elicit eudaimonic experiences, implying players might be likely to select this game type for eudaimonic reasons. For instance, having an abundance of in-game resources in cozy games allows players to focus not on survival but on higher-order needs such as self-realization, personal development, and the initiation of deeper relationships (Wäppling et al., 2022; Waszkiewicz & Bakun, 2020)—needs that have been linked to eudaimonia (Huta & Waterman, 2014). Similarly, the softness or slow pacing of cozy games can allow players to free up more time for self-reflection and engagement in more emotional elements of a cozy game's story (Short et al., 2018). Additionally, poignant narrative themes focused on altruism and generosity as well as deeper social connections with other players and NPCs, which are key elements of cozy games (Short et al., 2018; Waszkiewicz & Bakun, 2020), have also been identified as key elicitors of eudaimonic game experiences (Daneels et al., 2020; Oliver et al., 2016). Based on these insights, we formulated the following hypothesis:

> H5: Eudaimonia will be an important motive (i.e., the average score of this motive will lie above the scale's midpoint) for cozy game players.

Beyond a focus on gaming motives, this study intends to investigate cozy gamers' personality traits and how they relate to their reasons for playing cozy games, similar to prior research on digital games in general (de Hesselle et al., 2021).

However, personality traits of individuals playing cozy games and how these relate to players' game motives remain understudied.

Personality traits

Individuals' consistent ways of thinking, feeling, acting, and experiencing have been subsumed under the term personality (Neumann et al., 2020). Several approaches to personality traits exist. The most widely used perspective is the five-factor model of personality or Big Five model (McCrae & John, 1992). This model includes five personality traits of *openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness,* and *neuroticism*. Despite its frequent use, the Big Five model has faced considerable criticism regarding its many variations, problematically high correlations between traits, lack of theoretical support, and exclusion of other important traits (Eysenck, 1992; Grucza & Goldberg, 2007).

Therefore, we looked at more recently studied approaches of personality traits such as the Dark and Light Triad personality factors. These perspectives focus on how individuals are either self-centered or prosocial (Johnson, 2018). The Dark Triad is a set of three personality traits—Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy—that can be considered socially aversive, yet remain within the range of normal functioning (Paulhus & Williams, 2002). While Machiavellianism refers to a manipulative personality that lacks empathy and has no regard for morality, narcissism relates to having an excessive admiration for oneself that leads to feelings of uniqueness and superiority. A psychopathic personality, finally, connects to decreased levels of empathy, violent tendencies, and impulsiveness. In contrast, the Light Triad also consists of three personality characteristics—Kantianism, Humanism, and faith or belief in humanity—related to having a loving attitude toward others (Kaufman et al., 2019; Neumann et al., 2020). Kantianism includes the notion that other people are not a means to an end, contrary to Machiavellianism, and people should be treated with honesty and respect. Humanism is about appreciating and admiring others, while belief in humanity concerns the belief in the goodness of other people.

In a gaming context, prior research has shown that players' personality has an impact on their motives and experiences (de Hesselle et al., 2021; Tang et al., 2020). The Dark Triad has mainly been examined related to negative aspects of games, such as addiction and aggression. For example, Tang et al. (2020) showed that players with higher levels of Machiavellianism and psychopathy characteristics scored higher on indicators of gaming disorder or addiction. Additionally, all three Dark personality traits were related to gaming disorder when players were motivated to play

games for escapism or social reasons. Next to this, Jones (2019) found that a psychopathy personality predicted aggressive gaming behavior, while Machiavellianism predicted addictive gaming behavior. The Light Triad has been studied less in a gaming context. Mejía-Suazo et al. (2025), for instance, recently showed that there was no significant relation between individuals with Light Triad traits and internet gaming disorder. While the Big Five model has seen considerable attention in game research (de Hesselle et al., 2021), the current study will approach personality using the more recently formulated and less studied Dark and Light Triad personality traits, thereby expanding scholarship on personality within a gaming context.

The ability of cozy games to let players experience a slower or less-demanding style of play, a setting where players need to help others and show generosity without the need for violence, and the possibility to socially interact with other players and NPCs on a deeper level (Boudreau, 2024; Short et al., 2018; Wäppling et al., 2022; Waszkiewicz & Bakun, 2020) leads to believe that players who score higher on prosocial Light Triad personality traits are more appealed to this type of game. Therefore, we posed the following hypothesis:

> H6: Cozy game players will score significantly higher on the Light Triad personality traits compared to the Dark Triad traits.

Furthermore, Kaufman et al. (2019) showed that individuals' motives to conduct a certain activity can be related to their Dark and Light Triad personality characteristics. In terms of Light Triad personality, prosocial individuals who seek to help other people strengthen their own self-confidence and self-awareness (Schwartz & Sendor, 1999), making them grow on a personal level and enabling them to experience eudaimonia (Huta & Waterman, 2014). Additionally, having an altruistic personality might lead to players wanting to experience social connectedness with other players or in-game characters, which is a eudaimonic experience (Daneels et al., 2021). Therefore, we expect that players with a Light Triad personality are inclined to play cozy games for eudaimonic motives such as self-realization and personal growth as well as for social motives (Possler et al., 2024). Finally, Tang et al. (2020) indicated that players' Dark Triad personality traits were connected to playing games for reasons of escapism and social interactions. This led us to the following hypotheses:

> H7: Cozy game players' Light Triad personality traits will be positively related to their eudaimonic game motives (H7a) and social game motives (H7b).

> H8: Cozy game players' Dark Triad personality traits will be positively related to their social game motives (H8a) and escapism game motives (H8b).

Figure 1 provides a visual overview of the study's hypotheses, representing the hypothesized relationships between digital gaming motives, personality traits, and playing cozy games.

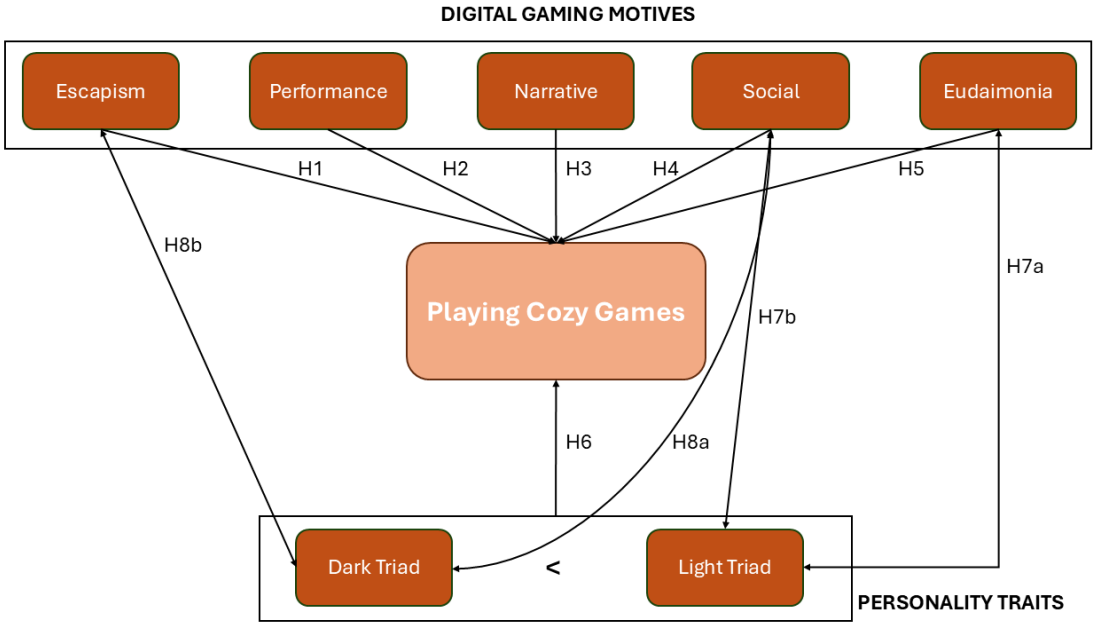

Figure 1. Visual representation of the study's hypotheses.

Methods

Procedure

We conducted an online survey using Qualtrics to study cozy game players' personality traits and gaming motives, allowing us to examine the relationship between both of them. Before data collection started, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, ensured that their data was processed anonymously, and asked for their written consent. The survey started with several socio-demographic (i.e., age, gender, nationality) and game-related background questions (i.e., game frequency, favorite cozy game). Respondents were then asked about their gaming motives to play a cozy game in the near future. The survey ended with several questions on respondents' Light and Dark Triad personality traits.

The full questionnaire and all analysis files can be found on OSF (https://osf.io/n6urd). Surveys took on average 11 minutes 30 seconds to complete (SD = 9 minutes 42 seconds).

Sample

Cozy gamers were contacted through multiple online communities on Reddit (i.e., r/CozyGamers with 79000 members), Discord (e.g., *The Cozy Gaming Club, Stardew Valley,* and *Unpacking*), and Facebook (e.g., *Cozy Gamers* and *Animal Crossing New Horizons Community*). See Appendix 1 (or Supplementary Table A on OSF) for the full list of included gaming communities. All respondents had to be at least eighteen

years old to participate in the study. A total of 389 participants filled in the survey. Through data cleaning, we removed N = 106 respondents who did not fully complete the questionnaire, N = 2 minors, N = 2 respondents who filled in the survey in more than two hours, and N = 2 'straight liners' who indicated the same answer for all items of the motives and/or the personality scales.

The final sample consisted of 277 respondents. Respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 67 years old, with a mean age of 31.04 (SD = 8.40). The majority of respondents identified as female (78%), while 10.1% identified as male, 11.9% as non-binary or gender-fluid, and one respondent preferred not to mention their gender. In terms of nationality, 48.7% of respondents originated from the USA, 12.3% from the UK, 8.3% from both Canada and Belgium, and 22.4% from 24 other nationalities. They played on average 2 hours 39 minutes during a weekday (SD = 2 hours 25 minutes) and 4 hours 41 minutes during a day on the weekend (SD = 2 hours 31 minutes). Finally, respondents mentioned a range of favorite cozy games. By far the game most often mentioned was *Stardew Valley* (45.8%), followed by *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* and other games in the *Animal Crossing* franchise (12.8%), *Palia* (3.2%), *Minecraft* (3.2%), *The Sims* franchise (2.8%), *Disney Dreamlight Valley* (2.8%), and *Wylde Flowers* (2.5%). See Appendix 2 (or Supplementary Table B on OSF) for the full list.

Measurements

To measure gaming motives, we used the Digital Games Motivation Scale (or DGMS) by De Grove et al. (2016), as this scale also includes morally normative motives and habitual reasons to play games that other scales tend to overlook. The scale was adapted to cozy games, meaning that questions started with "If I were to play a cozy game in the near future, I would select a game where I…". The scale consists of 43 items across eight motivational dimensions: agency (5 items; e.g., "… can do my own thing during the game."; α = .75), narrative (9 items; e.g., "… feel involved in the story."; α = .83), escapism (5 items; e.g., "… can put daily reality aside."; α = .74), pastime (4 items; e.g., "… play because I am bored."; α = .86), performance (4 items; e.g., "… get far in the game."; α = .80), social motive (9 items; e.g., "… keep in touch with friends."; α = .92), habit (3 items; e.g., "Gaming is part of my normal routine."; α = .82), and moral self-reflection (4 items; e.g., "I feel good about playing games."; α = .78).

To measure eudaimonic game motives, we used the recently developed and validated Motivations of Eudaimonic Gaming (or MEG) scale (AUTHORS [Anonymized for peer review]). This scale includes 10 items divided into two motivational dimensions: self-realization (7 items; e.g. "… can grow as a person"; α = .86) and meaningful affect (3 items; e.g. "… feel moved"; α = .74).

For personality, we used the Short Dark Triad (SD3) scale by Jones and Paulhus (2014) and The Light Triad Scale by Kaufman et al. (2019). The SD3 scale was chosen because of its earlier validations and limited number of items to avoid survey fatigue

(Maples et al., 2014). The scale consists of 27 items spread across three personality traits: Machiavellianism (9 items; e.g., "I like to use clever manipulation to get my way."; α = .77), narcissism (9 items; e.g., "I know that I am special because everyone keeps telling me so."; α = .75), and psychopathy (9 items; e.g., "People who mess with me always regret it."; α = 75). Kaufman et al.'s (2019) Light Triad scale, chosen because of its brevity as well as being the only validated scale to measure Light Triad personality traits (to our knowledge), consists of 12 items for three personality traits: Humanism (4 items; e.g., "I tend to applaud the successes of other people."; α = .70), belief in humanity (4 items; e.g., "I think people are mostly good."; α = .68), and Kantianism (4 items; e.g., "I prefer honesty over charm."; α = .45). As Kantianism showed poor internal consistency (i.e., < .70), and removing items did not improve the reliability of this dimension, this set of personality traits was excluded from the analyses. This may have been caused by the alternation of positively and negatively worded items in the Kantianism scale, in contrast to the exclusively positive wording in the other two Light Triad dimensions. Such alternation has previously been shown to lead to misinterpretations and mistakes by respondents, which, in turn, lowers the internal reliability of scales (Sauro & Lewis, 2011; Zeng et al., 2024).

All main variables were measured with a Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Strongly disagree") to 7 ("Strongly agree").

Results

Motives to play cozy games (H1–H5)

Means and standard deviations were calculated for all dimensions of gaming motives (see **Table 1**), testing hypotheses 1 through 5. Overall, respondents were mostly motivated to play cozy games for reasons of moral self-reflection (M = 6.06; SD = .87) and agency (M = 5.80; SD = .68). This means that respondents choose to play cozy games mainly because they believe that playing these games is morally correct and because these games allow them to do what they want to do.

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Motivation		
Moral Self-Reflection[a]	6.05	.87
Agency[a]	5.80	.68
Escapism[a]	5.72	.87
Meaningful Affect (Eudaimonia)[a]	5.59	.98

Narrative[a]		5.42	.80
Performance[a]		5.09	.98
Habit[a]		4.99	1.39
Pastime[a]		4.58	1.35
Self-Realization (Eudaimonia)[a]		4.53	1.12
Social[a]		3.49	1.33
Personality			
Light Triad	Humanism[b]	5.87	.82
	Faith in humanity[b]	4.81	1.08
Dark Triad	Machiavellianism[b]	3.60	.94
	Narcissism[c]	3.19	.92
	Psychopathy[b]	2.42	.85

Note: $N^a = 277$; $N^b = 275$; $N^c = 274$; On a scale from 1–7.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for gaming motives and personality traits.

Testing our hypotheses of whether certain motives are important in the selection of cozy games (i.e., by scoring on average above the midpoint of the scale, so above 4 out of 7), we found that the motives of escapism (M = 5.72; SD = .87; confirming H1), performance (M = 5.09; SD = .68; confirming H2), the narrative (M = 5.42; SD = .80; confirming H3), eudaimonic meaningful affect (M = 5.59; SD = .98; confirming H5), and eudaimonic self-realization (M = 4.53; SD = 1.12; confirming H5 as well) were important to play cozy games. Only the social motive scored below the scale's midpoint (M = 3.49; SD = 1.33), as it was the least important reason for playing cozy games, rejecting H4.

Beyond hypothesis testing, we conducted a repeated measures ANOVA to see whether respondents' motives to play cozy games differed significantly from one another.[1] Mauchly's test indicated that the assumption of sphericity had been violated ($\chi^2(44) = 494.388$, $p < .001$) and the Greenhouse-Geisser estimate of sphericity

[1] While typically used to analyze differences in mean scores of one variable measured over more than two time points, a repeated measures ANOVA is also useful to determine significant differences between means of more than two conditions or dependent variables of the same type (Sullivan, 2008)—in our case, the different gaming motives.

was below .75 (ε = .72). Therefore, we used the Greenhouse-Geisser corrections for the within-subjects test (Field, 2009).

The overall model was significant: $F(6.436,1776.469) = 181.935$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .397$, indicating that there are significant differences between the different gaming motives. To examine which motives are significantly different, we conducted post-hoc pairwise comparisons based on Bonferroni corrections (see Supplementary Table C on OSF for all mean differences and p-values). These comparisons showed the following sequence from most to least important motives to play cozy games:

1. Moral self-reflection: scored significantly higher than all other motives.
    a. $p = .007$ with agency.
    b. $p < .001$ for comparisons with all other motives.
2. Agency, escapism, and eudaimonic meaningful affect: scored on the same level of importance ($p \geq .059$).
    a. They scored significantly higher than the other motives ($p < .001$), except for moral self-reflection (see above). There was also no significant difference between eudaimonic meaningful affect and narrative ($p = .052$).
3. Narrative: scored significantly higher than the other lower-scored motives ($p < .001$).
4. Performance and habit: scored on the same level of importance ($p = 1.00$)
    a. They scored significantly higher than the other lower-scored motives ($p < .001$).
5. Pastime and eudaimonic self-realization: scored on the same level of importance ($p = 1.00$)
    a. They scored significantly higher than the social gaming motive ($p < .001$).
6. Social motive: scored significantly lower than all other gaming motives

Cozy game players' personality traits (H6)

Descriptives (means and standard deviations) were also calculated for all dimensions of the Light and Dark Triad personality traits (see **Table 1**, above), testing hypothesis 6. We found that respondents on average scored higher on the Light Triad personality traits (Humanism: $M = 5.87$; $SD = .82$ and faith in humanity: $M = 4.81$; $SD = 1.08$), while they scored lower on the Dark Triad characteristics.

To investigate whether these differences were statistically significant (and test H6), we conducted another repeated measures ANOVA with the Dark and Light Triad personality traits as within-subjects variables. Mauchly's test indicated that the assumption of sphericity had been violated ($\chi^2(9) = 291.605$, $p<.001$) and the Greenhouse-Geisser estimate of sphericity was below .75 ($\varepsilon = .61$). Therefore, we used the Greenhouse-Geisser corrections for the within-subjects test (Field, 2009).

The overall model was significant: $F(2.423,661.610) = 610.843$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .691$, indicating that there are significant differences between the different personality traits. Post-hoc pairwise comparisons based on Bonferroni corrections (see Supplementary Table D on OSF for all mean differences and p-values) showed that respondents scored significantly higher ($p < .001$) on the two Light Triad personality traits (i.e., faith in humanity and Humanism) compared to the Dark Triad personality traits of Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy. This confirms H6, showing that cozy players assess themselves as having more positive and compassionate personality traits.

Relationship between cozy game motives and personality traits (H7–H8)

Finally, we wanted to examine how cozy players' personality traits are related to their specific game motives, focusing specifically on the eudaimonic, escapism, and social motives (i.e., those with concrete hypotheses: H7 and H8). An initial correlation analysis showed that respondents' Light Triad personality trait of Humanism was positively and significantly correlated to the eudaimonic meaningful affect motive ($r = .326$; $p < .001$), the eudaimonic self-realization motive ($r = .156$; $p = .010$), and the social motive ($r = .154$; $p = .011$); while none of the motives were significantly correlated with the Light Triad trait of faith in humanity. In terms of Dark Triad traits, we found that Machiavellianism was significantly and positively correlated to escapism as a motive ($r = .125$; $p = .038$), while both narcissism ($r = .182$; $p = .002$) and psychopathy ($r = .218$; $p < .001$) are positively and significantly correlated with the social motive. **Table 2** shows the full correlation matrix of all motivational and personality traits dimensions.

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.
Moral Self-Reflection (1)	1														
Agency (2)	-.012	1													
Escapism (3)	.118	.349***	1												
Meaningful Affect (4)	.216***	.199***	.332***	1											
Narrative (5)	.179**	.218***	.286***	.541***	1										
Performance (6)	.063	.265***	.228***	.248***	.327***	1									
Habit (7)	.362***	.110	.215***	.121*	.189**	.147*	1								
Pastime (8)	-.183**	.229***	.219***	.027	.104	.263***	.119*	1							
Self-Realization (9)	.144*	.225***	.375***	.583***	.551***	.352***	.270***	.142*	1						
Social (10)	.059	.123*	.066	.264***	.285***	.312***	.193**	.102	.446***	1					
Humanism (LT) (11)	.171**	.103	.070	.326***	.182**	-.109	-.032	.009	.156*	.154*	1				
Faith in Humans (LT) (12)	.066	.059	.005	.113	.039	-.092	-.074	.062	-.036	.064	.500***	1			
Machiavellianism (DT) (13)	-.053	.085	.125*	-.058	.137*	.256***	.228***	.211***	.182**	.116	-.388***	-.323***	1		
Narcissism (DT) (14)	.000	.093	-.040	.070	.068	.171**	.014	-.016	.168**	.182**	-.021	.017	.281***	1	
Psychopathy (DT) (15)	-.050	.135*	.089	.010	.046	.149*	.195**	.143*	.257***	.218***	-.327***	-.345***	.580***	.341***	1

Note: *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001; DT = Dark Triad, LT = Light Triad

Table 2. Correlation matrix between gaming motives and personality traits.

We conducted four separate stepwise regression analyses, one for each gaming motive we had a hypothesis on (i.e., both eudaimonic motives, escapism, and social motive), to further test the hypothesized relationships. For each analysis, the gaming motives were used as dependent variables, while the control variables (age, gender, nationality, education, and game frequency) and the different personality trait dimensions were the independent variables (see **Table 3**). No multicollinearity problems were found across the four regression models, as the highest VIF value was 1.76.

Motives		**Eudaimonic Self-realization**	**Eudaimonic Meaningful Affect**	**Escapism**	**Social**
		β	β	β	β
Control Variables	Nationality	.104	**.140***	-.051	.043
	Age	-.076	-.017	-.048	**-.121***
	Gender	**.163****	.077	.070	.034
	Education	-.062	-.066	-.039	-.088
	Game Frequency (Weekend)	**.155***	.055	.034	**.266*****
	Game Frequency (Weekday)	.064	.086	.119	.043
Light Triad	Humanism	**.258*****	**.396*****	.085	**.167***
	Faith in Humanity	-.059	-.043	.021	.075
Dark Triad	Machiavellianism	**.167***	.037	**.163***	.054
	Narcissism	.085	.056	-.095	**.126***
	Psychopathy	.143	.053	.007	**.168***
R^2		.219	.167	.069	.233

Note: N = 257; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001; Statistically significant relationships in bold.

Table 3. Linear regression analysis with personality traits and gaming motives.

For both the eudaimonic self-realization (β = .258; p < .001) and meaningful affect motives (β = .396; p < .001), results showed that the Light Triad personality trait of Humanism was a strong positive and significant predictor of playing cozy games for eudaimonic reasons. However, the second Light Triad trait faith in humanity was no significant predictor for either of the eudaimonic motives. This partly confirms H7a. The same regression analysis also showed that the Dark Triad personality trait of Machiavellianism was a moderately strong positive and significant predictor of the eudaimonic self-realization motive (β = .167; p = .025). Regarding social reasons to play cozy games, the regression model shows that the Light Triad personality trait of Humanism (β = .167; p = .023) and the Dark Triad personality traits of psychopathy (β = .168; p = .024) and narcissism (β = .126; p = .043) were moderately strong positive and significant predictors, while faith in humanity and Machiavellianism were no significant predictors. These results partly confirm H7b (Light Triad) and H8a (Dark Triad). Finally, we found for the escapism motive that only the Dark Triad personality trait of Machiavellianism was a moderately strong positive and significant predictor (β = .163; p = .0.44), partly confirming H8b.

Discussion

Cozy games, increasingly popular since the COVID-19 pandemic, have seen limited academic interest, in particular regarding who plays them and why. Therefore, the present study investigated why players choose these games, what personality traits cozy game players have, and how players' personality traits relate to their game motives.

Playing cozy games for various reasons, except social interactions

For gaming motives, the results confirmed most of our hypotheses: escapism (H1), performance (H2), narrative (H3), and both eudaimonic motives of meaningful affect and self-realization (H5) were important motives for cozy game players, with average scores above the scale's midpoint.

As expected, players tend to choose cozy games to *escape* from their daily lives, which is especially relevant during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Lewis et al., 2021; Pearce et al., 2022; Zhu, 2021). While escapism often has a negative connotation—escaping into games can lead to, for example, excessive gaming—escapism can also be healthy, for instance, as a way of coping with daily life and stress (Kosa & Uysal, 2020). Due to their lack of violence, slow pacing, and overall safe and inviting environments (Boudreau et al., 2025; Wäppling et al., 2022; Waszkiewicz and Bakun, 2020; Waszkiewicz & Tymińska, 2024), cozy game players seem well-suited to allow players to temporarily escape. Furthermore, playing cozy games to swiftly progress and *perform* well (i.e., performance motive) can be explained by their characteristic softness, which implies cozy games have achievable tasks, easy mechanics, and are typically less demanding for players (Boudreau, 2024; Short et al., 2018;

Waszkiewicz & Bakun, 2020). Since most cozy games are easy to play, players will more likely expect to perform well. Additionally, wanting to play cozy games for their *narrative* aligns with the idea that cozy games often include deeper storylines with themes like empathy, altruism, and generosity (Boudreau et al., 2025; Waszkiewicz & Bakun, 2020). This is not surprising, as the narrative has been found as a key motivator for game use in general (De Grove et al., 2016; Scharkow et al., 2015).

Moreover, we confirmed that *eudaimonia* was a strong deciding factor in the selection of cozy games. Their abundance of in-game resources allows players to engage in meaningful play, or becoming a better person through self-realization and personal growth (Wäppling et al., 2022). In addition, cozy games' slow pacing lets players focus on self-reflection and get caught up in emotional storylines (Short et al., 2018). Both of these aspects explain why *eudaimonic self-realization* was identified as an important motive. Furthermore, the second dimension of eudaimonic motives, *eudaimonic meaningful affect*, was even more important in selecting cozy games. As cozy games are frequently described as wholesome through the inclusion of poignant and empathic storylines and characters as well as cute aesthetics (Boudreau et al., 2025; Campbell, 2022; Wäppling et al., 2022; Waszkiewicz & Tymińska, 2024), which have been previously identified as key elicitors of eudaimonic game experiences (Oliver et al., 2016), players seemingly choose to play these games to feel moved or experience heartwarming moments while playing (i.e., eudaimonic meaningful affect). These findings also support the existence of eudaimonic gaming motives (Possler et al., 2024). Interestingly, we found that meaningful affect was a significantly more important motive than self-realization. Whether this difference only exists in cozy games or whether this persists in other game types should be explored in future research.

Unexpectedly, players were not as motivated to play cozy games for *social reasons* (H4) as we anticipated. Respondents scored this motive significantly lower than all other motives. On average, it was the only motive in this study rated below the scale's midpoint, despite cozy games providing plenty of social interactions with both human players and NPCs (Wäppling et al., 2022; Waszkiewicz & Bakun, 2020) and despite social motives being prevalent throughout game motivation research (Sherry et al., 2006; Scharkow et al., 2015). This could be the result of using the Digital Games Motivation Scale (DGMS) by De Grove et al. (2016), which focuses only on socializing with other human players within its scale questions, leaving out interactions with NPCs. Player-avatar relationships are a key element of gaming in general (Banks & Bowman, 2016) and of cozy games in particular (Wäppling et al., 2022; Waszkiewicz & Bakun, 2020). Excluding such (para)social interactions from the current study's operationalization of social motives may lead to misinterpreting the current findings, as social reasons could also be an important motivational driver for cozy games when player-avatar relationships are considered. Future research should therefore consider players' social motives for interacting with NPCs, by looking into other measurements such as Bowman et al.'s (2016) character attachment scale or Banks et al.'s (2019) common player-avatar interaction (cPAX) scale. Another

explanation for this surprising finding could be the nature of our respondents. Half of our sample were fans of the cozy game *Stardew Valley* (ConcernedApe, 2016), a farming simulator that mostly focuses on interactions with NPCs and less with other human players (although there is the possibility to play with friends in a cooperative setting). While respondents were asked to rate their motives for playing cozy games in general rather than for their favorite cozy game, the combination of this very specific player population (see *Limitations*) and the absence of questions about players' social motives to interact with NPCs may have biased our results.

The Light Triad personality traits of cozy gamers

As expected, cozy game players scored significantly higher on Light Triad traits than Dark Triad traits, supporting H6. This can be explained by cozy games' slower pacing, frequent collaborative settings, and altruistic and empathic narratives (Boudreau et al., 2025; Wäppling et al., 2022; Waszkiewicz & Bakun, 2020). Our findings indicate that cozy gamers overall have a prosocial personality (Johnson, 2018), appreciate others, and believe in the good of humanity (Kaufman et al., 2019)—contributing to the scarce scholarship that examines players' Light Triad personality traits (Mejía-Suazo et al., 2025). However, given that Kantianism was not included in the analysis due to poor internal reliability, we can only conclude that cozy gamers scored significantly higher on two out of the three Light Triad personality traits.

Furthermore, the lower scores for all three Dark Triad personality traits show that these traits contradict key characteristics of cozy games: for instance, psychopathy, which indicates a low level of empathy, contrasts strongly with cozy games' empathic narrative themes (Waszkiewicz & Bakun, 2020). However, caution is needed when interpreting these results due to their self-report nature. Respondents could have presented themselves more favorably than their true personality (i.e., socially desirable responding bias in personality research; Paulhus, 2002).

Motives and personality traits matched

Finally, building on prior research (de Hesselle et al., 2021; Tang et al., 2020), we investigated whether players' personality traits related to their play motives. Humanism (i.e., Light Triad personality) was positively related to both eudaimonic self-realization and meaningful affect (partially confirming H7a), and to the social motive (partially confirming H7b). Schwartz and Sendor (1999) found that helping others (cf. Humanism) can contribute to someone's self-confidence and self-awareness, which ties in with the eudaimonic game motives for self-realization and personal growth (Possler et al., 2024). Similarly, eudaimonic meaningful affect, or being motivated to experience awe of others and feel uplifted when others do good deeds, is closely related to the Humanism aspects of appreciating and admiring others (Kaufman et al., 2019). More so, being humane and open toward others might lead players to

become motivated to play games for social reasons. However, future research could further investigate this speculative explanation.

Regarding Dark Triad traits, both narcissism and psychopathy were positively related to social motives (partially confirming H8a), while Machiavellianism was positively related to escapism (partially confirming H8b); confirming previous research by Tang et al. (2020). Surprisingly, Machiavellianism was positively connected to the eudaimonic self-realization gaming motive. One possible explanation for this finding is that it reflects a spurious association, or false correlation. In regression analyses using cross-sectional (non-causal) data, it is possible to detect statistically significant relationships that do not represent actual causal links in reality (Ghouse et al., 2024). Typically, such spurious relationships occur when a third, confounding variable is at play. In our case, this is illustrated by the relatively low average scores on the Dark Triad Machiavellianism trait in our sample, particularly compared with the Light Triad traits and the eudaimonic self-realization gaming motive. This suggests that most respondents did not in fact report Machiavellian personality characteristics, making it likely that the observed association is a statistical artifact rather than a genuine relationship. Alternatively, since individuals with stronger Machiavellian personality traits tend to pursue personal goals at the expense of others (Rauthman, 2012), they may be strongly motivated to seek self-realization and personal development, both core elements of inward-driven eudaimonia (Oliver et al., 2018). In this case however, cozy game players with Machiavellian traits may define personal growth in more self-serving terms. Important to note here is that this Machiavellian interpretation of personal growth does not align with the more virtuous, eudaimonic understanding of the same concept (Huta & Waterman, 2014), as some of the psychological processes that typically support eudaimonic responses (e.g., prosocial orientations) may be incompatible with self-centered personality traits. This second, speculative explanation, as well as the potential relationship between eudaimonia (and eudaimonic play motives) on one hand and antisocial personality traits or outcomes on the other hand, needs further investigation (Daneels et al., 2023).

Limitations

The decisions made in this study have also introduced certain limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, participant recruitment resulted in an overrepresentation of female players, which could have impacted our results. For instance, Neumann et al. (2020) found that Dark Triad personality traits are more common in men and Light Triad in women (i.e., women having a more caring and nurturing personality, perhaps largely because societal norms enforce this expectation: Bem, 1993). This could be an underlying bias to our findings that cozy gamers score significantly higher on Light Triad personality traits. Future research should therefore collect a more gender-balanced sample when studying cozy games.

Second, nearly half of the respondents mentioned *Stardew Valley* (ConcernedApe, 2016) as their favorite cozy game. Although they were asked about their motives as

'playing any cozy game in the near future', having their favorite cozy game such as *Stardwey Valley* in mind may have biased their responses toward that particular game. Similarly, some respondents mentioned games like *The Last of Us* (Naughty Dog, 2013) or *Fortnite* (Epic Games, 2017) as their favorite cozy game, even though these games do not align with current definitions of cozy games (Short et al., 2018; Wäppling et al., 2022; Waszkiewicz & Bakun, 2020). This suggests that cozy games as a game type are still subjective, requiring further examination in future research. A more diverse sample with varying preferences for and experiences with cozy games could also lead to more representative findings in future studies.

Third, the cross-sectional design of our study limits the ability to make causal claims about the relationship between players' personality traits and their motives for choosing cozy games. To address this, future research should employ an experimental design, not only to study this particular relationship but also to investigate how players' motives for playing cozy games could predict (1) their actual cozy game use, (2) their hedonic and eudaimonic experiences while playing these games, and (3) positive outcomes of cozy game play, like players' well-being.

Conclusion

Cozy games, known for their relaxing and easy gameplay, have gained popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. While academic research has mostly focused on defining cozy games and their impact during the pandemic, little is known about who plays cozy games or why. An online survey among 277 cozy game players first revealed several key play motives, including moral self-reflection or believing that playing cozy games is a morally sensible activity, agency, escapism, eudaimonic meaningful affect, and interest in the game's narrative. Interestingly, playing cozy games to have social interactions with other players was the least important motive. Furthermore, cozy game players self-reported higher levels of Light Triad personality traits, specifically Humanism and faith in humanity, compared to Dark Triad traits. Additionally, players who scored higher on Humanism were more likely to play cozy games for eudaimonic and social reasons. However, players with higher Dark Triad traits were also motivated by eudaimonic self-realization, social interactions, and escapism.

These findings provide new insights into why people play cozy games, highlighting eudaimonic game motives and further validating a recently developed scale measuring these specific game motives. It also connects Light Triad personality traits to gaming motives, for the first time to our knowledge, advancing research on personality and digital games in general, and cozy games in particular.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare to have no potential conflicts of interest concerning the research, authorship, funding, and/or publication of this article.

References

Andiloro, A. (2024). Comfortably numb: An ideological analysis of coziness in videogames. *Replay: The Polish Journal of Game Studies, 11*(1), 79-92. https://doi.org/10.18778/2391–8551.11.06

Banks, J., & Bowman, N. D. (2016). Avatars are (sometimes) people too: Linguistic indicators of parasocial and social ties in player–avatar relationships. *New Media & Society, 18*(7), 1257–1276. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814554898

Banks, J., Bowman, N. D., Tammy Lin, J.-H., Pietschmann, D., & Wasserman, J. A. (2019). The common player-avatar interaction scale (cPAX): Expansion and cross-language validation. *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies, 129*, 64–73. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhcs.2019.03.003

Bem, S. L. (1993). *The lenses of gender: Transforming the debate on sexual inequality*. Yale University Press.

Boudreau, K. (2024). Beyond aesthetics: Players, player-characters and interactivity-as-demand in cozy games. *Replay: The Polish Journal of Game Studies, 12*(1), 7–22. https://doi.org/10.18778/2391–8551.12.04

Boudreau, K., Consalvo, M., & Phelps, A. (2025). Whose vibe is it anyway? Negotiating definitions of cozy games. In T. X. Bui (Ed.), *Proceedings of the 58th Hawaii international conference on system sciences* (pp. 2645–2654). https://hdl.handle.net/10125/109161

Bowman, N. D., Klecka, H., Li, Z., Yoshimura, K., & Green, C. S. (2024). A continuous-space description of video games: A preliminary investigation. *Psychology of Popular Media.* Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1037/ppm0000522

Bowman, N. D., Oliver, M. B., Rogers, R., Sherrick, B., Woolley, J., & Chung, M.-Y. (2016). In control or in their shoes? How character attachment differentially influences video game enjoyment and appreciation. *Journal of Gaming & Virtual Worlds*, *8*(1), 83–99. https://doi.org/10.1386/jgvw.8.1.83_1

Campbell, C. (2022, November 28). What are cozy games, and what makes them cozy? *Gamesindustry.biz*. https://www.gamesindustry.biz/what-makes-a-cozy-game-cozy

ConcernedApe. (2016). *Stardew Valley* [Microsoft Windows]. Digital game published by ConcernedApe.

Daneels, R., Bowman, N. D., Possler, D., & Mekler, E. D. (2021). The 'eudaimonic experience': A scoping review of the concept in digital games research. *Media and Communication*, *9*(2), 178–190. https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v9i2.3824

Daneels, R., Vandebosch, H., & Walrave, M. (2020). "Just for fun?": An exploration of digital games' potential for eudaimonic media experiences among Flemish adolescents. *Journal of Children and Media, 14*(3), 285–301. https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2020.1727934

Daneels, R., Vandebosch, H., & Walrave, M. (2023). 'Deeper gaming': A literature review and research agenda on eudaimonia in digital games research. *Technology, Mind, and Behavior*, *4*(2), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1037/TMB0000108

De Grove, F., Cauberghe, V., & Van Looy, J. (2016). Development and validation of an instrument for measuring individual motives for playing digital games. *Media Psychology*, *19*(1), 101–125. https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2014.902318

de Hesselle, L. C., Rozgonjuk, D., Sindermann, C., Pontes, H. M., & Montag, C. (2021). The associations between Big Five personality traits, gaming motives, and self-reported time spent gaming. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *171*, 110483. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2020.110483

de Pan, G., & Bosman, F. (2024). If all is cozy, what isn't? Some conceptual problems regarding cozy games. *Into the Magic Circle: Rethinking Homo Ludens, 1*(1), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.71265/ebqz9m33

Epic Games. (2017). *Fortnite* [Microsoft Windows]. Digital game published by Epic Games.

Eysenck, H. J. (1992). Four ways five factors are not basic. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *13*(6), 667–673. https://doi.org/10.1016/0191–8869(92)90237-J

Field, A. (2009). *Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS Statistics* (4th ed.). Sage.

Ghouse, G., Rehman, A. U., & Bhatti, M. I. (2024). Understanding of causes of spurious associations: Problems and prospects. *Statistical Theory and Applications*, *23*, 44–66. https://doi.org/10.1007/s44199–024–00072–0

Gnat, T. (2024). Looking for cosy in all the wrong places: Cosiness and tamed sublime of *No Man's Sky*. *Replay: The Polish Journal of Game Studies*, *12*(1), 23–40. https://doi.org/10.18778/2391–8551.12.03

Grucza, R. A., & Goldberg, L. R. (2007). The comparative validity of 11 modern personality inventories: Predictions of behavioral acts, informant reports, and clinical indicators. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, *89*(2), 167–187. https://doi.org/10.1080/00223890701468568

Holl, E., Sischka, P., Wagener, G. L., & Melzer, A. (2024). The Motivation to Play Scale (MOPS): Introducing a validated measure of gaming motivation. *Current Psychology*, *43*, 31068–31080. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144–024–06631-z

Huta, V., & Waterman, A. S. (2014). Eudaimonia and its distinction from hedonia: Developing a classification and terminology for understanding conceptual and operational definitions. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *15*, 1425–1456. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902–013–9485–0

Ivory, J. D. (2016). A brief history of video games. In R. Kowert & T. Quandt (Eds.), *The video game debate: Unravelling the physical, social, and psychological effects of digital games* (pp. 1–21). Routledge.

Johnson, L. K. (2018). *The Light Triad scale: Developing and validating a preliminary measure of prosocial orientation* [Master's thesis, University of Western Ontario]. https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/5515/

Jones, A. B. (2019). *Personality and dark gaming: The relationships between perfectionism, the Dark Triad, and anti-social online gaming behaviour* [Master's Thesis, York St. John University]. https://ray.yorksj.ac.uk/id/eprint/4371/

Jones, D. N., & Paulhus, D. L. (2014). Introducing the Short Dark Triad (SD3): A brief measure of dark personality traits. *Assessment*, *21*(1), 28–41. https://doi.org/10.1177/1073191113514105

Kaufman, S. B., Yaden, D. B., Hyde, E., & Tsukayama, E. (2019). The Light vs. Dark Triad of personality: Contrasting two very different profiles of human nature. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *10*, 1–26. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00467

Klimmt, C., & Possler, D. (2021). A synergistic multiprocess model of video game entertainment. In P. Vorderer & C. Klimmt (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of entertainment theory* (pp. 623–646). Oxford University Press. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190072216.013.33

Kosa, M., & Uysal, A. (2020). Four pillars of healthy escapism in games: Emotion regulation, mood management, coping, and recovery. In B. Bostan (Ed.), *Game user experience and player-centered design* (pp. 63–76). Springer.

Lewis, J. E., Trojovsky, M., & Jameson, M. M. (2021). New social horizons: Anxiety, isolation, and animal crossing during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Frontiers in Virtual Reality*, *2*, 1–7. https://doi.org/10.3389/frvir.2021.627350

Maples, J. L., Lamkin, J., & Miller, J. D. (2014). A test of two brief measures of the Dark Triad: The dirty dozen and short Dark Triad. *Psychological Assessment*, *26*(1), 326–331. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035084

Maslow, A. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review, 50*, 370–396. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/h0054346

Maxis. (2000). *The Sims* [Microsoft Windows]. Digital game designed by Will Wright, published by Electronic Arts.

McCrae, R. R., & John, O. P. (1992). An introduction to the five-factor model and its applications. *Journal of Personality*, *60*(2), 175–215. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467–6494.1992.tb00970.x

Mejía-Suazo, C. J., Landa-Blanco, M., Mejía-Suazo, G. A., & Martínez-Martínez, C. A. (2025). Personality traits and digital challenges in Honduran adults: Exploring the Dark and Light Triads' influence on internet gaming disorder and technology-related conflicts. *Frontiers in Public Health, 13*, 1–15. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2025.1485264

Naughty Dog. (2013). *The Last of Us* [PlayStation 3]. Digital game directed by Bruce Straley and Neil Druckmann, published by Sony Computer Entertainment.

Neumann, C. S., Kaufman, S. B., ten Brinke, L., Yaden, D. B., Hyde, E., & Tsykayama, E. (2020). Light and dark trait subtypes of human personality: A multi-study person-centered approach. *Personality and Individual Differences, 164*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2020.110121

Nintendo EPD. (2020). *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* [Nintendo Switch]. Digital game directed by Aya Kyogoku, published by Nintendo.

Oliver, M. B., & Bartsch, A. (2010). Appreciation as audience response: Exploring entertainment gratifications beyond hedonism. *Human Communication Research*, *36*(1), 53–81. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468–2958.2009.01368.x

Oliver, M. B., Bowman, N. D., Woolley, J. K., Rogers, R., Sherrick, B. I., & Chung, M.-Y. (2016). Video games as meaningful entertainment experiences. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture, 5*(4), 390. https://doi.org/10.1037/ppm0000066

Oliver, M. B., & Raney, A. A. (2011). Entertainment as pleasurable and meaningful: Identifying hedonic and eudaimonic motivations for entertainment consumption. *Journal of Communication*, *61*(5), 984–1004. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460–2466.2011.01585.x

Oliver, M. B., Raney, A. A., Slater, M. D., Appel, M., Hartmann, T., Bartsch, A., Schneider, F. M., Janicke-Bowles, S. H., Krämer, N., Mares, M.-L., Vorderer, P.,

Rieger, D., Dale, K. R., & Das, E. (2018). Self-transcendent media experiences: Taking meaningful media to a higher level. *Journal of Communication*, *68*(2), 380–389. https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqx020

Paulhus, D. L. (2002). Socially desirable responding: The evolution of a construct. In H.I. Braun, D.N. Jackson, & D.E. Wiley (Eds.), *The role of constructs in psychological and educational measurement* (pp. 49–69). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

Paulhus, D. L., & Williams, K. M. (2002). The Dark Triad of personality: Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. *Journal of Research in Personality*, *36*(6), 556–563. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0092–6566(02)00505–6

Pearce, K. E., Yip, J. C., Lee, J. H., Martinez, J. J., Windleharth, T., Li, Q., & Bhattacharya, A. (2022). "I need to just have a couple of White Claws and play *Animal Crossing* tonight": Parents coping with video games during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Psychology of Popular Media*, *11*(3), 324. https://doi.org/10.1037/ppm0000367

Possler, D., Daneels, R., & Bowman, N. D. (2024). Players just want to have fun? An exploratory survey on hedonic and eudaimonic game motives. *Games and Culture*, *19*(5), 611–633. https://doi.org/10.1177/15554120231182498

Possler, D., Kümpel, A. S., & Unkel, J. (2020). Entertainment motivations and gaming-specific gratifications as antecedents of digital game enjoyment and appreciation. *Psychology of Popular Media*, *9*(4), 541–552. https://doi.org/10.1037/ppm0000248

Rauthmann, J. F. (2012). The Dark Triad and interpersonal perception: Similarities and differences in the social consequences of narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, *3*(4), 487–496. https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550611427608

Reinecke, L., Tamborini, R., Grizzard, M., Lewis, R., Eden, A., & Bowman, N. D. (2012). Characterizing mood management as need satisfaction: The effects of intrinsic needs on selective exposure and mood repair. *Journal of Communication*, *62*(3), 437–453. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460–2466.2012.01649.x

Ruggiero, T. E. (2000). Uses and gratifications theory in the 21st century. *Mass Communication & Society*, *3*(1), 3–37. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327825MCS0301_02

Ryan, R. M., Rigby, C. S., & Przybylski, A. (2006). The motivational pull of video games: A self-determination theory approach. *Motivation and Emotion*, *30*(4), 344–360. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031–006–9051–8

Sauro, J., & Lewis, J. R. (2011). When designing usability questionnaires, does it hurt to be positive? In D. Tan, G. Fitzpatrick, C. Gutwin, B. Begole & W. A. Kellogg (Eds.),

CHI '11: Proceedings of the SIGCHI conference on human factors in computing systems (pp. 2215–2224). ACM. https://doi.org/10.1145/1978942.1979266

Scharkow, M., Festl, R., Vogelgesang, J., & Quandt, T. (2015). Beyond the "core-gamer": Genre preferences and gratifications in computer games. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *44*, 293–298. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.11.020

Schwartz, C. E., & Sendor, M. (1999). Helping others helps oneself: Response shift effects in peer support. *Social Science & Medicine*, *48*(11), 1563–1575. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0277–9536(99)00049–0

Sherry, J. L., Lucas, K., Greenberg, B. S., & Lachlan, K. (2006). Video game uses and gratifications as predictors of use and game preference. In P. Vorderer & J. Bryant (Eds.), *Playing video games: Motives, responses, and consequences* (pp. 213–224). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Short, T. X., Ordon, A., Hurd, D., Howe, C., Forbes, J., Eiserloh, S., Diaz, J., Cook, D., & Meiners, R. (2018, January 24). Cozy games. *Lostgarden*. https://lostgarden.com/2018/01/24/cozy-games/

Simond, S. H., & Klös, T. (2024). Cozy heterotopias in JRPGs: A Foucauldian perspective on the spatiality of coziness in Japanese role-playing games. *Replay: The Polish Journal of Game Studies*, *11*(1), 93–109. https://doi.org/10.18778/2391–8551.11.07

Smith, C. (2024). Getting cozy with the zombie apocalypse: The saferoom as capitalist breakroom in *Left 4 Dead* and *Back 4 Blood*. *Replay: The Polish Journal of Game Studies, 12*(1), 41–53. https://doi.org/10.18778/2391–8551.12.01

Sullivan, L. M. (2008). Repeated measures. *Circulation*, *117*(9), 1238–1243. https://doi.org/10.1161/CIRCULATIONAHA.107.654350

Tang, W. Y., Reer, F., & Quandt, T. (2020). The interplay of gaming disorder, gaming motivations, and the Dark Triad. *Journal of Behavioral Addictions*, *9*(2), 491–496. https://doi.org/10.1556/2006.2020.00013

Vandewalle, A. (2025). Cozy history? Frameworks, contrasts, and affect in cozy historical video games. In V. Navarro-Remesal, K. B. R. Giappone & J. Sun (Eds.), *Abstract proceedings of DiGRA 2025: Games at the Crossroads* (pp. 1–5). https://doi.org/10.26503/dl.v2025i3.2655

van Rooij, A. J., Daneels, R., Liu, S., Anrijs, S., & Van Looy, J. (2017). Children's motives to start, continue, and stop playing video games: Confronting popular theories with real-world observations. *Current Addiction Reports*, *4*, 323–332. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40429–017–0163-x

Vorderer, P., Klimmt, C., & Ritterfeld, U. (2004). Enjoyment: At the heart of media entertainment. *Communication theory*, *14*(4), 388–408. https://doi.org/10.1093/ct/14.4.388

Wäppling, A., Walchshofer, L., & Lewin, R. (2022). *What makes a cozy game?: A study of three games considered cozy* [Bachelor's thesis, Uppsala University]. https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1709393&dswid=-2825

Waszkiewicz, A. (2024). Soft horrors: The visual and ludic safety of dark cozy games. *Replay: The Polish Journal of Game Studies*, *11*(1), 111–124. https://doi.org/10.18778/2391–8551.11.08

Waszkiewicz, A., & Bakun, M. (2020). Towards the aesthetics of cozy video games. *Journal of Gaming & Virtual Worlds*, *12*(3), 225–240. https://doi.org/10.1386/jgvw_00017_1

Waszkiewicz, A., & Tymińska, M. (2024). Cozy games and resistance through care. *Replay: The Polish Journal of Game Studies*, *11*(1), 7–16. https://doi.org/10.18778/2391–8551.11.01

Zeng, B., Jeon, M., & Wen, H. (2024). How does item wording affect participants' responses in Likert scale? Evidence from IRT analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *15*, 1–10. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1304870

Zhu, L. (2021). The psychology behind video games during COVID-19 pandemic: A case study of *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*. *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies*, *3*(1), 157–159. https://doi.org/10.1002/hbe2.221

Zillmann, D. (1988). Mood management through communication choices. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *31*(3), 327–340. https://doi.org/10.1177/000276488031003005

Appendix 1

Facebook
Official Peeps of Cozy Gaming
Cozy gaming
Cozy Gamers
Cozy Millennial Gamers
Animal Crossing New Horizons Community
Animal Crossing New Horizons NL/BE
Stardew Valley Community
Cozy Grove Switch Players
Story of Seasons & Harvest Moon
Palia
Faefarm Community
Reddit
r/CozyGamers
Discord
The Cozy Gaming Club
Cat is Loaf
Stardew Valley
Payton's Corner *
Unpaking
Fleurs *
Jerrrs *
Queendom of Lady Brittany *
Animal Crossing New Horizons
Note: Discord communities marked with '*', are online communities of cozy game streamers and YouTubers.

Table 4. List of gaming communities where the survey was spread.

Appendix 2

	Percentage
Stardew Valley	45%
Animal Crossing (New Horizons + Pocket Camp + New Leaf)	12,8%
Minecraft	3,2%
Palia	3,2%
The Sims	2,8%
Disney Dreamlight Valley	2,8%
Wylde Flowers	2,5%
Unpacking	2,2%
Spiritfarer	1,8%
Cozy Grove	1,4%
Fae Farm	1,1%
Harvest Moon	1,1%
My Time at Sandrock	1,1%
A Little to the Left	0,7%
Coral Island	0,7%
Dragon Quest Builders 2	0,7%
Genshin Impact	0,7%
Wildermyth	0,7%
A Short Hike	0,4%
Bluey The Videogame	0,4%
Cats and Soup	0,4%
Chess	0,4%
Coffee Talk	0,4%
Deemo	0,4%
Dinkum	0,4%
Firewatch	0,4%
Fortnite	0,4%
Garden Paws	0,4%
Gris	0,4%
Happy Color	0,4%
Horizon Zero Dawn: Forbidden West	0,4%

House Flipper	0,4%
I Was a Teenage Exocolonist	0,4%
Journey	0,4%
Lake	0,4%
Later Alligator	0,4%
Life is Strange: True Colors	0,4%
Little Witch in the Woods	0,4%
Mineko's Night Market	0,4%
Mutazione	0,4%
My Time at Portia	0,4%
Ooblets	0,4%
Ori and the Blind Forest / Will of the Wisps	0,4%
Pikmin	0,4%
Pokémon GO	0,4%
Pokémon Soul Silver	0,4%
Potion Craft	0,4%
Potion Permit	0,4%
Raft	0,4%
Romance Club	0,4%
Rune Factory	0,4%
Skyrim	0,4%
The Last of Us	0,4%
The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild	0,4%
TOEM	0,4%
Trio of Towers	0,4%
Unpacking	0,4%
Usagi Shima	0,4%

Note: N = 277

Table 5. List of favorite cozy games mentioned by respondents (in %).