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When Actual Meets Virtual:
Values, Perceptions and Experiences in World of Warcraft

(Spine Title: When Actual Meets Virtual)

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by

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Graduate Program in Anthropology

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
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Master of Arts

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Abstract

World of Warcraft, a Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game, is a rich, complex virtual world where people play and interact without leaving their physical space. This thesis examines the ways in which *World of Warcraft* players bring their values, perceptions, and experiences into the game space through several different avenues: gender, sexuality, sex, race, ethnicity, and multinationalism. I discuss how this affects players experience of the game and community, as well as how it influences player identity. Through their behavioural assumptions and actions, players bring aspects of each of the listed avenues into the game, which changes the way interactions occur, and how identity is experienced.

Keywords

World of Warcraft; MMORPG; video game; gender; sexuality; sex; race; ethnicity; multinationalism; community; identity

For Patrick and Gaye Whippey, who always believed

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Introduction

The virtual is the anthropological.

- Boellstorff 2008:237

[It's] about playing between worlds - playing, back and forth, across the boundaries of the game and the game world, and the "real" or nonliteral game space.

- Taylor 2006b:17

An audience gathered to watch the arena battle forming before them. Gleaming steel flashed as the rogue brought his blade down, the druid wheeling back in a desperate attempt to avoid the blow. The mage's hands waved rhythmically as a blast of blue light shot from them aimed directly at the druid's heart. The blow was unavoidable. The druid sank to his knees as the world around him went dark. There was a bare second of silence before the watching crowd exploded with cheers.

From the back of the crowd, I watched as six players stood up from their computers and shook hands. The only sign of the finished battle was a fine sheen of sweat across their foreheads. The giant screens behind them showed their avatars, who displayed the scars of the fight. The battle for the title of *World of Warcraft* Arena Champion was over. I was struck by the enthusiasm shown by the thousands of attendees of the Blizzard Worldwide Invitational 2008. It was at this moment that I realized the magnitude of the relationship between the actual and virtual within *World of Warcraft* (WoW).

World of Warcraft is a game; a rich, complex virtual world where people play and interact without leaving their physical space. It is one of the most popular Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGs) today. Since its release in November 2004, the WoW population has grown to over 11.5 million people worldwide¹ (Blizzard 2008a).

Virtual worlds, such as WoW, are places of human culture, brought to life by computer programs and the Internet as well as those who play them (Boellstorff 2008,

¹ Other MMORPGs have not yet reached this milestone. *Final Fantasy XI* had over 500,000 users as of 2008 (Sundi 2008), *Lord of the Rings Online* was estimated to have between 800,000 and 1,000,000 players as of 2007 (Vella 2007) and Taylor (2006b) reported *EverQuest* as having a population of 420,000.

Castronova 2005). These worlds have three fundamental elements: they are places, are inhabited by people, and are enabled by online technologies (Boellstorff 2008:17). The concept of the virtual world is one that is familiar in popular culture. Literature and film, such as William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) or Tad William's *Otherland* (1998) series, as well as films such as *The Matrix* (1999) trilogy and *The Lawnmower Man* (1992) have explored ideas and issues surrounding virtual worlds.

Virtual worlds are seen as analogous, separate, yet connected to the actual world (Golub 2007). Millions of people take part in these communities, whether it be through WoW, *Second Life*, a chat room, or other forms of virtual communities. Currently there are at least 220 active Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOGs), although many of these are exclusive to South East Asia (BBC 2009). MMOGs are becoming important because events inside the games are affecting the actual world (Castronova 2005) and events in the actual world influences the gaming community. For instance, in 2006, the Joint Economic Committee of the United States Congress announced an investigation into the commerce taking place in virtual worlds (BBC News 2006). The blurring of lines between the actual and virtual worlds means that cyberspace, and thus virtual worlds, are no longer just places; they have become a potential way of being (Markham 1998:114).

Networked social games (such as WoW) need to be studied, as they are a social phenomenon: they are a new form of community and social interactions that are becoming normative faster than we have been able to collect data, analyse, or theorise (Williams 2006:13). While reading the available literature on games, I began to ask myself where the boundaries between the 'virtual' world and 'actual' world lay. A number of works highlight the blurry line between the virtual and actual, including Boellstorff (2008), Castronova (2005), and Taylor (2006a, 2006b). Each author discusses the ways in which the virtual affects the actual, and vice versa, in a variety of ways. The boundaries between virtual and actual are crossed daily by those who inhabit these worlds. Individuals bring their behavioural attitudes and assumptions with them into each space (Castronova 2005:147), profoundly affecting their experience.

My research was designed with specific questions in mind: Do gamers bring their own values, perceptions, and experiences from the actual world into WoW when they play? How does this affect a player's experiences of the game and the community? How does this

affect player identity? These questions will be evaluated through three avenues: gender/sexuality, sex, and race/ethnicity/multinationalism. These three avenues are not distinct; they exist through and in relation to each other. This thesis will illustrate how aspects of the actual world can be drawn into the virtual, and the extent to which this affects the players. WoW is unparalleled in the MMORPG genre. It has a very large player population and provides a variety of activities in the game, making it an ideal game to study. It is a unique space and place to conduct research in, as WoW is a persistent 'virtual' world - one that exists on the computer and through the Internet - and is populated by millions of people through their avatars.

These research questions were selected after careful consideration and reflection. During my undergraduate research, I conducted a small study that examined the ways in which players' social and emotional needs and desires are fulfilled through the community in WoW. This led me to further question the ways in which the WoW community operated, the kind of experiences players may have, as well as how identity plays out within the game space. I was also largely inspired by Taylor's (2006a) work, "*Does WoW Change Everything? How a PvP Server, Multinational Player Base, and Surveillance Mod Scene Caused Me Pause.*" Taylor (2006a) conducted field research on an English speaking European server with a multinational player base, revealing several instances of players incorporating their nationality into their play.

The three avenues of research (gender/sexuality, sex, and race/ethnicity/multinationalism) were selected for this study due to their connected nature. Each of these categories provides individuals with a way of identifying themselves, for example, as male, female, straight, gay, white, or black. These avenues may also be based around visual interpretation in the actual world: people will often look at others and make assumptions based on gender, sexuality, race, or ethnicity. In WoW, it is impossible for players to see other individuals behind the computer screen: the only visual image available is that of the avatar. People may make judgments based on this virtual visual image. Each category will provide an example of how players bring aspects of their actual world values, perceptions, and experiences in the game space.

In chapter one, I will describe the methodologies that define and explain my research. An overview of WoW will also be provided. Chapter two will discuss the demographic

information of study participants as well as their play styles and choices. I will also examine how the WoW community is formed and how it functions. In chapter three, I look at how gender and sexuality exist in WoW, through the character choices that players make, how they identify their gender and sexuality as well as the ways in which players bring this into the game. Chapter four discusses the sexual experiences that players may have in WoW and how it is viewed by the community. Chapter five examines race, ethnicity, and multinationalism in WoW. I will demonstrate how players experience race, ethnicity and multinationalism by exploring the ways in which the game portrays these categories, and the cross-national nature of the game space. Lastly, I will conclude with a summary of the results of my research as well as suggestions for further research directions.

There are many terms to describe both online (virtual, synthetic, digital, artificial) and offline (real, actual, physical, tangible) worlds. Most of these terms, when juxtaposed against each other, imply that WoW is not real. Nevertheless, the distinction between the offline and online worlds is becoming less useful as online worlds become increasingly more prevalent and as the two spaces interact and change each other (Garcia et al. 2009:52). WoW exists constantly, regardless of how many players are actually in the game space at any given time. It is also a space that is very real to its players. The term 'real' indicates "that which is experienced" as well as "those experiences that occur offline" (Markham 1998:115). If real means that something exists independently so that people can verify its existence, then virtual worlds are real (Shields 2003). Thus, real versus virtual, as both a concept and as defining terms, is not a useful distinction (Wilson and Peterson 2002:455).

Finding appropriate terms to describe the difference between the physical world and WoW is difficult. "Virtual reality" is a reality that is part of human action and experience, not separate from it (Garcia et al. 2009:54). Boellstorff (2008:19) states that the virtual implies approaching the actual without arriving there. The gap between virtual and actual is critical, as without it, there would be no virtual worlds (Boellstorff 2008:19). I will use the term 'virtual' when referring to WoW, and 'actual' to describe the offline world. The juxtaposition of these two terms demonstrates that while WoW, a virtual world, and the actual, physical world are different in their scope and terms of existence, they are both very real.

Chapter One: Defining and Explaining Methodology

The field of gaming studies, or *ludology*, became an academic discipline within the last several decades. The study of online games makes up a significant part of the current gaming literature. The field is highly interdisciplinary, drawing from disciplines such as communication science, psychology, sociology, and computer science. Anthropology, however, has only recently taken an interest in Internet-based social and communication research. This area of social and communicative applications is relatively new and a coherent anthropological focus is only in the process of development (Wilson and Peterson 2002:450). This is true particularly in the case of online gaming, as it is a recent phenomenon. Nonetheless, anthropology is uniquely suited to the study of gaming cultures and communities because it provides a framework and methodology for the study of games and culture (Boellstorff 2006:30). As Boellstorff (2008:5) states in his ethnography of *Second Life*¹, “We are virtually human.” It is human nature to experience life through the lens of culture; humans have always been virtual (Boellstorff 2008:5).

Boellstorff suggests three ways in which anthropology can aid in the study of games. First, anthropologists can study game cultures as many games are developing their own cultural forms (Boellstorff 2006:33). Culture is present in WoW in several ways: Blizzard Entertainment, the creator of WoW, has borrowed various aspects of cultures from around the world in creating the cultures of WoW, players bring their own cultures into the game as they play, and customs evolve within the game itself. Second, the cultures of gaming can be studied; most people who play games participate in more than one game, and across genres (Boellstorff 2006:33). Examining the cultures of gaming includes many sub-cultures because these societies are emerging on a range of spatial scales and are shaped by a variety of factors (Boellstorff 2006:33). For example, these sub-cultures include youth, male versus female, or competitive versus cooperative gaming (Boellstorff 2006:33). Finally, Boellstorff (2006:33) posits that the gaming of cultures be studied as gaming becomes more significant in contemporary society. Each subsection within this topic provides a different view and

¹ Boellstorff, an anthropologist, has completed extensive research in *Second Life*, a virtual world which allows ‘residents’ to create and imagine the world, as well as socialize and interact with others in it. For further information, see Boellstorff (2008).

suggested avenue for the study of gaming cultures. In this research, WoW as a game culture in several forms is under study.

There is a debate surrounding the differences between conducting offline and online research. Forte (2004:226) states that ethnographic sites pre-exist the ethnographer, and the ethnographer comes to visit as an 'outsider'. The view of the anthropologist as an 'outsider' has long existed in the discipline. Those who are anthropologists in the usual sense of the word are thought to study 'others', coming to know a cultural world entirely different from their own (Narayan 93:671). Nevertheless, no anthropologist is truly 'objective', as each carry their own cultural backgrounds with them.

In the case of my research, I am not an 'outsider' to WoW. The debate over being an 'insider', 'native' or 'indigenous' anthropologist has existed in anthropology for several decades. Those who are considered 'insider' anthropologists are believed to write about their own cultures from a position of intimate affinity (Narayan 1993). Narayan (1993:676) argues that every anthropologist shows "multiplex subjectivity" with crosscutting identifications. Solutions to this debate include looking at ways we, as anthropologists, relate to people (Narayan 1993) or to write for multiple audiences (Abu-Lughod 1991).

In order to conduct research, it was essential to have a prior knowledge of and experience with the game. My experiences in WoW allowed me to obtain an understanding of the game and its mechanics, as well as make preliminary connections with several people in the community. I am native to this virtual world, a part of the community before the conception of this study. My prior knowledge and relations within WoW allowed me to gauge the kinds of information I would be able to obtain throughout my research. This can be compared to the preliminary fieldwork that is conducted by some anthropologists before they undertake an extended stay in the field.

It is important to have experience with the game being studied, for this can limit illogical leaps and misunderstandings. Games have different play styles and mechanics that researchers must be aware of and understand in order to participate in the game as well as communicate effectively with the community. The gaming community is beginning to speak

out against research on games done with little background knowledge.² For example, studies have been done comparing two games from entirely different genres and with incompatible play styles (Lavigne 2009). Games also contain a plethora of different terms which are not used in other contexts, ie: *noob*, a term used to describe a player that is new to the game or who is acting like a beginning player. The storyline and history of the game must be learned in order to contextualize gameplay. Without this knowledge, it would be difficult to conduct meaningful conversations with players, engage in participant observation, or negative responses may be received.

When examining online gaming communities, different methods, such as participant observation or surveys, may be used to obtain information about the community under study. Many ethnographic techniques currently in use in the actual world can be adapted to the study of online gaming, as ethnography has always produced a kind of virtual knowledge (Boellstorff 2008:5). Participant observation is an effective mechanism for studying online gaming communities, as it blurs the line between researcher and researched (Boellstorff 2006:32). It allows the researcher to participate in community activities and interactions without a large degree of disruption among the populace. Surveys allow a larger portion of an online population to be reached. Each of these methods are frequently used in the actual world and are also effective methods in the study of virtual worlds and games.

When conducting online ethnography, problematic issues may arise. The anonymity of the Internet means that it is difficult to verify the accuracy of participants' statements (Sade-Beck 2004:7). There is no way to visually verify information such as age, gender, or ethnicity (Wittel 2000:6). In WoW, it can also be difficult to ensure you are talking to different people, as some players have multiple avatars (commonly called *alts*) or may assume different identities when playing each avatar. Nonetheless, Wellman and Gulia (1999) found that Internet users tend to trust strangers and show willingness to communicate truthfully, perhaps due to the perceived anonymous nature of the Internet. The anonymity of the Internet, while providing the opportunity for people to be dishonest, does not mean that people will not be truthful. In fact, there is as much a chance of being misinformed via the

² This is not a reaction unique to the gaming community. Other cultural and social groups have spoken out against research completed with little or no background knowledge.

Internet as there is in person to person ethnography; in 'live' ethnography people also have the capacity to lie to a researcher.

Personal information is not the only information of value when studying online gaming communities. The community under study lives in a virtual world, and the players that participate in it are represented by the characters, or avatars, they control. Information can be obtained by observing the actions and conversations occurring in the game. By employing participant observation, the researcher can examine the gap between what people say and their actions (Boellstorff 2006:32). In the case of WoW, avatar-to-avatar interactions in the community are observed as opposed to person-to-person.

As most of the communication in WoW takes place in writing, the pattern of interpersonal communication is altered; layers such as speech tone and body language are lost (Sade-Beck 2004:7). There is a time lapse in the conversation as each person formulates and types their reply (Sade-Beck 2004:7). Typed conversation replaces visual and auditory cues used in the actual world. These points, nevertheless, do not constitute a major issue in the study of MMORPGs. This person-to-person environment is altered to a character-to-character environment.

Interacting via characters does not reduce the effectiveness of participant observation, it simply changes its nature. Casual conversation may be witnessed through observing public chat forums or by walking through the game. In WoW, characters have the ability to express emotions through emotes, turn of phrase, or in tone of voice if the player is using voice chat. The style of typing (words used, or way of spelling) may also be indicative of a player's emotions or thoughts. In a virtual world, the community can be observed by strolling around it, just like an actual community.

In addition to participant observation and in-game interactions, interviews and surveys are also useful in augmenting anthropological research, in both WoW and the actual world. These methods allow the researcher to ask specific questions of players, in an anonymous survey format or through interviews that take place either on- or offline. Interviews online can be conducted through a number of venues, such as in the game, through Windows Live Messenger, a instant messaging service, or through Skype, an internet phone service.

It is essential to obtain information from both online and offline, and in-game and out-of-game sources. It is difficult to complete ethnography of online gaming communities without including both an online and offline facet to the research. It has been found that there are very few research topics that justify limiting the field to solely online research (Garcia et al. 2009:56). As I will demonstrate, and others have noted³ ethnographers must alter research techniques to accommodate these new social spaces.

Ethical concerns may arise with the anthropological study of video games. For example, it is difficult to get written consent to conduct an online interview. It can also be challenging to ensure that minors have parental consent. As of 2002, the American Anthropological Association (AAA) did not offer any ethical protocols for online research (Sade-Beck 2002:461). A recent search of their website failed to locate any mention of the Internet in their Code of Ethics (AAA 2009). As anthropologists studying virtual worlds are unable to meet the people they are working with face-to-face, procedures to obtain informed consent and maintain privacy must be adapted from the current ethics procedures. Through discussions of methodology, I will highlight how ethical procedures were adapted in order to conduct online ethnography.

Before beginning my analysis, it is important to define the methodology and theory I will be using. I will provide a definition and brief discussion of the core concepts of my research: identity, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and nationalism. Identity is a theme that will be present throughout my thesis. In anthropological discourse, identity is defined as “*being the same as oneself*, as well as *being different*” (Eriksen 2002:60). Humans are layered with multiple identities that may shift, emerge, and recede as people interact with their immediate reality (Williams, P. et al. 2006). These identities may overlap or be complementary and it is the negotiation of these identities that allows individuals to interact in a variety of social contexts (Williams, P. et al. 2006). For WoW players, there is another side to identity: the basic premise of MMORPGs is to take on identities that exist within the context of the game (Williams, P. et al. 2006). This identity can be viewed as an alternative or additional identity that emerges when the player is engaged in the game.

³ See Garcia et al. (2009) for further discussion on ethnographic approaches to conducting research in online communities.

Gender is about social identity and is socially determined. It includes categories such as men and women, heterosexual and homosexual, and varies across space and time. Although gender can have different meanings in various contexts, there is a tendency for it to be envisioned as a dualism of male and female, men and women, or masculine and feminine (Corneliussen 2008:64). Both men and women are gendered subjects, but there are multiple ways of being in gender within a single space and time (Parr 1990:10). In its simplest contemporary usage, “gender” has become a synonym for “women” (Scott 1988:31) or “sex”, as a biological category. To study women as isolated from men implies that information about women also provides definitive information about men (Scott 1988:32). An important part of understanding gender is examining the relationship between genders as well as gender itself. (Corneliussen 2008:64).

Gender is the social organization of sexual difference, the knowledge that creates meanings for bodily differences (Scott 1988:2). The term gender suggests that “male” and “female” identities are largely culturally determined, as opposed to produced by individuals (Scott 1988:25). The concept of gender emphasizes a system of relationships that may include sex, but is not directly determined by sex or determining of sexuality (Scott 1988:32). Gender, in this definition, is a social category imposed on a sexed body (Scott 1988:32). It is a cultural construction whose legitimacy is justified by referencing biology (Eriksen 2002:171). In WoW, gender is defined as a dualism of male and female. Players must select one gender or the other when creating their avatar. Nonetheless, players bring identities of male and female into the game from the actual world which affects how gender is viewed as well as the interactions between players.

There is a direct association between sexuality and gender; gender is expressed through sexuality and sexuality is conveyed through gender (Caplan 1987:2). Gender and sexuality, therefore, are not distinct categories that exist in isolation from each other, nor can they be simply linked to each other. The categories that define sexuality (ie: heterosexuality and homosexuality) are also gendered. As Jackson (2009) notes, they are empirically interrelated yet analytically separate. Without this distinction between the two categories, we cannot examine the ways in which they intersect, but if they are merged, it is possible to decide how gender and sexuality interrelate in advance (Jackson 2009:144). However, if the empirical connection is ignored, there is a danger of analysing sexuality as if it were

separated from other socioeconomic structures (Jackson 2009:144). Within the game, sexuality is not pre-selected by the player during character creation; players choose whether they will bring it into the game space. In many cases, players include sexuality as part of their gendered identity, even if they do not explicitly state it to the community.

Sexuality can be seen as a set of boundaries that divide a population according to sexual orientations, identities, practices, and desires (Nagel 2003:46). In this view, “men” and “women” are socially, mainly genitally, defined individuals with culturally defined appropriate sexual tastes, partners, and activities (Nagel 2003:8). There is a great deal of variety in sexual practices across the world, such as differences in sexual activity, identity, types of partners, practice, desire, and intensity (Nagel 2003:46). This is reflected in the virtual as well.

In WoW, the definitions and views of sexuality as seen by the Western world are considered the norm. Homosexuality, and therefore heterosexuality, are relatively recent inventions in Western culture (Foucault 1978, Somerville 1996). As Foucault (1978) argues, sexual acts between two people of the same sex were punishable through religious and legal means before the nineteenth century, but they did not necessarily define individuals as homosexual. In the late nineteenth century, a new understanding of sexuality arose in which sexual acts and desires became constitutive of identity (Foucault 1978). In the current world, to say “I am gay” makes a statement about belonging and takes a stance in relationship to the dominant sexual norms (Weeks 1987). It also makes a statement about gender, as the line between gender and sexuality is blurred.

The concept of race as a distinct biological category is no longer considered valid in anthropology. On a biological level, race does not exist; there is no way to divide humans into meaningful biological categories beyond the species level (Feder and Park 2001). The construct of race emerged from a set of definable historical circumstances in the nineteenth century (Daynes and Lee 2008, Smedley 2007). Like gender and sexuality, race is a social construct, based on the social representations attached to physical differences (Daynes and Lee 2008). The concept of race has sociological importance: racism builds on the assumption that a person’s personality is linked with the physical characteristics which systematically differ between “races” (Eriksen 2002:5). In mainstream culture, the term ‘race’ is still commonly used and assumed to be a biological factor based on visual features such as skin

colour, facial features, or hair textures. Within WoW, the term 'race' is a biological determinant. The races are based on visual attributes and have pre-programmed physical features.

When looking at race in virtual worlds such as WoW, the challenging question of what constitutes race in the actual world is amplified (Thomas 2008). It is tempting to erase the category completely (Thomas 2008). This is not possible in WoW: players must pick a character race when creating their avatar, thus making race a visible and permanent marker. Players also bring values, perceptions and experiences of race in the actual world with them into the game space. It is essential to remember that in the game, race is not mutable. Race informs people's actions, making the concept of race relevant (Eriksen 2002:5). In WoW, and in the actual world, people may make assumptions about an individual's skills and attributes based on race.

The distinction between race and ethnicity can be problematic as the boundaries between the two terms in common usage are blurred (Eriksen 2002). Ethnicity, in this work, refers to differences between people in language, religion, culture, nationality, traditions, customs, activities, beliefs, and/or practices that pertain to a group of people (Nagel 2003, Smedley 2007). They see themselves, and are seen by others, as having distinct history, cultural features, and sociocultural identity (Smedley 2007). Ethnic groups remain more or less discrete, but they are aware of and in contact with people of other ethnic groups (Eriksen 2002). Ethnicity can create an "Us" versus "Them" environment as ethnicity presupposes an institutionalised relationship between depicted categories whose members consider each other to be culturally distinctive (Eriksen 2002:19). In popular culture, the word "ethnicity" has a ring of "minority issues" and "race relations", nevertheless, majorities or dominant peoples are no less ethnic than minorities (Eriksen 2002:4). In WoW, ethnicity has been created and is linked to each race.

The relationship between ethnicity (and thus, race) and nationality is also complex. Ethnic boundaries can be seen as national boundaries, or vice versa. Nations are communities where individuals within them are expected to be integrated with respect to self-identity and culture (Eriksen 2002:104). National identities, like ethnic identities, are constituted in relation to others creating another "Us" versus "Them" relationship, because the concept of the nation assumes that there are other nations in existence (Eriksen 2002:104). Nationalism

is a theory of political legitimacy, requiring that ethnic boundaries should not cross political boundaries (Gellner 1983).

In terms of nationality, WoW is unique. It can be viewed as a nation in itself, according to Anderson's (1991) definition of a nation as an imagined political community. It is also a multinational space, with people from many different countries entering the world and interacting with each other. There are also nations within WoW - the Horde, Alliance, and the various nations within the overarching factions. These interactions are an important part of defining the above terms in the game, as the social definition of an individual's race, ethnicity, and nationality is determined and given meaning through interacting with others (Nagel 2003:42).

Gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and nationalism are not distinct, separate categories. They should not be seen as existing in isolation, nor can they be simply joined together. These categories come into existence in and by way of relation to each other. In the coming chapters, I will explore how these categories exist in WoW as well as how they are brought into the game by its players.

The primary fieldsite for my research was in-game in WoW. Thus, in order to set the stage for the discussion of my research in WoW, it is essential to explain the mechanics of the game. It is also important to note that due to the release of the 2008 expansion *Wrath of the Lich King*, WoW is no longer the same space as when I conducted my fieldwork. The expansion added many new features and changes, such as a new continent, new character class, and a higher maximum character level. The WoW environment is also affected and influenced through updates by Blizzard, real world events, and the player population.

WoW is divided into many realms, each with 20,000 people maximum (Duchenaut et al. 2006b; Nardi and Harris 2006). Each realm is hosted on a server. The servers are divided in order to support WoW's large player base. Each realm is linked to a geographical region, in order to give people the opportunity to play with others in similar locales. When beginning the game, the player must select a realm. There are four types of realms that cater to different playing styles. Player versus Player (PvP) realms provide opportunities for players to participate in player versus player combat throughout gameplay. Players may attack others of the opposite faction at will. The only 'safe' areas on these servers are the major cities belonging to each faction and the beginner areas. This adds challenge to the

game, as players must be more vigilant during their play. Player versus Environment (PvE) realms require players to consent to player versus player combat. Most of the time, the player is fighting characters controlled by the computer, commonly referred to as Non-Player Characters (NPCs). Role Play (RP) realms operate in a manner similar to PvE servers, however, players are expected to act as they believe their character would during play. Finally, Role-Play Player versus Player (RPPvP) realms combine the PvP server type with the RP rule of consistently staying in character.

The next step is to create a character or avatar. The avatar can be viewed as a second self, with physical qualities and traits different from a player's real embodied persona (Rettburg 2008:23). Figure 1.1 shows the character creation screen. Character creation is a multi-stage process. Players first must select one of two opposing factions; the Alliance or the Horde. After choosing a faction, players must then pick a race and gender for their character. There are five races in each faction. The Alliance is made up of Draenei, Dwarves, Gnomes, Humans and Night Elves. The Horde consists of Blood Elves, Orcs, Tauren, Trolls, and Undead. The Draenei and Blood Elf classes were added to the game in 2007 with the release of *The Burning Crusade* expansion. Each race provides a unique look for the character. All races are sexually dimorphic, with distinct appearances for males and females. Each race also provides specific racial bonuses in the game. For example, the gnomes have an increased engineering skill. Additionally, each race has specific bonuses that will increase a character's competency in a particular class or profession.

Once players have chosen their character's race, they must choose a character class. There are nine classes available with some only available to particular races. The nine classes can be divided into three main groups. The physical fighting classes are Hunters, Rogues, and Warriors, these are most proficient in weapons-based combat. The caster classes include Mages, Priests, and Warlocks, which are highly skilled in magic. Finally, the combination classes, Druids, Paladin, and Shaman are able to use both weapons and magic in combat. In 2008, Blizzard added a tenth class with the release of the *Wrath of the Lich King* expansion: the Death Knight. The Death Knight is a hero class, and thus is only available to players once they have a character that has reached level 55. The class based system means that players need each other which aids in building community and social contact (Taylor 2006b:38). Each class plays to different strengths and methods of play. For example, a Warrior may be

chosen by a player preferring to be in the middle of a battle.



Figure 1.1: Character creation screen. Screenshot taken by author 20 July 2009.

whereas another may choose a mage in order to remain at the edges of combat. Typically, players will choose a class based on the kind of game they wish to experience.

Following race and class selection, players can customize the appearance of their character. Various features such as skin colour, facial features, hair colour and style, horn colour and style, and jewellery may be tailored. This allows each character to have an individualized look. The final step is for the player to choose a name for their character. With this, the player is now ready to begin the game.

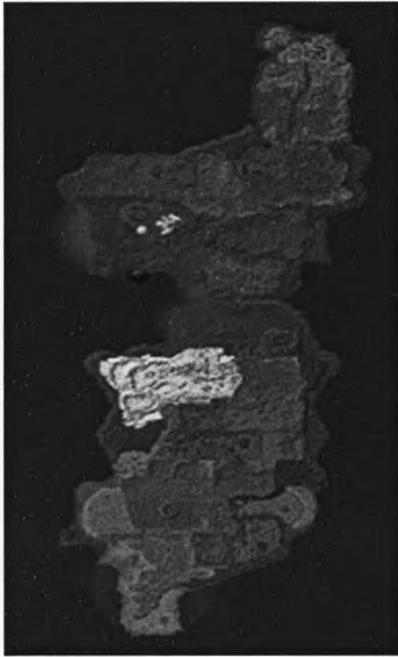
WoW takes place in Azeroth, a full scale, three dimensional virtual world. It is a rich space, with a large population of NPCs in addition to the many avatars. Azeroth is a product of recent events and history, influenced by fantasy fiction (ie: Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*), and cultural events exterior to the game, such as holidays (MacCallum-Stewart 2007) as well as a product of the players. It consists of three continents: Kalimdor, Eastern Kingdoms and Northrend (see Maps 1.1 - 1.3). A fourth content is available, Outland, by travelling to another dimension (see Map 1.4). The latter two continents were added in the 2007 (Outland)

and 2008 (Northrend) expansions. In order to show the scale of the world, I have included three maps (see Maps 1.5 to 1.7) which show the relative size of cities and avatars in comparison to the continents. The four continents are divided into randomly scattered 'zones'. Each zone is geared toward a specific set of character levels. For example, Durotar is a zone designed for levels one to ten and The Barrens is aimed at levels 11 to 20. There are eight different starting zones and multiple zones geared to any given level. Each character starts at level one equipped with simple armour and weapons and has little experience or skill, rendering them weak and vulnerable in battle.

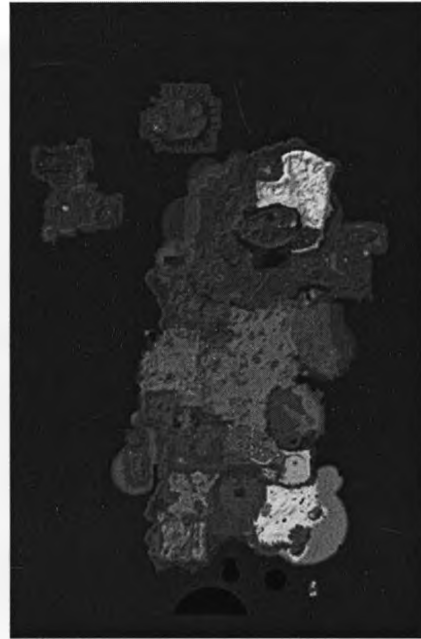
Characters gain levels by earning experience points. As the character levels, he/she becomes stronger and is able to obtain new abilities, armour, weapons, and money. Experience points are primarily gained by completing quests given by NPCs. There are thousands of quests in the game, each requiring that the player complete a specific task. Quests may entail killing a particular number of enemy NPCs, gathering a certain number of items, or travelling to another location. Each quest has a story behind it, which adds to the overall story-arch of the game. Experience may also be gained by killing foes, exploring, or participating in dungeons or raids (areas of the game where you need to have a group of players in order to succeed).

In WoW, it is possible (and indeed, very likely) that a character will die during game play, for which there is a mild penalty. Upon death players become a ghost at one of a number of graveyards located throughout the game. To revive their character, they can either run back to their corpse or they can choose to resurrect via the Spirit Healer, a ghostly NPC located in each graveyard. There is a penalty for using the Spirit Healer: all items that the character is wearing or carrying will take a 25% durability loss; additionally the avatar will experience resurrection sickness for up to ten minutes, which drastically reduces the character's attributes. A third option, if it is available, is to be resurrected by another player who has the ability to revive others (Druid, Paladin, Priest, or Shaman). Once a character is revived using any of the aforementioned methods, they take an additional 10% durability loss to the armour they are wearing and weapons they are using.

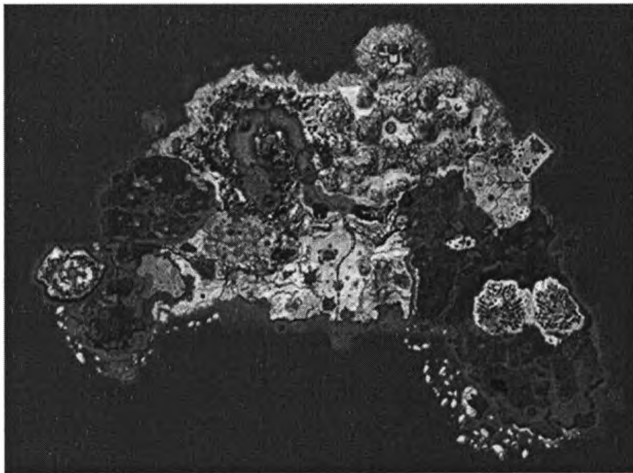
WoW is a diverse world with many different game activities. Players may complete the activities discussed above to gain experience points, battle other players in battlegrounds, enjoy the world of PvP, or spend their time working on their professions and skills. There



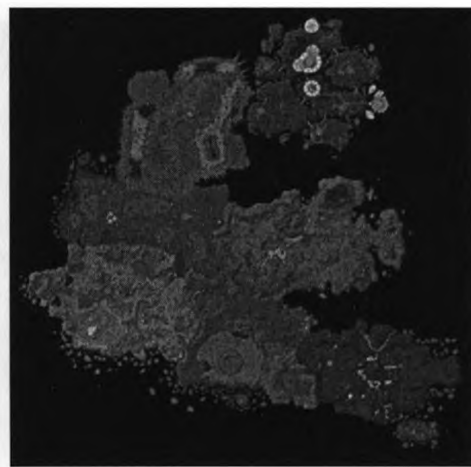
Map 1.1: Eastern Kingdoms



Map 1.2: Kalimdor

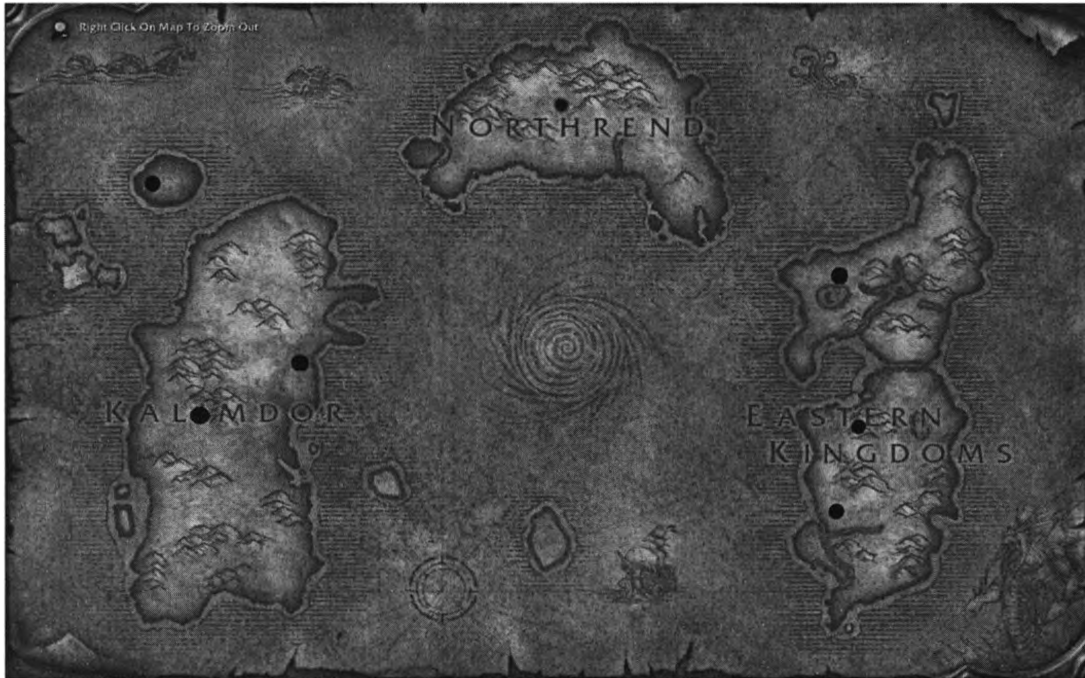


Map 1.3: Northrend



Map 1.4: Outland

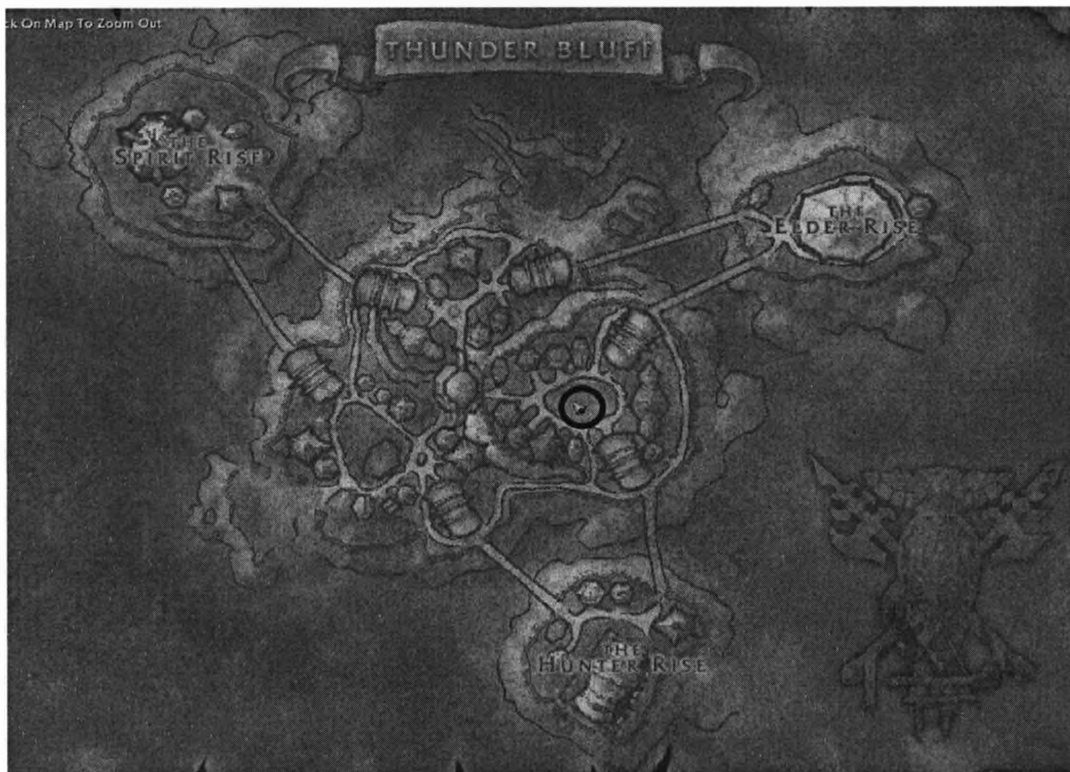
Source: <http://www.mapwow.com>



Map 1.5: Azeroth. All major cities are marked by black dots.
Screenshot taken by author 13 July 2009.



Map 1.6: Kalimdor continent. All major cities are marked by black dots. Screenshot taken by author 13 July 2009.



Map 1.7: The city of Thunder Bluff. The arrow in the black circle represents an avatar.
Screenshot taken by author 13 July 2009.

are eleven primary professions (ie: alchemy, blacksmithing, engineering, or tailoring) and three secondary professions (cooking, first aid, and fishing). Each character may learn two primary professions, and all of the secondary professions. Working on professions does not provide experience points, but it does allow the player to create useful items to either use or sell. Thus, some players may choose to spend a significant amount of time fishing, as opposed to participating in combat-based activities. This means that players are able to play at their own speed and in their own style, alone, or in groups. Simply, in WoW, the player experience is what each individual makes of it.

Communication with other players is a significant part of the game experience. Each player has a chat window on their screen where all communication that occurs in the game will appear. Players can communicate directly with others in their faction using a variety of methods. When characters meet face-to-face in the game, they can talk to each other through the '/say' command, which produces text that will be broadcast to anyone in the immediate area. The speech will appear in a bubble above the character's head, as well as in the chat window. Players can also communicate through the use of emotes, special commands that tell the character to complete some kind of action. For example, if a player types '/wave' the character will wave on screen and a note will appear in the chat window saying, '[name] waves'. Emotes can also be used to communicate with the opposite faction, who cannot be spoken to directly. There are a large number of emotes in the game, some with voiced or animated cues (see Appendix B).

Another way to communicate in WoW is through the use of general chat channels. The general channels are public and open to all players. Each zone has a General channel that players can use to talk to anyone else in the region. Zones also have a Local Defense channel which is used to notify players when avatars from the opposite faction are in the area and a Looking for Group channel which allows players to look for others to participate in group activities. Major cities also have a Trade channel, which is used to advertise items or skills available for trade or payment. The Trade channel is also used as a general chat channel, over which many different conversation topics arise. Players can also '/whisper' to each other in a private chat mode, should they wish for a private conversation. Finally, there is a channel for guild chat. *Guilds* are semi-permanent groups of players who play and communicate with each other on a regular basis. Each channel is colour coded in the chat window so a player

may easily discern if the text is from a private, guild, or public chat channel.

A third way to communicate is through Voice over IP (VoIP) software: an Internet-based auditory chatting system. In 2007, a voice chat system was implemented in WoW. Players can also use third party software, such as Ventrilo. This allows players to communicate verbally with each other through the use of a microphone and speakers. This verbal communication is only available to those signed onto a particular voice chat channel. This is commonly used by guilds or groups running dungeons or raids in order to speed up, increase, and ease communication.

The multiple methods of communication in WoW create a very social space, which makes it an ideal game to research. A variety of research techniques were utilized in my study, including both online and offline components. The research followed the Tri-Council Ethics Guidelines and was vetted by The University of Western Ontario Non-Medical Research and Ethics Board. All participants indicated that they were over 18 years of age at the time of study. My research was conducted from 27 June to 31 October 2008. Throughout my fieldwork, I attended a WoW convention and conducted an online survey, participant observation, as well as interviews in both the virtual and actual world.

I attended the Blizzard Worldwide Invitational 2008 in Paris, France from 28 - 29 June. The event was attended by over 4000 people from across the world, including Europe, North America, and Asia. Two days were spent at the Porte de Versailles Convention Centre talking to players, conducting interviews, going to panel talks on WoW and watching elite players compete live. This allowed me to observe people who played WoW in the offline world as they interacted with each other. Unfortunately, I was unable to talk to anyone from Blizzard Entertainment during my research.

The online survey was hosted by SurveyMonkey, a company that provides survey software and hosting. Responses were collected from 2 July to 31 October 2008. The survey was advertised through word of mouth, e-mail, and in game advertising. In order to complete the survey, participants were directed to a webpage hosted by The University of Western Ontario with a letter of information. By starting the survey participants signified that they read and understood the letter of information and were eighteen or older. The survey consisted of 92 questions and took between 20 and 30 minutes to complete. The set of survey questions can be found in Appendix C. There were six sections to the survey: General,

Character, Play Style, Race/Ethnicity/Multinationalism, Sexuality, and Gender.

A total of 119 responses to the survey were obtained. Thirty-two responses were unusable because the participant did not finish over 50% of the survey, they were not 18 or older, or they admitted to never having actually played WoW. There are several challenges in doing an online survey. It is sometimes difficult to judge if a participant is being serious in their answers. As a researcher, one must examine the responses carefully to try to discern responses that contain sarcasm or jokes. It is also difficult to phrase the questions so that every participant will understand and be content with them.

I conducted participant observation in WoW throughout the research period. Throughout my fieldwork, I played two characters. Ama, a level 70 Undead Priest on a PvE server, and Zay, a level 70 Tauren Druid on a PvP server.⁴ These characters were chosen because they were the highest level characters I had (at the time of research level 70 was the highest level obtainable) and would therefore allow me access to all areas and facets of the game. Both Ama and Zay were in guilds during the time of research. Ama's guild was small and intimate with a primarily social focus while Zay's guild focussed on raiding and PvP battles. By joining two guilds with different populations and focuses, I was able to observe and experience two very different styles of players and playing. Two characters were the most I could reasonably play during my field research, as developing relationships with others took large amounts of time.

Throughout my fieldwork, I participated in group activities, conducted in game interviews, and carried out discussions with other players. Nevertheless, there was a limit in what I had access to, as Blizzard splits the servers by geographical location. There are different sets of servers for North America, Europe, Asia, and Latin America. I am on a North American server set, (made up of people mostly from Canada, the United States, Mexico, and Oceania) and thus did not have access to in-game interactions with people on European, Asian, or Latin American servers. It is possible for players to play on servers outside of their geographical location. In all instances, the other players were aware that I was

⁴ I have altered the names of my characters in order to protect participant anonymity and confidentiality. With the advent of programs such as WoW Armory, which allows people to look up characters by name, it is easy to track other players. The names of all participants have also been changed.

a researcher conducting an ethnographic study. Participants viewed a webpage with a letter of information, stated they were 18 or over, and gave their consent to participate in the study.

I also recorded a great deal of public chat through the Trade chat channels in the major cities. Once translated into a *.txt file, over 1000 pages were obtained. This was done purely as an observer. I did not identify myself as a researcher since the chat is publicly broadcast in the game. Disclosing my identity would have changed the nature of the conversation. In past research undertaken for my Bachelor's degree, I experienced *flaming*, or being ridiculed or insulted, as a result of identifying myself as a researcher in a public channel. Topics under discussion in the Trade chat channel cover a wide variety, including play styles and preferences, religion or sexuality, and even Chuck Norris, an American martial artist, action star, and actor.

Participant observation was also completed by examining online forums. Blizzard Entertainment hosts a large variety of forums on WoW in which people can discuss a variety of topics. These forums are monitored by Blizzard employees and are public domain. I did not identify myself on these forums as a researcher for the same reasons I did not identify myself in the Trade chat channel.

During the period of fieldwork, I conducted eleven in-person interviews and two followup interviews. The interviews were advertised through e-mail, word of mouth, and posters. The interview questions were similar to the survey questions, however, they allowed for the participant to add any information they felt was relevant, and for follow up questions. Informed consent was obtained for each interview. The interviews took between 30 to 90 minutes. The in-person interviews were helpful, as they allowed me to have real time face-to-face conversation and yielded a great deal of information.

In this research, it was difficult to obtain a representative sample of the entire game population. I spoke with and surveyed less than one percent of the total WoW population. This means that my study will not have great statistical significance nor will I be able to make inferences about what may occur across the entire population of WoW.

With this grounding in theory and methodology, the analysis of my research may begin. In chapter two, my analysis will begin by discussing the play styles and habits of WoW players. This is an essential part of understanding the identity and experiences of the community as it provides an overview of how the players and the community functions.

Chapter Two: WoW and Its' Players

In order to understand the ways in which people bring their actual world values, perceptions, and experiences into WoW, it is necessary to begin by reviewing general demographic information, character choices and play styles. Factors such as the type of character an individual chooses to play and the activities players participate in shapes their experience of WoW. It is also important to examine the basic structure of the community, as this will ground later discussions about community interactions. I will discern between the interview and survey results, as the interview questions were loosely structured, whereas the survey questions were firmly structured and in some cases, had pre-defined answers.

I received 87 completed survey responses, and conducted 11 interviews during my fieldwork. Fifty-two males (59.8%) and 35 females (40.2%) completed the survey. I interviewed seven males (64%) and four females (36%). It is interesting to note that the male/female split between survey responses and interview participants are close. This may indicate that the number of female WoW players is rising. In previous studies, it has been found that about 20% of players are female (DiGuseppe and Nardi 2007, Fron et al. 2007, Seay et al. 2004, Yee 2008).

Until recently, video games were seen as a male pastime. Females in video games were portrayed as damsels in distress or rewards for the hero (Cassell and Jenkins 1998), such as Princess Peach in the well-known *Super Mario Brothers* games. This stigma began to change when Lara Croft, the protagonist of the *Tomb Raider* video games series, appeared on the screen in 1996. Lara, while buxom, clothed in a shirt and shorts, is equipped with guns, and very able to defend herself.

Lara Croft opened the door for 'pink games' - games designed specifically for girls and women. Despite this strong female character, games in this genre tend to play on stereotypical female activities, such as fashion, cooking, or taking care of animals. Regardless of the trend of stronger female protagonists in recent games, women gamers too often occupy a closeted gamer identity (Taylor 2008:53). In larger society, it is still somewhat unusual to be a girl gamer. While there has been a notable increase in the number of female gamers, previous studies state that women are still under-represented in MMOGs (Cole and Griffiths 2007). My own results indicate that this number may be increasing.

Regardless of the differences between the numbers of male and female gamers, women who are participating in games play for the same amount of time as men (Yee 2008:85). A potential reason for this under-representation may be social context. There are limited social access points to introduce women to games, as well as in-game dynamics. Unfortunately, physical, social, and cultural barriers may be interpreted as a lack of desire to play video games. The results in this study may differ from those previous for a number of reasons. First, games are becoming more popular as a form of entertainment, drawing in more women players. Second, it is possible that women are more likely to participate in a research study than men. Third, I worked with a very small portion of the entire WoW population, which may have influenced the number of male and female participants. Finally, my own status as female may have encouraged other women to participate in my research.

The average age of survey respondents was 28.35, with an age range of 18 - 55. Figure 2.1 displays the total number of responses per age category. The average age of interview participants was 30.75, with an age range from 23 - 37. The average age of all participants was 28.55. This is close to the average age of 26 and 27 that Nick Yee (2006:772, 2008:85) found in his extensive studies of MMORPGs.¹

When asked about sexual orientation, the majority of people responded that they were heterosexual or straight (75 survey respondents and 10 interviewees). Ten people who answered the survey identified as bisexual, one as queer, and one person stated that she was unsure of her sexuality. One interviewee, Nora², identifies herself as queer, although she “know[s] that definition gets bantered around a lot.” The term queer has historically been used (and sometimes still is) as an insult towards gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people (Ferber et al. 2009). This can make people uncomfortable, as I found in my research. One survey participant wrote that he thought I should consider changing the word or removing it completely because of its negative connotations. Today, the term describes people who identify or live outside heteronormative notions of gender, sex, and sexuality

¹ Yee conducted a series of studies, entitled The Daedalus Project, on Massively Multiplayer Online players for six years. He has recently put the study into “hibernation” due to time constraints. More information can be found at <http://www.nickyee.com/daedalus>.

² All participant names, actual and virtual, have been changed to protect anonymity.

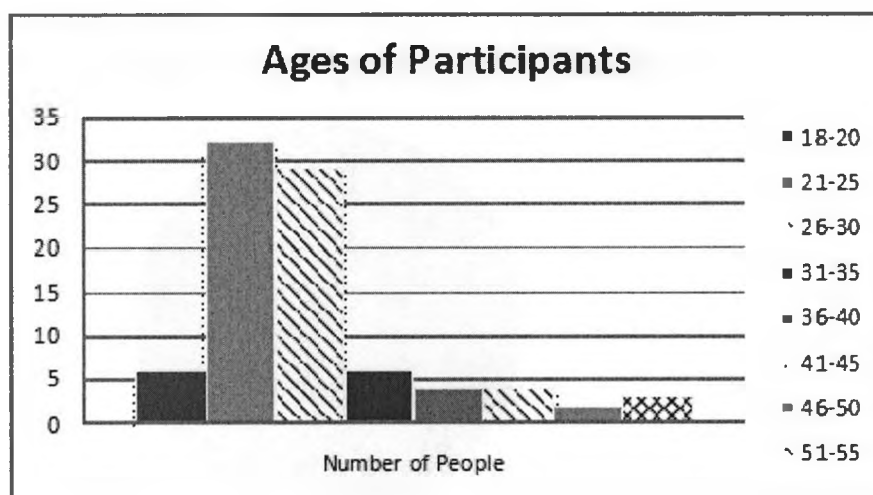


Figure 2.1: Ages of participants

(Ferber et al. 2009). Its usage continues to be controversial, but it is a valid sexual identity for many.

The majority of survey respondents were from Canada (46%) and the United States (42.5%). The remainder (11.5%) were from countries around the world, including England, Wales, China, Australia, Singapore, and Switzerland (see Figure 2.2). Nine of the interviewees were from Ontario, Canada, and two were from England. I met the two British interviewees at the Blizzard Worldwide Invitational. Most survey (55.1%) and interview (72.7%) participants worked full time. Five of the interviewees revealed that they worked in a computer-related field, and two worked or had previously worked in the gaming industry. All other study participants stated that they worked part-time, attended school, were unemployed, or worked as a homemaker.

When asked how long they had been playing WoW, the majority of survey respondents stated that they played the game for over three years (43.7%). This echoed the interview responses, as most people I spoke with had been playing WoW for at least 2.5 years. Figure 2.3 displays the amount of time spent playing for both survey and interview participants. Only three people in my study had played for less than six months, indicating that the people who play WoW do so for an extended period of time.

When asked why they started to play, a variety of responses were gathered. The most popular reason for playing WoW was because friends, family, or partners were playing the game. Eve, a 24-year-old graduate student, revealed that it was because of her boyfriend that

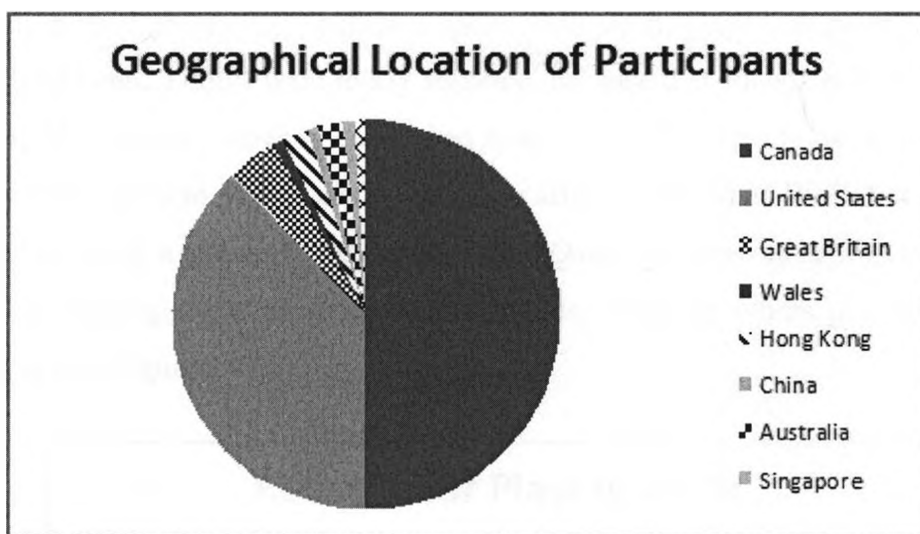


Figure 2.2: Geographical location of participants

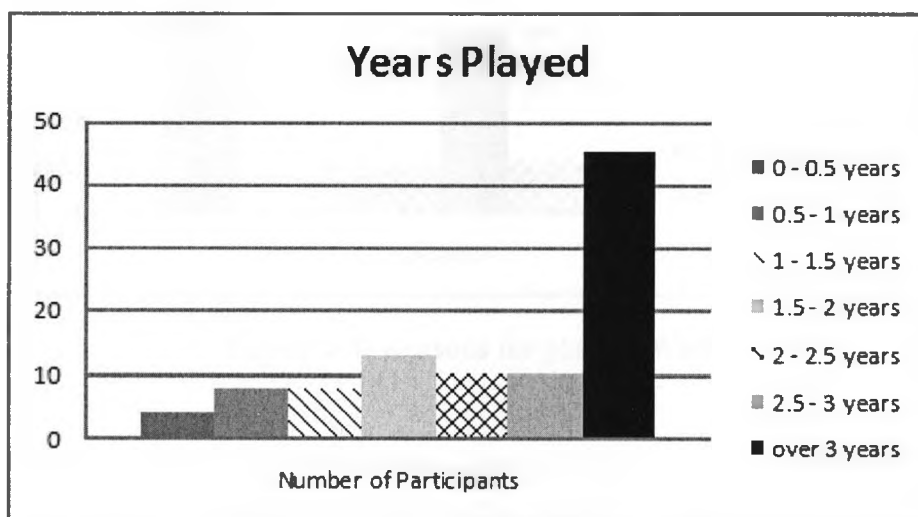


Figure 2.3: Number of years played

she started playing the game. “He plays it, and I didn’t quite understand what his obsession with it was. So one day he sat me down ... and I played, and I didn’t even realize I was playing for two hours!” I heard this type of statement in different forms on numerous occasions throughout my fieldwork. Many players were given the opportunity to try by a partner, friend, or family member, and find themselves enjoying the experience.

Many WoW players have previous experience in Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOGs) as well, thus bringing a play history with them (Taylor 2006a:77). Blizzard’s *Warcraft* and *Diablo* series as well as the MMORPG *EverQuest* were common

previously-played games. One person I spoke with, Josh, played many different online games. “I’ve been...I don’t want to say addicted, because that sounds bad, but I’ve loved Massively Multiplayer Games since I played *Asheron’s Call* ... I really liked the whole idea of it, and then I got into *EverQuest* immediately after.” Josh joined WoW because he was interested in trying it and knew people from *EverQuest* that were switching games. Other reasons for playing WoW included online friends, watching others play the game, or advertising (see Figure 2.4).

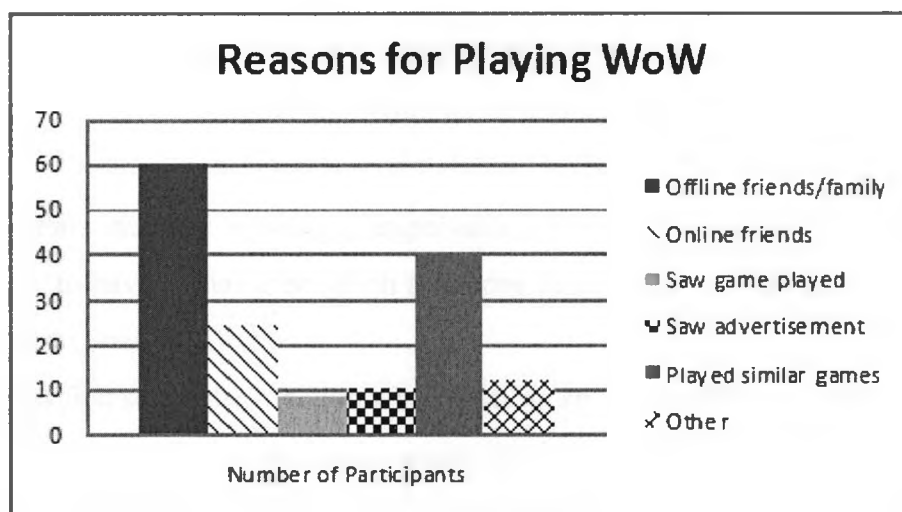


Figure 2.4: Reasons for playing WoW

The average player in WoW, according to my survey responses, plays 10 to 19 hours per week (33.9%). The number of hours played for all responses can be seen in Figure 2.5. Most interview participants and a few survey respondents stated that their play time fluctuated, depending on actual life circumstances such as work or school. Play time can also be influenced by WoW’s reward structure (Ducheneaut et al. 2006b:293). The more time a player invests in the game, the more rewards they will receive. Since beginning to play WoW in June 2005, I have logged approximately 1920 hours, or 80 consecutive days of play time.

The avatar is the vehicle through which players experience the game, and the choices one makes while creating the avatar shape this experience. Many players create more than one avatar, although they will play one or more (referred to as *main characters*, or *mains*) most often. When asked about the total number of characters, the majority of players said they had from two to five. Twelve people stated they had over 20. Reasons for having

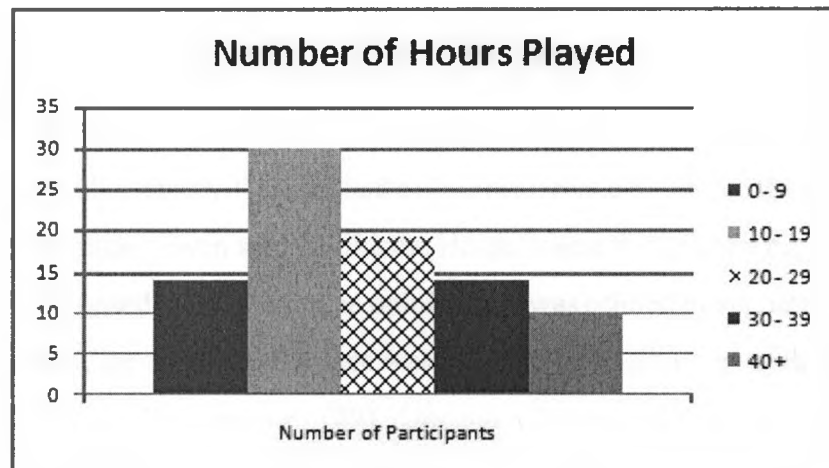


Figure 2.5: Number of hours played

numerous avatars included wanting to experience all of the beginning areas or race/class combinations, to have a character which functions as a bank, or to make an avatar for a specific purpose, such as a PvP.

Players first select their faction when creating an avatar. In the survey, respondents were asked to which faction their main characters belonged. Alliance was the preferred faction with 219 characters, with only 167 Horde characters reported. This echoes the trend found in a quantitative study based on WoW demographic data conducted by Ducheneaut et al. (2006b). The WoW Census, a third party program, also reports that there are more Alliance players (55%) as opposed to Horde (Wikia 2009). Thirty-four people reported that they played exclusively Alliance, 18 played exclusively Horde, and 35 people held characters in both factions. Interview participants differed in that the majority of people (six) played Horde characters. Three people had exclusively Alliance characters, and two people played characters of both the Alliance and Horde. Out of the 25 total characters spoken about with interview participants, 19 were Horde characters. I believe that this difference is because the interview participants were recruited primarily through word of mouth.

It has been suggested by some that the Alliance could be seen as “good” while the Horde are “evil” (MacCallum-Stewart 2008a, Schwartz 2006) This is not the case. The Alliance races are ecologically destructive, aggressive colonizers while the Horde live harmoniously with the land around them (MacCallum-Stewart 2008a:23). This is an interesting juxtaposition which could be viewed as reflective of the European/First Nations

interactions in the history of North America. In the lore of WoW, the Horde are lead by Thrall, an Orc who desires peace between the two factions and tries valiantly to help his fellow Orcs see his point of view.³ While no study participants identified the rift between the two factions as “good versus evil”, some had a clear preference for one or the other. “I didn’t like the models as much,” Evan said. “I like the Horde where things are a bit grittier.” Evan preferred the Horde based on aesthetics, an opinion that was echoed by six other participants.

In the survey, the most popular race was found to be Night Elves with 45 characters, followed by Humans (38), Draenei (29), Undead (25) and Blood Elves (24). In the interviews, the most popular race was the Undead (six characters), followed by Blood Elves (five), Trolls (four) and Night Elves (three). From my study, Night Elves are clearly the most popular Alliance race, while the Undead are the most popular Horde race. The least popular races were the Orcs (13) and Dwarves (14). These results also agree with those reported by Ducheneaut et al. (2006b), who found that Night Elves and Humans were the most popular races and that Orcs are the least. Figure 2.6 illustrates both the survey and interview participants race preferences.

The most popular classes in the survey were Priests (34 characters), Hunters (32), Druids (30) Rogues (29). Interviewees preferred Hunters (four), Rogues (four), and Warriors (four). Figure 2.7 displays the popularity of each class. It as been noted that the more *soloable* classes (such as rogues, hunters, or warriors) are more popular, as it is easier to get through the game without requiring a group, which improves levelling speed (Ducheneaut et al. 2006a, Ducheneaut et al. 2006b). Ducheneaut et al. (2006b) also stated that healing classes are among the least popular. In my study results, it was shown that Priests, primarily a healing class, were chosen frequently by players. One survey respondent suggested that this was because healers are an essential component of being successful in a raid or dungeon. Healers are an integral part of the group makeup. In the most challenging of group fights, the group will perish without them. Within a group, there is an element of caring and concern for the other members by the player - if one perishes, it is likely that the entire group will fail.

³ For further information, see the novel “Lord of the Clans” by Christie Golden and other *World of Warcraft* novels

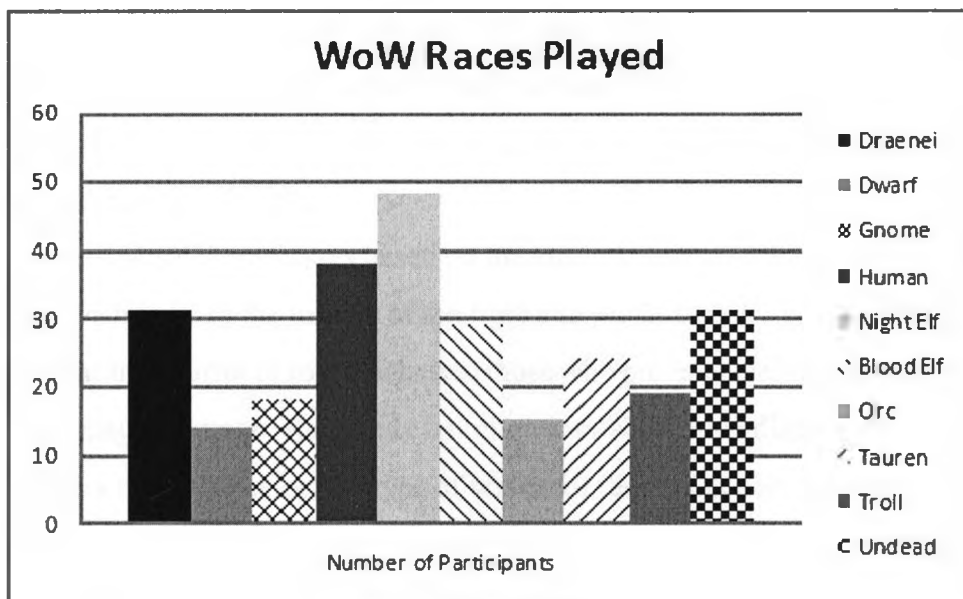


Figure 2.6: WoW races played by survey and interview participants

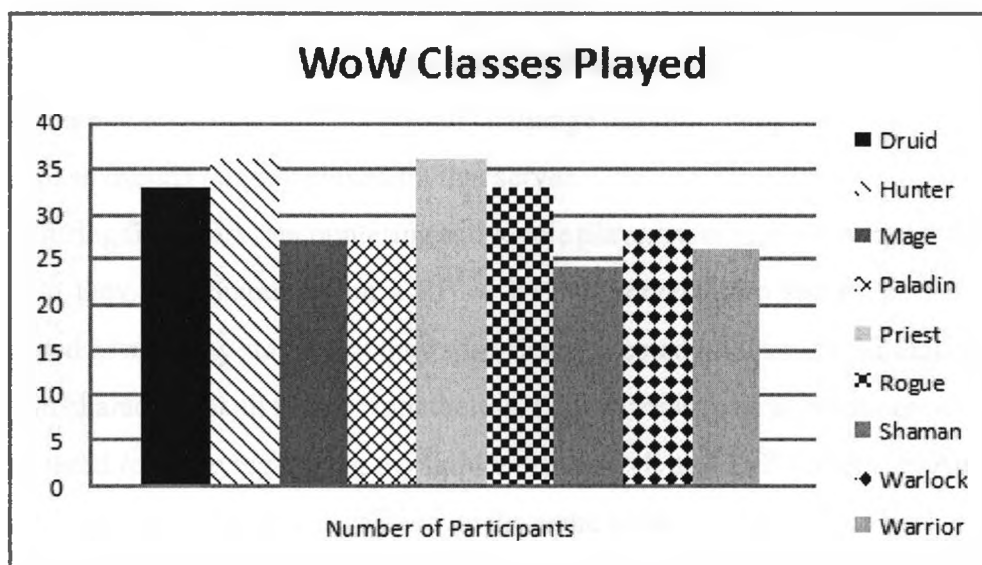


Figure 2.7: WoW classes played by survey and interview participants

Participants chose characters' races and classes for a variety of different reasons. Race was primarily chosen for aesthetic reasons. For example, Nora said that she "would never play the Undead because they creep me out." Nora prefers a character that is visually pleasing, such as the Night or Blood Elves. Another interviewee, Brian, commented that "aesthetically, I just don't like the look of the Blood Elves." Another reason rested upon the racial bonus of a particular race. "Warstomp...I think I knew immediately that would be a really useful

tool,” William said, referring to a Tauren ability that allows the player to stun enemies in the immediate area for two seconds. Each race has specific abilities that may lend itself to playing a particular class. In William’s opinion, the warstomp ability would be of assistance to the warrior he wished to play.

Players select their classes based on the kind of game experience they wish to have. Those who wish to be in the middle of the fight and prefer the offensive tend to pick melee classes such as the warrior or rogue, whereas those who prefer to maintain distance in combat may select a mage or hunter. Race and class choice will be further discussed in Chapter Five.

Players must also select the type of server for their gameplay. In both the survey and interviews, the most popular server type was PvE (55.2%) , followed by PvP (36.5%), RP (5.2%), and RPPvP (3.1%). PvE servers provide players the opportunity to play through the game without worrying about being killed by another player, something many people claimed to desire. People who preferred a PvP server stated they wanted that additional challenge to the game. One survey participant stated that, “it alleviates the monotony of PvE content by facing other players, as they offer a greater challenge usually.” People also chose their server type because friends already played on that server.

During fieldwork, encountering active role players was rare. Only eight people in the study said they had characters on a RP or RPPvP server. Two survey participants who participated in role play stated that they specifically created a backstory for their avatar, and stayed “in character” at all times. Nonetheless, I did witness several instances of what could be considered role playing during my field work on PvE and PvP servers. In Ama’s guild, two characters (Aran and Jestus, played by the same person) would argue back and forth in the guild chat channel. Below is an excerpt from a conversation in the guild:

Jestus: Aran sucks.

Aran: No, Jestus sucks

Valah: you both suck!

Jestus: Aww geez, not this shit again

Kellen: sweating bullets

Valah: Hunterz rule!

Aran: hot in the apt Kellen?

Kellen: nope the - psychosis you were just exhibiting

Aran: what

Jestus: psychosis?

Aran: I

Jestus: so
 Aran: err
 Aran: I
 Jestus: DO
 Aran: not
 Jestus: have
 Aran: a
 Jestus: personality
 Aran: disorder

The person who controlled these two avatars would often have conversations like this to provide humour and entertainment for guild members. “I don’t feel like I’m playing two characters here, I’m just controlling two puppets,” he said, when asked about playing two characters. “It’s not like there’s actually two personas there, I’m just myself, and I’ve got a puppet on my left hand and a puppet on my right hand, and that’s more entertaining than just one puppet.” In this situation, he did not consider himself role playing - he was simply having fun in the game.

It is not uncommon to find one player operating multiple avatars. One person in the game has a whopping 36 accounts, which he plays on 11 different computers (Landis 2008). He created the accounts so he would not have to rely on others in order to create raid groups (Landis 2008). His goal is to raid the capital cities of the opposing faction (Landis 2008). While having such a large number of WoW accounts is unusual, many players may have more than one.

While PvP servers promote a more competitive atmosphere, it is possible to PvP on PvE and RP servers. Players can do this through entering Battlegrounds, specific instances where players are pitted against those of the opposite faction, or by duelling. Duels must be agreed to by both players before they can occur. When asked if they ever participated in PvP or duelled, only 13 people (15.1%) in both the survey and interviews stated that they never did. William sees PvP as a sport. “It really resembles team sports, particularly football. Everybody has an assigned role, if everybody does their role well, you succeed.” For him, that is a big part of the enjoyment of PvP - a team environment in which people can work together to win the battle.

However, there is a negative side to PvP: *griefing* or *ganking*. This occurs when a player purposefully kills or harasses another player repeatedly. Grievers may also “corpse

camp”, which involves staying near another character’s corpse in order to kill them as soon as they come back to life. Figure 2.8 shows a instance of corpse camping that I experienced during my fieldwork with Zay. Corpse camping can lead to large-scale retaliation with more and more powerful avatars becoming involved.

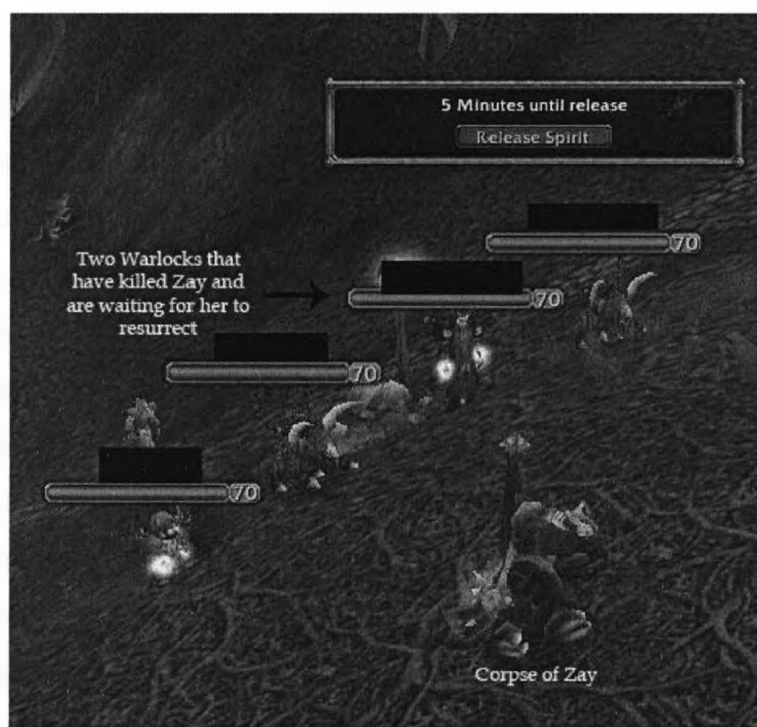


Figure 2.8: Corpse camping. Zay has been killed by the two avatars and their pets standing around her body. They are waiting patiently for Zay to resurrect, in order to kill her again. Screenshot taken by author 12 July 2008.

Griefers act intentionally and may enjoy the act which may cause others to enjoy WoW less (Boellstorff 2008:188). Only 10 people (11.8%) in the study stated that they were never ganked or purposely annoyed. This indicates that griefing/ganking is experienced by many players. People respond to this act with a range of emotions. Some simply ignore the offender, others leave the game world for a period of time, and some become angry. “Killing eachother [*sic*] is part of the game and I take it as that. Ganking is not, and I feel angry towards them” one participant stated. Players can also choose to report an offender to a GM (Game Master) from Blizzard. Blizzard may choose to warn, suspend, or ban the offending player from WoW.

When asked if they had ever ganked or purposely annoyed anyone, 50% of the survey

respondents said no. For those who had ganked someone, many stated that they were prompted by the need for retaliation or revenge. Others see it as a part of the game. Andrew, who plays on a PvP server, laughed as he told me “For sure, I play a rogue.” Rogues are characters that are suited to PvP combat as they can go into a stealth or invisible mode and hit players from behind. Andrew also said that he did not corpse camp unless someone thoroughly provoked him. Protests, threats, social punishment and attempts to negotiate rarely work when dealing with griefers (White 2006:94). Some players will contact high level friends to help them deal with a griefing problem. Players who chose to avoid PvP servers often cite this kind of behaviour as a reason for their choice.

While avatar and server choice are a major influence in the experience that each player will have in WoW, there are a myriad of other factors that will influence gameplay. The most important aspects of the game according to survey participants were the game interface quality, quests, dungeons and raids, as well as obtaining high level items. When asked about the thing they enjoyed most about WoW, an overwhelming majority of participants stated that it was the social aspect of the game that kept them playing. Some make new connections with people they meet online. One survey participant encourages people to think of it “as a really fun version of AIM.”⁴ WoW also functions as a way for people to stay in touch over long distances.

Many interviewees and several survey respondents said they enjoyed the humour in WoW. Blizzard has programmed many cultural references into the game. For instance, in the city of Shattrath, players can visit an NPC named Haris Pilton, an “Ex-socialite” who sells exclusive novelty items, such as “Gigantique Bag”. There are also more subtle cultural references, such as the empty barrels dropped by apes in Ungoro Crater (an homage to Donkey Kong) or the safari character Hemet Nesingwary, which is an anagram of Ernest Hemingway.

WoW can also be a form of escape, from work, school, or other pressures in life. “It’s a nice break from everyday life,” Nora said as she contemplated what kept her coming back to the game. “It’s sort of goal oriented but it’s very far removed from having to do homework, or go to work.” Since WoW is a fantasy based game, it creates a sense of reality

⁴ AIM is AOL Instant Messenger, an instant messaging program.

that is removed from that of the actual world. The challenge of the dungeons and raids also captivates players. These are activities that require between five and forty players. They also promote grouping in the game, as the only way to experience this content is to play with others.

WoW encourages players to form groups through two mechanisms: some quests and dungeons are too difficult to do alone, and classes have specific abilities that complement each other well (Ducheneaut et al. 2006a). A good example of this complementary design is the Warrior and the Priest. Warriors can take a great deal of damage, but are unable to heal themselves. Priests have the opposite ability - they are able to heal themselves, but are not able to sustain large amounts of damage. Together, they make an excellent team. When asked if they preferred to play alone or in a group, only one person said that they always played alone. All other study participants stated that they enjoyed playing in a group at least part of the time.

Many stated that it depended on the day - that sometimes they felt like playing alone, and other times they desired a group atmosphere. Some players prefer to play with those they know in their actual lives. Several interviewees and survey participants stated that they did not like *pick-up groups*. These are groups that form quickly and at random to complete a quest or dungeon and are also known as *pugs*. They cited negative experiences, such as people being selfish, greedy, or angry if the group did not function exactly as they saw fit. Evan saw pugs as a waste of time. "Life is really finite, and there's no point in spending time with people you don't like." He preferred to play with people he knew to avoid the frustrations that can be associated with pick up groups and to spend time with his friends.

In WoW, there are formal groups known as guilds. Guilds are officially sanctioned groups or organizations of players with a basic hierarchical structure (Jakobsson and Taylor 2003:85). In WoW, every guild must have an official guild leader, regardless whether or not the group formally acknowledges him/her. They are one of the essential elements of game social life and help to frame a players experience by providing a stable backdrop to many of the activities in WoW (Ducheneaut et al. 2007). They provide players with a variety of social interactions, a way to share resources and information, as well as people with which to undertake quests, dungeons, and raids. Guilds also provide support for other players and congratulate members on achievements within the game, such as obtaining a new level. I was

involved in two different guilds during my fieldwork. Ama was in Fortuitus,⁵ a small (~10 members) guild that had a primarily social focus. While this guild did run some five-man dungeons, it was first and foremost a place for friends to talk and play. Zay's guild, Incursio, was a large guild with over 100 people that focussed on raiding, dungeons, and PvP. Participating in these two guilds allowed me to experience two very different kinds of play and meet with a variety of people with different interests and experiences.

Only four people in the study stated they had not experienced guilds in WoW. Four others were previously in guilds, but had left them and not joined another. Reasons for leaving included the guild disbanding, frustration, or inactivity. All other participants, survey and interviewees, were currently in a guild. For many, this was not their first guild. Often players will try multiple guilds, searching for one that suits their play style and temperament. The most popular activities for guilds included dungeons, raids, and socializing. Even when guilds do not define themselves as "social," the word is omnipresent (Williams, D. et al. 2006:345).

As the size of a guild grows, it is more likely to engage in formal management or organization (Williams, D. et al. 2006:346). Larger guilds may exert social pressure on their members; for instance, to be present and on time for dungeons or raids (Ducheneaut et al. 2006a). Guilds may also take responsibility for policing social regulations (White 2006:92). For example, if a member chooses to violate Blizzard rules by using vulgar or prejudiced language, they may remove them from the guild. Some may even hold guild meetings as a way to ensure that all members are aware of the rules and ongoing or planned activities.

Through my experiences in both Ama and Zay's guilds I saw informal and formal organization. Within Fortuitus, there was no need for any formal organization. All members got along well and knew at least one or two people from their actual lives. They often spoke of their personal lives and events in the actual world. This experience was common among the other players I interviewed and surveyed; they often talked about aspects of the actual world. In Zay's guild, only a few people knew each other offline - it was mostly made up of like-minded people with similar in-game goals. Incursio had a formal organization structure, with a guild leader, several officers, and a set of rules that all were expected to follow. One

⁵ Guild names have been changed in order to protect participant anonymity.

such rule was that only guild leaders or officers could initiate a raid. On one occasion, a member of the guild insisted on starting his own raid despite the fact there was one scheduled that he could attend. He persisted after he was reminded of the rules, became rude and belligerent, and was quickly removed from the guild.

Guilds are a part of the larger social community, something that is always present in WoW. The game promotes interaction with others and communication; this shapes players identity and the character of Azeroth itself (Innocent and Haines 2007). Only one person in the study stated that they never chatted socially while playing the game. This was unusual as I had not met anyone who never participated in the social aspects of WoW. Despite a lack of social communication, this person would still be surrounded by the Wow community - the other players, and by the general chat that occurs in the game. In WoW, it is impossible to avoid the community at large.

The community in WoW can be viewed as a kind of nation according to Benedict Anderson's (1991) concept of the nation as an imagined political community. Anderson (1991:6) states that the community is imagined because the members of a nation will never know most of their fellow members. It is imagined as a community because it is always conceived of as a deep, horizontal comradeship (Anderson 1991:6). This is true of WoW; people will not know the majority of those that play in their realm, let alone the whole player base. However, players know that there are others in the game around the world and thus feel connected in some way. Common connectors for WoW players include physical or cultural proximity, previous game experience, and similar world or in-game views (Jakobsson and Taylor 2003:84). Players are also connected through the game history and lore, which can be likened to national lore or myths in the actual world.

The WoW community is a very complex society. Players learn there is an entire culture within the game that they must function within and accommodate (Taylor 2006b:18). Players are socialized into the game space and over time they learn what it is to be a good player. Rules, rituals, and language are learned through experience and interacting with others (Taylor 2006b, Castronova 2005). It cannot be said that WoW is a static society. While it is a game, and thus subject to the pre-programmed rules, the networks can change over time through the life of the game (Taylor 2006b:36). WoW changes through updates made by Blizzard. It also experiences changes to the community, made by the players.

The sense of community is created in a variety of ways, only one of which is direct social interaction. Guild membership is a common method of community formation. Players also create community through gifting or selling in-game items (White 2006:91). Acts of altruism may also be performed in the game. *Buffing* is a altruistic gesture in which one player casts a friendly spell on a fellow faction member, such a spell to boost stats. Buffing is seen as a gesture of goodwill when done for someone whom the player does not have a relationship (Nardi and Harris 2006:151, White 2006:91). It is a common courtesy within the game world.

Players may also create spontaneous community events. I came across a public WoW trivia game several times during my fieldwork. Through the use of a *mod*, a third party program written to enhance WoW, one player was broadcasting trivia questions through the '/say' command for others to answer. I have also seen groups of players getting virtually drunk together in a pub. Figure 2.9 shows Ama drinking at Brewfest, an in-game holiday based on Oktoberfest. When virtually drunk, the screen becomes blurry, reaction times are slower and avatars are unable to speak correctly or walk in a straight line. During Brewfest, players would gather together to drink and participate in the holiday revelries. Some players will also state that they are drinking in the actual world while playing, the effects of which can sometimes be seen through their conversation and actions.

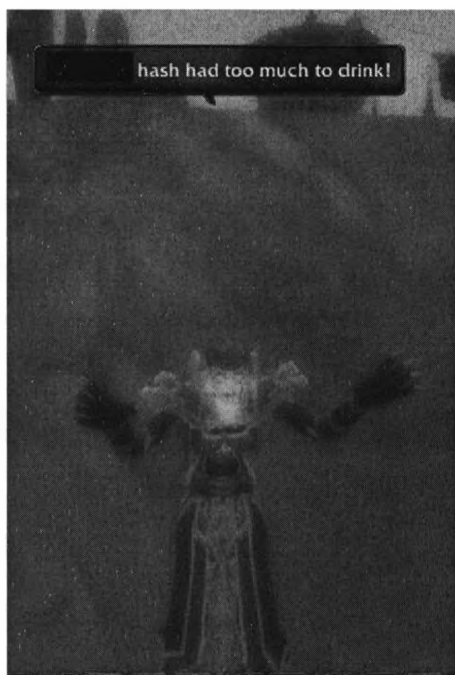


Figure 2.9: The affects of virtual drinking. Screenshot taken by author 24 September 2008.

In guilds and community activities, it is possible for players to experience exclusion or inclusion. Through my own experiences as well as those of my informants, I found a variety of exclusionary methods within the game. The most frequently mentioned were level contrasts, class difference, weapons or armour (or *gear*) differences, guild membership, or the amount of time people are able to devote to the game. In any large group, stratification is likely to occur. In WoW, stratification is often based on gear and playing ability. “Gear (difficult to obtain gear from content requiring more skill/coordination/etc.) often creates a sense of classism in my experience.” a survey participant commented, expressing frustration in being excluded from higher-end game content. It can be difficult to break into groups that complete the raids at the end of the games, as many of them require a specific level of gear and play competency.

Comparatively, inclusion is also something that can come from participation in the WoW community. It also is a more frequently experienced by players. Guilds often lend themselves to inclusive practices. “Oh yes, that’s with my guild.” Talia said immediately as she smiled, when I asked her about inclusion in the game. She constantly talked to others in her guild and played with them frequently. “This is the great thing about WoW in general. You get to be a part of a permanent group and join other groups. So, you feel like you belong” a survey respondent wrote. The inclusive experiences in the game outweigh any exclusionary situations a player may encounter.

There are many kinds of social interactions within the game. In addition to guilds and groups, people form close relationships through playing together. There are many accounts, in both academic and non-academic literature, of relationships being formed through a mutual love of online gaming (Berman 2006). In some cases, people will get married in the game, or meet each other in the actual world (Berman 2006:67) While I did not witness an in-game wedding, a married couple who had met through online gaming shared their experiences. They had played in a guild together in *EverQuest* and had the opportunity to meet in the actual world where they were eventually wed.

Relationships may also form that are based on support. Evan experienced an unusual relationship with a player he met randomly. The contact started when Evan mistakenly thought another player, a teenage girl, was someone he knew in the actual world. After this accidental contact, the girl would message Evan whenever he logged on to the game.

It got a little bit irritating...but it's also obvious she's really lonely. So this continues for months, and now I've become this person's confidant...and she's asking my advice about things, and again, this is not what I want to be doing in my leisure time, but, I feel some kind of paternal responsibility for this individual now.

For the past two years, Evan has had contact with this individual, providing her with advice and friendship. He has told her that he is happily married, which, he suspects, is part of the reason she trusts him.

Evan told me that he was relieved in a way that he was the person she decided to make a confidant. "She's lucky I'm the person she latched on to, because you read these articles, like that guy in Australia who lured some 15 year old girl. What if that was the guy she decided to latch on to?" Unfortunately, sexual predators do exist in WoW. In one case, a 27 year old male lured a 14 year old girl across state lines and convinced her to have sex with him, plying her with alcohol and prescription drugs (Fahey 2009). On 15 July 2009, he was convicted and sentenced to nine years in prison by the United States court (Fahey 2009). While the community in WoW can be an opportunity to meet new people, it is also essential to remember that not everyone has good intentions.

In WoW, socializing can take the many forms, such as guild interaction, regular friends and grouping partners, participation in spontaneous community interactions, or romantic relationships (Taylor 2003:25). Within these social interactions, people are free to explore other identities (Bessière et al. 2007, Taylor 2003, White 2006) such as race, gender, sexuality, or cultures. Social bonds can cross the barriers of age, race, gender, sexual orientation, social class, or religion (White 2006:88) due to the anonymous nature of the world.

In WoW, the avatar provides anonymity to the player. This anonymity means that people need not know about their fellow players actual lives. Individuals choose what they do and do not disclose to others. Previous research has suggested that people's avatars are an amalgamation of their idealized and actual selves (Bessière et al. 2007:531). The process of anonymity through the avatar allows players to escape real world norms and expectations and to act out a different role (Bessière et al. 2007, Cole and Griffiths 2007, Fron et al. 2007). Anonymity is a neutral concept and separates the virtual avatar from the actual person behind it (Bartle 2004). It means that people will not be judged on their physical appearance. Players

also have the opportunity to explore their identity and can act in ways they may not normally behave in the actual world.

People can use this anonymity for positive or negative actions within the game. A common negative practice in WoW is *ninja-looting*, a player in a group attempting to take all the rewards dropped in a dungeon or raid. This is viewed by others as unsavoury and will result in the offending player being avoided or removed from the group or guild. Anonymity allows people to hide behind the avatar and avoid the negative consequences of their actions (Brignall 2008). “People can be big time jerks in this game and forget that there are real people behind the toons. I have just had people literally go out of their way to be mean and do something that they know is heartless” a player wrote on the survey. Other offensive behaviour may include tagging enemies in order to prevent other players from fighting them or provoking enemies to attack other players. There are very few consequences for the offenders that are readily visible. Those that are available include social sanctions, such as the player being avoided, removed from groups and guilds, or publicly shamed in general channels.

Players have the opportunity to bring their own identity into the game space, create an entirely new one, or amalgamate their actual and virtual identities. All identities are affected by the player’s actual world values, perceptions, and beliefs. In the following three chapters, I will explore how values, perceptions, and beliefs of gender, sexuality, sex, race, ethnicity, and nationalism have influenced the way that players construct their identity in WoW, as well as how this affects their gaming experiences.

Chapter Three - Gender and Sexuality

“Oh! A bouncing baby Blood Elf boy!” When an avatar is created, one of the first things that is chosen and noted is gender. In WoW, it is impossible to escape the dualism of male and female, masculine and feminine. Players have no choice; they must select one or the other. Sexual orientation, however, is the personal choice of the player. The selection of gender is important, as avatars are a tool in producing a sense of presence (Taylor 2006b). In WoW, gender becomes a site of performance and play, a place where both men and women can experiment with its manifestations and extremes if they so choose (Fron et al. 2007).

In each WoW race, males and females are sexually dimorphic. The defining features that construct the bodies of males and females in WoW are the breasts, waistline, muscles, and size (Corneliussen 2008:71). Males are bigger in size and tend to have larger muscles, while females are smaller, more svelte, and in some cases, are quite buxom. The body for all WoW avatars is pre-defined by the game: it is not possible to change features such as breast or waist size. Players are unable to change any part of the physical shape of their character.

The biggest visual difference between genders is that of the body, both in the actual and virtual world. Women and men have different physical markers, such as waist, hip, or breast size. Bodies are not neutral. They act as central artifacts through which identities and social connections are shaped and thus have bearings on experience (Taylor 2003:38, 2006b:117). Simply, they carry social meanings and can be the “profound site of contestation” (Taylor 2003:38). The body has different social meanings that are imposed and developed by people of all ages and backgrounds (Taylor 2003:38). In Western society, males and females are socialized in part through gender. For example, in the actual world, boys and girls are ‘taught’ to enjoy different activities. Bodies facilitate the production of identity through shaping the look and actions of avatars as well as social relationships and communication (Taylor 2003:38). The power of the body lies in the very fact that it cannot be neutral (Taylor 2003:38).

The majority of the Alliance races (Dwarf, Gnome, Human, and Night Elf) have bodies that are similar to humans, whereas the Horde races (Orc, Tauren, Troll, and Undead) are more “monstrous” with fantastical features (Corneliussen 2008:73). The races that were

added in 2007 break this pattern. The Draenei are a race with cloven hooves, pointed ears, horns, tails, and males have tentacles. This is the first race in the Alliance to have a more “demonic” appearance (Corneliusen 2008:73). On the contrary, the Blood Elves, added to the Horde in 2007, are an ethereal race descendent from the night elves with classic elven features.

The Blood Elves are seen as the ‘pretty’ class of the Horde. “All the Horde characters are, you know, you think of as a horde, right?” Evan commented on the creation of Blood Elves. “It was clear what they were doing. They found people were playing the Alliance because they wanted that pretty look and they wanted people on the Horde to have an option to play a pretty looking character.” He felt that this addition seemed incongruous, but also saw the logic from Blizzard’s perspective. The Blood Elves get a fair amount of good natured ribbing in the game on the Horde side for this reason.

It is primarily the males that define the generic races, while the females of all races tend to be more woman than race (Corneliusen 2008:74). For example, the female Orcs and Trolls appear to have more visual commonalities with the human-like female races as opposed to the Undead and Tauren races (Corneliusen 2008:73). Their body shapes are downsized and adjusted to stereotypical proportions and their faces are beautified away from the more fantastical features (Corneliusen 2008:73).

Players can choose to make their characters appear more or less gendered or sexualized with the clothes that they wear. In WoW, clothing is not gender-specific. Any piece of clothing can be worn by any character. The clothes are moulded to the avatar’s physical shape, thus, pieces of clothing will look slightly different on male and female avatars. Figures 3.1 and 3.2 depict two characters in identical shirts. These pictures show how the same piece of clothing may appear different on male and female avatars. They also provide an example of the sexual dimorphism in the WoW races, with an example from the Alliance (Draenai) and the Horde (Undead).

Clothes are worn for a variety of different purposes. The most common is clothing worn as armour. Armour mitigates physical damage and supplies the avatar with attributes to boost their combative abilities such as strength, stamina, or intellect. There are four types of armour: cloth, leather, mail, and plate. Certain character classes can only wear particular types of armour. For example, Priests are only able to wear cloth armour, whereas warriors



Figure 3.1: Male and female Undead characters wearing identical shirts.
Screenshot taken by author 13 July 2009.



Figure 3.2: Male and female Draenei characters wearing identical shirts.
Screenshot taken by author, 13 July 2009.

can wear plate. Each avatar begins play at level one with basic armour suited to their class. Armour can be obtained as quest or dungeon rewards, crafted by players, or purchased from NPC vendors or other players.

Clothing may also be worn for casual purposes, such as dress-up, role play, or for fun. In the game, there are a number of clothing items available for this purpose, such as costumes for the holidays, for example, Hallow's End, Winter Veil, or the Lunar Festival. Figure 3.3 shows Ama in costume for Hallow's End. Holidays in WoW are often modelled after actual world holidays, such as Halloween, Christmas, and the Chinese New Year. Players may also choose to dress their avatars in costume for their own events. For example, characters may obtain a wedding dress or a formal suit. Figure 3.4 shows two characters in a dress and suit. Figure 3.5 shows the same two characters, but in the opposite clothing, illustrating that clothing is not based on gender. Players dress their character according to personal preference and the extra attributes that the clothes may provide.



Figure 3.3: Ama in a pirate costume.
Screenshot taken by author 20 October 2008.



Figure 3.4: A male and female Tauren in formal dress.
Screenshot taken by author 13 July 2009.



Figure 3.5: A male and female Tauren in formal dress of the opposite gender.
screenshot taken by author 13 July 2009.

The majority of survey participant's main characters were female (54.1%), while the majority of interview participants had main characters that were male (63.6%). I believe this discrepancy is caused by the fact that no one interviewee had a main character of the opposite gender. When asked about the sexual orientation of their main character, half (44) of survey participants stated that their character was straight, one as lesbian, two as bisexual, and one as queer. This is illustrated in Figure 3.6. The remaining participants stated that they did not play out sexuality in the game. All interviewees reported that they either did not play out sexuality in the game, or that their character was of the same sexuality as they were in the actual world. This indicates that players tend to act out their own sexuality through their character or leave it out of the game altogether.

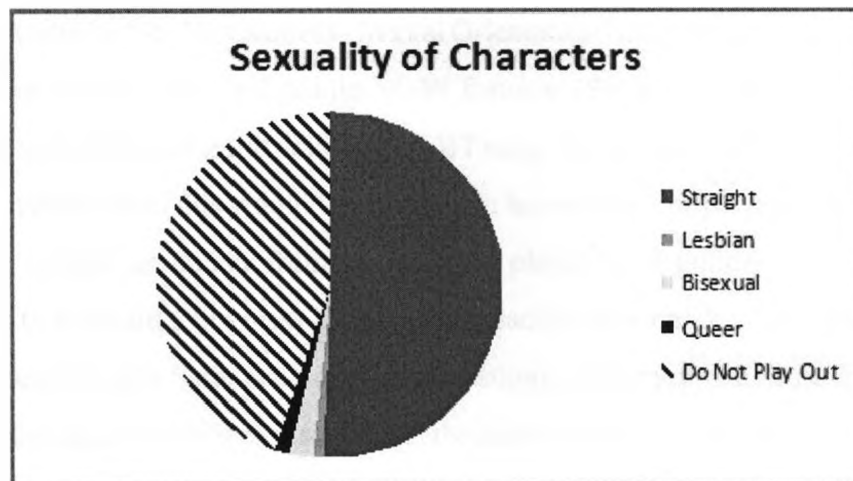


Figure 3.6: Sexuality of player's main characters

One 33 year old male stated that he played a female lesbian Draenei shaman as his main character. He was the only person I encountered in my research who stated that he played a character of a different gender and sexual orientation from his own. He also stated that he did not role play, contradicting his statement that he played out a sexuality different from his actual world sexuality, and did not elaborate upon any of his experiences. It is also possible that he was being dishonest or trying to be funny. This is one of the inherent difficulties in conducting an anonymous survey; it is impossible to ask any follow up questions.

In WoW, the majority of the population appears to be heterosexual. Nonetheless,

there is an active gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer (GLTBQ) part of the WoW community. There are GLTBQ guilds within the game; some may have coded queer themed names, such as Stonewall Champions, Oz, or Friends of Dorothy to indicate the nature of the guild while limiting harassment from other players (Yuen 2008:40). Some players deliberately seek out guilds that are GLTBQ friendly. One survey participant stated that she had quit her previous guild because her guildmates were insensitive to issues of gender, sexual orientation, and race. It is interesting to note that people in WoW leave “queer” out of the list when discussing sexuality. The common acronym is GLBT, however, I will refer to it as GLTBQ unless I am referring to a specific person or guild who uses the abbreviated acronym, as I have spoken to players that self-identify as queer.

There has been some controversy over GLBTQ guilds in WoW. In 2006, Blizzard cited Sara Andrews for “Harassment - Sexual Orientation” after she posted a guild recruiting advertisement on the Blizzard public WoW forums. (Sliwinski 2006b, Terdiman 2006). Sara’s post stated that her guild was “not GLBT only, but we are GLBT friendly” (Sliwinski 2006b). Blizzard stated this would likely result in harassment for players (Sliwinski 2006b). This ruling caused an outcry from the GLBTQ players and guilds, with several writing complaints to Blizzard (Sliwinski 2006c). This reaction was enough for Blizzard to reverse their decision towards Sara, send a letter of apology, and review their policies (Sliwinski 2006a, Terdiman 2006). Blizzard stated that the harassment policy would likely be broadened and that they would be adding a guild recruitment chat channel to the game (Sliwinski 2006a, Terdiman 2006).

Despite the Andrews incident, the GLTBQ community continues to be active in WoW. On 20 June 2009, the Fifth Annual Proudmoore Pride Celebration was held on the Proudmoore realm, organized by two GLBT guilds: The Spreading Taint (Horde) and The Stonewall Champions (Alliance) (see Figure 3.7). The event involved hundreds of players gathering in the town of Booty Bay for the festivities, including a nude duelling championship, DJ contest, parade float contest, and an Azeroth’s Next Top Model competition. (Gaygamer 2009). It was the largest Pride Celebration that the server has seen, attended by multiple GLBT guilds from across the realm (Gaygamer 2009).

The WoW community had a mixed reaction to this event. Some saw it as a positive event where players could find a sense of belonging in the community. Others emphatically

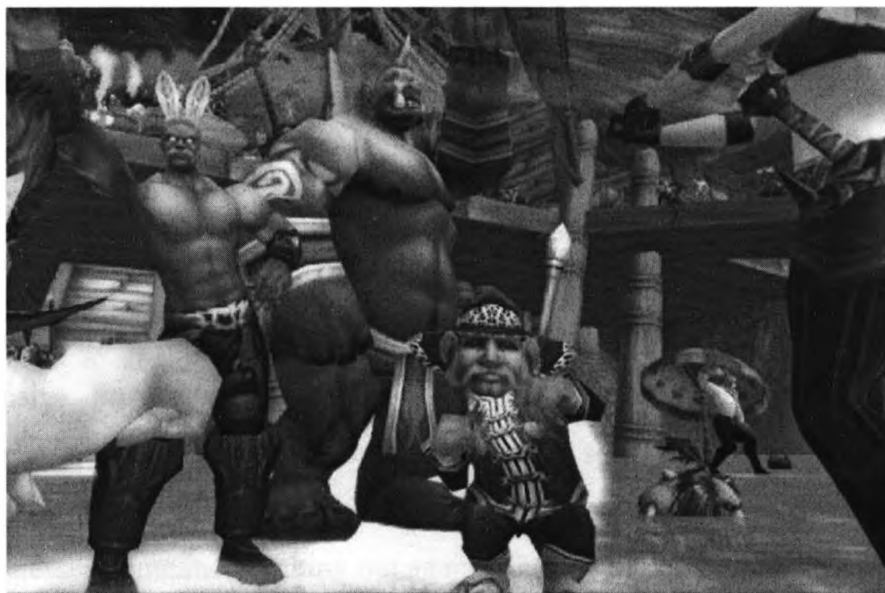


Figure 3.7: Gay Pride celebration

<http://myworldofwarcraftshop.com/2009/06/23/around-azeroth-i-love-a-parade/>

disagreed. One news forum poster wrote, “There is no need for these parades because there is no homosexuality in Azeroth” (Glasser 2009). This implies that the writer sees WoW as a space that is not influenced by the actual world. In actuality, homosexuality exists in Azeroth through players creating characters and assigning them homosexual orientations.

Sexuality, in fact, is pre-programmed into the game. Each race has a set of pre-programmed jokes that players can say to others by typing ‘/joke’. One of the male Tauren jokes is “Homogenized? No way, I like the ladies” which is an obvious comment indicative of heterosexuality as a preferred sexual orientation. Blood elves may say “I could really use a scrunchy... yeah, you heard me”, implying that they may appear effeminate. It is clear that the game is not without comments on the nature of sexuality of the characters that people can create. These comments imply that the world is predominantly heterosexual and that this is the preferred sexual orientation.

Heterosexuality as the desired ‘norm’ of the community can also be seen in general conversations among players. In the general chat channels, I have witnessed sex-based language used in a derogatory manner. While observing the trade chat channel and guild chat, I witnessed many occasions where the word “fag” was used as a pejorative term. In Incursio, one person stated “eat cocks fags” before quitting the guild, leading another person to

respond “waht [*sic*] a fag”. The terms “homo” and “gay” have also been used to imply something negative about another player. On occasion, players will speak up against this type of conversation:

Burna: I love to care about little whiny 12 year old fags

Klurn: Would you please drop the “fag” talk, Burna? Some of us gay folk really don’t appreciate it.

In this case, Klurn openly identified him or herself as gay, as well as noting that the comment was offensive. Several study participants recognized that these comments may offend GLBTQ players. While within the larger community, some may realize that these kinds of comments are offensive to others, this does not stop them. The case cited above was the only time I witnessed someone speaking out against the use of sexual terms as pejoratives. As MacCallum-Stewart (2008b:34) notes, it is fair to say that preconceptions and bigotry on the matter of sexuality (and gender) are a part of play, as they come out in casual public conversation.

Despite the prejudices that may occur, playing a character of a different gender is not uncommon in WoW. The idea of “gender-bending” is a much discussed aspect of playing online games (Ducheneaut et al. 2006b:296). It allows people to experience what it feels like to be the opposite gender, as opposed to merely observing (Boellstorff 2008:142). It has been found that only 10 - 20% of the players are female, however, it is estimated that about 50% of the avatars are female (Fron et al. 2007; Kafai et al. 2008; Seay et al. 2004). This suggests that approximately half the female characters in WoW may be played by males. In my survey, thirteen males reported that their main character was female. While no females said they had a male main character, several stated that they had created and played male characters. When asked if they played a character whose gender is opposite to their own, 42 people (48.8%) said yes, while 44 people (51.2%) said no. This is a very small numerical difference, which suggests that overall, playing a character of the opposite gender is not unusual.

There are a number of reasons why people might play a non-matched gendered avatar. One survey participant stated, “I suppose it’s because I’m comfortable enough in my own sexuality that I don’t have to worry.” This surveyee was entirely comfortable in playing a character of the opposite gender, adding that they have been doing this for a long time.

Others remarked that they find the female versions of avatars more appealing, particularly the elves. Several people, male and female, emphatically noted that the Horde characters were “ugly.” Others wanted to have a character they found attractive. “It’s like, you’re your character sort of thing,” Eve said when I asked her why. “I’d rather be a prettier character I suppose. Even when I’m trying to design a troll character, I try to pick the prettiest.” For Eve, and several people in the survey, their avatar was an extension of themselves and thus, they desired an attractive avatar. In general, the female avatars are seen as more attractive than males by the player population.

In addition to aesthetics, players may choose a female character in an attempt to gain a psychological edge against an unsuspecting chauvinistic player in PvP (Fron et al. 2007:18). Evan created a female hunter for battlegrounds for this very reason. One person said they have had people send them an apologetic emote after killing them. “I have a female Alliance alt that I sometimes play battlegrounds in. I’ve had a few times when an emote comes from a Horde male after they kill me ‘<name> is really sorry’ and <name> thinks you’re cute’.” This illustrates one type of differential treatment between male and female characters that can occur in WoW.

Several other males were curious about the opposite gender. “I found it interesting to see how female characters were treated differently than males” a survey participant commented. In my fieldwork, I heard many stories of female characters being treated differently from males. Female avatars are more likely to be given money, items, and unsolicited help. One participant noted that her female characters tended to make friends in the game faster than her male characters. Several people said that they played a female character because of this kind of behaviour. “[I play a female] to exploit foolish men who give free things to pixelated boobs” a survey participant wrote. This is an example of how stereotypes from the actual world are brought into the virtual. Players may use this action to reaffirm normative ideas about forms of gender identity (MacCallum-Stewart 2008b:34).

Some individuals exploit other player’s tendencies to give money to women by dancing naked or scantily clad in a major city. I often saw avatars dancing on mailboxes for this purpose, in order to elevate themselves above a crowd. When ‘naked’ in WoW, an avatar appears clothed in their underwear - briefs for men, and a bra and panties for women. It is also possible, through use of a mod, to make it appear as if characters on your screen are

completely naked (Castronova 2007:53). This phenomenon will be further discussed in Chapter Four.

Some female players are offended by the idea of playing a female character specifically to receive gifts and aid. These women wish to be regarded as gaming equals, rather than receive special treatment (MacCallum-Stewart 2008b:37). Thirty-one people in the survey reported that they have been treated differently because of their offline gender. “When people find out I’m a girl, sometimes they stop playing with me. Sometimes they start flirting or trying to give me things. Rarely, they don’t treat me differently” one woman reported. Other players were greeted with amazement that they were women playing the game, showing that the perception that women do not play WoW is alive and well despite evidence to the contrary. On one occasion, a male avatar ran up to Ama and said, “omg [oh my God] a girl!”, exhibiting disbelief that a female would be playing WoW. Several people reported that they got “hit on” frequently once people discovered they were women. It is also possible that male players may lie and state that they are a female in the actual world. Nonetheless, players are aware that the avatars they interact with, especially female, may be a different gender in actual life (MacCallum-Stewart 2008b:36). This can be taken to the extreme with some players assuming everyone is male (MacCallum-Stewart 2008b:36).

On one occasion when I was monitoring trade chat, I witnessed an exchange where a player assumed another’s gender based on their name.

Jamary: is that how Angel got her mount?

Gabrielangel: angel is a man ty

Dalio: wow people way to assume that angle [*sic*] was a girl

Gabrielangel: see angel is not my name just like ur name isnt douchebag
thats just who you are [*sic*]

In this case, Gabrielangel became quite offended that someone assumed he was female because of the “angel” in his name. This conversation went on for several minutes, eventually degrading into a battle of insults between Gabrielangel and Jamary. This example illustrates the kind of reaction that people may have when an assumption is made. It also shows that some players will assume the actual gender of someone else through their name, or in other cases, appearance, race choice, or class choice.

Does this mean that people find the idea of playing a character whose gender is opposite to their own strange? The majority of people I spoke with said no; the avatar is just

an avatar, whether it is created as a representation of the player's self or not. Only one person in the study stated that "people's characters reflect their likes, but characters are not a representation of self." This goes against the more popular belief throughout academic literature as well as other players opinions that an avatar is an extension or desired image of themselves.

Several of those who found playing a cross-gendered character strange reported that it was not the idea of gender-bending they found odd, but rather the idea that people may actually role play the opposite gender. "I think it's a bit weird for someone to roleplay like a member of the opposite sex" Brian said. "...maybe it's not weird, I just don't understand the motivation... but it doesn't offend me or anything like that." For Brian and several other people, the idea of someone acting as they thought the opposite gender would behave was difficult to understand. "One of the young kids i [*sic*] know had people believing he was a young girl for the longest time, and then he came clean and told us he was a boy," a survey participant revealed. "Not sure of his reasons...but we treat him no different." This is a prime example of taking role playing very seriously, to the point where people are surprised to find out about the person behind the avatar.

Gender-bending is a way to explore different gender identities in a safe environment. The idea of cross-gendering is becoming normalised. Players view it as heterosexual and liberating as opposed to a homosexual or transgendered desire (MacCallum-Stewart 2008b:37). An online environment allows people to experiment with aspects of the gender and sexuality that would not be easy in the actual world (Hussain and Griffiths 2008:50). New identities can be asserted, and it is possible that a new empathy for the opposite sex may be acquired. For example, Evan, after playing a female character in *Star Wars Galaxies*, an MMORPG, developed a newfound respect for women gamers. He was treated as if he did not know anything about the game because his avatar was female. Gender-bending can also help females avoid sexual harassment; if they play a male character, players simply assume that they are also male.

It is clear that gender - that of the player and avatar - affects the game experience and interaction within the WoW community. Gender has an impact on the race people choose for their avatars. Players seem to prefer the aesthetically pleasing visuals, which influences the choice of character race. It is commonly believed that female avatars look better and are

“prettier.” In my results, it was clear that the more attractive races were the most popular, with Night Elves and Humans at the top of the list.

Class choice may also be influenced by gender. Azeroth is a place where gender is being constructed, negotiated, and represented in ways that are not entirely dissimilar from the hegemonic Western gender discourses (Corneliussen 2008:65). WoW has a rich history and lore, which can be found in the game, on the WoW official website, and in the published novels. This history is mainly about the male heroes, such as Thrall, the Orc ruler, the wizard Rhonin, or the dragon-mage Krasus. The females who are present have taken on prominent roles as war heroes and rulers (Corneliussen 2008:69). For example, Lady Jaina Proudmoore is the founder and leader of Theramore Isle, founded after the defeat of the Burning Legion. The history of Azeroth also mixes different perceptions of gender, including females in positions with masculine connotations (Corneliussen 2008:70). Aegwynn, a human mage elected Guardian of Tirisfal, filled a ‘traditional’ male role when she seduced a man in order to have a successor for her position (DeCandido 2006, Corneliussen 2008:70)¹. This is a reversal from the traditional role of the female being seduced and used for the purpose of gaining a child.

In addition to the roles found in WoW lore, there are various roles that players may assume in the game, such as that of healer. There is a common stereotype that surrounds WoW, stating that women prefer to play healers and men prefer to play *tanks* (characters meant to take the brunt of damage, such as Warriors, Paladins, or Druids). These are stereotypical roles - women, who are more nurturing and emotional, it is assumed will enjoy playing a class that is focussed on healing and benefiting a group, whereas men are more aggressive and want to defend. “Males probably prefer to do damage and women probably like to heal. Women are taught to be nurturing while men are taught to fight. It’s very hunter-gatherer” one participant said, comparing WoW to societies that use hunting and gathering as a subsistence strategy. Several players echoed this opinion, showing that this stereotype

¹ For further information on the history and lore of WoW and these particular characters, see *Warcraft: War of the Ancients Archive*, by Richard A. Knaak, *Warcraft Archive*, by Richard A. Knaak, Christie Golden, Jeff Grubb and Chris Metzen, and *World of Warcraft: Cycle of Hatred* by Keith R. A. DeCandido. The novels have been used for general background information and illustrative purposes. No extensive analysis has been completed on the use of gender in the WoW novels.

is perpetuated. “I know a lot of women tend to be playing priests. They tend to play a lot of helping classes....that’s just from what I’ve seen” Talia said, who was hesitant to apply this opinion to the entire game population. These conventional gender roles reinforce the gender division without examining the complexities and nuances of gendered social activity (DiGiuseppe and Nardi 2007). In the survey, seventeen women (48.6%) had a character who was a Priest. None of the women I interviewed had a Priest avatar. The only person who played a Priest was Josh, a 37 year old male.

During my in game fieldwork, I did not encounter many women playing Priests. While I do play a Priest, Ama is *specced* as a Shadow Priest, which means that her skills lie in dealing damage as opposed to healing. For each character class, there are three different *specs* or *talent trees*, which make the character a specialist in one of their available class roles. For example, the priest’s three talent trees are Shadow, Discipline, which focuses on damage mitigation and strengthening buffs, and Holy, with skills in healing. Zay, my druid, is skilled in Feral talents, which makes her adept at tanking and *DPS* (damage per second). Thus, I do not fit the stereotype, as I prefer to play a damage dealing class.

In my two guilds, I also witnessed character choices that combatted this stereotype. In Incursio, Zay’s guild, the people who played healers (Priests, Druids, and Shaman) were both male and female, with a fairly even split. In Fortuitus, the only healers were played by men, a Priest and a Paladin. The tanks in both guilds, however, were played by men. In the survey, only three females reported playing a Warrior (as opposed to 20 men), and only one person who I interviewed, Eve, had a Warrior character. She commented that she would not have chosen a warrior, except for the fact that the Draenei race has an ability to heal themselves. These results may indicate that women prefer to play supporting roles or characters that have multiple roles.

When it comes to DPS characters, both women and men enjoy playing them. Several people remarked that they believed that ranged DPS classes (such as the Hunter, Mage or Warlock) were more popular among women as opposed to the melee DPS (ie: Rogue or Druid). The data I gathered during my fieldwork does not support or refute this conclusion. DiGiuseppe and Nardi (2007) found that while females were less likely to play the melee classes of Rogue and Warrior (which reflects the stereotype), the class that stands the furthest

away from the opponent is the most popular class, and chosen by both genders. Thus, it appears that melee is not a universally masculine preference, rather, it is a survival strategy.

There are other kinds of roles, besides that of battle, that characters may play in the game. Several survey respondents suggested that males tend to appropriate the role of leader in a group setting. It is also interesting to note the handful of activities, open to all avatars, with feminine associations, such as tailoring, herbalism, cooking or jewelcrafting. This means that WoW not only presents the traditional invitation for women to act like men, but also invites men to participate in activities associated with women or femininity (Corneliussen 2008:79). As Corneliussen states (2008:79), it is interesting that the various activities that have masculine or feminine association in Western culture are seemingly unaffected by gender in the game; they are only gendered through our cultural perception of them as gendered. This Western influence in WoW is another example of how players bring aspects of their actual lives into WoW.

During the discussion of gender in my fieldwork, the question of age also arose. Age plays a non-trivial role in motivations for MMOGs (Yee 2008). When I asked questions about gender influencing character choices or the stereotypes that surround them, many players brought up the ages of people in the WoW community. Another common stereotype in WoW is that younger players are drawn to the Alliance faction as opposed to the Horde, as they are “prettier” and the “good guys”. Nonetheless, while this is another oft heard rumour, there is no statistical proof. “Certainly as a teenage boy, the Horde would appeal to me way more than the Alliance did...I’ve played on the Alliance side, and I didn’t find it as immature as people said on the Horde side in general chat” Evan said, when I asked him about his feelings about this stigma. When viewed from this stance, this stereotype does not follow the logic of what boys are thought to enjoy.

In my research, I found that it is generally thought that younger players will be drawn to the strongest class. “I **think** (asterisks for emphasis, *sic*) that younger, more intensely focussed ‘gamers’ are more drawn to the classes/races that match up to be the most ‘effective’ at whatever role they play,” a survey participant commented. They believe that, “younger players seem to play to WIN, rather than play to enjoy.” Yee (2008:91) has also noted that differences in how competitive or power-driven a player may be are explained better by age. Other players hold that younger players will be drawn to the classes that are

easier, less complex, and soloable. It was also proposed by several people that younger players enjoy DPS classes as opposed to healers or tanks, as this requires less responsibility from the player during group play.

While some people dislike playing with younger players, many stated that it is an issue of maturity. “You can be annoying and immature whether you’re 15 or 55, so I don’t choose who I play with based on how old they are, I choose who I play with based on how they approach the game, how they treat me” Brian stated, emphasizing that maturity was something he looked for when playing in a group with others. Others felt that while maturity was the most important thing, they enjoyed playing with players around their age because it was easier to relate to them. A 40-year-old male survey respondent revealed that he “like[s] playing with folks who understand that I may need to pause to put kids to bed, or take the dog out, etc. Younger folks seem to not understand RL [real life] things happen.” For many, it is important to socialise with people that they enjoy, relate to, and can play the game with without stress or drama.

While there is a general acknowledgement that younger players can be quite good at the game, there is also a strong undercurrent in conversation that lays blame for the ills of the game at the feet of “the kids” (Taylor 2006a:324). I have witnessed many immature and silly conversations in the trade chat channel over the course of my research, some of which is assumed to be by younger players.

In response to a conversation about “poop jokes”

Lystav: enough [immaturity] is enough

Putrale: cuase [*sic*] this is trade chat not kids chat

Ragda: and childish and sad

This conversation assumes that it is younger players that make immature comments, despite the fact that it is impossible to verify. Taylor (2006a) identifies two reasons why this practice around age may exist. First, Blizzard’s reputation drew in more young players who may not have been particularly ready for the social complexities involved in the community. (Taylor 2006a:324). Second, it is much easier than games such as *EverQuest*, and therefore more appealing to a broader, younger demographic (Taylor 2006a:324).

There are stereotypes that surround both age, gender, and sexuality in the game. Each of these stigmas has a related stereotype in the actual world. The stigma that women

do not play video games has its roots in the history of the genre itself. The stereotypes surrounding character faction and race choice can be compared to that of what we see in magazines or on television. It is common to see women who are thin, svelte, and beautiful and men who are well muscled or overtly sexy. There is a societal influence to have the right 'look' and this has translated itself in the character creation that I have seen in WoW. Finally, the stigma of women and men choosing particular classes has its roots in the stereotypical roles of women as the nurturing gender, and males as the aggressors. While these stereotypes are not as strong as they once were in the actual world, they are still perpetuated in society today and retain a strong hold in virtual worlds.

Blizzard has recently released a commercial that has interesting implications for the stereotypes present in WoW. The commercial, aired in Summer 2009, advertises Mountain Dew Game Fuel, a caffeinated soda beverage (YouTube 2009). Two flavours of the Game Fuel are available: wild fruit, representing the Alliance, or citrus burst, characterized by the Horde. In the advertisement, two attractive women are in the midst of paying for their purchases at a grocery store. One woman has the Horde beverage and the other is buying the Alliance drink. Once they see each other and note they are buying opposing drinks, one morphs into a female Night Elf and the other a male Orc and proceed to battle inside the store.

This commercial combats two stereotypes that arise in WoW. The first is the stigma that women do not play video games. The drink is clearly advertised as a "game fuel" and the advertisement is targeting WoW players. The commercial clearly implies that the two women play WoW. Second, an attractive woman becomes a male Orc, one of the races that is seen as more monstrous and unattractive. This indicates that women do play the "ugly" characters. It also shows that people play avatars of the opposite gender.

Throughout this chapter, I have illustrated multiple ways in which actual world gender, sexuality, and age have been brought into WoW by the players. It is clear that in at least some cases, gender, sexuality and age do affect the kind of characters that players choose to create. It is also evident that a number of stereotypes have made their way into WoW and have made their mark on the world. Gender in WoW is inescapable and cannot be denied. It may be modified through dress up, but despite the costume, the body is still masculine or feminine.

For the modern world, the concept of gender and sexuality is a fundamental part of defining identity as it offers a sense of personal unity, social location, and political commitment (Weeks 1987). Cyberspace has opened opportunities for community building and identity exploration; players have greater agency to explore and rework sexual and gender roles and norms (Brookley and Cannon 2009). While it does not move people outside of the political and social matrix of sexuality and gender, it allows people to reconfigure the relationships and explore possible liberation (Brookley and Cannon 2009).

It is clear that the Western notions of sexual orientation are brought into the game space. Heterosexuality is seen as the norm; identifying as GLTBQ makes a statement of belonging and is made in relation to heterosexuality. I witnessed very similar language of sexuality in WoW as in the actual world. Words such as “gay”, “fag”, or “homo” are used in a pejorative way in each space, and heterosexuality is certainly promoted over homosexuality. Events from the actual world have also been brought into WoW, such as Gay Pride parades, bringing various members of the community together. Gender and sexuality in WoW is virtually impossible to avoid.

A player’s experience of the game is influenced by their avatar, as it is their vehicle through which they experience WoW. The gender, sexuality and appearance of their avatar may affect how they interact with the community at large, depending on whether or not they choose to play out their characters gender, their own gender, or neither. It also changes how other players interact with them. The examples in this chapter of how female avatars, and players, are treated emphasizes this point. Thus, the avatar is a crucial part of the game experience.

The avatar also affects player identity - both that of their identity in the community, and how they identify with their character. Gender shapes identity, through the way people see themselves, the world, and how they relate to and communicate with others in it. Some players choose to role play, or play an avatar of the opposite sex, and identify with this choice. Others find it easiest to be themselves, both in the creation and play of their avatar as well as how they identify with it. The virtual space allows people to experiment with identity if they wish to do so. It is a safe place where they can do so with maximum

anonymity and without² actual world consequence.

The question of gender, sexuality and how they are brought into the game space leads into the next avenue of investigation: sex. In WoW, people may talk or act out their sexual beliefs, desires, or practices. Relationships of all kinds, including romantic or purely sexual, are formed. In the next chapter, I will be examining how people have brought their values, perceptions, and experiences of sex into the game space.

² Actual world consequence may be experienced if Blizzard identifies a player or if their account is hacked by an outside party.

Chapter Four - Sexual Experiences

In the actual world, it is impossible to escape sex, attraction, and sexual experiences: they surround us in the media and exist in many people's lives. Within WoW, players may have sexual experiences, whether it be through chat or play. They may act out or discuss their sexual desires, practices, and beliefs. Sexual experiences in WoW are brought into the game through creative players. People can choose to make their avatar "sexy" through their choice of race, facial features, or clothing and play out their sexual desires, practices, and identities.

Some character races are seen as "sexier" than others. Throughout the survey, several people commented on the "sexiness" of the Night Elves, Blood Elves, Humans, and Draenei. In general, female avatars are seen as "sexier" than males. Eve, who has a Blood Elf alt was told that this particular character (as opposed to her other Blood Elf character) "looks like she puts out." Eve had experienced more people hitting on her alt than any other of her characters.

While Blood Elf females are seen as overtly sexy (they can also dance like Britney Spears), the male Blood Elves are sometimes seen as effeminate. "In RL [real life] I'm a straight male... in the game I'm... a [male] bloodelf." Jestus, a guildmate, joked one afternoon. This is a common joke within the WoW community, as blood elves are one of the most attractive male races.

Some survey participants stated that they find the female versions of the avatars more appealing, particularly the elves. Several people, male and female, stated that the Horde characters were "ugly." Others desired to have a character they found attractive. "I'll admit that I enjoy the female body quite a bit", one male survey participant wrote. "So, if I had to stare at something for hours at a time, at least it would be something appealing." Seven other males agreed with this opinion, as well as Andrew, who simply asked, "Why not get a female avatar than stare at a guy's ass all day?" This indicates some males prefer to play an avatar that is sexually attractive to them at some level. However, no female commented that they chose a male avatar for this reason, indicating that this is a male preference.

When playing a female character, there are social and cultural constraints that women may encounter in MMOGs (Yee 2008:93). The proportions and clothing options can be problematic (Yee 2008:93). For example, a character with large breasts encourages the player

to think about women, not as actual players, but as spectacles (Yee 2008:93). Some players will exploit this by doing things like dancing mostly naked in a major city (see Figure 4.1). Characters without any clothes or armour on are seen in their underwear. In this particular case, the people around the dancer assumed the player behind it was male.



Figure 4.1: An Orc dancing mostly naked in Ogrimmar.
Screenshot taken by author 21 September 2008.

Sexual comments are often seen in public chat. A frequent sexual comment includes the use of the term “anal”. In these comments, “anal” is used as slang to refer to the butt of an avatar or doing something in an obsessive, meticulous manner. Players will type the word “anal” and the name of one of their abilities or an item. For example, they may say “anal [attack]” or “anal [backstab]”. This usually prompts a flurry of such statements, along with other comments about the immaturity of such conversations. On a few occasions, players will threaten to report others to Blizzard GMs for acting inappropriately in public chat. There is no way to verify who may actually get reported or if they are reprimanded. I did witness several repeat “anal” conversationalists, indicating that people either do not follow up on their threats, or that suspension or banishment is not included in the reprimands for this offense.

In addition to the above commentary that may be experienced, I have seen various sexual innuendos and general comments in trade chat. For example, in response to a call for more players for five-player dungeon called the Mana-Tombs, one person commented “ill [*sic*] mana your tombs”, turning the in-game reference into a sexual insinuation. Other players will use an actual world scenario:

(In response to Dios refusing to give Thaduo a deal on an item)

Thaduo: Not even the special deal? =C

Dios: no

Thaduo: But.. like, you always give me a special behind the gallery =C

These are common examples of how sexual innuendos may be used in the public channels in casual conversation.

I have also witnessed conversations on sexual topics in the public channels. These are often begun by random comments in the trade chat channel, such as “Showing boobs for 100G [gold] IRL [in real life] pst [please send tell (private message)]”, which spawned a discussion over the likelihood of the person being male or female, and if they were physically attractive. These conversations are often based on some kind of actual world sexual desire, practice, identity, or partner. In several cases, one or two players would threaten to report others to the Blizzard GM’s in an attempt to change the subject or end the conversation.

Throughout my fieldwork, I discovered that the majority of sexual play occurs through flirting and romantic or sexual relationships. The majority of survey respondents (65) as well as interviewees (eight) were in an actual life relationship, whether it be casual dating, a committed relationship, or marriage, at the time of research. This is illustrated in Figure 4.2. A number of people played with their partner, either on a casual or regular basis. It is an opportunity to chat and participate in an activity that both partners can enjoy. Several couples stated that they played complementary classes, such as a Warrior and Priest or Druid and Mage.

Flirting makes up a significant part of social interaction within WoW. It adds “spice to our life” and supports a positive attitude towards others (Ben-Ze’ev 2004:149). Flirting is also programmed directly into the game. Players may use the ‘/flirt’ command, which will prompt their character to say a pre-made flirtatious line. Night Elf Females may say, “I’m the type of girl my mother warned me about.” This flirt is particularly interesting, as it indicates

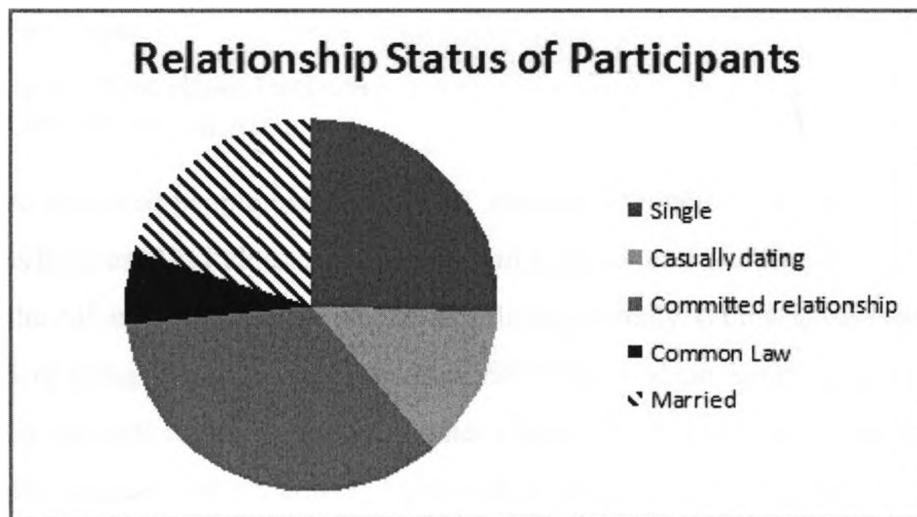


Figure 4.2: Relationship status of study participants

that a mother is warning her daughter about dating other women. This is the only indication I have seen in the game of homosexuality, and it is impossible to confirm if this is the way that Blizzard meant it to be interpreted. Gnome males might say, “I like large posteriors and I cannot prevaricate” (a reference to the Sir Mix a Lot song ‘Baby Got Back’ (1992)). Some players also make up their own lines; by typing ‘/em’ players are able create their own emotes.

In the survey, 44 people stated that they flirted through the use of emotes, and 36 people flirted through public or private chat. Several people that I spoke with in interviews discussed flirting in the game. “I dance and blow kisses for my boyfriend” Julie told me as she laughed. For Julie, it was a joking flirtation, but she would only flirt with her boyfriend. Several other interviewees stated that they flirted with people they knew as a joke. One respondent noted that, “I might blow a kiss to my brother. You’ll see us taunt each other mercilessly.” William frequently trades quips with his brother and friends. Evan flirts jokingly with others in his guild. “What would a team sport be without homo-erotic undertones?” he asked, as he compared WoW to playing on a football team. Nevertheless, no interviewees stated that they did anything overtly sexual with another person in WoW.

I also witnessed flirting in public areas during my fieldwork. Just after finishing placing some items in Zay’s bank in Shattrath City, I walked back to the flight master and encountered a scantily clad avatar (see Figure 4.3) having a flirtatious, sexual conversation

with another player.

Alara: I likes plzing [*sic*] you
Miliscent purrs at Alara

I have also observed people using the '/flirt' emote on numerous occasions. Sometimes, flirting has been used in PvP as a way to poke fun at the other side. "If someone is bothering me from the Alliance side, I'll use emotes like flirting in reply. If they do rudes at me, I'll do a flirt back or a hug. It usually makes them angrier" Talia told me, laughing at her memories. For her, flirting was a way to deal with other players that were annoying or ganking her. Flirting also occurs in the general chat channels, with couples kissing, hugging, or flirting with each other.



Figure 4.3: Miliscent.
Screenshot taken by
author, 17 September 2008.

On occasion players will form romantic relationships in WoW. Online relationships can involve many imaginative aspects, but the relationship itself is not imaginary as there are actual people involved (Ben-Ze'ev 2004:2). Physical distance is not as relevant, as communication can take place virtually in an instant. In an online relationship, self-disclosure is of great importance (Ben-Ze'ev 2004:34). Due to the anonymity and reduced vulnerability that comes with being online, people must take what others say at face value and trust that they are being honest (Ben-Ze'ev 2004). Trust however, is not pre-given and must be worked upon; the work involved requires a mutual process of self disclosure (Giddens 1990). One survey participant described the trust in his exclusively online relationship in detail. "The trust between the two people who meet in WoW, or any other online forum, is

uncannily successful... I confessed to [my online partner] more of my secrets than people I know in real life.” While he had broken up with the woman before completing the survey, he still valued the experience and relationship.

The majority of survey respondents (77) had not developed a defined romantic relationship with another player. Several people stated that they felt relationships belonged in the actual world. Be that as it may, four players stated that they met their significant other through WoW and have developed an offline relationship as a result. One participant described her relationship to me, saying,

It’s actually quite nerdy, we met in WoW and live in separate countries (I’m in Canada, he’s in the US)... We played together as friends for a year or so and then decided to evolve the relationship into a more specific, long distance dating sort of thing. I have visited him on several occasions over about a year and a half and we are now at the point where we are considering moving in together.

While this 29 year old female and her partner did not roleplay their involvement through their avatars, WoW was the catalyst for their relationship. Other couples do choose to show their affection for each other in the game. Several flirted within the game, for example, sending flowers or small gifts to each other, but did not bring sexual play into their game experience. This phenomenon is not as rare as one might think. Two people in Ama’s guild met through the game *EverQuest*, which led them to meet in the actual world and eventually marry.

Not all WoW relationships transfer to the actual world. One player stated she maintained a strictly in-game relationship, commenting, “[I] met this nice guy, and our chars are fiancee.” Two others mentioned that they had been to weddings held in the game. While I have never witnessed an in-game marriage, in-game relationships have been noted by other studies, such as Berman (2006) who did witness in-game marriages. In some cases, people who have an in-game relationship were also involved in an actual life relationship with another person. Most people seem to feel casually when asked about their spouses marrying another in-game (Berman 2006:69). This is not always the case; actual world relationships have been destroyed because of an online romance (Berman 2006:67).

In addition to romantic relationships in the game, people can also experience a sexual encounter in WoW. Twelve people in the survey stated that they had a sexual encounter and 38 people said they had witnessed one. By the term “sexual encounter”, I refer to any kind

of sexual activity, from public naked dancing to online sex. No interview participants admitted to a sexual encounter, but several had witnessed one during their gameplay. “Every city I go to you always see the stupid Night Elf on the mailbox dancing. I shake my head,” Nora sighed, when I asked her about sexual experiences. This is a common theme of sexual play in WoW, one that several people commented on during my research. Players will take off their clothes and armour and use the ‘/dance’ emote, which causes their avatar to execute a pre-programmed dance. Each gender and race has its own specific dance, most taken from the actual world. For example, the female Blood Elves dance was taken from a collaboration of Britney Spear’s music videos, and the male Night Elves dance is from Michael Jackson’s (1982) “Billie Jean”. Players will do this for fun, or to solicit money from other players.

Players may choose to go beyond flirtation, by engaging in sex through typing and emoticons, commonly known as *cybersex*. Cybersex allows erotic interaction between players who many never see each other, exchange their real names, or physically touch each other (McRae 1997:74). It can be linked to the kind of anonymous, fleeting sexual experience that can be found by having phone sex, watching pornography, or going to sex clubs or pick up bars (Castronova 2007, McRae 1997). In WoW, players can create the atmosphere and construct the image by using their characters, the commands that are provided (such as ‘/sit’ or /kneel’), emotes, and typing. While some people may find cybersex to be a disembodied, meaningless experience, others find it to be intense, involving, and transformative, enhanced by the virtuality as opposed to decreased (McRae 1997:75).

Sometimes players will act out a sexual pose or act as a joke. “When our guild downed a new boss, someone invariably [*sic*] humped the corpse” a survey participant wrote. This image can be achieved by quickly standing up and sitting down repeatedly. I have seen similar behaviour in my own playing experience - players either “humping” a corpse, or another player. This act is often a mark of machismo after defeating an enemy.

During my fieldwork, several places in the game were identified as spots for erotic encounters, including the Inn in the small Alliance village of Goldshire; Silvermoon, a Horde city; and the Deeprun Tram tunnel, a tunnel for the tram that runs between two of the major Alliance cities, Stormwind and Ironforge. The kind of eroticism experienced at these places in the game is varied.

There are an array of reactions to cybersex in WoW. Some players choose to not acknowledge that it exists. Others are extremely offended, one person even stating that the image of two characters having cybersex was “scarred into my mind.” Some choose to report those having cybersex in a public place or through public chat, as it is offensive to them and something that should not be played out in WoW. Others are concerned younger players could stumble on the couple.

Players taking part in cybersex will often create their own emotes during the encounter. The following is an excerpt from a well-known blogger, who witnessed two characters having cybersex in the Deeprun Tram.

Artemisia groans softly, biting your neck softly, her breath hard against your neck. “Oh...”

Inotep smiles and his fingers move in a circular motion. “Sounds like someone is enjoying her self [*sic*].”

Artemisia squirms against your hand, softly whimpering. “Maybe”

- (Tactic 2005).

Tactic, the author came across this couple while playing, and decided to attempt to interact with them, as he was on a RP server. The couple did not appreciate this and stopped their interaction with promises to meet again.

Twelve survey participants revealed that they had participated in a sexual encounter in WoW. Half stated they had engaged in cybersex, and others said they had sexual conversations with others. One person shared her story of why she had cybersex:

I was in the process of breaking up with my common-law husband ... and I was a bit of a mess. ...I will admit to a random ‘one night stand’ I guess it could be called. It was with some guy I barely knew, and I felt ridiculous doing it, but I suspect it fulfilled some need I must have had at the time, confirmation that I was still desirable or something to the effect. All in all, it was creepy.

This 29 year old woman was the only person to share her sexual experiences with me in detail. For her, cybersex had provided a validation and escape, much like one might see when people have one night stands in the actual world.

There is also a darker, or negative side of sexual interactions in WoW. Harassment does occur. Nora experienced this two short weeks before I met her. Another player had asked her if she wanted some gold. At first she said no, but after he asked several times, she accepted the offer. Shortly after, he attempted to have her send him “sex pictures”. At first,

she ignored him, but after seeing him make the same request in general chat, Nora reported this to a GM. Some women after having such an experience may elect to play a male character to avoid harassment. “I’m a girl... either I suck at playing, I’m a flirt, or I’m a whore. That’s the only way a majority of the players in the game view women” one woman wrote, stating that she was often treated differently because of her gender and sexuality. Several people I spoke with indicated that they played or knew someone who played a character of the opposite gender for this reason.

As with flirting, sexual encounters can also be performed or discussed in a comedic manner. In *Fortuitus*, the classic ‘mistell’ joke was told multiple times. A *mistell* occurs when someone accidentally sends a private message to a public or group chat channel.

Jestus: /tell Tavi I take off my robe and wizard hat
 Jestus: mistell!
 Valah: lol [laugh out loud]
 Tavi: that was supposed to be our secret

Jestus, a person who enjoyed providing entertainment within the guild, would occasionally deliberately send such a ‘mistell’ in the guild chat channel. All members of the guild knew it was in jest, and would react in an appropriate manner. In other cases, people may make serious sexual innuendos or suggestions towards a particular player. Others may use this as a method to announce their availability or attempt to ‘pick up’ in the game.

Throughout my fieldwork, I came across several instances WoW influenced an event in the actual world. In the case of sex and sexual experiences, this occurred several times. Dez a producer in the pornography industry and avid gamer, has produced six episodes of “Whorecraft”, a pornographic film based on WoW (Crecente, 2007). Actors portray WoW characters in the production. “People play these games and see these sexy elves, but they don’t ever get to see the elves have sex” (Crecente 2007). Over 20,000 copies have sold and five times that have been downloaded, indicating that there are people who are interested in watching the game come to life in this particular manner (Crecente 2007).

WoW has also made its way onto craigslist, a popular worldwide online classified website through advertisements from players. One person posted a personals ad for her level 44 female Blood Elf, looking for someone to “rock my world (of warcraft)” and join her on an in-game date (craigslist 2008b). Another player desired 5000 WoW gold for their epic

flying mount, and offered “in return you can mount me” in an in-game encounter (craigslist 2007). Finally, a woman advertised that she was looking for someone to have intercourse with her while she fought arena battles in the game (craigslist 2008a). This particular woman’s ad was highly specific in her requirements for her desired partner’s physical attributes and prowess, stating, “You must be kinky, naughty, and very horny.... circumcized will be considered, but not preferred” (craigslist 2008a). While I knew that cybersex was not uncommon and that people had sexual interactions in the game, finding public classified ads centred around WoW was not anticipated. These ads were found in the “best of craigslist” section of the website. On 13 July 2009 I searched craigslist in the cities of Calgary, Detroit, London, Los Angeles, New York, and Toronto looking for additional ads concerning sex and WoW. No further ads were found, suggesting that they are highly unusual. They demonstrate the fact that people are bringing sexual experiences into WoW as well as taking WoW into their own sexual encounters in the actual world.

Sex is a part of WoW; it has been programmed into the game itself by Blizzard, and as I have illustrated, it has also been brought into the game by the players. Players have the agency to create their own identities through sexuality as well as sexual experiences. Online sexual experiences can provide a variety of different things for the people who are participating in them. WoW players may gain sexual satisfaction, validation, experience, or create new relationships. WoW is a generally safe environment in which people who may be physically or socially awkward can gain experience in interacting with others or where individuals can experiment with their sexuality. While there are negative aspects of sexual experiences in the game, such as harassment, there are also a number of positives. Problems that occur in the actual world, such as not knowing what to say, performance anxiety, or the danger of sexually transmitted diseases do not exist in the WoW environment.

This brings me to the final area of my research: race, ethnicity, and multinationalism. Akin to gender, sexuality, and sex, this too is unavoidable in WoW. Through an analysis of my fieldwork, I will demonstrate how race, ethnicity and multinationalism is brought into WoW, and how it is related to both gender and sexuality.

Chapter Five - Race, Ethnicity and Multinationalism

World of Warcraft is unique as it allows people from different geographical locations to come together in the same space. The cross-national nature of this space is one of the promises of WoW (Taylor 2006a). People who play WoW are from various places, cultures, backgrounds, and ethnicities. Throughout my fieldwork, it was evident that they bring this into the game space as they play despite the anonymous nature of the game space. Race, ethnicity, and nationality are also programmed directly into the game.

The world of Azeroth is very detailed; there are races, ethnicities, and nationalities programmed into WoW through the races, their appearances, historical backgrounds, and geographical locations. The traditional use of fantasy races - the elves, humans and dwarves in one faction and trolls and orcs in another - suggests that the Alliance are “good” and the Horde are “evil” (MacCallum-Stewart 2008a). Several survey and interview participants also noted this dichotomy, and it is easy to see where it comes from. Evan saw the visual difference between the Alliance and Horde, noting that “the Alliance cities are all pretty and high-rend looking, and the Horde areas look sort of ramshackle and run down, so there’s definitely visual cues there.” He also observed that it was difficult to determine if this was purposeful on the part of Blizzard.

Schwartz (2006) has attributed the Alliance and Horde as representations of first and third world countries. Langer (2008) echoes this thought in her statement that the Alliance and Horde are divided by lines between civilized and savage. This seems to be a visually-based analysis. Neither side has an advantage in economy or in technology, two things that are definitive of first and third world countries in the actual world.

The races in WoW are pre-defined and the player cannot manipulate them in any way except for specific characteristics in physical appearance, such as skin colour. It is worth noting that only two races have skin tones that go from white to tan to black: humans and dwarves. Each race has specific racial abilities. This means that the races actually function as different species more so than different races; they are all humanoid, but have racial traits that are biologically determined (Langer 2008:104). Each race and culture also has its own ficto-historical background (Krzywinska 2006:387).

In addition to the connections between actual world cultures and the WoW races,

there is also a connection between actual world cultures and geographical locations with the places in WoW. When Blizzard created the races, cultures, and geographical space of WoW, they made use of simplified actual world cultural inflections (Langer 2008:92). In many cases, the use of actual world cultures and places is easy to find. When I asked if players were reminded of cultures or places in the actual world when they played WoW, 43 of the survey participants and all interviewees stated they did. The most common connections that people saw were that of the Tauren to First Nations in Canada and the United States, Trolls to Jamaicans, and the dwarves to the Scottish.

The Tauren connection to First Nations peoples is one of the most obvious cultural linkages in the game and was brought up by many people in my study. Tauren are bovine humanoid creatures, with body shapes that approximate humans, but cow-like horns, snouts, hooves, and pelts. They are respectful of nature and emphasize the necessity to live in harmony with the earth. The Tauren NPCs have names that are modelled on stereotypical First Nations names, such as Perith Stormhoof or Baine Bloodhoof. The areas that Tauren live in reflect cliched First Nations imagery. They live in wooden huts, longhouses, or teepees, have totem poles on display, and the buildings are decorated in a mish-mash of First Nations styles. It appears to be a mix from the First Nations cultures of the Southwest, Northwest, and Great Plains. Figure 5.1 provides an example of the style of Tauren areas. This is the most obvious cultural depiction in terms of geographical space in WoW.

The trolls have a distinct Jamaican feel to them. They speak with a strong, stereotypical Jamaican accent, make statements such as “Ya Mon”, and the troll NPCs have a Rastafarian feel to their appearance. Evan felt their manner of speaking was “borderline racist”, and stated that he did not like this obvious attempt at imitating stereotypes of Jamaican culture and mannerisms.

The dwarves are characters out of Tolkien’s fantasy; short, portly figures that speak with a Scottish accent and have a fondness for ale. They are suited to blacksmithing and engineering. Several other races were also identified as having a connection to actual world cultures. According to my informants, Humans are seen as British or American, Night Elves as Asian, Draenai as Eastern European and Blood Elves as Middle Eastern.

Many people that I spoke with also identified the Humans as living in Medieval England-like surroundings. Their main city, Stormwind, is depicted as a large castle made



Figure 5.1: The city of Thunder Bluff
Screenshot taken by author 20 July 2009.

of greybrick, complete with a drawbridge and surrounding moat (see Figure 5.2). Other races with cities that people saw as related to the actual world include the Night Elves, who reside in the city of Darnassus. The structures have a distinct East-Asian feel, many of them resembling pagodas (see Figure 5.3).

Players identified a number of areas in the game that reminded them of places in the actual world. For example, the Barrens reminded several players of an African savannah, as it is an open grassy plain and Stranglethorn Vale is seen as representing a jungle or tropical rainforest. The very names of these places give the impression of these kinds of landscapes. These environments communicate cultural meanings that are experienced not only through the game environments themselves, but also through the avatars (Schwartz 2006:321).

The remaining races (Gnomes, Undead, and Orcs) were not identified by the people I worked with as having a direct relationship to a culture from the actual world. These races are often seen by players as being related to works of high fantasy, such as *Lord of the Rings* or *Dungeons and Dragons*. However, other researchers have identified such connections. Langer (2008:89) notes that the body shape and hair of the Orcs suggests that they represent colonial depictions of black people. She posits that the Undead and Gnomes do not



Figure 5.2: The entrance to the human city of Stormwind
Screenshot taken by author 20 July 2009.



Figure 5.3: The city of Darnassus, inhabited by the Night Elves.
Screenshot taken by author 20 July 2009.

correspond to actual world peoples, but rather represent a sort of “pure” otherness (Langer 2008:89).

Prejudiced and racist comments are made by players towards the races within the game. Hating the opposite faction, calling a Tauren a cow, orcs ugly, or using the /spit emote is seen as an acceptable practice, and in no way racist or derogatory (MacCallum-Stewart 2007). I have also seen many references to Tauren characters and beef, suggesting that they may be better seen as a meal. It is intriguing how negative comments towards in-game race are seen as acceptable. On the contrary, as I will discuss, those towards actual world ethnicity are not.

Gnomes are also seen as a lesser race. For example, one player in trade chat stated, “Gnomes only ability should be ‘shoeshine.’” Four survey respondents also commented on the lack of respect for Gnomes. “There are far too many people who think that ‘punting’ gnomes is funny. It’s not funny, it’s hurtful!” one woman said who played a gnome mage. Gnomes are also one of the few races without a distinct home city; they share the city of Ironforge with the dwarves.

Race and ethnicity are marked within the game world itself. They are also marked by players own ethnicities, geographical locations, languages, and cultural practices. During my fieldwork, I asked participants to identify their ethnicity. The survey requested participants to select their ethnicity from a list: White, Chinese, South Asian, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Southeast Asian, Arab, West Asian, Japanese, Korean, Aboriginal, or Other. The Other category is necessary in an increasingly multiethnic and multicultural world, as it is difficult to create categories for all ethnicities (Nakamura 2002). It gave participants the ability define their ethnicity as they saw fit, as opposed to forcing them to pick a pre-defined category. The majority (71 people) of survey participants identified their ethnicity as White, with the second largest category being Chinese, with six participants. The results of the inquiry can be seen in Figure 5.4.

During my interviews, I asked the interviewees what their ethnicity was without providing a pre-defined category. I received a variety of different answers: Four people defined their ethnicity as “white”, two as Canadian, one as Caucasian, one as Caucasian-Canadian, one as Chinese-Canadian, one as Greek-Canadian and one as “North American of European descent.” It is interesting to note that the people I spoke with interpreted the

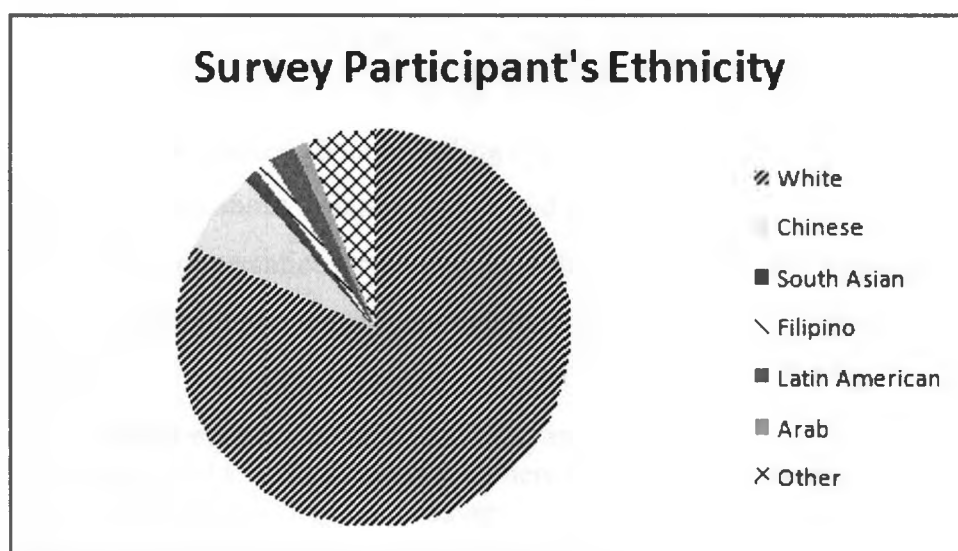


Figure 5.4: Survey participant's ethnicity

question in a variety of ways, and in two cases asked for clarification. This demonstrates that there is some confusion over the way the term “ethnicity” is understood. In mass media and casual conversation, ethnicity is not used consistently (Eriksen 2002:119), thus, people interpret it in different ways. In my research, I found that people either connected it to their skin colour, their nationality, or both.

Another factor in the diversity of WoW is the geographical location of players. This allows people to interact with those that they would not have the opportunity to encounter in the actual world. Many survey respondents reported that they have played with a person who lived in a different country. “We are from all over the world, thats [*sic*] one of the best things about this game, I think” one survey participant wrote. Only two people reported that they never played with someone who was from a different country, and 52 people stated that they often played with someone from a country other than their own. The list of countries that people had encountered others from was long and varied, including Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Brazil, China, Japan, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, and the Netherlands. While the amount of people encountered from other countries can be limited by server availability, players may choose to purchase copies of the game sold in other parts of the world so that they can play on specific servers.

All the interviewees played with someone from a different country at some point in their WoW experiences. In addition to the opportunity to meet people from different places, players are free to discuss cultural differences with other players. For example, Brian often

plays with a friend who lives in England. “I’ve discussed with [my friend] little differences between life in Canada and life in England, and different words for things, like diapers versus nappies.” Brian has also talked about travelling experiences with his friends in WoW, taking the opportunity to learn about different people and places.

Many such conversations occurred in a variety of different formats during my fieldwork. In trade chat, I saw several discussions on the stereotypical traits of Canada and the United States.

Skuli: me and my pet beaver love subway meatball subs

Maruka: its [*sic*] a national symbol up here (*referring to Canada*)

Laman: good oh canadian [*sic*] beaver

Phron: they taste just like maple syrup when you grill them

In this conversation, both the beaver and maple syrup were brought up as something that is commonly Canadian. The beaver and particularly maple syrup are also seen as symbolic or typical of Canada in several forum discussions, as well as the moose. These are stereotypical symbols of Canada and are often depicted on souvenir merchandise. These Canadian stereotypes have made their way into WoW through the players. I have not discovered any Canadian stereotypes programmed into the game itself.

The most memorable conversation I had concerning cultural differences was with a man from Texas. While playing Zay, I became friends with a group of people from Texas, and we would often discuss or joke about the differences between Canada and the United States. The Canadians, myself and two others, were often referred to as “Canadian bacon”. In turn, the Texans became the “hicks”. These nicknames, based on stereotypes, became common friendly jokes within the group. One afternoon, I mentioned that I had to leave the game shortly to pick up a bag of milk. The man’s response was, “Wait, what? Milk comes in bags?” He had only ever seen milk sold in cartons. He told me that his original image of buying milk in a bag was taking a bag to the store and filling it up with milk. This unusual image struck me as very funny, and we then continued to discuss other small differences between Canada and the United States.

When attending the Blizzard Worldwide Invitational, I interviewed two people from England, Mike and Julie. They played on a European English server with people from different countries across Europe. They had played with people from a variety of different

places, although always in English. Mike and Julie told me that they had seen guilds that were created around national identity. They also witnessed players demanding that English be spoken in the general chat channels, despite the multinational nature of the player base.

Mike and Julie's experiences echo what Taylor (2006a) found in her research on European English servers: that there is a default multinationalism at work in the structure of the space (Taylor 2006a). The player base on European servers is primarily made up of people from Western Europe, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East. (Taylor 2006a:321). In general chat, there is an expectation that players will speak English (Taylor 2006a). She saw guilds forming around national identities as well as bias, generalizations, and stereotypes about particular countries in informal discussions (Taylor 2006a:321).

Both Taylor's (2006a) work and the experiences of Mike and Julie illustrate the multinational nature of European realms. Multinationalism is more predominant on these servers because they cater to a larger number of countries. The North American servers are also multinational (as is North America and Oceania) and experience these kinds of phenomena. I have encountered guilds that cater to a specific nationality, such as Canadian, American, or Australian. As illustrated above, people from outside North America play on the North American servers regardless of their specific geographical location or the language they speak in every day life.

In addition to national and cultural diversity, language diversity also exists in WoW. Everyone I worked with spoke English, nonetheless, seven people stated that it was not their first language and many spoke a second language to some degree. I also asked participants what languages they used in the game. All survey respondents and interviewees spoke English in the general chat channels. Three people conversed in French, one in Japanese, and one in German. These results were echoed when I asked about private conversations; everyone used English with only a few people using other languages, including French, Japanese, Spanish, and Italian.

On occasion, I spoke in Japanese with a fellow guild member, as we both hold a primary knowledge of the language. We used this opportunity to practice our Japanese in a casual, fun setting. Evan, ever the intrepid WoW player, even attempted to learn Italian from a fellow guildmate. He found it challenging, but "kind of fun", although he only maintained a basic grasp of the language.

During my fieldwork, I only witnessed a single occasion where a language other than English was used in the general chat channels. In response to a statement about the appearance of a guild tabard, one player responded “really thats [*sic*] kawaii!” (Kawaii means “cute” in Japanese). This prompted another person to say, “OMAE GA NIHONGO WO HANASEMASENKARA, OMAE WO KOROSU”, the capitalization signifying yelling. In English, this roughly means “Because you cannot speak Japanese, I will kill you.”¹ In this situation, it became clear that the person who yelled the Japanese statement was joking in a confrontational manner; a common occurrence.

Nevertheless, the predominant language on WoW’s North American servers is English because they were created for players from Canada, the United States, and Oceania. American English - the slang and spelling - is the most common. Regardless, varying degrees of English proficiency can be found. This could be a result of a lack of literacy or knowledge of the English language, laziness, or the emergence of a new form of English. In my experiences, I have had several encounters with people who spoke little or no English. In these cases, I communicated through the use of emotes and very basic English: one or two word sentences. In every situation, I was able to communicate on some level. In each instance, it was a person seeking help to finish a quest or kill an enemy.

A great deal can be communicated through the use of the /smile, /point, and /thank commands. I have communicated entirely through emotes in situations where I was unaware of the other player’s language. In one instance, I was fighting a particularly difficult foe and was near death. Another player was running past and stopped to help me. At the end of the fight, I thanked him through the use of the /thank emote. He bowed to me in return and continued on his way. This example illustrates how conversation is not always needed in WoW, thus, it is possible to communicate with others without speaking the same language.

In addition to my own experiences, many survey respondents and interviewees encountered players who did not speak English as their first language. Fifty survey participants and three interviewees reported they played in a language other than English. Ten people stated that they had played in French before. One survey respondent used the

¹ Japanese translated through personal knowledge and the use of the website http://www.dicts.igenfo/2/english-japanese_romaji.php.

French she had learned in school to converse with others. “I met up with some Québécois people a while ago and we had a blast talking in French to one another. They were so stoked that I could understand and converse that it added a new dimension to the game for me.” Other players stated that they used emotes, happy or sad faces, or short sentences. “We communicated with numbers and chat abbreviations. It was actually quite fun :)” a survey participant noted concerning their experience of playing with some people who spoke no English. The majority of people in my research study attempted to communicate with others despite language barriers, whether it be through conversation, emotes, symbols, or behaviour, such as casting a buff on a friendly party.

Yet there are other players who choose not to attempt to communicate with those who do not speak a language with which they are familiar. One person in the survey commented “the servers are US based, I expect to read english [*sic*].” This reflects some of the results that Taylor (2006a) found in her study of the European English servers: there is an underlying assumption that the server language will be English. Despite some player’s negative reactions, most appear willing to work through language barriers to communicate and play together.

It is sometimes difficult to judge whether a person is not familiar with English by simply examining the discussion in the general channels. People regularly write badly spelled and grammatically incorrect sentences. This could be the result of individuals not being aware of the proper spelling or grammar, not caring about it, mistyping, or as a result of having English as a second language. The use of short-forms for words or slang is becoming more prevalent as text messaging on cell phones increases. For example, one person wrote “what techer do u have?”, a spelling mistake that could have been made because of any of the above reasons. A spelling or grammatical error is often followed up by another person pointing out the error, and making fun of the individual who made it. At times, these comments are also incorrect. In the above situation, another person commented, “your the one complaining about it”, spelling “your” incorrectly. Often in these situations, the conversation quickly turns into a flurry of insults.

Another common assumption that people make when they encounter someone who does not speak English well is that they may be a “Chinese gold farmer”. This term has become a broad epithet in WoW (Taylor 2006a). *Gold farmers* are people who play the game

solely for the purpose of obtaining WoW gold, the in-game currency, to sell in the actual world for money. Gold farmers may also attempt to hack other players accounts in order to steal their in-game items and currency. In the game, gold farmers can be identified by looking for avatars that are repeatedly killing the same things in a small area. They will sometimes use *bots*, a program that runs the character for them. A bot program operates the avatar for the player, sending it to specific points and killing whatever lies in the avatar's path. It is easy to spot *botters* as they will follow a scripted path and often become stuck on geometry, such as running into a wall. They may also be identified by their language use or unwillingness to communicate with other players (Nakamura 2009:133).

Gold farmers may be referred to as "Chinese" because gold farming has become a thriving business in China. Companies will hire people to play WoW and farm gold as a full time job. These employees work from eight to twelve hours a day and make approximately \$100 to \$250 per month (Bailey 2006, Barboza 2005). They may also be provided with room, board, and free computer game play (Barboza 2005). Companies in the business thrive, as the minimal cost of labour realizes the maximum profit (Bell 2006).

The market in buying and selling virtual game items is huge: as of 2006, it was worth nearly \$900 million (Bailey 2006). These virtual things become actual when people agree that they have a value outside of the game (Castronova 2005). Aside from gold, in game items such as armour, weapons, or novelty items may be sold as well as player's accounts. The largest sum an account sold for is £5000 (Jimenez 2007). The primary character on this account was a level 70 rogue with the highest weapons and armour available at the time (Jimenez 2007). However, five days after the sale, Blizzard banned the account, because account sales violate the Terms of Service (ToS) (Jimenez 2007).

There are many issues that arise when looking at gold farming. The nature of property becomes a critical issue. If an individual spends thousands of hours developing assets such as equipment, items, or avatar capital, the question of who it really belongs to arises (Castronova 2005:157). The ToS and End Users Licensing Agreement (EULA) which all players agree to upon installing WoW states that this property belongs to Blizzard Entertainment. These documents have not stopped gold farmers and others from selling virtual items in the actual world. If the ToS and EULA are ignored, there are interesting consequences that arise (Castronova 2005). For example, how does the sale of a piece of

armour differ from the sale of a t-shirt; are they both then taxable? (Castronova 2005:158). The issue of commerce in virtual worlds is currently being investigated by the Joint Economic Committee of the US Congress. The goal of the investigation is to obtain a better understanding of where the line lies between taxable and non-taxable trade (BBC 2006).

The large number of Chinese companies that employ people to farm gold led to the stigma that most gold farmers in WoW are Chinese. In the surveys and interviews, six people specifically referred to farmers as Chinese. One player even learned Chinese in order to taunt them.

I'm not about to say that we shouldn't allow entrepreneurialism, but I don't like what they do and I'm not going to let them slide without giving them some flak. When I find them I'll usually just toss out a few friendly comments like 'Cao ni ma,' [fuck your mom] 'Gan ni ba,' [fuck your dad] 'Chi shi.' [eat shit] etc. and then tell them to free Tibet and cause whatever mischief I can, without expending too much effort.²

This player linked gold farming to slavery or selling drugs. This statement clearly shows the antipathy some players have for gold farming.

The majority of people I spoke with expressed some level of frustration over the practice of gold farming. Informants stated that they would insult them, kill them in PvP, harass them, or report them to Blizzard for violating the rules of the game. Several people also expressed annoyance over the in-game advertising by gold sellers. This advertising can come in several ways such as through trade chat, private messaging, group invites, or in one extreme case, through the use of the dead bodies of avatars (see Figure 5.5).

Farmers, particularly those from China, are often subject to oppression as a racio-linguistic minority and an undesirable social body (Nakamura 2009:130). Specific forms of gamic labour, such as gold farming and selling, as well a specific style of play have become racialized as Chinese (Nakamura 2009:130). Through her research on gold farming, Nakamura came across videos with titles such as "Chinese Gold Farmers Must Die" and "Chinese Farmer Extermination" which depicted other players killing farmers (Nakamura 2009:133). People who post statements against Chinese gold farmers seem eager to prove that their dislike is due to the unsuccessful assimilation to American social norms, as opposed to a racist statement (Nakamura 2009:139).

² Translated through the website <http://www.it-rx.com/insults/swearing/mandarin.htm>.



Figure 5.5: Advertising in Ogrimmar: a website selling gold through the use of male Orc corpses in the city of Ogrimmar. Screenshot taken by author 3 October 2008.

Not all players become angry or frustrated with gold farmers. “If I’m living in China and need to feed my family, and this is how I’m feeding my family, then, well, people being a jerk to me isn’t helping that” Evan said, putting himself in the shoes of someone working for a company in China. Another player admitted he had bought gold from a company based in China. “I bought \$1000 for \$20 off a website. I justified it by saying that I’m paying to have a good time already, might as well up the ante. I don’t consider it cheating at all.” Clearly there is a demand for this service, as many gold farming companies exist and continue to do a thriving business.

There is also a darker side to the gold farming industry: that of hacking accounts. I will never forget the day that I came home and found an e-mail in my in-box stating that my WoW account had been “accessed by someone who is not allowed to use it” and suspended for 24 hours. After the 24 hour period had passed, I logged into my account to find both my primary characters, Ama and Zay, stripped of all their items and gold. Items from their guild banks were also stolen. Someone had hacked my WoW account in order to strip my character of anything valuable to sell for gold and then transferred all the money made to a different account. I was angry and frustrated that someone would do this in order to make money. It took two weeks for Blizzard to investigate and rectify the situation. Prior to this experience, I harboured no hard feelings against those who chose to make money off of virtual items and currency from WoW. Once I found my play (and my research) completely disrupted by

someone wanting to make quick cash, my feelings changed: preventing someone else from enjoying and playing the game takes the phenomenon of gold farming one step too far.

Racism and prejudice is not only seen through reactions toward gold farming. It is also present in every day interactions between players. In the trade chat channel, I have seen racist, sexist, homophobic, and prejudiced comments directed at a number of populations. As discussed in Chapters Three and Four, players have insulted or made fun of others for their gender or sexuality. I have witnessed comments making fun of First Nations peoples, such as someone calling out, “LF [looking for] Aboriginal Gin”, the French, midgets, Asian people, or people of African descent. A survey participant wrote, “everyone makes fun of black people. I guess its just because all of us as a society hate them for bringing us down and can express it freely online.” This illustrates the fact that people do bring their values and perceptions of race and ethnicity into WoW. In this case, it is clear that this person has brought their racist attitudes into the game space and felt safe expressing them there.

Several survey and interview participants commented on the use of the word “nigger” in trade chat. The use of this word in trade chat is often followed by someone, or a group of people from the community telling the offending player that they have acted inappropriately, are being racist, and will be reported. While it is encouraging to see people standing up against those that bring racist attitudes into the game, it is curious that it often happens in reference to this specific word and does not occur as much in other situations, such as with comments towards Chinese gold farmers. This is an example of normalisation within the WoW community. It is considered acceptable to insult Chinese people, First Nations, or various religions, but the use of the “n-word” is prohibited.

Both Langer (2008) and Schwartz (2006) witnessed players role playing bigotry and hatred in WoW in order to make the game environment more real. This indicates that some players do not view WoW as an escape from the actual world; in fact, they bring aspects of the actual world with them into the game space (Schwartz 2006). My research also reflects this fact, illustrating that players are deliberately choosing to include influences from the actual world in their play.

It appears relatively easy to start conversations about sensitive topics in the general channels. As a fellow guild member put it, there is almost a formula to start such *flame wars*. “Here’s a good starter: ‘I think that {ethnic group} is {superlative} {adjective}!! You’re all

a bunch of {adjective} {pejorative term for previous ethnic group}!!!!” While he was being facetious, there is a grain of truth to this statement. It is very easy to get people involved in a battle of insults by issuing a statement following his ‘formula’.

There are also insults used in the game that are based on the gaming genre. *Noob* is a word used to describe a new player, someone who is not yet familiar with the game mechanics or the community. It is often used as an pejorative term in response to someone asking a question that some think of as obvious or a statement that illustrates a lack of game knowledge. “I find that the game has more and more experienced players, and that the noobs are tolerated less and less” Brian commented during a conversation about the definition of the term. I saw this illustrated first hand at the Blizzard Worldwide Invitational, when a girl posed a question to a discussion panel asking if they would up the difficulty level of WoW because there were too many “noobs.”

The terms “nerd” and “geek” may also be used as an insult in WoW. In the actual world, the terms often signify a person who enjoys nonsocial hobbies, who is unattractive, and socially awkward. These terms can also be used in a joking positive manner. For example, I logged onto Ama’s guild one day to find this guild message of the day: “If you are reading this, then you are playing WoW and you are thus a NERD.” My instant reaction, and that of my guildmates, was to laugh. In this manner, the term nerd is more of a compliment, meant to provide the guild members with a chuckle, and creates a sense of inclusion. It also shows that we do see ourselves in this manner, thus, the comment was amusing.

Several people suggested to me that people feel they can issue racist, prejudiced or off-colour comments because of the anonymity that cloaks them in WoW. When I asked him if he had witnessed any racism or prejudice within the game, Josh replied,

I think because people feel they have some sort of anonymity, hidden behind their screen, and with this avatar that they’re playing that they feel safe to be able to say a lot of the stuff that they probably shouldn’t. Stuff that they wouldn’t normally say in public.

Several other people also suggested this as a reason for why players will make such comments. It has also been suggested that it is a result of immaturity. This is an opinion that is echoed throughout literature on games; the avatar can allow players to hide behind it, as

no one will be able to connect them to their avatar unless they choose to reveal their actual world identity.

In addition to discussions of race, ethnicity, and nationalism, I also witnessed several conversations on the topics of politics and religion. As my fieldwork took place during the 2008 United States Presidential election, I was privy to a number of conversations on the subject. In trade chat, the number of debates over the presidential and vice-presidential candidates increased as the election day drew closer. Barack Obama, the Democrat Presidential candidate and Sarah Palin, the Republican Vice-Presidential candidate were frequently discussed. "I witnessed threats associated with individuals opinions on Sarah Palin." William said, who also saw "numerous overtures about sexual things" towards Palin, which made him uncomfortable. Nora and Eve also stated that they had seen conversations concerning the US election. I also saw discussions over the US election in both Ama's and Zay's guilds.

While they were a hot topic of conversation in WoW, both Obama and John McCain, the Republican Presidential candidate, spoke out against video games, stating that they were a negative influence on younger generations (CBC 2008, Houghton 2008). Yet, Obama used a game as a vehicle for advertising, taking out an ad in the XBox 360 game, *Burnout Paradise* (CBC 2008). This method of advertising was an attempt to reach youthful voters (Elsworth 2008). His use of in-game advertising was ironic: he spoke out against games, then used them as a vehicle for campaign advertising. Houghton's (2008) article, a tongue in cheek piece about what the candidates could learn from video games, pointed out how WoW could teach valuable lessons about leadership.

It is interesting to note that while the Canadian election was also ongoing during my fieldwork, I never saw it arise as a topic of public conversation. This illustrates, as Braz (2005) notes, that Canada is barely acknowledged in inter-American discourse. It was discussed the night of the election, 14 October, in the Fortuitus guild chat, as the guild mostly consists of Canadian players, but not prior to voting day. The American political race was far more popularized than its Canadian counterpart.

In addition to politics, I also discovered several debates over religion in public chat. Conversations about religion continued far longer than those concerning race, ethnicity, nationalism, or politics, showing that it is a hot topic. Players discussed a number of aspects

of religion, particularly Christianity. Topics centring on Christianity include what the church is for, giving money to the church, conversion, and views on abortion. The topic of religion results in interesting reactions from the WoW community.

Kuya: Hey invisible man in the sky - no one else love me so I make you up to love me!

Sera: In the Bible, Jesus turned water into wine But then Chuck Norris turned that wine into beer.

A few players attempted to turn the debate into a fight by inserting provoking comments into the conversation. Others tried to change the subject to lighter topics, such as Chuck Norris. It was clear that while some people were enjoying a more serious debate, others preferred the lighter, sillier topics of conversation.

Trade chat is not the only place in which religion can be found in WoW. There are also religious themed guilds within the game, for example, the True Christian guild (Bell 2006, Nardi and Harris 2007). Christian guilds are “dedicated to sharing Jesus with the gaming community” (Bell 2006:29). The amount of Christian guilds or level of Christian evangelism that occurs across the realms varies from server to server (Bell 2006:29). In 2005, a woman attempted to start an e-mail petition to insert a Nativity scene into WoW (Crecente 2005). However, Blizzard did not honour this request, and in fact has reportedly suspended players for putting down another religious affiliation (Bell 2006:29). In trade chat, I have seen people insult a variety of religions and the people who follow them including Muslim, Roman Catholic, or Jewish practitioners, who are also frequent targets for insult in the actual world.

There are a number of ways in which players bring prejudice into WoW, including race, ethnicity, nationality, or religion. Players bring their opinions into the game space with them through their individual values, perceptions, and experiences as well as encounter it within the structure of the game itself. Race, ethnicity and multinationalism are difficult to erase from the way individuals, groups, and societies live and function because it has participated for too long and too closely in social organization and thought (Daynes and Lee 2008:119). This applies both in the virtual world of WoW as well as the actual world. It is essential that we be aware of the everyday context that WoW operates within and how it is situated within broader, often more ambivalent conversations (Taylor 2006a).

The inequality that is created by racism, prejudice, and the biases that result from actual world race, ethnicity, and multinationalism being present in WoW can be seen as a natural phenomenon. That is to say, no human society exists without some form of inequality (Boellstorff 2008:225). To be human - virtually human - is to live in social contexts that are structured by inequality, though the severity and form of that inequality will vary (Boellstorff 2008:225).

Race and ethnicity are marked within the game space by geography, language, and specific cultural practices (Thomas 2008). While race may be somewhat “virtual”, or at the very least culturally and socially constructed as opposed to biologically grounded, racism, in the actual and virtual worlds, is very real (Nakamura 2002:145). People bring their biases into the game world from the actual world as well as encounter stereotypes that Blizzard has built into the game world itself.

Conclusion

When we step through the screen into virtual communities, we reconstruct our identities on the other side of the looking glass.

-Turkle 1995:178

Throughout this thesis, I have illustrated and discussed the ways in which WoW players bring their values, perceptions, and experiences from their actual lives into the game space. As Thomas Malaby noted, virtual worlds and actual society share the same structures and patterns of behaviour (Castronova 2007). Some players feel that WoW is just a game, but this appears to be the minority opinion. WoW provides many things for the players in addition to its entertainment value. People are able to participate in the community, form new relationships, and experiment with different identities.

Gender, sexuality, sexual experiences, race, ethnicity, nationalism, religion, and politics have all found their way into WoW through the players. Players bring their values, perceptions, and experiences that surround these topics into the game space as they play. This affects the ways in which people shape their online identity as well as the way they experience the game and the community within.

Virtual worlds are not free from actual world stereotypes or prejudices. Stereotypes function in a number of ways. They help people create order in a complicated social universe, making it possible to divide the social world into *kinds* of people (Eriksen 2002:25). Stereotypes help to define the boundaries of a group and can justify privileges and differences in access to resources (Eriksen 2002:25). They can also act as self-fulfilling prophecies. (Eriksen 2002:25). Finally, they are morally ambiguous, and contested by different parties (Eriksen 2002:25).

Stereotypes have functioned in each of the ways outlined above within the game. The stigmas that surround gender, sexuality, sex, race, ethnicity, and nationalism have helped to sub-divide the WoW population. This is evinced in guild and group formation, as well as in general conversation. In this manner, the online community is very much like those in the actual world. Sub-groups and cliques form within the larger WoW community, which affects social interaction and hierarchy.

It is evident that events and identities within WoW reference ideas from the actual world, from landscape to gender, sexuality and race, as well as actual world issues. Moreover, players may reference them in their conversations and interactions with others. During fieldwork, I witnessed multiple occasions of people discussing actual world events, including politics, religion, and popular culture. At times, these discussions would become heated, players showing the passion behind their values and perceptions of the issue at hand. These cultural meanings may be further complicated by the effect of identity through the avatar (Schwartz 2006). Identity and space influence social and political perceptions, while race and identity shape the player's perspective and role in the game (Schwartz 2006).

Humans are layered with multiple identities that shift, emerge, recede, complement, and overlap as people interact with each other (Williams, P. et al. 2006). An avatar provides another layer of identity, which may reflect aspects of the person's actual world identity as well as combine new or different forms. By negotiating these identities, we are able to interact in a variety of different social contexts, both those on- and offline. These identities shape a player's perspective and role within the game. People have a messy relationship with both their on- and offline personas and social contexts (Taylor 2006b:18). The fact that people can slip into and out of complex social networks that cross space and genres is paramount (Taylor 2006b:18).

Perceived anonymity is the key influence on online identities. Players are not forced to disclose details about their actual selves. The anonymity of virtual worlds and their potential for experimenting with different identities, social, and cultural norms shape people's choices in WoW powerfully (Duchenaud et al. 2006b). As illustrated, players may choose to behave in ways they would not in their actual lives because there are very few consequences. Despite claims that the Internet, and thus WoW is an ideally democratic, discrimination free space without gender, race, age, sexuality, or disability, analysis reveals that these identity positions are still in place (Nakamura 2002).

WoW is not one single space and the play within the world is fairly divergent (Taylor 2006a). People who play come from a variety of geographical locations, ethnicities, cultural backgrounds, and with their own values, perceptions, and experiences. These are all brought into the game space by the players which changes its very nature. The actual world influences

in WoW cannot be overlooked or ignored, as they are an integral part of how the game is experienced.

It is my hope that these findings will be of some assistance to those who study WoW or other online games. I have contributed to the understanding of online gaming communities and how they function, as well as provided insight into how player's experiences and identity in online games may be influenced by the actual world. This thesis lays the groundwork for a more extensive study of WoW and other MMOGs, providing fresh insight into the issues of how aspects of WoW and the actual world interact with each other through the players.

Through my research, a new facet of WoW has been explored. Players experience the game world through multiple lenses: those which the game provides, and those they bring with them into the virtual space. This thesis demonstrates the many ways in which the actual world influences the virtual world and the effects on the player community, providing a greater understanding and knowledge of online game communities.

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Appendix A

Glossary of *World of Warcraft* Terms

Aegwynn - a Guardian of Tirisfal and mage. She is featured in numerous WoW novels.

Alliance - One of the factions in WoW. The Alliance is made up of the Draenei, Dwarves, Gnomes, Humans, and Night Elves.

Alt - An avatar that a player does not play often, sometimes used as a bank or auctioning character.

Arena - an in-game player versus player competition. Players compete in teams against others in groups of two, three, or five.

Azeroth - a full scale three-dimensional world in which WoW takes place

Battleground - specific instances where players are pitted against those of the opposite faction.

Blood Elf - a race in WoW. Blood Elves are descendants of the High Elves and have racial abilities useful for magic use and enchanting.

Bot - a program that runs the character for a player. It operates the avatar, sending it to specific points and killing whatever lies in the avatar's path.

Buff - the act of casting a friendly spell on another player

Burning Crusade, The - the 2007 Expansion for WoW. It added the Blood Elf and Draenei races, as well as the continent of Outland.

Burning Legion - a vast army of demons and corrupt races who seek to destroy anything in their path. They have invaded Azeroth three times and been defeated.

Corpse Camp - the act of killing another player in PvP combat, then waiting by their body for them to resurrect in order to kill them again.

Darnassus - one of the four capital cities of the Alliance. It is home to the Night Elves.

Death Knight - a new hero class added in the 2008 expansion, *Wrath of the Lich King*. Players must have a character of level 55 in order to play this class.

Deeprun Tram - a tram that runs between two Alliance cities, Stormwind and Ironforge.

DPS - Damage Per Second.

Draenei - a race in WoW. Draenei travelled to Azeroth from another dimension. Their racial attributes include an increasing gemcutting skill and a healing ability.

Druid - a class in WoW. Druids are a combination class, with skills in melee and magical combat. They can also shapeshift into bear, seal, cat, and bird forms.

Durotar - the beginning zone in which the Orc and Troll races begin the game. Designed for characters levels one to ten.

Dungeon - an activity for groups of players. Dungeons may be five-, ten-, twenty-five- or forty-man activities.

Dwarf - a race in WoW. Dwarves are an ancient race with racial abilities to find treasure, resist frost attacks, and an increasing gun skill.

Eastern Kingdom - one of the three continents in Azeroth.

Emote - special commands that tell the character to complete some kind of action. Emotes may have animated or voiced cues.

End User Licensing Agreement (EULA) - a document that governs each player's license to use the WoW software.

Experience Points (XP) - these points are gained as players work through the game by completing quests, killing foes, or participating in dungeons or raids. Players must obtain a certain amount of XP in order to gain new levels.

Faction - there are two opposing factions in WoW: the Alliance and Horde. They have a tenuous truce, but often are at odds with each other.

Flaming - the act of insulting or ridiculing other players

Game Master (GM) - a person employed by Blizzard Entertainment to help solve disputes, problems, or bugs within WoW.

Gank/Grief - the act of purposely killing or annoying another player repeatedly.

Gear - the items that characters wear or use in the game, such as armour or weapons.

Gnome - a race in WoW. Gnomes are small in stature and are known for their skill in Engineering. They also have an increased intellect stat.

Gold - the WoW currency.

Goldshire - a small village just outside the Alliance city of Stormwind

Gold farmer - a person who plays WoW for the purpose of obtaining gold to sell in the actual world.

Guild - a semi-permanent group of players who play and communicate with each other on a regular basis.

Haris Pilton - an NPC in the city of Shattrath, located in Outland. She is an Ex-Socialite and sells exclusive items such as "Gigantique Bag". This character is a reference to Paris Hilton.

Hemet Nesingwary - an NPC in Azeroth. He is a safari character and gives the player quests to hunt animals. This character is a reference, and the name an anagram, of Ernest Hemingway.

Horde - one of the factions in WoW. The Horde is made up of the Blood Elves, Orcs, Tauren, Trolls, and Undead.

Human - a race in WoW. Humans have an increased spirit stat, a diplomacy skill, and an increased skill in sword specialization.

Hunter - a class in WoW. Hunters are a proficient ranged melee class and have animal pets to help them in combat.

Ironforge - one of the four capital cities of the Alliance. Ironforge is inhabited by the Dwarves and Gnomes.

Kalimdor - one of the three continents in Azeroth.

Krasus - the name that the red dragon Korialstrasz uses when he is in human form. He is located in Northrend, and features in several WoW novels.

Lady Jaina Proudmoore - the founder and leader of Theramore Isle, an area in southern Kalimdor. She is featured in several of the WoW novels.

Mage - a class in WoW. Mages are skilled in magical combat.

Main - the avatar a player uses the most often.

Massively Multiplayer Online Game (MMOG) - the acronym for games that are online, built for a large player population.

Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game (MMORPG) - the acronym for games, such as WoW, that are online, built for a large player population, and have a focus on role-playing.

Mistell - a private message sent to the wrong person or a group of people by mistake.

Mod - a third-party program created to improve interaction or play in WoW.

Night Elf - a race in WoW. Night Elves were the first race in WoW. They are elusive and resistant to nature damage.

Ninja-loot - the act of attempting to take all the rewards in a group activity, such as a dungeon or raid.

Noob - a player who is new to WoW, or who only knows basic information about the game. This term is often used as an insult.

Non Player Character(s) (NPC) - characters in the game that are controlled by the computer.

Northrend - one of the three continents in Azeroth. It was added in the 2008 expansion, *Wrath of the Lich King*.

Ogrimmar - one of the four capital cities of the Horde. Ogrimmar is the home of the Orcs and Trolls.

Orc - a race in WoW. Orcs are skilled in the use of axes and have racial abilities to increase their attack power and resist stun effects.

Outland - a continent in another dimension, added to the game in the 2007 expansion, *The Burning Crusade*.

Paladin - a class in WoW. Paladins are proficient at melee combat as well as healing.

Pick-up groups (pugs) - groups that are formed spontaneously to complete an activity in the game, such as a dungeon.

Player versus Environment (PvE) - a realm type in which players may not attack each other at will: they must acquire consent for PvP combat.

Player versus Player (PvP) - a realm type in which players may attack each other at will. The only 'safe' areas are the major cities belonging to each faction and beginner areas.

Priest - a class in WoW. Priests are known as skilled healers, although they can also be proficient in shadow magic to deal damage.

Professions - activities that players can choose to learn. There are eleven primary professions, and three secondary professions. Each player can learn two primary and all secondary professions.

Raid - groups of six or more people, gathered to do an activity within the game.

Realm - players are divided into realms of maximum 20,000 players each.

Rhonin - a wizard, he is currently the leader of the Kirin Tor. Rhonin is featured in the game in Northrend, as well as in the WoW novels.

Rogue - a class in WoW. Rogues are stealthy and proficient in melee combat.

Role Play (RP) - a realm type in which players are expected to act as they believe their character would at all times; or the act of speaking and behaving as players believe their character would.

Role Play Player versus Player (RPPvP) - a realm type which combines the RP and PvP realm rules.

Server - servers host the realms in the actual world. Server is also used interchangeably with realm.

Shaman - a class in WoW. Shamans are a combination class, proficient in both melee combat and magic. They use totems to augment their abilities.

Silvermoon - one of the four capital cities of the Horde. Silvermoon is the home of the Blood Elves.

Spec - for each character class there are three specs; each spec makes the player a specialist in one of their available class roles. See also Talent tree.

Spirit Healer - an NPC found in graveyards which can instantly resurrect an avatar.

Stats - attributes that each character has. Players can choose to augment any of their attributes. The primary attributes are Strength, Agility, Stamina, Intellect, and Spirit.

Stormwind - one of the four capital cities of the Alliance. It is home to the humans and has a distinct Medieval style.

Stranglethorn Vale - a zone designed for characters level 30 - 45. It has a marked jungle feel.

Talent tree - for each character class there are three talent trees; each tree makes the player a specialist in one of their available class roles. See also Spec.

Tank - an avatar, often a Warrior, Druid, or Paladin, who takes most of the damage in a group battle.

Tauren - a race in WoW. The Tauren are a bovine race, with bodies that approximate humans, but cow-like horns, snouts, hooves, and pelts. They are able to stun enemies and have an increased skill in herbalism.

Terms of Service (ToS) - a legally binding agreement all players must agree to before playing the game. It governs the use of and conduct on WoW servers.

The Barrens - a zone in the game designed for characters level 10 - 30. It resembles an African savannah.

Thrall - the leader of the Orcs. Thrall is an NPC in Ogrimmar, as well as featured in several WoW novels.

Thunder Bluff - one of the four capital cities of the Horde. It is inhabited by the Tauren and has a First Nations motif.

Trolls - a race in WoW. Trolls have increased health regeneration and can do increased damage to beasts.

Undead - a race in WoW. The Undead are also known as the Forsaken. Their racial abilities include a cannibalism and extended underwater breathing.

Ungoro Crater - a zone in the game designed for characters level 48 - 55. It is filled with exotic plant life and creatures - including dinosaurs.

Voice over IP (VoIP) - a method of chatting online through the use of a microphone and speakers.

Warlock - a class in WoW. Warlocks are proficient magic users and are able to control a variety of pets.

Warrior - a class in WoW. Warriors are skilled in melee combat and can often be found at the front of a battle.

Warstomp - a racial ability of the Tauren, it stuns enemies in the immediate area for two seconds.

Wrath of the Lich King - the second WoW expansion, released in 2008. It added the continent of Northrend and the Death Knight hero class.

Appendix B Sample of Emotes

Below is a small sample of the emoticons available in WoW. Some emoticons are animated (the avatar performs some kind of movement) or have a verbal component.

Emote	Animated	Voiced	Description
/angry	Yes		You raise your fist in anger. You raise your fist in anger at (target).
/apologize			You apologize to everyone. Sorry! You apologize to (target). Sorry!
/cheer	Yes	Yes	You cheer! You cheer at (target)
/chicken	Yes	Yes	With arms flapping, you strut around. Cluck, cluck, Chicken! With arms flapping, you strut around (target). Cluck, cluck, chicken!
/congratulate /congrats	Yes	Yes	You congratulate everyone around you. You congratulate (target).
/cuddle			You need to be cuddled. You cuddle up against (target).
/dance	Yes		You burst into dance. You dance with (target).
/drink	Yes		You raise a drink in the air before chugging it down. Cheers! You raise a drink to (target). Cheers!
/farewell /goodbye	Yes	Yes	You wave goodbye to everyone. Farewell! You wave goodbye to (target). Farewell!
/flirt	Yes	Yes	You flirt. You flirt with (target). *note: each race and gender have a set of unique flirtatious statements.
/giggle	Yes	Yes	You giggle. You giggle at (target).
/hello	Yes	Yes	You greet everyone with a hearty hello! You greet (target) with a hearty hello!

/hug			You need a hug! You hug (target).
/kiss	Yes	Yes	You blow a kiss into the wind. You blow a kiss to (target).
/laugh	Yes	Yes	You laugh. You laugh at (target).
/love			You feel the love. You love (target).
/moon			You drop your trousers and moon everyone. You drop your trousers and moon (target).
/rofl	Yes	Yes	You roll on the floor laughing. You roll on the floor laughing at (target).
/sexy			You're too sexy for your tunic...so sexy it hurts. You think (target) is a sexy devil.
/sleep	Yes		You fall asleep. Zzzzzzzz.
/thank /thanks	Yes	Yes	You thank everyone around you. You thank (target).
/wave	Yes		You beckon everyone over to you. You wave at (target).

(From: Blizzard Entertainment 2009)

Appendix C

Thesis Survey Questions

General

- 1) Are you male or female?
 - A) Male
 - B) Female

- 2) How old are you?
 - A) fill in blank

- 3) Where are you from?
 - A) There will be a pull-down list of countries

- 4) If you are from Canada or the United States, what province/state are you from?
 - A) There will be a pull-down list of provinces/states

- 5) What is your occupation?
 - A) Full time job
 - B) Full time student
 - C) Part time job
 - D) Part time student
 - E) Combination of work and school
 - F) Unemployed
 - G) Other (please specify)

- 6) How long have you been playing World of Warcraft?
 - A) Under six months
 - B) One year
 - C) 1.5 years
 - D) Two years
 - E) 2.5 years
 - F) Three years
 - G) Over three years

- 7) Approximately how many hours a week do you spend playing World of Warcraft?
 - A) Under 10
 - B) 10 - 19
 - C) 20 - 29
 - D) 30 - 39
 - E) 40 or more

8) Why did you start playing World of Warcraft?

- A) My offline friends/family were playing
- B) My online friends were playing
- C) I saw someone else play
- D) I saw an advertisement
- E) I played the other Warcraft games
- F) Other (please specify)

9) In this space, please add any additional comments you may have regarding this section of the survey

- A) fill in blank

Character

10) How many main characters do you have?

- A) fill in blank

11) What faction is your main character(s)?

- A) Horde
- B) Alliance

12) What character race is your main character(s)?

- Table to be filled out - race, class, levels, server type

13) How many characters in total do you have?

- A) fill in blank

14) Which character do you play most often?

- A) fill in blank

15) Why did you select the server type(s) that you play on?

- A) Fill in blank

16) What are your favourite features of your main character(s)?

- A) Fill in blank

17) Is there anything you dislike about your main character(s)?

- A) Fill in the blank

18) Is there a race/class you would not play?

- A) Fill in the blank

19) In this space, please add any additional comments you may have regarding this section of the survey

- A) fill in blank

Play Style

20) What elements of the game are most important to you? (Participants rank these on scale)

- A) Questing
- B) PvP
- C) Duels
- D) Arena
- E) Dungeons
- F) Raids
- G) Game interface quality
- H) Role Playing
- I) Obtaining high quality items
- J) Obtaining lots of gold

21) What do you enjoy the most about playing World of Warcraft?

- A) Fill in blank

22) When playing World of Warcraft, do you prefer to play alone or in a group? Space for Why?

- A) Alone
- B) In a group

23) Do you enjoy PvP or duelling with others?

- A) Often
- B) Sometimes
- C) Seldom
- D) Never

24) Do you ever role-play with your character(s)? Space to elaborate

- A) Often
- B) Sometimes
- C) Seldom
- D) Never

25) When playing World of Warcraft, how often do you communicate with others, verbally or through emoticons?

- A) Often
- B) Sometimes
- C) Seldom
- D) Never

26) When playing World of Warcraft, how often do you communicate with others through general channels?

- A) Often
- B) Sometimes
- C) Seldom
- D) Never

27) When playing World of Warcraft, how often do you communicate with others through one-on-one chat?

- A) Often
- B) Sometimes
- C) Seldom
- D) Never

28) When in conversations with others, do you discuss aspects of the game? (Select all that apply)

- A) I talk about questing
- B) I talk about PvP
- C) I talk about dungeons or raiding
- D) I talk about arena
- E) I talk about group strategies
- F) I talk about game strategy in general
- G) other (please specify)

29) When in conversations with others, do you discuss events in the offline world? (Select all that apply)

- A) I talk about tv shows
- B) I talk about music or music videos
- C) I talk about news or current events
- D) I talk about events in my personal life
- E) Other (please specify)

30) Do you ever gank/purposely annoy others in the game? Space to expand

- A) Often
- B) Sometimes
- C) Seldom
- D) Never

31) Do contemporary politics influence your decision to gank/purposely annoy others?

- A) Yes - space to expand
- B) No - space to expand

32) Are you ever ganked/purposely annoyed by others in the game?

- A) Often
- B) Sometimes
- C) Seldom
- D) Never

33) What is your reaction to being ganked/purposely annoyed by others in the game? (Select all that apply)

- A) Anger
- B) Sadness
- C) Desire for revenge
- D) No reaction
- E) Other (please specify)

34) Are you in a guild?

- A) Yes
 - B) No
- If yes:

35) Is this your first guild?

- A) Yes
- B) No

36) If no, how many guilds have you been in?

- A) fill in blank

37) If you answered No to question 1 on this page, why did you leave the previous guild(s) for your current one?

- A) fill in blank

38) What does your guild focus on? (Select all that apply)

- A) PvP
- B) Dungeons/Raiding
- C) Levelling
- D) Arena
- E) Socializing
- F) Other (please specify)

39) How often do you play with others in your guild?

- A) Often
- B) Sometimes
- C) Seldom
- D) Never

40) How often do you play with people outside your guild?

- A) Often
- B) Sometimes
- C) Seldom
- D) Never

41) How often do you communicate with others in your guild?

- A) Often
- B) Sometimes
- C) Seldom
- D) Never

if no:

42) Have you ever been in a guild before?

- A) Yes
- B) No

43) If yes, how many guilds have you been in?

- A) fill in blank

44) If yes, why did you quit the guild?

- A) fill in the blank

Race/Ethnicity/Multinationalism

45) What is your ethnicity?

- A) White
- B) Chinese
- C) South Asian (East Indian, Sri Lankan, Pakistani, etc)
- D) Black
- E) Filipino
- F) Latin American
- G) Southeast Asian (Vietnamese, Indonesian)
- H) Arab
- I) West Asian (Afghan, Iranian)
- J) Japanese
- K) Korean
- L) Aboriginal
- M) Other (please specify)

46) What is your first language?

- A) Chinese
- B) English
- C) French
- D) German
- E) Italian
- F) Japanese
- G) Korean
- H) Spanish
- I) Other (please specify)

47) Do you speak any other languages?

- A) Yes (please specify)
- B) No

48) Do you believe that people are drawn to certain races in World of Warcraft? Why/why not?

- A) Yes - space to expand
- B) No - space to expand

49) Do you believe that people are drawn to certain classes? Why or why not?

- A) Yes - space to expand
- B) No - space to expand

50) Have you ever experienced exclusion in World of Warcraft? (Ex: making you feel like you don't belong or are inferior)

- A) Yes - space to expand
- B) No - space to expand

51) Have you ever experienced inclusion in World of Warcraft? (Ex: making you feel like you belong, are an equal)

- A) Yes - space to expand
- B) No - space to expand

52) Have you ever felt that you were treated unfairly in World of Warcraft?

- A) Yes - space to expand
- B) No - space to expand

53) Have you come across gold farmers in your playing experience? Reaction?

- A) Yes
- B) No

54) Do you often play with people who live in a different country? Where from?

- A) Often
- B) Sometimes
- C) Seldom
- D) Never
- E) I don't know where my fellow players live

55) Do you ever discuss cultural differences with other players?

- A) Often
- B) Sometimes
- C) Seldom
- D) Never

56) Do the areas in World of Warcraft remind you of any places or cultures in the "real world"?

- A) Yes - space to expand
- B) No - space to expand

57) When interacting with others, is there a particular place within the game world that you feel more comfortable in?

- A) Yes - space to expand
- B) No - space to expand

58) Do you believe that there are particular areas in the game world that people are drawn to?

- A) Yes - place to expand
- B) No - place to expand

59) Have you ever experienced any kind of prejudice or racism while playing WoW?

- A) Yes - place to expand
- B) No - place to expand

60) What language(s) do you use in World of Warcraft in general channels?

- A) fill in blank

61) What language(s) do you use in World of Warcraft in private or guild channels?

- A) fill in blank

62) Do you ever play with people who do not speak your first language? Please elaborate on your experiences

- A) Yes

- B) No

63) How do you react if you encounter someone who does not speak a language you are familiar with?

- A) Fill in blank

64) Do you know the ages of the other people that you play with?

- A) Yes
- B) Sometimes
- C) No

65) Do the people you play with know your age?

- A) Yes
- B) Sometimes
- C) No

66) Do you prefer to play with people of a certain age?

- A) Yes - space to expand
- B) No - space to expand

67) Do you believe that people of certain ages are drawn toward particular races or classes in World of Warcraft?

- A) Yes - space to expand
- B) No - space to expand

68) Do you believe that the world of Azeroth is one of equality? Why or why not?

- A) Yes - space to expand
- B) No - space to expand

69) In this space, please add any additional comments you may have regarding this section of the survey

- A) fill in blank

Sexuality

70) What is your sexuality?

- A) Straight
- B) Gay
- C) Lesbian
- D) Bisexual
- E) Transgender
- F) Queer
- G) Other (please specify)

71) What sexuality is your main character?

- A) Straight
- B) Gay
- C) Lesbian
- D) Bisexual
- E) Transgender
- F) Queer
- G) I do not play out sexuality in the game
- H) Other (please specify)

72) What is your current romantic relationship status?

- A) Single
- B) Casually dating
- C) In a committed relationship
- D) Common Law relationship
- E) Married
- F) Other (please specify)

73) If you are in a relationship, does your significant other play WoW?

- A) Yes
- B) No

- 74) If your significant other plays WoW, do you play with your significant other?
A) Yes, space to expand
B) No
- 75) Do you flirt with others while playing World of Warcraft through emoticons?
A) Yes
B) No
- 76) Do you flirt with others while playing World of Warcraft through public or private chat?
A) Yes
B) No
- 77) Are you involved in a romantic relationship within World of Warcraft?
A) Yes - space to expand
B) No - space to expand
- 78) Have you ever had a romantic encounter within World of Warcraft?
A) Yes - space to expand
B) No - space to expand
- 79) Have you ever had a sexual encounter within World of Warcraft?
A) Yes - space to expand
B) No - space to expand
- 80) Have you ever witnesses a romantic or sexual encounter between other characters in WoW?
A) Yes - space to expand
B) No - space to expand
- 81) Do you ever experience people treating you in a specific way in World of Warcraft because of your sexuality?
A) Yes - space to expand
B) No - space to expand
- 82) In this space, please add any additional comments you may have regarding this section of the survey
A) fill in blank

Gender

- 83) What is the gender of your main character?
A) Male
B) Female
- 84) Do you play a character who's gender is opposite to your own?
A) Yes - why?
B) No

- 85) Do the people you play with regularly know your offline gender?
A) Yes
B) No
- 86) Do you treat other players in a different way if you know their offline gender?
A) Yes - space to expand
B) No - space to expand
- 87) Do you find that other players treat you in a particular way because of your character's gender?
A) Yes - space to expand
B) No - space to expand
- 88) Do you find that other players treat you in a particular way because of your offline gender?
A) Yes - space to expand
B) No - space to expand
- 89) Do you find it strange that people play a character who's gender is opposite to their own?
A) Yes - space to expand
B) No - space to expand
- 90) Do you think that males and females choose certain races or classes to play because of their gender? Why or why not?
A) Yes - space to expand
B) No - space to expand
- 91) Do you feel that there are roles that males and females play in the game?
A) Yes - what kind?
B) No
- 92) In this space, please add any additional comments you may have regarding this section of the survey
A) fill in blank



Office of Research Ethics

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Use of Human Subjects - Ethics Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. K.S. Hele

Review Number: 15047S

Review Level: Full Board

Review Date: June 13, 2008

Protocol Title: : When Real Meets Virtual: Real Life Values, Perceptions, and Experiences in World of Warcraft

Department and Institution: Anthropology, University of Western Ontario

Sponsor:

Ethics Approval Date: June 24, 2008

Expiry Date: December 31, 2008

Documents Reviewed and Approved: UWO Protocol, Letter of Information and Consent (In person interview), Letter of Information and Consent (Online Survey), Letter of Information and Consent (In game interview), Poster.

Documents Received for Information:

This is to notify you that The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (NMREB) which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the approval date noted above.

This approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the NMREB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information. If you require an updated approval notice prior to that time you must request it using the UWO Updated Approval Request Form.

During the course of the research, no deviations from, or changes to, the study or consent form may be initiated without prior written approval from the NMREB except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazards to the subject or when the change(s) involve only logistical or administrative aspects of the study (e.g. change of monitor, telephone number). Expedited review of minor change(s) in ongoing studies will be considered. Subjects must receive a copy of the signed information/consent documentation.

Investigators must promptly also report to the NMREB:

- changes increasing the risk to the participant(s) and/or affecting significantly the conduct of the study;
- all adverse and unexpected experiences or events that are both serious and unexpected;
- new information that may adversely affect the safety of the subjects or the conduct of the study.

If these changes/adverse events require a change to the information/consent documentation, and/or recruitment advertisement, the newly revised information/consent documentation, and/or advertisement, must be submitted to this office for approval.

Members of the NMREB who are named as investigators in research studies, or declare a conflict of interest, do not participate in discussion related to, nor vote on, such studies when they are presented to the NMREB.

Chair of NMREB: Dr. Jerry Paquette

Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Grace Kelly	<input type="checkbox"/> Janice Sutherland	<input type="checkbox"/> Elizabeth Wambolt	<input type="checkbox"/> Denise Grafton

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cc: ORE File