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Community in World of Warcraft: The Fulfilment of Social Needs

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Keywords

community, World of Warcraft, MMORPGs, online gaming, gaming culture

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APPENDIX C: continued

Modern <i>Homo sapiens</i>	Sex	Cranial Capacity (cm ³)	Source
Australia - Tasmania			Wunderly (1939)
Specimen 1	M	1270	
Specimen 2	M	1250	
Specimen 3	M	1378	
Specimen 4	M	1150	
Specimen 5	M	1366	
Specimen 6	M	1184	
Specimen 7	M	1336	
Specimen 8	M	1362	
Specimen 9	M	1122	
Specimen 10	M	1106	
Specimen 11	M	1140	
Specimen 12	M	1320	
Specimen 13	M	1316	
Specimen 14	M	1160	
Specimen 15	M	1498	
Specimen 16	F	1098	
Specimen 17	F	1080	
Specimen 18	F	1150	
Specimen 19	F	1128	
Specimen 20	F	1296	
Specimen 21	F	1130	
Specimen 22	F	1428	
Specimen 23	F	1275	
Specimen 24	F	1252	
Specimen 25	F	1322	
Specimen 26	F	1220	
Specimen 27	F	1362	
Specimen 28	F	1160	
Mean		1245.0	
Standard Deviation		112.9	

Modern <i>Homo sapiens</i>	Sex	Cranial Capacity (cm ³)	Source
Europe - Moorfields			MacDonell (1906)
Specimen 1	M	1605	
Specimen 2	M	1427	
Specimen 3	M	1247	
Specimen 4	F	1425	
Specimen 5	M	1589	
Specimen 6	F	1399	
Specimen 7	M	1476	
Specimen 8	M	1450	
Specimen 9	M	1425	
Specimen 10	M	1486	
Specimen 11	M	1670	
Specimen 12	F	1460	
Specimen 13	M	1207	
Specimen 14	F	1476	
Specimen 15	F	1202	
Specimen 16	F	1121	
Specimen 17	F	1541	
Specimen 18	M	1394	
Specimen 19	F	1405	
Specimen 20	F	1308	
Specimen 21	F	1531	
Specimen 22	F	1440	
Specimen 23	M	1470	
Specimen 24	F	1425	
Specimen 25	F	1384	
Specimen 26	F	1227	
Specimen 27	M	1643	
Specimen 28	F	1313	
Specimen 29	M	1648	
Specimen 30	F	1176	
Mean		1419	
Standard Deviation		144.5	

Modern <i>Homo sapiens</i>	Sex	Cranial Capacity (cm ³)	Source
Asia - Burma			Tildesley (1921)
Specimen 1	M	1496	
Specimen 2	M	1264	
Specimen 3	M	1614	
Specimen 4	M	1382	
Specimen 5	M	1416	
Specimen 6	M	1359	
Specimen 7	M	1459	
Specimen 8	M	1430	
Specimen 9	M	1413	
Specimen 10	M	1421	
Specimen 11	M	1380	
Specimen 12	M	1330	
Specimen 13	M	1474	
Specimen 14	M	1338	
Specimen 15	M	1389	
Specimen 16	F	1277	
Specimen 17	F	1248	
Specimen 18	F	1086	
Specimen 19	F	1091	
Specimen 20	F	1216	
Specimen 21	F	1443	
Specimen 22	F	1418	
Specimen 23	F	1343	
Specimen 24	F	1412	
Specimen 25	F	1323	
Specimen 26	F	1254	
Specimen 27	F	1336	
Specimen 28	F	1405	
Specimen 29	F	1170	
Specimen 30	F	1239	
Mean		1347.5	
Standard Deviation		116.7	

Community in *World of Warcraft*: The Fulfilment of Social Needs

Caroline Whippey

Introduction

Online communities are becoming more prevalent as Internet technology continues to mature. One type of these communities is found in the genre of Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGs). While there is a growing literature on the subject of online gaming communities, anthropology has not yet made an extensive contribution. In this study, I argue that *World of Warcraft's* (WoW) social community helps to fulfill various social and emotional needs of its

players. WoW has been selected for this study because it is one of the most popular games of its kind, currently having a player base of over 11.5 million people (Blizzard 2008). This study provides valuable information about the social interaction in online gaming as well as emphasizes the need for anthropologists to study online gaming communities.

In order to discuss the inner workings of the WoW community, it is essential to examine the notion of "gaming culture". Subsequently, an

overview of the game itself will be provided. This will give the background necessary to explain the methodology of the interviews and surveys, as well as their results. I will then examine several specific aspects of the social community of WoW that pertain to this study including what attracts people to WoW, the social interaction in the game, and the emotions evoked in the community.

What is Gaming Culture and how can it be Studied?

Gaming studies, or *ludology*, has started to become a recognized discipline within the last decade. With the advent of new technology and knowledge, new gaming consoles and games have become readily available to the general public. With the growth of the Internet, games have moved to an online environment, which allows people to play and communicate with others from all over the world without changing their physical location. The study of online games makes up a significant part of the current game studies literature. The field is highly interdisciplinary, drawing from disciplines such as communication science, psychology, sociology, media studies, and computer science.

Anthropology has only recently taken an interest in Internet-based social and communicative applications. This research area is relatively new and a coherent focus or approach has not yet been developed (Wilson and Peterson 2002). This is particularly true in the case of online gaming, as anthropologists are only beginning to look at this phenomenon. However, anthropology is uniquely suited to the study of gaming cultures and communities because it provides a framework and methodology for the study of games and culture (Boellstorff 2006).

Boellstorff (2006), an anthropologist, suggested that there are three ways in which anthropology can aid in the interdisciplinary study of games. First, he stated that anthropologists can study individual game cultures, as many games are developing their own cultural forms (Boellstorff 2006). Second, they can study the cultures of gaming; most people who play games participate in more than one game and more than one genre (Boellstorff 2006). This type of study includes many sub-cultures because these societies are emerging on a range of spatial scales and are shaped by a

variety of factors (Boellstorff 2006). Finally, Boellstorff (2006) posits that the gaming of cultures should also be studied as gaming becomes more significant in contemporary society. Each subsection within this topic provides a different view of gaming cultures and all can be combined to obtain a complete picture. This study falls into the first category, as it examines the cultural forms and social interactions in WoW.

When examining online gaming communities, a variety of methods must be used by anthropologists in order to obtain information about the culture under study. Many ethnographic techniques currently in use can be adapted to study cultures of online gaming. For example, participant observation is an effective mechanism for studying online communities. It allows the researcher to become a part of the community. While in the virtual world, the researcher is also able to witness the difference between what people may say they do, and what they do in actuality (Boellstorff 2006).

When conducting online ethnography, several problematic issues arise. The anonymity of the Internet means that it is difficult to physically monitor people and confirm the accuracy of their statements. There is no way to visually verify information such as age, gender, ethnicity or nationality. This can be ethically problematic when working with a population that includes people below 18 years of age. Nonetheless, Wellman and Gulia (1999) found that Internet users tend to trust strangers and show willingness to communicate truthfully. There is as much chance of being misinformed via the Internet as there is in person-to-person ethnography; in "live" ethnography people are able to give anthropologists incorrect information about the way in which their society operates.

Personal information is not the only information of value when studying online gaming communities. The community under study 'lives' in a virtual world; the people that participate in it are represented by characters, or avatars, that they control. Information can be obtained from observing the actions and conversations that occur in the game, regardless of the characteristics of the player behind them.

Wittel (2000) has criticized participant observation, stating that it can only take place in a limited mode as the researcher is not able to observe the community in a person-to-person environment. Since most of the communication takes place in writing, the pattern of interpersonal communication is changed; layers such as speech tone and body language are lost and there is a time lapse in the conversation as each person formulates and types their reply (Sade-Beck 2004). These points, however, do not constitute a major issue in the study and ethnography of MMORPGs. The person-to-person environment is changed to a character-to-character environment. This does not reduce the effectiveness of participant observation; it simply changes its nature. In WoW, characters have the ability to express emotions through *emotes*, special commands that tell the character to complete some kind of action. Emotes may have animated or voiced cues. Some players may also chat through the use of microphone software, eliminating the need to type to each other.

In addition to participant observation, interviews and surveys can also be used to augment ethnographic and anthropological research of online communities. These methods allow the researcher to ask specific questions of players, either in an anonymous survey format, or through interviews that can take place either online or in the physical world. Through using different methods of data collection, the researcher can determine if there are differences in response due to the research venue.

It is essential for the researcher to become familiar with the game(s) under study. Each game has different mechanics and play styles that must be known by the researcher in order to play the game and communicate effectively with the community. The gaming community is beginning to speak out against research done on games with little background knowledge. For example, studies have been completed comparing two games from entirely different genres and with incompatible play styles, eliciting a negative response from those that play the games (Lavigne 2009). The language of gaming is also unique. Games contain a plethora of different terms which are not used in other contexts. For example, *noob* refers to a person that is unfamiliar with the game, or is making elementary errors. The story and history of the game must be learned in

order to place what people are doing during gameplay in the proper context. Without this knowledge, it would be difficult for an anthropologist to conduct meaningful conversations with players or engage in participant observation. This can be likened to introductory research and preparation anthropologists undergo before fieldwork.

Ethical concerns also arise with the anthropological study of online gaming communities. For example, it is difficult to get written consent to conduct an interview or for minors to participate in the research. As of 2002, the American Anthropological Association (AAA) did not offer any ethical protocols for online research (Sade-Beck 2002:461). A recent search of their website failed to locate any mention of the Internet in their *Code of Ethics* (AAA 2009). As anthropologists are unable to meet the people they are working with face-to-face, procedures to obtain informed consent and maintain privacy must be adapted from the current ethics procedures. During the discussion of methodology, the ways in which ethical procedures were adapted in order to conduct an online survey will be highlighted.

World of Warcraft: An Overview

To continue to set the stage for the discussion of the online WoW community, the mechanics of the game must be explained. In order to participate in WoW, players must pay a monthly fee of 14.99 USD. Before beginning gameplay, a player must first select a server. The game is divided into many servers with approximately 20,000 players on each. This division allows the servers to run smoothly without being overwhelmed by players. Players are encouraged to play on servers which are located in the same time zone as their physical location. There are four different server types that cater to various playing styles. The first type, Player versus Environment (PvE) is a server in which players cannot attack other players at will. The only active enemies in the game are those controlled by the computer, commonly referred to as Non-Player Characters (NPCs). The second type, Role Play (RP) operates under the same rules as the PvE server; however, in this type of server, players are expected to act as they believe their character would at all times.

The third type of server is the Player versus Player (PvP) server. On this server, players may attack other players of the enemy side at will as a part of the game. The only 'safe' areas are major cities and the beginner areas. This makes the game more challenging, as it requires a higher level of vigilance on the behalf of the player. Role Play Player versus Player (RPPvP) is the final type of server; this server combines the PvP server type with the RP rule of always staying in character.

The first step in character creation is selecting a faction. There are two opposing factions in the game: the Alliance and the Horde. Each faction contains five races. The Alliance is made up of Dwarves, Night Elves, Humans, Gnomes and Draenai. The Horde consists of the Undead, Tauren, Orcs, Trolls, and Blood Elves. Both the Draenai and Blood Elf classes were added to the game in 2007 with the release of *The Burning Crusade* expansion pack.

Once a character race has been selected, the player must then choose a character class. There are nine classes in WoW that can be divided into three groups. The physical fighting classes consist of Hunters, Rogues and Warriors. The caster classes, which are proficient in magic use, include Mages, Priests and Warlocks. Finally, the combination classes are the Death Knights, Druids, Paladins and Shamans; players of these classes are able to fight through use of physical or magical abilities. The Death Knight class was added to the game in 2008 in the *Wrath of the Lich King* expansion. Each class plays to different strengths and methods of play. For example, the Priest may be chosen by a player who enjoys having the ability to heal themselves and prefers to be at the edge of a battle as opposed to the forefront.

Characters can be customized through the selection of various skin colours, hair styles, hair colours, jewellery, horn style, or other specific traits. The player is able to choose from a set of pre-programmed selections, allowing players to add some individuality to their character. The final step is to give the character a unique name.

Upon the completion of character creation, the player is able to begin gameplay. WoW takes place in the world of Azeroth, a full-scale three-dimensional virtual world. It is divided into four

continents: Kalimdor, The Eastern Kingdoms, Outland and Northrend. (It is important to note that at the time of this research, the Northrend continent was not yet created, as it was a part of the 2008 expansion.) These continents are further subdivided into "regions", each catering to a specific set of character levels. Characters start at level one; at this level, the character is weak in battle and has simple armour and weaponry. At this point, gameplay is straightforward and easy in order to allow the player to become familiar with the game controls.

Characters move through levels by gaining experience points at their leisure. Each level requires a certain amount of experience points to be obtained before the player may graduate to the next level. As the player achieves higher levels for their character, he or she gets stronger and is able to obtain better items (e.g. armour and weapons) and more money. Experience points are gained primarily through completing quests given by NPCs. There are tens of thousands of quests in the game that ask the player to do things such as kill a particular number of enemies or deliver an item to another NPC. Experience can also be gained by killing foes, exploring or playing through dungeons or raids (areas of the game where you need to have a group of players in order to succeed).

WoW is diverse and has many different game activities. Players may complete the activities listed above, fight other players in battlegrounds, enjoy the world of PvP, or spend their time socializing. This means that players are able to play at their own speed and in their own style. People are able to choose to play alone or in groups. In WoW, the player experience is made by each individual. While players are completing game activities, they are also able to communicate with others.

There are several ways that a player can communicate with other people during gameplay. When characters meet face-to-face in the game, they can communicate through speech (which appears in a bubble above their head to anyone in the immediate area) or through emotes. Emotes are special commands that tell the character to complete some kind of action. For example, if a player types '/wave' the character will wave on screen and a note will appear on the screen in the general window saying, "[name] waves".

The second main way to communicate in WoW is through the general chat channels. These are public channels that anyone can participate in and the conversation appears at the bottom left of the screen. Each region of the game has its own general chat channel. There are also channels for trade, defence tactics, and for those who are looking for groups. Players can also “whisper” to each other in a private chat mode, should they wish for a more personal conversation. Finally, there is a channel for guild chat. Guilds are semi-permanent groups of players who talk to and interact with each other on a regular basis. Each channel is colour-coded so that a player may easily discern if the text is from a private, guild, or general chat channel.

A third way to communicate is through Voice over IP (VoIP), an Internet-based auditory chatting system. Players may download third-party software or make use of the in-game voice chatting system and talk with friends as they play through the use of a microphone. This is commonly used by guilds in order to ease communication. However, this use of third-party software is not available to a player who is not already involved in a group, as VoIP programs require a server name and password.

In order to study an online game (or indeed, to read about it), it is essential to have a good understanding of how the game works. There are a number of terms, as there are in any discipline, that one must learn in order to understand the discourse surrounding a game. Without in-depth knowledge, the creation of interview and survey questions would be extremely difficult.

Methodology

In this study, both face-to-face interviews and an online survey were conducted to obtain information from WoW players about their experiences in the game. The same set of questions for both the interview and survey were used for ease of analysis. This research was vetted by the University of Western Ontario (UWO) Research Ethics Board. Participant observation was not conducted as the study time was very short (two months). However, examples are used from my own playing experiences to illustrate a point or idea.

The interviews were advertised through posters put up in various places around the UWO campus from February 2 until March 26, 2007.

During this period, three interviews were conducted. I believe it was difficult to find participants for the interviews for two main reasons. Firstly, the survey was advertised on the UWO campus during a busy time of year. Secondly, fees prevented poster advertising in highly trafficked areas.

The survey and associated website was hosted online by the UWO Information Technology Services (ITS). Participants were directed to a webpage with an information letter before being able to access the survey. By beginning the survey, they signified that they had read and understood the information letter, thus satisfying ethics protocols. The online survey was advertised through word of mouth and the WoW forums. The questions from the online survey are identical to those used in the interviews. However, in the online survey, respondents were asked to select an answer from a set of pre-programmed responses, whereas during the interview there were no restrictions on the answers given.

The language used in the website for the online survey proved mildly problematic for some participants. Several participants did not understand the survey process. The ITS survey program required a password (to be created by the user), and several players saw this as a threat to their WoW account security. This was corrected immediately by stating that participants should not use their WoW account information, and after the first day, ceased to be an issue. It is essential to be clear when conducting an online survey, as people may not come to the researcher for clarification of terms or phrasing. During the confusion over passwords, I was subjected to *flaming*, or insults and ridicule on the online forums.

A total of 50 people participated in the online survey. Over half the participants (62%) were male, and 38% were female. The majority of participants (72%) were between 20 and 29 years of age. No participant was under 18 or over 39. Most participants had played WoW for at least a year. Only ten percent of participants had played WoW for under six months.

The results from this study can be used to ascertain the attraction to WoW and the social and emotional needs and desires it is fulfilling for players.

What Attracts People to World of Warcraft?

There is a perception that people who play MMORPGs are an “odd bunch”: teens with no social skills or slackers who sit in front of their computers for endless hours (White 2006:82). However, this attitude is foreign to many gamers who think of themselves as rational, creative, and well-adjusted people who are capable of fitting into many social groups (White 2006). Games are no longer just for ‘geeks’ or ‘nerds’. This statement is supported by the current interview and survey data, which shows that the majority of players are between the age of 20 and 29 years and have full-time jobs (40%). This is close to the average age of 26-27 that Nick Yee (2006a:772, 2008:85) found in his extensive studies of MMORPGs.

In particular, WoW has opened up this genre to the casual player as it is designed for use by a variety of player types and requires a less advanced computer system. WoW is, therefore, made up of a larger and more diverse segment of the world population (White 2006; Mortensen 2006). WoW begins with almost instant gratification, which helps new players to feel that they are making progress in the game despite any initial unfamiliarity with the game mechanics. The game is engineered to ensure attainable advancement for its players.

WoW is a game that, while virtual, creates a sense of reality in its space. This virtual space is real in the sense that it always exists, but is not physically tangible. The virtual world of Azeroth has become a real world to its players. Players can control or re-script this reality to make it more appealing (White 2006). For example, players who role play might make up special rules in order to explain why their characters never age, despite the fact that they are playing the game for a long period of time. People can choose if they want to play alone or in a group, which quests to complete, and where to travel in Azeroth, as well as many other variables which affects how they play the game and interact with the community.

Playing a character in a virtual world allows people to do things that may not be possible in offline life. For example, players are able to fight mythical creatures that they would never encounter in the real world. During the time of my research, I spoke to a person who is physically

disabled. Through playing the game, they are able to obtain greater levels of social interaction and to walk, run, and jump, feats which they are unable to do in the physical world.

The social community of WoW attracts many players to Azeroth. There are many opportunities to meet and communicate with other players during gameplay. Several game activities present in WoW are also available in other games, such as questing and fighting enemies. However, the shared experience, collaborative nature and reward of being in a social community set this game apart from others (Duchenaud *et al.* 2006). The WoW experience allows people to learn and practice social skills that are also used in the real world (Robson 2006).

The survey and interview data show that every participant communicated during gameplay in some form. Only 10% of all survey participants and one interviewee stated that they preferred to play alone. Participants reported discussing aspects of the game as well as real life during in-game conversation. Only three survey participants stated that they did not discuss the outside world while playing the game with one person saying, “I do not talk about the real world in a fantasy game.” This echoes the sentiments of one of the interview participants, who said that he played the game to “zone out”.

Another draw to the game comes from the economic side of WoW. Inside the game, players may trade items with each other or sell things through use of the Auction House. This allows players to obtain items through purchasing them as opposed to obtaining them through quests or killing enemies, or to sell them to earn in-game currency. Obtaining these goods may give players personal satisfaction. The survey results show that all participants use the Auction House, with 64% of people using it “often”. One survey participant stated that he did not really use it because he is “too lazy and it requires too much effort”, while another enthused, “...the Auction House was great. ‘I need to get rid of this stuff, let’s sell it. Oh look, 500 Gold!’ ”.

Nick Yee (2006b) conducted a series of surveys in which he examined the motivations of people playing MMORPGs. Five areas of motivation

in MMORPGs were examined in Yee's (2006b) study: achievement (the desire to become powerful); manipulation (those who enjoy deceiving and taunting others); relationship (the desire to interact with others); immersion (those who enjoy the fantasy aspects of the game), and escapism, (how much a person is using the game to avoid real life problems). He found that males scored higher on the achievement and manipulation factors of motivation, whereas females preferred relationship, immersion and escapism factors (Yee 2006b). Yee (2006b) stated that these results imply that males and females are motivated to play for different and specific reasons.

The results from Yee's study provide information about why the different genders may prefer playing MMORPGS. These results aid the current study in providing ideas and information about why people might play MMORPGs. From my own data, I have several hypotheses what motivates people to play WoW.

By analysing the data in terms of age groups, particular trends can be determined. In examining the 10 to 19 age group, it was found that the most popular features of the game were playing with other people, competing with others, and accomplishing the goals of the game. In the 20 to 29 age group, the most popular features were playing with others, accomplishing game goals and the fantasy environment of the game. Finally, the 30 to 39 age group preferred the fantasy element of the game, accomplishing game goals and playing with others.

The 20 to 29 age group is the largest found in both my own and Yee's survey. This may occur because this age group is young enough to be familiar and comfortable with gaming technology and also has the financial means to play on a regular basis. People in this age category may also play WoW because it provides social interaction with people they know in their real lives. For example, 22 (61.1%) survey participants in this age group stated that they began to play WoW because their friends in the real world were playing. Clearly, the social aspects of WoW contribute to the popularity of the game

The Social Interaction in World of Warcraft

The social community of World of Warcraft is a major attraction for its players. Kolo and Baur

(2004) suggest that there are three levels of social interaction involved in MMORPGs. The first is the social micro level made up of the individual players and their characters (Kolo and Baur 2004). The second is the meso level of social formations among players/characters (Kolo and Baur 2004). Finally, the macro level consists of the social interaction of the entire community (Kolo and Baur 2004).

The WoW community is a complex society made up of individuals and groups of people (White 2006). Robson (2006) states that in WoW, "social skills are everything". Players are connected to the community whether they are actively participating in conversation or not. While playing, every player has access to the general chat channels of the region in which they are playing.

Social interactions in WoW can take place on several different levels; they can be casual or intimate, romantic or platonic. Berman (2006) states that flirting is a major component of in-game encounters and, in some cases, is programmed into the game. Marriages have occurred among people who met through WoW, both online and offline (Berman 2006). The survey data has shown that several participants were playing with their significant others. People are forming lasting relationships through playing the game, as well as preserving ones they already have in real life.

When playing WoW, players are free to explore other identities, such as that of a non-human race or a different gender (White 2006). First impressions are formed from the appearance of the avatar, as opposed to the physical appearance of the player. The forms of communication (primarily visual) used in WoW also change the nature of interaction. White (2006) stated that language cues and styles form the basis of social bonding; this is because communication is based on written language and thus, forms the basis of first impressions. Through the use of avatars and written communication, WoW allows people a form of freedom that they do not experience in the real world, as their physical characteristics do not play a part in the impressions people form of each other. This anonymity allows players to act or appear differently than they do in the actual world. Social bonds have the ability to cross barriers of age, race, gender, sexual orientation, and social class (White 2006).

Social rules and cultural constructions from the real world can cross over into the virtual world. Taylor (2006) found that on European English servers, there is a form of multi-nationalism at work. On these servers, the player base is made up from people from Western and Eastern Europe as well as the Middle East (Taylor 2006). People are brought together from many different cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Taylor 2006). On these servers, an informal regulation around speaking English has arisen, and is tied in to broader demographic and regional issues (Taylor 2006). As not everyone speaks English, this construction of "European" space is immediately stratified through language (Taylor 2006). Players choose whether or not they will challenge this stratification. The boundaries from the real world have been imposed on the virtual, bringing new forms of stratification into the game.

Despite these challenges, the social community of WoW has produced various levels of player attachment. Some frequently participate in the social community of WoW and regularly confide in their online friends. This was illustrated by the results of the survey when asked if they discussed personal events or problems with others in the game. One person said, "I share my problems and issues and I listen to others as well. I have formed very good friendships". This person has become involved in the community of WoW and found a group of close and trustworthy friends.

In WoW, even small acts can create a sense of community. For example, gifting or selling an item for a minimal price to another player can help create this aura of belonging (White 2006). Other acts of altruism include healing someone in need, or *buffing* them: the act of casting a friendly spell of protection. Players can ask for help finding locations or quests in the general channels and be confident that it is likely someone in the game will be able to answer their query. The community provides an audience and sense of social presence, as well as a mode of entertainment (Duchenaud *et al.* 2006).

Guilds provide another method for players to create community and are a major aspect of the social community of WoW. Guilds are commonly made up of core (frequent) and periphery (infrequent) players (Duchenaud *et al.* 2006). Seven

players are the minimum number required to form a guild. Guilds can be as large as several hundred players. They often have longer lived player associations; within guilds a player's important relationships are formed, and they frame the player's social experience in the game (Duchenaud *et al.* 2006).

Williams *et al.* (2006) stated that there are four basic types of guilds: social, PvP, raid and RP. A purely social guild is one in which the game goals are secondary to social interactions (Williams *et al.* 2006). PvP guilds are ones in which the primary goal is to succeed in battle and on the Battle Grounds (official areas of the game in which players fight people of the opposite faction) (Williams *et al.* 2006). Raids are areas of the game that require 25 or more players in order to play through them successfully. These guilds are in many senses the most glamorous in WoW, as raiding is considered one of the ultimate challenges in the game (Williams *et al.* 2006). The purpose of an RP guild is to allow and encourage players to truly "be" their characters (Williams *et al.* 2006). While the social guild is considered a separate type, the three other kinds of guilds are often considered social by their members (Williams *et al.* 2006). This variety of guild types allows the player to select one that is compatible with his or her own playing style and personality.

The larger guilds often require careful management by the Guild Master (GM) and officers. The largest guilds maintain external message boards, websites, a sign-up system, and VoIP chat (Williams *et al.* 2006). Formal practices of larger guilds include a mission statement to explain the purpose of the guild as well as recruitment and expulsion policies (Williams *et al.* 2006). Smaller guilds do not require this level of organization. They are often made up of real life friends or family members and focus more on social bonds (Williams *et al.* 2006).

All but two percent of survey participants and two of the three interviewees were involved in guild life. All respondents had been in at least one guild. When asked how often they communicated with others in their guild, 82% stated that they often had conversations with their guildmates. Sixty-six percent said they often spend time playing with their guild, followed by 26% who played with their guild "sometimes". This shows that guild life is a major

part of the social interaction that takes place within the game. Most people enjoy playing and interacting with their fellow guildmates, preferring to play with them in a group as opposed to a random “pick up” group.

The social interaction that people can obtain through WoW may assist in fulfilling a need or desire for community. In my survey, 54% of people felt that their online friends were comparable to their real life friends, and one person said that he preferred his online friends. These results show that a significant proportion of people are relying in part on their online friends in order to fulfill their need for social interaction.

As has been shown through the discussion above, people can build new relationships through WoW and can also extend relationships that were originally formed in the real world. The social community of WoW operates, in some cases, much like the real world. In WoW, people encounter thousands of others who come from different cultures and backgrounds. Compromises must be made, as in real life, to ensure that the community continues to function in a positive manner.

The Emotional Side of World of Warcraft

When playing WoW, players inevitably form a bond with their character in addition to the bond they form with the social community. As it takes tens of hours to reach level 80 (the highest level in the game), a player invests considerable time and energy in their character. White (2006) stated that the bond between player and character can be likened to the bond formed with book characters. Emotions are also evoked by the game through the overall storyline and quests. The emotional attachment of players to their characters is something not largely discussed in the literature.

Castronova (2006) identifies three significant moments in an MMORPG worth pausing and reflecting upon: the moment when the character’s attributes feel like the player’s own, when the player acquires a real emotional investment in an event in the virtual world, and when he/she is grateful to someone for giving them a gold piece. Each of these moments represents a point when the player is reacting as if their character or the situation taking place was in the real world. Real emotions become involved in the game because players invest a part of

themselves in their character.

The death of a character is mechanically a small problem. When a character dies in WoW, his/her spirit is resurrected at the nearest graveyard. The player must then either bargain with the spirit healer for new life (which brings the character back to life immediately, but damages all items and inflicts resurrection sickness upon the character) or walk back to the location of their body. In this sense, death is an inconvenience (White 2006). Some RP players explain this ‘unreal’ death experience by saying they were just very badly hurt; however, a few RP players choose to begin the game again (Mortensen 2006).

In the study, participants were asked what their reaction was to the death of their character. The most common reaction was frustration (32% of participants). Twenty-four percent said they had no reaction, and 14% stated that they were angry at the death of their character. Thirteen respondents wrote about their reaction in the “other” option. The overall consensus seemed to be that people feel very frustrated or angry when they are killed by another player in a PvP situation. Players also found the walk back to their body to be an annoyance.

The second major emotional reaction WoW extracts from players occurs when one player *ganks*, or purposely attacks or annoys another. Players who continually gank others are referred to as *griefers*. All survey and interview participants stated that they had been ganked by another player. This has also been identified as a problem in the literature. White (2006) wrote that it can be difficult to stop griefers through either formal rules or informal social sanctions. Griefers can be found on both PvP and PvE servers; in the latter type, they harass someone with messages until they respond (White 2006). There are several methods used to deal with this, including informing a Blizzard representative, asking other players for help, or exiting the game for a short period of time.

It is difficult to determine the amount of aggression in the average player. In this study, 16% of participants stated that they often ganked other players and 34% stated that they sometimes or seldom ganked others. However, as the context of these situations was not provided, I am unable to hypothesize why this occurred. Some players may be aggressive by nature, whereas others may be

reacting to a PvP situation and desire some kind of retribution.

The survey and interview found that all but one respondent were involved in the social aspects of the game. When asked if they talked about personal issues or problems in conversations with others, only 18% of the respondents stated that they did not. Thus, it can be hypothesized that at least some people become involved in the community on an emotional level. Through confiding in others about personal problems, people are showing a large degree of trust in their fellow players. These interactions can fulfill the need for emotional support. If people are not receiving emotional support from those they know in the real world, the online community of WoW provides another source to which players may turn.

Conclusion

Through the above discussions, it has become clear that the social community of WoW helps to fulfill various social and emotional needs of its players. Players can gain support through the community in both the virtual and real worlds. As previously stated, the community can also provide players with opportunities that are not available to them in their offline life. The WoW community is a vital part of the game and helps to keep players interested and playing avidly. The social community is what separates MMORPGs from other role play video games that are currently available.

This study has also illustrated the importance of studying MMORPG communities in an academic setting. The community of WoW is a unique phenomenon which deserves anthropological attention. It is important to acknowledge this because WoW and other MMORPGs are becoming an increasingly large part of mainstream society. Anthropology provides extensive knowledge of the concept of culture (including its challenges) and possesses the techniques with which to study it. Knowledge of how cultures and societies operate in the real world can be compared to the culture and society of WoW in order to ascertain its likeness to offline communities.

The research conducted here has allowed me to examine the social interactions of WoW and to begin to discover its culture. However, this study

only provides a brief overview of the society and culture within the game. Future research will expand on the findings of this study in order to broaden perspectives of the culture of WoW and provide more information about MMORPG communities from an anthropological perspective.

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