

Wow: a world of warcraft ethnography assignment



**ASSIGN
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WOW A World of Warcraft Ethnography Here is a little background of the World of Warcraft for those new to it. “ World of Warcraft (commonly acronymed as WoW) is a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG). It is Blizzard Entertainment’s fourth released game set in the fantasy Warcraft universe, which was first introduced by Warcraft: Orcs & Humans in 1994. World of Warcraft takes place within the world of Azeroth, four years after the events at the conclusion of Blizzard’s previous release, Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne.

Blizzard Entertainment announced World of Warcraft on September 2, 2001. The game was released on November 23, 2004, celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Warcraft franchise. With more than 10.9 million monthly subscribers, World of Warcraft is currently the world’s largest MMORPG in those terms and holds the Guinness World Record for the most popular MMORPG. In April 2008, World of Warcraft was estimated to hold 62% of the massively multiplayer online game (MMOG) market. ” (Wikipedia)

Mass multiplayer online role playing games (MMORPGS) have drawn in millions of online players from many different countries across the globe into gaming worlds in which people socialize and dialogue as if they were located in the same room next to each other. This virtual relationship exists despite not being in close proximity and is an interesting concept. Also interesting is the societies that are created and upheld by these games. Imagine a man from Arkansas, a wife from China and a boy from France all “ hanging out”, in a virtual sense, together as a new society.

These games allow for a person to represent themselves virtually as they actually are or how they wish they could be. Most MMORPGs contain human and non human characters which allows for further diversity. In addition to the racial aspect, there is a choice of “ class” options which alter how the user interacts with the game in the virtual world. This choice of class is a permanent one unless the user chooses to recreate a new character and significantly influences one’s gameplay in a number of key ways.

Maybe the most obvious of these is the way in which one’s class affects gameplay in the role of combat, an aspect of most games. A player’s role in nearly all MMORPGs is centered of the concept of how they support a group in combat. In every group there are healers and warriors. Warriors are the front line soldiers, the hack and slash fighters, they are the shield that protects their groups from harm. Healers are near polar opposites of warriors, they keep every alive and ready to keep fighting, they essentially support and supplement others.

Accounting for this vast difference in functionality of these classes, it indicates some self projection of one’s idea of their identity when choosing a role. There is a clear relationship between one’s social perception of one’s self and the class chosen, possibly even some gender bias is present in class representation. Largely populated virtual online environments like World of Warcraft (WoW) are not just entertaining places to game, they are also a good place to examine social psychology.

Gender bias is not by any means a new subject of interest, it has been the target of research for many people. In general, it is accepted that men and

women tend to treat each other differently in games and are also motivated by other reasons. “ The differences in MMOG player gender, typically biased in favor of the overwhelming male majority, even reflect in the real world economic market of MMOG characters in which male avatars fetch loftier prices than females of the same level. ” (Castronova) There is a tangible link between gender and class choice and the motivation behind it.

Although maintaining a level head during combat, being able to hold concentration for long instances of time and having good hand-eye coordination are all desired traits of a good a gamer, Taylor points out that “ chatting, connecting with other people, forming relationships and maintaining them are all aspects of the interpersonal pleasure MMORPGs afford and multiuser games have benefited by drawing in this component of online life” (Taylor, 2003). These are generally associated as feminine trait strengths in online scenarios.

As my brother pointed out, in high end ‘ raiding’ good group cooperation is necessary and being socially “ unawkward” as he put it, helps build reputation as a competent individual. In this instance, these commonly feminine oriented skills are desirable. Despite this women are still vastly underrepresented in WoW and in other games in general. Even though their skill sets make them viable and valuable members of end game raiding guilds. Speaking with Amy, a WoW player for over 3 years now, she discussed the apprehension that her guild had in giving any responsibility based solely on gender. The guys had a hard time letting me do anything alone for a long time. I guess they had always had poor girl players in the past, but that’s different now I think. I do ok. ” This same concept of skill sets

also transitions into class selection, where they will fit in the best and what responsibilities their chosen role will require of them. The point I attempted to grasp is ‘ what factors are related to which class a player eventually choses to play in a virtual world? ‘ Whether that a be gender based decision, a self image reallocation, or another factor. I discussed this concept with 4 different players, two of whom I already mentioned.

Amy, 20 years old, a long time gamer and warrior class player in a high end guild and a current BSU student. Ben, my younger brother, also a warrior type class, player of 2 years and a new college freshman. Jenny, a healer class and guild leader of Amy and Ben’s guild, 25 years old, a single mother with 2 kids. Lastly, Docan, a 27 year old employed at a computer software developer. Docan, this is his in game name he didn’t give his actual name to me, is the only male healer I found that would interview with me, though he was very quiet and far less open than the others.

He is also the newest member to the guild. All of these players have been gaming collectively for over 15 years and are members in the same high end raiding guild called Audacious on the server Magtheridon. Each of the members is not married, however Docan was recently engaged, he met his fiance on WoW. Each of them were fairly open in their responses to my questions and had unique perspectives on the idea of self actualization via in game personalities.

Since my conversations seemed to suggest that female players tend to be motivated more by relationships in the game rather than achievement, the classes that I examined both mostly require grouping throughout their

character's life in order to effectively advance. Along the same lines, since the warrior's effectiveness is typically reflective of the quality of the items that he or she has equipped, at least much more so in relation to a typical healer's effectiveness, this juxtaposition provided a decent method by which to analyze the differences in character class, and thus group role, selection.

Several topics that interested me emerged during my conversations with these four players, possibly the most enticing is the sense of importance of their class that each of the players indicated. Each of the tanks both stated that having a good warrior makes the group since they 'tank' the monsters and enable the survival of the group. Docan mentioned to me that he felt that the healer was the most important since it kept everyone alive and that regardless of the warriors 'skills' "you can make or break the group.

Another interesting theme that emerged during my talks was the common observation that participants didn't seem to observe many females at all playing warrior classes; when I asked Amy about her lack of warrior peers, she said "Ya I get that a lot, I guess some girls just aren't cut out for it. I mean the in your face fighting style, that's such a typical boy game front, not really very girly I guess. " The idea of class selection was another common theme represented by all the players. Ben and Amy both expressed similar views on this. Ben said, " I like being in the middle of the action, being in charge somewhat. Though he might not realize this, this a pretty accurate representation of his every day life too that I've seen from growing up with him. That's always been his personality and how he handles himself. As for the healers, Jenny indicated to me that she played it because " we aren't the one's who get all the glory, but we definitely aren't dispensable by any

means, without us we (the guild) go nowhere. ” The analysis of responses to various questions asked during the interviews and subsequent to several in-depth conversations with individuals that I spoke with led to the emergence of several noticeable patterns.

First of all, every one I interviewed commented on the appeal of grouping, absolutely everyone mentioned grouping being an important part of their character’s life and enjoy playing with smaller or larger groups of people as a primary method of advancing their characters. Second, the theme of protector came up amongst almost all of the participants; in warriors, it emerged in the form of the description of their role as being the “ meat shield” whereas amongst the healer classes this theme surfaced in statements in the form of “ keeping the group alive”.

Thirdly, most participants of both warrior and healer class-type referenced, either directly or indirectly, the action that their class-type was involved in during group combat as one of the appeals of playing the class that they chose. The warriors’ (more so than the healers) references came in the form of being ‘ in midst of it all’ or directly mentioned the greater sense of “ action that comes with being a warrior” (Ben), while the healers sense of action seemed to spur more from trying to keep their group-mates alive during large battles. Finally, the warrior class seemed to attune more to the interest of achiever-oriented individuals.

For instance, Ben commented that the competition aspect of the game made the game fun for him, elaborating that he was always the “ main tank” in raids, the best equipped, the most skillful, and the first player to reach the

top levels of any game that he played. This is also backed up by some comments made by a healer who would play a warrior or rogue if forced to change classes because of “ the importance of items for those two character classes. Makes the game retain some fun at maximum level when you can continue to upgrade your class (noticeably) via items.

That’s one of the flaws of priest characters in that the item upgrades have minimal effects” (Docan). Thus described, the healer class loses some appeal in the eyes of players motivated by achievement, at least at the highest end of the game, because items obtained within the virtual environment have less of an effect on the performance of the character in comparison with character-classes such as the warrior. All of the participants expressed an interest if not a definite preference in grouping with other players, and many of the healers even specifically mentioned choosing the healer class because of their constant demand in groups.

Secondly, the warrior class seems to be more catered to the achievement motivation due to its long-term upgradeability, in the form of levels and items that confer power and substantial increase in effectiveness as compared to healer classes. Also, a substantial sense of ‘ action’ is witnessed in both warriors and healers, although it was referred to in a more positive sense amongst warriors, and more as a hectic aspect of group play that healers were forced to deal with on their side. The correlation this sense of ‘ action’ may have with the choice of character class is unknown.

In addition to the idea behind class selections there is another choice that faces every WoW, and most of all other MMORPG, player and that is what

guild, if any, to be a part of. Becoming a member of a guild in World of Warcraft is described by players as being beneficial and enhancing the game playing experience. Blizzard describes guilds to the World of Warcraft gaming community by saying, “ Guilds offer many benefits including free items, opportunities for groups, access to trade skill masters, quest items, and readily available trade skill ingredients through gathering guild members.

You may discover that a guild greatly enhances your gameplay experience. You can meet friends, share adventures, and find people to protect you if you fight in faction versus faction combat. Typically, players in good guilds can go places and do things that players in poor guild or no guild can’t” (Joining Guilds, 2005). The guilds are not run by Blizzard, which means players must take the initiative to create a guild, join a guild, or help maintain the guild. Each guild varies in membership size and it is up to that community to determine how large or small it will be.

Players cannot enter into any guild they want. Many people play in groups to find people they enjoy playing the game with and eventually become members or start their own guild. Other players research specific guilds that they would like to become a part of within World of Warcraft. Players can find information about guilds through recruitment forums that contain links to guild sites. Finding the right guild can even involve interviews with current and past guild members. Blizzard warns those looking to join a guild saying, “ Be on your best behavior.

Asking to join one of the more powerful guilds can actually be similar to a job interview in real life” (Joining Guilds, 2005). Joining a guild is an aspect of the game that anyone can choose to participate in or to avoid. Why do some people join when others don’t? Guilds are expressed as enhancing game play and allowing you to do more than you could if you were to play the game alone. They are said to provide a stronger sense of community and create a social environment with people who share similarities. There are many players who are members of guilds but there are also players within World of Warcraft who are not.

Some players were once part of a guild but no longer are. Other players are not part of a guild and are searching for the right one. WoW, like many other MMO games, can actually be seen as two different games. The first is the journey of exploring the game world and advancing the abilities of one’s character or avatar either through solo play or in groups of up to five players. This acts as a proving grounds or gateway for the second stage of WoW, joining a raid group of up to 25 players to kill all the monsters in “ high-end” or “ endgame” dungeons for the treasures they guard.

I have found that invitation to join an end-game group is contingent on a player’s reputation as an expert of WoW’s underlying mechanics and rules. It is also necessary, however, to have proven oneself as someone who works well with others and understands his or her particular role in a team. Upon joining a raid group, players soon find that the conditions that determine expertise have changed, because the activities and player practices have changed to fit the local context, which includes raid-specific tactics and new communication norms.

It becomes clear that expertise is specialized for individual roles, depending on character type, and that to succeed as a raid group, players need to draw on their distributed expertise and knowledge, each doing their part while trusting others to do the same, so that collectively they act as a coordinated whole. Yet the actual skills and abilities an individual player uses are reassessed for how well they complement other players' resources. Thus, once-expert players become novices or "noobs" to relearn expert or "leet" gameplay, yet they are not true novices because they already have a good understanding of the game system.

Rather, they are leet noobs who must realign and adapt their expertise for new social structures and norms that emerge above the underlying game through joint venture. These are a few of the choices that face MMORG, and more specifically WoW players at the very start of their gameplay. This however, is just the beginning of all of the decisions that one must make when creating an online persona. To me, this is what draws the several million players to this virtual world.

A place that they can recreate themselves, to become what and who they want to be in the real world but aren't able to due to societal constraints and harsh judgmental peers. Ironically enough, several choices that are made in game, are influenced by the society that the player's live in according to their gender, social status or even race in some cases. Further down the line more and more decisions are made in this game, and though I didn't address them here, the reflection of the player's would-be self is still very evident.

There is a definite hierarchy of players based on a multitude of things including “ e-fame”, in game skill and leadership, social nature of the player, gear of your character and overall knowledge of the game. Fitting into the one of these categories is actually a choice though, unlike in most reality where you can occasionally be forced into your spot of the social hierarchy based on looks, talent or your lineage. This is the most unique aspect and most likely the reason that this game has had such a dedicated following in since it’s release and will likely to continue to enjoy success in the future.

Works Cited 1. Castronova, Edward, “ The Price of ‘ Man’ and ‘ Woman’: A Hedonic Pricing Model of Avatar Attributes in a Synthethic World” (June 2003). 2. Joining Guilds (2005) [http://www. worldofwarcraft. com/info/basics/joiningguilds. html](http://www.worldofwarcraft.com/info/basics/joiningguilds.html) , September 25th, 2008 3. Taylor, T. L. (2003). Multiple Pleasures: Women and Online Gaming. *Convergence*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 21-46, Spring 2003. 4. “ World of Warcraft”, [http://en. wikipedia. org/wiki/World_of_warcraft](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_of_warcraft) September 25th, 2008