Parties, partying, and party games in single-player videogames

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ABSTRACT

Parties and partying appear in single-player videogames but have been studied little. In this paper, we investigate how parties are used and represented in videogames. In this explorative study, we analyzed 22 games to answer the research question. Parties in games are often intertextual references to film and television as well as to party games in popular culture. The analysis resulted in the following themes: Party as a Backdrop, Party as Space for Social Interaction, Party as a Place to Have Sex (with subthemes Bodies Collide, Party Games as Minigames and Party Games Motivating Sexual Encounters), Party as a Place for Voyeurism, and Organising a Party as a Challenge.

Keywords

parties, party games, intertextuality, videogames

INTRODUCTION

Mass Effect 3 gives[1] players the possibility of going to a club and partying, in the form of dancing and drinking. The *Citadel* DLC of *Mass Effect 3* includes a house party with a focus on partying and social interactions and the opportunity to have a date in a casino. *Sims* expansion *Party House* adds the ability to throw parties and arrange parties is also part of the gameplay in *Playboy The Mansion*. In *Life is Strange 2*, the story begins with characters discussing going to a party that same night, but the situation changes. This last example perhaps encapsulates the role parties commonly have in digital games: an afterthought. This said, dating sims and porn games often utilize parties and partying as a more central element, as we see later. Party as a setting for game events highlights social interaction in contrast to violent conflicts that are typical of videogames. It is important to also look at these kinds of alternative mechanics and settings and map them systemically, partly to understand the design space and partly to acknowledge the multifaceted nature of videogames. The above examples also highlight the use of social interaction as a main game mechanic in contrast to widely used combat-focused mechanics.

In this paper, we understand a *party* as "a festive gathering" often involving food, drink, music, and dance (Elza, Edgerton, and Jackson 2010), or "a social event at which a group of people meet to talk, eat, drink, dance, etc." ('Party' 2023), and 'partying' as "the activity of enjoying yourself, especially at a party, for example by drinking alcohol and dancing" ('Partying' 2023). This definition of a *party* includes a variety of parties from formal dinners to very informal gatherings among family, friends, students or colleagues, as well as a variety of environments or settings, such as festivals, carnivals or nightclubs. The reasons for having parties can equally vary from rites of passage (birthdays, graduations, bachelor/bachelor parties) to meeting new people. The paper explores the following research question:

- How are parties, partying, and party games used and presented in single-player games[2] and what kind of relationship do those presentations have with popular culture and popular media?

We approach the research questions in an exploratory fashion via the perspective of intertextuality and how it binds the games to different genres of games and other media. Intertextuality was originally defined by Julia Kristeva (1980), who, drawing on Mihail Bakhtin, described how "any text is a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (66). Kristeva understood intertextuality as inherent in all texts but later it has been used also to describe a strategy employed by media producers as well as an unconscious practice of intertextual interpretation by audiences (Ott and Walter 2000, 430). We combine this perspective with a formalistic approach (see Myers 2010) for contextualising party mechanics in the analysed games, because the phenomenon, we believe, cannot solely be understood via intertextuality although it has been argued that intertextuality is also relevant for understanding game-specific features such as quests and strategies (Consalvo 2003; cf. Jørgensen 2018). This formalistic view is present in the use of *genre* as a concept in our analysis. Intertextuality has been understood as an essential component of genres, which are in essence formed through intertextual (and metatextual) connections to other texts (Juvan 2008). The intertextual references can take form in different elements, such as characters, stories, narratives, and aesthetics, typical of a particular genre.

Existing research on parties and partying has commonly dealt with the connections between partying and alcohol use among students and young people (e.g., Frederiksen, Bakke, and Dalum 2012), or with the culture of dance parties (e.g., Beck and Lynch 2009). Anthropologists have studied the functions of parties in communities and societies, often focusing on traditional parties that mark annual events or rites of passage (e.g., Van Gennep 2001). Even though parties and partying have been mentioned in publications in fields of film studies, literary studies etc., they are, with few exceptions (e.g., McLoughlin 2015; Ames 1991), usually referenced only in passing and often focus, again, on alcohol (mis)use and sexual violence (e.g., Bufkin and Eschholz 2000; Brown and Witherspoon 2002). In film studies, high-society parties have been interpreted as symbols of capitalist excess emblematic of the 'American dream' as well as its critique (Ferriss 2018). We have not been able to find substantial scholarship on parties, partying and party games as part of games with a few exceptions (e.g., Yong Khong et al. 2018; Sotamaa and Stenros 2019).

Studying unconventional or less used game designs or settings, those that diverge from traditional patterns or established genres, offers several compelling benefits, both for game design innovation and for understanding player engagement. Parties

and implementations of parties reveal less utilized design spaces that break away from well-trodden gameplay loops, opening up untapped possibilities for storytelling, immersion, and player interaction. Social game mechanics and understanding more may be relevant for attracting potential player spaces who do not find typical AAA games entertaining.

The descriptions of games in digital marketplaces and other marketing materials rarely mention parties or partying included in the game, which makes it difficult to find games with parties or partying. As a result, the games analysed in this paper are chosen mainly based on our knowledge of games containing parties or party games. Games were analyzed either by playing, from gameplay videos, or both (see Appendix 1). However, we expanded our list of examples with online searches. The details of the analyzed games are listed in Appendix 1.

INTERTEXTUALITIES OF PARTIES

Depictions of parties in games analysed in this paper are drawn from other media using intertextual imagery. Parties in college games, such as *Being DIK: Season 1*, *College Kings: Complete Season*, and *Fetish Locator: Week 1* draw from the representations in American teen sex dramas (films and television series) (cf. Nowell 2014; O'Neill 2016) and teen genres, especially college farces, such as *American Pie* (1999)*, Animal House* (1978)*,* and *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982) (cf. Shary 2012). Parties in the game *House Party* (Eek! Games 2022), though it is not explicitly a college game, have the same point of reference. This connection is explicated in the game description on Steam: "House Party is an edgy comedy adventure game inspired by classic comedies of the '90s." Among actual American college students, alcohol and sex are major parts of the college party culture, and the ability to gain sexual experiences is seen as a method of gaining higher status among peers for male students (Sweeney 2014, 812). This "image of the heterosexual playboy fraternity guy" (ibid., 806) presents a regularly used character type also in the games depicting college parties.

Cocktail and office parties are recurring settings in audiovisual media, from the office Christmas party in the film *Die Hard* (McTiernan 1988) to an episode of the television series *Boston Legal* titled "Dumping Bella" (S3E14)*,* and in crime fiction, for example in Raymond Chandler's *The Long Kiss Goodbye* (1953). It is to be expected that also games contain depictions of these kinds of parties. *Jessica O'Neil's Hard News* includes a cocktail party at the mayor's residence. *Jessica O'Neil's Hard News* is a porn game/visual novel, where the player character (PC) is a young investigative reporter covering crimes among other things. The cocktail party takes place in a luxurious location where characters spend time socialising. A high-class cocktail party is also the setting in *Mass Effect 2: Kasumi: Stolen Memory* DLC. The use of the party setting in the DLC is similar to, for example, the television series *Blacklist* episode *Madeline Pratt (No. 73)* (S1E14), where a cocktail party in an embassy is the setting for stealing a painting.

Playboy The Mansion was licensed by Playboy and presented a similar lifestyle, including house parties in the Playboy founder Hugh Hefner's mansion, to *The Girls Next Door* (2005-2010) reality television series focusing on life in the Playboy mansion or *Playboy's Penthouse* (1959–1960) television series. The game's DLC *Private Party Expansion Pac* adds (among other things) parties, such as Hefner's birthday and

Midsummer Night's Dream party. The parties in the game draw from Playboy's media presentations and are part of building the brand (cf. NeoGamer 2022; Regan 2021).

Games we have analysed also include representations of party games, such as the kissing game *Spin the Bottle*, *Truth or Dare,* or the drinking game *Never Have I Ever*. Those kinds of games have a long history as party games (cf. Sutton-Smith 1959) and are also seen in teen dramas (e.g., *Spin the Bottle* in *Freaks and Geeks* [1999–2000] TV series). Because of that, we assume that the digital games we analysed draw from representations of parties in popular culture but they also have a function in games which we will discuss in the following.

WHY PARTIES?

We propose that parties have different functionalities within the games and games utilise intertextuality in their use of parties and party games in various ways.

Party as a Backdrop

Parties function as backdrops for the action, such as a house party of the social elite is a backdrop for a heist in *Mass Effect 2: Kasumi* DLC. In the DLC, the game scene takes place at a cocktail party given by Hock, a rich criminal. The main function of the party in the narrative is to give the PC a reason to access the place. The PC searches the apartment where the party is held to break into the vault containing valuables. Blending into the party by socializing is not necessary for advancing in the game. The party is a backdrop for the action with minimal impact on how the player needs to play in contrast to a break-in scene in a casino in *Mass Effect 3: Citadel* DLC where the PC needs to go and talk to other characters to blend in and reduce suspicion of the guards.

Fallout 3 uses a birthday party as a storytelling device to jump forward in time at the beginning of the game to tell the backstory of the character. In addition, the birthday works as a marker of coming to the age and getting the game's main tool, Pip-boy which is a wrist computer monitoring health etc.[3] The party as a social gathering allows bringing in a range of NPCs to interact with and all those interactions narrate something about Fallout's world, the current situation and the PC.

Until Dawn, a horror game uses a cruel prank at a teen party in an isolated location as a starting point of the events. Two teens disappear as a result of the prank. The party and prank lend from the typical narratives of teen sex comedies. Still, the rest of the game utilises the horror trope of the isolated place where the characters are trapped, familiar from the horror film *Evil Dead* (Raimi, 1981) but also giving a nod to parties in horror movies such as *Scream*[4] (Craven, 1996) or *Prom Night* (Lynch 1980). The party in *Until Dawn* is a story device with a minor role in the game's narrative.

Party as Space for Social Interaction

Parties create a narratively plausible reason for bringing a set of characters together in one place and offer a fictional set-up for social interaction and character-building, e.g., a house party in *Mass Effect 3 Citadel* DLC. The party in *Citadel* DLC is a narrative device to bring a mix of characters, also from previous games in the series, into one place. The party works as a credible reason for those characters to have more relaxed interactions without having quests (relating to the game progression) drive those

interactions. Also, characters can reveal other sides of themselves than their 'business side'.

In the *House Party* game, the party, again, is a place where various young adult characters can gather and interact. The party is also an excuse for drinking, flirting, sex and practical jokes just like in those classical teen comedies. Of course, a party is also a place for picking a fight. That is one type of social interaction, isn't it?

Playboy The Mansion uses parties as thematic elements and as places for social interaction. In addition to using parties as a thematic element, *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* and *Playboy The Mansion* utilise parties as places for social interaction. *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* was a mobile game where the PC aimed to become a celebrity similar to the reality star Kim Kardashian, who is represented in the game as an NPC. Progressing in the game necessitates charming the right people. Parties provide an opportunity for this, as the PC can meet and network with characters in these settings. However, parties are not merely an appropriate setting for social interaction but part of a progression structure where the player can gain experience points and in-game currency but also get invited to better parties by succeeding in the social challenges. Presenting this kind of social interaction in the form of game mechanics makes visible the kind of emotional labour that often remains unrecognised and is generally considered feminine (Harvey 2018; cf. Chess and Maddox 2018). The game assigns measurable value to this labour. In *Playboy The Mansion*, however, the mansion itself is already the place of social interaction, so parties have limited functionality in bringing characters together. Hefner can invite people over with few limitations even without throwing parties, so parties are more an extension of the base mechanics. In these games, parties function both as signs of progression (being invited or succeeding in arranging a party) as well as possibilities for progression (in social relations).

Alcohol and drinking are often depicted as central elements of partying. In *Summertime Saga*, finding alcohol for a party serves as a subgoal in a couple of quests. The drinks are required to get a party going which then changes character behaviours and gives an opportunity to have sex. The PC does not get drunk. In *Mass Effect 3*, during the house party in the citadel, getting alcohol to the party is a step in preparation. The PC does not get drunk but a couple of guests do and the game exploits that for comic effect. In these examples,

1. drinking, or more precisely the effect of alcohol, has been downplayed as the social interaction and reaching goals are foregrounded, or

2. drinking/being drunk has been presented for comical effects (cf. Kerttula 2023).

Overall, social interaction, especially in dating sim games, functions as the challenge: seduction is a sort of minigame where the player, with the right choices, can make other characters like the PC.

Party as a Place to Have Sex

Bodies Collide

Parties are also places and events for characters to have sex. The games where parties have this function include *Playboy the Mansion, Mass Effect 3's* house party (in Citadel

DLC), *Being DiK, Fetish Locator, Milfs of Sunville* (L7team) and *College Kings*. Most of these games are connected to the teen sex comedy genre but also mirror the university hookup culture of casual sex (cf. Pham 2017). *Playboy The Mansion,* on the other hand, draws from Playboy representations. The dating sim logic is present in most of these games: the progress in a relationship is rewarded with an intimate cut-scene (cf. Lankoski and Välisalo 2023; Navarro-Remesal and Loriguillo-López 2015). As an exception, in *Mass Effect 3*, the party lacks dating sim mechanics and the (implied) sex is tied to the romance the PC is having.[5]

An interesting early example of using a party as a place for having sex is *Bachelor Party* (JHM Ltd. 1982). The game itself uses pixel graphics to visualise a simple game character with an erect penis, and the player's goal is to aim and hit female characters with the male character. The 'party' is only referenced in the game title but together with the gameplay it creates an intertextual reference to (currently rather outdated) narratives of bachelor parties as consisting of wild partying including sexual encounters with women.

The games mentioned above use parties and sex in the parties as one narrative element among others. There are also games focusing merely on sex; sex in parties is the main content in the *Pleasure Party* game. The game is Sims-like but focuses on different types of (orgy) sex parties.

Party games in the analyzed games relate to sex and often to advancing relationships to a sexual level. These party games are sometimes playable minigames *(Party games as minigames*) and sometimes they merely function as a narrative device *(Party Games Motivating Sexual Encounters*).

Party Games Motivating Sexual Encounters

Party games provide motivation or reason for fast-tracking sexual behaviour: *Truth or Dare* is used to advance sexual relations in, for example, *College Kings*. *Fetish Locator: Week 1* revolves around a sex dare game where one collects points by doing a sex dare given by the Fetish Locator app. A task can be having sex and taking a picture of that or, at a sex party, finding a person based on a photo of her/his genitalia and pleasuring her/him. In this category, party games are narrative devices but they are not implemented as minigames inside the game, probably because the minigames and storytelling are tightly coupled in the examples in our material.

Party Games as Minigames

Minigames are used to copy the game mechanics of some party games, such as *Spin the Bottle* and *Strip Poker*. These games utilize randomness and the games in themselves do not require extensive content generation like in *Truth or Dare,* where questions and consequences need to be written in the game script. Players roughly know the rules and how to play these games due to either real-life experience with them or the intertextual relationship between the minigames and representations of party games in other mediums. These games can create replayability to the game as well as provide a challenge, different from the rest of the game.

Replayability. Party games are used to create more replayable events as in *Summertime Saga*, where the *Spin the Bottle* party game is used to randomise access to sex scenes during a small beach party. The PC and three women play *Spin the Bottle*.

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Spinning the bottle decides who will be kissing each other in all rounds except the last one. The last spin decides which of the women will have sex with the PC. If the bottle points towards the PC, the PC will have sex with all of the women. The structure means that if players want to see all possible sex cut-scenes, they need to play the event multiple times. Kissing and sex function as a reward or what Juul (2010) calls *juiciness*—positive (visual) feedback—in the context of casual games. Notably, porn games do not otherwise use juiciness in feedback to push buttons etc., as casual games do.

Challenge. Strip Poker and *Hot Shots* party games are used in *Holiday Island* to create gameplay challenges for reaching sex scenes. The player needs to beat a female NPC in a strip poker game multiple times to open various nude and sex scenes. A similar logic is in the *Hot Shots* drinking game. The game is a variation of the *Hangman* game and adds an alternative to Strip Poker. Both of these require some skill to win.

Party as a Place for Voyeurism

Sex parties provide opportunities for voyeurism, and are a means to introduce sex to the game events. Watching others having sex or being watched links to pervasive, but not the most typical sexual fantasies people report (cf. Joyal, Cossette, and Lapierre 2015) but are also present in porn videos focused on college parties containing public sex. An example of this is *Fetish Locator: Week 1* and *Fetish Locator: Week 2*, which contain sex parties where the PC can stumble on others having sex or have sex while others watch. The sex party setting makes these actions socially acceptable.

In *Being DiK,* an initiation for joining a fraternity starts with three male initiates tied to chairs with only their underpants on and being teased by three female initiates from a sorority. The teasing ends when two of the guys lose, that is ejaculate. The male PC has the option to have vaginal sex with a female character while tied up. Party and fraternity rituals function as means to introduce a public sex scene that makes sense in terms of the narrative logic of a teen sex comedy. Also, all kinds of hazing activities (not always sexual though) are associated with fraternities in news media (cf. Biddix 2016).

Organising a Party as a Challenge

Parties in games are rarely linked to game mechanics or progression more than superficially.

Playboy: The Mansion uses parties as goals: "throw a party". In *Sims Party House,* if your party is good, you have a chance to get a celebrity to join the party; on the other hand, one can also get party crashers to join, if it is a good party. While in these games challenges are not exactly obligatory to continue to play, the 'as challenge' function relates to completionist playing motivation (cf. Cruz, Hanus, and Fox 2017). In *Being DiK,* organizing a party that includes renovating a vandalised clubhouse is presented as a challenge but it seems that it is not possible to fail the challenge. *Organising Party as a Challenge* builds on the conventions of simulation and resource management games.

DISCUSSION

As seen above, games contain parties and party games. Studies looking at the portrayals of parties are somewhat rare. Oddly enough, how parties and partying are presented in other media have been studied little—with few exceptions focused on themes like alcohol use and attitudes towards alcohol consumption (e.g., Flynn et al. 2015; Van Den Bulck, Simons, and Gorp 2008), and symbolic meaning of parties in modern literature (e.g., McLoughlin 2015; Ames 1991). Sexual violence in college parties (e.g., Armstrong, Hamilton, and Sweeney 2006) is another aspect that have been studied, Furthermore, the functions of parties in games have seldom been analyzed in their own right.
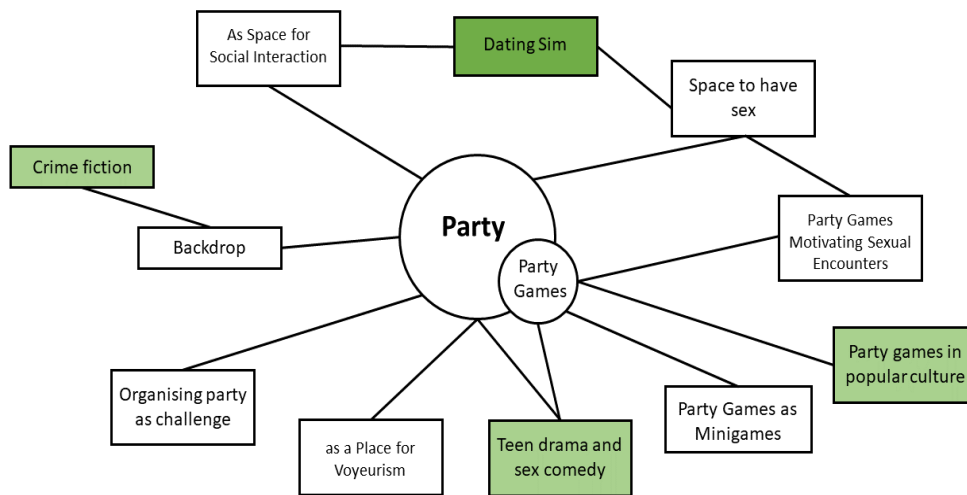

Fig 1: Functions of parties, game genres, and major connections between them.

Parties, partying, and party games serve multiple functions in video games, both narratively and mechanically anchoring the story or game mechanics to something players already know using intertextual references. Fig 1 illustrates intertextual references in genre level. Parties have their interaction rituals, verbal and non-verbal, that are culturally shared (Bogdanowska-Jakubowska 2010) and create expectations on the game narrative and interactions with NPC characters. As quests relating to social aspects are not the most typical content of popular videogames, intertextual references set up the context hinting at the game mechanics and helping understand them. In terms of fiction, parties often act as pivotal moments in the storyline, introducing social interactions that can drive the plot forward, reveal character traits, or establish relationships. Party settings, whether a formal gathering or a casual house party, offer a break from typical game environments. They create spaces where characters can let down their guard or engage in behaviours that might otherwise seem out of place. Party games, in particular, are frequently used to justify or explain certain actions that, within the context of the game's fiction, might seem questionable or uncharacteristic. As Sotamaa and Stenros (2019) suggest, the context of a party or a game within the game can excuse or normalise otherwise dubious behaviour, mirroring real-life social dynamics where "it's just a game" is used as a justification for

breaking norms. In this way, parties blur the lines between game rules and social rules, making the actions of characters or players more believable within the game's world.

Party games in digital games set their questions as some of them are game systems within game systems. Mechanically, party games or activities within a party setting serve as catalysts for gameplay variety, offering players new challenges, goals, or interactions. Popular real-world party games, or variations of them, are frequently incorporated into games to add depth and motivate specific events. For example, mini-games involving gambling, drinking contests, or truth-or-dare mechanics can create moments of tension, comedy, or even competition between characters. Notably these party games we observed are the same as reported by Sutton-Smith (1959) before the age of videogames. These mini-games may serve as crucial plot devices, unlocking new story branches or providing critical character interactions that affect player decisions. Party games also introduce a challenge that breaks from the main mechanics, offering lighter, more playful interactions that contrast with the heavier themes of the game.

Party as a Space for Social Interaction and Party as a *Place to Have Sex* connect in some cases to dating sim game mechanics. Dating sim games, short for dating simulation games, are a subgenre of simulation games that focus on building and managing romantic relationships between characters (cf. Taylor 2007). The mechanics typically involve various stages of interaction, dialogue choices, and resource management that simulate aspects of dating, relationship-building, and character development. The mechanics use dialogue where the player must choose the right option (or at least avoid wrong options) or complete quests to advance a relationship.

Parties in general are prevalent in games where social interaction is a central mechanic, such as dating sims, visual novels, or adventure games and RPGs. In these genres, parties serve as social hubs where characters come together, allowing the player to explore interpersonal dynamics, make choices that affect relationships, and gather information about the game's world. In dating simulators, for instance, a party might provide an opportunity for the player to deepen their connection with a romantic interest, while in RPGs, parties may function as key narrative moments where alliances are formed, secrets are revealed, or missions are triggered. These social events are often used to advance character development, letting players see new sides of characters in a relaxed, social environment. In addition, in some games, such as *Mass Effect 3*, a party functions as a fiction device to communicate and motivate a different game mode.

In sum, parties and party games in video games fulfil important narrative and mechanical roles. Narratively, they offer an organic way to introduce social dynamics, justify actions, and advance plotlines. Mechanically, they provide variety in gameplay, challenge players, and create opportunities for meaningful character interactions, particularly in games where socializing and relationship-building are central to the experience.

The games we analyzed seem to draw some inspiration from popular culture and the conventions of film and television, which are deeply interconnected. This influence can be seen in various works, particularly in how both games and visual storytelling mediums use specific tropes, settings, and events to create tension, drama, or humour. For example, heist films frequently utilize settings like parties and high-end casinos to stage their action, creating glamorous backdrops for deception and crime.

In films like *Ocean's Eight* (Gary Ross 2018) and in television shows such as *The Blacklist* (series 1 episode 14 "Madeline Pratt"), parties become a cover for elaborate schemes, while the party serves as both a social setting and a moment of intense plot development. Casinos are a common element in the genre, serving as high-stakes environments for cunning characters. The 1960 version of *Ocean's 11* (Lewis Milestone) epitomizes this, using a casino as the ultimate symbol of wealth, risk, and allure (cf. Desser 2012). This same convention is mirrored in video games, such as *Mass Effect 3*, where casino-like environments and high-society parties are used as both game environments and narrative devices, blending the appeal of risk and luxury.

The trope of teen house and college parties is another example where film and games overlap in their depiction of youthful rebellion, social dynamics, and rites of passage. Films like *Animal House* and *American Pie* have made such parties iconic symbols of teenage freedom, mischief, and the search for identity (cf. Shary 2012). Notably, (sexual) mischiefs are highlighted in the scrutinized games These tropes are similarly embraced in video games like *Being a DIK* and *House Party*, where players navigate party environments focused on social interactions, challenges, and sometimes humour.

Additionally, cocktail parties are a staple in many film and television series, often serving as sites of intrigue, conversation, and power dynamics. In shows like *Boston Legal*, cocktail parties are used as a backdrop for the characters to engage in witty banter and professional manoeuvring. In the episode "Dumping Bella" (series 3 episode 14), the cocktail party setting provides an atmosphere of sophistication and tension, where characters' interactions are loaded with subtext. In both cases, these scenes highlight the performative aspects of social gatherings, where appearances and conversation play crucial roles in shaping the narrative. The examples of cocktail parties in games were in *Jessica O'Neil's Hard News* where the player-character is a journal (in contrast to college-aged young adults in *Being DiK* and *House Party*) Through these examples, it becomes evident that games, films, and television shows share a symbiotic relationship in their use of parties and other social settings to enhance storytelling. These settings are not merely decorative; they are integral to character development, thematic exploration, and plot progression, offering viewers and players immersive environments where social rules are tested and dramatic stakes are heightened. All the parties are dimensions of being places to find partners for sexual encounters,

Again, we infer that intertextual references are a means to convey meanings and help understand the game scene and the player-character's goals as well as create a context for game mechanics. The familiar game mechanics and controls from a genre that a player is familiar with help to understand what to do, what to expect and how to play.

In these examples, designers are using the tropes of the heist, college party, and cocktail party in their designs as inspiration sources. The developers of *House Party* acknowledge their inspirations of 1990s comedies in their game description on Steam. In a more general sense, game designers have been acknowledged to draw inspiration from film and television. For example, *Silent Hill* is acknowledged to be inspired by the early David Lynch movies (Nutt 2008; IGN Staff 2011) and developers of *Mass Effect* have mentioned the television series *Firefly* (Joss Whedon 2002-2003) as an inspiration (Skrebels 2017).

A function of *Playboy: The Mansion* and *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* and parties in these games is brand building and lifestyle promotion. In the Playboy brand and lifestyle, parties have an important role (cf. Coulter 2014; Regan 2021). The parties in the *Playboy Mansion* refer to Playboy magazine and reality television, as well as to the Playboy lifestyle marketed by Playboy. In *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* throwing successful parties means gaining popularity, something that is central in the game. In terms of the Kardashian brand, throwing parties connects to the glamorous lifestyle and how it is depicted in reality television and social media – both of which are important to building and maintaining a connection with fans (Lueck 2015). Similarly, the game connects to brand building and fan engagement (cf. Chess and Maddox 2018). Both games are part of brand building and intertextual references in the games connect to brands and other media that are part of the brand building.

CONCLUSIONS

We have argued that parties in videogames (often) use intertextual references to films and television series, for example, teen sex comedies. The videogames also use party games commonly represented in popular culture. In contrast to casual young adult parties, games also include representations of more formal parties, which are represented in a style familiar to television drama or mainstream film. A particular type of party in games is the sex party, which are modelled after pornographic representations in various media.

Moreover, these intertextual references motivate the game mechanics and help players understand what kind of gameplay one can expect. In addition, we also see that games are used in brand building. Intertextuality is a method for brand building.

The main results of the analysis are the functions of parties in games: *Party as a Backdrop, Party as Space for Social Interaction, Party as a Place to Have Sex* (with subthemes *Bodies Collide, Party Games as Minigames* and *Party Games Motivating Sexual Encounters), Party as a Place for Voyeurism,* and *Organising a Party as a Challenge*.

The primary contribution of this paper lies in identifying the diverse functions that parties, as a social phenomenon, serve within video games. By examining how party games are integrated into gameplay, this study sheds light on how the act of playing itself is represented and reimagined within game worlds. This exploration not only deepens our understanding of the role of parties in games but also contributes to broader discussions on how games reflect and reinterpret social practices, such as playing games.

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APPENDIX 1: GAMES ANALYZED

Game	Publisher	Publishing year	Analysis
Bachelor Party	JHM Ltd.	1982	Game
Being DIK: Season 1	DrPinkCake	2020	Game
College Kings: Complete Season 1	Undergrad Steve	2021	Game
Fallout 3	Bethesda Game Studios	2008	Game + video
Fetish Locator: Week 1	ViNovella Games	2020	Game
Fetish Locator: Week 2	ViNovella Games	2021	Game
Holiday Island	Darkhound	early access version 0.4.5, 2024	Game
House Party	Eek! Games	2022	Game
Jessica O'Neil's Hard News	stoperArt	early access version 0.65, 2024	Game
Kim Kardashian: Hollywood	Glu Mobile	2014, discontinued 2024	Game (early 2023 version)
Life is Strange 2	Dontnod Entertainment	2019	Game
Mass Effect 2: Kasumi: Stolen Memory DLC	Bioware	2011	Game
Mass Effect 3	Bioware	2012	Game
Mass Effect 3 Citadel DLC	Bioware	2013	Game + video
Milfs of Sunville	L7team	2024	Game

Playboy the Mansion	Cyberlore Studios	2005	Video
Playboy the Mansion: Private Party Expansion Pac DLC	Cyberlore Studios	2006	Video
Pleasure Party	HTFGames	2022	Video
Sims	Maxis	2000	Game
Sims Party House DLC	Maxis	2001	Video
Summertime Saga	Kompas Productions	Early access version 0.20.16, 2024	Game
Until Dawn	Supermassive	2015	Game + video

ENDNOTES

[1] Details about games (developer, publishing year, how the game was analyzed) are given in Appendix 1. We use this format to highlight that games we discuss are the data.

[2] Multi-player games would require its own study with different methodology, because in many cases we would need to account for what players actually do together within the framework the game provides and not just analyzing what possibilities the game content offer.

[3] Introducing game mechanics incrementally is a way to help players learn the game by providing a simple controls and interface at the beginning and introducing new features a bit by bit.

[4] *Scream* parodies the cliches of slasher movies and provides intertextual references to *Halloween*, *Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Friday 13th*.

[5] There is an exception to ongoing romance.