

”Social platform or fantasy world?”
- A mixed methods approach to the study of social interaction in World of Warcraft

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Abstract

Title: "Social platform or fantasy world? - A mixed methods approach to the study of social interaction in World of Warcraft"

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The purpose of this study was to investigate massively-multiplayer online role-playing games from the social interactionist perspective. The aim was to chart the social interaction within the game environment as well build upon previous known findings concerning player's in-game preferences as well as the sociability of the game environment.

The questions addressed by this study were:

- How does the social interaction within World of Warcraft utter itself?
- What function does World of Warcraft have for its players?

A mixed methods approach was used in the form of an online self-completion survey in combination with separate in-game participant observations. The resulting material consisted of surveys, chatlogs and screenshots.

Results indicated that the game environment contained several spheres of interaction, where real life as well as guilds showed the qualities of a protected backstage region while the public and action-oriented spheres showed frontstage public qualities. The playerbase of the game showed the inherent qualities of a team, displaying a coherent routine that reinforced the boundaries between the back-and frontstage regions. Players were also often seen gravitating to form two opposing teams in the dramaturgical sense as well as share a mutual culture based on popular culture.

Furthermore, survey results showed that the nature of the social ties that players have with them in the game have a correlation with both their in-game activities as well as their preferences. Different demographic groups were also found to vary in their activities and social ties.

The findings of this study grant an insight into the way in which the social interaction within massively-multiplayer online role-playing games is formed by the actors within the interaction as well as the game environment itself. These findings have possible application use in both understanding game usage as well as the social possibilities of massively-multiplayer online role-playing games.

Key words: Social interaction, MMORPGs, Presentation of self, Erving Goffman, World of Warcraft, digital communities, computer mediated communication

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1. Introduction

With just over one third of the world's population connected to the internet¹ (Internet World Stats, *n.d*) it can be argued that the digital sphere has become an integral part of our society. Furthermore, although the technological domination of the personal computer may in part have now become rivaled by newer technologies, the computer medium continues to be Europe's most preferred entertainment medium in terms of gaming (ISFE, 2012). Both positive and negative aspects of the widespread medium have been lifted in the current debates, where the increased connectivity and expanded social landscape offered by the internet is contrasted by internet and gaming addiction as well as problems with cyber-bullying. Due to the widespread presence of the computer and internet medium in today's society it is of importance to understand not only the prevalence and use of the medium but to investigate its internal mechanisms.

The internet medium allows us to connect, share, and do so at a wider range than before as well as providing access to new social resources that otherwise are out of reach in our immediate physical environment (Ito et. al., 2008). It is also an enabling medium (for better or for worse), having an impact on not only how we see and experience the world but also how we feel. Studies have shown that youth's emotions in connection with using the internet are primarily positive emotions and that the internet is mostly used for connecting with friends or learning (Page & Mapstone, 2010). The internet is also a place that may be new but not detached from real life norms and values, often reflecting prevalent social norms such as those of real life beauty standards (Siibak, 2007). With other words, the internet allows us to connect and it also reflects real life norms. The online world can thus in some way be seen as an extension of the real world.

In the case of gaming, it appears that it too invokes mostly positive connotations for its consumer audience, where the most commonly associated word with gaming in Europe is "entertaining" (ISFE, 2012). In fact, most people that play computer and video-games play for the entertainment value of the games (Lee et al., 2007). In the case of gaming, similar normative reproductions of real-life realities as those across the internet appear to take place. For instance, the interactive gaming society has been indicated to reproduce both stereotypical gender roles in terms of over-sexualizing women (Williams et. al., 2009) as well

¹ Data valid in 2012.

as reproducing the norm of whiteness (Nakamura, 2002). However, the over-sexualization of female characters appears to differ between game genres, where casual games have not been found to have this occurrence (Wohn, 2011). The gaming world is thus not a distanced fantasy world, disconnected from real-life concerns but a social space that is firmly grounded in real-life expectations and values.

The popularity of gaming is seen in that the gaming industry is a thriving one, with 3.7 billion SEK in revenue in 2012 in Sweden alone (Spelutvecklarindex, 2013) while generating a revenue of 14.8 billion USD the same year in the U.S (ESA, 2013). The industry is currently outnumbering the musical industry in revenue (Spelbranschen, 2013). An estimated 62% of the Swedish population plays computer games (ISFE, 2012) with an equivalent of 53% playing video games in the U.S (ESA, 2013). Males and females as well as all age groups are represented in the gaming community, where female players account for 46% of the player population in the U.S while male player constitute 55% (ESA, 2013). Games are also replacing other media outlets such as TV and board games. For example, the average Everquest 2² player spent 10 hours less per week watching television than the average American (Williams et. al., 2008). So what is it that makes gaming so widespread?

Four out of the top five selling games in the U.S in 2012 were games in the role-playing game genre, all of which included a socially interactive component (ESA, 2013). The top selling game was *World of Warcraft: The Mists of Pandaria* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2012), a Massively-multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) characterized by its strong immersion, expansive world and large player community with 7.6 million active players³ (Activision, 2013). Furthermore, the majority of players who play massively-multipalyers online games (MMOs) play with someone they know in real life (Yee, Daedalus project) and online multiplayer games have been found to predominantly contain socio-emotional communication of positive valence (Peña & Hancock, 2006). These findings suggest that the online gaming environment has a socially enabling component and that there is an indication that the gaming industry (especially the MMORPGs) has a social aspect that seems to draw in players. This study aims to

² Everquest 2 is a game within the MMORPG genre and has a similar game-play to that of World of Warcraft.

³ Data valid as of the second quarter of 2013

investigate the social interaction that occurs within the interactive MMORPG genre and shed light on the meaning that the social aspect of the game has for its player-base.

1.2 Research aims and questions

The Goffmanian symbolic interactionist perspective on the presentation of the self puts a great weight on both the mutual collective agreement of the definition of the situation in which any given interaction happens as well as on the reciprocal validation of one's actions being perceived as they are intended. What this study aims to do is to investigate the mechanisms which shape the definition of the interaction within the digital environment of *World of Warcraft: mists of Pandaria* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2012), as well as to investigate the ways in which the inhabitants of that environment carry out their interaction.

In this study, *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) has been chosen to serve as a representative of this digital environment due in part to its large community and spread. Previous studies have already been made on the subject of both the social and interactionist aspects of both *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) (e.g Eklund, 2012 and Chen & Duh, 2007) and MMORPGs as a whole (e.g Yee, 2006 and Blinka, 2008). However, this study aims to approach the subject with a differing angle, both through its methodological difference in respect to previous research by using a mixed methods approach as well as investigating two parallel aspects of social communication by investigating the social interaction in-game as well as the nature of the players preferences in terms of activities and social aspects.

1.3 Research aims

The primary aim of this study is to investigate how the social interaction takes shape in the digital environment by studying the cues and objects that facilitate the communication. This study's main aim is to investigate the digital social dynamic of *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) through Erving Goffman's dramaturgical framework using a participant observational method, aiming to investigate how individuals communicate and interact in an environment that has literal role-playing as well as role assignments. Previous research suggests that the in-game environment is a scene that allows players to express themselves in a

more personal way in comparison to real life (de Larois & Lang, 2013) and the MMORPG environment has been indicated to be a socially interactive environment that facilitates human encounters in a way that is sufficient enough for the formation of social relationships (Cole & Griffiths, 2007). The game environment has also been shown to have some dis-inhibiting properties both in terms of relationship building as well as in terms of acting out (Cole & Griffiths, 2007). In light of these indications, this study aims to investigate the interaction that occurs between players when a ready-made "stage" is in place and aims to identify both the forms of communication in this environment as well as the contextual mechanisms that shape the interaction by conducting participant observations.

In order to gain insight into the social interaction *within* the MMORPG setting, this study also further aims to first investigate the definition of the game environment as in terms of what meaning the game has for its players with focus on the social tasks in contrast to solitary ones. Previous research has identified several reasons for playing (Yee, 2006 and Bartle, 1996) as well as suggesting that the social aspect of games is not the main objective for players when identifying what players *do* in-game (Ducheneaut, 2006). The aim of this study is therefore not only to investigate how the social interaction within *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) utters itself but to create an understanding for the extent to which its players engage in social activities in-game, whether they like these social activities or not as well as to investigate what social spheres are represented in the player's online circles. This study thus aims to not only investigate the social interaction within the MMORPG environment through the participating observational method, but also define the environment of the game as it is seen by the players through the use of an online survey method in order to contextualize the main findings generated by the participant observations.

This study thus aims to investigate social interaction within *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) and the way in which the interaction is uttered through the use of a participant observational method, while contextualizing the findings through the use of an online survey which addresses the interaction's prevalence amongst players and its meaning for the players. The aim is thus to gain insight into the utterance, prevalence and meaning of social interaction within *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004). This study does not aim

to draw conclusions about the underlying causes for the mechanisms of the interaction within the game, nor does it intend to determine the effects of the social interaction within the game.

1.4 Research questions

What characterizes social interaction in *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004)?

Question 1: How does the social interaction within World of Warcraft utter itself?

- What defines the social interaction within *World of Warcraft*?
- How is the self presented within *World of Warcraft*?
- How can the definitions of the interaction and presentation of self within the game be understood with the help of the dramaturgical framework provided by Erving Goffman?

Question 2: What function does World of Warcraft have for its players?

- Do players engage in social activities more than solitary ones?
- Do players prefer social activities over solitary ones?
- What is the most prevalent motivation for playing the game?
- Which of the player's social spheres are involved in the gaming activity?

1.5 Disposition

The subsequent sections of this study begin with a general introduction in the area of *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) both in terms of its characteristics as its specific environment and game-play. This section is meant to facilitate the key terms and aspects of the game which will be touched upon in this study as well as provide a background introduction into the medium for those who are unfamiliar with it. The background section is intended for those who are not familiar with MMORPG games overall rather than providing theoretical terminology and addresses more practical aspects of the game. There is also a glossary of the key game-specific terms which will be used throughout this report which is provided in Appendix 1.

The subsequent sections will go on to address previous work conducted in the field of both games as well as in some part digital environments to then go over

into the section of the theoretical framework of this study which consists of the dramaturgical framework as formulated by Erving Goffman (Goffman, 1958). The theoretical framework section will briefly present key concepts and terminology which will be used in the analysis. The method section follows the theoretical framework section and accounts for the rationale behind the mixed methods approach as well as for the survey and participant observation method applied in this study. Due to the extensive nature of the data generated through the observational method, the gathered results are presented and analyzed separately from the survey results. The survey results are presented prior to the observational results in order to contextualize the main findings of the observational results presented further. The final results and analysis of both data types is summarized together in the summary section which is followed by a general discussion.

2. World of Warcraft – Background

World of Warcraft (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) is the most played MMORPG, making up approximately half of the MMORPG game genre population in amount of players (Cole & Griffiths 2007). In September 2013, the game remained the number one selling game for subscription MMORPGs with an approximate 7.6 million subscribers (Activision, 2013). The in-game population was thus an equivalent of the size of the population of Bulgaria or Hong Kong. The appeal of the game can in part be attributed to the fact that it further introduced the MMORPG genre to new, less time-devoting demographic spectrum through its use of reward systems that target players who do not wish to or can not spend many hours in front of the game (Ducheneaut, 2006). For example, it allows for various types of play-styles, providing a choice of five main game-play actions which include: questing, instanced dungeons/raiding⁴, trading, player versus player activity⁵ (Suznjevic et al., 2009) and a fifth player-generated activity which is role-playing.

⁴ Raiding and instances are sectioned off areas which contain a combination of mobs and bosses with greater combat difficulty. Carried out in groups of 5, 10 or 25 players.

⁵ PvP refers to activities where players interact in a competitive way in relation to each other. The interaction in PvP refers to players competing by killing each other or dueling with each other in various ways and settings.

2.1 Game-play and the game environment

World of Warcraft (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) is an MMORPG, where a large amount of players play simultaneously over the internet, sharing one large storyline which has role-playing elements. The game is a living story in the sense that the story of the game is constantly updated through the release of patches which introduce new content to the game and its story as well as larger parts that are expansion-packs. Each expansion-pack furthers the story, introducing new villains and heroes. One can play through the whole story and still go back to the beginning of it, but the amount of players in each area of the game (and thus each story part) naturally changes depending on how long ago a new expansion-pack was introduced. Therefore, even though all parts of the game (old and newly added) stay in place, some of the areas and content gets outdated due to the fact that many players have at some point played through that content and grown bored of it.

Character creation

When entering the game, players can choose between playing for one of two sides; the Horde or the Alliance. The two sides have somewhat varying background stories within the game and once chosen, the player then selects one of the races available on that side. Then, one of 11 classes is chosen, thus choosing a pre-made set of abilities that have different advantages in the game and that influence your role in group settings. The classes can be grouped into three main categories: tanks⁶, healers⁷ and damage dealing classes (DPS)⁸. It is further possible to customize the appearance and gender of your character to a limited degree. Each player also chooses their own unique character name.

⁶ Tanks are players who's task-related function is absorbing all the damage from bosses/mobs in dungeons and raids, allowing other players to do damage to the mobs/bosses without getting hurt or attacked by them. The tank's primary focus is to have armor that is strong enough to absorb damage and to keep the focus of the boss/mob off of the rest of the group.

⁷ Healers are players who have the task-related function of healing the damage which has been inflicted by mobs/bosses on all party members during dungeons or raids. The healer's primary focus is to acquire armor that allows for maximum regeneration of the power need to cast healing spells and primarily focus on keeping tanks alive.

⁸ DPS are players who's task-related function is dealing damage to mobs/bosses during dungeons or raids. The DPS's primary focus is to acquire armor that allows for maximum damage dealing and do not focus on survivability.

Figure 1. Example of the user-interface (including author's labels) – here engaging in combat



Starting points and leveling

Once the player enters the game, they begin at level 1 and start in an area designated for players levels 1-6. Which area one begins in is dependent of which race one has chosen. The leveling is done by receiving experience points for exploring new places, killing monsters or automated enemies (mobs), completing assignments (quests) and by doing crafting. The main way of receiving experience points is by completing quests, which is carried out mostly as a single player but can include help from others. The quests are also the main components of the game that contain the game's story. With each level, players gain new abilities, spells or attacks and increase both their health-pool as well as their strength. Once players reach level 10 they can begin to do level appropriate dungeons, which are areas that are sectioned off from the rest of the world and contain more difficult enemies as well as better reward items and more in-game money (gold) compared to questing. These dungeons are completed by entering these sectioned areas (sometimes a cave or castle) areas in groups (parties) of five players, which may be assembled on one's own accord through friends, chat advertisements or through a built-in in-game cuing system (PUG⁹) that automatically groups players who

⁹ Pick-up-groups, or “PUGs” are a group of players that form a group by random chance by being paired together by a built in cuing system in the game where players sign up to cue for a dungeon.

wish to do a dungeon. Leveling is then carried out from level 1-90 by moving to different areas within the game world and completing areas with increasing difficulties as well as intermittently doing dungeons with groups (parties) of players.

It is possible to leave any area before reaching the maximum level of the area, but the automated enemies of the higher level areas will most likely kill your character due to their higher difficulty which is adjusted for higher levels. Similarly, a player who has reached the highest level (90) can come and go in any level area within the game, but not gain any experience from killing the mobs or completing the quests in those areas. Furthermore, a higher level character can still join a group (party) for a lower-level dungeon but will not gain much experience for it or have use of the rewards. Players will still often “go back” and do dungeons that are too low level for them that they have done before in order to either get armor or weapons that look appealing for pure cosmetic purposes as well as to change the appearance of their armor as well as their equipment (transmogrification).

Getting around - transport

Players will get around the in-game world by simply running. Some classes have abilities that allow them to use a teleportation ability which instantly takes them to certain cities, while some classes have abilities which increase their running speed. Players may also use a slower flying transportation that can be used along set flight paths inside the game. Upon reaching level 20, players can purchase a mount or a vehicle for in-game currency and purchase a faster, flying mount or vehicle at level 60. All mounts and vehicles come in many different shapes ranging from glowing panthers to motorcycles and later on flying carpets. These mounts and vehicles are often popular to collect within the game and some are harder to get than others.

Player versus player activity

During level progression, players can also engage in player versus player (PvP) activity, battling other players either through dueling each other in the game or completing so-called battlegrounds or arena matches. Battlegrounds are similar to dungeons in that they are sectioned off and completed in groups, but here the

players instead fight each other instead of mobs. Arenas are a gladiator-like area which is also sectioned off, where players can fight each other in smaller teams of 1 versus 1. 2 versus 2 and so forth up to 5 players versus each other. Completing these tasks and winning grants some experience points as well as special points in the player-versus-player system which then can be traded for items.

Side-activities

Players can also engage in various side-activities such as simply exploring the world, leveling up professions in the game which allows them to create in-game items for use or otherwise trade with via the trade chat channels or the physical auction house in the game. Players can also join a guild, which is a type or semi-permanent group of players created by players themselves, in resemblance of a club¹⁰. Guilds can contain between 5 and 1000 players, often forming on the basis of either common in-game goals or real-life mutual characteristics such as for example nationality (Eklund, 2012). With the release of the later expansion packs, joining guilds has been further incentivised by various in-game perks that one gains through being part a guild. The longer a player stays in a guild the more reputation points they gain and the more perks they can unlock.

Chat channels

The communication in the game can occur through various channels. The most common chat channels to use are the: general channel, trade channel, guild channel and the party/raid channel. There is also an in-game mail function that is used mostly to send out mass letters to for example guild members or to send in-game items to each other. The general chat is characterized by the fact that those who have access to seeing and writing in the channel are those who share a certain area within the game. Each area has its own designated general chat channel and once you leave one area you no longer see that specific area's channel. The trade chat is similar to the general channel in that it is dependent on a player's geographical location, but as opposed to being single-area specific it can instead only be seen when players enter the main cities of the game and where all the

¹⁰ The guild is a long-term created group of players who choose to join forces to either help each other with leveling, doing high level content in the game, role-play or simply socialize. Guilds may fill various functions and each guild within the game formulates their goals and intentions themselves. The guild may communicate with each other through a private guild chat and calendar which is otherwise invisible to those who are not within the guild.

cities share one trade channel. Raid and group chats are used by and can be seen only by those who are part of a temporary group.

More specialized channels exist such as the lookingforguild channel and lookingforgroup, but these are mostly replaced by the use of the general channel or the automated cuing systems "pick-up-group" (PUG) and "looking-for-raid" (LFR¹¹).

The game also contains conversational-like chats such as the "say" function, the "yell" function and the "whisper" function. Wherein the say function allows players in one's near physical proximity to see what one writes while the yell function can be seen by players further away, alongside the general and trade chats in the chat window. The whisper function allows for a two-way conversation only, where only the send and recipient of the messages can see what is written.

End-game – when you reach the highest level

Once a player reaches the highest level (90), they shift their focus to more teamwork activities such as completing raids. Raids are similar to dungeons, but require 10-25 players in a group and are of a greater difficulty while giving greater rewards. Raids are often tied into the ending of the story of the game where players face the major antagonist of the game who has been present as a main villain throughout the storyline as they have been leveling. Prior to being able to enter raids, a player must have acquired good enough equipment (weapons, armor) to be able to fulfill their role in any given raid. Due to the armor requirements, players spend their first time as a level 90 doing dungeons on harder settings (heroic dungeons) to gain better armor in order to be able to perform well in a raid group. Players will often do the same dungeon and raid over and over again in order to get equipment (which has a random chance of appearing) as well as to gain in-game currency (gold) which may be traded in for more armor or other valuable items such as mounts and vehicles.

¹¹ LFR is a built-in system within the game that allows players to assemble full groups for raiding (either for groups of 10 or 25 players) when they do not have the appropriate amount of players or the appropriate type of players in full. The LFR system then groups players together randomly with other players who are also cuing to start a raid. Players thus often do not know each other prior to entering the raid group.

Achievements and nostalgia

Players will often go back to doing lower level or out-dated dungeons and raids in order to gain armor for cosmetic or role-playing purposes. Players also re-do raids and dungeons in a specific way to gain in-game achievements and earn usable character titles and to simply earn in-game achievements as a status symbol. Some players also go back to old content out of nostalgic reasons, since they may miss playing a certain part of the story.

3. Related previous work

Since the birth of even the most basic interactive computer systems, there has been research regarding both the effects as well as the possibilities of the new digital technology in relation to our ourselves. Much of the research has had a focus on an effects-based approach and this effects-based approach has mostly investigated addiction issues in regards to computer and digital technology as well as correlations between computer games and elevated aggression. However, this is not the limit of the research which has been conducted in the digital research field. Williams, Yee and Caplan have written that the effects-based perspective is and "one-way relationship is not adequate in the highly interactive and social age" (Williams et. al., 2008) and there is in fact a vast amount of research conducted on the interactive aspects of both computer technologies as well as computer games. There has been a prevalent interest in studying both digital environments and computer games from a sociological and socio-psychological perspective ever since the emergence of even the most basic online computer-mediated-communication (CMC) (e.g Turkle, 1997 and Bartle 1996). Computer games have been studied from different perspectives, such as: addiction (e.g Grüsser et. al., 2007 and Wood et. al., 2004), aggression (e.g Anderson & Bushman, 2001 and Ferguson, 2007), a social platform (e.g Eklund, 2012 and Chen & Duh, 2007) as well as studying the role of avatars (e.g Blinka, 2008 and Yee & Bailenson, 2006). However, this study aims to more look into the nature of the social aspect of the game rather than assert causality or effects, relating to the social aspect of the medium as well as the presentation of self through the use of an avatars.

3.1 Games and health

Several studies have focused on the addiction-related aspect of video- and computer games. Studies have supported the claim of game's addictive qualities, where 12 % of test subjects were found to meet criteria for addiction in relation to games (Grüsser et. al., 2007). Similarities between gambling and video gaming have also been found (Wood et. al., 2004) as well as similarities in dopamine release mechanisms in comparison to ecstasy users, where gaming has been linked to similar symptoms as those including substance addiction in that there is a similar presence of cravings (Weinstein, 2010). The genre of games has also been indicted to have an impact, where role-playing game players show a higher presence of internet addiction than web-board gamers or sport gamers (Lee et al., 2007). There has also been an increasing amount of warning labels that have been appearing on both computer and video games, warning labels are an unusual occurrence in the market of leisure goods (Rooij, 2011). These warning labels can be interpreted as society's reaction to the new medium and the perceived problems that it may incur.

Furthermore a correlation between aggression and playing video games amongst youth players as well as decrease pro-social behavior has been indicated (e.g Anderson & Bushman, 2001) while others have debunked this suggestion (e.g Ferguson, 2007).

In terms of positive psychological effects of gaming, a positive correlation between sociability in-game and hours played has been indicated (Cole & Griffiths, 2007) indicating a certain weight to the social aspect of games. In addition, the players who express feelings of being "themselves" in the game (in comparison to real-life) tend to spend more time in-game than those who do not share the same feelings towards the game (Cole & Griffiths, 2007) suggesting that games can have varying personal meanings for players. Game environments have further been shown to aid in certain treatments, where for example modified 3D games were shown to be successful in the treatment of arachnophobia (Bouchard et. al., 2006) and used as an analgetic for burn victims (Hoffman, 2004).

On a negative side, overall computer usage has also been linked to physical problems such as lower back- and joint pain in adolescents (Hakala et. al., 2012). However, positive correlations have been seen in the sense that online gamers have been shown to both have a lower than average BMI and engage in physical

activities more often than the average American (Williams et. al., 2008).

3.2 MMORPGs - why play them?

The MMORPG genre appeals to a wide demographic, representing a mixed array of both age, ethnic and gender groups. The appeal of the MMORPG genre can in part be attributed to its content, which allows for many different play styles to be encompassed in one game (Yee, 2006). The motivations for playing can vary amongst players and some research has been aimed at investigating this aspect of the online gaming sphere.

Prior to the emergence of MMORPGs digital researchers studied an early form of interactive role-playing games called Multi-user dungeons (MUDs). One of the most prominent studies concerning this early form of interactive online gaming was Richard Bartle's "Hearts, clubs, diamonds and spades: players who suit" (Bartle, 1996). The study revealed four player-types which were found to be characterized by separate interests, including: exploring the world, socializing with other players, achievement within the game and imposing on other players (Bartle, 1996). The four player-types which corresponded to these interests were thus labeled as: *explorers*, *socializers*, *achievers* and *killers* (Bartle, 1996). These were considered to exist in an ecological equilibrium state and enforced by different game mechanics; *acting*, *interacting*, *world* and *player* benefiting mechanics in the game (Bartle, 1996).

Another study which addressed the motivations of play, revealed that player's motivations may be categorized into three overarching game components, namely; *achievement*, *social* and *immersion* (Yee, 2006). The three overarching sub-components then encompass the subgroups; *advancement*, *mechanics*, *competition*, *socializing*, *relationship*, *teamwork*, *discovery*, *role-playing*, *customization* and *escapism* (Yee, 2006). Yee countered Bartle's static concept of play-styles and developed on the idea that one cannot generalize the effects of gaming when studying one game onto all games due to variations amongst players as well as game-types (Yee, 2006). These 10 motivations for playing as defined by Yee (2006), not only encompass motivations for play but also activities in which players may engage in and will therefore be used further in this study as a base for investigating player's play-styles as well as to study their self-reported interactional patterns.

Bartle's player-types were described within a MUD setting, which allowed limited graphics and text-based interaction between players. The model has also received some criticism in terms of limiting players to only one player-style. The interactions within MUD settings may not fully compare to the larger expressive freedom within today's MMORPGs, but can still be applied to today's player base to some extent. For instance, Yee's 10 player motivation for playing MMORPGs was formulated based on these four player types (Yee, 2006) and although Bartle's player-types are somewhat dated, they can still be linked to the five available activity-types available to players as they are identified by Suznjevic et. al. amongst others (Suznjevic et. al., 2008).

Motivations for playing MMORPGs can thus vary from player to player and motivations can also overlap. However, some differences between motivations and driving forces behind play-styles have been found. For example, female players were found to score higher on social aspects that are relationship-building while male players scored higher on social aspects that are of more interacting and socializing nature. Similarly, there is a discrepancy in motivations for play between age groups, where for example younger male players score higher on the *grief*¹² sub-component (Yee, 2002). One study has also indicated that female *World of Warcraft* players most often get introduced to the game by their significant others (Eklund, 2012). The competitive aspect of the game is also another motivation for play, where player's are attracted by the competitive elements within games even if they only offer rewards with merely symbolic value (Liu et. al., 2013) such as those within MMORPGs. Cyberspace itself has many different functions for individuals and while for some it may be an arena to resolve problems as well as conflicts, for others it may be a place to socialize and try out different identities (Turkle, 1999).

MMORPGs are characterized by the fact that actors within this interactive world have to do something, relating to Bartle's emphasis on the *acting* component within games as a driving force for some players. This need for acting and reacting is integral to the game experience and is part of the reciprocal relationship between the interactive world and its players. It is also this coordination as well as good communication that is the key to team-building and group cohesion within *World of Warcraft* (Chen, 2009).

¹² Where *grief* refers to antagonizing behavior towards other players for one's own enjoyment.

3.3 The social aspects

An estimated 81% of the players in Europe play online and for example in Sweden, 52% of all those who play, play with others (ISFE, 2012). The gaming community thus has a noticeable amount of social interaction. On the other hand, the sociability of the game may be questioned, where for example the MMORPG genre's extent of socializing has been questioned, where the play-style has been viewed in terms of an audience or a spectacle that is enjoyed by players as a form of entertainment rather than as an integral part of the game (Ducheneaut et. al., 2006).

The environment of MMORPGs creates a special environment in terms of communication and interaction by both removing non-verbal cues and enabling the reception of information about the other without the other in question knowing about it through the use of *gazing* (Chen & Duh, 2007). The gazing mechanism is specific to the virtual environment, since the environment allows the player to have an exchange of information via a one-way channel by i.e inspecting a player¹³, which leads to communication which only the said *gazer* is aware of (Chen & Duh, 2007). Most of the built-in in-game communication channels are text based, however, the use of voice communication through Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP)¹⁴ clients is widespread (Suznjevic. et. al., 2009).

The role-playing communities of the virtual environments are the places where the concept of trying out new identities is the most prominent (Turkle, 1999). The self which is present within these digital communities is a pluralistic self, which is the self which is present in many forms dependent of which chat-room or what virtual space one takes at that time (Turkle, 1997). In the digital environment of CMCs, the individual no longer carries out separate roles in separate temporal and spatial areas but may take on a multitude of roles and identities all at once (Turkle, 1997). Similarly, the interface of MMORPGs, with multiple chat channels and areas of interactions gives room for this multiplicity that is characteristic to the digital self and therefore it can be assumed that individuals are free to express multiple aspects of their persona even in this environment. In the case of *World of Warcraft*, there are two different styles of communication: sociable and

¹³ Inspecting is done by clicking on a player and getting up a visual image of the player with all of their statistics of their character, in-game achievements and the information regarding their armor

¹⁴ VoIP clients are programs that allow individual's to speak to each other as well as use video communication over the internet. Such current programs include Skype Ventrilo and Teamspeak, which are also currently often used by players to coordinate in the game.

instrumental (Eklund, 2012) which means that a player can be expected to take on such multiple identities and their following communication-style, while present within one area, an area which is the game itself.

The online community and the technology of CMCs facilitates the ability to rapidly change one's identity if one would wish to change others perceptions of oneself (Zhao, 2005). However, the detachment of one's online identity to form a new one still comes at the price of sacrificing one's resources in the form of time spent to build the current identity as well as the acquired resources within the current digital space (Zhao, 2005). In the case of MMORPGs the resources lost encompass everything from simple money and time that had been dedicated to the now changed identity, to social resources in the form of friends and guild ties. Furthermore, the digitalization of our selves also poses another problem, namely the separation and upkeep of our various personalities and selves (Belk, 2013).

Players of computer games most often play for the entertainment value of the games (Lee et al., 2007) at the same time as players that play computer and video-games play due to social ties with friends constitute about 15.8% of the player-base and is the third most common reason for playing, right after the number one reason "entertainment" and second favorite reason "relaxation" (Lee et al. 2007). There are therefore indications that although the social aspect of the game is an integral part of its success, it cannot fully be put forth as the sole reason for the success. It has been indicated in studies that it is the more engaged players within the game interactions are those who tend to benefit most from the social interactions within them as well as form friendships therein (Chen & Duh, 2007 and Utz, 2000). In the case of *World of Warcraft*, approximately three quarters of the players have been estimated to have made friends inside the game, one third have at some point been attracted to another player in-game (Cole & Griffiths 2007). This indicates that the medium has a social aspect and potential for facilitating the formation of social relationships. On the other hand, another study suggested otherwise, showing that many players stayed out of the social formations within the game and that the solitary player-types constituted such a large portion of the game population that it could not be attributed to different play styles (Ducheneaut et. al., 2006).

Although the social aspect of MMORPGs does not appear to be the most vital part of the games, studies have indicated a large potential for social interaction

and bonding within the games. The bonding within and through the interactive gaming environment encompasses both in-game relationship formations as well as offline relationship formations. As an example, it has been found that as many as two fifths of the players would discuss sensitive aspects of their life with in-game friends, aspects that they would otherwise not share with real-life friends (Cole & Griffiths, 2007). In fact, much of the in-game communication that occurs within active guilds¹⁵ in *World of Warcraft* is centered around building cohesion and solidarity amongst the group members (Rusaw, 2011) and this team-building process is based on the notion of a shared knowledge amongst group members (Rusaw, 2011).

The cohesion of the tight-knit guild groups within *World of Warcraft* is further upheld by refraining from openly criticizing each other and doing so only in the guild chat (Rusaw, 2011). However, it must be noted that the findings regarding solidarity and group cohesion apply to tight-knit groups within guilds, while communication amongst players in the broader scope of the game environment in *World of Warcraft* limits socializing and makes communication costly (Eklund, 2012). An early study concerning MUDs indicated that the development of friendships and relationships in a CMC environment relies on the acceptance of the CMC and its language from the user, while the sociability aspect has a moderate role in the relationship-building (Utz, 2000). It is the degree of skepticism towards the use of the CMC medium for relationship-building that is the determining factor and not for example the habit of doing so (Utz, 2000).

The anonymity of the game-setting creates room for a greater rate of self-disclosure as well as acting out, where female players have been found to be more prone to self-disclosure in online encounters within the MMORPG genre than their male counterparts (Cole & Griffiths, 2007). The increased self-disclosing effect amongst MMORPG players has in-part been attributed to the anonymity which is provided by the game and in part attributed to the broad age range amongst the players (Cole & Griffiths, 2007). Players within *World of Warcraft*

¹⁵ The term *guild* refers to an in-game type of group formation (known otherwise as *clans* in many other games). The guild is a semi-permanent group and can be formed by any player who recruits other players into the guild either and may be based on common goals such as leveling or role-playing the the game or on external grounds such as for example nation-specific guilds or age-specific guilds. The guild has certain communicative specificities to it in terms of that it has a private guild chat, which only guild members can see and an in-game calendar to coordinate guild events amongst guild members.

have also been found to have a lower rate of pluralistic ignorance when compared to social groups IRL (de Larois & Lang, 2013), meaning that there appears to be greater consistency between the inner attitudes of the individual and the way in which they act upon these than there would be in real life situations (de Larois & Lang, 2013). Some players have also reported to feel more "themselves" in-game, stating that the lack of visual attributes such as age and gender as something that facilitates a perception of a safe environment (Cole & Griffiths, 2007).

The digital game environment along with the representation of the self through the avatar has both a positive and a negative impact on the way in which the players act and communicate. The digital environment creates a safer place for self-expression in comparison to for example one's workplace, but at the same time it creates an environment to act- and lash-out without real life consequences (de Larois & Lang, 2013). On the other hand, there is evidence of the presence of real-life norms of social interaction even within the game environment. One study of the game *Second Life*¹⁶ showed that real-life non-verbal social norms regarding eye-contact and accepted spacing between individual's also transfers into the game environment (Yee et. al., 2007). The presence of real-life norms of physical cues in the interaction process in the virtual interaction process leads to the idea that it is possible to relate the virtual social interaction to the social interactions that occur in real life in terms of cues observed (Yee et. al., 2007). However, it is important to keep in mind that the environment of *Second Life* differs from that of other more action oriented multi-player games and may not so readily transferable (Yee et. al., 2007).

The game environment of MMORPGs has thus been seen to have some degree of social interaction as well as incorporate both rigid social mechanisms as well as norms of interaction, but how does this environment relate to the offline lives of players? The general gaming activity in itself has been shown to have an impact on romantic relationships, where playing video-games has been linked to conflict when studying heterosexual couples (Coyne et. al., 2012). This conflict has in part been attributed to the time displacement of time otherwise spent engaging in other activities to playing video games instead (Coyne et. al., 2012). In turn, players of

¹⁶ *Second Life* is a game within the MMORPG genre. The game-play is somewhat different from that of for example *Everquest 2* and *World of Warcraft* in that most of the content is player-generated and the aim of the game is more socially oriented while other MMORPGs often are more action and progression oriented.

World of Warcraft have been found to report that they find gaming with family and offline friends more enjoyable and bonding than for example playing with strangers (Eklund, 2012). Similarly, guilds within *World of Warcraft* often form on the basis of a mutually shared offline characteristic such as for example nationality (Eklund, 2012).

3.4 The role of avatars and digital possessions

Studies have shown that users of avatars in digital environments come to shape or alter their behavior in accordance with how the said avatar is expected to behave. Thus, not only do we create avatars in the digital sphere, but they too create us by influencing our behavior both online and offline (Belk, 2013). For example, players who play taller avatars have been shown to negotiate more aggressively (Yee & Bailenson, 2007). Furthermore, the dress-code of avatars has been shown to have an impact on user's views in regards to the notion of the "rape myth", where users who are exposed to the use of lightly clad female avatars show a stronger inclination towards the belief that a women's clothing impacts their status as a victim (Fox, 2013). Avatars have also shown the ability to teach individuals to take the perspective of others, where playing elderly avatars has shown signs of having a positive impact on the player's attitude and stereotyping towards the elderly (Yee & Bailenson, 2006).

The avatar appears to have an impact on both the user's cognition as well as represent the individual who is controlling it. These identifications with the avatar have been found to vary between different age groups. Younger players distinguish less between themselves and the avatar, where adolescents are the age group that most often connects the accomplishments of the avatar with their own sense of accomplishment (Blinka, 2008). However, the sense of distinguishment between the self and the avatar increases with age, while no difference between age groups has been found regarding the immersion factor of the avatar (Blinka, 2008). However, no matter how much the avatars and the game-created world affects its users, it must still be remembered that it is dependent on players to actually be a world. For example, players have been found to have to actively up-key the fictional framework of *World of Warcraft* to uphold the feeling of being in a fantasy world (Linderoth, 2012). The digital environment produces an arena not only for different identities of the self and the formation of relationships, but it

also creates an arena for a different way of viewing one's possessions as well as the idea of the self. Belk proposes the notion that the digitalization of society requires us to rethink the self and the extended self, which in part is created by our possessions, meaning that there are several updates that need to be made to our concept of the extended self in the digital age (Belk, 2013). Primarily the concepts that need to be addressed when addressing digital items is the dematerialization of otherwise material possessions, re-embodiment of the possessions, sharing of the digital possessions, the distribution of memory or the collective memory of the self as well as the co-constructed image of the self (Belk, 2013).

While Belk addresses material possessions that have analogue equivalents he also means that the digitalization of society has created the opportunity for individuals to acquire items in the digital sphere that would otherwise not be obtainable or even existing in their possession in real life, with the example of swords and magical shields within games (Belk, 2013). When it comes to digital representations, users or digital environments have been found to also have an attachment to digital possessions. According to Cushing, digital possessions are defined by their owners as digital items that: can be controlled by their owner, provide some evidence about their owner, represent their owners identity or some aspect of it, and are characterized as something that has value for its owner (Cushing, 2013).

4. Theoretical framework: Goffman's dramaturgical analogy

The central concept of the symbolic interaction theory is the notion that the social self is formed and molded in the interaction with one's social surroundings and in the interaction with others. This perspective has a constructionist approach and views the individual as driven by subjective interpretations rather than objective facts regarding their surroundings. Prominent figures within the symbolic interactionist school are George Herbert Mead, Blumer and Erving Goffman. This study is focused on the latter's formulation of the symbolic interactionist theory in terms of a dramaturgical analogy due to both its applicability to the more situational interaction between individuals as well as offering a role-based approach for the study of the interaction between actors. The dramaturgical framework offers an applicable model for understanding social interaction even in

the digital age, through its concept of the social interaction as a performance and the use of equipment, making it appropriate for use in the study of actual role-playing environments in the digital age.

The application of both Goffman's dramaturgical analogy as well the social interactionist perspective as a whole has been prevalent within both the study of interaction within digital environments (i.e Siibak, 2007) as well as the social interaction in MMORPGs (i.e Eklund, 2012 and Chen & Duh, 2007). The theory has also been developed by such studies, where for example Chen and Duh have built upon the social interactionist perspective and added the dimension of possible interaction between individuals where only one of the individuals is aware of this through the concept of *gazing* (Chen & Duh, 2007).

The central concept of Goffman's dramaturgical perspective is that individuals not only shape their self in the interaction with others but also that in order for the interaction and the self to be formed, all parties must first have a consensus regarding the definition of the situation within which the interaction occurs. The individuals have a need to define their environment and the situations which they are part of. This study draws upon the dramaturgical framework as formulated by Erving Goffman in his work *The Presentation Of Self In Everyday Life* (1958) and will further reference the terminology and explanations of such as stipulated by this work.

The dramaturgical perspective draws upon the theatrical analogy in relation to human interaction, viewing the interaction in terms of a *performance*. The performance is defined as an “activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers .” (Goffman, 1958:13). The notion of the interaction as a performance is said to be consistent of the presence of different *stages* and *equipment* in the act of the performance. The parties involved in the interaction, or performance are referred to as *observers* and *performers*. Goffman further makes the distinction between the *expressions given* and *expression given off*, meaning that while “expressions given” are tangible cues that can easily be perceived, the “expressions given off” are interactional social cues that are of more contextual nature. The “given off expression” is hard for the individual to control and consists of the expressions transferred towards the audience during the performance. The “given expressions” are easier to control

and adjust as these are the expressions that the individual is overtly communicating.

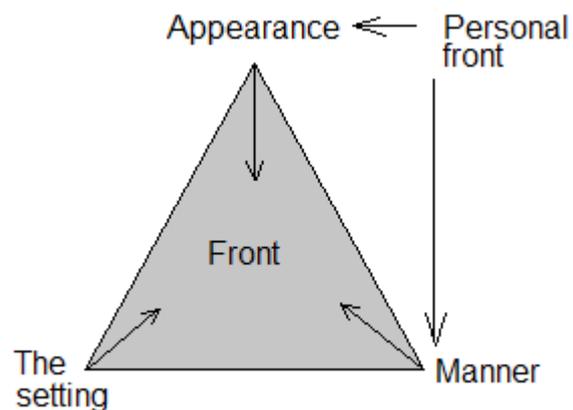
The performance aspect makes a division between performers and the audience and this is furthered by the concept that individuals belonging to the opposite groups (performers and observers) work to ensure that they are sectioned off from one another. The result of this is different regions, which are sectioned off from one another in the purpose of protecting one social area from merging into another. Regions may be sectioned off to varying degrees as well as for different reasons, and may be sectioned off into two predominant regions: the *front region* denoted by the term *frontstage* and the *back region* which is denoted the *backstage*.

The characteristic of the frontstage is that this is the region where the performance occurs in front of observers. The frontstage is maintained through the use of the *front* in combination with the direct communication with the audience and the performer's composure. The actor maintains this composure when within the near vicinity of the audience while the direct communication is referred to as *politeness*. Politeness involves speaking, as well as conveying non-verbal cues to the audience. The composure on the other hand is an overt aspect of the communication with the audience and is referred to as the *decorum*, which entails the way in which the actor may behave when within communicative range of the audience. The front itself is viewed not as much as a personal expression but rather as a reflection of a certain task or setting. This notion of the setting's reflection in the interactional presentation of the self is one of the central components of this perspective, which makes it so readily applicable to digital environments and the study the interaction within such environments.

The front, through which the performance is sustained, is the consistent part of an actor's performance that is fixed, functioning as a way of defining the situation for the observers or the so-called audience. The front functions as an expressive feature of the performance, consisting of three different components: the *setting*, *appearance*, and *manner* (see figure 2.). The manner and appearance components of the front are both parts of the *personal front*, which consist of cues that are given by- and in relation to an individual performer. The manner component communicates the individual performer's role in the performance, thus informing the audience of what they may expect from their interaction with the performer.

The appearance component on the other hand, communicates the individual performer's social status. This can include visual cues such as clothing and the way in which the individual speaks. It is expected of the performer that their appearance and manners are consistent with each other in the performance. The setting is the third component of the front, and refers to the physical equipment as well as the ambiance of the performance that is fixed in a physical sense. Such aspects may involve the sounds of the environment, the furniture or the scenery. The setting is thus both the equipment and the environment in which the performance takes place. The stationary nature of the setting forms such an implication that if the performers wish to make use of a setting for their performance, they are physically bound to that setting.

Figure 2. Based on Goffman 1958:13-19

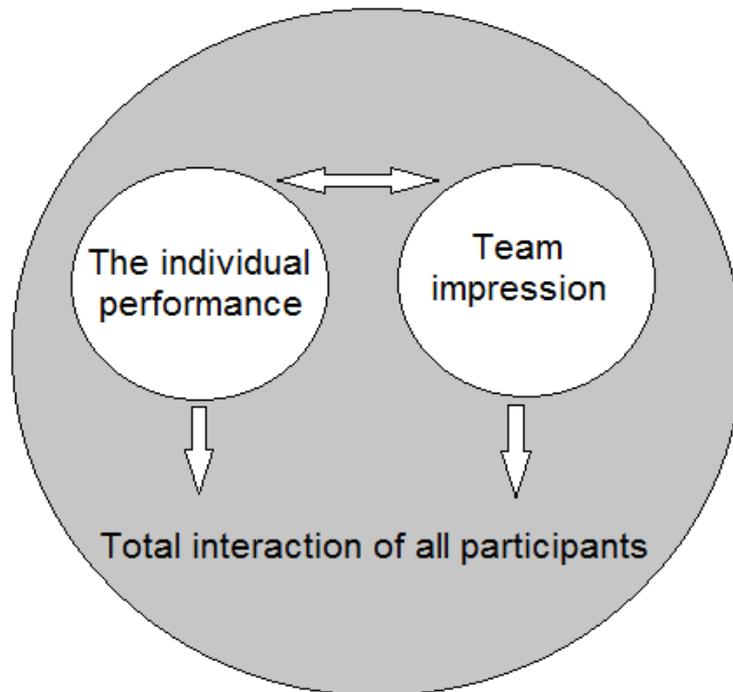


The *social front* is a front that represents a certain setting or task which, through repetition becomes institutionalized through *stereotyping* and thus eventually forms a *collective representation*.

The backstage region, in contrast to the frontstage, is characterized by the contradiction of the performance, as well as being a place which is sectioned off from the frontstage. This is also the region in which the performance is not only contradicted, but also fabricated and where the front becomes apparent as it is assembled. The assembly of the front and the composing of the performance is conducted through the act of *staging talk* that occurs in the backstage region. The backstage region is not only a place for preparation for a performance, it is also an area in which the performer can engage in relaxation by dropping their front. The backstage is often located near the frontstage, facilitating aid to performing team

members if need be. The passage from the frontstage to the backstage is thoroughly controlled as to avoid the pressures of the frontstage from accidentally merging onto the backstage as well as to keep secrets of the performance from emerging on the frontstage and to those who are not part of the team.

Figure 3. Aspects of interaction (based on Goffman 1958:48-50)



The term *team* within the dramaturgical analogy refers to the set of individuals who co-operate in the development and performance of a routine for a performance. Single members of a team may even carry on a routine or performance of a team in their absence, even if they themselves do not believe in the performance and do so through the act of *self-delusion*. This means that a performer may sometimes become his or her own audience. The individuals who perform despite their disillusionment with the performance are referred to as *cynics* and may utter their disagreement with the performance through the use of irony or sarcasm. The concept of teams is another central concept which makes the dramaturgical perspective applicable in the study of particularly game environments, since it is an environment which by default builds on teamwork and cooperation to varying degrees in a literal sense.

Teams are not necessarily a group of individuals who have to agree with each other on a subject matter and this is not a prerequisite to be considered a team.

Teams can consist of both one person and multiple performers. One-man teams involve an actor who carries out a performance based on his or her own goals and expectations in accordance with his or her inner motives, while having the benefit of being able to adjust their performance as they go along (Goffman 1958:53). Teams of greater sizes need to coordinate with each other, where the team members must first mutually agree upon a mutual line of conduct before acting in public on the behalf of the team. Furthermore, a team consisting of more than one actor will therefore generally avoid criticizing another team member in the presence of others. When individuals tend to gravitate towards team making, the teams tend to group themselves into two teams in most social situations, where teams may form on the basis of mutual aims or social statuses and where one team becomes the performer and the other an audience.

The team often forms a familiarity, which bonds the teammates together after initiation into the team and this familiarity allows team members to no longer have to uphold a front before one another. This bond is further strengthened by the reciprocal notion of both the familiarity but also a mutual dependence on one another to maintain the team's front. The team also has a need to control the setting, which gives them security. The concept of teams facilitates the understanding of impressions as conveyed and managed in the middle-ground between individual performances and the total interaction of all participants (see figure 3.).

The key terms from Goffman's dramaturgical framework which will be used in this study are thus primarily the concepts of the frontstage and backstage, along with the team behavior which is linked to these regions. Furthermore, the way in which the setting affects and facilitates the performance is a central concept in some interactional spheres in the games, along with the notion of the importance of both appearance and manner through the use of equipment. The way in which these key terms presented in this section will be used is further presented in the method section "5.3.3 Participant observations – themes".

5. Method

The study of communication and its interactional sub-component can and has been studied from a multitude of perspectives: rhetoric, semiotic, phenomenological, cybernetic and so forth. This study however, took on a

sociological perspective on communication with emphasis on the presentation and representation of such. This study thus aimed to study the interaction between the social environment and its actors, doing so through a mixed methods approach.

This study was carried out using a mixed methods approach through the use of in-game participating observations as well as a survey study. A mixed methods approach combines quantitative and qualitative research methods, where the different data types may be used to either build on upon each other or view a problem from different viewpoints (Clark et. al., 2013). The use of a mixed methods approach can provide insight into a research problem from both the participant's perspective as well as the researcher's perspective and provide grounds for triangulation of results, or facilitate one method with the other (Bryman, 2001). In this particular study the mixed methods approach was used in order to first chart the setting through the use of a quantitative method in the form of an online-survey and then to broaden the focus through the use of a qualitative method in the form of an ethnographic method in the form of participant observations. The two methods in this study were thus meant to complement each other as well as to gain insight into the studied setting from both an outer perspective as well as an immersive perspective with focus on the study subjects. The survey was thus used to chart the definition of the setting as it is perceived *by the players* while the observations were used in order to complement this charting through an in-depth study *of the players*. The mixed methods approach that was used in this study was thus from the point of an embedded design of a study, where one data-type is meant to complement the other rather than serve as a validating agent as in the case of triangulation. The approach is especially useful in cases where two separate questions need to be answered in a study (Clark et. al., 2013) which was the case of this study.

5.1 Ethical considerations

Internet research requires ethical consideration in the same aspects as those concerning real life research. However, the issue has been debated, and the main question when approaching ethical issues is that of whether the online context is public or private (Mann, 2003 and Markham & Buchanan, 2012). A general guideline is to aim to do no harm and weight the vulnerability of the study's subjects, adjusting the ethical considerations after this (Ess, 2002). The anonymity

of the environment poses a risk in this, since vulnerable groups such as children or individuals with certain disabilities can not be protected from research due to the fact that it is not known who is who in the digital environment (Mann, 2003). These ethical considerations were taken into account through the removal of all survey participants under the age of 18, however, since participants stated their age themselves it was still possible that some underage individual's took part of the study without it being seen on their stated age. The observational segment of the study however, could not ensure that players that were studied were not underaged. However, those who were quoted from the private settings in the game were all noted to reveal that they were of university age or older.

Further ethical guidelines encompass considerations in regards to what areas of a digital environment are private and which are public by looking into both the option to make information private and section one's communication, as well as the accessibility of the environment overall (Ess, 2002). This is a central issue in regards to ethical considerations within internet research. The issues of public and private areas are also linked to the notion of whether those who are studied are to be viewed as authors of the content that they produce in the online public sphere or as subjects who express themselves in smaller private areas (Ess, 2002). In this study the ethical consideration was made as such that areas which could be accessed by all were treated as public areas, while areas which had a selective viewing availability and consisted of smaller static groups were treated as private and were subject to stricter applications of ethical considerations. Wherein the public areas within the game were not liable to the gathering of informed consent from the observed groups or players, while informed consent was gathered from those who were studied in the private areas as well as individuals who were encompassed as lone-standing individuals in screenshots.

The confidentiality of participants is another aspect which must be considered, where one of the key aspects is that the gathered information about a research subject must be unidentifiable and not be traced back to an individual person (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). This was addressed through that the collected data in both the survey and the observations was depersonalized for both possible names as well as character names of players in order to assure anonymity of the subjects. IP-addresses were taken away from the survey results before analysis and all character names in both chats and screenshots were censored.

One of the main ethical considerations is that participants must both be informed of the intent of the study as well as leave consent to their participation in a study which encompasses them as well as have the available option of withdrawing themselves and their contribution to the data within the study (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). This is an aspect which should be assured as long as possible during the study's all stages (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002) and was in part facilitated in the survey through the option of withdrawing one's participation in the study by closing down the survey before completion or by notifying of their withdrawal from the study by following the contact information provided in the survey. However, since the surveys were automatically made anonymous upon completion, it was not possible for participants to withdraw themselves from the study unless they could provide their IP-address information to me. Furthermore, the participants were presented with a letter of intent upon viewing the survey (see Appendix 2), which outlined the intent of the study as well as providing information on how participants could take part of the results.

The participating observational part of the study could not live up to the same requirement of participant consent as well as being informed of the study's intent. This was due to the fact that most group constellations as well as individual conversations appeared and disappeared at a moments notice and it was impossible to retain consent from the participating parties due to the rapid dynamic of the social context of the observed environment. The digital environment is particular in that it is dynamic in a way as such that notifying of one's presence as an observer is sometimes both impractical and an insurmountable obstacle to overcome when doing an immersive study of the culture. This is a common issue with internet communities, where asking for consent and informing of the study is both impractical and impossible if any data is to be collected, since most people tend to not voice their opinion or tend to be skeptical towards formal requests (Hudson & Bruckman, 2004). Consent for observation was however retrieved from the guild-leader of the guild which was observed, since this was a static environment which was observed and therefore could be notified of my intent. My presence as a researcher was announced on intermittent occasions in the guild chat as well to ensure that players who were newly logged on would have a chance to speak against this. Furthermore, players who's conversations with me personally was included in the study as well as those who were individually present in

screenshots were notified about the intent of the study as well as asked for permission to use their image and statements in the study.

Further ethical considerations were made in regards to the principal of using the collected data for its intended purpose without mediating them to either commercial or legal third party organizations (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). The data was in fact gathered on the basis of the initially formulated research questions and was then used only for the study at hand. In addition, the intent of the study was stated in both the survey as well as when gathering consent from individual's who's statements in the private game areas were used in the study. However, since the study was conducted on the basis of the commercial entertainment product *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004), it is not fully possible to be assure the non-use of the data with such intents from other parties than myself. Furthermore, the fact that the study was conducted within the framework of Blizzard Entertainment's intellectual property which is still under copyright, there is an ethical consideration to take into account in regards to the product itself as well as its creator. Therefore, referencing to the creators of the game has been maintained throughout the entire study except for instances when it has been described by secondary sources.

5.2 Survey - pilot survey

Prior to beginning the study, a minor pilot-survey was conducted in order to test for; response rates, the best place for allocation of the survey link in order to get maximum answers and to test possible phrasing difficulties as well as test for population attitude towards the study. The pilot survey was posted on the official *World of Warcraft* forums (Blizzard Entertainment, 2014) under the general discussions thread as well as on the WowHead forums¹⁷. The latter was removed by the administrator due to a policy against survey posting on the website. After the pilot-survey was closed, a one month waiting period was given prior to posting the actual survey, in order to allow for a certain degree of circulation of players to occur. After this, a 10 question long survey was then designed based on the feedback from the pilot-survey in terms of question phrasing and its legibility as well as the distribution of the survey in terms of the target group. A full version

¹⁷ Wowhead is one of the largest unofficial help-pages for World of Warcraft players where game-related tutorials and discussions are posted by other players. Unlike the official World of Warcraft forums, this page is not divided after geographical region.

of the survey service was also purchased in order to make the data extraction more efficient since the pilot-survey proved to be too time-consuming when using a manual data extraction method. Furthermore, administrator approval for posting on the WowHead forums was obtained in order to allow for a greater distribution of the survey, since the pilot-survey indicated a problem with reaching a large target-group.

5.2.2 Survey - selection

This study used a non-probability purposive sampling by targeting online settings inhabited by *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) players in order to gain responses from active English speaking members of the game's player community. Purposive sampling targets certain groups with the purpose of acquiring insight into a particular selective group of a population and has the benefit of often fitting the purpose of a study (May, 2001). The problem with non-probability sample types is that they cannot generate data which may be generalized for a population as a whole, but may well serve as a foundation for linking to previous findings or serving a base for other complementing methods (Bryman, 2001) as in the case of this study. Furthermore, non-probability sampling is the type of sampling that is often used in social research due to probability sampling's higher comparative costs in terms of financial and time-related costs (Bryman, 2001). The sampling method was thus chosen out of considerations in regards to both resources available for the conduct of this study as well as the purpose of the study.

The target audience for the survey were the active players of *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004). For this purpose, the official European forums¹⁸ were first chosen as the only area for data collection due to the insurance that the players who are active on these forums have to be active game subscribers. However, survey response was low on this page and the scope of posting the survey was broadened to encompass the WowHead forums and the top three *World of Warcraft* (ibid.) related Facebook forums. Furthermore, the scope was broadened to the Facebook and WowHead forums due to the fact that my *World of*

¹⁸ These forums require the forum posters to be both logged into an existing World of Warcraft account in order to post on the forums. The official forums forcefully divide the forums into the three existing geographical divisions, namely; Asia, Europe and America, meaning that a player with a European account can not post in the American or Asian forums and vice versa.

Warcraft (ibid.) account was a European account and could therefore not reach the other servers from other continents.

Credibility issues from the side of players regarding the credibility of the posted link for the survey was attempted to be remedied by using distribution channels that would allow for as great of a degree of non-anonymity from the researcher's side as possible. This resulted in the use of the official *World of Warcraft* EU forums¹⁹ (Blizzard Entertainment, 2014), the WowHead forums²⁰ and the top three largest *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) oriented pages on Facebook²¹ to reach the target audience of active players.

5.2.3 Survey – design

The survey method through self-completion was chosen as a method of data collection over a structured interview due to the method's low cost of distribution in terms of money and time (Bryman, 2001). Since no interviewer was needed for the questionnaires to be completed by respondents, time could be dedicated to in-game observations simultaneously, thus effectively making use of the time available for the study. The self-completion questionnaire method had the advantages of lower costs, quick administration, no interviewer effects as well as offering a convenient access for respondents (Bryman, 2001). Furthermore, a self-completion questionnaire that is mailed (or in this case electronically distributed) has the advantage of covering larger geographical areas than for example structured interviews (May, 2001).

The self-completion survey that was created was an online electronically distributed questionnaire, designed using the online survey building tool www.surveymonkey.com. The survey consisted of 10 questions of varying character. The survey was kept short in order to maximize the response rate, as longer self-completed surveys often yield a lower response rate (Bryman, 2001). Respondents were informed of the intent of the study at the beginning of the survey and were informed that they had the option of closing the survey at any moment and thus withdrawing their contribution. The introduction text to the

¹⁹ These provided a high amount of credibility due to the fact that one has to be logged on to an active subscription account within World of Warcraft in order to access the forums as well as that your character name and server is shown when you post on the forum.

²⁰ These provided a high amount of credibility through the post of approval from the previously contacted administrator of the forum.

²¹ These pages provided credibility due to the visibility of the real-life name and personal photo that appears next to the posts on the page.

survey thus covered the requirement for self-completion surveys concerning both information in regards to the survey's aim as well as to assure respondents of their anonymity (Bryman, 2001). The survey itself can be viewed in Appendix 2 of this study.

The first part of the survey contained questions of general nature in regards to age and sex, as well as simple single-choice answers relating to the respondents gaming in relation to *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) in terms of duration of playing the game, frequency of play and duration of each play session. The second half of the survey had more extensive categorical ranking questions regarding the players activities within the game as well as the activities' appeal to the players. The questions regarding activities were of ranking nature, where respondents had to rank their activities from most preferred/done as number one and then in ascending order. The activity related questions (questions 6-8) were as following:

- › Q. 6 “What activity do you prefer in-game?”
- › Q.7 “What do you most often find yourself doing in-game?”
- › Q.8 “What do you find most appealing in-game?”

The final question (question 10) “What one word would you use to describe how World of Warcraft makes you feel?” was an open question where players could type in answers freely.

The first categorical question (question number 6) was based on the five main activities that are available for players in-game: raiding/instances, player versus environment, player versus player, role-playing and trading/crafting (Suznjevic et. al, 2008) and aimed to investigate what activities the players prefer as well as to investigate whether players preferred group-related activities or solitary ones. Furthermore, since previous research has indicated that players more often engage in solitary actions than social ones (Ducheneaut et. al., 2006), two questions (questions 7 and 8) were formulated to investigate both the preference of players in terms of in-game activities and their self-reported frequency engaging in the same actions as well as to test whether these differed. Questions 7 and 8 were formulated as two separate questions since one was aimed to determine what players *do*, while the second question was to investigate what players *like* since it was assumed that the answers to what player report doing in game may be related

to game mechanics that force people into doing some things more than other but that does not necessarily speak for what people prefer to do in game. The ten choices of activities that the players were presented with in questions 7 and 8 were based on the phrasing of the 10 player motivations as formulated by Yee (2006). Each of the 10 motivations encompasses certain activities within the game (Yee, 2006). The 10 corresponding activities as mentioned by Yee (2006) were thus phrased into questions 7 and 8 in the following way:

- **Advancement:** “Advancing in-game, achievements, level, item level, progression”
- **Mechanics:** “Optimizing your characters/analyzing game mechanics and tactics”
- **Competition:** “Duelling, PvP, ganking, raiding enemy cities”
- **Socializing:** “Socializing/chatting/making friends”
- **Relationships:** “Speaking in-game about personal matters/providing emotional support to others”
- **Teamwork:** “Working in groups in various ways/group achievements”
- **Discovery:** “Exploring the world /finding hidden lore objects or other hidden items”
- **Role-playing:** “Role-playing”
- **Customization:** “Customizing your character (gathering transmogrification items, getting other items for looks etc.)”
- **Escapism:** “Logging on to relax/take your mind off things”

The 10 player motivations were used to complement question 6, in order to broaden the scope and take aspects such as socialization and relaxation into account, which otherwise would not be able to be investigated by merely looking at the formal in-game activities. Question 10, which was an open ended question in regards to player's feelings concerning *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) was inspired by Page and Mapstone's method for investigating the use of the internet amongst adolescents and was in likeness of Page and Mapstone's study aimed at investigating the meaning of the medium for its users (Page & Mapstone, 2010).

The survey was conducted in order to contextualize the findings of the

observations. Even though there has been previous findings concerning the demographics of gaming and *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) itself, the survey was necessary due to the interchanging nature of the game itself and the need to chart the prevalence of the demographics of the game at the actual time of the study. The survey was thus conducted in order to gain insight into the *current* preferences and activities of players within the game at this time. This due to the fact that the game was at the end of its expansion pack and at the end of its story may, which have impacted the outcome of the study and it was therefore necessary to conduct a survey which would reflect the current conditions of the observed environment.

The final result of the survey was 585 unique survey responses out of which 518 remained to be taken into the calculation of the results after removing responses from under-aged players. No missing values were otherwise reported since the survey contained no questions which could be omitted by the respondents. The survey data was then imported into Excel for initial data clean up, after which the data was imported into the statistical analysis program SPSS. Questions 1, 2, 4, 5 and 9 were calculated in terms of frequencies using the descriptive statistics function. Question 3 provided continuous data and was therefore calculated in terms of mean, distribution and was further grouped into 5 age-groups. Question 6, 7 and 8 were ranking questions but were treated as continuous numerical data, where the mean scores between activities were compared as well as their distribution. Means between genders were then compared in questions 3, 7, 8 and 9, where data appropriate tests in the form of chi-square and respectively t-tests were conducted to verify the significance of the correlations. A one-way ANOVA test was performed for the isolated variable "play with offline friends" in question 9 and the preferred activities stated in question 6, the same was done for the variable "play with guild members". Further calculations were made in light of age-groups in relation to question 7 and 8, but the data was omitted from the results due to its extensive nature and is presented in Appendix 3. Question 10, "How does World of Warcraft make you feel" was processed separately from other survey questions due to its open phrasing and was analyzed with the help of the online text analysis tool "Voyant tools" at www.voyant-tools.org. The analysis consisted of calculating the frequency of the appearance of a certain word when describing how the game makes the

respondents feel. Prior to analyzing the data from question 10, all words input by respondents were spell-checked and corrected and some minor changes were made to unify some words that differed in spelling and tense. This was done in order to facilitate a analysis of which word was most commonly used by players to describe the game. Furthermore, a secondary analysis of the words was conducted after coding words into 10 categories. The coded material was then once again analyzed through the use of the Voyant online text-analysis tool. Since the data was of nominal nature, no additional tests for validity could be made and therefore the data can be considered to point towards a tendency rather than a statistically significant finding. Only the encoded data results were included in the presentation of the survey results. The 10 categories were as following:

- Relaxation
- Escapism
- Social
- Addiction
- Positive
- Negative
- Neutral
- Engagement
- Empowerment
- Entertainment

5.2.4 Survey – Limitations

Self-completion surveys entail certain limitations in regards to both reading comprehension and limited literacy as well as a higher risk of missing data through unanswered questions (Bryman, 2001). These limitations were addressed through the fact that the users of the game which was studied inherently need to have proficiency in English and therefore the study subject itself becomes a tool for countering this limitation. As in regards to the notion of not all questions being filled out, this was remedied through the use of an online survey which doesn't allow skipped answers. Similarly, the self-completions survey method entails limitations in regards to comprehension of the questions from the respondent's side due to the fact that no interviewer is there to explain questions or rephrase

them (Bryman, 2001). This was addressed through the conduct of a pilot-survey to test phrasings and comprehension.

Other limitations in terms of limitations of the sample composition were as such that not all players are active on the *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) related forums and those who took the survey on the forums may not fully be representative of those who generally play the game. This is an inherent problem with self-completion questionnaires since it is not always certain who actually takes the time to fill them out, thus not giving control over the resulting sample group's demographic composition (Bryman, 2001). Since player's participation in the survey was self-selected, the sample of the player population that is represented within the survey can thus be assumed to consist of players who are both active on forums (not necessarily in the game) and also players who are generally more vocal and outgoing. The survey results thus do not reach the general population of the game, but rather a fringe off-branch of it and this may have had an impact on the results given by the survey. Furthermore, Mann argues that online surveys may not be representative of a certain population due to the limited access that some individuals have to the internet (Mann, 2003). However, Mann's reasoning was based on that 0.01% of the world population had internet access in the year 2000, wherein today a third of the world population has access (Internet World stats, *n.d*) and the target group of this study by definition is one that has internet access since they play an online game.

5.3 Participant observations – preparations

The main considerations to take heed to during observations as a method is to consider spending enough time within the studied setting as well as with the study subjects and gain an understanding of the language used. This is needed to gain a certain level of intimacy as well as to acquire a certain degree of social consensus revolving around what is conveyed in the observations as well as what setting it is conveyed in (May, 2001). Having to both gain insight into and adapt the use of a culture specific language as well as to gain particular practical skills is of importance even in the internet setting, where the field provides certain challenges in both it's data recording as well as it's presentation (Hine, 2013).

In preparation for the participant observations, a highest level character (level 90) was chosen from the available characters on a previously existing personal

World of Warcraft (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) account. This highest level character was chosen for the purpose of having access to both low-level areas within the game as well as the highest level areas, thus ensuring access to as great of a range of possible observation areas as possible. The need to access the areas inhabited by characters of the highest level was especially necessary since these were currently the areas where most players were known to reside due to the fact that the game was at the end of its expansion-pack, meaning that most players had by now completed the game and were located in the highest level areas. The character chosen was a mage, a damage dealing character with a rather passive role in raid and instance settings as to not attract attention in group settings during observations. Furthermore, the specific character was chosen due to her mage-specific ability to instantly travel (teleport) between the different areas of the game, easing the data collection through shorter travel times between areas of observation.

After a level 90 character was selected, a high population server named “Argent Dawn” was targeted for a character transfer from the otherwise low populated server on which the character was situated originally. The server was chosen based on population statistics provided by the Warcraftrealms website (Warcraftrealms, retrieved 2014-02-26). At the time of selection, the chosen server had 57,959 active players (41,537 alliance and 16,422 horde) and had the highest registered population of all servers available. The server “Argent Dawn” was also an English speaking server, easing the gathering of data from the game and enabling my interaction with players on the server. Furthermore, upon log-in, Argent Dawn was one of the few servers that was noted to have a “full” status, meaning that the server had such a large population that players were advised against creating new characters on it. It was therefore concluded that the server had a high amount of players.

The transfer of my character to a different server was made for several reasons, primarily to gain as much access as possible to as large of a population as possible in-game to ensure the possibility of data collection as well as to gain access to as an active player-base as possible to ensure the possibility of data collection. Another prominent reason for the server change prior to beginning observations was to minimize the risk of “going native” and research bias since my character and I had been active on the original server for leisure in the past and had some

social ties there. This is not to say that a knowledge of the setting would have hindered data collection, on the contrary, but the main reason was to not “go native” in the sense of personal relations to the study subjects rather than the setting itself.

5.3.1 Participant observation – the process

The introductory stage of the data gathering was to read not only research regarding the subject of MMORPGs, computer games and more precisely *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004), but to read and assess the user's and the producer's statements regarding the subject. Prior to beginning observations, several mediums were taken part of, including: official press-releases from Blizzard entertainment, player's forum posts regarding the game and general new's articles on the matter. This introductory general stage is often important to not rush in ethnographic studies and is necessary in order for the observer to get to know the study subject as well as possible before contacting the actual intended demographic groups of the study (O'Rielly, 2005). The information that is gathered in this stage may force one to alter the original intentions of the project (O'Rielly, 2005), meaning that it is important to take time to get into the subject that is to be observed, before engaging with the actual subjects of the research.

Observations were conducted by sampling various areas within the game in order to gain insight into as many various activities and social arenas as possible. Observations were carried out in countryside settings, cities, high-level questing zones, randomly generated raid groups (LFR) and randomly generated dungeon groups (PUG). Observations were carried out for 5.5 weeks (dated 27-02-2014 till 07-04-2014), carried out in sessions with varying length ranging from 30 minutes to 8 hours. Screenshots were taken within the game during sightings of social gatherings in the game alongside the recording of all visible chats in the game using the built-in chat-logging function of the game. Log-ins would be carried out during varying times of the day in order to capture the maximum amount of player and interaction variation which may have been linked to the time-of-day or days of the week. Field notes were also taken along-side the chat-logging function. Field notes are a key component to ethnographic research, but should not overshadow the actual observations carried out (May, 2001) and this study used mostly “jotted notes” as a form of field notes, which are notes consisting of brief

phrases and words that are aimed to activate a memory of an event or specific occurrence than a full-flared detailed account of such (Bryman, 2001). The jotted notes approach was used instead of for example a more detailed types of field notes such as “full field notes” since the data was already recorder digitally through both chat logs as well as screenshots and therefore more needed to keep in mind triggered associations and parallels drawn from observations rather than keeping full detailed notes.

During the observations, the sample not only consisted of varying areas of interaction within the game but also encompassed a selection of varying social spheres. Chats that were used by players for trading and the general chats in various areas were observed, as well as the chats in raids and dungeon settings. The only area which was omitted from observations were areas dedicated to player-versus-player activity (PvP) due to personal limitations in participating in such settings. The initial aim was to gain membership in an active guild within the game. However, the practical implications of gaining membership in a guild while maintaining a visible profile as a researching observer proved to hinder such an ambition and a guild was only joined in the latter stages of the observations. Therefore, the observations concerning a guild were carried out for one week as opposed to one month. The observations were ended once the gathered data material reached a certain degree of saturation, which is the point where the data material begins to repeat itself (Bryman, 2001).

5.3.2 Participant observations – data collected

After data had been collected for one month, the chat-logs were sorted by date into separate folders and paired with eventual screenshots that may have been taken alongside the chat-logging during observations. Some screenshots were omitted due to poor resolution. The chat-logs were refined by editing away such expressions as NPC scripts, events and other information that was not in direct relation to what actual live players were saying. All these expressions were initially logged in order to get a full context to the events that may have shaped the social interaction. NPC generated text that was of relevance for the logged text to be understood in the final data was color-coded into a less visible font to enable for faster reading of the actual speech or chat generated by players. The logged text in the chats that referred to emotes and physical actions made by players were

kept during the processing of the chat logs and were color-coded in order to make it easier to find them in text. The end result was 452 pages of edited and sorted chat-logged text, accompanied by 62 screenshots. The data was transferred into a PDF document and commentary was added to the logged chat text. Secondary coding based on emergent themes was then performed using the color highlighting function of the Adobe Reader program. The themes which emerged in the data coding process are presented below in section 5.3.3.

5.3.3 Participant observations – themes

The edited chat log text was paired with field-notes and was then coded based on emergent themes. The themes for the coding had not been decided prior to the analysis of the data on purpose to leave room for alteration during the actual analysis of the data. Several central themes and their dramaturgical analogies emerged from the data, including the categories outlined in figure 4 on the following page.

Figure 4. Themes used in the analysis of observational data

Theme	Definition	Dramaturgical terms
Areas of interaction:	Differences between in-game areas in which players interact and their differing interactional features and styles.	<i>No dramaturgical terms were used in this section due to its descriptive intent.</i>
Game-specific communication	The specificities of communication when being present in a digital environment.	- (Fluid) setting - (Multiple simultaneous) performances
The spheres of interaction	The interactional difference sin the following spheres: private, semi-private, public, and task-oriented spheres	- Fronstage - Backstage
Real life and current affairs	How real life is downplayed or continuously diverted from in the game in some areas.	- Defining the interaction - Routine - Backstage - Frontstage - Team
The private sphere	The expression of emotion and free personal self-disclosure and its prevalence in certain contexts.	- Backstage - Team - Letting down the front
White noise	Background noise and non-player generated ambiance as well as scripted speech performed by in-game features but not by actual players.	- Setting
The roles and their communication styles	How designated in-game task-related role of the player influences interaction and communication styles.	- Team - Audience - Routines - Roles - Performances
The shared culture	The prevalence expressions relating to pop-culture and specifically geek-culture though names, quotes and other utterances.	- Setting - Team - Social front - Defining the situation - Cynics
The role of visuals and vanity items	The prevalence of items which possess only visual impressions and their meaning	- Equipment - Access to different regions
Role-playing	Interactional differences amongst role-player styles.	- Teams - Appearance - Setting - Manner - Performance

6. Results

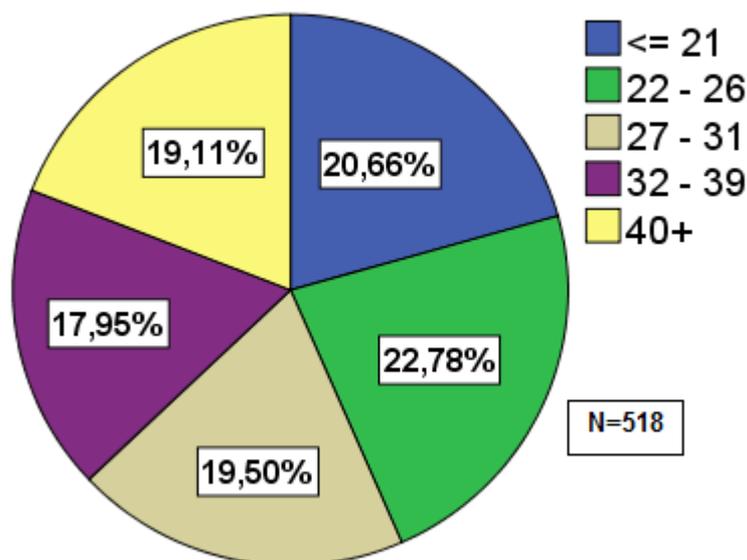
This section will present and review the empirical data which was collected during the time of the study. The survey data presented is intended to serve as a foundation for understanding the context in which the social interaction occurs and its results are therefore presented prior to the main data generated by the in-game participant observations.

The data from the survey is used in order to investigate and define the environment in which the social interaction occurs as well as to define the meaning and motivations which the game-play contains for its player base. The observational data is used in order to investigate and exemplify the different aspects of the social interaction within the game as well as to pin-point its mechanisms. Due to the extensive nature of some of the data, selected tables were removed from the presentation of the data in this section and placed in Appendix 3. Furthermore, due to the somewhat similar phrasing of question 6-8 in the survey, the question number is given in conjunction to the results which relate to that question .

6.1 Summary of survey results

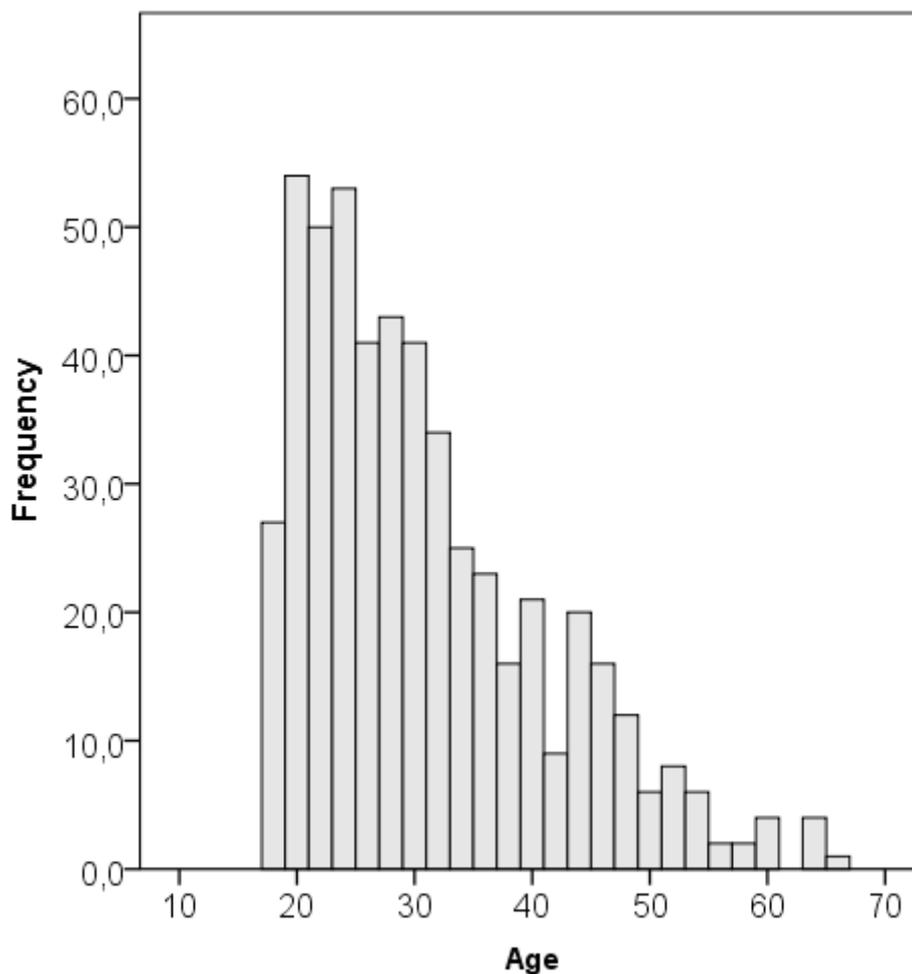
The original data consisted of 585 fully completed surveys with 0 missing values. However, once all respondents under the age of 18 years were removed from the sample, the survey resulted in 518 unique survey responses with 0 missing values and thus a 100% completion rate.

Figure 6. Age distribution amongst groups



The mean age of the respondents after removing players under the age of 18 was 30,5 years ($sd.=10.29$). Since all respondents under the age of 18 were removed from the study, it must be kept in mind that the data in regards to age only indicates tendencies above that age. However, the data in figure 6.1 shows a distribution skewed towards the 20+ group. These findings somewhat differ from previous studies and from the average age of gamers overall. When viewing the spread of the age of the respondents after dividing the sample into five age-groups, the youngest group (≤ 21) only accounted for 20.7%% of the sample population.

Figure 6.1 Age distribution within sample

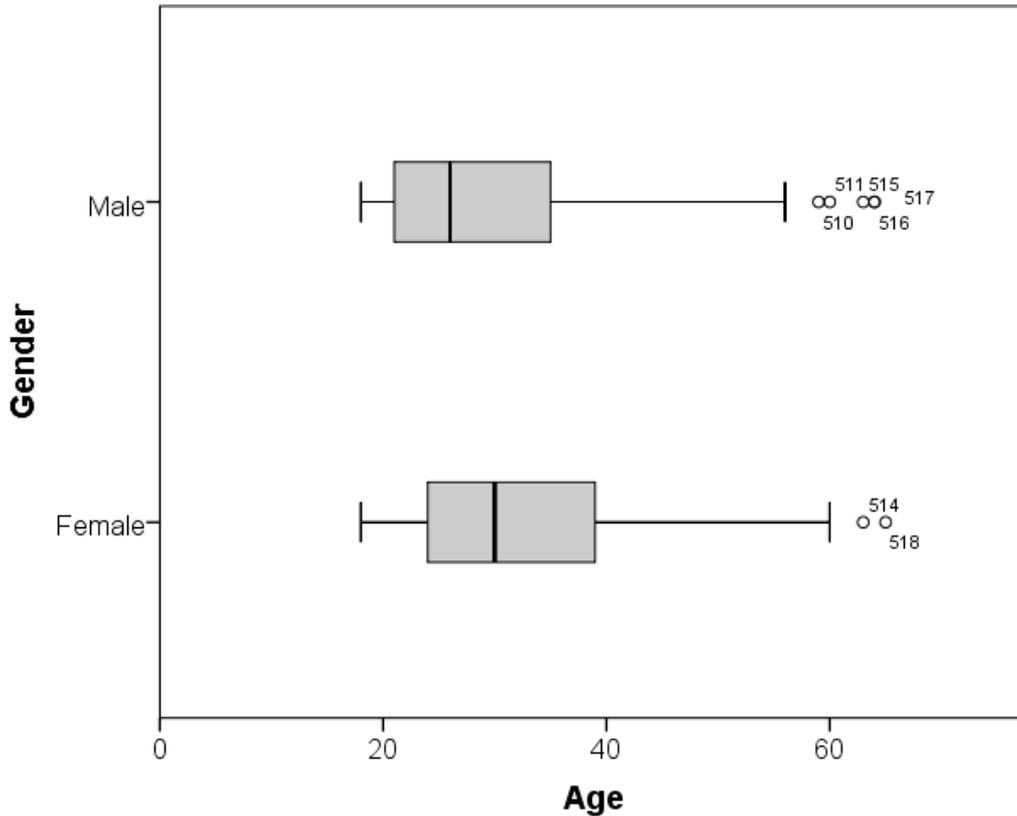


Note: N=518, mean=30,5

Female players accounted for 45.9% percent of the sample, male players for 54.1%. Male respondents had a somewhat lower age-average than female players where the mean age for male respondents was 29,2 years ($sd.=10,296$, $p=.002$)

while the female respondents had a mean of 32.00 years ($sd.=10,092$, $p=.002$). The age difference among male and female players was found to be statistically significant ($p=0.002$). These values were nearly identical to those reported by ESA in terms of the gaming population overall (2013).

Figure 7. Distribution of age between genders within sample



The majority of respondents (19.11%) within the sample stated that they have played the game for 10 years, thus since the time the game came out on the market. However, some differences were found between male and female players in regards to years played, where female players were not as represented in the 10 years group as males players were and had a more even spread across years of experience unlike male players. Most of the respondents reported to play everyday (63.51%) and most (25.1%) reported that they play for 6 hours when they play.

When presented with a choice of the main in-game activities (Q.6), respondents on average ranked *raiding/instances* the highest in terms of preference ($m=1.90$, $sd.=1.09$) while the second most preferred activity was questing ($m=2.33$, $sd.=1.197$). The group activity was thus more preferable than solitary activities. The least preferred activity was role-playing ($m=4.28$, $s=1.041$). Furthermore, the advancement sub-component was ranked as the most frequently carried out

activity in-game (Q.7) by respondents on average ($m=2.15$, $sd.= 1.664$), while the mechanics sub-component was ranked second most frequent ($m=3.89$, $sd.=2.149$), and socializing as third ($m=4.53$, $sd.=2.110$).

Table 1. Activity rankings by frequency of doing and preference

Question	Activity	Min.	Max.	Mean Score	Std. Deviation
Q6. What in-game activities do you prefer?*	Raiding/instances	1	5	1.90	1.09
	Questing	1	5	2.33	1.197
	Trading/crafting/professions	1	5	3.05	.967
	PVP	1	5	3.43	1.380
	Role-playing activities	1	5	4.28	1.041
Q7. What do you find yourself doing in the game? **	Advancement	1	10	2.15	1.664
	Mechanics	1	10	3.89	2.149
	Socializing	1	10	4.53	2.110
	Escapism	1	10	4.85	3.020
	Customization	1	10	5.69	2.479
	Discovery	1	10	5.80	2.210
	Teamwork	1	10	5.82	1.950
	Competition	1	10	6.65	3.128
	Relationship	1	10	7.18	2.223
	Role-Playing	1	10	8.44	1.979
Q8. What do you find most appealing in the game? **	Advancement	1	10	2.25	1.783
	Mechanics	1	10	3.88	2.080
	Socializing	1	10	4.33	2.043
	Escapism	1	10	5.16	3.250
	Teamwork	1	10	5.84	1.819
	Customization	1	10	5.87	2.639
	Discovery	1	10	5.92	2.245
	Competition	1	10	6.49	3.169
	Relationship	1	10	7.03	2.211
	Role-playing	1	10	8.24	2.055

Note: N=518

* Ranking question where: 1=most preferred and 5=least preferred

** Ranking question where: 1=most often carried out/preferred and 10=least often carried out/preferred

This pattern could also be seen when respondents were asked about what activity they most preferred in-game (Q.8), where the advancement sub-component was ranked the most preferable on average ($m=2.25$, $sd.=1.783$), while the mechanics

sub-component was ranked the second most preferable ($m=3.88$, $sd.=2.080$), and the socialization sub-component third ($m=4.33$, $sd.=2.043$). Thus, there appears to be a congruency between what players *do* in-game and what they *prefer* doing. Furthermore, data indicates that players both *engage in* and *prefer* activities which directly relate to getting ahead in the game over social aspects. However, the social aspects of the game follow after the main advancement components and have an overall middle-ground rating. Data further indicated that while the socializing sub-component was a somewhat present motivation amongst players, the relationship motivational sub-component is not.

When asked whom respondents play *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) with (Q.9), the majority (87%) responded that they play alone, which may in part be attributed to the fact that a large part of the game consists of leveling through the solitary activity of questing. Furthermore, a large portion of respondents reported playing with guild members (79%) and on-line friends (72%).

Table 2. People whom respondents report playing with within the game (Q.9)

In-game companions	Min.*	Max.**	Mean score	Std. Deviation	“Yes”
Play alone/solo	0	1	.87	.338	87 %
Guild members	0	1	.79	.405	79 %
On-line friends	0	1	.72	.447	72 %
Offline friends	0	1	.56	.496	56 %
Spouse/partner/girlfriend/boyfriend	0	1	.37	.484	37 %
Siblings	0	1	.14	.344	14 %
Children	0	1	.13	.332	13 %
Colleagues	0	1	.11	.313	11 %
Other family members	0	1	.11	.308	11 %
Classmates	0	1	.08	.279	8 %
Other	0	1	.07	.248	7 %
Parents	0	1	.05	.222	5 %
Grandparents	0	1	.00	.06	0 < %

Note: N=518. Yes/no questions where: 0=“no” and 1=“yes”

Data indicated that there was some differences between genders in relation to preferences in terms of the main in-game activities (Q.6), where statistically significant differences between gender groups were found for all activities except for role-playing.

Table 3. Gender differences in preferred in-game activities (Q.6)

Activity	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Sig.
Questing	Male	2.60	1.217	.073	.000***
	Female	2.02	1.096	.071	
Raiding/instances	Male	1.71	.987	.059	.000***
	Female	2.13	1.15	.075	
Trading/crafting/professions	Male	3.14	.936	.056	.016*
	Female	2.94	.994	.064	
PVP	Male	3.20	1.389	.083	.000***
	Female	3.71	1.321	.086	
Role-playing activities	Male	4.34	1.028	.061	.124
	Female	4.20	1.052	.068	

Note: N=518. Male=280. Female=238. Ranking question where: 1=most preferred and 5=least preferred

* $p < .05$

*** $p < .001$

Female players ranked questing higher ($m=2.02$, $p=.000$) on average than male respondents ($m=2.60$, $p=.000$). On the other hand, male players ranked raiding/instances higher ($m=1.71$, $p=.000$) on average than female players ($m=2.13$, $p=.000$). Female players also ranked trading/crafting higher ($m=2.94$, $p=.016$) on average than male players ($m=3.14$, $p=.016$), while male players ranked player-versus-player activities higher ($m=3.20$, $p=.000$) on average than female players ($m=3.71$, $p=.000$).

When asked what in-game activities respondents most often engaged in (Q.7), female and male players were found to have a statistically significant difference in the teamwork sub-component which encompassed raiding and instances. Male players ranked the teamwork sub-component as a more commonly carried out activity ($m=5.66$, $p=.045$) on average in comparison to female respondents ($m=6.01$, $p=.045$). Male players also rated the competition sub-component ($m=6.10$, $p=.000$) as well as the optimization sub-component ($m=3.47$, $p=.000$) as more commonly engaged in than female players did ($m=7.30$, $p=.000$ and $m=4.39$, $p=.000$), while female players reported engaging in escapism to a greater degree ($m=4.38$, $p=.000$.) than male respondents ($m=5.82$, $p=.000$). However, no statistically significant differences were found between genders in regards to the advancement sub-component which implicitly encompassed questing. The gender differences in regards to what activity players engage in most often in-game (Q.7) were the same.

Table 4. Gender differences for engaging in in-game activities (Q.7)

Question	Activity	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Sig.
Q7. What do you find yourself doing in the game?	Advancement	Male	2.08	1.671	.103	.297
		Female	2.24	1.655	.107	
	Optimization	Male	3.47	1.993	.119	.000***
		Female	4.39	2.222	.144	
	Competition	Male	6.10	3.174	.190	.000***
		Female	7.30	2.950	.191	
	Socializing	Male	4.67	1.99	.119	.100
		Female	4.37	2.232	.145	
	Relationship	Male	7.27	2.143	.128	.317
		Female	7.07	2.315	.150	
	Teamwork	Male	5.66	1.909	.114	.045*
		Female	6.01	1.985	.129	
	Discovery	Male	6.01	2.122	.127	.016*
		Female	5.55	2.288	.148	
	Role-Playing	Male	8.44	2.004	.120	.991
		Female	8.44	1.954	.127	
	Customization	Male	5.85	2.526	.151	.113
		Female	5.50	2.414	.156	
Escapism	Male	5.45	3.117	.190	.000***	
	Female	4.14	2.743	.178		

Note: N=518. Male=280, female=238. Ranking question, 1=most preferred/most often engaged in, 10=least preferred/least often engaged in.

* p < .05

*** p < .001

Table 4.1 Gender differences for preferences of in-game activities (Q.8)

Question	Activity	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Sig.
Q8. What do you find most appealing in the game?	Advancement	Male	2.23	1.821	.109	.717
		Female	2.29	1.741	.113	
	Optimization	Male	3.53	2.009	.120	.000***
		Female	4.29	2.090	.135	
	Competition	Male	5.98	3.165	.189	.000***
		Female	7.08	3.075	.199	
	Socializing	Male	4.47	1.945	.116	.092
		Female	4.16	2.145	.139	
	Relationship	Male	7.00	2.135	.128	.714
		Female	7.07	2.302	.149	
	Teamwork	Male	5.76	1.836	.110	.296
		Female	5.93	1.798	.117	
	Discovery	Male	6.09	2.208	.132	.051
		Female	5.71	2.276	.148	
	Role-Playing	Male	8.25	2.031	.121	.899
		Female	8.23	2.088	.135	
	Customization	Male	5.87	2.682	.160	.980
		Female	5.87	2.593	.168	
Escapism	Male	5.82	3.327	.199	.000***	
	Female	4.38	2.981	.193		

Note: N=518. Male=280, female=238. Ranking question, 1=most preferred/most often engaged in, 10=least preferred/least often engaged in.

* p < .05

*** p < .001

Table 5. Gender differences for in-game companions (Q.9)

In-game companions	Female - "yes"	Male - "yes"	Sig.
Play alone/solo	85.3%	88.2%	.327
Guild members	81.1%	77.9%	.365
On-line friends	76.9%	68.6%	.035*
Offline friends	50.4%	61.4%	.012*
Spouse/partner/girlfriend /boyfriend	56.3%	21.4%	.000***
Siblings	15.5%	12.1%	.262
Children	17.2%	8.6%	.003**
Colleagues	8.4%	13.2%	.081
Other family members	13.0%	8.6%	.101
Classmates	5.5%	11.1%	.022*
Other	5.0%	7.9%	.197
Parents	5.9%	4.6%	.527
Grandparents	0.4%	0.4%	.908

Note: N=518. Male=280. Female=238

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

When asked whom players play with in-game (Q.9), some statistically significant gender differences were found amongst the respondents. Female players more often reported playing with their significant others (56.3%, $p=.000$) than male players (21.4%, $p=.000$). However, female players more often reported playing with online friends (76.9%, $p=.035$) than male players (68.6%, $p=.035$).

Overall, data indicated that female players prefer (Q.6) solitary activities to a greater extent than male players, while male players prefer group activities to a greater extent than female players. On the other hand, no gender differences were found for the sub-component *teamwork* in relation to preference when asking respondents what they *prefer* doing in-game (Q.8) which were only found when asking what players most often *do* in-game (Q.7.). Furthermore, it must be kept in mind that the age distribution between genders in this sample was skewed, where male respondents were on average younger than the female respondents and therefore conclusions regarding the correlation between gender and preference was not certain. The data regarding differences among age-groups indicated similar tendencies and is presented further in this section.

The data indicated that females appear to prefer more solitary *activities* in-game (Q.6), but not necessarily prefer the solitary *components* of the game (Q.8). Female players were however found to more often *engage* in the solitary activities (Q.7) than male players. Female players were also indicated to more often play with online friends, while male players were indicated to more often play with offline friends. One question that arises then is whether the presence of offline

social ties makes players more engaged in the social activities. Eklund points out that players of World of Warcraft express that playing with real-life friends and family is rewarding (Eklund, 2012), while playing with strangers is more taxing on them and it can be so that the presence of real-life social ties does in-fact incentivise engaging in group activities such as raiding or player-versus player activities. In order to investigate whether the presence of offline social ties incentivised engaging in group activities, a one-way ANOVA test was performed for the question “Which in-game activities do you prefer” (Q.6) and the isolated variable “play with offline friends”.

Table 6. Comparison of scores by players who play with “Offline friends” and preferred activity

Activity	Plays with offline friends	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Sig.
Questing	No	226	2.18	1.210	.081	.011*
	Yes	292	2.45	1.176	.069	
	Total	518	2.33	1.197	.053	
Raiding/instances	No	226	2.06	1.141	.076	.003**
	Yes	292	1.78	1.029	.060	
	Total	518	1.90	1.087	.048	
Trading/crafting/professions	No	226	3.03	.959	.064	.721
	Yes	292	3.06	.975	.057	
	Total	518	3.05	.967	.043	
PVP	No	226	3.53	1.392	.093	.145
	Yes	292	3.35	1.368	.080	
	Total	518	3.43	1.380	.061	
Role-playing activities	No	226	4.19	1.070	.071	.109
	Yes	292	4.34	1.015	.059	
	Total	518	4.28	1.041	.046	

Note: N=518. 1=most preferred and 5=least preferred

* P< .05

** p< .01

Results showed a statistically significant difference between those who had reported that they play with offline friends and those who did not. Those who reported playing with offline friends ranked questing as lower on average ($m=2.45$, $p=.011$) than those who did not report playing with offline friends ($m=2.18$, $p=.011$). Similarly, those who reported playing with offline friends ranked raiding/instances higher on average ($m=1.78$, $p=.003$) than those who did not report playing with offline friends ($m=2.06$, $p=.003$). Thus, those who reported playing with offline friends, rated group activities higher than those who did not.

On the other hand, those who did not report playing with offline friends, they tended to rate solitary activities higher than those who do. It can therefore be suggested that although the players on average rated raiding/instances (and thus group activities) as the most preferable activity, there are some differences amongst different groups and where the presence of offline ties appears to play a role in the rate of preference for solitary contra group activities.

Table 7. Comparison of scores by players who play with “Guild members” and preferred activity

Activity	Play with guild members	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Sig.
Questing	No	107	2.56	1.347	.130	.028*
	Yes	411	2.27	1.150	.057	
	Total	518	2.33	1.197	.053	
Raiding/instances	No	107	2.47	1.254	.121	.000***
	Yes	411	1.76	.990	.049	
	Total	518	1.90	1.087	.048	
Trading/crafting/professions	No	107	2.95	1.050	.101	.255
	Yes	411	3.07	.945	.047	
	Total	518	3.05	.967	.043	
PVP	No	107	2.97	1.668	.161	.000***
	Yes	411	3.55	1.270	.063	
	Total	518	3.43	1.380	.061	
Role-playing activities	No	107	4.05	1.111	.107	.010*
	Yes	411	4.34	1.015	.050	
	Total	518	4.28	1.041	.046	

Note: N=518. 1=most preferred and 5=least preferred

* p< .05

*** p< .001

However, when looking at the same question (Q.6) “what in-game activities do you prefer?” and at the isolated variable “play with guild members” a similar type of data appears where players who reported playing with guild members rank raiding/instances higher ($m=1.76, p=.000$) than those who don't ($m=2.47, p=.000$). Another interesting component is that player-versus-player activity was in turn ranked lower by those who play with guild members ($m=3.55, p=.000$) than those who reported that they do not play with guild members ($m=2.97, p=.000$). This data may indicate that it is not only offline social ties that have a connection to players' preferences for group activities, but rather long-term social ties that influence preferences for social activities.

The most common word used by respondents when asked how *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) makes them feel was “relaxed”,

accounted for in 14.06% of the responses. However, once words were categorized into 10 subsequent themes, the most common theme in the responses was “positive” feelings (30.44%), followed by feelings of “relaxation” (16.96%) and feelings of “empowerment” (15.99%). This can be put into relation with the fact that the game itself is in-fact a leisure item that provides entertainment. Players who participated in the survey may have ranked the escapism component only as their on average fourth most preferred game component ($m=5.16$, $sd.=3.250$), but it was still ranked higher than many actual integral parts of the game such as the competition component in the form of player-versus-player activities and even teamwork which includes the content which is the main goal of the game.

Figure 8. Themes used describing how World of Warcraft makes respondents feel: coded (Q.10)



Code word	Frequency	Percentage of all responses
Positive	158	30.44 %
Relaxation	88	16.96 %
Empowerment	83	15.99 %
Neutral	41	7.90 %
Social	39	7.51 %
Entertainment	35	6.74 %
Engagement	22	4.24 %
Negative	22	4.24 %
Escapism	19	3.66 %
Addiction	12	2.31 %

6.2 Participating observation results

The data gathered during the observations was gathered in four environmental settings within the game: cities, raids, dungeons, and role-playing environments. Amongst these four settings various different gatherings and activities were observed. The guild chat was observed only by observing the guild chat and not its physical gatherings in-game and will therefore only be accounted for later in this section.

6.2.1 Areas of interaction and their distinguishing features

The game consists of different environments and each area was found to impact communication in its own way. However, players would in some cases transgress the intended communication style of the designated environment, but with certain consequences. The following section presents the environments encompassed by the observation and their distinguishing interaction patterns. This section is descriptive and does not bring forth theoretical terminology which will be used further on.

Cities

The city environments within the game reflected a setting similar to that of a real life city to some extent. The city setting was seen to be mostly for crafting items, leveling professions, and running errands. It was seen to be a half-way stop, where players gathered while waiting for someone to then venture on elsewhere.

The setting of the city was seen to be both visually and linguistically busy, where the time in-between posts in the chat window of the general and trade chat was short. In this setting, the conversational topics in the chat were seen to vary within moments. Most of the public communication that occurred in the city was found to be facilitated through the trade chat, the general chat as well as the say²² function. Some use of the yell²³ function could also be observed during the observations. The communication style within the city through these channels was found to be either game-related or casual in its content. However, the city had a

²² The “say” function is a conversational option in the game and means that players may write /say in the chat window prior to typing a statement and this statement will then be both written out above the player’s avatar in the form of a speech bubble as well as only appear in the chat-window for players standing in relatively close vicinity to the player who writes the statement.

²³ The “yell” function functions in the same way as the say function but with the difference that the written statement is visible to players in a greater radius than that of the say function. The text appears as red in the game, highlighting that the statement is “yelled”.

second side to it if one were to step away from the city center and enter more scenic areas, which were found to be used by role-players. The role-players that role-played within the city were found to seek themselves to areas with less visual and textual intensity in terms of communication. In the dramaturgical sense, the role-player's literal roles were as such that their social front was inconsistent with the busy setting of the main central city environment and therefore the players actively sought themselves to settings that would allow them to act out their literal performance. Linderoth's findings in relation to players working hard to up-key the fantasy elements of the game (Linderoth, 2012) were thus found in the observations.

Figure 9. Example of a city setting – seen here: main square of Stormwind City



The countryside and nature

The countryside environment was found to be mostly used for questing and thus populated by players who were leveling their character. However, *some* areas were also used as a refuge point for role-players and role-playing guilds that either wished to not be judged for conducting so-called “bad role-playing²⁴”, or by players who wished to escape busy environments as well as to escape from the

²⁴. Bad role-playing (also called “bad rp”) is a term used by role-players and players in regards to players who

“bad role-play”. The general setting was found to be quiet in terms of both visual and text-based impressions and the communication occurred through the use of the general chat or the say function. The latter was observed to be used when a player would not answer a whisper²⁵ from another player in order to draw attention or otherwise only used in role-playing contexts.

Figure 10. Example of the countryside within the game – seen here is Goldshire



Dungeons

Dungeons can be of varying difficulty (normal dungeons and heroic dungeons) and be carried out with different aims. The goal of the group in regards to the dungeon as well as the way in which the group was assembled was seen to play a role in the communication-style amongst the players during a dungeon session.

Groups that were gathered by advertising in different chats and that were of the achievement-oriented type were found to differ from those groups that were assembled using the pick-up-groups (PUGs). PUG groups were observed to generate very little writing in the chat and the observed communication was seen to occur mostly in conjunction to when players were not engaged in combat.

²⁵. The “whisper” function in the game is a player-to-player in-game communication option which allows players to write to another player where the message is only visible to the sender and receiver of the message in the chat window.

Personally assembled groups that were in dungeons for achievements and vanity items would have a broader conversational spectrum as well as have a more casual way of speaking.

Figure 11. Example of a random dungeon group – here seen after killing a boss in the dungeon “Jade Temple”



The dominating task-oriented communication-style can be attributed to the specific goal with entering the dungeon, which is to obtain either items that further the optimization of your character or to advance in either levels or end-game progression. However, some of the communication was also aimed at letting out emotions related to the ongoing task within the dungeon, where players either joked or argued in order to deal with negative emotions of boredom or irritation.

The type and degree of expression in the dungeon settings was thus observed to be linked to both the difficulty of the task as to the expected experience with the content. Newly released dungeons often invoked some expressions in regards to instructions of what to do. Older dungeons that were still relevant but had been available in the game for a longer time, invoked very little interaction amongst the players. This may have been due to the fact that there is an assumption that players already know what to do and do not need instructions. Furthermore, groups that gathered to do completely outdated dungeons (achievement groups)

that did not generate any benefits for the players in the current game were observed to manifest a greater amount of interaction than action-oriented settings. The old, outdated content was observed to invoke a more social atmosphere and have a higher degree of interaction that was both task-related and socio-emotional in nature (however mostly related to in-game topics). The old content oriented groups also had some degree of real life topics brought up in them, unlike current content oriented groups. However, real-life references mostly referred to either one's country of origin or to in-game achievements that had been done either by oneself or others.

Real life events were rarely brought forth in *any* of the different dungeon environments or groups and were mostly referred to in order to make a point or speak about what country one come from. The topic of nationality seemed to often serve as an ice-breaker in the game when there was a pause in the performance of a certain group task, while references to either one's own or others' achievements were most often a response to something that happened in the game. This lack of presence from real life is closer examined under section 6.2.4.

Timeless Isle

The timeless Isle was an area which did not fully fall under the category of a free area such as nature or countryside, nor was it a city or dungeon. It was unique in the sense that was designed for end level characters (level 90's) and its specificity was such that it contained dungeon elements but that were unpredictable. The area had enemies that appeared randomly and could be defeated by anyone with a large enough group that could complete the task, thus entailing no prerequisites of planning or equipment level. The random chance element of the appearance of the enemy monsters (referred to as "rares") forced people to communicate and coordinate with each other. Since the monsters could not be killed single-handed, players relied on each other for both information on the whereabouts of the monsters as well as coming to each others aid in killing these. Since players could not plan ahead, no one was *expected* to plan ahead either.

People used more ways of communicating and coordinating in the Timeless Isle area than in other areas as well. Since the waiting time for the rare monsters was sometimes long and unpredictable, there seemed to be a slightly more prevalent amount of banter or joking in the various chat channels in the area and there were

also some references to real life issues. However, similarly to other areas within the game, references to real life were not *often* encountered within the area.

Figure 12. Players engaging in a randomly re-occurring event on the Timeless Isle – seen here fighting the newly appeared boss “Houlon”



The random element of the appearance times of the monsters forced players to be more communicative and use many more ways of communicating and coordinating. Observations generated a great amount of chat text in the area and much of the chat text was found to be requests from players regarding the whereabouts of rare monsters and requests to join groups spontaneously. The unique observation about this area during the observations was that this was the *only* area in which players would spontaneously help other players or otherwise be aware of each others difficulties and needs without being in a group. An example is that being new to the area, I had some difficulties knowing the locations of things and also had a limited knowledge of some mechanics with the area. When I failed on some mechanics I was whispered by several players that saw that I had trouble, where these players would give me hints and instructions. Furthermore, players who were not in the same group were seen to often heal each other or buff each other up with different spells when players were in the same area in order to help each other.

Raids

Raids were found to have similarities to the dungeon environments in their heavily task-oriented communication style, requiring both tactical knowledge from the the individual players as well as a certain degree of group cohesion and coordination. The raid setting was observed to also have similarities in the communication style in comparison to dungeons where players would most often communicate in the party chat and mostly communicate task-related expressions. However, the raid settings had a higher amount of communication between players. Where players would often write in the chat and discuss both tactics before a boss encounter or during one. This can be attributed to the need of coordination between group-members in raid settings, which are harder to complete than dungeons and therefore require both more attention and group cohesion. A similar discrepancy as that amongst dungeons group types was found between the groups assorted through the looking-for-raid (LFR) cuing system and groups assembled by regular players to do old content for achievements and vanity items.

Figure 13. Randomly assorted raid group, about to engage in combat with a boss



The LFR groups were far less talkative and more formal, while the personally assembled groups that did old raids for the pure sake of achievements and vanity

items was less formal. The different in-game environments thus resulted in differing observations and encompassed varying interactional styles. As described by Bartle, the in-game environment was seen to impact both the degree of the players' *acting* in relationship to the game as well as the degree to which they were *interacting* with both each other as well as the game environment (Bartle, 1996).

6.2.2 Game-specific communication aspects

The communication channels in the game create an open arena for new encounters, allowing players to carry out conversations with people they don't know. This is an obvious description of what any digital environment entails when it comes to communication opportunities. However, what is of interest is that the chats are a non-stop collective conversation that may be joined by and dropped out of by anyone who is in the area (or with trade chat, then in any city). This both makes for a very fast pace of conversation, where topics interchange yet still get followed through in ultra-speed while at the same time making conversation harder. During observations, the topics of conversation in the public chats were noticed to stay constant for no more than a few minutes, which may in part be attributed to the fact that most players may move in and out of zones in the game within minutes and therefore do not follow through on conversations.

Another aspect of the game's communications that is worth bringing forth is the ability to interact with people across distances, not only through gazing as described by Chen & Duh (2007), but also through the whisper function and various ways of keeping in touch with newly found friends or fellow players in general. This makes the borders between private and public as well as formal and informal relationships more fluid. In the dramaturgical sense, the backstage and frontstage of the game becomes no less rigid than in real life but rather more accessible. Real life has the option where one can easily connect with a friend or acquaintance in an instant through phones and social media, but this is the case with people who one may already have formed some connection with. It is considered uncustomary in real life to contact someone who you met only seconds ago by asking them for the time or direction and then calling them the next minute. In-game, the situation is different than that of real life, where a player may whisper another player, start a conversation and then end a conversation like

you would otherwise in real life when you have to go elsewhere. However, in the game it becomes possible to continue speaking even some time after parting, through the use replying to past whispers. This interaction is neither temporally nor physically dependent of its performers, where the setting also becomes more fluid.

An example of the long-distance communication was observed during in-game observations when I would ask players in the main city of Stormwind²⁶ if it was possible to take a picture of their transmogrified equipment by whispering players in the city center. During this I ran into a player who seemed happy to help. After I took the pictures I thanked and we parted saying goodbye over the whisper function. However, after a minute or two they whispered me again and began a conversation which continued on for several hours over the whisper function. Both me and the player were in different areas of the game and we did not have much in common except for me mistaking them for coming from the same country as me due to their name spelling. This conversation continued on the basis of our mutual class and similar taste in equipment within the game (since the player was also a mage like my character) and it continued till we both logged out of the game.

This long-distance ability to communicate is of course obvious and has the purpose of communicating with each other without being in the same small area. However, the social dynamic becomes interesting due to the extended range of this communication when you meet new people and the ability to carry on a conversation with someone you just met while still being separated by both actions and geographical space. In *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004), you can still communicate unhindered after you part. Furthermore, this communication can happen alongside other activities without impacting these activities, unlike long-distance communication in real life. Furthermore, this long-distance communication does not vary much from the communication in person in the game, where all communication occurs within the various chats. Another dimension in this occurrence is that the conversation may be carried on without some parts wanting to do so or not having the time to do so. In real life, when a brief conversation is struck up on the way to some other destination on the city streets, the conversation is then ended once one of the key participants of the

²⁶ The capital city of the Alliance faction within the game.

conversations leaves. In the game environment it is harder to see if someone you are speaking to is busy, both if they are busy in the game and if they are busy in real life (i.e they may be away from the computer). There is a built-in function where one may automatically stop receiving whispers when encountering a boss, but not otherwise when a player may be conducting other matter across the game world. The only real way to end a conversation is once you log out or set your status to “afk”. If put in terms on the dramaturgical framework, the performance never ends, but rather flows into and trespasses upon new performances. This ability to perform in different roles and stages simultaneously is a trademark of both games as well as digital environments, where even the early CMCs allowed for this form of multiple staging of oneself (Turkle, 1997). *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) is thus no exception to the rule of possibilities for expressions of the multiple self in digital environments.

Furthermore, the communication of the game is not always free-flowing or appropriate. In action-oriented settings such as raids and dungeons, it can be rather costly to communicate outside the framework of task-oriented communication. An example of this is an observation of an LFR assembled raid group that was doing a newly released raid. It could be seen that when the group wrote during an encounter with a boss, the attack on the boss failed and everyone died. The group only succeeded once players became silent in the chat. This raid-group suffered several defeats where players were tired and discussed other things in chat during the final attempt at killing a boss, where the lack of coordination was seen in the conversation:

[Player 1]: “i wonder if this boss can drop loot..”

[Player 2] (me): “doesn’t he drop a pet? sometimes...”

[Player 3] : “yeah”

[Player 4] (auto emote): “Watch your Back!”

[Player 5]: “your meant to spread on swelling pride”

[Player 3]: “only after the third one”

(Boss) Sha of Pride yells: Your arrogance feeds me!

[Player 6]: “STOP AFK DPS”

[Player 6]: “DPS TOO LOW”

[Player 1]: “we have to do this boss fight again.”

[Player 1]: “dps is sleeping.”

[Player 7]: “why wtf”

Here in the conversation above, the conversation began with players speculating what random rewards may come from the monster or boss after they would kill it (“i wonder if this boss can drop loot..”), discussing this during actual ongoing combat. At the same time, Player 5 attempted to give people cues on what to do and when to move out of an attack's way (“your meant to spread on swelling pride”), upon which Player 6 gets angry and blames the damage dealing players for not being active (“DPS TOO LOW”). The communication forms of the game may allow for multiple conversations to occur simultaneously, but as Eklund has previously stated, the communication may sometimes be costly for the player (Eklund, 2012).

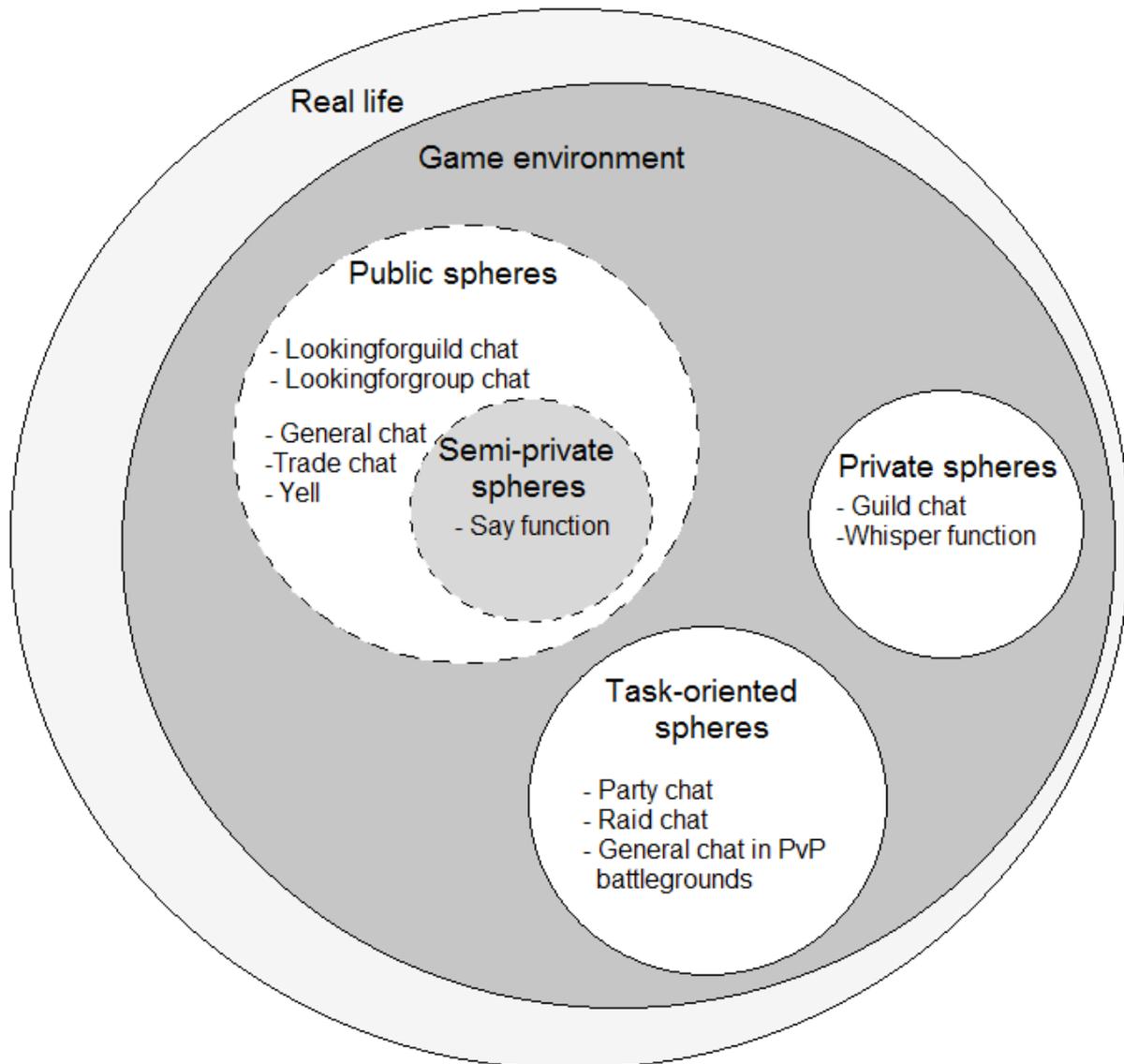
6.2.3 The spheres of interaction

In addition to different areas of interaction described previously, it was noted that the communication-style varied between different areas in the game, this difference could be attributed to four different types of spheres of interaction, where each environment type contained separate built-in channels of communication. The four spheres of interaction were: public spheres, semi-private spheres, private spheres and achievement/task oriented spheres.

In resemblance to real life, the environment within the game consist of several spheres of interaction, where attempts to merge between the spheres is either obstructed or downplayed by the players that are present within these spheres. What is different in these spheres is that although the non-public spheres are sectioned off, a player may still simultaneously inhabit any number of these spheres and the boundaries between the spheres do not limit the pluralistic self which is characteristic of CMCs (Turkle, 1997). Furthermore, the structures of the game has a key role in upholding these boundaries.

These spheres are often linked to a specific task, which in turn affects the interaction within that particular sphere. Thus, the specificities of different areas in the game not only affect players' behavior in-game as according to Bartle's four players-types model (Bartle, 1996), but also their interaction and expression as well as their rate of self-disclosure and emotional expression.

Figure 14. The allocation of the areas of interaction within the game and their subsequent communication channels



However, the specific task related structures of the game do not in themselves force or hinder any expressions and for example the low amount of emotions expressed in the public spheres is something that is done by the players themselves. For example, a player who had recently been forcefully removed from a guild (that he had been a member of for a long time) wrote of this in the general chat²⁷ in Stormwind²⁸. The player in question spoke derogatorily of this guild when he wrote in the public chats, warning others of the guild's actions and openly complaining about the guild in question. Players were quick to reprimand this player's actions and distanced themselves from this behavior.

²⁷ The general chat is a public chat that is visible to all who share a certain area within the game.

²⁸ Stormwind is the capital city for the players who play Alliance characters.

Observations generally showed a lack of emotional expression in the public chats, as well as a lack of personal disclosure and sharing of personal information. This protection of the public sphere's from personal matters can be viewed in the light of that players overall collectively work to separate the *frontstage* that is the public areas within the game from *backstage* behavior that is real life or guild matters. Thus, emotional or private expression appears not only be missing the public areas of the game environment but also hindered by others in the more public chats. Thus, the game consists of different spheres of interaction that dictate the accepted norms of communication between players. Public chats are for generalized conversation, game-related content, as well as non-personal conversation and can in the dramaturgical sense be seen as a frontstage for the performance of the collective playerbase of the game. Expressions of private nature are reserved for chats such as the guild chats and the whisper function, which in the light of the dramaturgical framework may be viewed as backstage regions for the players. This distinction is made apparent when players begin to overstep the unspoken boundaries of acceptable expression and topics in the public spheres within the game. Such expressions may be expressions of negative emotions or through mentioning real-life problems and current affairs which are further discussed in section 6.2.4 below.

6.2.4 Real life, outer threats and current affairs

During observations, players were seen to often diminish the presence of outer factors and the incursion of other spheres in the chats, both when it came to perceived possible threats towards the community, as well as expressions related to real world problems. This downplaying of outer encroaching factors may be viewed in the light of that it interferes with the mutually agreed upon *definition* of the game environment for the players, which is a place for entertainment and relaxation.

Possible threats to the community would often involve other large (often newly released) games within the same genre, or the threat of the game itself changing through either application of changes in recent updates or an upcoming expansion-pack. The issue of perceived threats from new games was a reoccurring theme in public chat channels, where a player would begin by mentioning a game similar to *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) and discuss its similarities as

well as its differences. Players would then often respond by agreeing with positive claims and negative feedback regarding the game to some extent but overturning the conversation in a direction where the initial conversation starter inevitably admitted that *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) was in some way better, by referring either to the vast population of the game or other favorable aspects such as its seniority or by referring to hope of an improving expansion pack. This reoccurring scenario could be viewed as a *routine* that the collective playerbase had in some way agreed upon, indicating that the players within the game environment are in fact a team in the Goffmanian sense in that they have a mutual routine and not only a mutual agreement (Goffman, 1958).

Real-life issues raised in the game also had a similar effect on players in the public spheres. When players began a conversation that would involve or even border current real life affairs, these conversations would often be joked off by other players. An example is when a player wrote in the trade chat;

[Player 1]: "Why cant i make a black dwarf?"

[Player 2]: "Because blizzard is racist."

The question may not have been very serious in intent, but still addressed or at least touched a real problematic subject that would have caused some amount of discussion in real life to some, but here it was framed into a joke by a responding fellow player. The serious response that eventually came from another player was one that linked to the issue within the fantasy world and its lore by saying; "No, black dwarves do exist. They're called dark iron.". The question was thus addressed and solved not by addressing the issue itself but by pointing to lore aspects within the game and thus maintaining the protective barrier between the world of *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) and real life. This was another example of where the *backstage* that is real life was kept out of the public environment in the game, but in this instance being downplayed by referring back to the game itself.

Another real life linked occurrence is the way in which outer threats and players' unhappiness with the game was met and downplayed by the community. In the public spheres, expressions of unhappiness with the game (or other components within the game) were rather quickly countered in a splitting way where one is presented with a like it-or leave it type of choice. For example, a player who was complaining about the game's difficulty in the general chat,

received the following reply; "dont like the game, click the exit button :D". Threats from the sphere of real life were often seen treated by counterings that continued until player who expressed unhappiness or somehow challenged the *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) sphere (even when subtle) somehow turned away from the argument. One example of this persuasion-type of conversations was a reference made by a player to other large MMORPG games, where a player player began to discuss the newly released Elder Scrolls Online (ESO)²⁹, speaking rather fondly of it. The discussion revolving then turned into a discussion about other games that were similar to *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004), upon which Star Wars the Old Republic (SWTOR)³⁰ was lifted into the conversation and was referred to as a "wowkiller"³¹. The notion of SWTOR in the conversation being a "wowkiller" was quickly countered by other players who began to put forth arguments of why they did not like the game and the players who wrote positive comments about the game in question were quickly subdued and they too began to write similar statements in agreement. These occurrences were similar to what can be viewed as team rehearsals, where the team that is the playerbase of *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) was mutually constructing their definition of the game environment and in turn the routine of the performance which is the interaction in the public areas of the game.

Another real-life negating aspect which was prominent in the observation material was the time perspective. While there are many different nations represented by the players of the game, the clock that is visible within the game is set to Central European Time and all the players within *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) seem to abide by the in-game time rather than take consideration to each others time-zones. This consideration was of course linked to practical issues of raid coordination and event coordination within guilds but also created an air of unity around the environment of *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) that marked it further as outside the real life. An example of

²⁹ Elder Scrolls Online (ESO) is an MMORPG which is similar to World of Warcraft in that it is achievement and action oriented but it has certain differing in-game mechanics.

³⁰ Star Wars the Old Republic (SWTOR) is an MMORPG which is similar to World of Warcraft in both its game-play and interactional areas. The game mechanics do somewhat differ from World of Warcraft however.

³¹ A wowkiller is a game which is considered to rival World of Warcraft in both quality and in its possibility to attract a substantial amount of players from World of Warcraft, thus "killing" World of Warcraft.

this was the guild calendar in the guild which was observed, where all the meeting times and events posted on the calendar by the guild leader were stated in in-game time. Another example of the time aspect become apparent during an achievement raid, when a player wrote: "Shall we while the night is still young?" upon which the player shortly added "It's 2 pm where i am" when some people became confused by what was meant by *night* seeing that the in-game time was only five o'clock in the afternoon.

Another example of real world issues held out or played down was a conversation that I only observed as I logged on in the middle of it. The conversation was between two players and one player wrote in the trade chat ;"Hiter lived by those words too". Whereupon another player mocked that player's spelling. However, the interesting thing is that another player responded; "putin is worse than hitler any1 agrees", and this is where the conversation took the step from a slur towards someone comparing them with a historical figure to touching current matters in the real world. The replies then were; "actually I wouldn't" and "how is he worse ?" whereupon the first player responded "he is hatin on europe and is gonna start world war 3 soon" and followed by another player seconding that and adding remarks regarding the politics towards HBTQ people. However, the conversation stopped there as abruptly as it began. Another example of the incursion of real life current affairs on the in-game world is the following conversation which was observed in the same chat but on a different day:

[Player 1]: "Lol they banned twitter last week in Turkey now Youtube is banned as well.. !@#Sing islamist dictator is killing the freedom.."

[Player 2]: "Cross over to greece"

[Player 3]: "I'm Turkish and I approve the Twitter/Youtube ban. Some really !@#Sed up %^&* is going on in Turkey, foreign government listened into Kryptic coded phones which can only be listened by supercomputers. Turkey has none of those."

[Player 4]: "US/UK listened to private Turkish government conversations and then serviced them to youtube/twitter. %^&* that"

This conversation was later continued by a player agreeing with the player 3, after which another player also agreed with the player who agreed. Here, it can be seen where the conversation not only ends but ends in a comic manner and is ended so by a player who ends it ironically, whether it is intentionally so or not. Both of the conversations have that in common that they touched upon current matters, but they both stopped as abruptly as they began and did not follow any set path of argument, but rather emerged as statement rather than a conversation.

The downplayed or outright missing real life utterances can, in the light of the dramaturgical framework, be understood through the notion of real life being a backstage region while the public spheres in the game remain a frontstage region. The players have a routine where they perform in the public areas in the game and as with all performances, they keep backstage behavior from seeping out onto frontstage.

6.2.5 The private sphere – emotions and banter

As noted previously in this study, the game environment consists of several spheres of interaction that can be divided into public and private spheres of interaction. So far it is only the public spheres within the game that have been brought forth in this study. The reason for the comparatively smaller amount of room that the private sphere has taken in the gathered data is linked to the availability of the private sphere to outsiders. The private sphere is after all just that, *private*.

During observations, the private sphere showed some distinct differences in communication in comparison to the public spheres that were otherwise observed. The guild chat was noted to have a presence of both private self-disclosure and the expression of emotions that was greater than that that could be seen in public areas within the game. Personal types of conversations have not yet been seen in general, trade, or raid/dungeon chats. It appears that these personal conversations occur mostly within the private spheres of guild chats or through the whisper function. One example was seen in the guild chat was a conversation between two strangers in a newly formed role-playing guild that was observed. The conversation began in the following manner:

[Player 1]: "heh wish i could get my self a job"

[Player 2] (after a few minutes): "whats stopping you?" .

[Player 1]: "Well i keep trying and trying, but i get nothing"

[Player 2]: "it sure ain't easy nowadays to grab a job"

[Player 1]: "nope"

[Player 2] "specially in england, it took my brother months when we moved here"

[Player 1]: "Aye, i'm stuck on benefits >:/"

[Player 1] "And they do nothing but downgrade you."

After a few lines, the players had time to exchange information about countries of origin, life situations, health problems, family situations and life goals, all within 10 minutes. Similar conversations were seen to emerge in the guild, where everything from real-life purchases to hobbies and children were discussed alongside plans for guild events within the game and coordinating various role-playing events within *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004). Here, the conversations were also less fluid and stayed on topic for several minutes and would gradually change into new topics unlike the public area conversations.

Here, unlike the more restrained and impersonal conversation within the public spheres, the guild interaction is more personal and may be so since it is a sheltered area from non-guild members. The guild environment can be viewed as a backstage protected from the insight of the audience, where the actors can relax, rehearse their performance and neither have to nor be able to uphold a front in front of the other members of the guild or in this case their team (Goffman, 1958).

6.2.6 White noise

The text derived from the recorded chat logs from the observations show that much of the chat text within the game is NPC³² generated or generated by player's actions such as finishing a crafted item or striking an enemy. This creates a feeling of a busy environment without there being any ongoing communication amongst players or amongst players and their environment. The prevalence of NPC generated speech and sound as well as its overwhelming proportion in contrast to player interaction was most evident in settings comprised of the so-called PUG groups. As discussed earlier, players in these settings were observed to be utterly restrictive in their communication and would only write something in chat when

³². The term NPC is an abbreviation and stands for *non-playable character* and refers to automated characters within the game. These players can be interacted with to some degree but give automated responses and are not played by real living players.

other group members displayed a lack of knowledge and only doing so when the lack of knowledge was very visible or damaging to the task that was to be performed by the group. This can be understood in that the settings in which these groups form is often one that does not require much coordination but also is marked by the fact that players do not know each other.

The white noise thus creates a type of setting, which enables the acting out of the literal performance of the group, which is in-fact playing through a part of the game as well as going through a part of the game's story. The white noise described here is thus yet another piece of equipment to orchestrate a setting which gives the illusion of interaction, but the interaction is not as much between players as between the players and the game environment.

6.2.7 The roles and their communication styles

The designated in-game roles of player's have been observed to affect players communication styles. Players who had a more passive role in the group in terms of game-play, such as the damage dealing players (DPS), tended to be more quiet and also had less attention drawn to them. Healing or tanking players tended to be the ones who took more space in the communication within the group chat. The healing and tanking players were also those who were the most often blamed for failures of a group's dungeon or raid progression.

One example of a problematic leadership and poor group spirit was within a LFR raid group which is assembled through the randomized cuing system, where the tank was not good and the healers weren't either. However, the tank was the default party leader so people gave him a hard time in comparison to the healers and started leaving when blame started to get passed onto the different group members. Even though the healers were bad from the beginning, they got a milder tell off than the tank:

[Player 1]: "the tank who tanked rook killed us imo "

[Player 2]: "no ^&*!...tank is clueless..im out"

[Player 3]: "the 4 healers who didnt do a single dispel killed us"

[Player 2]: "give the healers a br5eak, they prolly only just boosted and have not had time to get the experiance needed for LFR".

Here in the conversation above it was noticeable how the players with the healer roles received a circumstantial excuse in regards to probably not being used to doing randomly assembled LFR raids, (“have not had time to get the experience needed for LFR”), while the tank received hate for his poor skills in his role both as a tank and party leader (“the tank...killed us”). The excuse of the LFR being harder is a valid one, since LFR raids have a greater difficulty than guild one's due to the lack of use of Voice over Internet Protocol programs to coordinate, and the reliance on the chat for coordination, but this excuse would then have been valid for the tanking players as well.

The opposite effect of roles was also seen during an achievement raid for Ice crown Citadel, where players would begin to fail repeatedly, but stayed positive and continued the raid since no one was giving up or speaking in negative terms. This could in part have been due to the fact that the achievement (despite its outdated relevance since several years back) still had a higher status in comparison to other old achievements making the reward worth their trouble. Also, the dated aspect of the content that was being completed may have contributed to a less formal setting, which put the players at ease.

The most marked role that could be observed to stand out the most in the communication amongst players in PUGs and LFRs is the leader. The leader of the party was often seen to be the one who was expected to know the tactics and geographical locations of all the encounters with the given raid or dungeon and also most often fulfilled this role. However, the leader was also seen to be the one who took it upon themselves to communicate the most. The most prominent example of the leaders' more marked communication related position was when the party members of a group assembled through PUG or LFR to finish a dungeon or raid and began to leave, most people did not say anything, but quite often the party leader would thank the people for finishing the task or at least write some form of a goodbye. The leader of the party was also often the one that greeted people when they joined the group. It also appeared to fall on the leader to be the one who has to keep up the good spirits of the group if and when things go wrong.

When the leader showed stress it appeared that this was often the point when people began to act out more or simply leave the group. This had been observed to be the point when players also began to more openly criticize the leader as well as put forth their own competence (often as beneath the ongoing task). For example,

when a party leader in an achievement oriented dungeon group wrote: "God im stressed now :<", more people continued to leave and people started to openly show a negative attitude towards the leader. The leaders' diminishing role at the moment their of failure to keep up the personal appearance or front seemed to be further reinforced by the fact that the party members were not helping to get more members to finish the dungeon (although everyone's goal was to finish). Instead, players left the searching to the leader as well as back-talking the leader for not being fast enough or happy enough about the situation. The inconsistency in player's reactions and the differing degrees of willingness to act on the group's interest can be attributed to the fact that although the player's may agree upon a common goal, this does not necessarily constitute a reason to assume that they are a team (Goffman, 1958).

The role of the leader as a cohesive socially driving actor in the game was also seen in more non-formal settings such as the guild chat. During observations, the guild leader would often notify in the guild chat that they were going away from the keyboard, stating this on several occasions and even stating this when no active conversation was going on in the chat. They were also often the player who would start a conversation when the chat was quiet as well as coordinate guild events. An example of the guild leader as the facilitator of smooth interaction and keeping down tempers in the guild was a time when the guild was getting ready for a guild role-playing event and needed to coordinate their transport to the role-playing area via the guild chat:

[Player 1] : "say 123 who needs lifts"

[Guild leader]: "[Player 1] will take people to Aerie Peak if they cant fly there."

[Player 2] : "See taxi!"

[Player 1]: "wow, noone needs a lift, awesome"

[Player 3]: "i will try to make my way there"

[Player 4]: "i need"

[Player 5]: "me too ...hic!"

[Player 1]: "noone has said 123, so noone clearly needs a lift"

[Guild leader]: "[Player 1] pick up [Player 6] first"

In this example Player 1 was volunteering as a shuttle for fellow guild members by offering to transport them to an area call Aerie Peak, a place where the guild

had chosen to role-play for the night. The other players of the guild were not responding to the coordination attempts made by Player 1, who was doing them a favor by offering to fly them into the area on their transport vehicle, upon which Player 1 got irritated (“noone said 123, so noone clearly needs a lift”). The guild leader intervened by dealing out instructions to everyone and then further continued to change the topic.

Another example of the group leader's role as the peace-keeper and driving force behind completing group related actions was found when completing a newly released raid, where the following conversation was seen after a failed attempt at facing the final boss of the raid (after some failures):

[Player 1] (raid leader): “let's stay calm”

[Player 2] has left the instance group.

[Player 1] (raid leader): “rebuff, eat.”

[Player 1] (raid leader): “and kill. sleep.”

[Player 3]: “agreed :)”

[Player 4] (me): “please pop reapirobot.”

[Player 1] (raid leader): “we are at the finale! no need to give up, lets do it :)”

[Player 5]: “i am your highest dps but this groups sucks”

[Player 5]: “i am gonna leave sorry”

[Player 6]: “eat from the table”

[Player 1] (raid leader): “whatever [Player 5], your an jerk.”

You are now queued in the Raid Finder.

[Player 7] has joined the instance group.

[Player 1] (raid leader): “go be a jerk then and leave.”

[Player 5] has left the instance group.

[Player 8] has joined the instance group.

[Player 9] joined the instance group.

[Player 10]: “such a dick move”

[Player 11]: “Aaand he failed even at that.”

[Player 1] (raid leader): “yup”

[Player 12] looks tipsy.

In this conversation there was some negativity, but most of the group stayed in the group for a final attempt and what is more interesting was that Player 5 who left

after scolding the damage dealing players of group (“DPS”) for being unskilled was not only disagreed with, but even slightly mocked for his/her negative attitude. Here, the group gravitated towards what Goffman describes as the natural order of the formation of two teams (Goffman, 1958), where Player 5 was his own one-man team and the rest of the group another. Player 5 was consistently not participating in the optimism of the group and therefore eventually left, upon which the group returned to being both its own audience as its performers.

This notion of players being their own audience was prominent in the former examples, where the groups instead form two teams where one blames the leader or some player and others do not. When there is no opposing views amongst the group members, the conduct of the raid or dungeon and the discussion of tactics becomes the performance itself, but rather an action oriented one rather than a socio-emotional one. Chen and Duh describe that *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) contains rules of conduct, which are stipulated both by external factors such as the game company itself as well as by social actors within the game in the form of guilds and social norms (Chen & Duh, 2007). These rules of conduct were observed to be followed by players with almost no exceptions during the observations and players would often gravitate towards a mutual response in most matters almost automatically.

The interesting thing about groups in the game was that they appeared to adhere to a common routine (as a team would) and often gravitate towards two teams in the likeness of Goffman's description of teams in social settings (Goffman 1958). However, the difference in the game was that the teams were most often not previously coordinated and had not established a common routine together but rather acted on the basis of institutionalized rules of conduct which make up the social front of the entire game. In a sense, the *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) population as a whole can be viewed as a team, acting out a mutually developed routine where each literal role has its part in the collective routine.

6.2.8 The shared cultural base

As mentioned in the previous section in conjunction to the prevalence and utterance of emotions, there was a prevalent presence of a mutually shared and mutually understood culture amongst the players within the community. Pop-

culture and geek-culture references were often noted in various chat channels and also in many character names that would reference either current internet memes, in-game personas or other characters from geek culture. Even jokes often had to do with meme references or geek culture references. One example of this was during an achievement raid, when a group needed to kill an in-game character called Hodir and a player yelled "HODOR!" in reference to the book series and TV-show Game of Thrones. This player's exclamation was picked up by others in the group who then would yell the remark intermittently throughout the duration of the 3 hour long raid. This reference would also often be seen in the general and trade chats in the cities.

Players not only expressed a shared culture based on pop-culture and geek-culture, but also often bonded over in-game culture and lore as well as mutual in-game experiences. For example, once during an achievement raid players began to express nostalgic emotions in the party chat concerning a previous expansion pack; Wrath of the Lich King. During these laments of "the best expansion", everyone in the raid group was agreeing with each others' nostalgic views and spoke fondly of the bosses and places they liked in that particular game segment. Another aspect of a shared in-game culture is the fact that players often seemed to express a mutual joke in regards to that they are wasting their time by playing the game, displaying this in moderately ironic confessions such as when one player wrote in the general chat on the Timeless Isle; "this can't be fun" and another player replied "sadly it is.". Another example is the previously mentioned player who wrote: "Rare: Social Life was killed 5 years ago." while waiting on the Timeless Isle. This was a joke to relieve tension but at one's own and the community's expense and appeared to be something that was a frequently recurring theme. In the likeness of the cynics described by Goffman, it can be viewed as that some players express a certain degree of disillusionment with the game and express this through irony as described by Goffman (Goffman, 1958). However, this irony is also a part of a mutual culture within the game.

The following conversational exchange was observed in the trade chat in Stormwind City between players, where another joke on the expense of the community was made and where the pop-culture references as well as the play on lack of sociability was seen in a mixed form:

[Player 1]: “Lf a frend because i dont have one xD”

[Player 2] : “Ill be your friend”

[Player 3] : “It's a trap!”

[Player 2] : “nu its not D:”

[Player 4] : “Defo a secret gold borrower :D”

[Player 3] : “He'll touch your butt D:”

[Player 4] : “Oh my....”

[Player 6] : ”vet inte men han gör det snart”

[Player 2] : “NO I WONT”

In the conversation, Player 1 begins by joking about not having friends by saying that they are looking for a friend (“lf a frend”). The conversation then continues the joke by referencing two main pop-culture references, namely Star Wars (“It's a trap!”) and the referencing a Star Trek actor named George Takei (“Oh My...”) to then fade out into absurdity. Similar dialogues were seen throughout the observations and the dialogues would often inter-change between pop-culture references, in-game references through quotes as well as internal jokes. In relation to the dramaturgical perspective, the geek culture is part of the mutual base for the performance and both its prevalence as well as its utterance may be attributed to the specific setting of the game. The pop-culture reference is a shared foundation which creates an atmosphere of belonging, furthering the coherence between players. The references are also in part what upholds the setting in its dramaturgical sense, where the setting in combination with the personal front upholds the performance (Goffman, 1958) and in this case facilitates the upholding of the game community. Here, the setting and the personal front is that of popular- and game culture and in turn gamers, where this is repeated and becomes institutionalized to form a social front wherein the social front is that of a gamer community.

6.2.9 The role of visuals and vanity items

During the observations of public chats it was noticed that most things that were advertised by players for sale in the trade chat were vanity and status items such as armor, pets and mounts. In light of the dramaturgical framework, the role of the vanity items can be understood as such that they signal a player's status in one way or another, and just as in real life, they material possessions are the most

common and easiest way to signal one's status. Furthermore, the equipment in the game is not only a visible validation of one's status but also of one's dedication to the game. Equipment has different meanings in the different settings within the game, but what was observed was that there seemed to be no exceptions to its importance, regardless of setting. Serious role-players would put emphasis on either good quality or low key aspects of one's equipment and outfits, where attention grabbing outfits were considered distasteful, while so-called “bad rpers” would instead put emphasis on equipment and outfits that were eye-catching. The equipment of the role-players was thus the player's appearance, which made up their front and allowed them to distinguish themselves into separate teams with separate performances.

Figure 15. Examples of players with transmogrified items (and vanity pets) – posing in Stormwind



The equipment aspect in the game was not purely cosmetic, but also a large part of the game progression, where engaging in raids or dungeons (and even PVP activities) required a certain level of the equipment, where better equipment and weapons could only be acquired by investing time and effort into acquiring it and it is also necessary in order for a player to be able to continue moving forward through the game. New and better armor as well as equipments is constantly required in order to progress to the newest game content as well as a requirement to gain membership in some guilds.

Furthermore, when players were observed to begin fighting over tactics or wipes in dungeons, they were seen to refer to each other competences in-game

that can be viewed through gazing. This occurred when a player would begin to show a negative attitude and not offer constructive solutions to remedy for example a failing achievement raid. An example of such an utterance was when a player wrote during an achievement raid;

[Player 1]: “oh, of course, yes, your righyt, lose 5 and its a wipe??? are you for real?”

[Player 2]: “take ur 46k dps and shut ur bunghole”

[Player 3]: well when it is lfr and some of the 5 are tanks and healers yesn its a wipe mate”

...

[Player 4]: ”lets go i have hc raid tonight... yawn”.

Here, the conversation began as a response to Player 3, who was unhappy with the performance of the group in the raid, upon which Player 1 replied that the complaints in regards to 5 of the 25 players dying in the fight was unjustified critique (“lose 5 and its a wipe??? are you for real?”). This was followed by Player 2 remarking on Player 3's low damage output during the fight (“46k DPS”), moving the blame onto Player 3 himself. The conversation then went on to encompass Player 3 making remarks about the group member's low level equipment, upon which Player 4 ultimately settles the argument by making fun of Player 3's mediocre equipment while referring to his or her superior equipment and the general fact that they often engage in the hardest raid types in the game (“hc raid tonight”) and find this to be somewhat casual in their eyes (“yawn”).

In the game, equipment is not only a sign of skill or time dedicated but also an enabling agent that opens up access to new arenas for the player. Having better equipment means you can gain access to new places, experiences and events. The status lays not only in the material value of time or gold but also in the social and achievement-oriented aspect. Basically having appropriate equipment means you have access to more places and can join in on the fun, while lacking such leads to exclusion.

Even old, low-level equipment had a value depending on how hard it was to acquire and how visually impressive it was. Most players that were inspected during the observations in the cities were found to be wearing transmogrified armor and weapons, i.e the armor and weapons they were wearing had been cosmetically changed to look like other items that they owned. The equipment of

the players was found to not only serve as a gateway into a certain area but it also created space for personalization and expression, be it in-character or out of character.

The equipment in the game, is thus equipment in both its literal form as encompassing weapons and armor as well as in the dramaturgical sense. The role of equipment is used in the orchestration of either literal performances (i.e role-playing) as well as its figurative symbolic meaning in that it is a gateway to new social arenas such as raids as well as being a status symbol of one's dedication to the game.

6.2.10 Role-playing

Except for vanity items, the trade chat was often seen overflowing with various guild recruitments, where all types of guilds recruited members. The advertisements made by these guilds ranged from elaborate role-play story infomercials to simple descriptions of social or leveling oriented guilds. Some guilds were creative and some more standard.

Figure 16. Example of serious role-playing in Stormwind City – walk-through with player



Newly created guilds that were not role-play oriented would sometimes use more aggressive marketing by using the whisper function, while some would offer in-game gold benefits. Role-playing oriented guilds tended to present their role-playing story in the advertisements and according to a player who showed me around in Stormwind City one evening the most “serious” guilds do not recruit through these channels at all, stating that some go through external forums online and recruit members through forums petitions and in-game interviews. The lengthy process of the member acquisition for the serious role-playing guilds and

the shorter such for others may be understood through the notion that the way in which the guilds carry themselves in public is a portrayal of their expectations on team members. The guild recruitment process is part of an initiation into the team's performance in the Goffmanian sense and therefore, the manner and its appearance signals what the players may expect from each individual guild. In terms of role-playing, observations and conversations with players showed a clear divide between two types of role-players within the game namely so-called *serious role-players* and the *bad role-players*³³ (Bad RP). Several references to these two different kinds of role-playing were noticed during observations. Most notably, an area called Goldshire was the most commonly referred to place in reference to bad role-playing. During an encounter with a player who took me on a tour of the different role-playing areas in the game the player described this bad rp and the Goldshire area in the following way:

[Player 1] whispers: "Goldshire is mostly "lol" RP as they call it."

[Player 1] whispers: "and it is mostly deranged Teenagers."

[Player 1] whispers: "who have just figured out about sex and stuff.. it is unforunate."

...

[Player 1] whispers: "if you run around yo uare assumed a loller."

[Player 1] whispers: "they would ignore your chas."

...

[Player 1] whispers: "loller is the RP version of trolling."

In this statement, both bad role-playing ("lol" RP) and the Goldshire area is brought forth as something to stay away from, something outside the role-playing community and something that is equivalent to antagonizing behavior online ("trolling"). Much like a resident of a city showing a newcomer around and warning of which neighborhoods to stay away from. Here, the definition of role-playing is as such that it is a serious matter and the bad role-playing is not encompassed into that definition. On the other hand, the same player spoke differently about "serious role-playing" and spoke in the following way:

[Player 1] whispers: "You will find a lot of Guild RP in the

³³ A derogatory term used by role-players in regards to players who do not role-play in what is viewed as a serious manner. This can include using out of character expressions in the say function, acting in a provocative way, ignoring in-game lore and other various perceived transgressions on otherwise "serious role-playing".

cathedral square. they are well coordinated and they know what they are doing”...”you always find people standing there... like vagabonds in paris.”

Here, the differing definitions of the two role-playing groups are further emphasized by referring to serious role-players in a romantic way, in the likeness of “vagabonds in Paris”, while bad role-players are referred to in more slang terminology such as “trolling”.

The notion of bad and serious role-playing was noticed even in the first observations that were in fact made in the Goldshire area, where the following conversation was seen in the chat:

[1. General] [Player 1] : “Oh goldshire rp, how disgusting you are.”

[1. General] [Player 2]: “Only srs rp here, please.”

[1. General] [Player 3] : “goldshire rp is best rp”

[2. Trade] [Player 4]: “Any RP-hubs outside of Stormwind? (Not Goldshire please)”

[2. Trade] [Player 5] : “Goldshire.”

[2. Trade] [Player 6] : “Stromgarde was very popular”

[2. Trade] [Player 7] : “Pastashire”

[2. Trade] [Player 8] : “for the love of god and all that is holy, NOT GOLDSHIRE”

[2. Trade] [Player 6] : “Not sure about it now”

[2. Trade] [Player 5] : “Darnassus - For evles.”

[2. Trade] [Player 4]: “Oooh good point. To the Magemobile! (I.e. Darnassus)”

[2. Trade] [Player 9]: “Stromgarde was pretty popular, got some guilds like Arathi Honour Guard and so on”

Here the players discuss areas in which one can role-play (“rp”) and refer to several places such as Darnassus, Arathi Highlands and Stromgarde. In this conversation, Goldshire is put forth as an alternative that is not to be considered for the player who wants to role-play. This is another example of where the role-players of the game attempt to gain control over their performance through the setting by gaining information about what in-game areas constitute what settings. During observations it was noticed that the so-called bad role-players would more

often use emoticons³⁴ than serious role-players and used the predetermined emoticons available in the game instead of personalized ones. The bad role-players also used more everyday language and didn't shy away from places where the chat-window was filled with other activity, while the serious role-players used a more formal archaic language and shied away from busy places where the role-play conversations risked interference from other chat-window activity.

Figure 17. Example of role-playing in Goldshire – players inside the inn



An example of both the use of a player-created emote as well as archaic formal language was observed in Stormwind City during observations where the following appeared in the chat window:

”[Player 1] places both hands atop his left knee, using it as a support as he gets to his feet. Once up right he'd bow his head, making the sign of the holy light upon his chest before turning and taking his leave.”

Similar elaborate self-made expressions were seen consistently throughout the observations within the serious role-playing areas. Furthermore, when players were observed to carry out conversations, in serious role-playing constellations,

³⁴ Emoticons (emotes) are built in macros that make the avatar perform an action by typing i.e /dance into the chat, causing their avatar to dance while a notification in the chat states “player X bursts into dance”. Players may also create their own emotes which will appear as a performed action in the chat, but not cause the avatar to perform any visible actions.

they would often be seen using written emoticon expressions to convey non-verbal cues during a conversation. For example:

[Player 1] says: “Why does [Player X] insist on a cease fire? We have not attacked them, they are the ones persecuting us. Sorry. The whole scenario just perplexes me.”

[Player 2] says: “Good day.”

[Player 2] nods at [Player 4].

[Player 3] says: “Killed one, shoved a dagger through it's cold, cold heart.”

[Player 4] says: “I know what this [Player Y] did, - But again... This conflict shouldn't have been resolved on Stormwind soil.”

[Player 5] peers at [Player 4] searchingly.

[Player 6] looks at [Player 7].

In this conversation a role-playing guild was discussing current in-game affairs in character. The conversation took place in a corner of the Stormwind City Cathedral square and the players were standing in a closed circle during this discussion. The conversation was filled with gestures and eye-contact related expressions used by the players and the conversation continued in a similar manner. The emoticons here in the serious role-playing setting appeared to be used to mimic a real life conversation where the emoticons would replace non-verbal cues which keep the pace and flow of polite conversations. As mentioned previously, the way in which players carry themselves, or their manner, is a way to signal what one may expect from the interaction with these players, where the manner of serious role-players is as such that they follow a more real-life simulating way of interaction in the use of non-verbal cues. Just as players in Second Life have been found keeping to real life norms when conversing in dyads within the digital environment (Yee et. al., 2007), so do the serious role-players.

In short, the serious role-players can be seen forming a team and the bad role-players can be seen forming one too. Then the teams do what any team does, namely mutually agrees on a performance encompassing their routine, manner, front and appearance (Goffman, 1958). Another interesting aspect of the two opposite role-playing communities is that they initially can both be named role-players and this is yet another example of a gravitation towards two opposing

teams within a setting is something which is lifted in the dramaturgical framework provided by Goffman where there is an assumption that social settings will often result in the formation of two teams (Goffman, 1958).

6.3 Summary of participating observations

Observations indicated that the game environment is a social area and is in part dis-inhibiting. However, the dis-inhibition only stretches so far, and the in-game environment does not differ much from the regular everyday interaction that takes place in real life. Players do not self-disclose personal thoughts and emotions in the public spheres (much like in real life) but do so rather in private or semi-private spheres of the guild chat or through whispers. Similarly, people do not interact much when they are busy doing something in the game such as killing a boss or on their way to an activity.

In short, real life can be seen as a backstage in relation to the game environment, where it is also an outer threat to the team which is the players of *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004). Players work to uphold a front which both shields the performance in the public areas from real life as well as the other backstage area which is the guild. Unlike the real world, guilds don't pose a threat to the performance of the public in-game spheres but are rather purely a backstage region *within* the game, while real-life is something external. The frontstage regions of the game were thus the public spheres of the game, where players were seen to uphold certain routines and fronts.

This notion of players down-keying real life matters in the frontstage regions of the game environment is much in the likeness of Linderoth's findings of players working on up-keying fantasy elements when role-playing within the game (Linderoth, 2012). Real life simply interferes with the aim of the game, which is after all an entertainment product. Players thus not only work to shut out real life references when performing a role-playing session, but also when they simply socialize in public areas of the game.

Furthermore, observations showed a limited prevalence of emotions in public spheres, which put in terms of the dramaturgical framework can be viewed as that the composure can in part be part of the front, which gives the players control over the performance. This front is a socialized front, since most players abide by this mutually informally agreed upon front. All players within *World of Warcraft*

(Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) can in a way be viewed as one large team, since they are all part of a routine that keeps emotions down, while keeping real-life and the emergence of backstage behaviors out. Then there are sub-groups which form within the different settings of the game. When teams form within the general team of World of Warcraft players, it is as Goffman puts forth that it is most common that players form two opposing teams (Goffman, 1958). In this case i.e “serious role-players” versus. “bad role-players” as well as those who are happy with the group's raid/dungeon progression versus those who are not.

Observations further confirmed the enabling nature of the digital environment in regards to the presence of the multiple-self in that the communication options within the game environment allow for expressions of different aspects of the self to take place simultaneously in different chat-windows (Turkle, 1999 and Zhao 2005). Furthermore, observations confirmed that although the digital environment of the game allows for a certain degree of ease in relation to switching between roles and social groups, the change between social circles is not unproblematic (Zhao, 2005) where for example leaving a guilds came at cost both socially and in terms of resources.

Long distance communication was seen to be an ongoing performance that never stops, but rather molds into and transgresses onto other performances where this phenomenon is in part an expression of the multiple-self, which is common for CMCs (Turkle, 1997). It is also an expression of the more fluid boundaries between strangers and acquaintances as well as the more easily created teams.

Furthermore, popular culture and in-game lore was seen to form a strong base that united the players who otherwise have varying backgrounds. The shared mutual culture builds group cohesion between players within the game, as it is built on the mutually shared and understood popular and geek-culture base. This culture can be understood in the light of that players come from many countries, where the popular culture becomes a mutually shared foundation that all can relate to. The mutually shared culture thus allows the formation of a mutual definition of the players' shared environment as well as serve as a safe topic in public interactions.

6.4 Summary

The playerbase of *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004) within the observations could be seen as a team rehearsing a routine in terms of their relation to the game and their mutual development and maintenance of the definition of the game in public areas. However, public areas did not exhibit backstage behavior in terms of relaxation of the team members (Goffman, 1958), where the presence of a front was rather clear in that both guild matters and real-life matters were kept out of the areas. The players were not private in the public spheres in the game and kept to a formal action-oriented interaction style in action-oriented areas. The action oriented areas would to some degree have a dis-inhibiting effect where players would express their emotions, but this was always still related to a failed action attempt amongst the group and would involve negative emotions vented between action attempts. The public areas would also have a somewhat dis-inhibiting effect to some extent where some would verbalize their political opinions in the public areas, but no more personal than a discussion between two strangers on the street.

If viewed in the light of the findings from the survey, it can be argued that the game environment of the game is associated with primarily in-game activities such as raiding and questing, while the main feeling is that of positive emotions and relaxation. Thus, the environment of the game is defined as a relaxing situation and not a place for negative emotions. The interaction in the public spheres of the game may stem from this base definition, which is that players want to have fun. What was interesting was furthermore that role-playing was found to be the least favorite activity of all players within the survey sample as well as the most segregated and sheltered in-game activity viewed in the observations. This indicates that the meaning of the game may not have its emphasis on the *role-playing* aspect of the MMORPG genre's name, but simply on the *multi-player* and *game* part of its genre name. The meaning of the social interaction is thus that of casual socialization and personal fun. This could be seen in both observations through the segregation between private and public areas as well as in the results of the survey, where the *social* aspect ranked medium while the *relationship* aspect was seen to be ranked lower than most activities. Players may thus not necessarily down-key real life to role-play or immerse themselves as Linderoth's findings showed (Linderoth, 2012), but they may also down-key real life issues

because they want to have a good time and interact on the basis of that.

On the other hand, as shown by both Bartle and Yee, players may have different player-styles and motivations for play and what is fun for one player may not be so for another (Yee, 2006 and Bartle, 1996). In fact, areas of the game were found to be greatly segregated in terms of what activities players were engaging in. The raiders and players who did dungeons were naturally segregated from other areas, but role-players would also draw themselves away from the general idling population of the city environments. Furthermore, role-players who considered themselves more serious would draw themselves into more secluded areas. The segregation between players in terms of activities can be in part attributed to the fact that each activity requires a specific setting where role-players need props and equipment to *literally* perform their roles while raiders and those who do dungeons need enemies and bosses to engage with in order to fulfill their task. It is thus the activity type that dictates where players spend time and how they interact. However, when not engaging in activities, players were often seen to form a coherent performance in the public chats and would often then interact on the basis of a mutually shared culture in both the terms of *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004), but also in terms of other games and popular culture.

Findings further showed that there is an indication of a correlation between the type of social ties that players bring into the game. Furthermore, players who played in a community (guilds) down-ranked competitive actions such as PvP and rather favored teamwork (raids/instances). Essentially, data indicated that playing with real life friends as well as tight-knit communities either enables team-play or draws that kind of player-type into them. This could be seen in the observations, where PUG and LFR groups were very restrictive in their communication and would often lose group members as well as coherence and morale, while the guild chat was mostly positive in its interaction. Furthermore, the impersonal public sphere of the game may make real life connections and guild belonging a necessity to actually take part of the *multi-player* aspect of the game, after all interaction with strangers is taxing and not always favorable for entertainment.

Shortly, players were found to devalue being personal and role-playing aspects, favoring instead the casual sociability and entertainment aspects of the environment. What was most observed was that players had a rigid structure upholding the entertaining definition of the game environment and this

performance was adhered to almost unanimously in the interaction of the players. Players who bring in social ties into the game also keep them there by engaging in team-play, while players who enter the game themselves also mostly prefer to stay that way. With other words, players do what they want to do in the game and their intentions vary from player-type to player-type. The game environment entails the same interactional framework as real life, with smaller adjustments such as the long-distance communication options, and thus the socialization of the game may be a present component, but not the key force behind the game's vast population.

The findings of this study conclude a similar results as that of Bartle's study from 1996, where the meaning of the game environment can be seen to be different for different types of players. What this study found though, was that the presence of offline social ties within the game has a correlation with the preferences and actions of the players. Furthermore, gender and age were seen to have a correlation with preferences and actions of players in the survey, while observations showed the presence of a strong mutual culture. This information may be of use in relation to both the development of digital environments for different target-groups as well as creating an understanding for the different play-styles of different demographic groups, allowing to adjust the way in which for example problematic and compulsive gaming is addressed as well as pave the way for further use of the medium for social causes.

6.5 Discussion

The strength of this study was in that it encompassed a wide range of in-game areas, facilitating the analysis of both frontstage and backstage regions of the game. The overall data builds upon the dramaturgical framework as provided by Erving Goffman (1958), but may have further benefitted from a longer study with a greater data sample from a private sphere in the form of a guild, especially since no group activity conducted by a guild was encompassed in this study. The results of this study build on Goffman's dramaturgical framework and both show its applicability in modern digital settings as well as add a new dimension through the notion of the perpetual never-ending performance as well as the presence of teams that do not share familiarity or display backstage behavior amongst other things. However, the *effects* of the digital environment on these aspects were not addressed in this study and may be of interest for future investigation. This study

further raised some questions which may be of interest for future study, such as the mutual cohesion through popular culture and the differences between genders as well as age-groups in activity preferences. The way in which the social bonds within the game correlate with activity preferences is also another aspect which would be of interest for study. Further research is thus warranted on both the private areas of the digital environments as well as the differences of player behaviors and the underlying causes of such differences.

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Appendix 1. Glossary

Achievement:	Completing certain in-game tasks, such as a completion of a significant quest or by completing a certain raid in a special way which makes the raid harder. Some achievements grant titles that players can use in conjunction to their name. When players do an “achievement run” they refer to doing an instance or raid in a way that will gain them said achievements.
Boss:	An automated enemy which is extra hard to kill and grant more treasure upon killing. Most often found in raids and dungeons, where killing bosses is the main goal.
Class:	An in-game character characteristic which defines what abilities, spells and attacks a player's character may use. Defining of the player's role within the game and chosen at the beginning of the game when creating a character.
CMC:	Abbreviation for “computer mediated communication”.
DPS:	An abbreviation referring to damage dealing players, which players fulfill this role is chosen by what class they have selected. Is one of three roles that a player can have in the game.
Dungeon:	A sectioned off area of the game where players enter in groups to defeat harder enemies and bosses, in groups of 5.
Expansion-pack:	Games that are released in the likeness of a sequel to a current game. Often involving the expansion of the world within the game as well as story progression, often introducing some changes to both gameplay and game structure. Also makes permanent changes to previously released storyline parts in the game in some cases in order to make the new storyline coherent.
Gear:	Wearable equipment such as weapons and armor.
Guild:	A group created by players on the basis of either common in-game goals or real life qualities such as nationality or interests. The group is semi-permanent and contains its own communication channels. Much like a real life club.
Healer:	One of three roles players can have in a game. Refers to players who's main task is to heal their fighting teammates in enemy encounters.
Instance:	A sectioned off area of the game where players enter in groups to defeat harder enemies and bosses.
LFR:	The built-in in-game cuing system which pairs up players into groups when they wish to do raids but have no group to do them with.

MMORPG:	Abbreviation for Massively-multiplayer online role-playing game. A game type with a fictional storyline which players play through with other real life players online.
Mob:	An automated monster or enemy.
NPC:	An automated character in the game which is not played by a real person.
PUG:	The built-in in-game cuing system which pairs up players into groups when they wish to do dungeons but have no group to do them with.
PVP:	Abbreviation for player-versus-player, meaning activities which involve players engaging in combat with or dueling with other players.
Quest:	An in-game task offered to the players which upon completion grants rewards in the form of items or in-game currency. Often tied to a main storyline in-game.
Raid:	A sectioned off area of the game where players enter in groups to defeat harder enemies and bosses., in groups of 10 or 25.
Reputation:	A point system linked to certain areas and factions within the game as well as guilds, where completing tasks with or for a certain faction or guild grants reputation points which are needed to gain rewards.
RP:	Abbreviation for “role-playing”, which means that players gather in formal or informal settings and act out a certain character with other players like a digital living theater.
Say function:	An in-game communication function where players can write something so it can be viewed only by players who are standing n their near proximity.
Tank:	One of three roles a player may take on in the game, is defined by the class that player's choose. Fulfills the function of being a damage absorbing character in combat, protecting othe group members from receiving damage.
Transmogrification:	The in-game option of changing the apperance of an item or armor by transforming it into the likeness of another item of similar value possessed by the player.
Whisper:	An in-game communication function where players can write something so it can be viewed only themselves and the receiver of the message.
Yell:	An in-game communication function where players can write something so it can be viewed only by players who are standing within a certain range of them, but can be seen by players at a greater distance in comparison to expressions made in the say function.

Appendix 2. On-line survey

How do you play? - A survey on players' preferences in World of Warcraft

Information about the survey

This survey will take approximately 5 minutes and consists of 10 questions. This survey is part of a masters thesis paper in Social Work at the University of Lund, and is aimed to investigate players' preferences within World of Warcraft. All data received through this survey is anonymous and will be used for purely academic purposes. You may close this survey at any point and thus withdraw your data submission. Note: this survey is for active users of World of Warcraft at this time. If you have any questions regarding this survey you will find the necessary contact information listed at the end of this survey.

Only players age 18+ may take this survey due to legal consent considerations regarding data collection.

*** 1. How often do you play World of Warcraft?**

Every day

Every other day

A few times per week

A few times per month

Less

*** 2. How many hours per day do you spend playing when you play/are in-game?**

6 hours or more

5 hours

4 hours

3 hours

2 hours

1 hour

30 minutes or less

*** 3. How old are you?**

***4. Are you male or female?**

Male

Female

***5. How long have you played World of Warcraft?**

Less than 1 year

1 year

2 years

3 years

4 years

5 years

6 years

7 years

8 years

9 years

10 years (played since the original game was launched)

***6. Which in-game activities do you prefer? Rank in ascending order, with most preferred as number 1 and so on.**

Questing

Raiding/instances

Trading/crafting/profession related content

PVP

Role-playing activities

***7. What do you find yourself DOING in the game?**

Rank by numbering in ascending order, with most frequent activity as number 1 and so on.

<input type="checkbox"/> Advancing in-game: achievements, level, item level, progression
<input type="checkbox"/> Optimizing your characters/analyzing game mechanics and tactics
<input type="checkbox"/> Duelling, PvP, ganking, raiding enemy cities
<input type="checkbox"/> Socializing/chatting/making friends
<input type="checkbox"/> Speaking in-game about personal matters/providing emotional support to others
<input type="checkbox"/> Working in groups in various ways/group achievements
<input type="checkbox"/> Exploring the world/finding hidden lore objects or other hidden items
<input type="checkbox"/> Role-playing
<input type="checkbox"/> Customizing your character (gathering transmogrification items, getting other items for looks etc.)
<input type="checkbox"/> Logging on to relax/take your mind off things

***8. What do you find MOST APPEALING in the game?**

Rank by numbering in ascending order, with most preferred activity as number 1 and so on.

<input type="checkbox"/> Advancing in-game: achievements, level, item level, progression
<input type="checkbox"/> Optimizing your characters/analyzing game mechanics and tactics
<input type="checkbox"/> Duelling, PvP, ganking, raiding enemy cities
<input type="checkbox"/> Socializing/chatting/making friends
<input type="checkbox"/> Speaking in-game about personal matters/providing emotional support to others
<input type="checkbox"/> Working in groups in various ways/group achievements
<input type="checkbox"/> Exploring the world/finding hidden lore objects or other hidden items
<input type="checkbox"/> Role-playing
<input type="checkbox"/> Customizing your character (gathering transmogrification items, getting other items for looks etc.)
<input type="checkbox"/> Logging on to relax/take your mind off things

***9. Who do you play with?**

Check all that apply

Play alone/solo

Your guild members

Your on-line friends (people you DO NOT KNOW IRL but have on friends list in-game)

Your offline friends (may also be in your guild/friends list but that YOU KNOW IRL)

Your classmates

Your colleagues

Your parents

Your siblings

Your spouse/partner/girlfriend/boyfriend

Your children

Your grandparents

Your other family members

Other

***10. What ONE word would you use to describe how World of Warcraft makes you feel?**

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey! Your answers are very valuable. If you have any questions regarding this survey as well as the progress and outcome of the study which it is a part of, you may contact the following email address:

elena.shilnova.333@student.lu.se

Appendix 3. Secondary data omitted from the study

Table 1. Distribution of age-groups

Age-group	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<= 21	107	20.7 %	20.7 %	20.7 %
22 - 26	118	22.8 %	22.8 %	43.4 %
27 - 31	101	19.5 %	19.5 %	62.9 %
32 - 39	93	18.0 %	18.0 %	80.9 %
40+	99	19.1 %	19.1 %	100.0 %

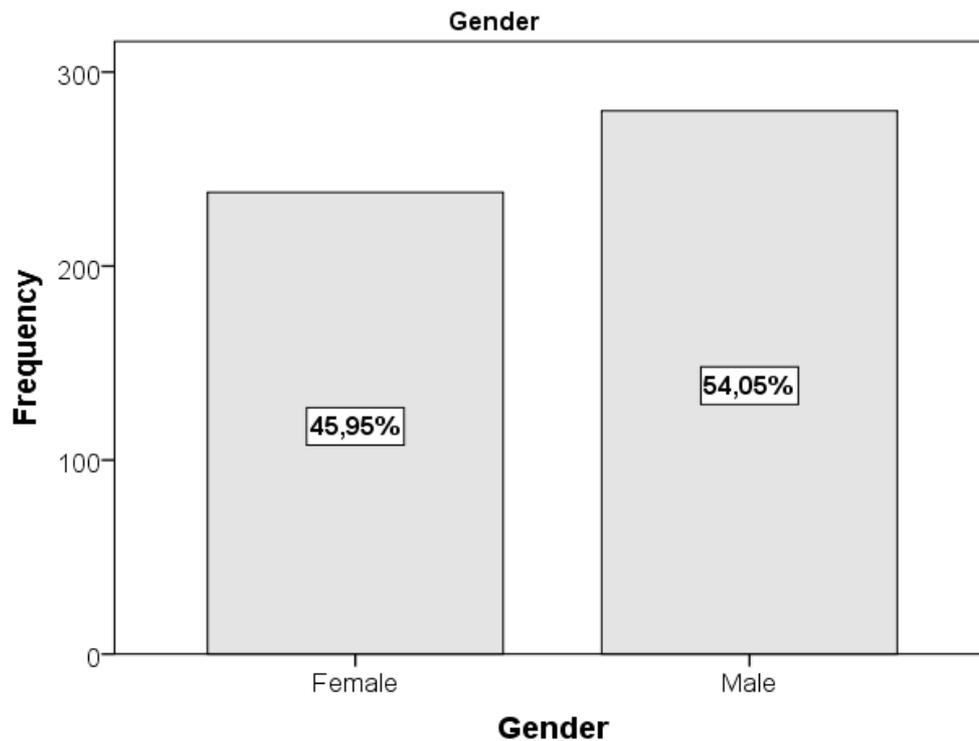
Note: N=518

Table 2. Distribution of gender amongst respondents within sample

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Female	238	45.9	45.9	45.9
Male	280	54.1	54.1	100.0
Total	518	100.0	100.0	

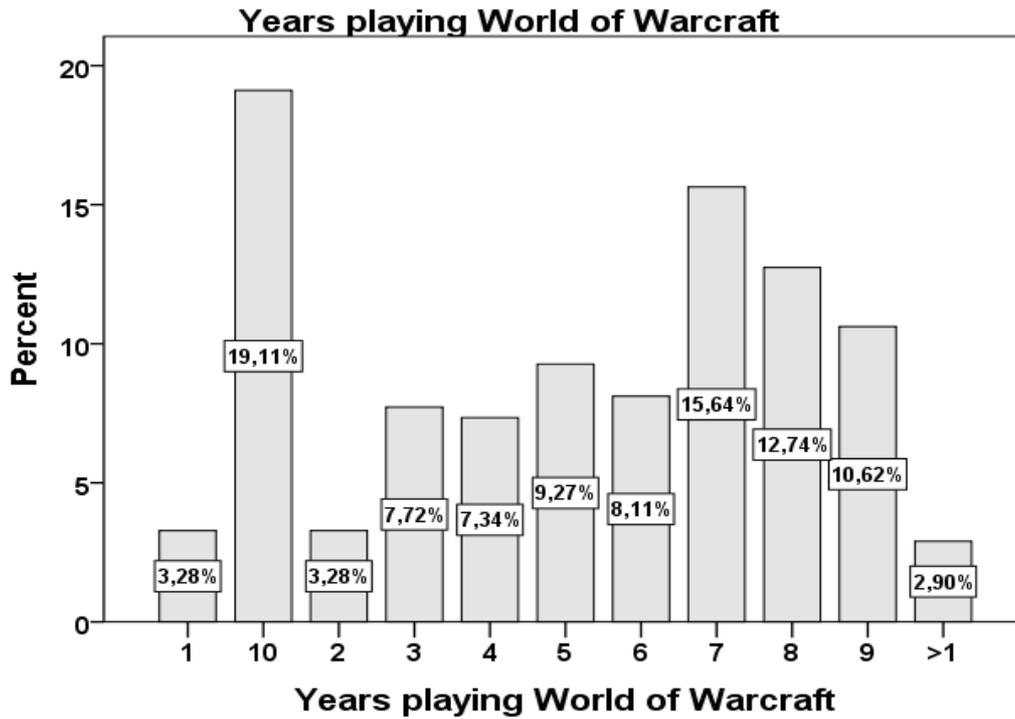
Note: N=518

Figure 1. Distribution of gender within sample



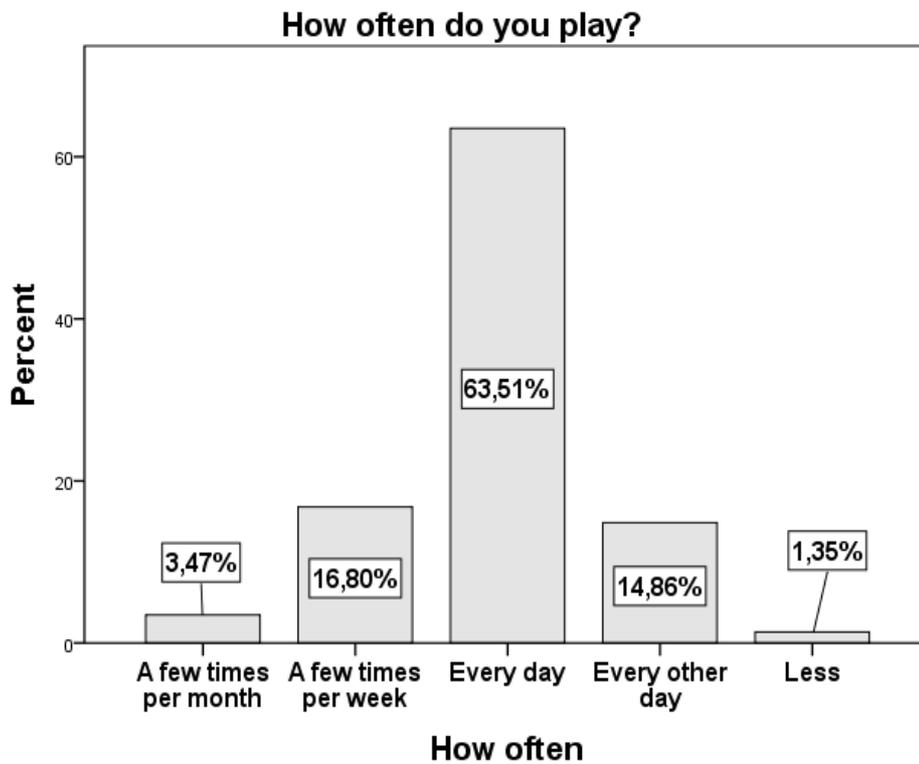
Note: N=518

Figure 2. Years playing World of Warcraft, distribution among respondents



Note: N=518

Figure 3. Frequency of playing World of Warcraft, distribution among respondents



Note: N=518

Table 3. Differences in activity preferences between age-groups (Q6)

Activity	Age-group	Mean score	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Sig.
Questing	<= 21	3.01	1.240	.120	.000***
	22 - 26	2.59	1.249	.115	
	27 - 31	2.14	.959	.095	
	32 - 39	2.10	1.094	.113	
	40+	1.72	.959	.096	
Raiding/instances	<= 21	1.72	1.026	.099	.013*
	22 - 26	1.75	1.023	.094	
	27 - 31	1.95	1.161	.116	
	32 - 39	1.97	1.098	.114	
	40+	2.18	1.091	.110	
Trading/crafting/professions	<= 21	3.38	.987	.095	.000***
	22 - 26	3.07	.976	.090	
	27 - 31	2.99	.954	.095	
	32 - 39	2.80	.927	.096	
	40+	2.96	.903	.091	
PVP	<= 21	2.84	1.442	.139	.000***
	22 - 26	3.24	1.357	.125	
	27 - 31	3.50	1.390	.138	
	32 - 39	3.72	1.228	.127	
	40+	3.95	1.198	.120	
Role-playing activities	<= 21	4.05	1.232	.119	.044*
	22 - 26	4.33	1.030	.095	
	27 - 31	4.42	.919	.091	
	32 - 39	4.42	.913	.095	
	40+	4.19	1.027	.103	

Note: N=518. 1=most preferred and 5=least preferred

* p< .05, *** p< .001

Table 6. Distribution of whom players play with by percent “yes” by age-group (Q.9)

In-game companions	Age groups					Sig.
	<= 21	22- 26	27- 31	32- 39	40+	
Play alone/solo	81%	85%	89%	87%	93%	.136
Guild members	75%	75%	84%	80%	84%	.275
On-line friends	72%	78%	80%	66%	65%	.040*
Offline friends	58%	66%	64%	55%	36%	.000***
Spouse/partner/girlfriend/boyfriend	26%	42%	41%	44%	35%	.061
Siblings	19%	18%	13%	9%	9%	.099
Children	0%	2%	8%	30%	27%	.000***
Colleagues	12%	8%	16%	10%	9%	.425
Other family members	7%	12%	11%	10%	13%	.725
Classmates	23%	10%	4%	0%	3%	.000***
Other	7%	6%	7%	5%	7%	.974
Parents	8%	5%	4%	3%	5%	.511
Grandparents	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	.559

Note: N=518. 1=most preferred and 5=least preferred

* p< .05 , ** p< .01 , *** p< .001

Table 4. Differences in frequency of activities between age-groups (Q7)

Activity	Age group	Mean score	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Sig.
Advancement	<= 21	2.25	1.620	.157	.439
	22 - 26	2.30	1.901	.175	
	27 - 31	2.19	1.592	.158	
	32 - 39	1.89	1.571	.163	
	40+	2.08	1.563	.157	
Optimization	<= 21	3.46	1.992	.193	.140
	22 - 26	4.05	2.438	.224	
	27 - 31	4.07	2.219	.221	
	32 - 39	4.11	2.019	.209	
	40+	3.78	1.946	.196	
Competition	<= 21	5.54	3.172	.307	.000***
	22 - 26	5.94	3.264	.300	
	27 - 31	7.06	3.107	.309	
	32 - 39	7.00	2.650	.275	
	40+	7.95	2.764	.278	
Socializing	<= 21	4.39	2.008	.194	.026*
	22 - 26	4.59	2.105	.194	
	27 - 31	4.02	1.918	.191	
	32 - 39	4.73	2.202	.228	
	40+	4.94	2.240	.225	
Relationship	<= 21	7.05	2.447	.237	.033*
	22 - 26	7.06	2.134	.196	
	27 - 31	6.74	2.292	.228	
	32 - 39	7.44	2.040	.212	
	40+	7.66	2.091	.210	
Teamwork	<= 21	6.06	1.912	.185	.517
	22 - 26	5.67	2.009	.185	
	27 - 31	5.95	1.982	.197	
	32 - 39	5.70	1.910	.198	
	40+	5.74	1.930	.194	
Exploration	<= 21	6.77	2.209	.214	.000***
	22 - 26	5.87	1.924	.177	
	27 - 31	5.91	2.069	.206	
	32 - 39	5.39	2.265	.235	
	40+	4.94	2.222	.223	
Role-playing	<= 21	8.02	2.387	.231	.013*
	22 - 26	8.58	1.950	.179	
	27 - 31	8.70	1.814	.181	
	32 - 39	8.80	1.632	.169	
	40+	8.13	1.899	.191	
Customization	<= 21	5.70	2.283	.221	.330
	22 - 26	5.34	2.687	.247	
	27 - 31	5.98	2.404	.239	
	32 - 39	5.90	2.554	.265	
	40+	5.59	2.420	.243	
Escapism	<= 21	5.77	3.194	.309	.000***
	22 - 26	5.60	3.092	.285	
	27 - 31	4.38	2.894	.288	
	32 - 39	4.04	2.778	.288	
	40+	4.20	2.646	.266	

Note: N=518. Ranking question where: 1=most often carried out/most preferred and 10=least often carried out/least preferred activity.

* p< .05 , ** p< .01, *** p< .001

Table 5. Differences in frequency of activities between age-groups (Q.8)

	Age-group	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Sig.
Advancement	<= 21	2.44	1.948	.188	.469
	22 - 26	2.33	1.961	.181	
	27 - 31	2.26	1.781	.177	
	32 - 39	2.23	1.616	.168	
	40+	1.99	1.508	.152	
Optimization	<= 21	3.79	2.110	.204	.471
	22 - 26	3.82	2.323	.214	
	27 - 31	3.80	2.030	.202	
	32 - 39	4.25	2.025	.210	
	40+	3.79	1.831	.184	
Competition	<= 21	5.07	3.086	.298	.000***
	22 - 26	5.90	3.198	.294	
	27 - 31	6.82	3.195	.318	
	32 - 39	6.97	2.865	.297	
	40+	7.92	2.709	.272	
Socializing	<= 21	4.11	1.973	.191	.010*
	22 - 26	4.53	1.857	.171	
	27 - 31	3.78	1.792	.178	
	32 - 39	4.61	2.231	.231	
	40+	4.62	2.275	.229	
Relationship	<= 21	6.78	2.283	.221	.002**
	22 - 26	6.65	2.224	.205	
	27 - 31	6.78	2.239	.223	
	32 - 39	7.55	2.154	.223	
	40+	7.54	1.991	.200	
Teamwork	<= 21	6.04	1.769	.171	.099
	22 - 26	5.77	1.823	.168	
	27 - 31	6.12	1.862	.185	
	32 - 39	5.47	1.821	.189	
	40+	5.76	1.785	.179	
Exploration	<= 21	6.59	2.339	.226	.000***
	22 - 26	6.13	2.102	.194	
	27 - 31	5.95	2.114	.210	
	32 - 39	5.62	2.172	.225	
	40+	5.17	2.286	.230	
Role-playing	<= 21	7.81	2.492	.241	.002**
	22 - 26	8.22	2.068	.190	
	27 - 31	8.47	1.764	.176	
	32 - 39	8.85	1.467	.152	
	40+	7.92	2.137	.215	
Customization	<= 21	5.90	2.747	.266	.137
	22 - 26	5.69	2.840	.261	
	27 - 31	6.41	2.531	.252	
	32 - 39	5.46	2.548	.264	
	40+	5.89	2.415	.243	
Escapism	<= 21	6.48	3.136	.303	.000***
	22 - 26	5.97	3.412	.314	
	27 - 31	4.61	3.020	.300	
	32 - 39	3.99	2.980	.309	
	40+	4.41	2.949	.296	

Note: N=518. Ranking question where: 1=most often carried out/most preferred and 10=least often carried out/least preferred activity.

* p< .05 , ** p< .01, *** p< .001

Figure 6. Top 11 words used for how World of Warcraft makes respondents feel, un-coded (Q.10)



Word	Count	Percentage of responses
Relaxed	73	14.06 %
Happy	54	10.40 %
Entertained	31	5.97 %
Free	24	4.62 %
Awesome	18	3.47 %
Good	13	2.50 %
Excited	12	2.31 %
Accomplished	11	2.12 %
Content	10	1.93 %
Satisfied	10	1.93 %
Connected	8	1.54 %

N. responses: 519
 N. unique words: 176