Essay Assignment - Design for Games & Play II

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Introduction

Millennials, young adults between the age of 18 and 33, are the most stressed generation [1, 2, 3]. They are trying to establish themselves in society in an era of unprecedented economic upheaval [1]. Stress can have different causes for every individual however most common sources originate from work, from life or from inside you [4]. Work stress such as heavy workload, working long hours or having poor management, is the biggest source of stress for most people. Stress from life can also have a big impact. This can be caused by a death of a person, a divorce, a move or an illness or injury. These are all reasons from outside; but stress can also be caused by oneself. Worrying, unrealistic expectations or fear and uncertainty can make someone stress out [4].

Sometimes stress can be useful and make people more focused and quicker to react. It can give someone the extra push needed to apply for that job or run that last mile. In contrast, a feeling of too much stress can make a person feel tired, irritated or tense [5]. Basically any disease can be aggravated and all parts of a person his body is affected by stress. Numerous emotional and physical disorders are linked to stress including anxiety or depression, heart disease and immune system disturbances. Also a person can be more susceptible to infections and can host viral linked disorders. Besides this insomnia, skin rashes and bowel problems can be a direct effect of stress [6].

Millennials experience more stress than other generations due to feeling greater pressure than ever in university education [7]. Besides this millennials experience an information overload. Nowadays people are often transmitting information and not enough reacting on receiving information. Especially when working people constantly look into information sources. However, time is needed to process the information that is received [8, 9].

There is a constant push of communication but there is not much depth and therefore not much conversation [2, 7]. Millennials have the feeling of constantly being busy and the constant need to be busy in order to contribute to all new aspects of society they now learn about through online media. When a millennial is not busy, he or she does not fit into social groups and is set off as 'lazy'. A millennial is ambitious and focused on quick wins. This is not surprising when looking at the speed of current developments in technology and society; everything in life is equipped for fast processes and fast results [2, 3].

A behaviour change is needed to not be affected by all the pressure and information leading to stress. Millennials need to do nothing sometimes; this could improve their health, productivity and creativity [9]. Besides this, they need to bring more depth in conversations and learn to reframe their problems [2, 7].

Role of the game
Stress could be reduced by visiting nature areas [10, 11]. A virtual walk or looking at a digital view of nature has not the same de-stressing effect as actual nature [11]. A game could be used to get people to go outside and walk or visit nature. Games like Pokemon Go or Geocaching persuade players to go outside however the phone still plays a large role while being outside. Besides reducing stress a game could focus on putting the problems causing stress into perspective and offer the player time in which he can do nothing.

Why a social game?
- It was described that a millennial is under constant pressure of his community to be busy, a new community of millennials who are protesting this idea is needed to show a millennial that it is OK to do nothing sometimes.
- To bring depth in conversations a discussion partner is needed, a social game creates the opportunity to go into (guided) conversation.
- To make a millennial feel appreciated and autonomous he should feel as if he has effect on a situation and he should feel competent. When stressed, a player does not feel competent regarding the challenge or the time. To avoid stress social reassurance about the player his competence can help.
- Social play makes a game more engaging and attractive to a social player type [12].

Game concept
The aim of the game is to have millennials guilt free doing nothing, create opportunities for meaningful conversations and help users reframe their problems. A millennial is used to quick wins [2, 3] and the game concept ties into this by offering the opportunity to score points and compete with friends, while working towards your own long term goal: a healthy self. The points visualize all the little steps taken to achieve this goal and show millennials some things take time.

A person is more likely to make decisions that benefit him in the long term when he sees a version of his future self [13]. Plus having an own character that resembles you while trying out different clothing styles is fun. Therefore a player has a character and the character is customizable. The character visualizes how well you are doing in the game: is the character healthy, positive and does he look 'young' than you are performing well. If the character starts looking tired, 'older' (more wrinkles) and starts getting ill and his life-span decreases the player is performing not so good. If the player is doing very well he even gets a more 'daring' character that is not afraid to take on challenges.

Points can be scored in two different ways: either by walking and visiting new places or by completing challenging tasks from friends. Friends of a player will choose challenging tasks, or 'dares'. A dare shows a player he can do more than he initially expected and that there is nothing to stress about. A friend can choose from three defined dares that relate to doing nothing (e.g. not use your phone for 20 minutes, where when a player accepts the phone will be blocked) or conversation starters. When a player scored enough points he can choose a friend to send a created dare to. This way a player receives dares that make him conquer his own problems or fears. Besides this the challenges are personal and therefore suit the person in difficulty level. The amount of points gained by a dare or walk can vary between 50 and 200 points depending on the difficulty of the task. Sometimes a dare will

add a '?' amount of points after completion. If a player scored 250 point he can define a challenge for a friend. Friends of the player judge whether a dare is completed successful if it cannot be measured by the phone, this can be done by showing proof such as a photo or video or by mutual trust.

Another way of scoring points is to go walking. Many phones and smartwatches already know the rhythm of their user, if they walk a lot and if they visit many places. Depending on how far a player normally walks and the location of the phone (is it off its normal route?) the player is awarded points. A player that normally does not walk often and is in a more unhealthy behaviour pattern is awarded more points for his efforts to start walking. Other 'higher' rewarded behaviour is making a habit of walking and visiting new places. Visiting nature areas will get a player also additional points as these work more de-stressing. This asymmetric rewarding levels the playing field for less sporty people and lowers the threshold to change the player his behaviour.

In the appendix game scenario illustrations can be found.

Design rationale
The game concept focuses on three important aspects that can reduce stress: doing nothing, have more meaningful conversations and reframing problems in order to find perspective. Becoming aware of what people are doing to their bodies and living healthier for a short period of time is a hype, looking at actions such as 'dry january' or people giving up social media for a while. [14, 15] People don't participate without letting their whole friends group know how healthy they are for giving up these unhealthy habits. Millennials play a lot of games and therefore a game is a great medium to reach this group [16]. Combining these two, we believe a game helps people realize the implications of stress and help them de-stress. It gives people the opportunity to connect with like-minded people and share their journey.

Walking or visiting nature areas has proven to reduce stress [10, 11]. During these moments a player could be alone and do nothing or walk with a friend and potentially have a meaningful conversation. The dares have different purposes; some give the player the opportunity to do nothing, some promote conversation (with conversation starters that are about meaningful 'life'-questions) and some are just 'funny'. The dares created by friends promote dealing with challenges that fit the player in difficulty and personal problems. Using dares for the design ties into the popularity of challenges such as the Ice Bucket Challenge or Cinnamon Challenge and makes use of the 'quick win structure' millennials are used to [17, 18]. Challenges created by friends put a player outside of his or her comfort zone putting their actual problems causing stress into perspective.

Assessing the game using various theories indicates that the game will be fun to play. The combination of challenge, competition, exploring your boundaries and social gameplay make the game interesting and fun for three of the four player types [12]. The awarding of points, social reassurance and stepping out of one's comfort zone (autonomous, surprising oneself) are the biggest assets. Furthermore, the game is relatable (many people deal with the problem of stress creating a community) and challenging (dares, changing a behaviour pattern, personal reflecting) this way it creates the feeling of competence. These values are

in line with the self-determination theory [19]. The game offers harder challenges the longer the player plays. Combining this with the awarding of points for walking depending on current habits and health patterns creates an equal start for players and creates flow in the game [20].

It sounds contradictory to use a phone, short communication and competition in order to de-stress and 'doing nothing' as those are stress increasing. However the game deals with this well, it turns these negatives into positives (e.g. the dares stimulate in depth communication in real life) and uses social play (e.g. helping each other feel competent) to decrease the effect of these negatives as well. The game is a tool to promote walking in nature and compete against oneself. For this reason the actual phone use in the game is not that high even though it measures (e.g. the walking distance and locations) without being used actively; phone use is even discouraged.

In the game positive reinforcers are seen in: the customized character of the player, creating a challenge for a friend and the awarded points. Besides this the positive physical experience after walking, completing a dare and being awarded an amount of points by a friend are positive reinforcements. Negative reinforcers consist of the social pressure created when not accepting a dare or not being able to complete a dare. Next to this the character of the player in the game can show decreased health which is a long term effect of stress when the player is not performing well and a player can have less points than his friends. Those are negative reinforcements as well. Also avoidance conditioning occurs in the game by the decrease in health of the player his character.

The reinforcement of being able to create a dare has a variable time interval as the fun of creating a dare is often given at varying intervals of points that are collected. This diminishes the scalloping effect of the responses of a player which works well to keep players invested and engaged while playing. Often the dare is given after collecting 250 points, giving a player something to look forward to. The changing of the player's character happens more gradually and depends on how long a player displays negative behaviors. Dares are given at a fixed interval, with the amount of points that can be gained being variable. The positive reinforcements of the physical experience felt after walking and the proud of completing a dare depend on how invested a player is in the game and how often he takes time to do either of those to gain points.

Summarizing, the game has a rewarding player experience, long term rewards in the player character, mid-term rewards in form of competing with friends, completing a big dare and creating a dare for a friend, minor rewards gained from completing small dares and cosmetic rewards in form of getting points for walking (and doing nothing, so not using your phone in the meanwhile).
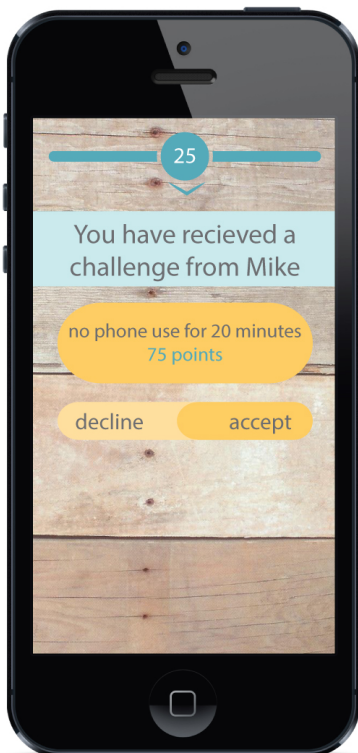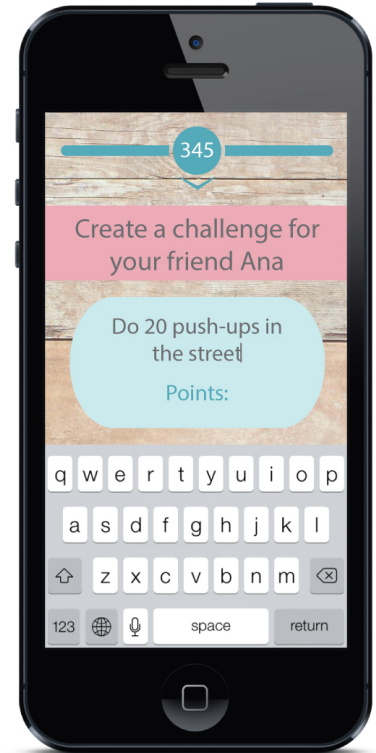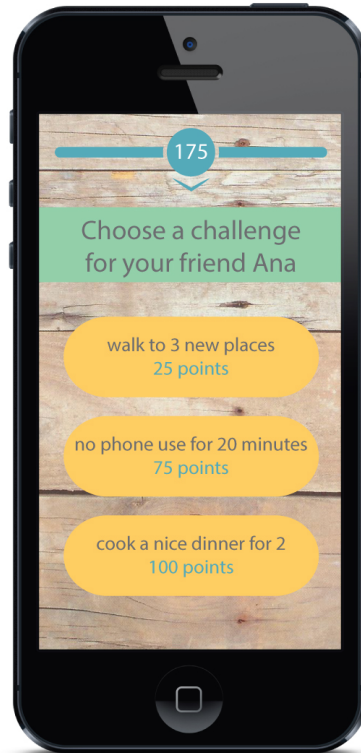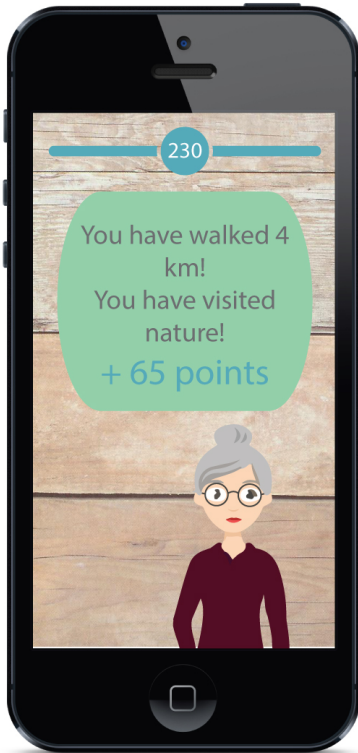
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VISUALS DARE NOT STRESS

For the design of the game a natural look was chosen. This enhances a relaxed feeling [21]. At the top of the screen the current amount of points is displayed. This section can be swiped down in order to see your character and history.

230

You have walked 4 km!
You have visited nature!
+ 65 points

175

Choose a challenge for your friend Ana

walk to 3 new places
25 points

no phone use for 20 minutes
75 points

cook a nice dinner for 2
100 points

345

Create a challenge for your friend Ana

Do 20 push-ups in the street
Points:

q w e r t y u i o p
a s d f g h j k l
z x c v b n m
123 space return

25

You have recieved a challenge from Mike

no phone use for 20 minutes
75 points

decline   accept

500

Character when the player lives very healthy and tries to cut out stress.

-10
life expectancy

Ouch!

25

Character after lots of misbehaviour.