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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

EMATURE:

INTERGENERATIONAL NETWORKS IN DIGITAL MEDIA SPACES

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN SOCIOLOGY

BY

ANDRÁS LUKÁCS

CHICAGO, IL

MAY 2016

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To the memory of my grandfather, László Lukács

Dezső Kosztolányi: A játék.

Az különös.
Gömbölyű és gyönyörű,
csodaszép és csodajó,
nyitható és csukható,
gomb és gömb és gyöngy, gyürű.
Bűvös kulcs és gyertya lángja,
színes árnyék, ördöglámpa.
Játszom ennen-életemmel,
búvócskázom minden árnnyal,
a padlással, a szobákkal,
a fénnyel, mely tovaszárnyal,
a tükörrel fényt hajítok,
a homoknak, a bokornak,
s a nap - óriás aranypénz -
hirtelen ölembe roskad.
Játszom két színes szememmel,
a két kedves, pici kézzel,
játszom játszó önmagammal,
a kisgyermek is játékszer.
Játszom én és táncolok,
látszom én, mint sok dolog.
Látszom fénybe és tükörbe,
játszom egyre, körbe-körbe.
Játszom én és néha este
fölkelek,
s játszom, hogy akik alusznak,
gyerekek

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GLOSSARY

Add: additional enemies raid groups have to contend with during boss fights.

Arena: Instance areas in which small team of players can compete against each other in deathmatch-stlye PVP.

Avatar: the graphical representation of a player within the virtual world.

Battleground: instanced, competitive player-versus-player zones.

Boss: unique and powerful non-player creatures, often requiring coordinated effort from large group of players to defeat.

Daily: the game used to offer extra rewards for completing a specific dungeon for players who finished leveling their characters. This game mechanic later changed and players got rewarded for completing their first randomly selected dungeon instead of a specific one.

DPS: damage per second. The measure of damage dealing performance in the game.

Dungeon: a special instanced game area with powerful enemies and special rewards. Dungeons are designed to be completed by a group of players cooperatively, rather than alone.

Farm: the practice of accumulating in-game wealth through the performance of repetitious and easy tasks. Guild often re-run already cleared instances to acquire equipment for players. These instances are referred to as "farm content".

Guild: networked association of players, providing certain benefits and making group-play easier and more rewarding.

Glyph: spell and ability enhancement item.

Healer: a role that specializes in keeping people alive during a fight through the use of healing spells.
Heroic: an increased difficulty setting for particular dungeons.

HPS: healing per second. The measure of healing performance in the game.

Instance: a special area within the game-space where parties or raids are able to interact with a dungeon privately. Most end-game activity is instanced.

Leveling: the process of gathering experience points to advance in the game.

Massively Multiplayer Online Game (MMO or MMOG): networked, multiplayer video games that enable a large number of people to play at the same time. MMOs often create persistent game worlds.

Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game (MMORPG): interactive computer games that blend the genre of role-playing games with massively multiplayer online games creating an environment where large numbers of people interact with one another in a world of make-believe.

Ping: response time from client to server in milliseconds.

PUG: pickup group. A raiding group or parts of a raiding group who do not belong to the same guild or play together frequently.

PVE: player-versus-environment. The term is used to refer to fighting computer controlled enemies as opposed to other players.

PVP: player-versus-player. It's a type of multiplayer game or game mode, where players battle each other.

Raid: a large group of players (usually 10, 20, 25 or 40) attempting to overcome powerful enemies. Raid groups usually play in instanced environments.

Server: all players must connect to a specific game server, which is the main source of information in a multiplayer game. The game server communicates data so all players experience the same events at the same time during gameplay.

Tank: a melee character that can take a lot of damage.

Theorycrafting: complex mathematical and statistical analysis of important game mechanics by players.

Ventrillo: Voice Over Internet Protocol software used by players to communicate during gaming sessions. Also called vent.

Whisper: a private message sent from one player to another. Also called tell.

ABSTRACT

While the literature on adolescent usage of the Internet and mobile communication technology is burgeoning, the technological affordance of increased intergenerational contacts and intergenerational friendships received less attention. This project documents how intergenerational virtual networks operate in one particular massively multiplayer online game (*World of Warcraft*) from the standpoint of adolescent players. Online social worlds are similar to offline settings in a lot of ways. Users must obey certain behavioral standards and follow established rules and moral codes to participate. Despite accounts of online democracy and networked individualism, control and authority is central to the functioning of these environments. Power-relationships are structured by technological protocols and affordances. However, within the social space created by technology, participants actively create and re-create cultural customs shaping experience. Using the ethnographic methods of participant observation and semi-structured, open-ended interviews, this project documents the ways a different form of mature behavior, ematurity, is emerging in online spaces. Ematurity means that skilled adolescents with the right set of cultural toolkits

and impression management techniques are able to participate as social equals in

adult governed environments. The main foundation of emature habitus is social

class. Ematurity allows young people to maintain desirable and acceptable social

selves in adultist environments. While ematurity is redefining the currently

narrow means of adult-youth interaction and friendship, it does not signal the

end of childhood.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

After arriving home from volunteering for a Chicago cross-country

running event in 2008, I decided to log onto *World of Warcraft*. I got involved with

this massively multiplayer online role playing game (MMORPG) about 6 months

earlier when I was helping out with a "Sociology of Digital Play" course at

Loyola University Chicago. I became familiar with the game environment rather

quickly, as my gaming pedigree included numerous titles from Blizzard

Entertainment (such as the *Warcraft* and *StarCraft* series and *Diablo 2*), and I

grew-up immersed in the fantasy role-playing environment. Throughout my

teenage years, I played table-top, play-by-mail, computer and collectible card

games. On this particular day, I got a whisper, a form of private message, from

Tony. We met months earlier in the game and became friends:

> *Tony: Hi. Are you there?*
>
> *AL: Yes. What's up?*
>
> *Tony: Just finished running a bunch of heroics with some people from Morbid Angels.*
>
> *AL: Sweet… I did my daily with them last week. Good guild.*

1

Tony: Yes, it was a breeze, pretty awesome. I had a good time and I might try to join them.

AL: Wanna raid again?

Tony: Thinking about it. [...] It was a little awkward though. I got invited to their vent after the second instance. We were just shooting the shit in party chat before. And one of their mages sounded so young on vent. She was thirteen.

AL: I see.

Tony: It freaked me out a little bit. My daughter is twelve. So I asked her a bunch of questions. Her parents don't play. […] So I kept thinking that it's creepy that I preach to my daughter about the dangers of meeting strangers online and I was doing the same to someone else.

AL: You were not doing anything, just playing a game.

Tony: Yes. I guess. Before I was invited to the vent, we had a good time. After that, I was uncomfortable.

AL: I don't think you had any reasons to be uncomfortable. What about the other members of the party?

Tony: They were hanging out, chatting, nothing special. Friends. But they are much older. But she was just part of the group. No big deal. [...] I guess, I just never thought about meeting people online from my daughter's point of view. I guess, I would not mind if she meets people like I am :-)

AL: Sure, she can learn how to waste time farming in WOW :-)

This episode and video games in general, could be dismissed as an insignificant,

perhaps trivial social world. Yet, this experience made me focus on an interesting

sociological phenomenon, the question of intergenerational relationships in the Internet age. The topic has not been widely addressed elsewhere.

The juxtaposition of different models of intergenerational relations was astonishing. Earlier that day, I watched young people being delivered by their parents to participate in organized soccer and baseball leagues to the park where my cross-country running event took place. These young people were prepared to compete by their coaches, watched and cheered on by their parents, while an adult referee presided over their activity. For these young people, adult authority was a more or less solid and taken-for-granted category. On the other hand, after my conversation with Tony, I started to wonder whether adolescent players of a video game are able to break down this traditional authority system and participate as equals based on their gaming skills, social competencies and leadership abilities. Or more precisely, how does this process work and which young players are successful in transgressing the usually ascribed and strictly policed generational boundaries.

Since the advent of the commercially available video games in the 1970s, technological advancement in hardware, software and communication technology has allowed game designers to transform the play experience from

games based on simple hand and eye coordination to persistent, multi-user

three-dimensional virtual worlds. The most popular game spaces are persistent

virtual realms, massively multiplayer online games. During my conversation

with Tony I was playing *World of Warcraft*, one of the most popular MMO games

ever. These multiplayer games are vibrant sites of social and cultural production

where regular and lasting social relationships develop (Boelstroff 2008). In fact, a

number of researchers argue that with the disappearance of public spaces, online

game environments have become central sites of community building

(Steinkuehler and Williams 2006). While the most popular MMORPGs are

constant topics of media criticism and were analyzed from the standpoint of

literary criticism, narrative analysis (MacCallum-Stewar 2008) and psychology

(Griffiths and Davies 2005), critical sociological investigations of game audiences

and detailed analysis of specific social dynamics within game spaces are less

frequent.

One of the first theories of persistent users was developed by Richard

Bartle. In a 1996 article, Bartle distinguished four types of players: achievers,

socializers, explorers and killers. While these categories are useful to

conceptualize ideal-type audience behaviors in virtual worlds, contemporary

MMO players are omnivores, displaying a multitude of orientations towards the game at the same time. T.L. Taylor (2006) categorizes players as casual and powergamers in the *EverQuest* game environment. In her definition powergamers engage in instrumentally rational play to become as powerful as possible, often bordering on cheating. On the other hand, casual gamers are not as goal oriented but focus on building relationships.

While these categories are useful guides to better understand the social dynamics of virtual realms, they are limited in that too much autonomy is given to players who are often viewed by researchers as playing such games in order to get away from the structural and ritualistic rigors of everyday life. As a sociologist, I believe that while approaches centered on escapism from the alienation and "disenchantment" of everyday life remains generally true, it is additionally true that online gaming also represents an extension of everyday life. Online environments are often created in a way that replicates existing social structures. For example, though the trade system in *World of Warcraft* is one where players trade gold and silver for merchandise of interest, it is also very much a replica of the capitalist market system in which players reside in real life. Similarly, while the dynamics of the game may be based on fantasy (e.g., playing

avatars who depict elves, dwarves, etc.), how players organize their social life and interact with one another in the online environment often parallel real world patterns of social organization and interaction. In fact, I believe that the binary of online and real life is often misleading.

The Pew Internet & American Life project reports that at least a half billion people play video games regularly and there are 183 million people in the United States alone who play some form of video game at least one hour a day. Young people are more likely to consume digital entertainment than older generations, 97% of boys and 94% of girls under 18 report playing consistently (Lenhart et al. 2008). Young people log over 10,000 hours of game time by the age of twenty-one, which is equal to the time they spend in classrooms during middle and high school with nearly perfect attendance (McGonial 2011). According to the Entertainment Software Associations' *2011 Sales, Demographic and Usage Data Essential Facts*, the most popular games are puzzle, board, game show, trivia and card games. Eleven percent of game players prefer persistent multi-player universes, such as *World of Warcraft* or *Guild Wars*.

The interest and taste cultures of different generations were traditionally bound to diverge in systematic and predictable ways. (Buckingham 2008). Yet,

contemporary entertainment software attracts a wide demographic of people: the average age of a game player is 37 and more than half of the gaming population is between 18 and 49 years of age. 42 percent of gamers are female (Entertainment Software Association 2011). One of the consequences of the availability of virtual social worlds is players' heightened exposure to generational fresh contacts (Mannheim 1952). That is, young people have frequent interaction with adults who are not part of their traditional social networks (parents, teachers, coaches, counselors, etc.). Additionally, these social worlds are not necessarily governed by traditional youth – adult authority patterns. Being part of player associations or guilds within these social spaces creates distinct idiocultures (Fine 1979). In these settings authority and power-relationships are not necessarily ascribed or tied to some credentialing institution. It is a result of a negotiation and boundary maintenance process.

In this research monograph I have three basic goals. First, I would like to describe and analyze the dynamics of intergenerational, youth-adult relationships within a particular virtual space (*World of Warcraft*). I present this latent social world through the lens of ethnography from a distinctively sociological perspective. Second, I would like to explore the social and

sociolinguistic processes that classify young players as mature or immature, thus influencing their gaming biographies and experiences in the game. And finally, I would like to contribute to a contemporary sociological debate about habitus and reflexivity using empirical data from *World of Warcraft*.

The Social *World of Warcraft*

World of Warcraft is massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) developed and operated by Blizzard Entertainment. It was released in 2004 and at one point had more than eleven million subscribers worldwide. Just like in any other MMORPG, the player controls an animated fantasy character (or avatar) from the third or first person perspective and adventures through an extremely diverse computer controlled (artificial intelligence or AI) landscape while interacting with non-player characters (NPC), game objects and other players. Characters battle monsters, explore caves and dungeons, mine resources, fish in freshwater lakes and oceans, buy and sell goods through vendors and from each other through auction houses or through peer-to-peer trading networks. Throughout these activities they collect experience points and become more and more powerful. Characters start at level 1 and can advance to level 85 (at least at the end of my fieldwork the maximum level was 85. The level

cap has been raised to 90 and to 100 in subsequent expansion sets). This process is called leveling.

Leveling does not represent the end of *World of Warcraft*. Players cannot really "beat" the game. Avatars reaching the maximum level do not gain any more experience points, instead the aim of the game becomes raiding, which refers to a large group of avatars playing together cooperatively to overcome extremely difficult challenges; or Player-Versus-Player battle. These types of play are called end-game. End-game is undoubtedly the most popular gaming activity and it is designed around a social infrastructure. Players cannot advance and explore the latest game content, battle against the most powerful enemies without the explicit help of others. This is where the social and multiplayer aspect of the game is the most important and visible. Therefore, in my research I focused on end-game play, in particular competitive raiding and powergaming.

World of Warcraft is not really innovative. The game narrative, the game design and the game rules are all rather conventional. The game narrative relies on traditional high-fantasy lore, drawing inspiration from the fantasy literature established by J. R. R. Tolkien. The origins of the game rules can be traced back to tabletop war-games and role-playing games such as *Dungeons & Dragons*. From a

game-design standpoint, *World of Warcraft* is hardly revolutionary (Bainbridge 2010). Yet, as of 2015, *World of Warcraft* is still the most subscribed MMORPG. This makes it a compelling choice to study the everyday life of video game play.

The background story of *World of Warcraft* is rooted in a war between two factions: the Alliance and the Horde. The Alliance is composed mostly of Tolkien-inspired races, such as elves, dwarves and humans whose culture, customs and aesthetic is reminiscent of the dominant Western ideology (British, Scottish, White American and German traditions) or at least redolent of Western-approved cultures. The Horde is characterized as ragtag, noble-savages whose representation predominantly relies on real-world cultures that have themselves been marginalized and colonized: trolls correspond to black Caribbean cultures, most importantly Jamaican. Tauren representation is rooted in Native American and Canadian First Nations tribes (Langer 2008).

This game narrative creates a society that is perpetually at war and where this state of warfare is naturalized. The game is designed around battle and conflict: players go on quests to slay "evildoers", fight other human controlled characters in special game-zones, try to manage their reputation with various tribes and factions while angering and alienating others, or just battle enemies in

the wide open-world. Many players are not aware of the racial and colonial tensions that the game creates. (MacCallum-Steward 2008). While they must choose between the Horde or Alliance factions to play the game, for many players the choice of character is purely aesthetic (looks) or strategic (better special abilities).

Massively multiplayer online games are by definition social spaces where large groups of people share a virtual environment in real-time. *World of Warcraft* represents a global networked play space, a participatory playground where people can interact real-time and build particular play communities, develop idiocultures while transgressing geographical and temporal boundaries (Pierce 2009). In fact, I argue that *World of Warcraft* is not really a game, but a social space where various games can take place.

Interestingly the game maintains strict separation between the two factions: Alliance and Horde players can only communicate through gestures, they do not share a common tongue. Players from the same faction have access to a multifaceted communication infrastructure. Mail and whisper (private message) are the most private forms of communication. Avatars can use the "/say" command to communicate with other characters within earshot. Players

also participate in numerous chat channels, reminiscent of IRC communication. Every game zone has its own "general" chat channel. Cities and activity specific locations (such as battlegrounds) also have their own dedicated channels. "Trade" is where peer-to-peer trading happens, but it is also used as the main hangout for players who are not currently involved in any activities or just hanging out in the game. Small groups (known as parties), guilds, guild officers, raids all have their dedicated communication interface and players are free to create new ones as they see fit.

Additionally, the game has a voice-to-voice communication interface, where players can communicate using their microphones. However, these are seldom used for two reasons. First, the quality and responsiveness of the built-in voice communication is relatively low. Second, this communication requires players to be connected to the game server. Users sometimes disconnect or experience problems with their *World of Warcraft* client. In these cases communication is still required during competitive, multiplayer gaming. Players have to let others know that they are experiencing issues, so the group can adjust strategies on the fly. Therefore, most players use third-party VOIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) software that works regardless of the status of the *WOW* client.

The availability of in-game mail, multitude of simultaneous chat channels and VOIP voice chat creates a complex and multilayered communication landscape with many front and back stages for presentations of social selves.

While at lower levels players can easily switch between playing alone or joining small groups, experienced players usually join persistent formal social organizations, called guilds. These guilds are hierarchical, almost dictatorial social formations due to technological protocols that enable their existence. At the same time, they tend to attract players who have similar goals or interest in the game and offer players admission into a broader social network. There are leveling guilds that focus on helping players reach the maximum level. There are social guilds that attract people who could be characterized as "casuals" using Taylor's (2006) terminology. There are guilds focused solely on Player-Versus-Player (PVP) content. Guilds also serve niche interest: on role-playing servers numerous guilds flourish where playing with avatar representations, in-character storytelling and the lore of the game is the focus of the community. According to Taylor, guild membership requires reputation management, the fulfillment of certain social obligations (most importantly trust) and a sense of responsibility.

Players reaching the maximum level do not gain any more experience points, instead the focus of the game switches to raiding or Player-Versus-Player battle. Both require tremendous team effort and organization, although raiding is sociologically more complex. Nick Yee's *Dragon Slaying 101: Understanding the Complexity of Raids* (2004) is a great point of entry to grasp the various problems raids experience: mobilization, management, communication, ground rules and knowledge and expertise are the most important variables upon which successful raiding sessions depend.

Given the complexity of raiding, ad-hoc groups are usually doomed-to fail. Competitive end-game raids require gamers to play and practice together for hours to master the various encounters. These players almost exclusively are members of guilds that exist with the sole purpose of raiding. The best of these raiding guilds form a special group. These are extremely goal-oriented and competitive gaming communities that require players to go through an admission and interview process, follow a strict playing schedule, often requiring 15-20 hours of commitment per week. Tardiness, absence or sub-par performance is not tolerated in competitive raiding.

Raiding requires knowledgeable raid leader(s), who extensively study the raid instance, have knowledge of all the challenges ahead, understand the mechanics of all the character classes in the game, have great communication skills and are able to manage and coordinate ten, twenty or more people throughout the entire raiding session, which can take anywhere between one and twelve hours per day. Raid leading is a huge commitment, and it is usually shouldered by veteran players.

Members of the raiding group are carefully selected given the division of labor within the raid. Various tasks are divided among participants: the leader designates tanks, melee classes, healers, ranged damage etc. Since there are limited spots available to participate, guild and raid members are carefully selected from a large pool of players who are interested in end-game raiding.

Guild raids demonstrate a thorough regulation of labor. The process of control is key in successful groups. Guild officers and raid leaders often possess the technical skill and game expertise to control the play session. Each raid member must run various add-ons on their computers which report how various tasks were executed individually. Group play is controlled through textual codes and unwritten customs: the length of the gaming session, communication and

breaks are regulated. Players are expected to do their "homework" by spending

considerable time preparing for upcoming boss fights. In a sense competitive

raiding is more like professional sports (Taylor 2012) and modern virtual realms

are simultaneously play and work environments: to make the distinction

between the two is counterproductive.

Overview of the Sociology of Games[1]

Sociologists are interested in video games as a medium for human

interactions. Video games are intriguing venues to observe the structures,

cultural norms, dynamics, and self-presentations of online social groupings.

From the sociological perspective, the ludic and playful dimensions of games,

and their storylines and narrative structures provide a necessary backdrop to

understand technology in use.

Sociology is less concerned with the narrative structures and rules of

video games, and more interested in the emergence of social practices and

idiocultures within and connected to gameworlds. Social structures frame the

play experiences and expressive life of humans. The rich history of sociological

theory provides powerful tools to understand the role of play and fantasy in

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[1] An earlier version of this section was published in Lukacs (2014).

everyday life. However, as Henricks (2006) reminds us, the sociological

perspective is rarely presented in a systematic way in the game studies literature.

Currently symbolic interactionism, an approach that places emphasis on

communication and the ongoing presentation of social selves, is the most widely

used sociological theory in video game studies. While it is tempting to bring in

symbolic interactionism as the primary model of social theory to explain in-game

behavior, other theoretical approaches are equally useful, yet often overlooked.

While having a broader scope than video games per se, Henricks' theory

of play is the most complex, but surprisingly overlooked sociological approach to

games to date. Henricks does not claim superiority of the sociological approach

over existing scholarship, but attempts to complement the individual and

cultural orientations towards play with a sociological, structural viewpoint. For

him, play is a mode of expressive behavior (as an action or performance of an

individual) and a mode of social interaction at the same time. Influenced by the

classical sociological thought of Karl Marx, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, Georg

Simmel, and Erving Goffman, Henricks' perspective frames play as a

complicated interaction between people and the social conditions of their lives.

Play Reconsidered: Sociological Perspectives on Human Expression (2006) argues that

play can only be understood relationally to other, not necessarily dissimilar and

unconnected social categories, namely work, ritual, and communitas. He

proposes that the relationship between these classifications can be analyzed by

looking at degrees of contestation and predictability. Play and work represents

contestive social activities; communitas and ritual are cooperative and unifying.

Work and ritual signifies a more or less predictable, scripted mode. On the other

hand, play and communitas are less ordained and more spontaneous.

This model helps us understand the complex geometry of relations within

gamespaces. Modernity and the rational, bureaucratic organization of social life

established the dichotomy where work is seen an instrumental, rational,

economic activity, while play is perceived as frivolous and unproductive. Yet,

this relationship is much more complex, and fetishized instrumentalism is a

central part of modern video games. This work and play antinomy has received

considerable attention in video game studies (see Yee 2006a; Silverman and

Simon 2009; Lukacs, Embrick, Wright 2009). These scholars have established that

the metaphor of labor is, indeed, useful for understanding user experiences.

Recent scholarship by T. L. Taylor (2012) documents how games morph into

professional, competitive e-sports with cyber athletes, teams, leagues, sponsors, and fans.

Ritual and communitas refer to the integrative elements of play. While game architectures are based on a certain degree of randomness and unpredictability, gaming communities participate in rituals that have a predictable, orderly, and even scripted quality. To partake in a ritual is to be part of something that transports players through the minutiae of life. Rituals are part of video game play: rich ethnographies describe the significance and meaning of various role-playing rituals (weddings, funerals, clan gatherings, initiations, etc.) in virtual worlds (Pearce 2009).

Finally, communitas expresses an integrative, unpredictable mode of relationship. In great moments of collective festivity, players feel themselves caught up and carried along in a surge of public energy. Collective effervescence, the experience of pure sociality can overwhelm any commitment to rationality and competitiveness. This pure sociability is the basis of burgeoning fan communities. Audience studies have focused mainly on the player as the primary audience of a video game; but with the proliferation of live-streamed

gameplay, we have seen the player emerge as a performance artist and an object of fandom.

Henricks' typology is helpful to conceptualize relatively stable collective participation frames within games. Frames, as a sociological concept, is built upon the understanding that finite worlds of meaning constitute human experiences. Erving Goffman (1974) argues that frames (some fickle, others comparatively more stable) construct social boundaries and provide interaction cues to shape events and participants' experiences of said events. The construction and interpretation of frames does not happen in a vacuum, even though virtual realms create imaginary worlds of fiction. Thus, as players switch from game to game, engross themselves in high fantasy or dystopian science fiction, hop from game server to game server, play on consoles, smartphones, or PCs, or change game modes, their ability to interpret these experiences remains the same. As Gary A. Fine (1983) demonstrates, tabletop role-players rely on a few stable frameworks to be guided throughout gameplay, despite the co-existence of other, simultaneously existing frames at the same time. These stable frames are part of video game play as well.

The frames of work, ritual, and communitas are advantageous to understand various social groups' orientation towards gameplay and provide a sociologically-grounded approach complementing Richard Bartle's individual player orientations established in 1996. Bartle categorized players according to their play style as achievers, socializers, explorers, and killers. While frame analysis is more focused on interaction and culture, rather than rules and structures, Pierre Bourdieu's notion of field is useful to understand how stable frames provide concrete social contexts to govern participation and constitute spaces with their own logics of functioning (1993). A field is a certain distribution structure of valued social assets or capitals, but it is not a product of a "coherence-seeking intention or an objective consensus […] but the product and prize of permanent conflict" (p. 34).

To adopt a frame or to enter a field, players are required to embrace the tacit participation rules of a game. Participants are required to possess the required habitus (a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and transposable dispositions generated by class, race, and gender positions), knowledge and skills to be seen as a legitimate player. Participation also means investing one's (cultural, symbolic, academic) capital to try to maximize profit from

participation. The notions of field, habitus, and capital are built upon the understanding that while social structures have subjective consequences, the very structures are built by individual actors.

Of course, some of Bourdieu's work has already been adopted by video game studies. Thomas Malaby advocates the use of cultural capital to understand how players move between various virtual settings and the physical world (2006). In an early version of this research, I documented how social class and gender dispositions shape interaction within virtual realms (2011). At the same time, field and habitus are under theorized and underused, even though these concepts anchor players in their everyday social networks while maintaining the relative autonomy of gaming idiocultures.

Both Goffman and Bourdieu stress that frames or fields, whether in gaming or other cultural spheres, are not mirrors of dominant ideologies. They have their own transformation rules. External determinants can have an effect only through the transformation in the structure of the field itself. In this sense, frame analysis from a symbolic interactionist perspective, and the concept of field-habitus from a more structural approach, both help game researchers to contextualize play experiences and connect them to larger societal processes.

As Crawford (2011) noted, the contribution of sociology to video game studies is still a significantly underdeveloped area. At the same time, the "social element" of online games has received considerable attention from researchers of various disciplinary backgrounds and perspectives. These scholars borrowed freely, although not necessarily in a systematic manner, from the sociological tradition to examine the relationship between game design and the development of social institutions, grouping patterns, the presentation of virtual selves and most importantly persistent social groups (guilds) that provide a stable enough social setting to most game activities.

The "social element" of games develops through an interaction between the structure of the game itself and the social, cultural practices that emerge in and around game titles, franchises, and genres. Off-the-shelf products rely on certain collaboration infrastructures (communication tools, networking tools, and persistent social groups) to encourage the development of in-game sociability. According to economist Edward Castronova (2005), the most important design choices affecting social institutions in MMO games are:

- character roles (division of labor);
- character advancement through various in-game capital accumulation;

- uneven distribution of social status;

- risk and danger as an incentive structure;

- scarcity of resources and forced cooperation;

- communication infrastructures; and

- personalized game content and artificial intelligence (AI).

These design choices offer affordances and social interaction possibilities for users. In this sense, online games as engineered social spaces are fascinating laboratories to observe the intended and unintended consequences of certain design choices.

Ducheneaut and his colleagues (2006) offer quantitative insight into the grouping patterns of a *World of Warcraft*, indicating that despite all the design choices encouraging social play and interaction, grouping patterns are not uniform throughout various stages of the game. They conclude that while the complex end-game phase from a group-play perspective is social, the game as a whole may not be. At the same time, they highlight that solo players in massively multi-player environments are still part of the social fabric: they are always surrounded by others even when not playing with them.

In fact, sociability is much more complex than grouping patterns may indicate. Beyond direct support and companionship, other players serve as an audience for various presentations of selves (often linked with status displays of gaming capital and competence), social presence and spectacle. While the distinction between players and audiences are much clearer in First-Person Shooter (FPS) games, it is nonetheless part of MMO games as well. In FPS environments, there is a constant back-and-forth movement between the roles of player and audience, or performer and critic, allowing players to negotiate the appropriate forms of interaction (Ducheneaut 2010).

These accepted modes of interactions are not only game title specific, but different playing modes, servers, factions, maps, clans, and guilds form their own local cultures, called idiocultures. Because games attract diverse audiences (when considered by geographic location, age, social class, gender, race, ethnicity, etc.) success is measured by a player's ability to integrate into a local idioculture. To become part of a community of play (Pearce 2009), players have to learn and master various gaming and technological skills while maintaining desirable social selves. Gaining visibility and reputation is an active, although not necessarily conscious, social process. Both individual and organizational

(guild) success is predicated upon reputation and status management, and the development of a sense of trust and responsibility (Taylor 2006).

Bonnie Nardi (2010) observed that performative mastery is fundamental in building reputational capital. Performance is often measured and reported through various gaming mods. Wright, Boria, and Breidenbach's work (2002) demonstrates that status is further established through virtual talk and behavior during down-time, in between games, or when one is forced into the role of spectator. Mastering this local gamer language, which borrows freely from popular and youth culture representations, is an admission requirement into the broader social network.

The management of reputation is a key component in becoming known as a skilled or knowledgeable player or an amicable playmate. On the group level, reputation is a key component of the creation of social hierarchies. These hierarchies are often anchored in measurable game achievements and goals, such as Player-Versus-Player rankings, kill ratios, or raid progression. At the same time, role-playing communities often disregard these official matrices and establish their own.

Trust and responsibility is the foundation of group play, although the reliance on others provides a constant challenge to find adequate playing partners and recruit new members to fill gaming groups. While ethnographic accounts of play communities often focus on the persistence of social groups, especially in MMOs, various social accounting metrics remind us that guilds are indeed extremely fragile and group cohesion and longevity is often overestimated.

Ducheneaut et al. (2007) believe that this fragility is due to various social factors and design flaws: leadership style, burn-out due to the repetitive nature of games, guild drama, and social pressures to participate. Pearce believes that persistent social formations and guilds resemble complex, decentralized, emergent social institutions and their rise and fall cannot be predicted by their underlying structures or set of rules, nor by individual behavior of stakeholders. At the same time, the data presented by Ducheneaut and his colleagues convincingly demonstrate that guilds are more likely to survive if they attract large number of players, maintain a balanced class composition, and are organized around a dense internal social network.

There has been an explosion of academic interest in video games and other virtual worlds during the last decade. Much of the social scientific work, with some notable exceptions, is focused on games as "cultures". As long as video games and the social dynamics of virtual realms are bracketed off from the "real" world, video games will remain marginalized for the field of sociology. Yet, given the importance of video games in modern society and the connection between these worlds of make-believe and consumer capitalism, it is important to expand the sociological lines of inquiry.

The sociological reframing of video game play allows researchers to fully embrace and discover the dialectic of contemporary video game play. This dialectic centers on predominantly for-profit enterprises developing titles by borrowing, transplanting, and transforming dominant ideologies, representations, and stereotypes. Packaged products are marketed under the rules of the transnational capitalist system. Still, the end-user is never a passive consumer of media products and the ideologies contained within them. Agentic users form communities of meaning, create lively idiocultures, and take ownership of virtual realms by challenging operators and publishers.

Methodology

The data for this study comes from ethnographic observations of player

social interactions on multiple North American servers in *World of Warcraft*

between 2008 and 2012. Since I was specifically interested in "how" young

players navigate an environment where generational boundaries might be

blurred, the qualitative approach of Marshall and Rossman (1999) was uniquely

suited to answer questions that require researchers to probe deeper than

traditional survey methods might allow.

To best understand the nature of intergenerational play in multi-user

online game environments and explore whether young players across different

servers had similar experiences, I logged more than 5,000 hours of actual playing

time in the *World of Warcraft* on different U.S. game servers. The game is running

simultaneously on multiple independent servers. This lowers individual server

traffic and makes parallel versions of the game technically more stable. From a

sociological perspective, it allows users to develop unique server cultures,

customs, etc. I recorded data both on the Horde and Alliance side, playing in

Player-Versus-Environment (PVE) and Player-Versus-Player (PVP) settings and

experiencing Role Playing situations on RP servers.

During the data collection process I developed social networks through various guild affiliations, experienced tensions, frustrations, boredom, success and pleasure during gaming sessions. I made numerous friends – both young and old. Most of the data used for this research was collected while playing competitive end-game content, ten and twenty-five man raid instances. Throughout these gaming sessions I took screenshots of noteworthy chat discussions, sketched notes and used voice recording software to capture relevant conversations, because typed chat communication is usually limited when voice chat is used by players to coordinate their activities. While I am self-critical, self-conscious and self-reflective about this methodology, I believe that this critical ethnography "reveal truths that escape those who are not so bold" to look for (Fine 1993:290). In other words the idiosyncratic, mundane and taken for granted events in virtual realms must be approached with methodological vigor.

I complemented my participant observations with thirty-five informal interviews taking place in the game. In total, I interviewed 28 players: seven key respondents were interviewed twice. I used snowball sampling and my in-game social networks to recruit adolescent and adult players who participate in competitive raiding and/or occupy positions of authority within their respective

guilds. Parental consent and adolescent assent was obtained prior to interviewing minors. I ended up with twenty-one male and seven female respondents. Fifteen of these respondents were minors, three of them female. Interviews lasted between twenty minutes and four hours. I am aware that this small sample does not provide an accurate representation of the whole gaming population, yet as a critical field worker I maintain that this methodology is the most adequate because language and discourse are essential to understand the lived experience of young players and the social construction of age-difference.

After the data from the participant observations and interviews were transcribed, I read all of the material to extract common themes and patterns. These findings were then coded in a two-stage process following the grounded theory model of Glaser and Strauss (1967).

Chapter Overview

Chapter Two provides a brief overview of the sociological literature surrounding generations and intergenerational struggles. It introduces two perspectives to look at generations, one focuses on biological age as the main mechanism to define generations, while the other approaches generations as socially constructed community of practice. I will consider the role of technology,

in particular new media, in constructing generations and describe the demography of fresh contacts within my research environment.

Chapter Three introduces a latent, yet extremely important social force within *World of Warcraft*. The avatar as the visual representation of a *WOW* player removes traditional markers of social difference. The avatar does not necessarily correlate to the gender of the player and hides other identity pegs: visible racial, ethnic and class markers, age, nationality, physical and mental disabilities, etc. However, competitive guilds select their membership based on age. This chapter describes adultism, a hegemonic discourse strategy about young people. Additionally, it takes a historical look at how younger people were though of and policed and how maturity discourses and confident characterizations shape the social experiences of young people who wish to partake in the competitive raiding scene.

Chapter Four introduces the concept of ematurity and argues that young people seeking admittance and equal status in competitive raiding guilds do not have to "be" mature, but have to be able to produce distinctions that make them appear different than the "average" young player. The ability to produce these

distinctions is dependent on the availability of various forms of linguistic and cultural capital, therefore it's is related to social origins and social class.

Chapter Five outlines the basic parameters of a contemporary sociological debate about the relevance of habitus and reflexivity in the 21st century. Relying on my empirical data from *World of Warcraft*, the chapter argues that reflexivity is predicated upon certain socialization processes and the existence of valued social capital within a given social field. It suggest that the various reflexivities outlined in Margaret Archer's seminal work (2012) are examples of habitus in action and not evidence of the futility of Bourdieu's (1984) framework in the 21st century.

Chapter Six provides a brief overview of this research monograph and highlights some important questions that are not addressed or not adequately addressed here due to space and data limitations.

CHAPTER TWO

GENERATIONS, TECHNOLOGY AND FIELDS OF STRUGGLE

Youth and age are not self-evident data, but are socially constructed in the struggle between youth and the old. (Pierre Bourdieu)

Warkid is talking on vent, carefully going over every detail of the upcoming fight. As I have never ventured deep into the Serpentshrine Cavern raid instance, I'm listening carefully. Other players appear bored and looking for a way to entertain themselves – their avatars are jumping around on the little platform we are standing on. The majority of my two dozen companions have been here before and just waiting on us, pugs, to understand the basic mechanics of the Lady Vashj fight. The encounter is complicated and I start a private side-conversation with my friend Amelie, who invited me to her guild's run at the first place. She is an active raider and knows the fight. Amelie quickly explains where to stand when the second phase of the fight begins, which adds should be my only concern. A couple minutes later Warkid initiates a final ready check and attacks the boss.

As millions of players log onto World of Warcraft every day, these pre-battle briefings are rather common. However, what is strange about my experience today is that Warkid is only 14 years old. Of course, I do not know this right away: his avatar is a muscular human warrior, dressed in a brown and orange armor set, wielding an oversized sword and shield. His battle gear is advanced, showing that he is a seasoned veteran of the game. Definitely more experienced than I am. I do not even know his age as he starts talking on vent, although I recognize the unsteadiness of a mutating male voice. I assume that our raid leader is a teenager. This surprises me. Not because young people are not playing World of Warcraft, quite the contrary, but because Warkid is a raid leader for one of the most respected guilds on our server. Amelie, who tells me the actual age of Warkid when I ask her in private, is a thirty-year old accountant from suburban Cleveland. The irony of the situation is that her soft voice and quiet demeanor often gives the impression to newcomers that she is very young. Amelie's engineer husband, who is also in the raid, is in his mid-thirties. I am twenty nine.

Warkid has the authority, courage, expertise and desire to lead playing sessions for 12-15 hours a week. He is comfortable telling adults what to do and challenge them when they make mistakes. This is pretty obvious after our first failed attempt on Lady Vashj:

Warkid: "We need to pay attention in phase two and be quick with target changing. Those nagas [a type of monster] have to die faster. Ranged DPS need to burn those elementals. If you don't have the macros, ask and I can help ya out […] I know we have a couple pugs with us, but this is farm content. Let's not waste our time failing."

We quickly regroup and try again. This time people are more focused and we make no mistakes. We overcome the boss.

This was one of my first known encounters with youth leadership in *World of Warcraft*. As Blizzard Entertainment does not release the demographic data of the players, we do not know precisely the number of young players, however it is substantial (Yee 2006b). Virtual worlds, most importantly through the use of avatars as tools of virtual embodiment, remove the physical body as a biological identity peg and collapse diverse audiences into an imagined one (Marwick and boyd 2011). Assumptions about the imagined audience are far from social facts, but in digital hypertexts people rely on them as behavioral cues all the time. Therefore, I am certain that I unknowingly encountered hundreds of young people throughout my ethnographic journey in *World of Warcraft*. The relative invisibility of the intergenerational nature of play and sociability in virtual worlds is intriguing. On the one hand, it is often taken for granted and

unproblematic for participants. Yet, at the same time, as the next chapter will demonstrate, generational boundaries are persistently drawn and policed.

While playing the game, I was constantly reminded that young people are present in the environment; however these reminders were almost exclusively a reference to the imaginary teen. Guilds and self-proclaimed mature players distanced themselves from young people. Demeaning comments started trickling in chat windows during school holidays, trumpeting the superior gaming and social skills of older players. The rebuttals were often missing, players ignoring or quietly agreeing with the bullies. Once in a while a sarcastic response followed in a general chat or during a quiet minute in a battleground, questioning the intelligence of the accusers. However, young players remained a significant, yet invisible minority in the virtual world.

My first encounter with Warkid sparked my interest in understanding the hidden generational dynamic of *World of Warcraft*, but not because Warkid was the leader. Young people often occupy positions of authority in their everyday life: they lead study groups, organize leisure activities or captain their sports teams. However, virtual realms are fundamentally different from the social spaces created by the family, school, church or organized sports. In these latter

settings, certain authority and power-relations are ascribed and defined a priori: parents, teachers, priest, rabbis, and coaches occupy higher social status than adolescents do. *World of Warcraft* represents a unique social space, where, at least in theory, age as an important axis of differentiation and oppression could be transgressed. Despite the asserted superiority of mature players, could this technologically mediated social space resemble a meritocracy?

Meritocracy, as a sincere fiction, is not abstract and ahistorical, but contextual. According to Shamus Rahman Khan, merit seemingly "have stripped individuals of the old baggage of social ties and status and replaced it with personal attributes – hard work, discipline, native intelligence, and other forms of human life that can be evaluated separate from the conditions of social life" (2012:9). Can we think of the positive experiences and success of young people like Warkid in virtual realms as a product of their hard work and merit? Can the computer screen erase social practices that distribute social status based on biological age?

Games and play is an elementary feature of all societies. *World of Warcraft* is not unique in enabling intergenerational interactions. The history of the fantasy genre provides examples of people of all ages playing together. In his

classic study, Gary Alan Fine (1983) described how fantasy role-playing games

attracted diverse audiences to create a cultural system as an avocation. However,

as these sessions were face-to-face encounters, the mulish social practice to

assume a close correlation between biological age and maturity prevented young

people to participate as equals. For *Dungeons and Dragons* players, it was

inappropriate for a fourteen-year-old to lead a party of adventurers where

twenty year olds were present. Warkid was leading people twice his age. What

changed? Was it a coincidence, a general change in societal attitudes towards

young people? Was it an affordance of technology?

As early as the 1960s, social scientist looked at the relationship between

technology and generational cultures and boundaries (Berger and Luckmann

1966). With the explosion of technological knowledge and the emergence of

secular culture, age ceased to remain one of the main features of stable authority.

In fact, intergenerational conflict and struggle became a permanent feature of our

modern technological civilization (Turner 1998). Generational boundaries and

the generational contract, which helped the transfer of cultural and social

resources across generations, became an increasingly contested terrain. The

emerging new social landscape offered increased occupational mobility and

leisure opportunities for younger generations, especially for previously marginalized social groups, while creating certain resentments.

The dramatic aging of many countries' populations has significant implications for policymakers and individuals. The demographic changes are challenging the ability of governments to provide a decent standard of living for the elderly without imposing a significant burden on the young. Additionally, smaller cohorts of younger people have to carry the weight of the generational contract, while facing rising tuition, housing and health care costs. Intergenerational relations are never stable; however anxieties become more visible when resources, whether material or cultural, are becoming scarce and contested.

To a certain extent, the intergenerational dynamic of *World of Warcraft* is a symptom of these processes. While intergenerational sociability, play, conflict and boundary negotiation is not new to virtual realms, it is the first time since the invention of adolescence (Fasick 1994) that young people have far-reaching access to adult social worlds, cultural content and the possibility to be treated as equals on a larger scale. Simultaneously, the traditional boundary maintenance processes are losing their effectiveness given the digital nature of interaction.

Generations as a Social Category

Ethnographers in virtual realms must constantly manage their

performative and ethnographic selves (Lukacs 2010). As a player and

experienced user of online environments, I learned to disregard the constant

chatter that characterizes massively multiplayer platforms. Indeed, many

participants reported using similar techniques. Some completely abandoned

public chat channels and only talked to their guildmates and friends. Others, like

Amelie, treated public channels as a constant background noise:

> All that ignorant stuff, you just have to learn not to pay attention to. It is
> like traffic outside your window. Constantly there, unhealthy, but you
> learn to live with it. And you have to choose your battles, too.

However, the purpose of my ethnographic presence was to pay attention to this

noise. As a conscious observer, I quickly realized that references to age,

generational attitudes and maturity compromised a small, but steady

undercurrent of the social milieu of *World of Warcraft*. While players used

effective technological tools and cognitive techniques to avoid or minimalize

undesired annoyances, they were omnipresent nonetheless.

Recording and analyzing the conversations about and references to age,

youth and generations showed that the majority of players equated generations

with date of birth, as an age group defined by a specific point in time. General

chat channels, forums and fan sites often discussed how age affects someone's

ability to play the game or be a good guildmate. These conversations relied on

confident characterizations, such as "young players are immature and unreliable,

because they grew up without discipline, and are so used to their entitlements"

or "older generations did not play games before *World of Warcraft*, they are

having a harder time picking it up."

The approach to define generations as a group of individuals of a specific

chronological location is commonly used in social sciences. It assumes that the

experiences of a particular generation are markedly different than the

experiences of people born before or after that particular time. Specific

chronological location can be a demographic category, such as the baby boomers.

Or, it can be established by historical experiences that affect a group of people

more than others. For instance, the U.S. draft lottery in 1969 determined the

order of call to military service in the Vietnam War for men born between 1944

and 1950. Cohort analysis is a common methodology in demography, education

and applied sociology where different measures are used to understand

differences between various age strata and develop social policy initiatives.

Yet, cohort analysis alone is not adequate to capture the complexities of generations. It does not account for the emergence of generational cultures and politics or explain how generational cultures and consciousness is transmitted (Edmunds and Turner 2002). Generations, as a sociological category opposed to a purely demographic category, are constructed and not given. The term "60s generation" is not a reference to an age-exclusive cohort, but a cultural and political phenomenon that includes the New Left, Flower Power and sexual revolution. Members of older cohorts (e.g. Allan Ginsberg, Herbert Marcuse) occupied important ideological and leadership positions in the development of the 60s generation. At the same time, the often untold story of the 1960s is the emerging political consciousness of the conservative youth, the New Right (Klatch 1999).

This complex, sociologically constructed view is also a part, although significantly less prominent part, of the generational discourse within *World of Warcraft* . Galloping on my newly tamed exotic raptor mount in the Horde city of Orgrimmar, I was chatting to Nabeel, leader of a progression oriented guild. We were waiting for guild members to ready themselves for the upcoming playing

session. I asked him to talk about his experience raiding with people of various

ages:

> I used to believe that there is merit to the 18+ thing. There is a sort of
> blueprint of how to run a guild, and we just copied that to start. One of
> the things is age. So we rolled with that, but had some very good
> applicants who were young. You have to be old, or intelligent, enough to
> understand theorycrafting. You need to be computer savvy. Be a sociable
> person. I guess those are age-related. But we realized that it's more a
> cultural thing than age. […] You have to understand gaming, have the
> reflexes, that sort of thing. But you have to be dependable *within* the game.
> But it's not really that your age will determine this. More like, there is a
> group of people who have the mentality or tools to be good raiders. Like,
> after a couple hours you know that he is one of us. Or she. But mostly he.

Nabeel's opinion demonstrates that there is a particular combination of

technological competency, gaming skills and social know-how that makes

someone part of the in-group. Biological age is certainly a component of this, but

it is not the only determinant. And while Nabeel is not implying that *World of*

Warcraft players – or a subset of these players – form a cohesive, conscious

generational unit within the game, he is challenging the idea that age-based

stratification is a meaningful way to assess people in this social environment.

Spiritus, co-host of a popular *World of Warcraft* fan podcast titled Forum

Junkies, talked about a similar idea while discussing the relationship between

age, maturity and gaming performance:

> I am kinda thinking that maybe there is a different sort of category of mature, specifically for someone who is in a *WOW* raiding guild. Like you could be an extremely mature person in all facets of life, your family, your job and all kinds like that, but there is a different sort of maturity that is expected of you as a raider in *WOW*.

A complex understanding of generations must integrate cohort analysis and a cultural, political approach. As a field worker and pragmatic researcher, I relied heavily on the simple cohort based dichotomy of young versus mature. These are socially produced categories and the watershed moment of turning 18 is arbitrary. At the same time, it is undeniable that people use, codify (see Table 2.) and internalize this distinction. What makes generations an interesting sociological category is "the interaction between historical resources, contingent circumstance and social formation" (Edmunds and Turner 2002:7). While transcribing and coding field notes and interview data, I was particularly interested in seeing how maturity is an actual performance, as opposed to a simple cohort effect.

The Sociology of Generations: Mannheim and Bourdieu

It was Karl Mannheim's influential essay, first published in 1928, that established generational research within sociology. Mannheim's approach was part of his general critique of the determinism and one-dimensionality of

Marxian class analysis. Mannheim's view was that the Marxian tradition failed to

address the questions of consciousness, historical events and various social

rituals with regard to class. The concept of generations in his sociology was

developed to offer a counterpoint and promote a more Weberian approach.

Mannheim formulated proper sociological distinctions between three

related, yet distinct categories: generational location, generation as actuality and

generation unit. Generational location represents the specific life chances and a

limited range of potential experiences of a cohort of individuals based on their

specific existence in a particular time. This means that individuals experience

various historical developments from a similar vantage point based on their age.

Just as shared class position does not necessarily imply shared class

consciousness, generational consciousness does not necessarily accompany a

generational location. Mannheim speaks of generation as an actuality only where

a concrete bond is created between members of a generation by being exposed to

the social and intellectual symptoms of a process of dynamic destabilization. The

above mentioned U.S. draft lottery is a prime example of the formation of a

generation as actuality. Young people experienced the turmoil of the 1960s from

the same generational location, yet various generational actualities reshaped and

reinterpreted this in their specific ways, aiding the formation of actively political

generational units.

Pierre Bourdieu's scholarship relies heavily on a broadly defined social

class analysis, yet generational struggle occupies an important place in his

thinking to account for sudden changes in artistic, intellectual or political

paradigms. Generational cultures, taste and politics are partially shaped by the

historical and economic circumstances in which people were born. These

circumstances create a distribution of various available positions or a field of

structured social relationships. At the same time, generational cultures also form

through skirmishes between generations over cultural, economic or symbolic

resources. Bourdieu refers to this as position-takings. Generational conflict

defined by particular distributions of positions (field) and position takings

(habitus) reject biological determinism and focuses on the specific rules of a

given field manifested through a deeply rooted, relatively stable generational

habitus. This generational habitus includes cultural dispositions, language,

postures, communication style, etc. Intergenerational conflict is boundary

negotiation: a powerful generational unit attempts to create social closure to

protect material or cultural resources within a particular field (Bourdieu 1993).

This generational gatekeeping is often achieved through the creation of credentials, for example diplomas, or other status distinctions such as elite educational institutions (1993).

Technology and Generations

Mannheim's formal sociological categories and Bourdieu's perspective are helpful to understand generations beyond the basic stratum of biological data and approach them through the medium of social and cultural forces. Generational research (see David Wyatt 1993) showed that the most important historical and cultural events shaping the biography of generations are traumatic historical events, charismatic individuals and sacred places, rituals. The fundamental question for researchers to ask is how to identify events and experiences that signify a generation? Who represents the voice of a generation? How to draw the biological and intellectual boundaries of generations?

The question inevitably arises whether modern technology, and the Internet in particular, represents a generation defining episode, a new historical epoch? MacKenzie Wark (1993) argues that in our image and media saturated consumer society generations are best defined by their media culture. Therefore, tastes in popular music, movies or clothing are markers of generational

affiliation. Yet, this affiliation is not necessarily a calculated rational decision: marketing companies create and promote certain generational markets. The category of youth itself has a symbolic value and is sold to diverse audiences. Young people seeking independence from the parental gaze, men and women experimenting with various beauty products, and nostalgic baby boomers are all consumers of what is sold with the label of youth.

Defining generation based on media consumption creates a false sense that generational habitus is a product to be consumed, an identity to shop for (Langman 1992). However, people who spent most of their leisure time logged onto *World of Warcraft* displayed diverse dispositions. Surely, *WOW* players shared a certain digital history and celebrated various in-game rituals together. Yet, they brought their personal beliefs, politics, attitudes and desires into the media world and the clash of worldviews and orientations created a dynamic and tension filled social space, or as Amelie described it, a noisy environment.

Despite the fact the there is no evidence of the existence of the *World of Warcraft* generation, generational rhetoric about new media is commonplace. This rhetoric is often an amalgam of cohort-based and technologically deterministic standpoints, and is employed by various stakeholders, including

journalists, academics and marketing companies. Young people are referred to as the Net Generation, Generation Z or the Digital Generation since they never experienced everyday life not shaped by the Internet and mobile communication technologies. Not every member of Generation Z is technologically advanced or has access to technology, however their life is nonetheless affected by communication networks in one way or another.

This general rhetoric suggests that technology is a crystalizing agent defining the digital generation. Is it true that technological change affect young people more than others? Is the digital generation more interested in understanding and shaping technology than older cohorts? Or, is it feasible to assume that young people only consume more digital media in its banality?

The Internet and social media quickly became the new ideological battlefield, replacing cable television, where arguments about children's useful and productive usage of leisure time, generational boundaries, parents' insecurities about the future, community and nation could take place. This discourse, often labeled media effects, is not particularly new (Gauntlet 2002). As early as 1916, Hugo Munsterberg (1970) warned about the penetrating dangers of movies on the human psyche. The technological advances during the last decade

of the 20th century, exacerbated by the growth of the youth consumer market,

intensified the debate. New media changed young people's access to information

that used to be labeled adult content.

Young people's increased access to media content and social worlds is

often deemed inappropriate by moral entrepreneurs. Elkind (1981) and Winn

(1983) argue that new technology gives young people access to media before they

are emotionally ready. Young people are growing up faster and without a real

childhood. While the relation between media and social behavior is ambivalent,

rather than causal, they place the lion's share of the blame for social issues

ranging from teen pregnancy, violence and educational achievements on media.

The growing sense of anxiety about powerful relationships between adults and

children due to media consumption is the central focus of scholarly analysis,

such as works by Postman (1982 and 1992), Meyrowitz (1985), Sanders (1995) or

Steinberg and Kincheloe (1997). Consciousness, agency and media usage are not

central to this line of thinking. Yet, these accounts make it apparent that

intergenerational relationships are never static or fixed.

Other scholars praise communication technology. They see interactive

media, computers and the Internet as a diverse, democratic and unauthoritarian

social space where youth can develop a new consciousness. Tapscott (2009),

Palfrey and Gasser (2008) and Papert (1993) believe that technology is

empowering and liberating digital natives from the previous top-down media

models. While this optimistic outlook on technology does not deny a degree of

self-determination from youth audiences, it downplays the importance of the

political economy of digital media, the way these new technologies are designed,

marketed, the environmental impact of digital production, etc. More

importantly, it does not address the issues of digital inequality, the distribution

of access to technology along race, class and gender lines and the control and

authority mechanisms that exist on the Internet (O'Neil 2009). Yet, while

minimalizing the impact of the everyday social context in which media is

accessed, these accounts detail a privileged youth population's relationship with

technology.

It appears that it is not technology, but the use of technology that matters.

How people use technology and what people use technology for is more

important than their generational location. New media created the possibility for

young people to become engaged with previously inaccessible media content

and social worlds. Technology created the possibility to communicate, interact,

play, retrieve information and consume in previously unimaginable ways.

However, there is a considerable degree of social variation within cohorts as well

as between them regarding their technology use patterns (Buckingham and

Willett 2006).

Fresh Contacts

Technology not only created the possibility for young people to access

previously restricted media content, but the chance to experience

intergenerational encounters at a level never imaginable before. Intergenerational

encounters are a central idea in Mannheim's theory of generations, because these

fresh contacts provide new generational cohort members a possibility to engage

with our accumulated heritage and aid the temporal process of culture. Fresh

contacts play an important role in the life of the people when they are forced by

events to leave their own social groups and enter new ones. Generational fresh

contacts provoke a "quite visible and striking transformation of the

consciousness of the individual" (Mannheim 1952:293).

This visible and striking transformation of consciousness is an interesting

concept. Commentaries based on the concept of the net generation or children

without childhood aim to understand young people's relationship with the

media itself. However, within the contexts of digital media, it is not technology

that is transformative, but the exposure to people and interaction. Social media

does not erase generational differences, does not create new generational

actualities, but distributes and mediates generational fresh contacts. By virtue of

spending time together, people are more likely to experience interactions with

people of various ages.

The responses to these fresh contacts are not pre-determined. Leena

Alanen (2013) describes how adults and young people construct and police their

differences based on age. Fromme (1999) talks about self-socialization to

highlight how young people actively construct their social selves in face of fresh

contacts. Hoikkala (2004) shows how parents learn to participate in youth culture

by being reversely socialized by their children. Fine (2004) documents how "mix-

role" adolescent fuse behavioral repertoires characteristic of both adulthood and

childhood while immersed in a social environment requiring childishness and

maturity at the same time.

Fresh contacts within *World of Warcraft* are commonplace. Young people

learn to manage them through trial and error, using their existing cultural

repertoires and knowledge to validate their group membership or challenge

people in positions of authority. Sometimes these maneuvers are successful other times they fail. However, they can only be understood in concrete social situations governed by a set of objective social relations. *World of Warcraft* represents a structured space with its own laws of functioning. To be successful in this field, one must possess certain skills and talent to be accepted as a legitimate player. Furthermore, one must use that knowledge, or talent, or skill in the most advantageous way possible during social encounters.

The Demography of Fresh Contacts

World of Warcraft is rated "T" by the Entertainment Software Rating Board, indicating that the game contains content that may be inappropriate for children under 13 years of age. As of December 2010, the Terms of Use Agreement clearly states that only people of legal age could create accounts. Access to minors is granted through authorization by parents or legal guardians only. However, people are not required to reveal their age.

With the introduction of the Battle.net 2.0 gaming service, which links various Blizzards Entertainment products (*World of Warcraft, Starcraft II* and *Diablo III*) to a single account, account holders are required to register a Battle.Net account and accept its Terms of Use. During registration, users must

enter their birthday. However, the demographic profile of Battle.net account holders is not available to the public.

Most researchers of intergenerational virtual spaces ignore or omit the discussion of age for practical reasons: Internal Review Boards and ethics committees often restrict access to minors. The best available demographic data is from the Palo Alto Research Center. Nick Yee (2006b) reports that while the most commercially successful multiplayer online game worlds were designed to late teens, the average age of players is close to 27 and only about a quarter of the players are teenagers. Their most recent (Yee 2012) data reveals similar trends, however with significant geographic variation. The average age in the U.S. was 34.2 (Standard Deviation: 10.7), slightly lower in the EU (32.6, SD: 8.6) and significantly lower for China (22.3, SD: 3.6).

Figure 1. Age Distribution of *World of Warcraft* Players by Region
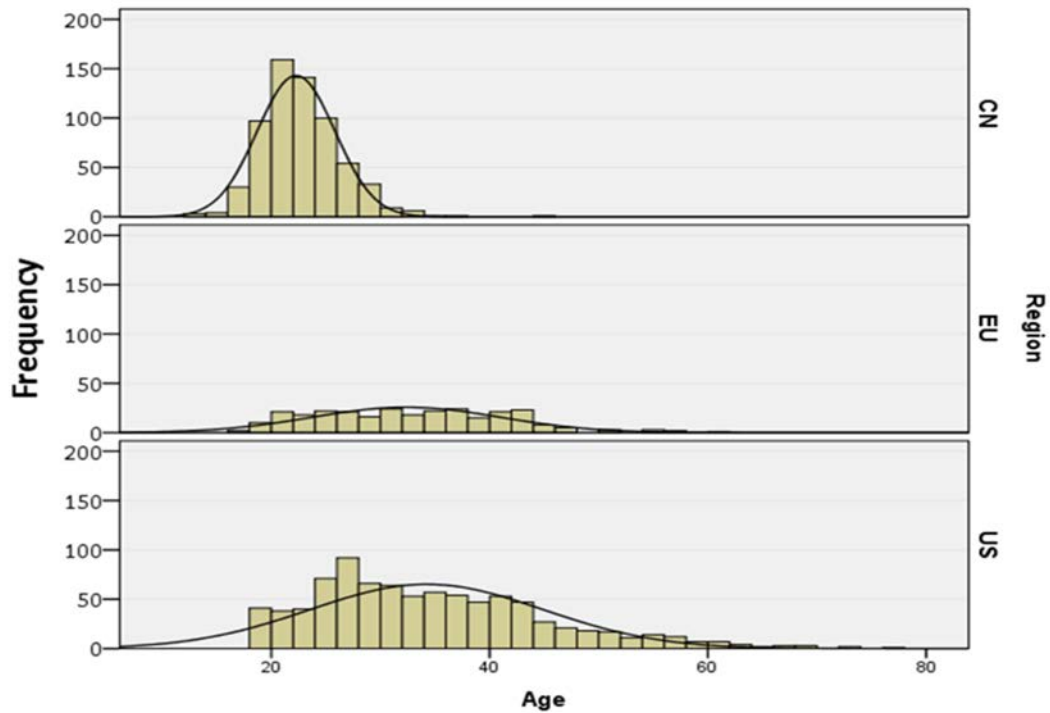
Due to human subject restriction, Nick Yee and his colleagues were unable to collect data from minors; however the age distribution curves (Figure 1) suggest that the number of players diminishes as age decreases.

Survey data reveals that the majority of participants are not minors and indicates the possibility of fresh contacts among various generational cohorts. At the same time, the field of generational relations only means something in relation to presence and absence. What populations are excluded from participating? How does the Digital Divide shape the available position takings?

Casual participation in *World of Warcraft* requires moderate computing power, more than an office computer but not necessarily a new gaming machine. However, competitive raiding necessitates expensive hardware. Additionally, it requires a stable and fast broadband Internet connection.

According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project (2010), about 66% of American households have broadband Internet access. African-Americans experienced a notable growth in home broadband adoption during the last few years, however they still trail whites in their use of broadband technologies (Table 1). Additionally, broadband access reveals inequalities based on educational levels, household income and geographic location. This unequal distribution of access plays an important, yet invisible role in defining how social relationships develop in virtual realms.

Table 1. Broadband Adoption Trends within Demographic Groups

	2009	2010	Percentage point change, 2009-2010	Percent change, 2009-2010
All adults	63%	66%	3	5%
Gender				
Male	64%	66%	2	3%
Female	63%	65%	2	3%
Age				
18-29	77%	80%	3	4%
30-49	72%	75%	3	4%
50-64	61%	63%	2	3%
65+	30%	31%	1	3%
Race/Ethnicity				
White (non-Hispanic)	65%	67%	2	3%
Black (non-Hispanic)	46%	56%	10	22%
Hispanic (English-speaking)	68%	66%	-2	-3%
Education				
Less than high school	30%	33%	3	10%
High school grad	52%	54%	2	4%
Some college	71%	76%	5	7%
College graduate	83%	86%	3	4%
Household income				
Less than $30,000	42%	45%	3	7%
$30,000-$49,999	62%	67%	5	8%
$50,000-$74,999	80%	79%	-1	-1%
$75,000+	85%	87%	2	2%
Geography				
Rural	46%	50%	4	9%
Non-Rural	67%	70%	3	4%

The task to understand the intergenerational experience of young people in

World of Warcraft, or the sociology of fresh contacts in a general sense, requires

constructing a field which is the product of permanent conflict, negotiation and

boundary-work. While federal law (for instance COPPA), the Digital Divide and

game operator policies set the initial parameters of the field, it is constructed

through everyday communicative practices, through regular speech events.

These provide repeated performances of generational scripts legitimating certain

discourses.

CHAPTER THREE

ADULTISM: HEGEMONIC DISCOURSES ABOUT YOUTH

When an individual becomes involved in the maintenance of a rule, he also tends to become committed to a particular image of self. (Erving Goffman)

I raided with Josh for a about a month, but didn't really know him. We were part of a very competitive and organized 25 men raiding group that was ranked in the Top 100 in the United States. Social interactions were limited during gameplay. The main tanks and the raid leader predominantly used the voice channels and the raid chat. Ranged, melee DPS and healers had their dedicated chat channels. We, mages, created yet another channel to discuss strategies and gear choices. This laminated organization of communication had its benefits and drawbacks. We were very successful at defeating bosses, yet it constrained the development of friendships.

Josh played a rogue. He was always on time, rarely made visible mistakes. While he was not topping the DPS meters, he was never at the bottom either. Josh logged on 15 minutes before the start-time of our raids and logged shortly after we finished. I couldn't recall any interactions with him until I got promoted to a newly created guild rank of "Researcher".

I joined the guild, Silver Hammer, to experience competitive raiding and see how generational attitudes are in the "serious" gaming community. The leadership of the guild was aware that I was working on a research project and was very supportive. However, they recruited me to fill the role of a raider, not a researcher. After about a month, they decided to create a "Researcher" rank for me. The new rank granted access to the officer chat channel and helped me establish my researcher self.

The first week after my promotion generated a lot of questions about my research project and invigorated the social life of the guild, at least from my perspective. After our Thursday raid finished, Josh initiated a private conversation with me.

> *Josh: hi. u there?*

> *AL: Yea, doing some dailies. Whats up?*

> *Josh: so ur writing an article about teens raiding?*

> *AL: Kinda – about how people of various ages play together in virtual worlds.*

> *Josh: cool*

> *Josh: I might b able to help u, but this is on the dl.*

> *AL: Sure. My research is confidential. So I don't use actual server, guild or character names. There's this whole research protocol I have to follow.*

> *Josh: ic. im actually 15.*

> *AL: Huh…*

> *Josh: nobody knows this in the guild. they think that im 19 and in college.*

> *AL: How did you get in?*

> *Josh: lied on the app and during the interview. my old guild fell apart and I wanted to be in a good group.*

After our initial encounter, I had a formal interview with Josh and followed his raiding career with interest until he took a break from the game two years later. He became a key informant for my research and a good friend. On his 16th birthday he announced to the guild leadership his actual age. "Coming out" was the phrase he used during our conversations before his birthday. His admission surprised some members of Silver Hammer, yet Josh remained with the guild: he was a solid player, a "mature" individual. Josh's biological age did not make one iota of difference.

Throughout my ethnographic journey, I realized that Josh's behavior was not unprecedented. My interview protocol was developed to reconstruct the biography of young people and age-bending often surfaced as a strategy to gain access to the raiding community. Guild leaders and veteran members of raiding groups occasionally talked about their encounters with youth who attempted to conceal their actual age. Sometimes the maneuvers were successful, other times they failed. How guilds dealt with these transgressions depended on their governance structure and the particular idioculture.

Young people cited various motives to attempt to disguise their actual age. While these reasons were based upon particular gaming biographies, these stories helped me understand the larger context of generational attitudes. Age and age related discourses were omnipresent and continuously shaped the experience of the player population. These discourses reflected beliefs and attitudes that young adults had superior gaming and social skills than adolescents or older people. The manifestation of this adultist (Bell 1995) behavior was particular to this virtual world and while it reconfigured power relations form other social fields, it was not necessarily reducible to attitudes outside the game.

One of the most common motives to conceal one's age was due to a governance issue. Virtual tribes, just like organized competitive sport, required carefully selected, committed members and significant time investment. Not surprisingly, the most successful of these virtual tribes were predominantly controlled by adult players. Virtual tribe leaders and officers were able to set membership criteria: age limitations, prior experience in virtual worlds, attendance requirements, etc. A large number of guilds that enjoyed high status attempted to administratively eliminate adolescent membership. Players had to apply for a raiding spot (a sample application form is available in Appendix B), interview with the guild leadership and pass a trial period to become permanent member.

The rationale behind stratifying membership based on age was the explicit notion that while adolescents might have had the skills and technological competencies to be valuable contributors to the virtual tribe, their psychological and social immaturity made them incompatible with a social group that was shaped by adult male cultural codes. Soliciting membership based on age lines resembled offline social practices limiting certain behaviors to teenagers

following biologically and psychologically deterministic developmental models (such as alcohol consumption, voting, driving, etc.).

At the time of our conversation, Mariel, 19, was member of one of the worlds' most successful raiding guilds. She held numerous World Firsts, an in-game recognition awarded to the guild that finishes a new raid instance the fastest after its release on live gaming servers. Mariel played between 10-14 hours a day during progression, when competitive guilds chased these recognitions (for instance, World First, U.S. or Europe first and Server First). She was well-known in the competitive raiding community and I met her through a private blog discussing her achievements.

Mariel became a serious raider when she was 14. Being homeschooled, she had the freedom to play excessively, although not at the level she was playing when I met her. She started playing after her brother introduced the MMO genre to her:

> I wanted to try raiding. I was pretty competitive, especially with my brother. But I couldn't get an invite to a guild that raided regularly. I was frustrated and bored. I was about to quit, when I was told by someone that I would need to lie about my age if I ever wanted to get into a decent guild. So I started telling people that I was 16. It worked. I was in, and although the guild was not that good, we were raiding regularly. Those days, during vanilla *World of Warcraft*, just being a raider was an accomplishment.

Mariel had to lie to get a foot in the door and to have a chance to establish her

reputation as a dependable and skilled player. Surveying the recruitment

procedures of the most successful guilds revealed that 90% of the highest ranked

guilds in the Americas requested – either explicitly or implicitly – the age of the

applicants. It is revealing that age appears more important in the initial

recruitment process than gender, race or occupation (see Table 2).

Table 2. Guild Application Demographic Information Requests (Top 100 U.S.
Guilds)

	Explicit Request	Implicit Request	No Request
Age	75%	15%	10%
Gender	60%	10%	30%
Race	0%	0%	100%
Occupation	25%	10%	65%

Remarkably, gender request were quite common, while racial identification

never appeared on the guild applications forms. It seems that competitive

raiding guilds, and *World of Warcraft* in general, embraced gendered, masculine

social performances and a neocolonial racial ideology that minimalized the

importance of race (Bonilla-Silva 2001). Gender and occupation were not reasons

for immediate rejection. At the same time, age limits were presented as

nonnegotiable.

The Administrative Gaze

Serious raiding guilds developed various governance strategies to manage

their play community. Naturally, the code of *World of Warcraft* represented the

first layer of control mechanism (Galloway 2004). Based on the game structure,

these virtual tribes had a hierarchical, almost dictatorial social organization with

one person having all executive and administrative power. Additionally, guilds

developed localized governance strategies when it came to organizing their

raiding group, distributing valuable goods, granting access to the guild bank, etc.

(Malone 2009). At the same time, as Nabeel has mentioned it in Chapter Two,

there existed a general blueprint to run guilds. From guild-to-guild, faction-to-

faction, and server-to-server, the social structure of competitive guilds were

relatively consistent. Age limitations were part of this blueprint.

Competitive raiders and guild leaders felt that age bracketing was one of

the most important ways to reduce "drama" and forge group solidarity.

Applicants were suspect if they were too old or too young. Paul was in his late

twenties from Minnesota and he the was leader of a very well-known guild that

consistently ranked in the top 500 globally. The raiding sessions of Paul's guild

were live streamed online and I spent considerable time watching and listening

to their interactions. During our formal interview, I asked him about their

recruitment policies:

> Paul: We actually have the age on the application for our guild, because
> we wanna know who are you. What type of person are you? Who is this
> person we are looking at admitting into our circle of friends? So than we
> can say, okay, this is an older or younger guy – chances are that he might
> not fit-in with our group that well. He might not be as interested in the
> stuff that we are interested in, because we grew up under a different
> generation, we just grew up differently.
>
> AL: Could you talk about what you mean by different interest? After all,
> you are interested in raiding…
>
> Paul: [Laughs]. That is true. We are very focused during progression, but
> still play to have fun. That is the only reason we play. So I can see why
> people don't want underage people in our guild, because the way we act.
>
> AL: What do you mean by "the way we act?"
>
> Paul: I know that it sounds kinda weird and it sounds like I am being
> ageist – I guess. Like I am racists against young people, but you have to
> understand, okay there are issues that can sometimes arise when you are
> hanging out with people who are much older than you. Fact. So making
> sure that that is not something that is gonna happen first, and then hang
> out with them.

Paul and his guildmates believed that filling a raiding group with people of

similar ages reduced "issues" and drama, because they had similar interests.

Their understanding was based on a cohort-centered view of cultural tastes.

Instead of unequivocally rejecting teenagers, Paul and his friends constructed a

narrative based on irreconcilable social differences. When probed to provide

examples and details of this generational gap during a group discussion, guild

members shifted emphasis from biological age to the dichotomy of mature and

immature players:

> Mick: Now, to be more honest, this is a maturity issue, not an age issue. However, it's simply a fact that younger individual can have less maturity. This is the reason most serious raiding guilds ask someone to be eighteen. It's because adults tend to be more mature. Plain and simple…
>
> Drew: [Interrupting] If a younger guy displays that he has the maturity to be a consistent and dependable raider, good! Problem is, rarely anyone under eighteen proves this.
>
> AL: What determines maturity?
>
> Paul: I also agree with Mick. It is maturity, mental maturity we are looking for, like how you handle things. The problem with a lot of *WOW* players, the nerd-ragers, is that they have never developed the social tools to actually handle bad situations. Maturity comes into play when an officer or raid leader say, 'okay, your performance is lacking, pick it up' and you gonna argue for 30 minutes about it.
>
> Mick: Absolutely, we had that all the time in my old guild. That's why I left. Going back to the eighteen thing, you are likely to be more mature as you graduate high school, go to college, get a job, whatever it is that you do. The point is that you have some real responsibilities. Shit is just not handed to you anymore. So it's a process. And we want you to be well underway before you join us.

Being a member of a competitive raiding guild was in fact a real responsibility.

On average, a guild spent ten to fifteen hours raiding per week. Silver Hammer

raided Wednesday, Thursday, Sunday and Monday from 8 to 11:30 Central U.S.

Time. During progression, a Friday or Saturday night raid was added to the schedule. Extra days were usually optional and attendance was less than perfect. Other observed guilds required members to actually take a day off work or school to attend extra playing sessions when the guild was in contention for a prestigious raiding achievement.

Guild leaderships discouraged tardiness or unexcused absences, because it had negative influence on the overall performance of the raiding team. Typical penalties included verbal warnings, diminishing chance to obtain better equipment, sitting out raids as punishment, permanent removal from the raiding group or from the guild. Attendance was usually better during progression times. Guilds ran into problems when the current instance was cleared and the raiding community waited for new challenges while completing the same content over and over to farm better gear.

The strict scheduling did not impact people the same way. College students enjoyed considerable leisure time and flexibility to meet the demands of progression raiding. People with children often had to juggle domestic responsibilities and in-game commitments at the same time. Young people found

themselves in a similar time-bind, as gaming was a point of contention with their

parents. For instance, Mariel was on a tight schedule:

> Once I got a taste of raiding and learned a little, I bounced around a bit, trying to find the right people. I joined this guild called Casino Nation. I still had to lie about my age. Also, my grandmother was pretty strict with bedtimes, so I had to log off at eleven every time. It was usually not a problem, but sometimes the whole raid was ready to continue late and I couldn't. Or, I pretended to go to bed and came back to raid. It was dreadful; I was always worrying about getting caught.

From an administrative standpoint, young people and people with children were

suspect because they had less control over their schedules. Some guilds were not

as understanding as Casino Nation. I met Daemon when I tried out for one of the

top-ranked U.S. guilds. He was the recruitment officer and an engineering

student at a very prestigious university when not raiding. I failed miserably

during my tryout, but I got a chance to establish a relationship with Daemon,

interview him and observe recruitment interviews. Daemon mentioned the

scheduling problem during one of our interactions:

> In my four years with my current guild, I can only remember one member under the age of 16. First of all, he refused to use his mic, because he was too embarrassed, because he was so young… Uhm, and we kept making fun of him. I guess it's not nice, but whatever. And there would be times in the middle of the raid when between attempts he would be like "afk, I have to argue with my mom to stay up one more hour".

Daemon turned out to be a key informant. As one of the best-known players on

his server, he had an extensive network of friends, ex-guildmates and admirers.

One of these old guild members was Greg. He left the guild after the birth of his

daughter and started a small, 10-man group with a condensed, nine hour raiding

schedule. He reiterated the time and commitment concerns regarding young

people:

> Greg: Some of them just show-up when they feel like. I don't know if it's their parents not allowing them to play, they have no access to a computer or they just don't care. I have a small guild, everybody is a core raider. If you don't show-up, you screw us over. I lead my raids to be successful – I don't know if it's puberty, hormones, rebellion against adults, but they generally fail at being good raiders and good members. I don't need extra drama. So I don't even bother with kids anymore.
>
> AL: So your guild used to recruit adolescents? Could you talk about that?
>
> Greg: We had some, by chance I would say. There was this warrior, who was decent and pretty cool. Sophomore in high school I think. His friend joined and sometimes they were great, but sometimes they just logged-off in the middle of the raid. When it was only the warrior, he was good, but together they just fucked around. But basically, we had a raiding guild and herding teenage groups was just way too much. So they were asked to leave.

It is evident from these remarks, that there were teenagers who were considered

valuable players based on their performance; nonetheless, their perceived lack of

time management skills and immature interaction with their peers were

considered undesirable.

Conflicts over the schedule appeared to be a major part of young people's administrative exclusion from the raiding scene. This was one of my expected findings, as the structure of daily life gives little freedom and unsupervised time to young people. Especially for middle-class families, free time and play is sandwiched between activities (Lareau 2003). At the same time, keeping the regular raiding schedule was not a problem for young people. The conflict usually happened when impromptu raids were organized or when an ongoing session was extended.

Guided by a cohort based understanding of cultural tastes or justified using the developmental narrative of the mature versus immature dichotomy, the competitive raiding scene limited young people's access. They were seen as liability, because they had less control over their schedules than other players. Age bracketing reduced that possibility of generational fresh contacts, although young people gained access to this protected environment from time to time.

Adultism, Youth and the Developmental Paradigm

Paul's reference to ageism, Mick's mention of real responsibilities and Mariel's strict schedule highlight that while *World of Warcraft* has its own cultural logic, it is still embedded into and influenced by other fields of power. External

forces and determinants about youth and families were absorbed and refracted.

The vocabularies associated with youth within *World of Warcraft* resonated with

the increasing marginality and disposability of young people in general. Yet,

adultism as the hegemonic view of teenage players, and the structure of social

relations it produced did not necessarily mirror offline practices, but

reconfigured them.

Ageism and age related discriminatory practices stratify human beings on

the basis of actual or perceived biological age. These social processes operate on

various levels (interpersonal, cultural and institutional) and assume that certain

social, psychological and biological competencies are directly related to age. Age

discrimination is most commonly used to describe oppressive social practices

against older people, an attitude that was present in *World of Warcraft*. However,

it is crucial to point out that young people are often mistreated and disrespected

because they are young. John Bell (1995) identifies adultism as behaviors and

attitudes based on the assumption that adults are better than young people, and

entitled to act upon young people without their agreement. Social institutions,

laws, customs, and attitudes reinforce this mistreatment.

Younger cohorts are one of the most watched and surveilled in human history, which is a consequence of the changing social and economic relationships of late modernity, parental anxieties about the future and the availability of surveillance tools (Marx and Steeves 2010). In fact, except for prisoners and few other institutionalized groups, young people are more controlled than any human group. Their opinions are often not valued, adults reserve the right to punish them at will or take away certain "privileges" while their emotions are considered "immature". Besides being good consumers and representing a tremendous market, adolescents are considered less important and inferior to adults. Rhetorically they often signify "the future", yet adolescents are not included in the decision-making processes in their communities (Giroux 2009). It is undeniable that adults are very important in the lives of young people as providers of emotional support, guidance, rules, discipline, role modeling, etc. Thus, adultism refers only to the consistent, patterned disrespect and mistreatment of young people. It is something that young players of *World of Warcraft* often experience.

The concept of youth and childhood is often a fixed, static, unproblematic, descriptive category. The dominant ideological formula of childhood was shaped

by Aristotelian and Rousseauian philosophy. Whether it's Aristotle's concept as the potential to develop into fully human beings with maturity or Rousseau's tabula rasa, the legacy of these influential thinkers established the hegemon position that placed development as the focal point of childhood and adolescence.

The developmental approach to childhood centers on biological and psychological categorizations. Based on the Aristotelian and Rousseauian foundations, recapitulation theory conceptualized development as a reenactment of the evolutionary climb (Lesko 2001). As an element of the colonial discourse and science, it leaned heavily on a clear race, class and gender hierarchy. Part of the appeal of recapitulation theory in the scientific and administrative circles could be credited to the changing social and industrial conditions of the Victorian era, which re-discovered the body as a central category of power. The malleable social word of adolescence became a space for reformers, politicians and educators to envision, and for public policy to craft citizens and future adults that could face the challenges of the 20th century.

This administrative gaze on the human body was not without its consequences. Assisted by burgeoning youth organizations (YMCA, Boy Scouts)

targeted to middle-class boys, the renewed focus on the physical assisted in

significant increase in the average height of American boys (Rotundo 1993). The

child was viewed as a noble savage to be brought into a state of sociability and

moral maturity under the authority of the state, church and family. In this

respect, the Victorian approach was successful in preserving white, male

supremacy in America.

While recapitulation theory faded as the 20th century progressed, it

remained influential in setting intellectual precedent and laying the foundation

of normative views on family and youth. According to Lesko, the four confident

characterizations of the paradigm are the claim that with biological and

psychological maturity children will develop into fully human beings, its

tendency to locate conflict within the physical, hormone raged body, its

insistence on adolescents as essentially peer oriented conformists, denying

individuality and voice and the central focus on age, as a shorthand attempting

to explain social experiences.

The work of Talcott Parson (1942) was a distinctively sociological response

to the psychological, biological tradition associated with cognitive

developmental models (Piaget 1972; Dewey 1997). Philippe Aries' (1962)

historical work also countered the above sketched dichotomous approach that conceptualized the social experience of children based on genitalia, hormones, body types and cognitive abilities. While Aries' historical literary analysis displayed methodological bias towards upper class, male accounts, nonetheless he was able to show the construction of childhood and the social and political power of the category of childhood itself.

Paul Willis' groundbreaking ethnography (1977) showed how working class boys constructed their own idioculture within the larger context of working-class life. Crude markers of difference that were on the center stage earlier became incorporated into the larger scholarly context highlighting the role of social institutions (family, peer groups, school, government, etc.) shaping the experience of young people. Childhood and youth became a culturally and historically bounded discourse with emphasis on competing childhoods. The production of terms, categories and language by adults for adults, and cultural content passed from adults to youth was challenged. As researchers pointed out, youth competence is influenced by social context and experience by a larger extent than by innate ability itself (James 2004).

Maturity Discourses

A non-participatory, administrative gaze defined the meaning of youth in *World of Warcraft*. Adultist interpretations and confident characterizations found their way into the general discourse. Young people were often regarded as humans-to-be based on biological and psychological accounts. Guild policies and the use of the dichotomy labels of mature versus immature attempted to demarcate members of various cohorts. But while adultism was about the systematic disrespect of young people, it also helped serious raiders to craft positive social representations for the outside world.

Just as the adult gaze defined young people at large within the virtual space, a non-participatory gaze set the parameters of the general conversation about gamers and the fantasy genre. Media talking heads and self-proclaimed experts frequently pondered about how video games teach violence, desensitize people and make them social isolates. MacLean's, a weekly Canadian magazine about politics, current events and culture, recently published an article titled *Are We Raising our Boys to be Underachieving Men?* (Intini 2010). The report focuses on the stereotypical slacker male, who prefers to spend his days and nights playing video games, instead of bettering himself.

World of Warcraft players were familiar with this rhetoric and participants of my study displayed and talked about ways to distance themselves from this stereotype. As their gameworld revolved around imaginary angels, elves, white knights, magic swords and dragons, some believed that *World of Warcraft* is by definition immature. Older people, who spend the majority of their free time playing in this "boy space", were adamant to reaffirm their maturity and dispel the possibility of Peter Pan syndrome. Paul used the pedigree of science fiction and fantasy literature to discredit the label of immaturity:

> I mean, like Tolkien was a World War I veteran and a professor at Oxford or Cambridge I think. So, I mean I can't make-up a more mature background for the father of high-fantasy.

Nabeel agreed that the game itself did not influence social behavior:

> The medium has little to do with maturity. It doesn't matter if this is a fantasy game, because there are still people behind those avatars. If listening to rap does not make a gangster, why would playing a fantasy game make you immature?

Media franchises like the *Lord of the Ring*s trilogy, the *Harry Potter* saga or the *Hunger Games* series attracted millions of viewers as they were told and sold across multiple media platforms, including video games. They are loved and celebrated by people of various ages. Yet, serious *World of Warcraft* raiders talked

about a constant struggle to justify their hobby. Daemon was particularly vocal

about gamer stereotypes:

> People hear that I play *World of Warcraft* and they think I'm like fuckin' Eric Cartman. You know, playing in my parent's basement, eating Hot Pockets. But what we do is like organized sports. We are the professional athletes of video games. You know, people can just throw a football or they can play in the NFL. Same here. You can just play *WOW* or you can raid like we do.

Competitive video game play is not a new phenomenon, however new

developments in computer gaming transformed the single player contest for

highest score to an e-sport with professional gamers, teams, sponsors, fans and

prize money (Taylor 2012). *World of Warcraft* was never a marquee e-gaming

platform, but the top raiding guilds and PVP teams did receive sponsorship from

gaming companies.

The professionalization of the game space was paralleled by a

simplification of game mechanics. During the first years of *World of Warcraft*, raid

instances required either 40 or 20 men teams. The *Burning Crusade* expansion

revised this model and introduced 25 and 10 men dungeons. *Wrath of the Lich*

King offered 25 and 10 men versions of the same raid instances, but offered better

rewards for players in large groups. *Cataclysm* further diminished differences

between raid sizes as their loot tables became identical. While these changes

made raiding more accessible, some players expressed disapproval, because the

game operators were "catering to casuals":

> Drew: In Vanilla, you used to have to work to get your dungeon set
> together and progress through the raids together. So when you inspected
> someone in Stormwind, you knew that they put the time and effort into
> their character. It was simple. You looked at gear and were able to see
> who is a good raider. I believe that at that point age didn't even matter.
> You showed your skill and commitment through your gear. And because
> filling a 40 men raid was hard, I think age didn't matter back then.
>
> AL: So what happened?
>
> Drew: Blizzard started to cater to casuals. Suddenly everybody had decent
> gear. You can hit 85 now [the maximum level at the time of the interview]
> and have raid-ready gear in two days. Welfare epics. So the pool of geared
> people is huge. Raids are smaller too. But today gear does not equal skill
> and commitment like it used to. If you wanna be in a pro guild, you need
> to show more than gear: your history, maturity, all that we've talked
> about.

As raid sizes became smaller and good quality gear was easier to obtain, the pool

of potential raiders increased. While guild leaders often talked about their

troubles trying to field a full raid during earlier versions of the game, by the

release of *Cataclysm*, there was an overproduction of geared people looking for

raiding spots. As competition for prestigious positions increased, credentials and

gaming history became more important. Maturity, as a shortcut to age,

developed as the recruiting slogan of guilds.

Players who attempted to reinforce and police the generational

demarcation line used the maturity versus immaturity discourse. It helped

serious players to distance themselves from stereotypical gamer representations.

It also helped raiders to minimalize self-policing.

Cliff was the father of a young child. As he was unemployed for over a

year at the time of the interview, he was able to spend considerable amount of

time playing the game. He was very active in the raiding community and a

regular fixture in the trade channel. I invited him and one of his raiding partners,

Hugh to talk about their understanding of maturity:

> Cliff: You know, they just act like… Basically, I'm not here to baby-sit. If they don't have respect for other people's wishes, do or say certain profanities or off-the-wall-shit all the time, you know… I don't think they understand that *WOW* is a public forum.
>
> AL: So would you say that the main problem for you is profanity, sexist and racist language?
>
> Cliff: Well, it's not just the high school kids. But they don't know when it is appropriate. I guess I don't mind teasing and stuff, you know we do it with [other guild members]. But there's a time and place for it and I don't want to watch my language not to offend them.

Cliff's views demonstrate that players often downplayed the significance of age

and used the binary code of mature/immature to signify that certain behaviors

(foul language, sexual innuendos, etc.) are acceptable from adult peers, but

prohibited and stigmatized from adolescents. Hugh shared a similar viewpoint:

> Hugh: Mature means old enough where we don't have to watch our
> language or worry about adult humor. Many people will have to be more
> conscious if a thirteen year old is in the raid, just like in real life. Imagine a
> group of college graduates drinking beers and playing pool. Then, a
> thirteen year old joins in the game. The kid may be an awesome pool
> player and really cool, but the college dudes will not be acting the same as
> before. Nothing against the kid, but that is just how our current social
> dynamic often occurs.
>
> AL: Could you recall an example of this from the game?
>
> Hugh: Okay. This was at the end of Icecrown [raid instance]. We had this
> new recruit. She played a ret/holy pally and was very good. It was farm
> period, we were more chatty and laidback. So this pally goes "brb, mom
> just got home". The reply was the usual: "She is already home? I just
> finished with her 10 minutes ago." Just typical shit we say. You hear these
> in video games all the time. Everybody is laughing, right? Then, the pally
> just leaves the guild and logs. We are like what the fuck? Well, turned out
> that she was 17 and got offended.
>
> Cliff: Yes. I remember that. It made us feel like shit, even though it was
> our guild with our rules.

Cliff and Hugh's virtual tribe had an established idioculture that tolerated and

celebrated locker-room masculinity. Young people represented a threat to the

communicative order. Taking offense to a "harmless joke" meant a disruption in

the ritual equilibrium. Age bracketing was not necessarily a practice against

youth, but a policy to protect an established linguistic market where mature jokes were in high demand.

Beyond Victimization

The competitive raiding scene, knowingly or unknowingly, maintained various adultist rules and social practices. However, it would be a mistake to overlook young people's remarkable competencies in constructing, understanding and interpreting their own social world. Adolescents barely talked about their experiences in terms of victimization. Rather, they looked at the challenges that their biological age presented in personal terms and constructed personal projects. They were conscientious social actors and agents of their own virtual biographies. Their virtual life appeared uncluttered and tidy, because they stayed away from guilds, places and topic where they were not wanted. Or, if they really wished to raid with a guild that did not welcome them, they used age bending and in-game networks to gain access.

The hegemonic discourse strategy around age was not restricted to adult players only. In fact, it was internalized and utilized by raiding teenagers themselves, thus serving as an important cultural reference point. Young players often made the conscious and calculated effort to define themselves against

players labeled and stigmatized as immature to gain status and recognition. For

example, Warkid talked about his preference of playing with adults:

> I would prefer playing with people who are older because they have more
> wisdom… They – I don't know – it's hard to explain. They act differently
> and are more patient I guess.

Triumph was a successful and respected teenage guild member in almost

exclusively adult guild. His remarks highlight how he used his membership

status to counter age-based stigma:

> Triumph: Well, first it was hard to get in to the guild, but I had a friend in
> there and he hooked me up. Before becoming a core raider, I never talked
> on vent. You know, I didn't want to hear the "how old are you"
> comments. Now we kinda moved beyond that. They know that I'm good,
> I show up and get things done. Even in PUGs I'm confident to lead now,
> on my alts. I don't PUG too often, but if some asshole wanna call me out
> on my voice or whatever, he better check my guild and gear first.
> Actually, some of my guildies say I talk too much now [laughs].
>
> AL: So you no longer feel the stigma because you are young?
>
> Triumph: Eh, not really. But I'm not one of those noob thirteen year olds
> who can't gem and enchant their gear, learn the fights, stay out of shit and
> be productive. I don't troll trade all day. Trust me, there are lots of those. I
> started *WOW* with some school friends, and they all play something else
> now, because they were not dedicated enough to learn how to play *WOW*
> well.
>
> AL: How many teenagers are in your guild?
>
> Triumph: I'm the only one. We do not allow them, unless someone knows
> them real well, an officer or something. But I'm okay with that. There's no
> need to dilute the guild. We are pretty good and I don't feel that I'm out of

place here. But I have to play with my headphones, because I don't want my mom to hear some of the stuff they say during raids [giggles].

Highly stereotyped notions of the "average teenager" were omnipresent in the virtual society constituted by *World of Warcraft* players. Even teenagers subscribed to these adultist conceptions and attempted to "other" members of their age cohort by defining their superior status through various resources (friend networks to gain access to adult-only guilds, guild membership and unique, hard-to-acquire equipment, etc.).

While adultism and the confident characterizations of youth were common during gameplay, a certain group of adolescents were accepted as equal tribe members. Nonetheless, this boundary crossing was not necessarily approved and rewarded as an achievement outside the social milieu of virtual realms: Triumph consciously concealed his access to this adult peer culture from his parents.

Signs and symbols are shortcuts in our society to convey social status and worth. *World of Warcraft* raiders constructed a complex, multifaceted environment, where biological age became an important marker of social skills and gaming competency. The age regime of this space was constituted through administrative practices, adultist and maturity discourses. Yet, as the examples

of Warkid, Josh, Mariel and Triumph demonstrate, young people were sometimes able to join the adult world of serious raiding. While adolescents might have started their tribal initiation process with the ascribed stigma of age, at the end of the process, after demonstrating certain social skills, they were evaluated based on their achievements and reputation management. In fact, age as a stratifying structure became less and less meaningful. The next chapter tells their stories.

CHAPTER FOUR

EMATURITY AND CULTURAL TOOLITS

Adolescence of all of the recognized life stages most dramatically demonstrates the power of the metaphor of a cultural toolkit. (Gary Alan Fine)

I was struggling for a while to better understand the experience of young people in this competitive raid environment, yet I was unable to find a moment to intercept them, to start building a relationship with them and to learn from them. Today I logged into World of Warcraft and I had a mail waiting for me from Daemon. He is the recruitment officer of one of the top ranked U.S. guilds. He is aware of my project and while his guild does not have any young people on the roster, he sent me an excerpt from a guild application submitted by Phil:

> *If you disregard that I'm three years below the required age to join you, I'm as close to a perfect candidate as you can find. My raiding history, my performance parses, my commitment and attention to details are excellent. So please, don't be fooled by age. It is just one number among all the other numbers that make me the best candidate. I'm looking for a pro raiding group. You do have that reputation. That is the reason I'm applying.*

While Daemon decided to interview Phil and not recruit him in the end, his messages made me pause. The guild application and interview process must be the first intercept point for my study. But more importantly, what Phil's message revealed to me today is that success in face of adultism is not necessarily by chance. It appears to be an active effort that requires persuasion, negotiation and the presentation of a "mature" social self.

Living in a Denver suburb, Phil was passionate about guitars, snowboarding and

competitive gaming. He loved learning about music and often talked to me about

music. On one occasion, I was listening to *Highway Star* by Deep Purple, a sonh

he did not know. A couple of weeks later, he logged onto our Ventrillo channel,

asked me to lean back and relax. Then, he performed an amazing cover of

Highway Star, including the solo. It was an incredible experience.

Phil had a very busy schedule. He was an excellent student with plans of

going to college. He participated in a variety of extracurricular activities and

spent his weekends skiing and snowboarding with his twin sister and parents.

"My dad is in city politics, government stuff. My mom is a school councilor" he

informed me. While playing *World of Warcraft*, he was focused and goal oriented:

> The story of the game, the lore… it's all the same, over and over again.
> There are neat things and all that. I might play once just to experience it.
> Maybe try a role playing server. But I really enjoy the numbers. Like
> knowing what my max DPS is under ideal conditions. And just looking at
> my parses and trying to get to that number. That is really exciting.
> Especially, when it's 25 of us, pushing ourselves to get there. It's like
> doing the same rail with your snowboard over and over, because you
> know you can get better.

Searching for guilds was a central aspect of Phil's gaming experience. He had

friends from his school that played the game, but he did not rely on them to

achieve his goals. Phil moved freely from guild to guild, faction to faction and

server to server in order to play with a group that shared his approach and

passion of the game. He often applied to "adult only" guilds and was not

discouraged by rejections. He was recruited to a mature guild soon after he

learned that Daemon's guild would not accept him. Then a few months later he

left this group, as they "lost focus and didn't perform". It took Phil two months

and some frustration to land with yet another mature guild. He stayed with them

until the end of my fieldwork.

> I talked to my dad about guild searching. He plays once in a while, nothing serious; he is pretty terrible [laughs]. He wanted to check-out the game once I started playing. So he asked about my guild after he noticed that I bounce around a lot. He was probably worried about all those charges on his credit card for faction and server transfers [laughs]. So we talked about that. He said it's like job searching. If you don't know people, you send out a bunch of resumes and rarely hear back. But it's hard for me, because sometimes my friends get in and I don't. Even though they are not better than I am, they are just older. But in my current guild, this shammy friend of mine told them that it's a 2 for 1 deal: they either take both of us or none. It worked. It was nice of him.

It was significant that Phil acknowledged the importance of friendship networks

in the game, even though his reliance on these networks was limited by his age. I

asked him to talk more about this:

> Sometimes my friends get in and I don't. It's the nature of the beast. No hard feelings or anything. We are competing for roster spots. I'm in high school. That's a disadvantage, for sure. But I keep applying and don't really care about those rules [age restrictions]. It's not like I'm doing something illegal, right? It's not like smoking pot on the ski lift [laughs]. Not that I do that. But you smell it all the time. Anyhow, they come up with these rules, these subjective rules. If my parses can't convince them

> to recruit me, well, it's their loss. That's what I like about numbers in the game. They never lie.

Of course numbers often lie, or at least cloak the truth and Phil acknowledged this after probing. Select performance parses highlight particularly lucky raid encounters. For instance, Phil often cited a fight against *Ragnaros the Firelord*, where due to the luck of the draw, he was able to stand stationary for long periods of time and perform his ideal spell rotation. His performance indicators for the encounter ranked in the Top 10 worldwide for the given raiding week. However, he was not able to perform this well on the encounter ever again. Additionally, performance parses do not measure every raiding role accurately (for instance, tank or raiders with hybrid or multiple roles in a given encounter) or the intangibles of raiding: situational awareness, communication skills, teamwork or leadership.

Individual performance parses, by definition, are generated during raids. People who are not raiding members of the *World of Warcraft* community have no "hard data" about their gaming performance. There is an interaction between the performance of the raid group and the performance of the individual: it is easier to perform better when other players are efficient, experienced and focused.

Given the adultist environment of most competitive raiding guilds, young people had a distinct disadvantage in trying to produce preferred raiding parses.

Performances and Guild Membership

Measuring performance in video games is a complex question. It was never my intention to try to understand performance. Success in a complex video game is dependent on many factors: technological infrastructures (physical location, Internet connection speed, computer capabilities, etc.), physiological and mental components (hand eye coordination, situational awareness, knowledge of game environment, ability to make the right decision under pressure, etc.) and sociological components (ability to work in groups, communication and interpersonal skills, etc.).

Technological infrastructures had tremendous impact on the game. Even when players were able to purchase and upkeep a current gaming machine, they had no control over the larger media infrastructure: not all Internet providers are created equal. Players living further from game servers had to endure slower response times. Mariel, who was introduced in the previous chapter, attempted to maintain her membership in competitive guilds while living in the Americas, Asia and towards the end of my fieldwork, in Europe as well:

> I lived in the U.S. but wanted to see the European raiding scene. It was a good raiding experience for me. Despite heavy ping, I played great and had fun, even though I was extremely shy and not in my usual environment of retarded Americans. Just kidding. I think I'm also one of the youngest people to get a world first, which felt like a great achievement at the time. Then I moved to Asia and I didn't think it would be possible to play in the EU from there because of the ping. I joined a great Australian guild. It's a shame they had bad pings because they were all very good.

Even the best players' performance is limited by technology. No matter how much one prepares and practices or studies the game, these technological factors often determine success at the highest levels of raiding. Mariel also highlighted the physiological and mental side of performance during an interview:

> I have to be in a calm mood before the raid. If I have too much pressure put onto me I tend not to play my best and the same goes with distraction. I have a good way of pep talking myself sometimes in my head which has helped me relax in the past. Also keeping hydrated, if I was the tiniest bit thirsty, I'd be unable to concentrate.

Yet, from my perspective, the most interesting factors of success within the competitive raiding scene were social skills, social networks and communicative competence. During my fieldwork, I came to realize that the methodologically important start of inquiry is not how well young people did once they gained full guild membership in an adultist guild, but the recruitment process itself.

It was important for me to recognize the importance of the guild application and the official guild interview as a main gatekeeping mechanism.

After my encounter with Phil, I made a conscious effort to gain access to guild

applications and often joined recruitment interviews in order to better

understand the practical competencies successful young raiders displayed from

the point of their initial contact with the guild. On the other hand, I was

interested in documenting what social performances were considered

undesirable.

While I had access to hundreds of guild applications and I visited the

guild websites of most top-ranked guilds to study applications, those documents

alone gave me little insight. I had no access to discussions between recruiters and

veteran raid members. I did not know the internal politics and the complex social

networks that were essential to the functioning of this competitive subculture

within *World of Warcraft*.

I found my semi-structured interviews important, but not as revealing as I

wanted them to be. I learned a lot from these interviews, but these were mostly

vocabularies of actions, complex stories people constructed around the idea of

age difference and they revealed little about social performances that made

certain young people accepted to the in-group. Nonetheless, I learned that many

young *WOW* players preferred not to raid. Not because they didn't have the

skills, but due to social pressures. They found other gaming modes, most

importantly Arena PVP play, where they were able to excel. As one participant,

Floyd, explained to me a few weeks after his failed interview with a serious

raiding guild:

> I like the idea of raiding. I could've been good, but holy crap, just so much
> drama, so much pressure. I have to be honest with you, I really wanted to
> raid. But after two interviews… I mean this should not be work. I want to
> log on and have fun. I can do that in Arena. You only need a few friends.
> We are consistently ranked high. Sometimes we can't do 3v3 or 5v5… I do
> other stuff outside this game, so I can't be online all the time. I play
> football and baseball, ATVing or shooting with my stepfather. Go
> hunting, fishing and other outdoor things. So just find someone in trade
> and run 2v2 for the points. It's easy and fun. Not as structured as raiding.
> So, I think, Arena is so much better.

Floyd had a great reputation as a PVP player, but was unable to enter the

competitive raiding scene and gave up on it quite easily. He framed this as a

choice, but I believe Jay MacLeod's (2004) notion of leveled aspiration capture

the experience of many young people like him rather well. They were capable

players but after a few unsuccessful attempts to enter the competitive raiding

scene, they drifted towards gaming modes that were not as heavily age-policed

as raiding. Of course Floyd had the option to join a middle-tier raiding guild first

and slowly advance. Moreover, it is possible that adultism was not the main

mechanism that leveled aspirations. It is also possible that older players "choose"

similar strategies to deal with their inability to join or maintain their membership

in competitive guilds. At the same time, I believe it's an important dimension

that could be further researched.

Structured interviews helped me record the stories young people

constructed around their experiences. During these interviews, adolescents

talked about the importance of luck, recalled how guild mergers gave them a

chance or believed that they were at the right place at the right time. They

highlighted certain choices they made during their gameplay or identified the

importance of friends and networks. These stories were important, but I wanted

to document these processes as they happened. Participant observation gave me

the best opportunity to study these social performances.

The Interview: Probing for Ematurity

Being present before, during and after recruitment interviews was

extremely important. It allowed me to slowly understand how the interview

room transformed from a gamer space to a professional space when the new

recruit entered and how it almost immediately morphed back to the previous

masculine gamer domain. This was not a trivial shift, and my early field notes

were not detailed enough to capture this process. I had to make a conscious

effort to pay close attention to the patterned nature of linguistic and behavioral reportoires.

Once the interview room transformed from a masculine and somewhat chauvinistic space to a professional and "mature" environment, young interviewees became participants of a scripted, ritualistic social performance. They were asked to become actors on this stage and render an emature performance. Young people's linguistic practices were measured against what was considered legitimate, professional, middle-class practices. While these language rules were not closely followed by guild members per se, they were a significant structuring element of the guild admission process.

The project of adolescents seeking admittance and equal status in a virtual tribe was not the "be" mature, but to produce distinctions that made them appear different than the "average" young player. The following recruitment sequence is a brilliant demonstration of this linguistic shift, the staging of a mature interview ritual and an interviewee's reliance on a developing professional, middle-class habitus.

Three of us were in the password protected officer room on Vent. All three of us were fishing in a game zone called Uldum. The guild needed to replenish

its raiding supplies and while mindlessly fishing next to each other, we chatted

on vent. I previously spent 6 months raiding with this guild and built a strong

relationship with the guild leader Summit and his recruitment officer, Charles. I

was allowed to observe interviews. My main character was a female gnome

priest healer nicknamed Lili. This became my pseudonym in this guild as well.

> Summit: Lili, you always play ugly gnomes. What the fuck is the deal with that? Your fishing rod is five time the size of your character.

> Lili: I like playing gnomes...

> Charles [interrupting]: You are looking at the size of his rod, because you have a tiny dick.

> Summit [laughing]: Sure, it must be it... but your mom liked it last night.

> Charles: Ah... you are compensating with the mom jokes.

> Summit [laughing]: Oh man. You just don't understand. There's nothing to compensate for. You are the one always talking about dicks. I was just asking Lili about his gnome fetish.

> Lili: I wouldn't call it a fetish. And the int. bonus is pretty nice on a priest.

> Charles: Still pretty ugly. Not as ugly as your mage though. That thing, because I can't call that a she, is fugly.

Conversations like this were not uncommon in most of the guilds I observed.

They were not necessarily the norm, but sexualized banter, soft insults and

teasing was not condemned by any means. Given my character choices, I became

the target of much mockery. While I did not create my avatars to make political

statements, it was clear that unusual selections were often noticed and talked

about. The above conversation in fact did continue for a while, focusing on the

connection between ones sexuality and in-game character choice.

> Charles: I'm about to grab the recruit. So let's stop the BS. Although this dude plays a female night elf. Fucking typical teenage shit. Like that YouTube with the kid masturbating while watching his *WOW* character dance [laughs].

> Lili: I haven't seen that. Maybe I shouldn't.

> Charles: Oh dude, you have to watch that shit. Pretty funny. I will email it to you later.

> Lili [laughing]: Please don't.

> Summit: Lili, you are so fucking PC with this shit. You are a bleeding-heart gnome-loving liberal academic [laughs].

> Lili [laughing]: Beats being an asshole like you.

> Charles: Not by much.

> Summit: So who is this recruit?

> Charles: A resto druid with boomkin offspec. He actually has pretty good gear and decent raiding history. He claims he can make all the raids. He is seventeen... Didn't you read his application? Or were you too busy jerking off looking at Lili's character?

> Summit: Already told you, I was with your mom.

> Charles: Fuck off. You should look at the app real quick. We need to find a decent healer in a few weeks, Trey is leaving. Hopefully this kid is not a moron... He is already on vent, I will bring him in.

> Summit: Sure. Let's do this fuckface.

This was the point, when the vent channel transformed from a masculine locker room to a professional interview space. The metamorphosis was initiated by the arrival of the new recruit. The guild usually didn't do interviews with new recruits, only if Charles or Summit were not sure about the candidate or if the candidate was young. The application form and available character biographies (Armory, raiding parses, etc.) gave them enough information to know whether the applicant had a chance to help the guild progress. The interview was not about gaming, it was a test of interviewing skills and social competence.

The applicant, Rene, had an impressive pedigree since he was coming from a higher ranked guild than ours was. He left his previous guild due to a scheduling conflict. He looked to be a perfect candidate on paper. In fact, the bulk of Charles' questions were not about *World of Warcraft* or were only loosely connected to the game. I edited the following interview transcript for brevity and I omitted few *World of Warcraft* specific questions.

Charles: How did you prepare for this interview?

Rene: I did a pretty extensive guild search before applying. I wanted to make sure that I make an informed decision. I looked through your guild website and studied your raiding parses. I was interested in seeing how quickly you recover after wipes. I believe that is important, because with a short raiding schedule, we need to maximize our chances. I checked the

Armory of your raiders, making sure that they are properly specced and geared.

Charles: That is impressive. Did you find anything unusual?

Rene: No. You run a pretty much standard 10 end-game setup. Your recovery time was a little bit slow, but since I was not here, I don't know the reasons behind it.

Summit: Wipe recovery is definitely an area we are actively working on.

Charles: Yes, indeed it is. How much *WOW* do you play? How does it fit into your daily routine?

Rene: I do not have time to be online outside raids. I have a busy personal and social life and I have other priorities. I will be online fifteen minutes before raids and never leave early, but I will not be able to do more. I hope that is not a problem.

Summit: No, it's not, although we expect you to have some of your own raiding supplies. We are currently fishing for the guild.

Rene: Oh yes. Supplies will not be a problem. While I don't farm, I developed an investment system in the Auction House. Without much time commitment I am able to maintain a positive balance while raiding full time.

Charles: So are you the one who is inflating prices in the Auction House?

Rene: I wouldn't call it that. I just understand market trends and the basic law of supply and demand.

Charles: Sounds good. What do you do in your free time when you are not raiding?

Rene: I like to draw and currently working on a graphic novel.

Charles: Interesting. What is it about?

Rene: It's a graphic novel about people I know. Part fiction, part reality. Almost like a fantasy/documentary about my social circle… I also like to play other video games. I play with my mom. I got into *WOW* because of her.

Charles: Really? Does she still play?

Rene: Yes, but not seriously. She is on a RPG server. [...]

Charles: Great. What are your plans after graduating high school?

Rene: I would like to study design and become a graphic artist.

Charles: Does that require a university education?

Rene: Absolutely, maybe even a Masters. I already visited a few places and I'm doing some research. I would like to stay in California if possible.

The interview was about fifteen minutes long. Interestingly, Charles was not particularly interested in Rene's gaming skills. He was interested in conducting a standard job interview. In fact he did include a cliché question about Rene's biggest weakness as a player. The interview was not structured to try to measure how the candidate will perform during raids. Rather, it was a test of interview skills, professional vocabulary and practical competence.

After the interview was over, Charles and Summit had a short discussion about Rene and the interview. They both agreed that it was extremely unlikely that Rene actually looked through old raid parses to see the guild recovery times. As Summit explained, "he must be the biggest fucking loser if he spent time on

that". At the same time, they agreed that it was an excellent answer and showed that he understood the intricate details of what separates a competitive raiding guild from a guild that raids regularly. In essence, Charles and Summit concluded that the candidate was emature for their guild and gave a 30 day temporary raiding spot to Rene. His full membership was dependent on his performance. Once the official guild business was concluded they continued their sexualized banter, this time focusing on Rene's mom and her role-playing skills.

As I started to focus on the process of the application and interview, I came to realize that successful young people in the raiding subculture were not smarter, funnier, and more skilled or to use the colloquial term, more mature than their peers. However, they were definitely more emature. This concept was developed to capture the essence of a "pseudo maturity" within the virtual realm. Ematurity is the ability to produce utterances, distinctions and social performances that made young people appear different than the "average youth" player when called upon.

Legitimate Language and Boundary Maintenance

Game scholars often focus on the avatar as the main conduit of social

interaction since it is the virtual embodiment of the player. However, I believe

that a sociological understanding must focus on written and spoken language

first and foremost. This inquiry must examine language as a form of social

interaction, not solely as a form of representation. As my data highlighted, the

language of *Word of Warcraft* – as a media object offering certain representations -

is masculine, follows certain racial and colonial trajectories. But I realized that I

cannot stop looking at language at this level. I was interested in a framework that

has the flexibility to admit the importance of locally meaningful linguistic

routines. Therefore, after paying attention to written and spoken language as the

main form of presentation of self in *World of Warcraft*, I started to understand the

process of boundary crossing form being labeled an immature teenager to an

emature in-group member. The main form of capital for emature youth was their

symbolic and verbal capabilities and capacity to present desirable social selves.

Young players are often able to conceal their age and avoid the

management of age based stigmas. Yet, those who are interested in serious

gaming and membership in competitive virtual tribes have to demonstrate their

maturity to guild leaders and recruitment officials. Once they are labeled

"young", they have to manage this stigma and rely on appropriate toolkits to

succeed. These toolkits are not necessarily arcane and specific to virtual realms:

they are interview skills and the ability to perform in a professional space when

called upon.

Players do not leave their offline selves behind as they log on to virtual

realms. While it might be necessary for researchers to rely on the simple

dichotomy of offline/online as a conceptual tool, social performances and

experiences in these realms are not separate, but connected and intersecting.

Thus, to understand the social forces shaping adolescent experience requires a

look at how various distinctions are constructed in everyday life. As previous

sociological analyses have shown, people navigate various social worlds by

using cultural toolkits and impression management techniques (symbols, stories,

rituals, language, etc.). Swidler's (1986) notion of a toolkit is useful in

understanding the maneuvers of young people within *World of Warcraft*,

although it might suggest too much freedom and choice to "pick the right tools"

in a social situation. In reality, cultural resources are simultaneously constraining

and enabling.

Adolescence is a sociologically intriguing period, because young people are in the process of replacing the toolkits of their childhood and learning to use adult tools and impression management techniques. In short, they are being socialized into the worlds of adults. Through trial and error, young people learn to use the appropriate tools in various environments (family, school, virtual realms, etc.) to validate their group membership or challenge people in positions of authority (Fine 2001).

Young people who were successful in the competitive raiding scene recognized the authority of certain cultural norms. They, not necessarily consciously, understood that in a professionalizing game environment they had to present themselves as professional, reliable and accountable individuals. For instance, Warkid talked about leadership and personal responsibility. Triumph believed that dedication and responsibility were keys to his success. Phil assumed that rationality, accountability and quantifiable facts helped him build his reputation as a mature and skilled raider. In an increasingly competitive game environment Rene highlighted the need to be detail oriented and prioritize certain aspects of his gameplay. These players used the right tools in this particular field of action.

This was not necessarily an accident or the outcome of conscious calculations. During the interviews and gameplay, these young players revealed their middle-class, bourgeois backgrounds. Their parents were professionals and they were trained from birth to become professionals as well. Even before their guild application, they were already predisposed to act in certain ways, function well in a professional, middle-class environment. Their successful use of a professional toolkit was not an accident or choice, but the outcome of the compatibility of this predisposition and what was considered mature behavior in the competitive raiding scene. Thus, this emature toolkit was devised through various class and gender experiences and socialization in family and peer groups. (Race did not factor into my analysis, although it is likely an important factor as well.) The more linguistic and cultural capital young players possess (the more emature they are), they have a better chance to take advantage of these resources and present themselves distinct from other teenaged gamers.

This perspective is most commonly associated with the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1984). Bourdieu's close attention to language, linguistic field and habitus (1991) is of particular interest, because the majority of social exchanges in virtual worlds happen through typed or VOIP chat. Legitimate language rules in

the observed guilds were not necessarily codified or these rules are rather vague,

painting a picture of linguistic plurality or freedom. Yet, players managing the

stigma of immaturity have to obey certain symbolic language rules. Young

players' linguistic practices are measured against what is considered legitimate

or mature practices, even though these language rules are not closely followed

by people in positions of authority. Thus, the use of foul language or sexist

references might be accepted, even praised if used by adult players; however it is

inappropriate for teenagers. The language used by young people is classified and

classifying at the same time (see Bernstein 1964).

The use of slang and Internet language by emature teenagers was not

uncommon. It was speech specifically designed to be valued in certain social

fields. However, if the market conditions within which these expressions were

received and valued did change, emature teenagers had no issue in changing to a

professional language. A great example to demonstrate how young players

switch to this emature toolkit when they face an "age-challenge" or changing

market conditions is the following exchange between Ray, a guild officer in his

mid-thirties, and Blunt, a sixteen year old male player. This conversation

happened in the general guild chat.

Ray: WTF?

Blunt: ?

Ray: We geared Jumpa and he left yesterday. Now he is in [a prestigious competitor guild]. We geared him and taught him how to play. What a bitch.

Blunt: Thats fcked up man.

[Longer Pause – communication is likely in privileged, backstage channels]

Blunt: Just called out that little bitch in trade. He isnt man nough to respond. Fuck him. I can pwn his ass.

Ray: Dude, we are not dealing with our issues publicly, so back up.

Ray: Also, spelling is not optional, unless you want to look like you are 13.

Blunt: Sorry Ray. I just got pissed. I should have handled this more professionally.

Players often leave competitive guilds that require tremendous amount of time, dedication and commitment or seek membership in more prestigious guilds. In this case, a player named Jumpa used the guild as a jumping board to gather better equipment and gain experience in order to get accepted to a different guild. Ray, the guild officer, was upset and showed his anger in chat accessible to guild members only. Blunt, a teenager who was on a try-out period for the guild responded in-guild, but also used a public communication channel called "trade" to express his frustration. The speech norms of the guild allowed members to use

foul language. In fact, after twelve months of participant observation, it was apparent that any racial, ethnic or gender slurs were acceptable. Or at least they were not contested too forcefully. Yet, when a teenage member failed to obey group boundaries and did not maintain the face of the guild, he got challenged.

Language rules were rather relaxed in the observed guilds; however teenagers often found themselves in social situations resulting in age-degradation. Similar to the Messerschmidt's notion of masculinity challenge (2000), these young players faced an age-challenge where they had to rely on their predisposed mature habitus, or ematurity, to mend a socially subordinating situation. In the above example, the age-challenge came as a guild officer and authority figure demanded proper and professional demeanor and language use from a teenager.

A patterned and durable instrument, age-challenges were most often issued and resolved from switching from the language of warrior masculinity to the language of professional masculinity. Warrior masculinity or warrior narratives (Jordan and Cowan 2004; Connel 1989) are organized around the themes of hyper-masculinity: power, domination and aggression. It is a contextually appropriate speech form, yet, when faced with an age-challenge,

young people must be skilled to switch toolkits and engage in a professional

discourse, evoking themes of rationality, responsibility and sociability. Young

people like Triumph or Blunt display professional masculinity through their

emature cultural toolkit, presenting themselves as "dedicated", "productive" and

"professional". This masculinity is "closely connected with the 'certification'

function of the upper levels of the educational system" (Connel 1989:291).

As Messner documented in the first chapter of his brilliant book, *Out of*

Play: Critical Essays on Gender and Sport (2007) and Laberge and Albert (2000)

reaffirmed, access to various linguistic resources and cultural toolkits is shaped

by race, class and gender structures. Recently, variationist sociolinguistics

(Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003; Mallinson and Dodsworth 2009) started

exploring the patterned nature of relationship between intersectionality and

language variation. In *World of Warcraft*, I call adolescents' socially recognized

and accepted mature linguistic and social performances emature. Ematurity as

an adolescent toolkit is an impression management technique that relies upon a

middle-class habitus and the uses of professional masculinity discourse. Young

people from privileged class, and to a lesser extent gender, backgrounds have a

better chance to possess the emature cultural toolkit (including the possibility to

use the language of professional masculinity when faced with an age-challenge).

In this sense, offline intersectionality maps on the virtual realms and stratifies

young players.

CHAPTER FIVE

EMATURITY, HABITUS AND REFLEXIVITY

The good player does at every moment what the game requires. (Pierre Bourdieu)

Sociological theories are essentially the products of practical concerns: they arise in response to social phenomena that is not explained or not adequately explained by existing scholarly approaches. While studying the experiences of young *World of Warcraft* players, I found myself gravitating towards the scholarship of Pierre Bourdieu. I used his concept of habitus to address to complex issue of generational sociology. I relied on a customized iteration of habitus that I labeled ematurity, to try to explain the journey of young players trying to become full-time members of guilds that are set-up to limit membership based on age. While my research project was not an exercise in using Bourdieu's framework, it quickly became my most often used theoretical tool.

During my ethnographic fieldwork I became aware of an extremely important debate about the relevance of Pierre Bourdieu's scholarship. Recent sociological research (for instance, see Archer 2010) suggests that habitus as a set

of dispositions generating durable, generative and transposable practices, perceptions and attitudes lost its significance in the 21st century. It is possible, the argument goes, that with the development of global capitalism, modern technology, the dismantling of working-class culture and shrinking pool of "similars and familiars", habitus as a master disposition is no longer able to provide an adequate implement to understand individual biography. Margaret S. Archer believes that reflexivity and not routine or habitus is the driving force of human action. Bourdieu's defense is that habitus, (and in the context of my research, linguistic habitus) is the result "of a long and slow process of acquisition, […] and which are therefore adjusted, without any cynical calculation or consciously expressed constraint" (Bourdieu 1991:51).

This debate had considerable impact on several European scholarly contexts. From my vantage point, it appears that these discussions are not as salient in American sociology. Nonetheless, I realized early that *World of Warcraft* is an ideal research setting and a great metaphor to become engaged in this debate: it is a product of global capitalism and a product, and driving force of new technology. Young people navigate a stratified social space often still foreign to their parents and teachers. In an earlier publication (Lukacs 2011), I

was wondering if my data will be able to shed light on whether ematurity is acquired through a reflexive process, it is the result of earlier socialization or a maybe hybridization of these two practices?

In this chapter, I would like outline the basic parameters of this conversation and, relying on my empirical data, argue that reflexivity is predicated upon certain socialization processes and the existence of valued social capital within a given field. In fact, I would like to suggest that the various reflexivities outlined in Margaret Archer's seminal work (2012) are examples of habitus in action and not evidence of the futility of Bourdieu's framework in the 21st century.

Habitus and the Hysterisis Effect

Bourdieu's grounded social theory is an attempt to fuse the subjective, personal, phenomenological experiences of individuals with the objective, structural social systems. His work is a sharp critique of the individual versus society dualism that has gained a prominent position in social sciences dominated by physiological, individual-focused analysis. Bourdieu's project is to understand how individual actors construct their social world together, based on already existing social systems.

Habitus is a structured structure that develops through socialization and creates limitations on human action based on what is possible or unlikely for a particular group in a stratified social world. Weber refers to these as common life chances or class (1978). On the other hand, it is a structuring structure since it generates perceptions, aspirations, practices and narratives that correspond to the earlier socialization. Habitus is the dialectical treatment of the problematic of agency and structure.

Fields represent diverse social settings in which habitus operates. Fields are the location of production of goods, services, knowledge and where the struggle to capitalize various cultural resources takes place. The social world has a great variety of semi-autonomous fields, such as art, religion, and higher education. Bourdieu argues that when an actor's habitus is aligned with the habitus of the field, they are able to succeed.

Bourdieu develops the concept of habitus and field as a critique of theories minimizing the importance of social structures and celebrating the freedom of individual agents. He is also wary of scholastic approaches that advocate that social actions are results of deliberate, conscious decision makings:

> The idea of "voluntary deliberation"… leads it to be assumed that every decision, conceived as a theoretical choice among theoretical possibilities

> constituted as such, presupposes two preliminary operations: first, drawing up a complete list of possible choices; secondly, determining the consequences of the different strategies and evaluating them comparatively. This totally unrealistic representation of ordinary action, which is more or less explicitly applied by economic theory which is based on the idea that every action is preceded by a premeditated and explicit plan, is no doubt particularly typical of the scholastic vision (Bourdieu 2000:137-138).

In spite of Bourdieu's intentions, some argue that habitus and field is rather deterministic (see Jenkins 1982) or that the operation of habitus is predominantly subconscious, therefore never intentional (Alexander 1995). Some scholars go as far as simplifying habitus as habitual action. Defenders of Bourdieu argue that habitus should be perceived as a mediating mechanism between the individual and objective social structures (Harker 2000). Bourdieu rejects the notion that habitus operates along the paths of mechanical determinism and maintains that habitus produces infinite possibilities that are relatively unpredictable, even if they are limited in their diversity (Bourdieu 1990). That is, habitus must not be seen as a principle of determination, but a generative structure.

Additionally, Bourdieu's intention is not to bridge the structure versus agency dualism, but to dissolve it dialectically. In fact, this conflation of human agency and structure is a major ontological chasm that separates Pierre Bourdieu and Margaret Archer.

Archer's critique of Bourdieu stems from a dualistic approach to the question of structure and agency. Archer believes in the ontological primacy of the former over the latter. Her earlier work (1995) developed the theory of morphostatic-morphogenetic continuum, essentially arguing that structure and agency operate on different timescales.

Archer believes that as long as the separation between the subjective, personal, phenomenological experiences of individuals and the objective, structural social systems is not maintained, sociology cannot attempt to empirically understand human action. As Archer argues, the conflation of structure and agency, a cornerstone of Bourdieu's work, explain too much without explaining anything.

On the other hand, Bourdieu is opposed to the strict separation of structure and agency: their dialectical fusion is at the core of habitus. Therefore, habitus is relatively resistant to change, since early childhood socialization is the formative period of habitus. While there's an ongoing adaptation to social conditions, given the structuring structure characteristic of habitus, it does not fundamentally alter dispositions. As a master pattern, habitus transcends cognitive, normative and corporal dimensions of human action. Nevertheless,

Bourdieu believes that the sudden reconstructuring of the "life world" can alter

habitus much faster than its adaptation under normative circumstances.

Values, expectations and aspirations amalgamate together in habitus.

Structural lag or hysteresis effect refers to a structural mismatch between

aspirations and real probabilities. Bourdieu uses the May 1968 crisis in France in

Homo Academicus (1988) to explain how the rapid educational expansion in post-

war France lead to the devaluation of educational credentials and a

misalignment of expectations and opportunities.

In fact, the lion's share of Archer's theoretical critique of the relevance of

habitus in the 21st century is focused on the perpetual mismatch between the

weight of history, expectations and structural affordances. Occupational and

workplace shifts, changing norms of community and social ties and the impact of

consumer culture created a "shrinking pool of 'similars and familiars' available

as potential and durable interlocutors because many class mates, work mates,

and neighbors will have embraced some element of their new opportunities or

have had novelty thrust upon them" (Archer 2012:86). For Archer, habitus lost its

explanatory power and only reflexivity remains.

Archer and the Reflexive Imperative

Reflexivity refers to internal dialogues through which individuals are able to articulate their personal values and expectations. Further, these reflexive deliberations evaluate the social circumstances that hinder or enable personal projects. These internal conversations condition individual responses to particular, even rapidly changing, social conditions.

The core of Archer's argument is that objective social circumstances generate various affordances, individual concerns, and subjective projects. Social action is the outcome of reflexive deliberations mediating between the objective and the subjective. However, these internal conversations are not alike. Archer's qualitative project (2012) is to develop a typology of reflexivity and try to explain behavior as an outcome of this typology. Of course, she acknowledges that these reflexive practices overlap:

- Communicative reflexivity refers to internal conversations that require an interlocutor to confirm the validity of these personal dialogues before they result in action. Communicative reflexivity requires "people who can understand and enter into the subject's concerns and preoccupations to such an extent that they can complete and confirm their friend's tentative

thoughts (Archer 2012:147). Archer believes that habitus is most closely related to communicative reflexivity and late modernity makes communicative reflexivity considerably costly and unsustainable, because familiarity and similarity upon which communicative reflexivity depends is harder and harder to maintain.

- Autonomous reflexivity means purposeful, autonomous instrumental deliberation. Archer argues that autonomous reflexivity develops because natal repertoires and habitual action are no longer suitable to guide behavior. She goes as far as to suggest that "extreme practitioners to autonomous reflexivity come closest of all to acting like the 'rational man' of Rational Choice Theory" (2012:34). Autonomous reflexives have deep investment in the practical order and value their independence over friendship.

- Meta reflexives problematize the social order, rather than internalize or normalize it. This critical detachment could intensify personal stress and social disorientation. Additionally, a "major consequence of their critical disengagement from their natal background is their adoption of an exploratory outlook toward the social" (2012:208).

- Fractured reflexivity refers to internal conversations that tend to create stress and disorientation. Archer writes that fractured reflexives "admit to huge difficulties in making decisions, in defining courses of action to be consistently pursued and, above all, in engaging in anything more than the survivalist's day-to-day planning" (2012:248). Archer further dissects fractured reflexives, but that discussion is beyond the scope of this short overview.

Archer believes that social origins are no longer able to guide individuals through intense and perpetual social change that is the characteristic of advanced capitalist societies. In this sense, she argues that structural lag or hysteresis is a permanent fixture of everyday life and therefore reflexivity becomes the basis of social action. Additionally, as marginally noted above, given increased geographical mobility, educational credential inflation and greater cultural diversity, communicative reflexivity becomes more and more unattainable and/or unsustainable. These are increasingly favorable conditions for the development of other reflexivities: autonomous, meta and fractured.

One of most important criticisms directed towards Archer is that her attempt to understand reflexivity overvalues human agency and minimizes or

discounts the role of social structures in guiding action. It might be true that "socialization is not what is used to be", but that statement is hardly revolutionary. Socialization has never been frozen in time. In fact, as discussed earlier, generational conflict was part and parcel the outcome of changing social structures and socialization patterns.

The problem is that in order to empirically prove the diminishing effect of habitus, socialization and social structures on human action, Archer must bracket and isolate social actors. That is, she overlooks a priori life experiences and only uses current vocabularies of action for her analysis. This is a real important methodological concern. Not just for Archer, but for any scholar who attempts to study social biographies and tries to highlight the significance of one social fact or condition over others. Indeed, my data is not sufficient enough to engage in a comparative discussion either, although I believe that the patterns emerging in my field notes are relevant enough to raise some questions.

Archer's argument that socialization fails to prepare contemporary generations to navigate the ever-changing technological society is not grounded enough. It works as a hypothesis, but her data does not provide a strong-enough foundation. Her latest work (2012) provides the most empirical data, but the

examples she uses to prove her point are less than satisfactory. She studied

college students, which already presupposes the presence of certain cultural and

educational capital and indeed signifies a disposition. Yet this is not really

discussed. Rather, Archer uses the examples of young university students

creating stories, vocabularies of actions, post-hoc rationalizations to attempt to

explain their educational and personal trajectories. As pointed out above, this is

methodologically problematic.

Internal conversations in Archer's theory are presented as isolated inner-

dialogues void of social contexts. In fact, her unit of analysis is always the

individual. Peer-groups, discursive decision making, societal influences and

structural affordances are seldom considered. Again, subjects appear without

history and previous experiences. They are like Lockian newborns and are able

to author their own souls every time they rely on their reflexive toolkits. But this

approach disregards important questions. How do certain social concerns

develop and why are some important while others are not? How do subjects'

vocabularies develop and allow them to have these internal conversations? In

fact, as Caetano (2015) points out, reflexivity is analyzed as the cause of specific

actions and not as the effect of social processes. Most importantly, Archer is yet

to explain how various reflexivities are acquired. What role do family origins, socializations and dispositions play? The "crux of the biscuit" is not whether people are capable to reflect on their social situations in various ways, but how do they develop and acquire certain capitals to be reflexive.

Reflexivity also fails to account for the relative lack of social mobility and continued inequalities. If reflexivity is a personal project than we could expect autonomous reflexives to succeed regardless of family origins, socialization and the pre-existence of financial, cultural, social and network capitals. Yet, as numerous studies continue to highlight, these resources do matter significantly in determining one's social trajectory. One could possibly theorize that reflexivity is a form of social capital that part and parcel develops through socialization. Yet, this fundamentally contradicts Archer's argument.

There have been attempts to bridge the chasm between habitus and reflexivity (Elder-Vass 2007; Adams 2006; Sweetman 2003; Farrugia 2013; Mouzelins 2008). As some contemporary sociologists argue, the end of organized modernity signified a shift in how individuals construct their social selves: the presentation of self is becoming increasingly flexible, individualized and it is reflexively constructed through various available image and ideology

depositories. However, this construction is predicated upon certain dispositions and habitus. Without various generative capitals that are valued within a given field, individuals have diminishing potential to succeed regardless of their ability of conscious reflexive deliberation. Given my empirical data, I maintain that the importance of habitus in determining social biographies greatly outweighs reflexivity. In fact reflexivity is a form of disposition.

Young Gamers, Habitus and Reflexivity

Beyond academic debates, habitus is essentially a practical concern: as long as the concept frames the observed behavior in meaningful ways, it is relevant. If it does little to explain how people interact in various situations and navigate through their everyday experiences, the concept needs revision or a new, alternative theory must be developed.

My project was predominantly focused on communication, language, presentation of self and interaction. During the interviews participants were able to provide their interpretation of various processes, yet I deemed their actual actions, behavior and biography more important than their vocabularies of action. Post-hoc reconstructions of events often transform necessities into

strategies, constraints and preferences. Therefore, I believe my contribution to this debate is practical and data driven, rather than purely theoretical.

I maintain that *World of Warcraft* represents a new social environment where habitus, dispositions and the possession of various forms of generative capitals remain essential. Successful young raiders are able to operate effectively in this social setting when there is a clean affinity between their dispositional conduct and their position within this particular field.

Archer believes that social origins do not prepare young people for the contexts and flows of change in contemporary societies. Therefore, she highlights the importance of reflexivity. Yet, her central focus of looking at social action through the lens of reflexive deliberation minimizes the role of social structures and institutions and overvalues human agency (Caetano 2015).

My interview data is revealing in this regard. While social class does not necessarily correlate to economic class, I believe my interview protocol gathered adequate evidence (demographic background, aspirations, career goals, leisure activity, media consumption, hobbies, etc.) to code the class position of the respondents. Table 3 shows the class and gender composition of the youth interview sample. All respondents identified themselves as white/Caucasian.

Table 3. Social Class of Youth Interview Participants

	Working-Class	Middle-Class
Female	0	3
Male	1	11

Fourteen of these young people were members of competitive raiding guilds.

The one exception, Floyd introduced in the previous chapter, was the only one I

classified as working-class. He was not a serious raider, although he was a

tremendously talented PVP player. Unquestionably, this tiny sample is not

adequate to propose any correlations. And the purpose of this ethnography was

fundamentally different. Additionally, it would be foolish to suggest that Arena

and PVP is more suited to working-class youth. At the same time, as I argued

before, serious, competitive raiding is an adultist social space. The probability of

success for young people are already low, and it further diminishes without

being able to present emature social selves.

Social origins and privileged background were clearly visible while

talking to the young people I introduced previously. Mariel referenced her

grandmother, an ex-opera singer, as one of the most significant influences in her

life. During her teenage years she lived in many countries, because her father

was a manager/engineer and worked for a global oil company. In fact, her class

position closely resembles of what Sklair (2000) calls the transnational capitalist

class. Phil lived a more conventional, suburban life. His parents had traditional

white-collar managerial occupations: his father was involved in city government

("politics and stuff" as he put it), while his mother worked in the high school as a

counselor. Warkid's parents were divorced and he split time between his

accountant father and social worker mother. Josh's father was a widowed

academic researcher. Josh didn't talk about his mother during the interview, and

I only learned about his mother from his dad during the pre-interview consent

process.

All of this background information is important when we look at their

gaming biographies from a sociological standpoint. Their success was predicated

upon being emature, thus having middle-class cultural and social values and

aspirations. As Annette Lareau (2003) brilliantly shows, parents' social-class

impacts the life experience of children in powerful ways. She argues that

discussions between parents and children are a hallmark of middle-class

parenting. Organized activities, organized and supervised by parents, dominate

the lives of middle-class children. This active "development", or as Lareau puts

it, concerted cultivation, creates a strong sense of entitlement. This entitlement

becomes increasingly important in institutional settings where middle-class youth learn to question adult authority and interact with adults as equals.

Not surprisingly, *World of Warcraft* and competitive gaming was not always popular among the parents of young people. While they managed to fit raids into their busy schedules, sometimes it was the cause of family tensions. Mariel got in trouble for staying-up too late or sneaking back to continue raiding after her bedtime while living with her grandmother.

But because competitive raiding is so structured and scheduled, it fits into the lives of adolescents who live structured and organized lives. For instance, Rene had an extremely busy schedule with extra-curricular activities ranging from sports to music lessons to church activities. At the same time, he promised full raid attendance during his interview and was always present when the raid invitations were sent during my fieldwork. Yet, he did not have the luxury of hanging-out before or after raids, he did not use *World of Warcraft* as a social space. He was extremely goal oriented during raids and left right after the session was over.

Some parents used the game and their knowledge of the game as an opportunity to talk about "real life". Phil's father was a casual gamer who

logged-on occasionally. As Phil told me during our interview, his father started

playing in-order to understand why his son prefers to spend his limited free-time

in a virtual space. Once he understood the game and found out the reasons his

son was often transferring from game server to game server and from faction to

faction, he used these experiences as metaphors for "real life". He leveraged

Phil's feelings, opinions and thoughts to address the process of finding a job,

keeping a job and advancing in one's career.

Discursive parenting is a cornerstone of middle-class child rearing.

Discussions offer teaching opportunities for parents and help blur the line

between adults and children. Young people learn that their opinions and

thoughts matter and feel that their reasoning skills and knowledge is valued.

Conversations help the development of vocabulary and lead to greater verbal

agility, more comfort with authority figures and familiarity with abstract

concepts. These skills are not only useful in educational and traditional

institutional settings. They are transferable to other fields as well. In fact, I

observed most of these skills being used by emature young people in *World of*

Warcraft.

While observing recruitment interviews, I realized that some adolescents did a much better job at preparing for the interview. They knew what was expected of them and knew how to answer questions in ways that made them look more mature, knowledgeable and serious. During interviews, I observed young people asking for a minute to gather their thoughts when they were unsure about their answers or when the interview was less amicable than probably desired.

Spud was a young aspiring raider, whom I played with for months. He chose not be interviewed for this project, or reveal a lot of information about himself. At the same time, he had no objections to my presence as a researcher-observer during playing sessions.

Gradually, I learned about his emature self. First, while I was observing his recruitment interview, and later throughout our gaming sessions as well. I recorded the following interaction while he interviewed for a raiding spot in the Silver Hammer guild. Rick was leading the recruitment interview:

> Rick: I will be honest with you. I looked through you application and I have some serious problems.
>
> Spud: What problems?
>
> Rick: Well. Let's start with your glyphs. They are okay, but not really optimal for raid healing. Second, your UI looks very crowded and non-

user friendly. I'm not sure how you see your toon or the raid environment through that mess. Seriously…

Spud: Is that it?

Rick: Yes. Isn't it enough?

Spud: Give me a second please. Let me organize my thoughts.

Rick: Sure.

[15 second silence]

Spud: So glyphs. Those are consumables and I use what is best for the raid, not what is best for my HPS. I am a team-player. I was asked by my old guild leader to re-glyph and I did that. I think that actually makes me a better player, a team player, because I'm willing to sacrifice personal performance for the good of the raid. Also, we are on farm content right now, so HPS is not really an issue. May I ask you the reason you care about my UI?

Rick: We want to make sure you run all the boss-mods and you are set-up for optimal performance. Your UI is part of that.

Spud: Well, I understand that minimalistic UI is a hipster thing to do. But this works for me. And I think my logs prove that. Honestly, I will not change my UI just because it doesn't appeal to you. It works for me. That's that.

In *World of Warcraft* glyphs are spell and ability enhancements. They allow

players to fine-tune their characters based on the type of play they are engaged

in. There are optimal glyph setups for leveling, PVP, raiding, etc. They can be

swapped any time and raiders often swap them before boss fights to optimize

performance. In this case, Spud's character was not set-up optimally for end-

game raiding and was challenged for that during the interview. Interestingly, he instantly turned this criticism into a positive, highlighting that he is willing to sacrifice his performance to make it easier for the group to succeed.

The game also allows players to modify and customize their user interface (UI) with third party add-ons, skins and other tools. Without some of these add-ons competitive raiding is not possible. Therefore, guilds often check the UI set-up. Rick had some issues with Spud's setup. Truth to be told, it did appear extremely busy and confusing. What is interesting here is that Spud did not panic. He asked for some time to gather his thoughts and was unapologetic about his UI arrangement. This highlights the fact, that some young people were more comfortable interacting with authority figures. Emature young people were comfortable to challenge people in positions of authority, make requests, demands and even offer ultimatums. This is a learned behavior and it is the result of the intergenerational transmission of differential advantages of the bourgeois, middle-class habitus.

Spud did not get an invitation to Silver Hammer, but I was able to follow his raiding career closely until the end of my fieldwork. He became invaluable for the guild that eventually accepted him. He never cleaned-up his UI.

Finally, I would like to highlight one more sign that middle-class children

benefit in ways that is often invisible to them, from a degree of similarity

between their cultural repertoires, habitus and the standards adopted in

competitive raiding. Competitive raiding is all about maximizing player

effectives, or more precisely maximizing group effectiveness. Players must

prepare their characters optimally: distribute skill points perfectly, understand

the break points of various game attributes where further increases result in

diminishing returns. They must perform optimal skill, spell and ability rotations.

Players learn these optimal strategies by reverse engineering the game and

calculating damage, healing and other coefficients that are not available for the

general gaming population (Nardi 2010). This complex mathematical and

statistical analysis of important game mechanics is called theorycrafting. The

name was coined by the *Starcraft* gaming community by combining the words

Stracraft and game theory.

Theorycrafting is a core aspect of competitive raiding. While these

calculations and abstract theories are available in public gaming forums, they are

often exceedingly complex. It is possible to boil down the findings into simple

choices. But players who are able to understand these abstract concepts could

gain a distinct advantage in the game. To join these debates, to contribute to the

theorycrafting community, one must possess the necessary educational

background and an affinity towards abstract thinking. Middle-class parents'

approach to child rearing that is rooted in discussion and conversation not only

leads to better linguistic agility, more advanced vocabularies and more comfort

with authority figures, but also to more familiarity with abstract concepts

(Lareau 2003). Phil, introduced in Chapter Four, is a clear illustration of this latter

point. As he admitted, he played the game for the numbers. He was an

instrumentally rational powergamer. He was a regular contributor to various

theorycrafting discussions, often showcasing his advanced mathematical skills. I

argue that his social class and habitus provided him with a clear advantage to

participate in these discussions. His success in the theorycrafting community was

not due to any reflexive deliberations, but the affinity between his habitus and

the given field.

    World of Warcraft is an ideal research setting to empirically test whether

social origins, social class and habitus fail to prepare young people to participate

in social settings that are exceedingly foreign to their parents. Even with the

emergence of transnational capitalism, the ubiquity of new media and computer

technology, and the restructuring of traditional working-class neighborhoods, it is clear that middle-class youth are more emature than young people from less privileged backgrounds. The fact that emature people are more reflective and able to navigate the social worlds of competitive raiding is not evidence of the demise of habitus and class-based differentials. It is habitus in action.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

William Sims Bainbridge calls *World of Warcraft* more than a game, more

than an allegory of today, but a virtual prototype of tomorrow (2010). With its

perpetual wars, irrational hatred of other races and struggle for depleting

resources, certain aspects of the game narrative resembles contemporary global

capitalism. Yet, beyond representations and the game as a media object, players

create a lively, dynamic and often contradictory social world using the toolkits,

ideologies and resources of today. They bring their skills, imaginations,

aspirations, hopes, prejudices and fears into the virtual realm and fuse it with the

representations and storylines provided by game developers and operators.

One of the consequences of the availability of massively multiplayer

online games and virtual social spaces is adolescents heightened exposure to

generational fresh contacts. While the interests of different generations were

traditionally bound to diverge in a systematic and predictable way, virtual

worlds attract adolescents and adults at the same time. Therefore, young people

have extensive access to adult social worlds and cultural content. Traditional

generational boundary maintenance processes are less effective given that digital representations often hide visible markers of identity, such as age.

Generations are often understood as a group of individuals of a specific chronological location only. However, it is important to highlight that generations are also a political and cultural category. Generational differences manifest themselves as cultural dispositions, language, postures, communication style, etc. Intergenerational conflict is boundary negotiation: a powerful generational unit attempts to create social closure to protect material or cultural resources. This generational gatekeeping is often achieved through the creation of credentials or other status distinctions.

Young people are part of several social worlds: family and kin networks, school, same-sex and cross-gender peer groups. While all of these environments are embedded into the larger social fabric, various settings require different standards of behaviors. Young people learn to navigate these social spaces through trial and error and attempt to use appropriate cultural toolkits and repertoires of action to justify themselves to people in positions of authority and validate their group membership.

The intention of this research project was to demonstrate that from a generational standpoint, *World of Warcraft* is not a neutral social space. Age is a very important dimension of inequality and distinction in virtual realms. While not explicitly recognizable, players are stratified based on their age: they are prohibited to join certain virtual groups and player networks; or constantly have to manage age-based stigmas when participating in social interaction with older players. Adultism, as a patterned mistreatment of young people solely on the basis of their age is an omnipresent, yet hardly acknowledged cultural code in *World of Warcraft*. This cultural code is often used by adult players and internalized by adolescents who struggle to define their social selves against confident characterizations and stereotypes.

The intergenerational dynamic of a *World of Warcraft* subculture described in this manuscript is the product of permanent conflict, negotiation and boundary-work within the game space, as well as symptoms of larger societal processes. The online social worlds of multiplayer video games are similar to offline settings in a lot of ways. Participants must obey certain behavioral standards and follow established rules and moral codes to participate. Despite accounts of online democracy and networked individualism, control and

authority is central to the functioning of these environments. These power-

relationships are structured by technological protocols and affordances.

However, within the social space created by computer technology, participants

actively create and recreate cultural customs shaping experience.

The game itself is a giant digital theme park where players can engage in a

variety of activities. Most of these activities require players to form or join

persistent social groups, known as guilds in the game. Based on the game

structure, these virtual tribes have a hierarchical, almost dictatorial social

organization with one person having all executive and administrative power.

Participation and membership in these social networks is demanding and closely

resembles organized sports and work.

While intergenerational networks are omnipresent in the game space, my

research focused on one particular activity: competitive raiding. Competitive

raiding, just like organized competitive sport, requires carefully selected,

committed members and a significant time investment. Not surprisingly, the

most successful of these virtual tribes are often controlled and populated by

adult players. Virtual tribe leaders and officers are able to set membership

criteria: age limitations, prior experience in virtual worlds, attendance

requirements, etc. A large number of guilds that enjoy high status attempt to administratively eliminate adolescent membership. The rationale behind stratifying membership based on age is the explicit notion that while adolescents might have the skills and technological competencies to be valuable contributors to the virtual tribe, their psychological and social immaturity make them incompatible with a social group that is shaped by adult male cultural codes. Soliciting membership based on age lines resembles offline social practices limiting certain behaviors to teenagers following biologically and psychologically deterministic developmental models (alcohol consumption, voting, driving, etc.).

Other competitive raiding guilds allow adolescent membership only after a rite of passage, where the adolescent must prove certain gaming skills and technological competencies along with social skills to participate in the adult culture of the persistent social group. These adolescents must be skilled in impression management and possess the cultural know-how not to appear immature or childish. Guild membership allows adolescents to access an adult social world as equals, which is fundamentally different from other social settings they are familiar with (family, school, etc.). While adolescents might start their tribal initiation process with the ascribed stigma of age, at the end of the

process, after demonstrating certain social skills, they are evaluated based on their achievements and reputation management. In fact, age as a stratifying structure becomes less and less meaningful. While in most social worlds adult-youth interaction depends on adult authority, some virtual tribes can transgress this division.

Transgression of this age boundary is not too common, yet it is not impossible. Young people can and do gain access to competitive raiding guilds as more or less equal members, although they have to juggle the stigma of age. The majority of social exchanges happen through written or voice-based chat channels. Therefore, young players rely on various linguistic skills and other cultural, social capitals to portray an image of maturity.

Throughout my fieldwork, I learned that young people seeking membership in competitive raiding guilds did not have to be mature. In fact, most guild leaders and recruitment officers did not have a good definition or a set of criteria of what maturity actually was. Adolescents were successful if they were able to define themselves against confident characterizations and stereotypes. In essence, they had to be different than the "average" teenage

player. I developed the term emature as an attempt to capture the essence of this presentation of self.

Based on participant observation and interview data, I maintain that young players from privileged backgrounds have a better chance to possess the cultural toolkit called ematurity. This cultural toolkit is forged through various socialization experiences in family and school. Social class appears to be the main foundation of ematurity, although gender had some impact as well. This habitus permits adolescents to diffuse age-challenges and maintain desirable and acceptable social selves in an adultist environment.

Recent sociological research suggests that habitus as a set of dispositions generating durable, generative and transposable practices, perceptions and attitudes lost its significance in the 21st century. As the argument goes, with the development of global capitalism, modern technology, the dismantling of working-class culture and the shrinking pool of "similars and familiars", habitus as a master disposition is no longer able to provide an adequate implement to understand biography. Margaret S. Archer believes that various forms of reflexivity and not routine or habitus is the driving force of human action (2010).

World of Warcraft was an ideal research setting and a great metaphor to empirically engage in this debate. The game is a product of global capitalism and a product, and driving force of new technology. Young people navigate a stratified social space that is often unknown to their parents and teachers. Additionally, contemporary commentators are often afraid of and hostile to virtual worlds and advocate disciplinary measures and increased surveillance to protect young people from generational fresh contacts.

Based on data collected through interviews and participant observation, I discovered that privileged social class background was an asset in gaining access to and participating in the adultist competitive raiding community. Having middle-class cultural and social values and professional aspirations did not affect the gaming skills of young people in visible ways, although numerous studies have established that access to high-speed Internet correlates to social class. However, becoming part of the competitive raiding community was not determined by gaming skills alone. There are hundreds of competent players for each raiding spot available. Earning the title of "raider" in a top-ranked guild was as much about social skills as about gaming skills. This is where young people with middle-class backgrounds and aspirations, had a distinct advantage.

Emature young people had great verbal agility and extensive vocabularies. They were comfortable with authority figures and were at ease during their recruitment interviews. Additionally, they were not afraid to ask special favors or even challenge people in position of authority and control. Their familiarity with abstract concepts and ability to understand and process complex streams of information helped them engage in instrumentally rational powergaming, including theorycrafting, and gave them a distinct advantage over other young players who lacked these skills. Overall, coming from privileged backgrounds and being able to conduct themselves in ways that were valued in the competitive raiding community helped these young people to become full-time members of the elite raiding scene.

Reflexivity was not evident in their actions. Rather, they had a sense of entitlement. I interpreted this as the presence of middle-class cultural and social capital. This disposition, or habitus, is acquired through family and secondary socialization. Based on my data, it appears that young people from middle-class, professional families benefit from a degree of similarity between the cultural repertoires and practices in the home and the standards and expectations adopted by the competitive raiding community.

My study of the generational dynamic of this powergamer subculture in *World of Warcraft* is limited to a specific time, space and geographic, or in case of an online ethnography, server location. I believe this is one of the strengths of this research: it is grounded, and it includes the perspectives of young people. Unfortunately, most studies of virtual realms and gaming communities exclude adolescent players due to Internal Review Board restrictions. While my data has its own limitations, I believe that the overall findings of the study are valid and very likely transferable to other complex interactive video games, virtual environments and social media.

The pace of technological change in the 21st century appears to be astonishing, although contemporaries of past historical epochs had described their experience similarly. Is it possible, that historical distance and time organizes "the history of the present" and makes it more palatable, yet more simplified as well? *World of Warcraft* was a complex, messy, contradictory and ever-changing research setting. While I presented the story of intergenerational relationships within this social space in a streamlined and focused manner, it is important to acknowledge that I encountered many sociologically interesting topics to document and investigate.

An important question to consider is how to save and document the

history and culture of these video games? The software as a medium or artifact is

easy to archive. This makes the preservation of single player games as historical

documents of a particular era relatively easy. However, massively multiplayer

online environments are hollow without the user community, because players fill

the silent technological space with meaning. Even saving the software is a futile

exercise: massively multiplayer games need constant connection to a game

server, the client-side software alone is non-functional.

Therefore, it is important to document and record the everyday life of

communities that exists inside these game environments. I believe that beyond

the broader findings and theoretical contributions, this work is valuable precisely

because it captures the story of a particular group of people at a particular time.

As an interpretive microsociology, the history of the guilds, players and the

process of play and leisure is a valuable artifact.

At the same time, sociologists maintain that games are extensions of the

society in which people reside. As Taylor argues, multiplayer online video games

are situational and reliant not simply on abstract rules and codes but also on

social networks, attitudes, technological abilities, structural constraints, cultural

dispositions and personal understanding of leisure (2006). Games represent

another social location from which people communicate and interact with one

another on a global scale, yet they are also produced by and at the same time,

reproducing various relations of ruling. Game scholars have adopted only bits

and pieces of this complex, intersectional sociological framework. Thus, our

social scientific knowledge about games is dominated by an individual and

cultural focus, rather than the organizational and group focus that sociologists

provide (Henricks 2006).

I believe that by presenting the sociological perspective systematically,

this work is able to connect player biographies and localized gamer idiocultures

with larger societal developments, existing structures of power and domination.

Sociology, rather than being antithetical to the current debates within the field of

game studies, can contribute to our existing scholarly knowledge about video

games and multiplayer online play. Throughout this research project I made a

conscious effort to stay away from the "game studies" literature as much as

possible in order to demonstrate how this systematically sociological framework

can be utilized to explore a hidden, latent social world of video game play.

Game scholars have a tendency to study virtual realms on their own terms. This approach only considers the visible manifestations of other lifeworlds. Nonetheless, meaning and culture is just as much constructed around what is invisible. There is a complex interplay between presence and absence. Personal biographies and social conditions might not directly manifest within virtual realms, yet they do influence social interaction in powerful ways. Age is one of these important, yet almost invisible markers of difference in virtual realms.

Additionally, game scholars often focus on games as "cultures" and players as "identities". While these approaches are useful, it is also important to acknowledge how power is produced and reproduced by publishers and gamers and how social exclusions (class, race, gender, etc.) in virtual environments are reproduced. The social structure of inequality is not deterministic. But it exists. Phil, Mariel and Warkid might play different characters, belong to different guilds and play on different servers, but they have important aspects of their lives in common. They all share similar dispositions, they all possess valued social and cultural capital. They rely on these resources to succeed in various social settings and fields of action, including virtual spaces.

Several sociologists have studied video games, players and fandom. Nevertheless, the willingness of the broader sociological community to take virtual gaming seriously is rather underwhelming (Crawford 2011). Additionally, most sociologists approach video games as media text only, focusing on representations of race, ethnicity and most commonly violence and masculinity. These studies often acknowledge that the meaning or the decoding of media texts is culturally and socially determined and not given. Yet, they fall short of moving beyond video games as an "object" of study. I believe that massively multiplayer online games and virtual worlds are sociologically interesting, because beyond the shell of the media texts, players create their own idiocultures. The meanings people attach to their play and the pleasures of their fantasies cannot be dismissed as simply consequences of the social structure of technology. Participatory media spaces represent complex social worlds and its study from a sociological perspective should always keep its interactive nature in focus.

The approach of focusing on games as predominantly media texts is not only an academic concern. The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) is a self-regulatory organization that assigns content and to a lesser extent interactive

element rating to video games. The video game rating systems in the United

States and Canada has elaborate categories and content descriptors. *World of*

Warcraft is rated as "Teen" with the following additional descriptors: "Blood and

Gore", "Crude Humor", "Mild Language", "Suggestive Themes", "Use of

Alcohol" and "Violence". These all refer to the game as a media-text. However,

user experiences during interaction are just as important. While the ESRB uses

additional qualifiers, such as "includes online features that may expose players

to unrated user-generated content" and "Online Interactions Not Rated by the

ESRB", these ratings do little to inform parents and young people about the social

worlds and idiocultures that exist inside these media spaces. Maybe such

analysis is not a reasonable undertaking in a policy environment. Therefore, I

believe that academic research that moves beyond content analysis is invaluable.

This dissertation project was designed to explain how adolescents create,

manage and experience certain behaviors, meaning and structure in a particular

commercially successful persistent online world through the lens of symbolic

interactionism. While it is the documentation of online idiocultures at a

particular place and time, it furthers the sociological understanding about

adolescence, intergenerational friendship, sociability, cultural production and the

everyday world of video game play. Interactive, participatory media will

continue to be a central part in the lives of young people. These observations

might be valuable for adolescents, parents, teachers and policy makers alike.

APPENDIX A

METHODOLOGY

The literature on youth – adult social spaces, in particular research about digital media is scarce. Some quantitative survey research do exist (see Griffith et. al 2004), however these approaches do not adequately address youth - adult intergenerational relationships, boundary work and document the cultural toolkits adolescences use to prove social maturity in order to maintain membership in competitive virtual tribes. Qualitative researchers, using participant observation and interview methods, have documented various aspects of virtual communities and online culture in intergenerational research settings, yet youth was not a central category in these analyses. In fact, most analyses actively avoid the question of youth to escape issues revolving around parental consent and IRB reviews.

To situate adolescences more immediately within the realities of their lives, this research project used a qualitative data gathering approach. Since the project involved subjects that are deemed vulnerable by the IRB, the research protocol had to pass a Full-Board IRB review[2].

After the initial conversations with the IRB, where I proposed to observe teenagers in a virtual realm, acquiring permission seemed almost impossible.

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[2] An earlier version of this section was published in Lukacs (2010).

The skeptical and cautious stance of the university was not surprising and boiled

down to two factors: their lack of understanding of virtual realms in general and

their unawareness of precedent ethnographic studies in particular. Even though

ethnographical methods aim to maintain the "purity" of the research setting, the

concerns of the IRB over informed consent were legitimate. The distinction

between private and public sphere is unsettled when it comes to the Internet.

While Judson and Bruckman (2004) maintain a strict definition of privacy and

shows that chat room participants had reasonable expectation of privacy, *World

of Warcraft*'s Terms of Use allowed the operator to monitor communication.

Legally, players acknowledge that their actions could be recorded by Blizzard

Entertainment, yet how could we inform them that among the hundreds of

players online, one avatar represents a social scientist? Could we look at these

game environments as public spaces, similar to previously studied coffee houses,

bookstores and bars? How does technology mitigate this distinction?

I engaged in lengthy conversations and meetings with IRB members in

hopes that I can familiarize them with the virtual setting and secure permission

to observe non-minors as the first step. I learned that taken for granted categories

within the gaming community needed to be explained in great detail.

Throughout our correspondence "vent" conversation became labeled "push-to-

talk conference calling", while "guilds" were referred to as "persistent social

groups". It was a great exercise in learning to converse with a non-specialized

audience, to explore the regulatory practices and legal texts governing digital

gaming and demonstrate the importance of my proposed project.

The second stage of gaining access was removing the age restriction:

excluding minors would have made it impossible to understand their

intergenerational experiences as native, subjugated knowledge. The initial

research plan waived parental consent for interviews and used a modified assent

form for 13-17 year old participants based on the Association of Internet

Researchers Ethics Guide (Charles Ess and the AoIR Ethics Working Committee

2002).

Additionally, the plan waived both consent and assent for the participant

observation segment, although participating guilds announced research intent

in-game and on their website, one guild even created a "Researcher" rank to help

establish "shallow cover". I was invited to attend the Full Board Review of the

proposal to present the justification of my waiver request. While the final

approved version required verbal parental permission to interview, it provided

an opportunity to explore the life world of teenagers deeper: access to parents helped contextualize the social experience of teenagers.

Through participant observation and semi-structured interviews, my research project successfully broke down the generational, institutional barrier between myself and the youth population (Fine and Sandstrom 1988). As Susan Herring (2008) cleverly points out, to understand situated knowledge, one must consider the radical possibility of seeing youth not only as subject of the study, but also as collaborators. Accordingly, collaboration and camaraderie was one of my goals while selecting the methodology.

I used participant observation as a data gathering tool to understand the social dynamics of virtual tribes. This fieldwork was invaluable in establishing myself as a researcher in various competitive raiding communities and gaining the trust and friendship of future interview subjects. Experiencing the everyday life and the cultural codes of various guilds, especially paying attention to authority and intergenerational cultural toolkits, helped me to develop the interview process and establish probing questions. More importantly, participant observation helped "ground" the research project and established a clear theoretical argument for my project.

To best understand the nature of intergenerational play in multi-user online game environments and explore whether young players across different servers had similar experiences, I logged almost 5,000 hours of actual playing time in *World of Warcraft* on different U.S. game servers. The game is running simultaneously on multiple independent servers. This lowers individual server traffic and makes parallel versions of the game technically more stable. From a sociological perspective, it allows users to develop unique server cultures, customs, etc. I recorded data both on the Horde and Alliance side, playing in Player-Versus-Environment (PVE) and Player-Versus-Player (PVP) settings and experiencing Role Playing situations on RP servers. During the data collection process I developed social networks through various guild affiliations, experienced tensions, frustrations, boredom, success and pleasure during gaming sessions. I made numerous friends, both young and old. Most of the data used for this research was collected while playing competitive end-game content, 10 and 25 man raid instances. Throughout these gaming sessions I took screenshots of noteworthy chat discussions, sketched notes and used voice recording software to capture relevant conversations, because typed chat

communication is usually limited when voice chat is used by players to

coordinate their activities. Data collection took place between 2010 and 2013.

While I am self-critical, self-conscious and self-reflective about this

methodology, I believe that this critical ethnography "reveals truths that escape

those who are not so bold" to look (Fine 1993: 290). In other words, the

idiosyncratic, mundane and taken for granted events in virtual realms must be

approached with methodological vigor.

Participant observation was the foundation of my interview protocol.

Through snowball sampling, I generated a large pool of participants from two

distinct user groups. The first group included young players between the age of

13 and 17 who were members of competitive, ranked raiding guilds or who went

through the application process. Before the interviews, I contacted the parent or

legal guardian of potential participants to ask for parental consent. Additionally,

before the interviews I obtained assent from participants as well. The consent

and assents form are available in this appendix. I ended-up conducting fifteen

interviews with participants who experienced raiding as a minor: three with

female and twelve with male participants. Three of these participants were not

considered minors at the time of the interview, although they played

competitively as teenagers. The second user group included guild leaders,

recruitment officers and raid leaders from highly ranked, competitive guilds.

Thirteen respondents were recruited from this group. I conducted 35 interviews

in total, seven key respondents were interviewed twice.

These interviews were conducted on private Voice-Over-Internet-Protocol

(VOIP) software resembling traditional phone interviews. Semi-structured, open-

ended interviews focused on the following topic areas:

- Demographics

- Entry to the game environment

- Friendship patterns within the game

- Membership in serious raiding guilds/virtual tribes

- Guild life and conflict management

- Age and intergenerational experiences

- Experiences of inequalities and boundary work.

Interviews lasted between twenty minutes and four hours. Interview scripts for

both user groups are available at the end of this appendix. I am aware that this

small sample does not provide an accurate representation of the whole gaming

population, yet as a critical field worker I maintain that language and discourse

are essential to understand the lived experience of young players and the social

construction of age-difference.

I transcribed all the data, including field notes, screenshots and audio

recordings. I wanted to ensure that my respondents are not recognizable to

others in the quotations and narratives I present in the manuscript. Therefore,

following the practices outlined by Robert. S. Weiss (1995) I dropped or changed

place names, servers, guilds and factions. Where occupation was not essential for

the argument, I tried to find substitute occupations with similar kinds of work. I

also gave multiple pseudonyms to a respondent and used these proxies to

further ensure that the identity of respondents remain confidential. I believe that

the changes I made were substantial enough to provide disguise, yet did not alter

the human elements that were essential part of the respondents' biography.

After the data from the participant observations and interviews were

transcribed, I read all of the material to extract common themes and patterns.

The findings were then coded in a two-stage process following the grounded

theory model of Glaser and Strauss (1967).

Consent to Participate in Research for Participants over 18

Andras Lukacs, ABD

Department of Sociology

Loyola University Chicago

Tel: 773-508-3451

alukacs@luc.edu

You are being asked to participate in a research study being conducted by

Andras Lukacs, a doctorate candidate in the Department of Sociology at Loyola

University of Chicago. The title of the project is E-mature: Adolescent Cultural

Toolkits in Intergenerational Virtual Tribes. Please read this document carefully

and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to participate in

the study.

<u>Procedures, Rights and Confidentiality</u>

By verbally consenting to participate in the study, you agree to be

interviewed once, for one-hour in length. During this interview you will be asked

questions from the Researcher about your social experience of being a *World of Warcraft* player and the ways you use the game.

Additionally, you understand that the contents of this research will be used by the Researcher only for the purposes of his academic research, including sharing with colleagues at academic conferences and in academic publications, and that your anonymity will be respected (your real name will not be used, and no personal details will be disclosed that could reveal your real identity). You may choose whether you want the interview to be audio recorded, and understand that these recordings will be destroyed after the interview has been transcribed by the Researcher. If, during the course of the interview, you feel uncomfortable about any questions that are asked of you, you can refuse to answer at any time during the interview, or ask for the interview to stop. You are under no pressure to answer all of the questions, and you have been told by the Researcher that you can stop at any time

You understand that your interview and identity (including identifiers within *World of Warcraft*) will remain confidential. Your anonymity will be protected through the use of a pseudonym (a made-up name) when the Researcher is analyzing the material and in his publications and conference

presentations of this research. You understand that transcripts of interviews will be kept in a secure manner. Contents will be kept on an encrypted, password secured computer at the Researcher's office for a period of between 5-10 years after the date of publications, and will only be available to the Researcher.

<div align="center">Benefits of the research</div>

There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. There are no direct benefits to you from participating, however, the knowledge we gain from this study has great social benefits. In particular, it will allow us to outline the complexity of adolescent experiences in virtual social world and the benefits that come from playing such games, in addition, to any cautions we should observe.

If you are concerned about any of this research, you can talk to the Researcher or contact Loyola University of Chicago:

- Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Talmadge Wright, Department of Sociology. 773-508-3451 or twright@luc.edu

- Compliance Manager in Loyola's Office of Research Services: 773-508-2689.

<u>Statement of Consent</u>

If you agree to this procedure, simply say yes to the interview to the

Researcher when asked at the beginning of the interview to indicate your

approval.

Assent to Participate in Research for Participants aged 13-17

Andras Lukacs, ABD

Department of Sociology

Loyola University Chicago

Tel: 773-508-3451

alukacs@luc.edu

You are being asked to participate in a research study being conducted by Andras Lukacs, ABD, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Sociology at Loyola University of Chicago. The title of the project is E-mature: Adolescent Cultural Toolkits in Intergenerational Virtual Tribes. You are being asked to participate because you are an adolescent (aged 13-17) playing *World of Warcraft*. Please read this document carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether to participate in the study.

<u>Procedures, Rights and Confidentiality</u>

By verbally assenting to participate in the study, you agree to be interviewed once, for one-hour in length. During this interview you will be asked

questions from the Researcher about your social experience of being a *World of Warcraft* player and the ways you use the game.

Additionally, you understand that the contents of this research will be used by the Researcher only for the purposes of his academic research, including sharing with colleagues at academic conferences and in academic publications, and that your anonymity will be respected (your real name will not be used, and no personal details will be disclosed that could reveal your real identity). You may choose whether you want the interview to be audio recorded, and understand that these recordings will be destroyed after the interview has been transcribed by the Researcher. Regardless of reasons, you may opt at any time to not respond to particular questions or stop the interview completely. You are under no pressure to answer all of the questions, and you have been told by the Researcher that you can stop at any time

You understand that your interview and identity (including identifiers within *World of Warcraft*) will remain confidential. Your anonymity will be protected through the use of a pseudonym (a made-up name) when the Researcher is analyzing the material and in his publications and conference presentations of this research. You understand that transcripts of interviews will

be kept in a secure manner. Contents will be kept on an encrypted, password secured computer at the Researcher's office for a period of between 5-10 years after the date of publications, and will only be available to the Researcher.

<div align="center">Benefits of the research</div>

There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. There are no direct benefits to you from participating, however, the knowledge we gain from this study has great social benefits. In particular, it will allow us to outline the complexity of adolescent experiences in virtual social world and the benefits that come from playing such games, in addition, to any cautions we should observe.

If you are concerned about any of this research, you can talk to the Researcher or your parent(s). Your parent(s) can also contact Loyola University of Chicago if they, or you, have questions about your rights as a research participant.

- Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Talmadge Wright, Department of Sociology. 773-508-3451 or twright@luc.edu

- Compliance Manager in Loyola's Office of Research Services: 773-508-2689.

<u>Statement of Assent:</u>

If you agree to this procedure, simply say yes to the interview to the Researcher when asked at the beginning of the interview to indicate your approval.

In-Depth Open Ended Interview Protocol for Participants aged 13-17

Date:

Avatar Name/Server/Faction:

<u>Parental Starting Script</u>

You are about to take part in a research project conducted by Andras Lukacs from the Sociology Department of Loyola University Chicago. You should know that you do not have to answer any questions which might make you uncomfortable and you may quit the interview at any time for any reason. This interview is confidential and your avatar, guild and server name will not be used. Details of this project are posted on the following website: [Link]

- Thank you for your interest in this research project. Did you have a chance to visit my website and read about the research and your rights as a participant?

- May I speak with one of your parents or guardian to verify that they allow your participation in this project?

Script Directed to the Parent/Legal Guardian

- Hi. My name is Andras Lukacs, I am a researcher at Loyola University of Chicago. I would like to talk to your child about his/her experience playing the *World of Warcraft* video game. Did you have a chance to visit my website and read about the research and the rights of your child as a participant?

- Do you have any questions?

- Do you understand the rights of your children as a participant?

- Do you consent to have your child interviewed?

Parental background questions

- Would you mind answering a couple simple questions to gather some background information about your child?

- What is your marital status? (married, divorced, single, widowed, etc.)

- What is your occupation? What is your spouse's occupation?

- Where do you live? (country, state)

- Do you play any computer games? If so, what games do you play?

- Do you play videogames with your child?

- Does your child have his/her own computer in a private room? Does he/she share a computer with other family members?

- Do you regulate the gaming time of your child? If so, do you use the parental controls offered by *World of Warcraft*?

- What is your general impression of *World of Warcraft*?

<u>Participant Starting Script</u>

- Do you have any questions regarding this study or your rights as a participant?

- Do you assent to be interviewed?

- Demographics and Background

- How old are you?

- What is your gender?

- What is your race/ethnicity?

- Are you currently a student?

- What are your plans after graduating? (major, type of career, etc.)

- What are your interests, hobbies?

<u>Entry Questions</u>

- How did you begin playing *WOW*? What got you interested in playing the game?

- How long have you been playing *WOW*? How many hours per week do you estimate you play?

- How interested are you in the game now as opposed to when you started?

<u>Age, Adultism and Cultural Toolkits</u>

- Did you ever encounter social situations when young people like yourself were discriminated against or talked down to based on age?

- Did you ever encounter the same social situation in a guild setting? How did you deal with it?

- How do people "know" the age of certain players in *WOW*?

- Can you recall any social situations when you tried to hide or conceal that you are young? Explain.

- Have you ever felt uncomfortable participating in voice-chat during a raid because you were self-conscious about your voice?

- Are you comfortable giving advice, criticism and commands to older, adult players? Do you find that they listen to you and value your opinions? Explain.

- Do you think age matters when playing *WOW*? If so, how?

- What is your experience with other teenagers playing the game?

<u>Social Networks and Virtual Tribes</u>

- What guild does your main character belong to? Since when?

- How did you choose this guild?

- Does your guild have a significant number of teenage players? If not, why not?

- Does your guild have a significant number of adult players?

- Are guild officers (guild master, raid leaders, etc.) adults, teenagers, both?

- What kind of "guild drama" have you witnessed? Was age ever a factor in guild drama?

- Do you think adult guild members have an advantage over you (promotion, authority, etc.)?

- Who are your closest friends in *WOW*? How did you meet them? How old are they?

- Do you play *WOW* with people you know offline (friends, siblings, parents, etc.)?

- What is the opinion of your closest offline friends about *WOW*? Explain.

Language and Policing Behavior

- Do people ever criticize you when you make grammatical errors or use improper English? Explain.

- Some players of *WOW* use explicit language. Do you ever trash-talk and taunt other players? Explain.

- Are you comfortable with the adult language of *WOW*?

- Have you seen anybody using racial, sexual and gendered language in guild chat? What was the reaction from other members/officers?

- Does your guild warn people to use appropriate language because teenagers are present?

- Does conversation in guild chat or during raids become "rated R"? Are you comfortable listening to/being part of these conversations?

Thank you for agreeing to be in this study.

In-Depth Open Ended Interview Protocol for Participants over 18

Date:

Avatar Name/Server/Faction:

<u>Starting Script</u>

You are about to take part in a research project conducted by Andras Lukacs from the Sociology Department of Loyola University Chicago. You should know that you do not have to answer any questions which might make you uncomfortable and you may quit the interview at any time for any reason. This interview is confidential and your avatar, guild and server name will not be used. Details of this project are posted on the following website: [link].

- Thank you for your interest in this research project. Did you have a chance to visit my website and read about the research and your rights as a participant?

- Do you have any questions regarding this study or your rights as a participant?

- Do you consent to be interviewed?

<u>Demographics and Background</u>

- How old are you?

- What is your gender?

- What is your race/ethnicity?

- What is your marital status? (married, single, widowed, etc.)

- Do you have any children? If so, how old are they? Any of them play video games? What games? Do you play together?

- What is your occupation? What is your spouse's occupation?

- Where do you live? (country, state)

- What are your interests, hobbies?

<u>Entry Questions</u>

- How did you begin playing *WOW*? What got you interested in playing the game?

- How long have you been playing *WOW*? How many hours per week do you estimate you play?

- How do you regulate your gaming time. Do you use the parental controls offered by *World of Warcraft* or self-monitor?

- How interested are you in the game now as opposed to when you started?

- What is your general impression of *World of Warcraft*?

Age, Adultism and Cultural Toolkits

- *WOW* is a multigenerational social space. What is your general opinion about playing with people who are much younger or older than you are?

- What is your experience playing with teenagers in general?

- Did you ever encounter social situations when young people were discriminated against or talked down to based on age?

- Did you ever encounter the same social situation in a guild setting? How did you deal with it?

- How do people "know" the age of certain players in *WOW*?

- Have you ever felt uncomfortable playing the game because other players were much younger than you are? Explain with specific examples.

- Are you comfortable giving advice, criticism and commands to young players? Do you feel younger players need/require special treatment? Explain.

- Do you think age matters when playing *WOW*? If so, how?

<u>Parent – Children Play (optional)</u>

- Do you play *World of Warcraft* with your children? Does your child have his/her own *WOW* account?

- Does s/he have characters on servers/in guilds where you are not present?

- Does your child have his/her own computer in a private room? Does s/he share a computer with other family members?

- Do you regulate the gaming time of your child? If so, do you use the parental controls offered by *World of Warcraft*?

- Are you concerned about your child's access to adult content/harassment through general and guild chats?

- Have you ever intervened on behalf of your child to protect him/her from trolling and verbal abuse? Please explain.

- What are the benefits of allowing your children to play in a multigenerational environment? What are the risks?

<u>Social Networks and Virtual Tribes</u>

- What guild does your main character belong? Since when?

- How did you choose this guild?

- Does your guild have any explicit or informal policy limiting membership based on age?

- Does your guild have a significant number of teenage players? If not, why not?

- Could you give specific examples of young players that are/were important to your guild? How would you compare their social and gaming skills to adult members?

- Does your guild have a significant number of adult players?

- Are guild officers (guild master, raid leaders, etc.) adults, teenagers, both?

- What kind of "guild drama" have you witnessed? Was age ever a factor in guild drama?

- Do you think adult guild members have an advantage over younger players in your guild (promotion, authority, raid invites etc.)?

- Who are your closest friends in *WOW*? How did you meet them? How old are they?

- Do you play *WOW* with people you know offline (friends, siblings, children, etc.)?

- What is the opinion of your closest offline friends about *WOW*? Explain.

Language and Policing Behavior

- Some players of *WOW* use explicit language. How does the presence of

  young players change the language during gameplay?

- Does your guild warn people to use appropriate language because

  teenagers are present?

- Are you comfortable with the adult language of *WOW*?

- Have you seen anybody using racial, sexual and gendered language in

  guild chat? What was the reaction from other members/officers?

- Does conversation in guild chat or during raids become "rated R"? Are

  young players comfortable listening to/being part of these conversations?

Thank you for agreeing to be in this study.

APPENDIX B

ADULTIST GUILD APPLICATION FORM - SAMPLE

These documents were retrieved on August 15, 2015 from the website of the

Encore guild (http://encoreraiding.enjin.com/). At that time, Encore was ranked

55th in the world, twelfth in North America and second on their server.

Disclaimer: to the best of my knowledge, neither this guild nor any of its

members were part of my research project.

Recruitment Information

Guild: Encore

Server: Illidan (U.S.) - PVE

Progress Ranking (Tier 18)

World: 55   Region: 12   Realm: 2

<u>Recruitment Information and Application Form</u>

We are always recruiting extremely skilled players. Do not hesitate to

apply even if we have several of your class. The most skilled players will be

raiding, guaranteed.

<u>Current Top Recruitment Spots</u>

- Tank – All

- DPS – Shadow Priest/Warrior

- Healer – Resto Druid/Resto Shaman

    - <u>Previous Progression - Always Improving</u>

- Siege of Orgrimmar - U.S. #22 25m Heroic Garrosh

- Throne of Thunder - U.S. #44 25m Ra-den

- MSV/HoF/ToES - U.S. #102 25m Finish

- Dragon Soul - U.S. #115 25m Heroic Madness of Deathwing

- Firelands - U.S. #128 25m Heroic Ragnaros

For those of you interested in joining Encore, you should know and that we are

foremost a *WOW* progression raiding community. However, Encore has a

gaming community that expands far beyond the scope of most other guilds. With

numerous alt runs, sales runs, competitive CMs, DOTA games, and random

group runs through (often terrible) steam games, Encore sets itself apart as a

family of gamers that enjoy not just the game(s) we play, but the people that we

play with.

Before applying, understand that we are looking for exceptional players

only. We are not looking for individuals who plan on flaking out after a tier or

two. We are not looking for individuals who need to be coached on their

class/spec. We are not looking for someone who plans on logging in, collecting

loot, and disappearing until the next raid. Priority for spots will always be given to the player who performs at the highest level, and it should be noted that if you lack experience and gear from the current tier, you will need an extremely exemplary resume and learning curve to make the cut.

To apply, make an enjin account so you can gain access to the forums, and click on the "Apply to Encore" button at the top of the page to find out what Encore can offer you, and potentially join the team. If you have any questions, feel free to PM the officers listed below via the website, or in-game: [List of officers]

We will never raid more than 4 nights/week (12 hours/week), even during progression.

<div align="center">Time Schedules</div>

Monday 08:00PM TO 11:00PM

Tuesday 08:00PM TO 11:00PM

Wednesday 08:00PM TO 11:00PM

Thursday 08:00PM TO 11:00PM

<div align="center"><u>Guild Focus</u></div>

- 18+

- Hardcore

- Raiding

- Progression

- Must have vent

Application Form

So you are interested in applying to Encore. Read the guild "About Us" section before applying.

An applicant will have his app reviewed by all raiders/officers in Encore and various questions may be raised regarding spec/rotation/glyphs, and pretty much everything that can be questioned or reviewed. Be sure to check back often during the week. Weekend responses might be slower - Thursday post raid until Sunday - as we like to get some sun.

If everything looks good and we have a potential trial spot you will be contacted by PM on the website or through your application. The PM will include our vent information.

When you accept your trial you will have a time period of 4-10 weeks where you are "trial" status. We use a Loot Council system and you will be considered lower than my shit this morning while a "trial". You will earn your raider spot in Encore through performance/preparation/fit within the guild. It is possible that a raider may pass loot to you, but it is their decision.

The average trial lasts five to six weeks - during each week an officer will contact you about your performance. If by Monday you haven't heard directly (1

on 1) from an officer please contact one of us. If it goes longer than six weeks,

chances are you are performing borderline in one of the areas listed below and

have been told multiple times in your weekly check-in. Expectations will be

pretty simple:

- Learn the strategies we employ.

- Execute any jobs assigned you.

- Research ways to improve yourself constantly.

- Maximize DPS/HPS/Survivability while doing the aforementioned duties.

<p align="center">Additional Information about "Trial" Status</p>

- Vent is free for your use, don't be rude if someone else is in a channel - we
  have plenty of empty ones.

- Forum Access to our strats is listed once you are a trial - you can post in
  them if you wish but you are expected to know them.

- You are welcome to bring alts/friends into the guild - if you fail your
  "trial" they will all be removed.

- If you are lucky enough to make it to "Raider" - you will receive further
  forum access as well additional duties within the guild. This will also give

you an opportunity to read your "trial" thread and see what others noticed about you.

What We Expect From Our Raiders

- Progression - Do your research on the boss encounter and not the achievement

- Class - You should have a strong knowledge of your class and expect to perform at the highest level possible.

- Gear - All gear should be gemmed / enchanted / and reforged properly

- Raid Invites - Invites go out 30 minutes prior to raid. It is your duty to be at the instance for fully ready to raid at the time of invites.

- Vent - We expect all members to communicate

- Dedication - If we are close on a boss kill we will push at most 15-20 minutes after raid.

- Bench Time - Players will be switched out for progression when your class is not as desirable as another.

What We Do Not Want

- Players who just started playing this game.

- Players who can't own up to their own mistakes when addressed by others.

- Players who rage quit when given stressful jobs.

- Players who like to complain about loot.

- Players who can't handle sitting for a boss when it will be beneficial to the raid.

- Players who cannot make all of our raids with a 95%+ attendance.

Application

- Name, Age, Current Location:

- Character:

- Armory Link:

- *WOW* Character Name:

- *WOW* Server:

- Primary Spec:

- Secondary Spec:

- Please provide your Real ID or Battletag:

- Explain your gemming/forging. (This includes any breakpoints at which your stat priority changes).

- Please explain in detail any and all talents or glyphs that you would switch out and why, for this Tier's bosses.

- Please post an image of your UI in a raid environment

- What are your computer specs?

- Speed Test: http://www.speedtest.net. Post an image of the result.

- Availability for raids: we expect 90% attendance for main raiders and 100% for trials. (Schedule: Monday-Thursday 8-11 server)

- Link any recent logs/parses that you think displays your understanding of your class.

- Previous endgame raiding experience (be specific as to whether it was on a character that isn't currently your main).

- List all Encore members you know (if any), and how you know them. What will they have to say about you?

- What is your reason for wanting the join Encore? What do you expect from us and in return what do you bring to the table that will help us achieve our goals?

- Encore is a guild that has rapidly improved over time and continues to do so. What steps do you take to stay ahead of the curve and continuously better your personal performance?

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