blink

By [Jessica Webb](#)

As you surely have heard by now, the smartphone-using world has been taken over by a certain addictive game based on a certain popular Nintendo franchise. Fellow Blinker [Darshana](#) and I are no exceptions. We chatted about our mutual love of Pokémon GO over lunch one day and discovered a very curious difference between us.

I am a longtime player of games of all kinds, and at the age of 11, I became one of those who was undeniably hooked on catching them all. I even broke down two years ago and picked up a 3DS and a copy of Pokémon X to check out all the changes since I'd last played 10 years before. It was still as riveting as ever, and it took no time to fall down that familiar rabbit hole. What was strange to me was that even though I surround myself with gamer folk, I only have one other friend who has been a lifelong addict. Friends who were willing to build their own gaming PCs and buy expensive console systems and even (secretly) play casual games on their phones never really picked up handheld gaming, and never played much more than the card game as kids, and didn't play at all as adults.

Enter Darshana. She is not what you would call a gamer, in the least. Here she was, asking me this and that about Stops, and Lures, and Evolution. She was also hooked on Pokémon GO.

I understand the attraction – as games go, the simplicity and premise of Pokémon make it near irresistible, to begin with. To create a version that doesn't require players to purchase additional equipment, is discreet (relatively, as people have their smartphones out frequently as it is), and involves the real world is mad scientist genius. I was, and continue to be, like most folks, still pretty surprised at the near universal ravenous uptake by gamers and casual gamers and never-gamers alike. No matter where you go, there always seems to be at least one person within spitting distance playing. You know, the person walking along, phone in hand, glancing up at the street intermittently and stopping every now and then to swipe up on their screen – even stopping to shout in dismay at having failed to capture a Pokémon. Not to mention the folks who

in their fervor have walked [into traffic](#), [off cliffs](#), or trespassed onto [private property](#).

My server at the Thai place I dined at a few weekends ago regretted that he had run his phone through the wash the day the game came out, and now a coworker was several levels and tens of Pokémon ahead. When I saw two trendy-looking young women in front of a Starbucks jumping and laughing with their phones, "[Magnemite](#)?" was all I needed to say (because, of course, I was playing). They both exclaimed, "Yes!" One even added, "It's so low-level, but it's another one I didn't have yet!

pokeman go

We have questions

Working in Downtown Seattle, Darshana and I (and everyone) see this frequently. Who are these new friends? Did they play any version of the game before? Did they start playing right away? How do they figure out what to do when they don't have the knowledge background of longtime players? How do new players fare in this community? How were they dealing with the ubiquitous technical issues?

To find out, we headed to a local Pokémon gym (a location within the game where players can "battle" Pokémon against other players, among other activities) to find out more. We saw (from our office) that the [Seattle Great Wheel](#) is a gym, so we walked down the waterfront to the pier on a hot sunny afternoon, only stopping to catch a couple of Pokémon on the way. There were a few Stops close to one another on the pier, and someone had set lures on all of them.

The pier was busy. We had a hard time choosing who to approach because it seemed like at least half of the folks there were playing. For the first time, it occurred to me how nice it would be right now to have a portable phone charger, and when I looked around, I saw dozens of them. These people came prepared.

We talked to two young couples in their 20's, a pair of buddies in their 30's, a group of international students, and a 13-year-old tourist and her dad. We asked where they'd come from, how long they'd played, what they liked about GO, how they dealt with technical problems, and how they figured out how to use the app.

In our [next post](#), we'll follow up with what we found out about how and why people are playing the game, "trends" we've identified, and what its popularity might mean for the future of mobile games and augmented reality.