Designed for Play:

A Case Study of Uses and Gratifications as Design Elements in

Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games

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Dedication

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. -- Hebrews 12:1 (New Living Translation)

My thesis is like the race mentioned in the verse above so let it be dedicated to those who ran this race with me. First, the faculty listed on the title page who endured reading this during the summer while I had an extended stay at Liberty University. It's also dedicated to those who endured that extended lap with me and understand the value of a job finished even if it is in August opposed to May. Also, I cannot leave out my family and friends, especially my parents who always taught me that it's not whether I win or lose in the race, but that I finish the course set before me. Finally and most importantly, let it be a dedication to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit who allowed me to finish this race. May all who reads this thesis know that God reveals minor truths in all things including academic writings such as the one presented here. -- Timothy P. Gibson, Jr., August 2008

Abstract:

The *World of Warcraft* is a paid electronic experience known as a Massively Online Role Playing Game. Since its creation, this video game has attracted over ten million subscribers. A broad question asked why this massive amount of people would join this online environment. The researcher proposed that developers of the game designed certain uses and gratifications into the online environment and that these elements could be observed through a participant observation methodology. Four uses and gratifications were singled out for observation including interactivity, asynchroniety, demassification, and community. The work reports the observations of the uses and gratifications through the eyes of the researcher within the game's environment. It also discusses the possibility of something deeper and darker that may attract the player to the game. Finally, it lays the foundation for future researchers to explore these observations in future studies.

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I. Introduction

Welcome to the World of Warcraft

Nine million. The initial case study began by looking at a community that was nine million strong. Since the initial proposal of this study in October 2007, the massively multiplayer online role-playing game or MMORPG of the *World of Warcraft increased* to ten million subscribers. This means that the rapid growth of this online community continues to expand at a near record rate. Why does this large number of people continue to log-on and participate in the online *World of Warcraft*? This study proposes that elements are designed within the game to attract users to participate in play and can be observed within that environment through a participant observation methodology. These features run parallel to notions of modern uses and gratification theory that include interactivity, asynchroniety, demassification, and a fourth added element of community. This study will detail this idea by providing a brief history of Blizzard, the company who developed the *World of Warcraft*, along with a history of the game itself followed by a review of theory related to video game design and uses, a methodology that guided this study, the findings based on observations in the game environment, and finally a discussion of the relationship to theory and future studies.

History of Warcraft

Before establishing the theory that will be used to discuss the *World of Warcraft*, a historical background of the game and Blizzard, the company that designed the game, will be presented. The company began in 1991 as Silicon and Synapse.[1]   Blizzard is based in Irvine, California and now employs 250 designers, producers, programmers,

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[1] A more in-depth history of Blizzard can be found under the Company Profile on Blizzard's official website (http://www.blizzard.com/inblizz/profile.shtml).

artists, and sound engineers. Although Blizzard has had several chart topping properties, the major product that has brought the company recognition among the gaming community is its *Warcraft* properties.

The original game in the *Warcraft* series was an RTS.[2] The game titled *Warcraft: Orcs and Humans* was released in 1994. It was followed by two sequels, *Warcraft II: Tide of Darkness* and *Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne* in 2003. The subject of this study would be released in 2004 and amass over 9 million subscribers by 2007. Significantly, the *World of Warcraft* would take the series in a different direction from the RTS roots of the previous three games.

MMORPGs such as *World of Warcraft* are Internet-only gaming experiences. Characteristic of the MMORPG is a large, sophisticated, detailed, and evolving world (Griffiths, Davies, & Chappell, 82). In *World of Warcraft*, this environment is known as Azeroth and consists of several sub-continents that can take weeks or even months to explore. Where a person begins his or her journey depends on the way they design their character.

The *World of Warcraft* allows the user to make a customized character to represent him or herself within the game. This online character, known as an avatar, is a reflection of the player's offline self. "The identity we use in MMORPGs is another incarnation of contemporary man, the one incarnation that dominates the others." (Filiciak, 101) The word avatar comes from a Sanskrit word which refers to the incarnation of God, but can also be used to refer to a manifestation of one's self (Klang,

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[2] RTS is an abbreviation for a genre of video games called Real Time Strategy games. The RTS usually have a military theme and involve strategically moving military units to conquer a map while in competition with another army.

390).   Like many MMORPGs, *World of Warcraft* has the player start with a low level

avatar that needs to be developed through quests and equipment found within the game.

This can take some time as Mathias Klang points out in his essay explaining the role of

avatars in MMORPGs.

> The development of an avatar from an unskilled, low-level character to a level of
>
> skill and strength within the virtual environment requires, above all, a great deal
>
> of time and commitment from the player. The more one plays the greater the skill
>
> of the avatar. (391)
>
> At times a user may not be able to build the attributes of his or her avatar alone.

This process may require the help of users to complete a quest or obtain the proper

equipment to build the avatar's statistical prowess. Thus, a sense of online community

begins to build in MMORPGs such as the *World of Warcraft*. Within these groups the

same sort of social interactions that occur in real life can occur in the game world.

Players may be involved in hunting or combat, and they may also fall in love, make

friends, and form communities, which offer a sense of belonging and encourage them to

take part in various economic transactions such as buying and selling within a

marketplace. (Whang & Chang, 46)

> Within the *World of Warcraft*, these groups form within two factions known as

the Horde and the Alliance. The Horde is the darker side consisting of monstrous

creatures from Tolkien mythology such as orcs and trolls while the Alliance is

represented by creatures of light such as elves and humans. These two groups divide

further into sub-sects called guilds with their own political systems. These guilds begin to

develop a rule-governed behavior from the various interactions between the players. (Griffiths, Davies, and Chappell, 83)

Not only does interaction take place through cooperative play, but it also happens through on-screen text similar to chat box or instant messaging system. (83) Textual chat is not the only form of computer-mediated communication taking place within the *World of Warcraft* and other MMORPGs. Imagine being able to reflect a person's emotions through commands typed in by the user. For example, the avatar can "emote" visually through actions such as kneeling, saluting, and waving. (83) These emotional and communicative interactions further develop a sense of community within the game.

Now that it has been established that there is a strong sense of community that permeates the *World of Warcraft*, there needs to be a description of the audience who participate in this online community. In the study conducted by Griffiths, Davies and Chappell, the vast amount of MMORPG players were males between the ages 14 and 29. These players mostly lived in North America and had education levels that ran the spectrum. (84-85) Although this data is not derived directly from the *World of Warcraft*, the audience who log onto the *World of Warcraft* may have similar characteristics (i.e. age, sex, etc.) as the people who participated in that study.

Now that a short overview and history of the game has been established, this report can begin to expand on the major theoretical literature that influenced some of the ideas presented within this report. The next chapter will outline the works of scholars who contributed to previous looks at electronic media, most importantly video games followed by the methodology that observed the game. Then, the application of the theory and methodology will be detailed in the findings sections and discussed towards the end

of this study. In the end, the observations made about the uses and gratifications within

this game should provide a foundation for future scholars to launch new studies about the

design of online worlds and should provide some insight to the processes that guide the

actions of players within the environment.

II. Literature Review

Video Game Theory

On-screen and Off-screen Space

Like most new media, many scholars are taking existing theory from older media and applying it to the medium of video games. The most common application of existing theory to video game media comes from ideas applied to film and television such as storytelling, audience point of view, editing, cinematography, and other uses of screen. "Theoretically, many of the same issues are present in video games and film: spectator positioning and suture, point of view, sound and image relations, semiotics, and other theories dealing with images or representation." (Wolf, "Inventing Space,"11) Mark J.P. Wolf's study gave a historical perspective of how video games moved into the space of the three-dimensional world. He grouped his eleven elements of on-screen and off-screen space by order of graphical complexity. They are as follows: 1. No visual space, all text based; 2. One screen, contained; 3. One screen, contained with wraparound; 4. Scrolling on one axis; 5. Scrolling on two axes; 6. Adjacent spaces displayed one at a time; 7. Layers of independently moving planes; 8. Space allowing Z-axis movement out of frame; 9. Multiple nonadjacent spaces displayed on- screen simultaneously; 10. Interactive three-dimensional environment; 11. Represented or mapped spaces. [3]

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[3]The above concepts relate to what the audience see on the television or monitor's screen. Concepts 1-9 deal with the time when video games were flat, two-dimensional representations. Concepts 10 and 11, which will be discussed in this paper, are more representative of the three-dimensional world in *World of Warcraft* and other modern games. For a more in-depth discussion of on-screen and off-screen space, see Mark J.P. Wolf's "Inventing Space: Toward a Taxonomy of On- and Off-Screen Space in Video Games."

Today, most games are interactive three-dimensional environments and are so expansive that they have to be complimented by a represented or mapped space. In the interactive three-dimensional environment, Wolf says that the spaces and objects in these various spaces can be viewed from multiple angles and viewpoints, which are all linked together in such a way as to make the world appear to have enough spatial consistency so as to be navigable by the player. (20) As correctly stated in his article, Wolf sees the popularity of these games with the development of higher processing power in the computer's or game console's processing systems.

These three-dimensional environments have become so expansive that an off-screen map later became prevalent in many three-dimensional games. Wolf states that "the represented or mapped spaces became an on-screen representation of off-screen spaces." (21) He later goes on to explain that these were not actual spaces, but schematic versions of space to help orient the players or alert them to important events occurring off-screen. These represented or mapped spaces can take the form of a map that you can toggle between on and off-screen or a simple radar at the bottom corner of the screen.

In relation to the *World of Warcraft*, the game is based in a very expansive three-dimensional environment. The original world prior to the expansion packs of *Burning Crusade* and the upcoming expansion *Wrath of the Lich King* were based around two continents that could be traversed by foot, boat, and flying creature. The world is so large an off-screen map is provided as an option within the game to help orient the players to their next destination. A small radar at the bottom, corner of the screen is also provided to give a sense of direction when going to complete the next task or goal within the game.

The Avatar

The avatar as mentioned, previously, is the on-screen representation of the user within the game environment. This avatar is created and directed by the player and maintained indefinitely rather than for a single play session. (Williams, 73) In his article, which discusses the avatar as electronic property, Mathias Klang goes so far as saying that his avatar is the manifestation of himself within the virtual environment. (Klang, 397) Thus, he believes the avatar must be perceived as an extension of the body. (400) Klang brings some heavy spiritual undertones into a discussion that primarily focused on the ownership of digital property on the Internet. In this case, it was a digital representation of one's self.

Although some may find the spiritual tones lofty, Klang did present a key concept within the game: goals must be accomplished through the mediation of the avatar on the user's behalf. Although the user exists in an MMORPG not only as a character in the game but also outside of the character, it is the avatar that stands in the middle of the course of events once there several other levels of code and information are navigated through the computer to cause the avatar to act. (Filiciak, 98) Thus, the avatar becomes an interactive means through which goals within the game can be accomplished and an interactive element comes into play that will be further discussed within this proposal. The player-character surrogate in the video game is, in a very concrete sense the external object into which the player is absorbed, which receives the player's will to activity. (Wolf, The Video Game Theory Reader, 60)

While new and exciting on a certain level, the gaming avatar as mediator to another world is particularly troubling from a spiritual aspect. In religious circles such as

Christianity, where prayer and worship to God was once a means of extending one's self beyond the earthly plains, new electronic media acts as way to reach different worlds without God as the medium. Users are transported to new realms by flicking a switch or logging-on. Thus, the video game may function as a lesser substitute for religion and spiritually, but a substitute none the less.

The Narrative

Due to its similarities with television and film, many scholars want to use narrative as a way to explain the medium of video games. Mark J.P. Wolf notes that the narrative is important because it places the video game's action within a detailed narrative context, gives the game's world a greater illusion of depth, and the player, as the story's main character, has motivation so that here is more at stake than if the game's actions were merely some random, meaningless exercise. (Wolf, The Medium of the Video Game, 101) However, when the story elements of the game become the focus, a scholar can miss elements that make this particular medium unique such as the element of interactivity.

Another scholar, Ewan Kirkland, focused on narrative and thus missed the attributes that make the video game stand on its own as a medium apart from television and film. His scholarship was hindered due to fact that he chose *Silent Hill*, a game in the Action/Adventure genre that follows a very linear path of time. "Despite the game's undoubted interactivity, in presenting players with a single pathway, frequently contingent upon completing particular actions, game progress is structured to produce a specific game story." (Kirkland, 171) This is true for that genre since progress depends highly upon advancing the story.

For the MMORPG, such as the *World of Warcraft*, progress does not depend on advancing a linear story. Progress is dependent on advancing the individual's avatar in power and experiential growth. Computer games, although employing aspects of narrative often in a somewhat instrumental way, can be seen to lack the elements of narrative that make stories compelling and successful in old media—characterization and plot, closure imminent in each element of the story. (Humphreys, 38) Although it is not the dominant focus of the MMORPG, it can help add to the focus upon designed elements within the game that permit the user certain uses within that environment.

<p style="text-align:center"><u>Uses and Gratification on the Internet</u></p>

Basically, uses and gratification can be described as the uses to which people put media and the gratifications they seek from the use. The idea is experiencing a revival in the new age of the Internet. Thomas Ruggiero wrote on this revival in his report *Uses and Gratification Theory in the 21^{sst} Century*. Ruggiero states that "U&G has always provided a cutting edge theoretical approach in the initial stages of each new mass communications medium: newspapers, radio, television, and now the Internet." (Ruggiero, 27) He outlines three ideas that can be applied to uses and gratification on the Internet which include interactivity, demassification, and asychroniety. Ideally, as more games such as the *World of Warcraft* have an online element to their design, the elements of uses and gratification can be applied to MMORPGs.

<p style="text-align:center">Interactivity</p>

Interactivity has already been alluded to in this study. Ruggiero explains that interactivity strengthens the core notion of an active user in uses and gratification. (15) It gives users a degree of control over the communication process. Within an MMORPG,

interactivity can be referred to as immersion, how deep the interactive experience is for the user. The elements that tend to drive a game can be identified in terms of goals, cybernetic feedback loops, and performance. (Humphreys, 38)

For the user, interactivity can be experienced on two levels: a level that focuses on narrative or at level that focuses on other elements within the game. [4] Story, although it does not have to be apparent, can continue to immerse players within the virtual world. Books, manuals, and magazines which focus on these games often contain detailed back stories of the characters, giving them brief histories, as well as the motivation for fighting. (Wolf, The Medium of the Video Game, 101) These tools immerse the character within the story of the game and thus, build a greater sense of interaction with the material.

When focusing on MMORPGs, the story usually serves as secondary tool to facilitate interaction. Usually, the mechanics are the central feature to highlighting the interactive element of the game. The elements that tend to drive a game can be identified in terms of goals, cybernetic feedback loops, and performance. (Humphreys, 38) Immersion comes because the player is the performer, and the game evaluates the performance and adapts to the said performance. It is very possible to become immersed in the virtual world of a desktop computer despite the small screen size. (McMahan, 68) Immersion stems from the desire of the user to be a part of the world that is within the screen. "Much of development of videogames has been driven by a desire for the corporeal immersion with technology, a will to envelop the player in technology and the environment of the game space." (Lahti, 159) Although the player's desire for

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[4]Examples of those elements include scoring, gaining experience, strategy, or looking for a particular item.

interactivity becomes a design element within the mechanics of the virtual world, it also adds to idea that this desire can replace elements of a spiritual sense. The desire for another world electronically leads to a loss of sense of the actual world created around them or even the existence of spiritual realms beyond the physical such as Heaven or Hell.

<p style="text-align:center;">*Demassification*</p>

Next in Ruggiero's three concerns the idea of demassification. Here, Ruggiero is referring to the ability of the media user to select from a wide menu. He explains that "unlike traditional mass media, new media like the Internet provide selectivity characteristics that allow individuals to tailor messages to their needs." (16) A good example of demassification within an MMORPG is avatar selection. "Depending on game universe, the user can freely—of course within the confines of some realities—select sex appearance, profession and physical features for his or her character." (Filciak, 89) The *World of Warcraft* offers most of these characteristics within the confines of the game.

Another aspect to demassification within the game environment depends on the programming within the game. "The aspects of play and interaction that animate the text and make it different every time it is played." (Humphreys, 39) For example, during a raid,[5] the program may decide to spawn three enemies during one game or ten during the next game. These aspects are developed, dependent, and center on the game's design.

Demassification can even trickle down to the strategies of the players involved with that particular course of action. Humphreys says the creativity of the player can lead

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[5] See the definition for "raid" in the appendix provided at the end.

to new and unpredictable outcomes each time the game is played. (39) These outcomes depend upon certain dynamics within the game even down to the combination of players within the unit of play. (40) The point is that different elements come together at different times to make every experience within the *World of Warcraft* a unique experience for each player.

<p align="center">*Asynchroniety*</p>

The next concept that will help explain uses and gratification content online is known as asychroniety. When Ruggiero refers to asynchroniety, he is referring to the idea that mediated messages can be staggered in time. He uses e-mail as an example. "Senders and receivers of electronic messages can read mail at different times and still interact at their convenience." (16) Games also bear a different relationship to time, being a present-tense medium, rather than a past-tense 'retelling' form ."(Humphreys, 38) Online games are not on only during particular time periods—they are always on and available to anyone worldwide. (Williams, 70)

Unlike traditional media, the user is not bound by factors such as a particular time slot in which to complete the task. The interactive and conditional nature of what the player sees means that some degree of nonlinearity is often present in the experience. (Wolf, The Medium of the Video Game, 77) This means whenever, wherever usage is convenient for the user to partake with the MMORPG is decided on the user's end depending upon variables in his or her life. The experience of passing time becomes subjective within the game, dependent on what a person is doing. (85) Pacing of the video game, then becomes a combination of the preset pacing of the computer-controlled events and characters in the game, along with the pacing determined by the player, where

the player is given the option. (86) Within an MMORPG, the player is basically given free reign to determine within what time period a task is completed within the game.

Community

The problem with Ruggiero's research is that it ignores major uses of in-group communication on the Internet. Some people's interaction on the Internet is strictly to find people of like minds on the web. Hence, community should be added to the list of reasons why people partake in the medium of the Internet. That is where Howard Rheingold's research on virtual communities is useful at this point. Rheingold says that "CMC liberates interpersonal relations from the confines of the of physical locality and thus creates opportunities for new, but genuine communities." (Rheingold, 5) Online communities are social aggregations that emerge from the net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient, human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships. (5) In other words, communities are inevitable and that their existence is based on the interaction in that community, how long somebody's been involved in the community, and how strong that person's feelings are toward the community. Online communities are definite use on the Internet that was ignored. That is why Rheingold's research is needed to bridge the gap that Ruggiero previously missed.

Within the MMORPG, community becomes a major use and design element within the structure of the game. "The game requires interpersonal interaction and, as experience shows MMORPGs are in principle one more medium into which to communicate. While they may seem bizarre in comparison to telephone or e-mail, their growing popularity clearly shows that people to whom communication with other comes more and more difficult in the real world, communicate eagerly in a virtual world."

(Filiciak, 88)These MMORPGs are not only games but also social systems—living, breathing communities with their own ecologies, life cycles and cultures. (Holland, Jenkins, and Squire, 33)

After establishing all four elements of uses and gratifications that will be studied, the argument can be built that these aspects are actually designed within the game by the game developers. In fact, several scholars have already outlined these elements. In their chapter in The Video Game Theory Reader, Walter Holland, Henry Jenkins, and Kurt Squire identify four elements that are evident in MMORPGs: competition versus collaboration; robust simulation versus accessibility to new users; engrossing game dynamics versus appeal to broad audience; and offline versus online activity. (Holland, Jenkins and Squire, 33) When examined in the terms of this study, they are, as ordered by the previous list, community, interactivity, demassification, and asynchroniety under their own terms. It is exciting to see that this study is on the same track as work done by previous scholars and that it compliments already established theory for this particular medium

III. Methodology

The initial question that began this study was broad. Basically, what attracts such a large following to participate in these massively multiplayer online role-playing games? It is the proposed that elements of uses and gratification such as interactivity, demassification, asynchroniety, and community are designed within the *World of Warcraft* to attract and retain players. First, the project needed to reveal that these elements are designed into the game as a function. Next, an account of these elements needed to be taken from the users within the *World of Warcraft*.

 A qualitative means of examining the online environment was utilized to observe the element with the *World of Warcraft*. In order to prove that the elements are present in the game, they need to be observed. If one looks at the emergence of other media such as film theory, the most important early work did not come from distant academic observers, but rather from direct participants. (Holland, Jenkins, and Squire, 25) Thus, a participant observation methodology was developed for the game. Participant observation allows the researcher to gain an insider's view of the environment. It is exceptional for studying processes and relationships among people and events. (Jorgensen, 12) According to Danny L. Jorgensen's book, Participant Observation: A Methodology for Human Studies, there are seven characteristics that can be found in a participant observation method of study.

1. A special interest in human meaning and interaction as viewed from the perspective of people who are insiders or members of particular situations and settings.

2. Location in the here and now of everyday life situations and settings as the

foundation of inquiry and method.

3. A form of theory and theorizing stressing interpretation and understanding of

human existence.

4. A logic and process of inquiry that is open-ended, flexible, opportunistic, and

requires constant redefinition of what is problematic, based on facts gathered in

concrete settings of human existence.

5. An in-depth, qualitative, case study approach and design.

6. The performance of a participant role or roles that involves establishing and

maintaining relationships with natives in the field.

7. The use of direct observation along with other methods of gathering

information. (Jorgensen, 13-14)

It was appropriate for this study because people needed to be observed within the game

employing the uses and gratifications outlined in the literature review.

In order to observe the game, the researcher became a paying user within the

environment of the *World of Warcraft*. Two characters were created for this study.

Jinkinz and Norriabee[6]. Jinkinz, a Night Elf Druid, was brought into this project from a

previous study to make advanced observations among higher levels within the game. The

other, Norriabee the Human Warrior, was created solely for the purpose of illustrating the

processes of beginning the game and the progression that takes place from the earliest

levels. Within the first session, it was discovered that the character of the avatar is a

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[6] Jinkinz is named after cult hero/player in the game named Leroy Jenkins who became a
YouTube star due to a botched raid. Norriabee is named after Chuck Norris and Mike
Huckabee since the study took place during the 2008 Primary. These names really had no
influence on the study.

process within itself. Choices have to be made regarding the faction that the player will align his or herself, race, gender, class, and physical features. Each deserved an individual description, which is outlined in-depth within the findings section since that was part of the observations made within the game.

Once inside, the intent was to observe the designed uses and gratifications within the game while taking extensive field notes on the elements outlined previously. The notes were divided into two sections during the process: observations and comments. Observations focused on non-opinion data that were observed such as the actions of players and text within the game and message boards. The Comments section focused on ideas that linked the observations together during that particular session and how they related back to the uses gratifications theory defined by Ruggiero.

There were other avatars who were observed from a far in the game like people could be observed in a park or other public setting. Any other user generated avatar besides Jinkinz or Norriabee mentioned in those observation and comments has had its name changed to protect the identities of real life people within the game. Even though the *World of Warcraft* is a public domain, the researcher believes it is his ethical responsibility to still protect the identities of the people within the environment that can be recognized due to the name of a particular avatar.

This process took place for thirty days in order to provide a brief, yet sufficient case study of the elements in regards to Ruggiero's work observed within the *World of Warcraft*. Sessions were numbered at the beginning from 1 to 30. They were also outlined by the amount of hours spent within the online environment. For example if a session went from 10 p.m. to 11 p.m., that session lasted one hour. After completing all

the observations within the field, a title was given to session to determine how those observations would be discussed within the findings. In the findings section, it can be noted that sessions are grouped together based on topics (i.e., Session 1 is labeled Character Creation because it focuses on character creation.)

To complete the observations, an analysis of the *Official World of Warcraft Discussion Forums* was used. Session 22- 30 focused specifically on the commentary by users outside of the game. The reason is that relationships generated within the game and those external to the game generated through websites and bulletin boards seek feedback and input into the game design process. (Humphreys, 41) Developers tend to listen to user feedback on the boards and other areas to add new features to the game through expansion packs and patches. The content of the threads were not changed and include spelling and grammatical errors so not to compromise the data that was gathered from those boards. Screen names on the boards were changed just as avatar names were changed to protect the identities of private users in a public setting.

Hot terms were applied for each of the elements to determine how the users' feedback was affecting game play. A list follows of some terms that were used to examine features applied to each of the four design elements of uses and gratifications outlined earlier in this study. The lists come in no particular order of importance except that they are relevant to these issues within the game. A full glossary of that slang can be found in the appendix at the end of this report.

Interactivity:

1. controls

2. game play

3. nerfing[7]

4. buff

5. debuff

Demassification:

1. character/avatar

2. instance

3. spawn

Asynchroniety:

1. AFK

2. BRB

3.log on

Community:

1. newbie/newb

2. guild

3. raid

4. twink

These terms provided a good starting point for finding a discussion about the four elements of uses and gratification designed within the *World of Warcraft*. Generally, these discussions on the boards were accompanied by an assessment about the state of that particular element within the game. Over the course of the study it was interesting to see the opinions based upon these words and how they relate to the observed functions witnessed within the game.

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[7] See Appendix for definition of terms.

The findings chapter outlines what observations were made during the researcher's participation within the *World of Warcraft* and within the text of the message boards. Findings were divided into sub-sections that follow the *World of Warcraft* from a session-to-session basis. They were accompanied by an assessment of the relationship to the particular uses and gratifications observed.

The discussion follows the sub-sections of interactivity, demassification, asynchroniety, and community as outlined in the findings section except it offers criticisms and interpretations based on data related to each item. A call for future studies is also offered in this section for starting points of studies that can be done in the future generated from the research presented.

It is the belief of the researcher that there are certain uses and gratifications designed within MMORPGs that encourage users to play within this environment. They include concepts such as interactivity, demassification, asynchroniety, and community. Through methodically observing the world within the game and then comparing the observations to user feedback on the *World of Warcraft Discussion Boards*, it is believed these elements reflect the elements of 21st Century uses and gratification theory.

IV. Findings

The overall goal of this chapter is to display the observations made within the *World of Warcraft* MMORPG. This chapter will serve as a breakdown of the notes and observations taken from the game's environment and discussion boards. The sessions were broken down into topical subjects and are listed as each one relates to the topic observed during that day's game play or observation of the message board. Here are the results of those sessions.

Session 1: Character Creation

As mentioned in the methodology section two characters were used within this study. One character was brought into this project from a previous study, while the other was created solely for the purpose of illustrating the processes of beginning the game and the progression that takes place from the earliest levels. Within the first session, it was discovered that the creation of the avatar is a process within itself. Choices have to be made regarding the faction that the player will align his or herself, race, gender, class, and physical features. Each deserves an individual description.

First, a choice has to be made regarding the faction of the avatar. There are only two choices in this regard: the Alliance and the Horde. The choice was made to make the character a member of the Alliance. Once this choice is made, a brief description of that faction appears in the right hand side of the screen giving a brief back-story of that particular faction. The Alliance back-story is as follows:

> "Alliance consists of five races: the noble humans, adventurous dwarves, the
> enigmatic night elves, the ingenious gnomes, and the honorable draenei. Bound

by a loathing for all thing demonic, they fight to restore order in the war-torn

world." (*World of Warcraft*, 2008)

As mentioned in the Alliance faction description, the next choice appearing on the

list is the races within the Alliance. Five choices are available for play in the game. They

are humans, dwarves, night elves, gnomes, and draenei. Each comes equipped with its

own history and racial strength. The newer avatar was placed among the humans. Like

the choice of faction, once the decision was made a box appeared on the right side of the

screen giving the human's story within the game followed by a listing of strengths

designed by the developers within the game that are highlighted under the race

description. This is the content that appeared on the screen.

"Humans are a young race, and thus highly versatile mastering the arts of

combat., craftsmanship, and magic with stunning efficiency. The humans' valor

and optimism have led them to build some of the world's greatest kingdoms. In

this troubled era, after generations of conflict, humanity seeks to rekindle its form

glory and forge a shining new future.

-Stealth detection increased.

-Increased Spirit.

-Bonus to reputation gain.

-Increased expertise with Swords and Mace." (*World of Warcraft*, 2008)

The next choice appearing on the screen is fairly straight forward, the choice of

gender. The only thing this choice does is give the avatar a male or female appearance on

the screen. No special abilities are given to character based upon gender, and back-story

is not built in for the avatar's gender.

Following the gender, the player then chooses the class of the avatar. Class determines the focus of the character's abilities within the game. For example, whether the character will focus on magical abilities or physical abilities. Six choices are available for class choice among the human race: warrior, paladin, rogue, priest, mage, and warlock. For the journey within this game using this character, the avatar joined the ranks of the warrior class within the *World of Warcraft*. Class also helps determine areas of the on-screen presence of the character like what weapons the avatar will carry and how that character can dress. Initially, the character holds a wooden shield, rusty sword, and wears a white tank top with patched pants. Similar to choosing a faction and race, class is also accompanied by a textual description.

> "Warriors train constantly and strive for perfection in armed combat. Though they come from all walks of life, they are united by their singular commitment to engage in glorious battle. Many warriors serve as mercenary soldiers, while others become adventurers, and danger seeking fortune hunters. A typical warrior is strong, tough, and exceptionally violent." (World of Warcraft, 2008)

Once all these aspects are settled, the player can focus on deciding the physical features of the avatar. The user can choose from several aspects that are pre-designed by the programmers of the game including skin color, facial features, hairstyle, hair color, and facial hair. These aspects can be decided by the computer by simply clicking on a randomize icon below these physical features. For the purposes of this study, the choice was made to design the character without the aid of using the randomize feature. The physical appearance was made through conscious choices of the researcher. The end result was a white character with a goatee and long red hair.

The final aspect of the character creation system is choosing the character's name. By using a similar randomize button like the one used to determine physical features, the computer can generate a name for avatar. Once again, this choice was avoided and a name was given to the character by the researcher. The name Norriabee was selected for the character. Once a name was given to the character, the accept button was hit to confirm the choices that made for the avatar. Thus the researcher entered the online environment for further study.

Session 2-7: Beginning the Journey

As stated previously, the character is a member of the Alliance faction within the *WoW*. Each character begins the game depending on his or her race. For humans, the experience within the WoW starts outside an Abbey located right outside the gates of Stormwind city arguably the largest hub for the Alliance.

Questing

Out of the gate, quests are given for the character to complete. Questing is the foundation of game play for the *World of Warcraft*. It is how the avatar within the game gains experience and currency to continue to interact successfully within the game's environment. The process of gaining entry into a quest begins with an interaction between the player's avatar and an NPC or Non-Playable Character of the same faction. In the case of this study, the interaction would be a character who was affiliated with Alliance or neutral to the divisions displayed between the Alliance and the Horde. The player with an available quest displays a yellow exclamation over his or her head indicating to the player that an interaction can take place with that NPC. The player begins the quest by right clicking on the NPC with the exclamation mark.

After beginning the interaction with the NPC, a box is displayed on screen that gives a brief history of the quest and how it pertains to the world within the game. The story is followed by a list of objectives to be completed by the avatar. Below that are the rewards that will be given to the player upon completion of the quest. The quest window will ask the player to accept or decline the quest. The player enters into the quest by clicking on the accept button. This is the text of one of the quests that was observed during the participant observation research within the game.. The message appears as follows:

> Quest Title: A Threat Within
>
> NPC: Deputy Willem
>
> Description: I hope you strapped your belt on tight young warrior because there is work. And I don't mean farming. The Stormwind guards are hard pressed to keep he peace here, with so many of us in distant lands and so many threats pressing close. And so we're enlisting the aid of anyone willing to defend their home. And their alliance. If you're here to answer the call, then speak with my superior, Marshal McBride. He's inside the abbey behind me.
>
> Quest Objective: Speak with Marshal McBride

Like many quests within the game this was the first in a series of quests that are linked together. For the sake of this study, these series of quests will be called "string quests" because they are strung together. Once completing the first element in a string quest, a next element is given to the player complete. First a completion message must be given to let the player know that the quest is completed.

Quest Title: A Threat Within (continued)

NPC: Marshal McBride

Description: Ah, good. Another volunteer. We're getting a lot of you these

days. I hope it is enough. The human lands are threatened without, and so

many of our forces have been marshaled abroad. This, in turn, leaves room

for corrupt and lawless groups to thrive within our borders. It is a many-

fronted battle we wage, Norriabee. Gird yourself for a long campaign.

Upon receiving this message, this quest is completed. After successful completion

of the quest, a reward is given to the player. The reward can take a monetary value of

copper, silver, or gold within the game, gear such as weapons and armor, or experience

and reputation points. For "A Threat Within," Norriabee received only experience and

reputation points. No gear or currency was given for his successful completion of the

objective. The reputation points totaled 82 points and went to Stormwind. The character

gained 40 experience points.

The next quest within this session was "Kobold Camp Cleaning." Notable of this

quest is that it was the first quest to involve the mass killing of certain NPCs

representative of creatures within the game. Ten creatures known as Kobolds had to be

killed in order for this quest to be completed.

Quest Title: Kobold Camp Cleaning

NPC: Marshal McBride

Your first task is one of cleaning, Norriabee. A clan of Kobolds have

infested the woods to the North. Go there and fight the kobold vermin you

find. Reduce their numbers so that we may one day drive them from

Northshire.

Quest Objective: Kill 10 kobold vermin then return to Marshal McBride.

Reward: You will receive 25 copper.

The quest was accepted and Norriabee began hunting down the Kobolds. Every time a kobold or any other enemy NPC is killed within the game, experience is given towards the player's avatar to advance it in levels. The Kobolds were on a level with Norriabee at level one. For each kill, the warrior was averaging anywhere from 50-55 experience points. As a result of the XP generated during this quest, Norriabee advanced two levels within the game.

Not only did the character gain experience, but it also gained money and items by looting the corpses of the fallen kobold. To loot a corpse, the player right clicks the fallen enemy then a box appears on the screen with a list of items that the enemy NPC was carrying. Among the items that can be picked from the dead kobolds are money (such as copper), gear, food, and miscellaneous items that can be sold to local merchant NPCs. Norriabee gained 28 copper, battered bucklers, flimsy chain gloves, melted candles, and some refreshing spring water during the quest's completion. After killing 10 Kobolds, the quest was completed after Norriabee returned to converse once again with Marshal McBride.

Kobold Camp Clean Up (Complete)

Well done citizen. Those Kobold are thieves and cowards, but in large

numbers they pose a threat to us. And the humans of Stormwind do not

need another threat. For defeating them, you have my gratitude..

Rewards: 25 Copper

XP: 170 points.

As is the course of the game, more quests were available for Norriabee to access. One was a conversational quest in which Norriabee must follow some sort of instructions and end the quest by having a conversation with an ending NPC while the other was another killing quest involving more kobolds. Both quests were assigned to Marshal McBride.

Quest Title: Simple Letter

I was asked to bring this to your attention as you returned from the kobold camps, Norriabee. It appear to be a letter sealed with the insignia of Llane, our local Warrior trainer. I wouldn't hesitate to read it before you go about any other business here in the Abbey.

Quest Objective: Read the simple letter and speak to Llane Bashere in Northshire Abbey.

Quest Title: Investigate Echo Ridge

Norriabee, my scouts tell me that the kobold infestation is larger than we had thought. A group of kobold worker has camps near Echo Ridge mine to the North. Go to the mine and remove. We know there are least 10. Kill them. See if there are more, then report back to me.

Quest Objective: Kill 10 kobold workers, then report back to Marshal McBride.

Reward: 40 copper.

Already it can be seen that there was an overwhelming amount of quests within the game. There was a problem to see how to organize these quests. Built into the game is a quest log that holds all of the current quests that need to be completed by the avatar. Hitting the "L" key on the keyboard can access the quest log. An amount of 25 quests can be held in the quest log until all quests can be completed. Basically, an entire list of quests was added through out the study. Four more quests were added in addition to Marshal McBride's quests.

The second session within the game lasted two hours within the environment of the game. The character evolved three levels within the game. The amount of gear that was amassed within the session gave Norriabee an armor rating of 141. Looking at asynchroniety, this character moved three levels within two hours. Other players may have only advanced one level after this timeframe. If more play time had been invested during this session, the character could have advanced more levels. It just depends on the time the player chose to invest in this environment.

 In addition to the 10 kobolds originally killed within this session, the death toll of enemy NPCs would also include 11 wolves that needed to be killed for another quest. This questing format would be the bulk of the solo interactions observed within the game. What is concerning is that the majority of the interactions within this game were already materializing to be violent activities. As later illustrated, some of these interactions would begin to venture into the occult, too.

Death and Resurrection

During the questing sessions, there were several other milestones that need to be mentioned in conjunction with quests themselves. One of the most important milestones

was the first time Norriabee died. It happened during Session 3 during a quest in which

Norriabee was charged with recovering a woman's grape harvest overtaken by thieves.

The thieves killed Norriabee in the middle of the vineyard. He cried in pain, and fell in

the middle of the field while the thieves ran away from the corpse.

The next moment Norriabee is transported to a graveyard where he appears in a

ghostly state. The avatar has the same looks and features in his living form except he is

blue and transparent. Standing in front of Norriabee is an angelic form. This is what is

known as a spirit healer within the game. The character can choose to interact with it as

any NPC within the game by right clicking on the spirit healer. The spirit healer responds

to Norriabee like this:

> "If you find your corpse, you can resurrect for no penalty. If I resurrect
>
> you, all of your items will take 25% durability damage, equipped and
>
> inventory."

The choice was made to go find Norriabee's body without resurrecting or rezzing

at the graveyard through the spirit healer. Norriabee's ghostly form moves slightly faster

than his living form. Within minutes, the avatar returns to the vineyard and is resurrected

at the site he died. He then proceeds to complete the quest within the vineyard as if he

never died.

As alluded to earlier, interactions would not only become increasingly violent, but

also occult. Magic is a common interaction to escape many things within the game

including death. This interaction not only makes the death seem trivial, but gives the

player a means of escaping it without virtually any penalty except the damage to the gear

mentioned by the spirit healer. Not only is the interaction trivializing the final act of

death, it also lends to an odd spiritualism in which a faceless, nameless spirit controls the act of resurrection. It begins to show a pattern of violence and mysticism that permeates the environment of *WoW*.

<div align="center">*Session 8: Observing Conversation*</div>

At the bottom left corner of the screen is a chat box where players can chat using their character's identities in public. During the course of session eight, Norriabee sat on hill in the corner of Goldshire, a town just outside of Stormwind. The entire idea behind this session was to see how people talked in the public atmosphere of the community. One would think the chat would include some things about game play, but instead the chat turned out something like this.

> Delly: ur just jealous cuz i am hotter than you
>
> Melly: she has a point
>
> Shin is confused.
>
> Delly: we will have a dance off right now come all to watch
>
> Delly: I'll bet I'll pwn you
>
> Delly: pauses
>
> Shin thinks Mellade is pretty.
>
> Shin rolls on the floor laughing.
>
> Melly blushes at Shin.
>
> Delly slaps Shin across the face. Ouch!
>
> Shin let out a long drawn out sigh.
>
> Delly says: rotflol
>
> Melly bursts into dance.

Shin thinks Delly is funny.

Melly: Says da nan, nan

Unfortunately, the conservation offered nothing of real depth initially. It seemed like a long string of nonsense. The kind of nonsense offered up in instant messenger chat instead of anything that would reveal an inside tip or trick to maneuvering within the game environment. That is until one of the player's being observed noticed something interesting one of the emotes that another player accomplished.

Shin bows down graciously .

Delly salutes Shin with respect.

Delly hugs…

Delly hugs Shin X2.

Melly thinks Shin is very respectful.

Shin is going to take Melly away from here.

Delly: Hey Shin how

Melly laughs ha ha ha.

Shin: Hmmmm?

Delly: What do you type in common to do that?

Shin: say '/e'.

This conversation about nothing began slightly evolving into a conversation about controls within the game's messaging system. *World of Warcraft* allows the player to express emotions through what is commonly known as emotes. Outside the game in other applications emotes or emoticons take the form of faces expressing emotion. Within the game, emotes take physical action. For example, /dance could translates to the character

actually dancing on-screen. At the point in the conversation, it actually became something that could be of use to the players within the game learning about an interaction through members of the community.

<div align="center">*Session 9-11: Group Questing*</div>

For the remainder of observations within the game, characters were switched from Norriabee to Jinkinz. Jinkinz is a more advanced character that has advanced further in the game and has already built in contacts within the *World of Warcraft*. This next section represents the culmination of cooperative group play within the *World of Warcraft* as experienced through the avatar of Jinkinz. Jinkinz's partner for most team questing at this time was Merle, a gnome mage.

During this sequence, Merle and Jinkinz were trying to find a creature on a hill top. The overall goal of the quest was to transform into a similar creature and speak with it on friendly terms. Basically, Merle was at a higher level than Jinkinz. His role was to clear a path to the creature by using his magic to kill whatever stood in his way. Once again, this demonstrates that major interactions within this world fall back to violence. This worked quite well up until contact was made with the creature.

Once the creature was found, Jinkinz transformed into a similar creature to talk to the NPC. Again when the initial interaction of violence fails, the character fell back on a mystic solution, in this case shape shifting. The appropriate dialogue was exchanged in the end and it was time to walk away from the creature. Merle was not ready to walk away from the creature. Instead, he decided to kill the NPC for experience points and whatever the monster was carrying. Although the creature was no threat, Merle commenced with killing the docile NPC demonstrating not only a violent interaction

within the game, but also a demassified experience within the game. Jinkinz would have chosen not to kill the character due to adhering to the heroic storyline set within the game. Merle showed a disregard for this line of thinking and focused on advancing in experience levels instead of following any semblance of a moral code within the game.

On another occasion of group questing, Jinkinz met up with another group of explorers who were trying to complete the same quest he was attempting. The idea here was to kill and collect a bounty on an orc that was holed up in a tower outside of a local village. The three adventurers met up with Jinkinz outside the castle by chance.

Their original intent was to get Jinkinz to join their group due to his high level thinking he could carry the mission. For that particular group, Jinkinz was not what they wanted. Instead of being patient and waiting learning how to develop a group a dynamic, they abandoned the quest and disbanded the make shift party. They cited the user's lack of proficiency with Jinkinz as their chief reason for leaving. This showed an utter disregard for community within the game. Instead of building a relationship with Jinkinz, that group decided to disregard it due to their own selfish goals within the game. Further research is needed to see if this a common response among the members of *WoW's* online community.

Session 12: Battlefield

A battlefield is a player versus player environment also known as a PvP environment. It is a simulated war game where members of the Alliance compete against members of the Horde to see who's more competent in using there skills. The area that Jinkinz participated is known as Warsong Gulch. Warsong Gulch is based on the capture the flag concept. Two competing flags are placed on the opposite ends of the battlefield.

Players must run to the other side while fighting members of the competing faction to capture the other side's flag. The flag is picked up by right clicking on the flag without being attacked. The flag must then be returned to the other side of the field without dying. The basics battle interactions that were utilized outside this environment was also used within the battlefield.

Several observations were noted concerning the battlefield environment. Jinkinz's Alliance team lost three out of three times within the environment with only a score of one flag compared to the Horde's three flag captures. As a community, it seemed the Horde faction was more organized with a plan of attack compared to the Alliance's methodology. The Alliance would tend to have no plan of attack while the Horde seemed organized with three to four characters guarding their flag with one major healing character to take the damage burden off the damage dealing characters. The Alliance rarely had guards and were even lacking on the healing front. Although no notes were taken on exactly what was being said, the Alliance's chat screen was usually filled with bickering and arguing instead of any element of strategy.

Although there is no data to be compared here from the Horde side, it can only be assumed that the Horde players had a more positive experience than the Alliance players since Horde beat Alliance consistently. Knowing losing three times in a row did not elicit a generally positive response after participating in a battlefield scenario that was marred with arguments instead of cooperation. This is definitely a demassified experience that may have differed highly from somebody on the winning side.

Finally, looking at the asynchronous element within the battlefield, these battlefield scenarios differed each time they were played. The first lasted roughly 25

minutes, the second lasted 45 minutes, and the final scenario lasted 60 minutes. At this

point, there is nothing really to account in the difference of play time except for the idea

that different people played in each battlefield. This could mean there was a difference

somewhat in player proficiency. Still, that would not account for inequity in the Horde

versus Alliance players' abilities in the battlefield. This is something that may warrant

future study.

<div align="center">Session 13-14: Instance</div>

The instance is defined as a dungeon that basically changes as a character or

group of characters enter the environment. At the beginning of the instances encountered,

a swirling vortex appeared as if it was a portal. These portals would ensure that the

environment would be crafted for the group who entered into that area. It is basically the

element designed into the game to keep two different groups from entering the same

instance at the same time. These areas are basically designed as group quests and not for

a solo player.

Unfortunately for Jinkinz, he entered in as a solo character. Even with his level,

he could not accomplish what needed to be accomplished within the two dungeons that

were entered: one being the prison in Stormwind and the other a set of ruins in

Ashenvale. The reason being is that these areas are inhabited a higher level of enemy

called elites. These elites may have a lower level than the player. However, there are

designed to be taken on by group. When a solo player takes on an elite, this could be

mean a doomed instance for that particular player.

There were two elites encountered during the instances for Jinkinz. The first was a

crab creature that inhabited the Ashenvale ruins. The other was a prisoner NPC in the

Stormwind instance. In groups, these two types of NPCs dispatched Jinkinz quickly. This made observing an instance particularly difficult. Since the character was killed within the entrance of both these dungeons, he was rezzed at the entrance of the instance and quickly exited both dungeons. The overall conclusion was that these are meant to be a group or community effort tackled by a guild or other close association of players. For these particular sessions, a group could not be found to conquer the tasks in these areas and all interests here were abandoned.

Session 15: Talent Tree

The talent tree controls the power of the avatar's abilities within the game. It is basically a tree graph in which points are added to certain sections to increase that character's level of proficiency in a certain skill box. Under the character of Jinkinz, the night elf's skill sets were divided into three different areas: balance, feral combat, and restoration. Twenty-five points were divided among these three different areas to determine which skills would be the most effective in a battle within the game environment. Each spell is represented statistically like this:

1. Starlight Wrath (Action or Spell's Name)

Rank 5/5 (Talent Points Spent on Spell)

Reduces cost of your Wrath and Starfire spell by 0.5 seconds. (Spell's Effects)

To fully understand the breakdown of how these talents, one has to understand how the developers break them down. The top part is the title of the talent and is basically just a nice name that fits into the interactive environment the developers have created. The Rank represents how many talent points can spent within that particular ability. For

example, Starlight Wrath mentioned above has spent all five talent points for a total of five talent points that can be used in the overall ability.

After the name and rank, a brief description gives an idea of what the talent does. Once again, going back to the Starlight Wrath ability, the description says it will reduce the amount of time it takes to cast that spell by 0.5 seconds. If all the talent points were not spent in this category, it would have been followed by what will happen when another talent point is added to that ability represented by the phrase Next Rank. Simply, Next Rank just gives as description of the next level for that particular ability.

As mentioned above, the chief interaction for these talent trees are to disperse them among three categories. Balance refers to offensive natural magic utilized by the druid class within the game. The majority of these "spells" are used to inflict damage on foes within the game. Points divided up between these sections will increase the attack power of these natural attacks within a battle. Feral Combat is the second branch of the talent tree allows the character to increase its abilities in the combat while utilizing animal forms. So far it has been discovered that the character can shape-shift into a bear, two cat forms that resemble a panther and cheetah, and an aquatic form that resembles a manatee. The final branch of the talent tree, Restoration, deals with spells that heal or improve defense among the avatar being controlled or other avatars that participates as party within the game. These basically build on powers that are not related to attacks such as healing.

Not only does the talent tracks demonstrate and interactive experience within the game, but they also represent a demassified experience within the game. Each class has its own tracks to spend talent points. The Druid's talent track differs from the Warrior's

talent track. Also, just because players share the same three talent tracks does not mean they will spend their points in the same manner. One player may choose to disperse the talents among different trees while another will choose to spend his or her talent points in one tree. It is designed demassification on the part of the developers that allows the player to allot the talent points among different areas. This designed demassification becomes deeper as the player comes along more customizable options in the game environment.

Session 16: Character Info

The *World of Warcraft* is a statistical game when it comes down it. The player can check the numerical representation of his or her character in the character status screen. That translates also to a visual representation on the screen through health and mana bars, armor, and other equipped items. First, there was a listing for the basic statistics for the character as represented below.

Strength: 48

(Increase attack power 76.)

Agility 50

(Increase critical hit chance by 5.08%. Increase armor by 100.)

Stamina

(Increases health by 560.)

Intellect 69

(Increases mana by 755. Increases spell critical hit by 3.98%)

Spirit 94

(Increases health regeneration by 9 per second while not in combat. Increase

mana regeneration by 87 per 5 seconds while not casting.)

Armor 547

(Reduces physical damage taken by 14,24%)

Also within this character description screen is a statistical representation of

attack power beyond the basic character statistics. These combat numbers are divided

into four separate categories: melee being up close combat, ranged being projectile

attacks from long distances, spells: attacks using magic, and defense: non-offensive

maneuvers. Below is an example of how that statistical representation is applied to melee

or close ranged attacks.

Melee (Attack Type)

Damage 66-90 (DMG Numerical Representation)

Damage Per Second: 21.1 (DPS Numerical Representation

Attack speed in seconds: 3.70 (Time Between Attacks)

Haste Rating: 0

Power: 76 (Increases damage with melee weapons by 5.9 damage per second.)

Hit Rating: 0 (Increases your melee chance to hit a target of level 34 by 0.0%.)

Critical Chance: 4.20% (Critical rating: 0 (10.00% critical chance))

Expertise: 0 (Reduces chance to be dodged or parried by (0.00%). Expertise rating

0 to be expected.)

Not only is combat represented statistically in the game, but gear also plays a

significant numerical role within the game. Armor, weapons, all have their own valued

representation and also contribute to the statistical ratings listed in the above the values.

Gear is related to what part of the body that item protects on the avatar with the game. Not only is there a numerical armor value attached to the item, but also a color rating is attached to indicate the rarity of that item. Green being a common item, blue being rare, and purple is ultra rare. Jinkinz had green and blue items, but has not reached a level within the game to acquire the level of purple items. Here is how a particular piece of armor (Forest Leather Mantle) is represented on the character information screen.

Shoulders (Body Part)

Forest Leather Mantle (Name of Armor)

Green (Rarity Level of Gear)

Soulbound (Bound to Player)[8]

Leather (Material of Armor

64 Armor (Numerical Representation of Armor)

+4 Stamina (Statistical Addition to Character Abilities)

+4 Spirit

Durability 32/45 (Damage to Armor)

Requires Level 20 (Level Required to Use Armor)

The final piece of information that was examined on the character information screen was resistances. Resistances are allotted points based on what attacks the avatar can resist or has protection against. They are given five categories: arcane resistance, fire resistance, nature resistance, frost resistance, and shadow resistance. Look at Jinkinz resistance to what is considered a nature attack, that being a plant based, spell attack to gain an understanding of how it defends against those attacks

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[8] Soulbound means that item can only be sold to merchant NPCs and cannot be traded or auctioned among players.

Nature Resistance: 10 (Numbered Representation of the Attack.)

Increase the ability to resist nature based attacks, spells, and abilities. (What the
Resistance Does

 Resistance against level 34: Poor. (How it Protects Against Players Casting that
Type of Spell.)

These observations show that this a game of statistic, programming, and
strategy using these observations. It is similar to the older Role Playing Games in book
form of the 1980s. To the uninitiated, interacting with these numbers can seem
overwhelming and it should seem that way. Going back to the concept of asynchroniety,
this shows how much time that has to be spent within this environment to understand
how these numbers work. As a participant observer within the game, the researcher does
not fully grasp the extent of meaning of these statistical representations nor did he care to
invest the time to go that deep since it did not inhibit the game play experience.

 The key observation here is that the pursuit of knowledge is time consuming. In
relation to the study that means there may be a link between asynchroniety and
interaction in this environment. Even deeper that, more uses and gratifications may linked
together in the design of this game.

Session 17: Reputation

Reputation refers the relationship the avatar has built within game among the
factions within the game. It goes deeper than just the original Alliance and Horde
Division that was mentioned through out this case study. Reputation is built among races

and also working unions within the game. The only problem is that this reputation is not built based on player ratings. Instead, it is rating distributed in points from NPCs. The character of Jinkinz had built up a tremendous reputation among the factions with game. The majority of ratings among the Alliance were good or even better. Jinkinz's reputation was as follows among the groups he made contact.

Alliance:

Darnassus (City): Revered (Status)

Exodar: Honored

Gnomeregan Exiles: Honored

Ironforge: Honored

Stormwind: Honored

Alliance Forces:

Silverwing Sentinels: Neutral

Stormpike Guards: Neutral

The League of Arathas: Neutral

Steamwheel Cartel;

Booty Bay: Neutral

Everlook: Neutral

Gadgetzan: Neutral

Ratchet: Neutral

Other:

Argent Dawn: Neutral

Bloodsail Buccaneers: Hated

Cenarion Circle: Friendly

Darkmoon Faire: Neutral

Zandalar Tribe: Neutral

What is notable about these findings is that Jinkinz had built a substantial

reputation among the major races in the game noted by the races' city of origin. Little

sub-groups that were off on side roads in the game mostly had a neutral relationship with

the avatar since there was not as much interaction with these NPCs as the NPCs in the

major cities. What was interesting is that the Cenarion Circle was only friendly although

quite a few interactions were had with that group. This group played a substantial role in

the character's development since it was a class based group centered on Jinkinz's Druid

class. Many quests were completed at the Cenarion Circle's request in the game, but yet

it seems only the relationship with the group was only friendly instead of honored or

revered like with the races.

The observations are starting to show a designed community with non-playable

characters. The designers are helping the player to build relationships with soulless bits of

code represented through these three-dimensional avatars. Players within these

environments are striving to complete quests to gain highly regarded status among these

groups which in a way is an odd form of community service for these fictional cities. For

example, it was interesting that Jinkinz was revered among Darnassus. Darnassus is the

home city of the Night Elves, Jinkinz's race. The greatest reputation was built among his

own people. It only seems natural that this would happen since this is where he began his

game and completed a majority of quests for and around that city. It just seems like a

natural progression to be well respected in one's own community since that avatar is

participating in the daily actions there. The consequence is that possibly players could begin spending too much time building their reputation in these imaginary lands, where in reality they should be focused on doing some good deeds in their own real life communities.

The key here is that time spent within or around the environment is related in some way to a sense of community within the environment. A deeper study than this one would have to prove the extent to which these two are linked. More on possible links among these uses and gratifications within the environment will be explored later in the discussion at the end of this report.

<p align="center">*Session 18: Controls*</p>

This session examined what could possibly be called the most interactive element within the *World of Warcraft*: the controls. By controls, this section refers to the keys on the computer that makes the avatar move and interact within the environment. There are particular keys attached to particular actions within the game. This will look at mainly the keys that were utilized within the study as related to the character of Jinkinz.

For movement the primary keys are listed below:

W, UP Move Forward

S, DOWN: Move Back

A, LEFT: Move Left

D, RIGHT: Move Right

As can be seen, the player has a choice as to which controls can be used to move the character. However the lettered controls W, S, A, D are more efficient since the mouse is also being utilized by the right hand. These controls can then be used by the left

hand while the mouse is clicking on other interactive elements within the game

environment. Using the lettered combination for movement also allows quicker access to

other controls in the game that make use of the numerical keys on the keyboard. Mostly,

these keys are related to combat or controls within the game. A brief synopsis of that

ability can be brought up if the player moves his or her cursor over that particular control.

Look at the ability Wrath assigned to key number 2.

2. (Key)

Wrath (Ability)

Rank 5. (Talent Level)

100 mana. (Magic Power Used)

30 yard range. (Attack Range.)

Causes 106 to 121 Nature damage to the target. (Damage to Target.)

Not only are there keys assigned to combat situations, but there are also buttons

assigned to reach informational screens. Some of these informational screens were

mentioned earlier in this chapter. This is just an easier way to reach that information. The

keys were assigned like this for the informational windows.

C: Character Info

Information about your character including equipment statistics, skills,

and reputation.

P: Spellbook and Abilities

To prepare a spell or ability for use, open the Spellbook and Abilities window, left

click the spell or ability and drag it down to your character.

L: Quest Log

A list of all the active quests you currently have. You can have up to 25 active quests at one time.

O: Social

Information about other people in the game. You can use the Social Window to manage your friends lists and ignore list, as well as see who is online.

I: Looking for Group/Looking for More

A tool to help you find a group to join or find additional players to complete your newly created or existing group.

A common theme that kept appearing with the controls as interactive elements is the idea that all of these things could be accomplished in numerous ways. The hot keys mentioned above were just one way that the avatar could access abilities. However, the simple point and click interface of mouse was also utilized for these functions. A reoccurring theme came to light that certain control schemes could be used to meet the user's style. Here, a direct link was present between demassification and interactivity.

Session 19-21: Advanced Questing

The biggest thing that can be said about the observations made further into questing is that nothing major was discovered that has not been elaborated on already. The major idea within these sessions that can be translated over is that it becomes more complicated over the course of time spent with the game. Also, the higher level a character becomes the more difficult the quests become within the game. Quests also begin to ask for more cooperation among players within the game. Higher levels mean that it becomes more difficult for a player to solo quests like in the beginning of the game although it can be done. It was observed that the designers were making these quests so

the player had to depend other members participating in the online community making a link between building community and interacting with the game environment. This would link between community and interaction would become more apparent as the observations moved to the message boards for the *World of Warcraft.*

Session 22-30: Message Boards

The time spent within the last days of the study were spent observing the message boards on the *World of Warcraft* official website. These threads displayed several insights into what some players were thinking about the game. Overall, a common theme was the displeasure that many experienced with certain aspects designed into game play as illustrated within the excerpts from this thread below.

`   Thread Title: Worst mistake Blizzard ever made.

Leviticus: 0. What in you opinion would be the worst mistake Blizzard ever made? For me it would be making Epics not Epic anymore, purple is the new green.

Argument: 3. On the same note for. I think handing out epics to people who don't even have to be at the keyboard to earn them is the biggest mistake blizzard has made. As I said in an earlier thread, if you want epics you can take every skill and spell off your hotbar and get them. Blizzards poor pvp design has encouraged people to not to try because they will still get their rewards such a terrible idea.

Virtue: 17. I have to agree, epic items do not feel as epic during MC/BWL. But, nothing is the same forever. And I can understand the outcry people have for wanting epics more accessible.

For a certain segment of players, they were unhappy with the introduction of higher leveled gear illustrated by the color purple. Where once players worked hard for the older color blue they were now working for purple gear to achieve a higher level in the community. Players within this thread now feel that purple gear level can achieved easier than when they began playing the game. This means there are unhappy people in the community with the new interactions with gear in the game. Gear becomes a chief topic in later threads among members of the *WoW* community.

Also evident was an unusual amount of slang as illustrated with this excerpted piece. Notice the unprecedented amount of Qs within this user's comments. Here, it is evident that the community is developing its own language within this environment in the text of this thread

`   Thread Title: More Instances in Horde Zones? Unfair.

Ether: Ok….let's see…massive amounts of QQ (crying eyes or wining,) alliance complaining about Horde being favored…..what's new? I'm waiting for when they give horde fear ward… we will never hear the end of HORDE IS OP QQQQQQQQQQQQQQQQQQQQQQQQQQQQQQQQQQQQQQQQQQQQQQQQQ QQQQ"

Any way back to the point…there is this called "LORE" and "LORE" puts instances next to certain places, etc. I mean wtf…why would Zul'amin be next to Stormwind…that makes no sense. Why would WC be in Loch Modan…no sense yet again. I'm sure Blizzard doesn't like the fact that there are more instances in Horde territory., but they are kinda obligated to do it since they have to keep it accurate.

The QQs stand for crying or whining since two Qs together look like two eyes with tear drops. Basically, the user here is stating that the starters of this thread are complaining about something that is built into the narrative or storyline of the game. He even uses the word lore to refer to history of the game. Why not say crying for "QQ" or story for "lore?" A possible answer is that slang fulfills a community uses and gratification in this environment. If the user did not use that slang, he or she would not feel like he belongs in that community. It shows he or she has spent a considerable amount of time in that environment. Enough time interacting with that environment to gain knowledge of the communication and language used in the environment.

The forums also serve as vehicle to comment on other player's actions within the game. The next thread was a hot debate about why many people in the game cared so much about the other's gear, their gear and other people's gear. This thread was so interesting that it probably could have served as an entire study within itself. The initial excerpt here focuses on one player's reasoning into why the focus on gear followed by other players' responses.

Thread Title: Why raiders care about people's gear?

Aaron: 8. See most of you always get the reason wrong. It's not how strong there gear is. It's that they put in $1/20^{th}$ the effort as raiders do and end up with better gear. This is the problem.

I'm sorry if your worked 60 hours a week and only made 10k a year while some rookie 18 year old rookie came in with half the experience, and only worked 5 hours a week and made 100k a year, you would feel shorted. The issues with

welfare epics has nothing to with caring about other people's gear, it's the time and effort put into all the gear that's the issue.

Narcissist: 10. I think the point being missed here is that:

1.) PvPers/Raiders do like to achieve something unlike some WoW players we have goals . If there's nothing to achieve why play? Why even bother having "End Game" content, why even bother having Raiding? Nobody is going to dedicate their time to something and not be rewarded.

2.) Raiders/PvPers earn their gear. We something that maybe a small portion of the WoW community will ever personally experience. I think that gives them the right to something.

Just like a soldier gets a purple heart for achieving great things during war not every soldier gets a purple heart.

3.) WoW just like any other Online Game is meant to be dominated by he dedicated. Even if you play Counter-Strike, the players with years of experience will be mopping the floor with your head , no ones letting the newbie walk off with free headshots, it just doesn't work that way with online gaming.

Even in WoW newcomers need to earn and learn their not just by the hand fed Epic gear.

Lisa: 13. Because a massively multiplayer game is driven by its community and part of having a community is the desire of its members to establish a place in its recognizable pecking order. Gear is the only thing in the game that shows other players what you have done.

Riso: 17. I probably play (and have raided) about as much as your hardcore raider, but due to circumstances outside of my control, as well as my loyalty to friends in my family guild., have been stuck in Karazhan for close to a year. The fact that Blizzard is now throwing me a bone is what is keeping me play this game (as well as buying the next expansion). It's the people who say I don't deserve this break that really anger me So you're telling me that despite spending thousands of gold, hundred of hours of play, and nights upon nights of frustration because I haven't turned my back of my guild and friends. I don't deserve something for my efforts?

Major discussions that took place in this thread dealt with two major ideas. The first being gear is a visual sign of a player's status in the *World of Warcraft* community. The gear shows the player's level and commitment to the game. The better gear a person has in the game shows how much time interaction that player has had with the community in *WoW*.

The second reason is to show social inequities in the game. People what to be rewarded fairly within game's structure, but cannot see the fairness in someone putting less time into the games and receiving the same rewards that they received at a higher level. They believe developers are trying bridge gaps in economic class structures within the game by allowing these players to get gear at certain levels. Thus, a complaint can be seen against these new interactions within the game among certain members of the community. Once again displaying a possible linkage between uses and gratifications designed in the game.

The final thread focused on why a particular group of players chose to play as a certain class with their avatar. Specifically, the user who started this thread singled out the healer class. The reasoning behind this player's questioning of the choice of the thread was because that player could not see how other player's who chose this class could enjoy the game. However, other users responded and justified their uses of this particular class of avatar within the game.

Thread Title: Why do people play healers?

Amber: 0. I don't even see how anyone can enjoy it.

Granted only class I have ever played to 70 is a rogue and a hunter, but healing seems to be the most boring thing ever. All you do is make it so other people can kick ass, while not kicking any yourself.

Healer: 3. Healing far harder than DPSing. Yet 90% of hunter/rogues still manage to mess it up . I'm willing to bet you're not part of that ten%

Swampthing: 5. My green numbers are usually bigger than your yellow and white numbers.

Plus, there is nothing quite like knowing "I could let him die if he ticks me off." And healing through 3-4 allies all trying to drop your target. Running through an Allied gauntlet and keeping the FC up, despite the ENTIRE other team tossing attacks on him? Gold ! (We also had good flank support from dps ccing the allies off the gauntlet and killing the others asap.)

Shana: 8. As said above, for the majority of fights healing is the hardest job, and we enjoy the challenge. You have to be constantly ontop of the ball and, have

great timing and manage cooldowns well. Unfortunately the majority of dps are played by 12yr olds with ADHD who click on autoshot and alt-tab out.

Amber: 10. Yes playing a hunter is pretty easy, I will admit.for my entire dps [9]cycle I press 1 button

Tyler: 12. Because I totally FAIL at dps. <_< Pre-BC, all I did was tank & heal Now I feel like I don't tank well in the 61+, so my warrior is still sitting at 60 or 61 & prot spec (I don't like arms or fury)

Fury: 14. I keep people alive. I decide who will live and who will die.

I also eat any or rogue I come across for lunch.

I pwn just fine. Only somebody who play a huntard or rogue (look at me! I can kill people without ANY kind of skill!) would think this.

The reasoning behind many player's choices for this class was to stand out from other players in the game who would deal damage instead of supporting their team. For many it was choice of community combined with a demassified use of the game. In general, fighting seemed their preferred interaction within the game opposed to the more friendly act of healing. It could also go back the concept brought to light first in the questing section. The designers' main objectives in these quests were centered around violent acts such as the killing of kobolds. If violence is the chief means of accomplishing goals at beginning of the game, it is only natural that some community members will gravitate to avatars where their class uses violence as a chief means of accomplishing a goal.

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[9] See appendix glossary for definitions of dps, pwn, and huntard.

Findings Conclusion

After compiling all these observations, some interesting ideas have been displayed. The next chapter will discuss how these game play observations interacted to display the qualities of uses of gratifications within the literature review. Then it will lead into a discussion of how these elements come together to keep gamers coming to this environment designed by the developers at Blizzard.

V. Discussion

The intent of this paper was to find out why so many people spend time playing the *World of Warcraft*. Based on the observations within the game, there are so many customizable options within the game that a player must have an enormous time investment in the game in order to be a successful player within the game's environment. In order to keep the player invested in the game, unlimited possibilities must be designed within the game to keep players coming back to the digital world. Thus, a set of uses and gratifications within the game are designed into the game whether consciously or subconsciously by the developer to keep users returning.

As a participant, observer, and researcher of this environment, it was originally hypothesized that four uses and gratifications were designed into the game. These uses taking the form of interactivity, demassification, asynchroniety, and community. It is important to note that these elements were observed to exist within a massively multiplayer online environment, but it should be considered that these elements were not scientifically proven in this study. This was a case study meant only as a starting point for other researchers to continue at a later date. These starting points will be shown to those who read these discussion and hopefully new studies will arise out of the work started within the *World of Warcraft*. Each of the four uses and gratifications will be discussed individually as they pertained to the game's environment.

Use and Gratifications Related to WoW

Interactivity

Interactivity as defined originally in the literature review is the degree into which a player is immersed within the game and how much a player can interact with the

environment of the game. Interactive elements within the game encompassed not the only the external environment encountered by the avatar, but also encompassed the avatar itself. Interactive elements were present through out the game as observed within the *World of Warcraft*.

As illustrated within the first session of the game, the player first interacted with the game through the character manipulating a variety of settings to gain a workable avatar within the environment. It is interesting that the first interaction within the game is with the chief way the player will interact with the environment, that being the character's avatar. Once the character is created, the player begins to experience the more intricate interactions with environment of the game.

The most complicated interaction within the game is with the controls. The control scheme for the *World of Warcraft* goes beyond the joystick and two button set ups of the original video games. For someone who is not an avid gamer, the control scheme is complicated. Hot keys for certain actions are all over the keyboard of the computer. Also, there are several screens that extend past a the environment screen as detailed in the findings sections. This leads to the conclusion that familiarization with the controls within the *World of Warcraft* takes a considerable investment of time. Even then, it is not guaranteed that a player will become familiar with everything that can be manipulated within the game.

However, there are players that have invested the amount of time to learn the control schemes to interact with the game's environment. One interaction stood out considerably from the other interactions within the game. The interaction of questing seemed the major idea that guided game play within the game. It leads to almost every

other interaction within the game. Questing was what could be called the gateway interaction that opened the door to all other interactions within this electronic environment.

Recall back to Session 2 on page 29 in the findings section. Norriabee began interacting with Non-Playable Characters allies due to questing. That lead to interactions with enemy NPCs such as the kobolds within kill quests, interactions with items that can be utilized by the characters such as armor and foods, and interactions with other ally NPCs. Even some of the instances and group interactions were a result of accepting a quest. The concept of a gateway interaction, an interaction that leads to other interactions, could be a major idea explored by future studies. This concept of gateway interaction means that an initial interaction that begins other interactions is designed within the game. This is something that needs to be looked at further concerning media on the Internet such as these computer games.

Asynchroniety

The hardest thing to observe within the environment was the asynchronous use and gratification. It was not as obvious as the interactive element. However, it was present within the design elements of the game. The idea behind this is not every player can enter *World of Warcraft* environment at the same time. Thus, the designers must leave the option that any player can log onto the *World of Warcraft* at anytime of the day. This means the *World of Warcraft* is open 24 hours a day, seven day a week.

Many of the sessions within the study took advantage of this concept. The sessions were played usually late at night between the hours of 10:30 p.m. -1:00 a.m. This was the most accessible time for the researcher. It can be assumed that others access

the game at the most convenient time for that particular player as the researcher did in the study. Accessibility becomes a factor that makes asycnchroniety an important use with the game.

How much time the user spends within the environment becomes a factor relating back to asycnchroniety. No session lasted the same length. For example the first session lasted only maybe went 11:00 pm to 12:00 am lasting only an hour to create the character. Other sessions lasted even longer. As the study became more involved, some sessions became as long three hours.

Another asynchronous element within the game was how long it took to complete an objective within the game. For example, a single session within the game could involve doing only one quest. Other times, three to four quests could be completed during a single session. It just depended upon the time commitments designed into the particular set of objectives.

It became evident during the sessions that a considerable time investment is needed to be successful within the *World of Warcraft*. Although there was the convenience factor that was built into the asynchronous use of electronic media, this use could back fire. If a player only plays at his or her convenience, the player may not advance at levels as quickly as a player who sacrifices other commitments in his or her life to participate in the *World of Warcraft*. One of the major criticisms in the game is this time commitment that it takes to participate. There is the possibility that a player would become overly immersed in this online world and it begin to take away from his or her life off line.

Demassification

Demassification refers to the idea that the media being studied offers each player a different experience. Go back to character creation again on page number 26. It is where this use is first experienced by the player. Each avatar created for the game is unique. They each have features that are designed to give the player an ownership over the avatar that are not typically displayed in other video game environments. This makes the online experience within the *World of Warcraft* a unique medium.

The concept of demassification extends to not just the physical looks of the character. The game allows many customizable areas that boost statistical attributes of the character such as defense and strength. This means that one character's attributes may not be the same as another character's. Usually, a raise in statistics relates back to the armor, which also gives the avatar a difference in appearance.

Another customizable aspect found within the game was the talent tree. How the points were distributed among the talent trees in the three sections will differ from player to player and can change at the player's will. These points have the possibility of an infinite amount of combinations to make the character into what it the player wants that character to end doing within the game. Thus, a character could have its talents distributed to focus healing, casting spells, or dealing damage. It just depends on the strategy devised by the user in the end.

The problem with observing the demassified element in the game was that there were so many aspects to look at during game play. Since the designers offer the player an infinite amount options for play, that means there is an infinite amount of possibilities for

observation and study. This means that many aspects may have been overlooked within this study leaving some open ends for others to fill in the future.

Community

Community was a concept for the developers of this game. There are several elements that prove the designers wanted the gamers to participate in a community within the game. One obvious way was the chat function that was designed into the game. As observed in the game, it was used as a casual communication tool, but it also provided an example of the community within the environment using it to help each other learn different interactive elements in the game such as the emotes.

Another way that community was observed in the game was the use of groups to complete quests. Some quests were designed for three or more players to complete as opposed to acting as a solo player. This is represented through the instances that Jinkinz attempted on his own yet failed to complete due the emphasis on groups. Also, there were the combined efforts of Jinkinz and Merle when it came to group questing mentioned on page 38 in the Findings chapter.

Also, the inclusion of the "O" hot key further illustrated that the designers wanted this community aspect to the game play. It basically gave players a way to observe their social interactions within the game and view their "friends" within the game. That hot key would not have been there if the designers did not want a social element to be part of the game play.

A less obvious form of community was the participation of NPCs in the community environment. The reputation was a way if gauging one's standing with computer intelligence within the game. Revered and honored meant that the player was in

high in standing with that particular group. Neutral meant neutral while hated meant that if the player would come in contact with a member of that faction, that player would be immediately be attacked. This is an interesting concept because the computer intelligence such as the NPCs is never thought of as a member of an online community. In this case, it would be fair to assume that the NPCs were designed to be a part of the community just like a human player participates in the community.

The last major concept that will be examined in regards to the community is the discussion boards. Upon examining the discussion boards, it was discovered that players in the game developed entire language for the community. For example, the discovery of the double-Qs on page   was interesting due to fact that in reality it was code for whining. Also, there was the typical use of words like raids, DPS, and other terminology through out the threads and found in the Appendix that is exclusive to the *World of Warcraft* that further demonstrated a tight-knit community within the game.

Other Observations and Criticisms

Interdependent Uses and Gratifications

Probably the greatest idea that can be relayed coming out of this case study is that each of these uses and gratification utilized as design elements have an interdependency built into them where one must play off the other in order to have a playable and enjoyable gaming experience. This means that one could not exist without the other and offer the same game experience for the player. The designers of the game realize this at some level. If they did not, theses uses and gratifications would not be observable in the game. They need each one to make the game appealing to the player. However, not every player finds every use appealing.

The message boards demonstrated that many players have problems with interactive elements such as controls and positioning within the community of the game. Changes to interactive elements were called nerfs meaning that changes were made to an interactive element that decreased its effectiveness in the environment. This concept of nerfing was a consistent complaint among the community about interactive elements. In the researcher's opinion, it simply means that in a community as large as the *World of Warcraft* not every person can pleased.

<p style="text-align:center">*Violence and Mysticism*</p>

The other observation within the game was the use of violence designed within the game. It seems to be the chief way of completing objectives within the game. The presence of kill quests and simple PvP contests where the object is to defeat the player through violent means such as the kobolds on page 29. This can be disconcerting to some, but ultimately it should not come as shock that a game called *Warcraft* involves some element of war in it. This is a game that deals with adult themes such as violence and death.

Also, it should be noted that when violence fails as the chief interaction to deal with a problem, magic or some form mysticism fills the interactive gap. This is evident on page 36 in the discussion about death and resurrection. Death was simply another triviality that could be escaped in the game through a magical means. Basically, the ideas here is when the interaction of violence fails then the interaction of magic should intervene to overcome the problem.

Looking at these elements, there is the possibility that these elements could constitute an escapist or fantasy uses and gratification not explored during this study. The

violent and occult overtones in this game could be a draw for some players looking for something beyond the reach of the physical world. Notes for future study of these elements should be taken if anyone wishes to explore this area further in the future.

Future Study

Coming to the end of this study, it should be noted that not everything was covered within the *World of Warcraft*. There are still many concepts that can be explored in MMORPGs. It should be noted that there is still more that can be done with this concept of uses and gratifications as design elements within the game. Future research should examine how perceptive users are to the uses and gratifications designed within the game. Either by using a scientific survey, a qualitative interview methodology, or some combination of these methods, a researcher could further support the possibility of the existence of uses and gratifications as a design strategy for video games.

Not only should potential future studies focus on the players' perceptions of the game environment, but future studies should also consider the impressions of the game designers within a Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game. Preferably, a qualitative study utilizing an interview methodology could reveal whether or not the designers chose to design certain uses and gratifications within their online environment. The study could also help people gain a better understanding of the worldview of the designers and why they chose to incorporate certain elements within the game.

Along these lines, it should be noted that violence and mysticism are chief interactions in the game. This could mean the presence of an escapist or fantasy use and gratification. Future researchers could explore whether this exists in the environment through similar observations within this study. Also, the researcher could ask about a

fantasy or escapist use and gratification if that person chooses to interview the designers about the game.

Looking at the possibility of this escapist or fantasy use and gratification, the violence and mysticism that comprise these elements of fantasy offer addictive and possibly a seductive element within these online games. There are those within these environments that spend hours upon hours of their free time in these games. Not that there is anything wrong with playing video games. However, there is something troubling about a person who neglects his or her personal life, friends, and family to live out their fantasies through a digital avatar. There is a danger to being so addicted to a digital world that one's standing in the real world suffers. Future research could address the possibilities of becoming addicted to these environments and how that affects a person's life in the real world. Possibly even following one person who exceeds a certain threshold of playtime considered to be abnormal and developing a study around that person or surveying a group of people to determine if an addiction to electronic media could exist.

The importance of this study and any future studies within Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games should not be underestimated. The massive numbers of people participating within these environments and the target audience of teenage males should make anybody stop and pause to look at the impact these environments could have on future generations. That is why scholars should continue to explore not only the *World of Warcraft,* but also other video games. The ideas presented within this section and throughout this study can be used as the foundation to understand what impact this ever evolving and emerging medium will have not only on this generation but those in the future.

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Appendix: *World of Warcraft* Slang Glossary

AC- Armor Class or Defense.

Add - An extra monster has joined an existing battle.[10]

Alt - A character on your account other than your main character.

AoE /Area of Effect Damage - This is a spell that hurts a group of monsters in an area

like Blizzard in *Warcraft III.*

AE - Area Effect. See above.

AFK/Away from Keyboard - This means the player is away from his computer.

Aggro - This means the monsters are mad at you and you've "activated" them to attack

you. They are now in the motion of trying to reach and attack you. "The Murloc aggroed

on me!" or "The Murlocs will aggro if you get too close!"

Aggro Radius - The radius around the monsters where they will "wake up" and attack

you.

AGI – Agility.

AH - Auction House.

AQ - Ahn'Qiraj, a location in the game.

AV - Alterac Valley, a location in the game.

Battleground Avatar - Your character.

BG – Battleground.

BRD - Blackrock Depths, a location in the game.

BWL - Blackwing's Lair, a location in the game.

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[10] Glossary taken from the *World of Warcraft* Handbook.

Buff - A beneficial spell cast on a monster or player. An example of a "buff" is the Priest's Inner Fire or Shaman's Bloodlust.

Carebear - Player that prefers to help other players attack monsters rather than attack other players in player vs. player combat.

Caster - A character that stays on the back row to heal or cast spells on the enemy, such as a Mage.

Cheese - To exploit an imbalance in the game.

Combat Pets - A NPC controlled by a player, aiding that player and his teammates in fights.

CR - Corpse Retrieval.

Creep/Monster Creep Jacking - A term from Warcraft 3 where players attack other players while they are already engaged in combat with neutral monsters

Critters - Monsters that don't attack back, like a bunny or deer.

CTF - Warsong Gulch Battleground, a location in the game. Refers to the capture the flag style of game located there.

DD/Direct Damage - This is a spell that does all of its damage in one hit rather than spreading its damage over time.

DM - Dire Maul or Deadmines (if in Westfall), locations in the game.

DMG – Damage.

DOT - Damage over time.

DPS - Damage per second.

De-Buff - A negative spell cast on a unit that makes it less powerful. An example of a "de-buff" is Slow.

FH - Full Health.

FM - Full Mana.

FTL - For The Loss, a sports or game term.

FTW - For The Win, a sports or game term.

Gank - Player vs. Player: To attack another player while they're trying to fight a monster.

GM - Game Master. Someone employed by Blizzard Entertainment to assist and help players.

Griefer - A person who purposely tries to annoy or anger other players.

Grinding - Staying in the same area fighting the same types of monsters for a very long time.

GS – Goldshire, a location in the game.

Hate - Similar to threat.

HP - Hit points or Health.

Huntard – A derogatory term referring to the Hunter class as mentally handicap.

IF – Ironforge, a location in the game.

Incoming (INC) - This means an attack is coming.

Instancing - This is a dungeon where you will load into your OWN copy of the dungeon with your group. Only you and your group will be in your copy of the dungeon. Another group that enters the same area will enter their own copy of the dungeon.

INT/Intelligence Kiting - A style of combat in which a player continually stays out of combat range of an enemy usually by running from it, while simultaneously causing damage to it.

KOS - Killed on Sight. If an Orc approaches a Human Guard, the Guard would try to kill on sight (aggro).

KS - Kill Steal. Try to steal another person's kill.

LFG - Looking for a group.

LFM - Looking for more.

Log - When you log off; disconnect from the game.

LOL - Lots of Laugh or Laughing Out Loud. This abbreviation indicates something is really funny. It's pretty cliché nowadays though.

LOM - Low on Mana.

LOS - Line of Sight.

LOOT - To take the treasure from a monster that has been killed or from a chest.

LVL – Level.

Mez - Short for Mesmerize. Refers to spells, such as Polymorph that temporarily incapacitate a target.

MMO - Massively Multiplayer Online.

MMOG - Massively Multiplayer Online Game.

MMORPG - Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game.

MOB - MOB" is an old programming acronym of Mobile Object Block. Mobs are all computer-controlled characters in the game. You should likely use some other term such as monster, creep, or bad guy.

MT - Main Tank.

Named - A special monster that is usually stronger than surrounding monsters with possible special abilities and item drops.

NBG/ Need Before Greed - Only people that need an item will roll dice (in case there are more than one player in the team that needs the item).

Nerf - To downgrade, to be made softer, or make less effective. "X has been nerfed."

Newbie - A term that sometimes means new player. Newbie is also used to suggest that a player is not very good.

Newb - Short for Newbie. See above.

Ninja - To try to loot an item without other players knowing or paying attention. Basically, to take an item without permission.

N00b - A derogatory way to say newb. Don't use it.

NPC - This is a non player-controlled character. The characters are controlled by the server or realm. A "computer" character.

OOM/Out of Mana - People say this to let their party know they are out of mana and can't cast any spells, especially healing.

Pat - Patrolling monster.

PC - Player controlled character.

Pet - A NPC controlled by a player such as a Wolf, Infernal, and so on.

PK - Player Kill or Player Killer.

POP - Contraction of "Repopulation", often used as a shortened term for the re-spawn of monsters.

Proc - Activate. Example: A weapon with a special effect will "proc" every so often.

PST/Please Send Tell - Indicates that the person speaking wants to receive communication via a /t(ell) or /w(hisper) command.

Puller - Person who pulls monsters for the party.

Pulling - One of the players in a party heads out and leads one or more of the monsters back to the party so that the party can attack the monsters. The idea is to prevent too many monsters from attacking at once.

PvE/ Player vs. Environment - Combat between players and computer controlled opponents.

PvP/Player vs. Player - This means for one player to attack another player.

Raid - A raid is a large-scale attack on an area by a group of players.

Res - Short for resurrect.

Re-Spawn - A monster that has been killed has spawned (been created) again.

Rest (state) - An indicator of how tired a character is, which affects how much experience is gained from killing monsters.

Rez – Resurrect.

RFD - Razorfen Downs, a location in the game.

Roll - This means that you should roll a random number to determine who has the right to get an item. For example: /random 1-100.

Root - To trap a target in place/stuck using a "root" type spell such as Entangling Roots.

RR - Redridge Mountains, a location in the game.

Shard/Soul Shard- An item gained by the Warlock through Soul Draining, used to cast several spells such as Ritual of Summoning and to conjure Soulstones.

Small Pets - An animal following the player around. While this does not directly influence the player or monsters, it is cool to have around, especially the rare ones.

Spawns - The location or process of monsters appearing when they are created in the world.

SPI – Spirit.

SS – Southshore, a location in the game.

STA/Stamina Stack - A number of identical items placed in a single inventory slot, to conserve space. Only certain items can be stacked.

STR – Strength.

STV - Stranglethorn Vale, a location in the game.

SW – Stormwind, a location in the game

Tank - A melee character that can take a lot of damage like a Warrior.

Tap - To do damage to a monster, making it "your" kill. Once you have damaged the monster, you are the only one able to get experience and loot from it. A monster with a greyed-out name bar has been tapped by another player and will not earn you experience or loot.

Taunt - Related to Aggro. An ability that allows a player to pull the attention of a monster off of another player and onto him or herself.

Threat - Related to Aggro. This is what a character "gives off" to generate or draw monster agro.

Train - To lead monsters into another player. This is not a desired behavior.

Trash - An item that only a vendor/merchant would buy.

Twink - A low level character who has been made more powerful by higher level characters, usually by getting stronger armor and weapons than the character would normally have at such a low level.

Uber - German slang for 'super', originally meaning 'over'; exceptionally powerful.

UC – Undercity, a location in the game.

WC - Wailing Caverns instance, a location in the game.

WF – Westfall Vendor, a location in the game.

WoW - *World of Warcraft.*

WTB - Wanting to buy.

WTF- An abbreviation for an expletive used as "What the @%^%?"

WTS - Wanting to sell.

XP or Exp - Experience Points.

Zerg - From *StarCraft*, to attack something with a lot of players/units.

ZF - Zul'Farrak, a location in the game.

ZG - Zul'Gurub, a location in the game.