



DET PSYKOLOGISKE FAKULTET

Ψ

***How Do World of Warcraft-Players Experience and Give Meaning to Their Activity?
An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis***

HOVEDOPPGAVE

profesjonsstudiet i psykologi

Knut Joachim Mår Skouverøe & Lise Krangnes

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Norman Anderssen

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Sammendrag

Med sine 12 millioner spillere er World of Warcraft (WoW) i dag det mest populære dataspillet innen sin sjanger. Spillets allsidighet gjør det til et unikt fenomen for vitenskapelig og filosofisk utforskning. Imidlertid har offentlighetens oppmerksomhet i hovedsak vært rettet mot enkelthistorier om spillere som blir framstilt som ofre for spillets forførende egenskaper. Dette har medført at spillet har blitt et sentralt tema i den kontroversielle debatten om videospillavhengighet. Det ensidige fokuset på spillets avhengighetsaspekt har medført at noen av dets spillere opplever at de blir utsatt for stigmatisering. I denne studien ønsker vi å utforske hvordan WoW-spillere selv opplever og gir mening til spillingen. En IPA analyse av et fokusgruppeintervju med tre svært erfarne spillere ble gjennomført. Deltakernes erfaringer avdekket tre resiprokale og sammenkoblede hovedtemaer: identitet, sosial interaksjon og lek. Deltakerne selv anså det sosiale aspektet som den viktigste faktoren. Negativ oppmerksomhet fra ikke-spillere brakte skam og fortielse til en ellers høyt verdsatt fritidsaktivitet. Spillrelaterte vennskap og relasjoner var et gjennomgående tema, som hovedsaklig ble oppfattet som meningsfulle og givende. WoW-samfunnet utgjorde en kompleks digital kultur med sine egne regler og normer, og syntes å utgjøre en arena for både identitet og lek.

Stikkord: World of Warcraft, MMORPG, IPA, Fokusgruppe, Spillavhengighet

Abstract

With its 12 million players World of Warcraft (WoW) is one of the most popular computer games to date. The game's versatility makes it a unique phenomenon for scientific and even philosophic exploration. However, the public's attention has mainly been directed to stories of players who are portrayed as victims to the game's seductiveness. Consequently the game has become a central topic in the controversial issue of video game addiction. This apparent unilateral focus on the game's potential addictiveness has led some of its players to experience being subject to stigmatization. In this study we explore how players experience and give meaning to their playing. An IPA analysis of a focus group interview with three highly experienced players was conducted. The findings revealed three reciprocally connected main themes; identity, social interaction and game play. The participants themselves appeared to consider the social aspect to be the most important factor. Negative attention by non-players brought shame and concealment to a highly appreciated recreational activity. In-game friendships and relations were reoccurring topics, and were mainly perceived as meaningful and rewarding. The community constituted a complex digital culture with its own rules and norms, making it an arena for identity and play.

Keywords: World of Warcraft, MMORPG, IPA, Focus Group, Video Game Addiction

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Background

World of Warcraft (WoW) is currently the most popular *Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game* (MMORPG¹) (Blizzard, 2010a; Reahard, 2010). Since the release of the computer game *Warcraft: Orcs & Humans* in 1994, the universe and lore of Warcraft has been in continuous development through three non-MMORPG computer games as well as WoW and its currently three expansion packs (Blizzard, 2010b). In a broad sense, the purpose of the game is to create and develop a digital character in this virtual universe. This is accomplished through gaining experience by from performing in-game tasks that raise the characters level. Although the players themselves decide to what degree they wish to socialize with other players, the tasks become increasingly difficult and cooperation with others becomes crucial. With its 12 million players (Blizzard, 2010a; Reahard, 2010), the virtual fantasy world of Azeroth consists of a population almost three times the size of Norway's. As WoW connects people from all over the world, represented through their characters while being stripped of what players refer to as IRL (in real life) identity, it makes WoW an unique social arena and culture to study (Corneliussen & Rettberg, 2008)

Theoretical Stance

Our own theoretical standing is mainly based on the perspective of symbolic interactionism (SI). This perspective draws on the idea that people represent the world symbolically, and then interact with the world on the basis of their symbolic representations (Augoustinos, Walker, & Donaghue, 2007). To illuminate this further, Norman Denzin (1974) has summarized these basic assumptions as follows:

Theoretically symbolic interactionism rests on three primitive assumptions. Reality as it is sensed, known and understood is a social production. As such it consists of social objects, the meanings of which arise out of the behaviors persons direct towards them.

¹ All abbreviations are included in the glossary (appendix A).

Humans are granted the capacity to engage in 'minded', self-reflexive behavior. In the course of taking their own standpoint and fitting that standpoint to the behaviors of others, humans interact with one another. Interaction is seen as an emergent, negotiated, often times unpredictable concern. Interaction is symbolic simply because minded, self-reflexive behavior demands the manipulation of symbols, words, meanings and diverse languages. (Denzin, 1974, p. 269)

Although SI has distinguished itself in the studies of human groups and interaction, the field lacks a clear methodological standing (Blumer, 1986). Traditionally, SI has been related to qualitative research, but it has been argued that it is also the basis for quantitative studies (Benzies & Allen, 2008). Thus the perspective can serve as a theoretical foundation to implement multiple research methods.

When we first started our research project in 2008, we were struck by how few qualitative studies there were on WoW. Even though it had been a recurring topic in several public media (Abreu, Karam, Goes, & Spritzer, 2009; Munger, 2009), few had given any interest to how the players themselves perceived the game. Thus, we conducted a phenomenological study, interviewing eight WoW-players individually (Krangnes, Skouverøe, & Anderssen, 2009). Our findings here inspired us to later conduct a small sample study of how Norwegian Internet media portray WoW and its players (Krangnes, Nordeide, & Skouverøe, 2010). In both of these studies we were baffled by how the players were portrayed as passive victims of the game in the public media. Consequently, we became interested in how this affected them when interacting with others.

Self-presentation and Identity

Cooley's (2009/1902) metaphor of "the looking glass selves" depict how we come to see our selves through the eyes and appraisal of others. In this perspective, others constitute a social mirror in which we present ourselves in ways that are believed to illicit desired

reflections. These “posing” behaviors are often referred to as self-presentation, and reflects how we manipulate our presentations of ourselves to suit the requirements of the different social situations (Augoustinos, et al., 2007). As WoW-players experience being negatively appraised by the public, we are curious to how this may affect them.

One perspective would then be that of Goffman (1959, 1961, 1963), in which the self is seen as a social performer, managing and defending his or her social image in a wide range of social interactions. Here, the self is both multi-faced and capable of putting on social masks that responds to the social situations demands. However, as some people are labeled due to their deviancies, these people do not only react to being labeled, but the labeling often creates the abnormal behavior in it self (Goffman, 1959, 1961, 1963). Thus, labeling has the inbuilt potential of being a self-fulfilling process were the stigma becomes the reality (Slattery, 2003). Following this rationale labeling, or even stigmatization of players as addicted, may thus cause players to change their self-image and relational patterns to fit the stigma.

However, we hypothesize that the players rather will downplay aspects that fit the stereotype while they emphasize aspects that are generally considered to be socially acceptable. We believe they do so in order to receive approval from others, both for what they do and who they are. For instance, we found that the players were eager to discuss how social the game was and how they rather spend their TV-hours playing, referring to aspects that we argue are generally accepted in modern society (Krangnes, et al., 2010; Krangnes, et al., 2009; Skouverøe & Krangnes, 2009). However, they appear more reluctant to talk about aspects such as how much they play or if they ever down prioritized other obligations in order to play; in other words, things that can confirm the negative stereotype of WoW-players (Skouverøe & Krangnes, 2009).

There are some findings on the relationship between real life identity and in-game character however. For instance, players tend to create characters that looks like their

idealized self (Bessière, Seay, & Kiesler, 2007) and that relating to ones character may affect how players perceives themselves (Yee, Bailenson, & Ducheneaut, 2009).

On the other hand, players who identify strongly with their game character have been reported to display greater tendency towards video game addiction (Smahel, Blinka, & Ledabyl, 2008). This is in cohesion with other findings that indicated that high scores on immersion motivation for game play, e.g. indulging in the role play aspect of the game and playing in order to tune out, are positively correlated to video game addiction scores (Caplan, Williams, & Yee, 2009).

Valerie Walkerdine (2007) has developed a relational approach to video game play in which she argues that the players² are connected to their characters in several ways when they play. Being wired to the game through the hand controller or keyboard provides a physical connectedness and embodiment to the character and the game, in addition the player perceives the same visual and auditory stimulus as the character and is thus sensory engaged as well. There is also an emotional connectedness as the player is both emotionally involved and motivated to invest in the video game character. Thus, she argues, that children engage in mini relationships with the video game character, following them through their narrative and having an experience of companionship.

Walkerdine (2007) argues further that the features in video games are to a great extent devoted to males. This is perhaps neatly illustrated by the fact that most video game characters are male, and those characters that are female are often designed in a way that pleases men, e.g. looking sexy and having masculine interests such as guns and cars (Corneliussen, 2008; Walkerdine, 2007). The storyline in video games have often been written for the male population, presenting game character as male heroes on the quest to save a passive female victims(Corneliussen, 2008). Furthermore, male player tend to perceive

² Walkerdine (2007) mainly focus on children video game players, however we believe this rational to account for players of all ages.

females as poorer and less skilled players (Walkerdine, 2007). It has been suggested that this may be related to female play styles which in general tend to be less offensive and more passive and explorative (Walkerdine, 2007). This is illustrated in Walkerdine's (2007) study where she observed one of the girls who explicitly stated that the most important thing was to remember not to die in the game, instead of focusing on winning (p. 47). Lastly, girls tend to display some stereotypic preferences in choice of video game characters choosing more hyper-feminine characters or the more cute and cuddly characters with more ambiguous gender traits (Walkerdine, 2007).

Video Game Addiction

As MMO-players spend on average 20-25 hours a week playing video games (Ng & Wiemer-Hastings, 2005; Yee, 2005) concerns have been raised in regard to what consequences this might have (Abreu, et al., 2009; Gentile, 2009; Gentile, et al., 2011; Griffiths & Hunt, 1998; Griffiths & Meredith, 2009; Grüsser, Thalemann, & Griffiths, 2007; Lemmens, Valkenburg, & Peter, 2009; Peters & Malesky, 2008; Phillips, Rolls, Rouse, & Griffiths, 1995; Porter, Starcevic, Berle, & Fenech, 2010; Salguero & Morán, 2002; Shotton, 1989). Some argue that in spite of being all fun and games, video games may be addictive and could lead to significant negative consequences for the players (Gentile, et al., 2011; Lo, Wang, & Fang, 2005; Wenzel, Bakken, Johansson, Götestam, & Øren, 2009). Studies addressing this issue have generally tended to be quantitative, focusing on prevalence rates and possible negative effects, such as poorer psychological health (Gentile, et al., 2011; Lo, et al., 2005; Wenzel, et al., 2009) and school performance (Skoric, Teo, & Neo, 2009).

Griffiths and Meredith (2009) distinguishes between engagement and addiction, stating that healthy engagement adds to life, whilst addiction takes away from life. It has been suggested that some of the definitional criteria for video game addiction may perhaps be peripheral criteria, in the sense that they are more characteristic of engagement than addiction

(Charlton, 2002; Charlton & Danforth, 2004; Skoric, et al., 2009). Participants who meet the peripheral criteria, e.g. thinking about the game when they are not playing or spending increasingly more time playing, tend to show few or no aversive effects due to their game play, and are thus categorized as engaged players (Charlton, 2002; Charlton & Danforth, 2004; Skoric, et al., 2009). This group have in some cases actually been reported to display beneficial effects from their game play, such as better skills in English (Shotton, 1989; Skoric, et al., 2009) and faster reaction time (Shotton, 1989). In comparison, players who meet the core criteria, e.g. not being able to stop playing in spite of negative consequences, lying or deceiving others in order to play, tend to show negative consequences due to their game play and are consequently categorized as addicted players (Charlton, 2002; Charlton & Danforth, 2004; Skoric, et al., 2009).

Furthermore, few studies attempt to shed light on the players' own perspectives. This may be important as many argue that excessive video game play may be understood as a coping mechanism for other difficulties (Griffiths, 2000; Griffiths & Meredith, 2009; Keepers, 1990; Wood, 2008). For instance one study found that children, who were diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyper Activity Disorder (ADHD) and who were also categorized as video game addicts, had a significant decline in their use of video games when proper treatment for ADHD was applied (Han, et al., 2009). However, longitudinal studies have found indications towards the opposite, claiming that video games are the primary cause of depression and anxiety which is often seen amongst the players of concern (Gentile et al., 2011). As the scientific field of video game addiction still displays significant deficiencies (Abreu, et al., 2009; Skouverøe, et al., 2011), the American Psychiatric Association (2007) concluded that the research on the topic was still inconclusive and hence did not to implement video game addiction as a diagnosis in the new Diagnostic and Statistic Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM).

In the midst of this ongoing debate, clinicians and media commentators have stood forward in public media (Abreu, et al., 2009); making statements comparing video games to tobacco products (Bushman & Anderson, 2001; Reimer, 2006) and narcotics (Paffit, 2011). Some have even attempted to blame tragic incidents such school shootings and other violent acts on video games (Ferguson, 2007). The players are in these contexts often depicted as passive victims of the negative impact from video games. Players, however, report that they experience this negative focus as stigmatizing; both by the public media and amongst their peers. They report that this continuous focus leads to negative stereotypes of them as WoW-players (Krangnes, Skouverøe, & Anderssen, 2009), but there is still uncertainty to how the players give meaning to this publicity, and the players' own perspectives on the topic of video game addiction.

The Social Aspect

The communication system in WoW is fundamentally text based and is generally used in order to chat, trade within the game and arrange and organize group activities. Studies on CMC have suggested that text-based communication excludes sensory qualities, feelings and context, and thus leads to a communicational experience that is almost unreal (Döring, 1999), and that have poorer quality and is less preferable compared to face-to face communication (Ocker & Yaverbaum, 1999). The loss of the sensory dimension is suggested to make it harder for players to familiarize themselves with the other players' perspective, and consequently leading to a loss of community spirit and empathy (Wicklund, 2007). However, WoW-players supplement their game play with Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) that allows them to speak to each other by voice while playing. In addition, WoW's virtual environment allows players to interact in far more complex ways than dialogue alone.

Furthermore, it has been suggested that what the players experience to be social in the game is mainly related to status, and the ability to compare achievements with one another

(Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell, & Moore, 2006). Even though players acknowledged that status is a part of the game, they do not experience this to be the defining factor in their perspectives of the social aspect (Krangnes, et al., 2009; Skouverøe & Krangnes, 2009). The social aspect then appears to a great extent to be related to experiences of performing activities together and experiencing moments of shared achievements (Krangnes, et al., 2009; Skouverøe & Krangnes, 2009). To them, social interaction is the main reason for playing, and also keeps them entertained while doing other activities in the game on their own (Krangnes, et al., 2009; Skouverøe & Krangnes, 2009). Additionally, the players often use online forums (Caplan, et al., 2009), instant messenger services and arranged social arrangements where they meet face to face (Krangnes, et al., 2009; Skouverøe & Krangnes, 2009). These activities are often regarded as bonding-experiences that create stronger relational ties as they get to know each other better. After participating in these social events the players report that they often experience the game to be more enjoyable and purposeful (Krangnes, et al., 2009; Skouverøe & Krangnes, 2009).

However, these relationships and friendships are not given when you buy the game. They are the result of the players' own active participation in the game, and thus we are interested in how the players understood this processes of them getting to know one another. Furthermore, we are curious to how they perceive other players within the game, e.g. if there are qualities they perceive as good or bad in others.

Research Question

Although hoping to illuminate some of these stated topics, our main goal remains to illuminate how players themselves understand and give meaning to their experiences. We wanted to see how players discussed their experiences as a group, and what they as a group perceived to be interesting topics. Our research question thus becomes: "how World of Warcraft players experience and give meaning to their activity?"

Method

We found Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to congregate the majority of our own perspectives. This approach draws on the traditions of phenomenology, hermeneutics and symbolic interactionism in attempting to understand how people make sense of their experiences (Back, Gustafsson, Larsson, & Berterö, 2011; Eatough & Smith, 2008; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). In addition to SI, there are four fundamental perspectives in IPA that we would like to emphasize.

Foremost, IPA acknowledge Husserl's attempt to construct a philosophical science of consciousness as an important theoretical touchstone (Back, et al., 2011), in that Husserl give focus to experience and its perception (Smith, et al., 2009). The second perspective is that of Heidegger (1962/1927), Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Sartre (1974/1948, 1986/1943), who are all regarded as important contributors. Even though there are some significant differences in their perspectives, all emphasize a point of view in which the person is seen as embedded and immersed in a world of objects, language, relationships and culture (Smith, et al., 2009). These philosophers also open up for a more interpretative position to the lived experienced of others, consequently giving focus to the perspectival directedness of our involvement in the world (Smith, et al., 2009, pp. 11-21).

Heidegger's (1962/1927) ascription of phenomenology as a hermeneutic enterprise is also important to IPA (Smith, et al., 2009). In this perspective, the analyst is implicated in facilitating and making sense of the data. The last perspective is that of Gadamer (1990/1960), first and foremost due to his insights to the relationship between the fore-understanding and the new phenomenon attended to (Smith, et al., 2009, pp. 21-29). Due to IPA's emphasis on the interpretative feature of analysis (Eatough & Smith, 2008), the perspective thus separates itself from other phenomenological perspectives such as for instance Giorgi's empirical phenomenology (GEP). Furthermore, in GEP there is an interest

in the relationships between the different experiences in order to build up a coherent understanding of a phenomenon. In IPA the diversity of these human experiences is of interest as it thus becomes a micro analysis of convergence and divergence within a small set of accounts (Eatough & Smith, 2008).

Additionally, we have utilized some of Carla Willig's writings on Discourse Analysis (2008). We did so because we are concerned with how language can play a central role in the construction of social reality, and consequently some of our perceptions, analysis and terminology are influenced by her work.

IPA and Focus Groups

While IPA studies traditionally are based on multiple individual interviews, we are interested in exploring how players as a group discuss and give meaning to their experiences. Based on this we decided to conduct a focus group. Although this is not common, it is consistent with the guidelines of IPA, and the analysis requires minimal adjustments from individual interviews (Smith, et al., 2009, p. 71).

As Kvale points out (1996, p. 101), there are some disadvantages to conducting focus group interviews. Compared to individual interviews, focus groups have a more chaotic nature and are thus less submissive to control by the researchers. Seeing as entangled voices may occur it often results in a more demanding transcription process, which and may in turn cause us to miss out on some of the data. The advantages are that focus groups allows participants to compare their experiences and expand each other statements, and Kvale also point to focus groups as a way of getting spontaneous and emotional statements (1996, p. 101).

Quality and Validity

Qualitative research is often critiqued for not being accessible by the same measures concerning validity and reliability as quantitative research, however as Smith, Flowers and

Larkin illustrate, there are ways suited for evaluating both the quality and validity of an IPA (Smith, et al., 2009, pp. 179-185). We take their advice of following Yardley's four criteria for the quality of qualitative research as closely as possible throughout the entire process. These criteria consist of sensitivity to context, commitment and rigor, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance.

Being sensitive to context involves putting the participants at ease and keeping an awareness of the interview as process, as well as considering the context of the statements during the analysis. Commitment and rigor includes being attentive to the content of the interview both in the analysis and interview, while being comfortable and thorough to follow up on important cues during the interview. The transparency is assessed by an extensive description of the procedure of the interview and analysis, and coherence in that the analysis should not be contradictory of itself. The final principle is of impact and importance, in that it should tell the reader something of interest and that the conclusions could be utilized in a meaningful way.

Having audits to the interview is suggested feat to strengthen the validity of the study, and is strongly suggested by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009). In this study our supervisor was as an audit for our presented analysis. Due to the principle of transparency we include the translation of selected quotes from our analysis (appendix B).

The Researchers

The study was conducted within the Group of Social Norms and Human Interaction at the Faculty of Psychology, University of Bergen (UIB) with Norman Anderssen supervising the project. Krangnes and Skouverøe both completed their practical internships at the student clinic for young adults and adults at UIB as well as in the field of substance abuse (Bergensklinikkene). Both share prior interest and experience with WoW and video games in general, and are both appealed and inspired by qualitative research and perspectives such as

symbolic interactionism, critical discourse analysis, critical psychology and the RSA project of 21st century enlightenment.

The fourth contributor in this study was master in sociology Andreas Larsstuen Nordeide. He is the third member in our research collaboration concerning World of Warcraft, created in 2009. Although, we all agree in our fundamental perspectives on WoW, Nordeide's background from sociology gives him a slightly different angle, and being greatly inspired from theories on social networking he has been of great help as well as inspiration. In this study, he helped plan and prepare for the interview as well as being a third interviewer. He had no further involvement in the study after the conduction of the interview.

The Participants

The participants in the study were self-recruited. They volunteered by responding to a post that outlined the purpose of the study (appendix C). This post was published on ten of the most visited online WoW forums (appendix D). The participants e-mailed us on a g-mail account created exclusively for this study, and were then sent more detailed information about our background and the purpose of the interview (appendix E). The inclusion criteria were being above 18-years-of-age due to concerns of informed consent, as well as having characters at the contemporary top level 80.

All three players volunteering to participate were included in the interview, which is considered a reasonable sample size in an IPA (Smith, et al., 2009, p. 51). Two of the participants were males and one was female. They were given pseudonyms from the WoW lore; "Jana", "Thrall" and "Uther". The participants were never asked about their age, but we estimate them all to be somewhere in their twenties. Jana and Thrall were friends IRL and were both members of a guild we named "The Dragonmaw Clan". Uther was a considerably more experienced player. He had extensive gaming experience as well as being the only participant who had been playing WoW since its release. During the interview the players

were served beverages and food, and after the interview they were compensated 200 NOK for expenses (e.g. bus fares) as well as contributing to the research.

The Focus Group Interview

Following the guidelines of Kvale (1996) a created semi-structured interview guide (appendix D) was developed in accordance with the guidelines for an IPA interview (Smith, et al., 2009). Since we wanted to evoke a discussion of what the participants perceived as interesting and meaningful topics, we attempted to minimize our own influence on the interview. Hence the interview guide was perceived more as means to help the players along than guiding the interview.

The interview lasted 90 minutes and was held in a lecture hall at the Faculty of Psychology at the University of Bergen in October 2010. All interviewers introduced themselves before we encouraged the participants to speak freely and that it was their experiences we were interested in. We also reassured them of full anonymity when presenting our results. At the end of the interview we briefly explained our standing on the topics and made sure there were no uncertainties in regard to the study. We thanked the players for their participation and encouraged them to contact us through e-mail if they wished to subtract any statements or if any questions about the interview or study should arise at a later point.

Data Analysis

Smith Flowers and Larkin (2009, p. 79) encourage a perspective on IPA as flexible and creative as possible, as it needs to be adapted to the particular data at hand. The writing of results is seen as the most crucial part of the analysis, and it is far more discursive than a typical quantitative rapport. The goal of this writing is to connect the overall interpretation of the interview back to the specific quotes from the participants, illuminating how we worked through the reading and analysis process.

As this is the first time we performed an IPA analysis, we followed the general step-by-step procedure described by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009, pp. 79-117) as closely as the data permits. We started off by individually reading through the interview while listening to the audiotape, familiarizing ourselves with its content. Our thoughts and recollections from the interview situation were noted as a means of bracketing them away, which helped us bring our concentration back to the content of the interview. Re-reading the transcript then helped us get an overview of the collected data. These steps of reading and re-reading is seen as crucial to IPA as it gets us closer to the participants statements and helps us avoid an overzealous understanding of the content.

The second step is initial noting, where we on a very detailed level note anything of interest in regards to both semantics and language used. As this is a highly time consuming analysis, we decided to split the up the interview in half, writing notes on each our halves. We then read through each other's notes and parts, finding several similarities, whilst differences were thoroughly re-analyzed and discussed. The similarities were also revisited, as we wanted to be as close up to the statements as possible. We had a shared agreement on some of the major topics and we consider this to reflect a sense of common understanding on what the central themes are in the players' experience of the game. Here we also noted our understandings of how the players might have influenced one another with their statements and behavior.

Looking at patterns and relationships between these initial notes were helpful in the third step of developing emergent themes. Here we tried to capture the psychological essence of what we believe to be the main themes in the players' experiences, which we then abstracted into main themes for the content of the interview. The next two steps are skipped in this study as they concern individual interviews specifically.

Ethics

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009, p. 53) emphasize ethical practice as a dynamic process in IPA; consequently it should be monitored constantly through the data collection and analysis. Furthermore, they highlight, full anonymity is all we as qualitative researchers can offer (Smith, et al., 2009, pp. 53-54).

The participants e-mail addresses' was the only personal information we stored from the participants. These were deleted after the interview was conducted. The interview was recorded with a digital recorder. The original recording was deleted as soon as it were transferred to a computer. We were especially attentive to storing this information on a single computer without Internet connection as the interview contained names mentioned during the interview. This computer was used for transcribing the interview, and all the names (both IRL and names related to WoW) were consecutively replaced with pseudonyms from the WoW-lore. We used Atlas.ti v6.2 for analyzing the interview.

As student clinicians we were attentive that sensitive issues that could arise during the interview, in which case we were to gently shift the focus away from these topics. We were especially aware of concerns related to the aspect of unhealthy gaming. However, none of the statements by the participants were considered unsuited for the interview. None of the participants have asked any statements to be redrawn up to the point of writing of results; subsequently all statements are included in our analysis.

Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD), whom has the responsibility to govern Personal Data Regulations on behalf of the Norwegian Data Inspectorate, approved the study.

Analysis

The abstraction of the interview leads us to three main themes: identity, social interaction and game play. These are interestingly more or less the same categories we found in our prior study (Krangnes, et al., 2009; Skouverøe & Krangnes, 2009). We introduce each of the main themes before examining each of the sub-themes.

Theme 1: Identity

The participants offers insight into how playing the game comes to affect the way they perceive themselves and their identity. Playing the game appears to have a significant impact on their lives both in positive and negative ways, as well as in and outside of the game. We identified three sub-themes that appears to be prominent. The first theme reflects how the players see themselves through the eyes of the public. The second theme is interesting in that it only becomes visible through the eyes of a female player, illustrating how masculine the WoW-culture is. In the third theme we illuminate how the players experience being a part of something bigger.

How The Eyes Of The Public Affects Being A WoW-Player

A general feature of all participants was an experience of not being accepted for what they did. There were some differences to how they responded to this, and how they talked about it. Thrall expressed that he felt that he had to hide that he played WoW in order to avoid being labeled a “nerd”. When we discussed the topic the players a great deal of humor; something we felt was an attempt to disarm a potentially uncomfortable topic. Additionally, using humor appeared to be a general way of coping with the experience of being disapproved. This experience of disapproval appeared rather diffuse to us, for instance as this participant told us:

1. Interviewer: You [Uther] stated that it was a somewhat sore issue, WoW, was

2. there anything in particular you were referring to?
3. Uther: There's awful lot of stigma out there, a little bit from the
4. media and perhaps a little because some WoW-players suit the stereotype pretty
5. well (laughs).

Here, we are provided with a strong sense of WoW-players being positioned in a harmful way (line 3). The participant is rather unspecific about who and where he perceives this stigma to originate however, it was something "out there" and did not seem to originate from a single source (line 3-5). This reflects an uncertainty to Uther's perceptions; in that he is not sure where it actually derives from. The participants do not describe what the stereotype entails; yet there appears to be an idea of us all knowing what it refers to. Jana also seems unsure, as he hesitantly elaborates:

6. You can get judged really fast, ehm, wow, you are ... then
7. you're like, because of media you may have, they believe perhaps that it is
8. dangerous and that you become hooked and never manage to get out of it. And
9. ehhhh... "that is like really nerdy", and that those who haven't played it, never
10. have tried it, just give you a stupid look, and, but I've never experienced it myself,
11. but I understand that it's like that, that people look down on people who play.

Jana stumbles quite a bit trying to find the right words. She refrains from using bombastic statements and treads careful as she presents her perspective (line 6-7). Her careful presentation gives clues of this being a delicate topic for her. A continuous use of "you" and "they" appears to give her some distance to what she conveys, making it less personal (line 6-9). Telling us indirectly of how she feels the public perceive WoW-players; WoW is dangerous, you become hooked and won't manage to quit, and it is nerdy (line 7-8). Jana points out that she has never experienced being negatively stereotyped herself, but she understands that this is how players in general are regarded (line 11). This experience of "it"

being out there appeared to account for all of the participants. Having a strong sense of being disapproved, but without knowing exactly by whom. Words such as stigma, descriptions such as “they just give you a stupid look” (Thrall) and a lack of understanding all illustrate a sense of perceiving the public as being prejudice, fixed and uninformed in their perspectives of WoW-players. To us it seems that the participants felt underestimated, i.e. the public did not see the social value of the game and had little faith in them as players being able to regulate their activity. They also appeared to feel misunderstood, as they felt that the public did not understand what the game was all about. We are tempted to encapsulate these experiences by referring to the words of the former U.S. president George W. Bush, stating it as a feeling of being “misunderestimated” (O'Farrell, 2001).

It appears that being a WoW-player had a sense of soreness to it. The participants appear to be selective to whom and when they express the WoW-sides of themselves. Generally limiting this self-presentation to contexts that it was experienced as safe and legit to do so. Jana clearly regarded this as a different side of herself. She tells us that she avoids mentioning WoW to her IRL-friends, even though she does not think that they will dismiss her for playing. She further states that her friends knows who she really is, and thus did not regard her to be a video game player. As this statement indicates, neither does she apparently. It appears that she suddenly becomes aware of this:

12. Jana: [...] but no one, -no one- has ever said anything “oh my god, you’re like a

13. nerd”, kind of.

14. Laughter

15. Jana: And, but it might be a bit strange because they would maybe have

16. considered it as really tacky. But they know me so well that it’s like, don’t consider

17. like a computer gamer kind of. So I got two personalities

18. Laughter

19. Jana: (Laughs) Like, a split personality. When I start using the computer and when I

20. get out amongst normal people (laughs), people who are (laughs). No, but..

In this statement Jana seems becomes aware of how these two different sides of her do not unite. Frequently laughing, as this becomes more clear to her, it indicates that this is a strange insight to her. She then jokingly presents her self as having split personalities as a resolution. She then provides us with a last clue to how she perceives her WoW-playing self; “when I get out amongst normal people” (line 20).

Being A Woman In A Man's World

The participants describe how several of the social situations were based on raiding experiences. These are complicated in-game challenges that require 10-25 players to cooperate, and use advanced coordination and tactics. For many players, raiding is seen as strongly related to in-game progress and consequently status, as this often requires a skilled and dexterous player. Jana illustrates this as she describes how she became a raider:

1. I had some pretty good gear when I applied to The Dragonmaw Clan, but I did not
2. dare apply as a “soldier”, since I thought that it was so deadly serious; “woah! I
3. can't join that!” Then I got better and better gear, eventually I started sobbing every
4. night because I wasn't allowed to join the raids with the big boys (laughs).

Jana's wording of the raiders as the “big boys” (line 4) gives associations to an experience of being on a lower tier in the guild's social hierarchy, implying that she herself was not a “big boy/girl”. While she initially considered herself to have rather good equipment, she invested time and effort on acquiring better gear for her character (line 3); successively she builds a safe ground for her to feel competent enough to raid with the “big boys” (line 4). It seems to his signify a process for Jana when telling about her development in past tense, from her initial hesitant nonraider-self to her current confident raider-self.

As she refers to the raiders as “the big boys” and her guild has chosen to call the group “soldiers” (line 2), there seems to be masculine understanding of the group. This is further clarified by what all three of the participants tell us, namely that the majority of the players are male. This is actually so prominent in the WoW-culture that for the most, players is referred to in a masculine way, which upsets Jana :

5. Nobody sits there and says “she”, they’re more like “ok, let that guy do it”. They
6. sort of take it for granted that it’s a “he”. And then, then I correct them right away.
7. I’m no fucking boy. No, that, there’s the line.

The tendency to undermine the presence of female players through language appears to really provoke Jana. She makes it very clear that it is important for her to correct others when they wrongly assume that she is a male player (line 6), which suggests there is struggle or opposition in her concerning this issue. The participants tells us that female player often get treated different in a WoW however, in that female players caused male players to be more generous in offering help, assistance and material goods. Jana felt that female players often took advantage of this, a tendency she expressed her contempt towards and clearly deplored. For her this appeared to strengthen a perspective on female players as poorer or less skilled players:

2. Jana: [...] but in raiding and such you are often looked down upon, ”oh a girl, you
3. don’t know how to play”. And then I get really angry. And it took some time
4. before I got more, mmm.. What should I call it, before everyone understood that
5. I’m not like that, I knew how things were and that it wasn’t any problem to
6. understand and get into things by myself. Of course you ask about things, boys do
7. that too, and that... But I don’t want others to be seen as a bad player who doesn’t
8. know stuff like that.

In this section the participant gives us a sense having proven herself to be good player. We get the feeling that this is a struggle that has been both tough and frustrating for her, shown by her perception of females being devaluated and how frustrated this is to her (line 1-2, 6-7). Her frequent referral to herself as “I” seems to present this as a personal struggle to her. Jana makes statements and comments related to being a worthy and skillful player throughout the whole interview, perhaps she feels that she has to prove her right to be an accepted member especially in this group that consists mainly of men. As she also emphasize her continuous effort towards become a better player, we get a sense of this being something that she still combats.

Belonging

All of the participants displayed a tendency to present themselves as representatives of their guild. Giving statements such as “we have a nice recruiting policy”(Uther) were very common, indicating a strong sense collectivistic identity. In general, we interpret these statements as an experienced cohesion and belongingness. And we often felt that they had a sense of pride in representing their guilds. Furthermore, their stories shows how they befriend other players, getting to know each other more and more, and sometimes even becoming romantic partners. The games social culture appears almost as a form of “virtual hometown” for the participants, in the sense that it is a place they felt affiliation and emotionally attached to. The relationships to the other players seems to be essential in this experience.

The creation of new friendships typically, although not exclusively, occurred within the guilds the participants were members of. Often, these guilds would arrange IRL parties or other social events where the members get to mingle and know each other better. The representatives from The Dragonmaw Clan gives us many examples of how these common activities outside the game are arranged, for instance:

9. Jana: but we had this barbeque, barbeque party, in Oslo, then we like... most of

10. the people from Trøndelag who are guild members we, I had a car so I drove
11. and picked up the other [members] in Trondheim, I had never met them before,
12. so I just drove, we took a road trip down to Oslo. It was really fun. So after
13. that it became more like, got to know the others better and we talked
14. with each other almost every day after that, on Ventrilo [voice chat]. I have tried to
15. arrange it once more this year, but it did not happen. But we have in
16. Trondheim it's this LAN [gathering where players get together to play]
17. Thrall: Yes
18. Jana: Trønder-LAN [wordplay on Trønderlag]
19. Thrall: At Easter we usually drive up to Trondheim and we arrange a LAN

During the interview we were somewhat struck by how Jana portrayed these get-togethers. She applied terms such “road trip” (line 4) and that they once “trashed” an apartment, and seeing as they are verbatim quotes they create an association to American youth culture. Her descriptions goes against the general conception of video game players, and this referral to idealized pop cultural references seems possibly a way of making the player-society more acceptable or “cool”. The participants nevertheless commented very enthusiastically about arrangements and activities with other players, how these their friendships developed and that it now had become the major motivation to play. WoW had become a place where they felt connected, as one Uther told us: “when I came back to the game after a huge break, and everyone sat there and was like waiting for me, that was really uplifting.”

Theme 2: Play

The players spend considerable time of the interview talking about the game in and of itself. When discussing these topics there is a high level of engagement amongst the participants, and their statements are often marked with a sense of affect.

In this theme we identified four sub-themes. The first is the participants' experiences with the learning the game. Secondly is immersion, where participants describes indulging themselves in the. The third topic illuminates the participants' relationship to the character. Lastly, the fourth discusses the participants perspectives on unhealthy gaming, which was a recursive topic commented upon throughout the entire interview.

A Comprehensive World

The experience from being new to Azeroth is a topic that evokes frustration as well as humor and good memories. The aspect of learning all the mechanics of the game was a subject highlighted by all participants. Jana and Thrall accentuate the comprehensiveness:

1. Thrall: [...] there's an awful lot to learn
2. Jana: M-mh
3. Thrall: in the beginning, but.. If I were to explain WoW to a person, I could explain
4. for days. But yeah, well, people don't really give the game a chance when you
5. begin at level 10 right, you don't get to see anything of the game then.
6. Jana: I usually say the game doesn't start before you reach 80 [the current top level].
7. Thrall: No (laughs)
8. Jana: But that's when it begins, when people reach level 80, then, "Yeah, so what do
9. I do now?" But *that's* when it [WoW] begins!

This discussion highlights the extensiveness of the mechanics as Thrall says he could go on explain for days to someone who is not familiar with WoW (line 6-7). It becomes clear that the game offers its players a huge variety of activities and challenges; there is all in all a lot player's have to master in order to progress. Jana then implies is only a mere necessity, which enables access what she experiences to the real game when reaching the top level (line 8-9). All participants shared stories about missing out information of the game play due to its complexity. Thrall evokes a lot of laughter when he says: "I was level 60 [former top level]

before I realized you could raise a talent.” We believe the participants laugh with Thrall in his comment, as Uther backs him up in an almost altruistic and comforting way: “Everyone knew very little then.” During these talks of learning process it seems that remembering how they have progressed through the game is essential to the nostalgic effect for the players.

As new content and mechanics are regularly added, the game is still in continuous development. As Uther highlights the original version, referred to as “Vanilla” WoW, is more far difficult than the current version: “They took it too far in the hardcore direction in Vanilla and too far in the other direction now”. Jana and Thrall both stated a sense of missing out of this Vanilla experience in the interview, asking Uther to elaborate on his experiences with Vanilla. The participants also explain that players rarely quit the game:

10. Jana: Yes, there some who take those half-year-breaks and say they’ll never return

11. Laughter

12. Thrall: Always come back.

13. Jana: Then they come

14. Laughter

15. Jana: They come crawling back

16. Uther: Sometimes when new MMO’s are released then people might switch.

17. Thrall: Yesyesyes.

18. Uther: Then they grow tired, so they come back, I did it myself multiple times.

Trying out other MMO’s for a while, then returning to WoW seemed typical, and was also something Thrall had done. In our previous study, the return of players who “quit” was tied closely to new expansions and content being released. Although this is not mentioned specifically by the participants in this study, development of the game and its newest content is discussed in detail. All in all, the participants seem very pleased with how Blizzard keeps costumizing and optimalizing the game, which may explain why the players return. Jana and

Thrall are happy with how the dungeons (areas players have to co-operatively defeat) were recently customized:

19. Jana: yesyes, true, that is really cool, that. They have done a scoop there, Blizzard,

20. yes.

21. Thrall: Yes.

22. Jana: Ye-ah, nifty.

Immersion

The participants mention little concerning the immersion aspect of the game directly, and Thrall never mentions anything related to this aspect at all. Jana comments upon the scenery and esthetics as something she enjoys about WoW, while Uther describes aspects of immersion as an important reason to why he plays. On the other hand, and perhaps surprisingly, the role-playing aspect it self does not seem to constitute an important factor to our participants.

Jana's describes her initial encounter with WoW closely tied to the esthetics of the virtual world, becoming engaged in settings her character is situated: "I didn't have lots of game experience, so it was just, running around with no purpose and goofing around, running through the trees and the landscape and enjoying it." The way Jana talks about this with a soft tone of voice in a sensitive and patient manner implies these are cherished memories to her. This kind of experience with the esthetics seems to return to her at times, e.g. discovering the area *Karazhan*⁸ for the first time:

1. And stuff like when we, I and him [referring to Thrall] and one more, went to
2. Karazhan (laughs), and it wasn't long ago, perhaps a month maybe, never been
3. there before you know. And god damn, I was sitting there and just "listen to that

⁸ A ten-man raid instance that previously was considered a high accomplishment to undergo. It is an important historical place in Azeroth, with a high, gloomy and isolated tower.

4. music!” And they, who have been there probably a thousand times before, were
5. probably sick and tired (laughter) and I was sitting on VT and just shouting “ooh
6. how cool!” They had probably muted me and everything (laughter). So, stuff like
7. that I find very amusing.

Here, the music seemed vital in drawing Jana into the virtual world. Her enthusiasm is apparent through her vivid and lively retelling of her outburst of “listen to that music” (line 3-4) and “ooh, how cool” (line 5-6) to her fellow players. This experience of being more drawn into the esthetics seemed to have somewhat struck her in that moment, as is an experience she vividly remembers.

Neither the participants nor we pursued these aspects further, but towards the end of the interview she brings in the overlooked subject of role-playing in WoW. As Uther responds that he used to be highly involved in this aspect of WoW, she responds enthusiastically: “Oh, that’s fun!” Here we interpret Jana’s curiosity and enthusiasm for the role-playing aspect as something unfamiliar and intriguing to her, perhaps she is trying to uncover if this is something she wants to get more involved in as she asks Uther how it works. Uther explains to her that there is not that much a difference other than “a little different atmosphere”, and that the players are slightly more talkative and better at spelling. So while WoW per definition is a role-playing game, the degree players want engage in role-playing is an optional in WoW, as demonstrated by Jana and Thralls lack of experience with it.

Additionally, Uther mentions playing WoW as a means to tune out: “It’s kind of like Zen to sit down in front of the computer after a busy week”. This is a somewhat peculiar phrasing, as “Zen” draws parallels to Buddhism and meditation. Uther elaborates on this, highlighting the relaxation of allowing one self to be indulged in the virtual world: “it becomes a way of tuning out”.

My Character

All of the participants have several characters and tend to vary on which they played the most across time. Additionally, they often change the characters appearances, name or even faction. Thus, we initially had an understanding of their relationship to their character being of less importance to them. However, the way the participants from time to time used character names to refer to friends in the game, and the way they discussed their characters, is somewhat striking. For instance, Jana talks about how the hunters class (adventure style of the character) is ruined with the new content released, and how: “we can’t do any damage any more!”.

Additionally, there was a sense of ownership as the players often referred to their character as “my hunter” or “my paladin”. With this the participants indicate that they experience their characters to have some sort of propertied value for them. Consequently, it seemed important to invest time and resources in both the characters’ names and appearances:

12. Jana: All my characters are female blood elves, and all look the same and it’s sort of
13. like that, because I think that, I’m maybe a little more interested in the details and
14. stuff, like I can not be bothered to walk around being an orc and look like a
15. complete idiot. (laughs) But then, I have a Tauren, that destroys everything, the
16. whole system
17. Thrall: “Cuddly”⁹
18. Jana: “Cuddly”, you know...
19. Laughing

In this excerpt, Jana tells us how she always plays the same race and gender within the game, and that she designs them to look exactly the same (line 1). She underlines that their appearance in the game is important to her (line 3-4), hence she spends time on details (line 2). However, she has one exception to this, which Thrall appears to know well of; “Cuddly”.

⁹ The names are changed to keep the players anonymous. However, we tried to find names that suited their meaning.

When Jana starts telling us about Cuddly, she turns her voice softer, talking about it as if it was a pet she had. She goes on describing how she feels bad for Cuddly, seeing as other players repeatedly team up against him leaving him defenseless, an action referred to as “ganking”. She attributed the repeated ganking of Cuddly to the characters name. Trying to avoid getting ganked again, she invests time and money changing it’s name, but to Jana’s frustration her character keeps on getting ganked. Jana continuously refers to this character as something or someone else than her, perhaps indicating that it has in some aspects become a virtual doll or teddy bear for her. She also attributes both feelings and thoughts to the characters as well, stating how sorry she felt for “poor ol Cuddly”.

At a later point in the interview, Jana asks Uther how it he experiences playing on RP-servers, to which he responds “people usually don’t have stupid names”. Even though this comment had a humoristic touch, it clearly indicates what Uther thinks of Jana’s choice of names. Consequently, naming appeared to be a more serious matter to him. This might also help explain why players ganked Cuddly, as Jana renamed the character in similar sounding name, seemingly to no use. Name, being the only truly personalized feat players can add to their characters, may thus have consequences to their play. Thrall had an experience in which both appearance and names had been drastically altered without his consent:

20. Thrall: My name Vasailne then, everyone called me Vaseline as they thought

21. it was funny I guess. [...] I could not play one day, so another guildmember was

22. playing for me. When I came online again, I was female, naked with pigtails and

23. also named Vaseline, I was on a deserted island out in nowhere.

24. Laughter

25. Jana: Aaw.

26. Thrall: did not have my horse, or gold or anything [...]

27. Jana: Sure, I remember it, they whispered me and said “come here, come here, you

28. GOTTA see this, and just “huh?”, and then you sort of turned into Vaseline, I was
29. dying of laughter, well, it was the funniest thing I’ve ever seen. But you do still
30. have that nick.

Thrall’s story appears to be something that both him and Jana cherish. The practical joke appears to represent something bigger to him. He does not express anger, but he rather appears to appreciate what he is telling us. We get the sense that he perceives this story to be a statement of how he belongs in the group, how he is accepted as someone the others feel close enough to pull off such a prank. As Jana points out, Thrall has still not changed his character’s appearance or name back to how he originally intended it to be, something that possibly underlines Thrall’s appreciation of what it represents to him.

Addiction

While the word addiction is never mentioned specifically, statements as these relating to addiction arise already in the second sentence, and are recurring throughout the interview. Jana and Thrall both seem to joke about the debate and address it somewhat hesitantly, while Uther comments more shortly upon the subject and seems to have a clear approach to the debate.

The very introduction shows how the topic is first touched by Uther:

1. Interviewer: Vi can really just begin, we could perhaps begin with you, tell us
2. a little about what you enjoy about the game?
3. Uther: Yes. I’ve played since its release. I began mostly because it was Warcraft,
4. and I’ve had a healthy and good relationship to Blizzard from earlier on

Stating his relationship to Blizzard is one of the first things Uther mentions, and thus he seems to disarm the issue straight away. Perhaps anticipating the topic, he finds it important to stress his playing as unproblematic, even good and healthy (line 4). There is a sense of irony in his statement, as he seems to refer to the publicity the game has received. Following

Uther's lead, bot Jana and Thrall also comment upon their relationship to WoW in their introduction, although with a self-ironic angle:

1. Jana: [...] it might have been more nerding than it should have been (laughs).
2. Thrall: [...] we began [him and his father playing WoW], and I got the feeling
3. it's something dad highly regrets, ever since (laughter). I play mainly because
4. there's always something to do, and yeah, when I don't play, in periods when
5. it's boring, then there is not much else to do than homework perhaps, but that's
6. not always that nice, so [...]

Thrall and Jana's way of making humorous statements could be a way of disarming a topic that they perceive as being negatively laden, making jokes at their own behalf before anyone else gets a chance to do so. While Thrall tells that his father regrets that they starting playing, disapproving the gaming in some aspect, Thrall humors this remark by laughing at it (line 3-4). As he later elaborates, there are few other options for him than doing homework and playing, in which case he clearly prefers the (line 4-6).

While the participants seem to avoid the word addiction, Jana said she experienced "withdrawal symptoms" when unable access to her computer: "But some of the first [days], I had some withdrawal symptoms then when I had nothing to do and such, but I worked a lot then, so then I didn't think about it." Although in a somewhat joking manner the fact that she is using the diagnostic term implies that the public debate concerning addiction seems to influence Jana in the way she addresses the issue. Jana nevertheless shows an improper understanding about what withdrawal symptoms are, as she seems to misses playing when unable to do so. Later on in the interview, when we ask if they find it difficult balancing WoW against other activities, Jana express some concern:

7. Thrall: naaah (very low)
8. Jana: Recently, yeah, actually

9. Thrall: ok.

10. Jana: because I have nothing else to do [...] I might be playing a lot more than

11. I used to, and it gets a little difficult to just, if he [boyfriend] comes around

12. asking “nah, are you gonna.. wanna do something, watch a movie?” and I just

13. “Naaaah, I can’t be bothered”. (Laughter). So there it might have been a bit

14. often recently, that I’ve chosen WoW partially above other social stuff. But,

15. it’s just because, like, if something were happening in WoW, if there was

16. nothing happening, and it *has* occurred, then there would be no problem.

While previously being self-ironic, Jana seems to have become more comfortable sharing her concerns at this point in the interview. Highlighting that there indeed *has* been times when nothing occurs in WoW (line 29-30) entails an implicit understanding that most often, she prefers WoW to her other available options. Meanwhile, she seems careful and hesitant when choosing her words, saying “a bit often recently ”and “partially above other social stuff” (line 27-28). While being the most explicit concerned mentioned in the interview, Jana do not mention consequences to this and she seems unsure of how to assess her concern.

This topic of prioritization was a frequent occurring theme, and Jana and Thrall both seems to agreement that other priorities was a “valid” reason for quitting or taking a break from WoW. Uther on the other hand, referred to it as sense of *saturation*, which he further elaborated to involve a sense of growing tired of the game and consequently starting to balance it more. Perhaps to extenuate the problems concerning prioritizing is not the only way to view the issue. As Uther highlights: “It [playing] comes on the bottom of the list, even though I enjoy playing [...] I used to organize my life around WoW, and now it’s something I use to fill in empty spaces.”

Theme 3: Social Interaction

Repeatedly throughout the interview, the social interaction in the game is discussed and explicitly emphasized by the participants. This aspect is related to experiences of shared achievement, helping as well as being helped by others, being frustrated at “newbs” (new/unskilled players) and other parts of interacting with other players in the game. They compare the game with a three-dimensional chat room, and tell us they at times log in just order to chat with their friends. Social events in the game are also reported by all three of the players as appreciated and memorable.

This main theme consists of three sub-themes. The first is the interplay between skilled and less skilled players, and how this affects their interactions with one another. The social hierarchies of the game, and how real life factors sometime influences this is the second sub-theme. The third is how norms affect their interaction, as well as the consequences to breaking these norms.

Working Together

Sooner or later, the game requires players to rely on others in order to get sufficient training and knowledge. Accordingly, helping and teaching each other the game becomes a crucial component. This is perhaps neatly illustrated by Jana’s description of how she came to know her guild:

2. I started raiding Naxx, and at that time I was in a guild, which also consisted
3. only of Norwegians, and we did 10 men raiding. And then a couple from
4. The Dragonmaw Clan boosted us again, and I got to know more and more
5. [of them] through that. And yeah Then when Garrosh [player name] came
6. our guild started to fall more or less apart. So I started applying to The
7. Dragonmaw Clan.

Initially, the situation Jana describes above appears to be built upon an altruistic incentive amongst the players, as boosting refers to strengthening other players’ characters.

The participants elaborated on how these experiences often were reciprocally rewarding, e.g. that they developed new friendships. In Jana's story, they even gained a new contributing guild member by doing so. This seems somewhat typical of participants' experiences, in that they meet other players initially through collaboration towards a common goal, e.g. raiding or helping each other out. Initially the communication, however, seems to follow more or less formal procedures. As they gradually come to know each other better they start to express themselves more freely, and sometimes these friendships are transferred beyond WoW and into more private spheres. Participants underlined that voice based communication enhanced their game play further, by opening up for more effective communication on strategies and other aspects relevant to their game play. As they gradually come to know each other better, aspects such as humor and experiences from their private life are introduced as well, in addition to opening up for meetings IRL.

Although WoW is an online activity, geographical nearness appeared to be a strong mediator for further relational development amongst the players. For Jana and Thrall this was partly explained by their preference to communicate in their native language. On the other hand, they told us that in-guild groupings were largely based on the major city they were closest to, thus they had a Stavanger-, Bergen-, Trondheim and Oslo-group within their guild. The ability to meet outside the game was heavily emphasized as an important aspect to why geographical nearness played such a central role. The players who lived near each other often tended to find activities outside the game together, which consequently also led to a strong preference to play with each other.

The perception of other players recurred as a topic and most commonly the participants refer to others the sense of being a part of the masses. Meanwhile, other players are sometimes comprehensively devaluated by the participants, especially less skilled players.

Thrall elaborates on some consequences of playing with less skilled players, compared to his guild members:

8. So you're there with this really good paladin and you're going to heal, and
8. it's boring as hell because there's no challenge at all. Then you end up with
9. four newly dinged nabs [new/inexperienced players] who don't manage to do
10. shit, so it ends up taking half an hour for something that could have taken five
11. minutes with our group.

The statement reflects that he expected to play with someone who were equivalent in equipment and skills, but instead ended up with someone who has just reached the maximum level ("newly dinged") and are consequently not as experienced. The lesser skilled players are thus devaluated, in that he refers to them as "nabs", a paronym for newb (line 9). This has consequences for Thrall, as it takes much longer time to accomplish tasks.

In addition to being skilled, being mature was also important to being positively perceived by the participants. This is perhaps best illustrated in Uther's description of how his guild recruits new members to their guilds:

12. Uther: We have a nice recruiting policy, we focus on personality instead of
13. ability to demonstrate that they've got good gear score and such,
14. Jana: "mm-mm" (aha!-sounding)
15. Uther: simply because it is easier to train someone who may not be a top
16. notch player, but otherwise a nice person, than to try to get someone who is an
17. asshole to sort of, get in line.

In the section above the participant emphasizes an idea of having someone being embedded by the group, by stating that the guild will teach their new member how to play (line 16). Thus he deemphasizes the value of the applicants' equipment, stating that personality is more important to them. This may appear as being in contrast to what Jana

stated earlier; that having good equipment made her feel competent enough to raid. However, we believe that this is rather a statement of how important it is to the players that the people they play with are likable and cooperative.

Social Hierarchies In WoW

As guilds arrange complex activities that are dependent on the co-operation of many players, sometimes scattered across the world, the responsibilities of each player becomes crucial. Guilds are thus organized in a hierarchy, in a seemingly military manner with a guild leader, generals etc. Jana and Thrall tells a story of someone behaves in an improper manner against the guild leader himself:

14. Jana: There was this one person who got thrown out after a week, he was really

15. Thrall [interrupts]: Attempted to revolt against the leaders.

16. Jana: M-mh [confirming sound]. I don't think he knew who the guild leader was,

17. before we were

18. Thrall [interrupts]: No.

19. Jana: in a raid one evening just for fun, and he tagged along. And then he stood

20. there yelling at the guild leader. And I just "oh my god, no, now he is going to be

21. thrown out" (laughter).

That a newly recruited guild member tells the guild leader off appears as breaking some crucial norms for the players. This behavior seems to be far out of reference for both Jana and Thrall, making them feel that they have to justify it in some sense; stating that he did not know what he was doing. To Jana, it appears to be a sort of freeze-moment, one she does not want this to happen, knowing strict consequences it implies for the other player (being kicked out). Thrall's phrasing of this as a "revolt" (line 2) gives us association to a minority attempting to rebel against an established authority.

When we asked the participants if it is considered a taboo to complain to the guild leader, the participants seemed to become impatient with us. In a somewhat didactic manner, Jana underlines that there are no dictatorships in WoW and that mostly the guild leaders are likeable people. Again we could suggest that it was important for the players to portray a positive image of WoW when confronted with this possibly negative aspect. However, Uther indicated that this position often indicated that the player was skillful and worthy of being treated with respect: “It kind of depends on how you do it [give remarks to the guild leader], but by default you assume that the guild leader knows what he is doing”.

To Jana, the concept of respect was closely related to age, and seemingly important as it takes quite some time for her to explain:

22. I thought about it [age] with him, it was like ”what, you’re that old and you’re
 23. sitting there playing?” (Laughter) No, I didn’t, but, it was like ”oh my god, you
 24. could be my father” (laughs). [...] But now maybe I have gotten, the longer I’ve
 25. been there, I’ve got less and less respect for (laughs), or maybe it subsided, so now
 26. I’m not scared of them anymore. [...] But it’s not like I got less respect to those
 27. younger than me, maybe the thirteen year olds, yeah (silenced laughter), but not
 28. those two years younger than me, I don’t get any less respect from them. –But-,
 29. like 30 year old, I kind of have a little respect for them. But I also have respect for
 30. those who know how to play, I’m not sitting there disrespecting and being rude to
 31. those who are skilled.

Jana draws a connection between the concept of respect and fear, implying she used to be scared of these players due of the respect she has for them (line 12 and 16). While explicitly arguing for not having less respect to those younger than her, she rapidly and with certainty adds “maybe the thirteen year olds, yeah” (line 14). The rapid comment about thirteen-year-olds provokes a silenced and somewhat nervous laughter in the room (line 14),

and is a direct contradiction to her previous statement, as she thus seems to take for granted the inferiority of players of this age. Uther tells that his guild has 12-year-old member. She becomes overtly enthusiastic, cheerful and engaged, responding laughingly: “Wow! No, that’s so cool! Or, how fun!” While Jana is struggling to find the words, or even make up her mind, Uther is crystal clear in regards his view of age and respect:

32. Uther: I’ve met people who are in their mid-twenties and are terribly immature

33. Jana: M-mh

34. Uther: and people several years younger than me who are very mature. So I

35. try not to base it on their age when I, like, judge them (scoffs).

36. Jana: M-mh.

Uther sums up very quickly his views on the topic (line 19 and 21), but then starts slowing down and struggles to find the right words. It seems as he chooses the word “judge” that implies he experiences this is what Jana does, which then cause him to scoff (line 22).

Norms Are Made To Be Broken

The players conveyed some norms that were present within the game. Some of these were minor, such as leaving a group without telling the other players why, whilst others were considered to be more comprehensive. One of these norms were what the players referred to as ninjaing, basically this means taking equipment that is not rightfully yours. Jana tells us of such an experience:

8. It was a really long time ago. So then the staff dropped, and ‘yes, now finally it

9. was my turn!’ And then there was this nab hunter who, ‘aaaargh!’, he had not

10. contributed with anything in Naxx (titters). He was so bad. And he rolled ninety-

11. nine or something and then I rolled two (laughing) And I was about to log out

12. (laughs) and then I see ‘you have received Journeys End’. And then the guy who

13. lead [the raid] had ninjaed it for me (laughter). And then I felt really bad and I

14. thought ... I was a bit happy and, and also terribly sorry. And all that bad luck I
15. had afterwards, I thought, I was convinced that it was because I was in on ninjaing
16. that staff (laughter).

Jana's frequent laughing (line 3-6 and 9) convey to us as a form of stating insecurity to the other listeners, knowing that what she did is something that is generally seen as wrong and even frowned upon. Thus, she steps careful in her presentation of how she ended up as a partner in crime. She attempts to justify her behavior by her experience of the other player as someone who did not contribute (line 2-3). She clearly expresses her feelings towards this player calling him a "nab hunter" and adding an angry growling-like sound (line 2-3). At the same time she displays a strong feeling of knowing that what she did was wrong (line 6-8). It seems to constitute a struggle that is displayed in the ambivalent change of emotions being really happy, but at the same time feeling guilty and sorry for what she did (line 6-7). Her experience of being punished, by having bad luck in the following period, give rise to this feeling of guilt. This understanding of almost karma-like consequences gives us the impression that these moral codes are for Jana as real as those IRL (line 7-8). Furthermore, we get the impression that she feels that she had to get some sort of punishment in order to fulfill a sense of really deserving the staff. Her whole presentation indicates to us, that this is something that she feels uncomfortable telling us. It appears almost as a confession, telling us something she did wrong, distancing the experience from her current sense of self by emphasizing that it was a really long time ago (line 1). Her continuous referral to "I" however may illustrate that this is something she still feels ashamed of and that it is difficult for her to share this experience. We are left with the impression that the experience led Jana to question her own understanding of herself as an honest player and person.

Relationship between themes

The main themes in this study appear to be highly intervened and entangled into each other. It is almost impossible to discuss one without also touching upon aspects of the other themes. Additionally they appear to be reciprocally influential, in the sense that they all influence each other and that they are equally important in constituting the participants experience of the game. Furthermore, there is logic coherence between the themes, as identifying with being a WoW-player implies that you first and foremost play the game, furthermore the game is designed and dependent on social interaction, which again appears to be strongly related to how the players perceive themselves.

The sub-themes however appear more chaotic, and less compound. They, sometimes constitute different aspects of what appears to be the same topic, such as in main theme 1 (the game), addiction is experienced as a part of the game, whilst in main theme 2 (WoW as an identity), addiction is seen as a part of the publics' perspective of them as players. At other times the sub-themes appear to be contradictive, such as Janas feelings of alienation within the game community due to her gender, this is in strong contrast to her feelings of cohesion and fellowship to the guild.

Furthermore, other sub-themes touch upon aspects that are in the realms of other main-themes, such as "norms are made to be broken" (in main theme 3: social interaction), emphasizes aspects that are apparent both within the same main theme, e.g. as in working together norms is a central aspect of how players interact, but also in the main-theme 2 (WoW as an identity), as this is a central aspect in how they perceive themselves as players. These convergences, divergences and contradictions amongst the sub-themes, and across the main themes are perhaps nice reminders on how versatile human experience and meaning giving can be.

The Themes: A Further Understanding

Addiction

In accordance with our hypothesis, we found that the participants were at first eager to discuss the more acceptable aspects of the game; such as how social they experienced it to be or how it often led to new IRL friendships. This was also what they wanted to emphasize when we asked them if they had anything they wanted to add. As we got closer to the end of the interview and the participants appeared to feel safer, they also talked more freely about things that were in consensus with the stereotype, for instance one of the participants told us that she had been playing more than she intended to lately. On the other hand, this can also be explained by Goffman's (1959, 1961, 1963) perspective, as we continuously focused on their identity as WoW-players, maybe they also started to act more in accordance to the stereotype of being one.

Goffman's (1963) work on stigma becomes highly relevant in regards to the debate in the public media, as all participants were very much aware of the controversy. Both Thrall and Jana adopted terms and stereotypes from media when they commented on their own relationship to WoW. This, perhaps, portrays that the negativity connected to the debate also influence how the players come to perceive their own playing in general. One participant wrongfully adopted the term withdrawal symptom on her own behalf when she seemed to simply miss the game. According to Lemmes et al. (2009) withdrawal can be understood as: "unpleasant emotions and/or physical effects that occurs when game play is suddenly reduced or discontinued. Withdrawal consists of moodiness and irritability, but may also include physiological symptoms such as shaking" (p. 79). This description of withdrawal is generally in consensus with others have defined it as well (Brown, 1991; Griffiths & Hunt, 1998; Mentzoni, et al., 2011; Salguero & Morán, 2002). Thus, missing the game or simply just wanting to play is not pathologic and does not fit the description of withdrawal symptoms.

Moreover, the participants appeared to be insecure to what extent they played too much, being concerned that time consumption was an indicator or measurement on video

game addiction. However, this assumption is partly invalid (Charlton, 2002; Charlton & Danforth, 2004; Skoric, et al., 2009). As time spent on video games have been found to be a peripheral criterion, and thus often related to engagement as well (Charlton, 2002; Charlton & Danforth, 2004; Skoric, et al., 2009). This distinction, between addiction and engagement, is generally not taken in consideration in the public media, and there are few attempts to nuance and elaborate on the distinctions between what may be seen as pathological or addictive playing, and normal recreational playing (Krangnes, et al., 2010). Thus, players are left in the blind in regards to how they are to perceive their own playing. Something, which is perhaps illustrated by Jana who expressed her concern in relation to how she prioritized WoW partially above other social activities, she was hesitant and unsure on how to assess this. This in spite the fact that she regarded it to have no negative consequences for her life in general. Interestingly, the participants in our study appeared to have few indicators on what addiction actually meant, even though they were fully aware of this being a part of the public perspective on them as WoW players. In addition, they appeared uncertain of whom it actually was that labeled WoW-players in this manner, they just knew it was out there. Thus, as there are still uncertainties and ambiguity surrounding the topic of video game addiction, we would advise a call for caution in the further assessment of the topic.

Although, the players stated that they often got bored of the game, they also told us that there was almost always some activity they could engage themselves in, adding to this was the experience of WoW being highly social, thus they would log on sometimes, if not to play, then to chat. The endless opportunities and tasks within the game has been argued to be an important aspect in understanding how it may be potentially addictive (Griffiths & Meredith, 2009). This is partly supported by how the participants found it harder to balance their play time when new content in the game arrived, and other findings that report an increase in playtime when approaching important benchmarks within the game (Ducheneaut, et al., 2006;

Rettberg, 2008). However, as these effects appear to be rather temporarily they do not appear to be a sufficient explanation (Caplan, et al., 2009; Ducheneaut, et al., 2006; Krangnes, et al., 2010; Krangnes, et al., 2009; Skouverøe, et al., 2011; Skouverøe & Krangnes, 2009). In Uther's own words players appear to reach a state of saturation, where they are temporarily not hungry for more adventures in Azeroth.

Our participants did not serve us any indications to the discussion on whether excessive video game play can be understood as a primary or secondary problem, i.e. to what extent it should be seen as a coping mechanism. However, as Uther terms it, sometimes the game gives you a feeling of Zen, or unwinding, which may be seen as a state of immersion. This may indicate that the game may provide thought escape/euphoria for some, which is one of the peripheral criteria for video game addiction. Nonetheless, the issue stands tall as this can be seen both as a coping mechanism in itself, and as a part of a developing addiction.

Nevertheless, the public labeling of players as addicted appears to be somewhat premature. Consequently, we are curious to what extent this better suits the concept of moral panic; i.e. when a "condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests." (Cohen, 2002/1973, p. 9). To what extent the discussion of video game addiction meets Ben-Yehuda and Goodes (1994) five criteria for terming it moral panic appears to be ostensible, and may perhaps best be evaluated by future generations as the phenomenon is still in its adolescents.

The Feminine Revolt

To Jana, customizing her characters look was of great importance. The blood elf characters are to a great extent hyper-feminine in the sense that their waists are minimized, and breasts and hips are enlarged, giving them a more feminine and sexually attractive look. Consequently, they are in many ways similar to the young and skinny supermodel ideal that characterizes the modern western society (Corneliussen, 2008). Her choice of playing female

blood elf and tauren as character races seems to fit the stereotype female preference for video game characters, that are either hyper-feminine or cute and cuddly (Walkerdine, 2007). Jana however also appeared to be struggling to earn her respect as a female player, attempting to avoid falling in to what she experience as a negative stereotype.

This stereotype of female players may be seen in consensus with how women traditionally have been presented in video games; as passive victims who needs help from the heroic male player (Corneliussen, 2008). Either way the participants were clear on the matter, female players were treated differently, and this was a source of great frustration to Jana. She is, however, both competitive and continually seeks to improve herself and her character, consequently leaning to a more masculine play style. On the other hand choice of characters and her love for exploration and esthetics in the world could be seen as a more feminine play style (Walkerdine, 2007).

There is however another side to this, as some of the participants told us of players meeting romantic partners in the game. The participants did not elaborate on these stories, but is an interesting aspect that can be illuminated in future studies. E.g., could “boosting” a girl be a virtual form of taking her out for a cup of coffee?

The Relationships In WoW

The participants’ description of how friendships in WoW developed appears comparable to that of a sports team or within a business firm (Krangnes, et al., 2010; Krangnes, et al., 2009; Skouverøe & Krangnes, 2009). The participants in this study exemplified this, in that players are initially gathered together by the guild, as in a team or a firm, both the activities and conversation topics are in the beginning of the relationship related to the formal settings of the work, e.g. raiding or competing against other players. As the players accomplished tasks and performed routines together, they feel safer to express themselves, which gradually allows humor and more private subjects to be included in their

conversations. From time to time the guild arranges get-togethers, where the players get to meet and mingle in ways that are usually limited by the restrictions of the game, or work. These get-together are in many ways comparable to social events arranged by employers or sports team, such as Christmas parties or “kick off-events”(Krangnes, et al., 2010). By getting to know each other better, they also find playing the game more enjoyable as it now involve maintenance and further development of meaningful friendships and companionship. In the same manner as social gatherings and work relations often are seen as factors that increase job satisfaction and motivation amongst employees at firms (Krangnes, et al., 2010).

The participants experiences appears to be compatible with the perspective of WoW as an arena for developing social capital, as they found new ways to develop networks, norms and trust within in the dynamics of the game. The participants also told us that living geographically close to each other often increased the chances of developing the relationship further outside the game. Consequently, the social nature of the game appeared as a great tool for the players to develop networks, friendships and equal trust. As two of the participants played mainly with other Norwegians, it seemed players create their own boundaries in the virtual world that seemingly has none.

Nonetheless, two of the participants appeared to have been introduced to the game by offline relationships, such as a friend or family member, and that it at first had started out as an activity they did together. Indicating, perhaps how the game gives a sense of companionship. These tendencies appears to be in coherence with what others report (Ducheneaut, et al., 2006; Krangnes, et al., 2009), however in these prior studies participants reported that they often used the game as a relational tool to keep in touch with friends and family members that were geographically distant (Ducheneaut, et al., 2006; Krangnes, et al., 2009). None of the participants in this study indicated such tendencies, it should be noted that this was not explicitly asked for.

The different aspects of how players interact with each other appear to be neatly intervened and interrelated. Players who did not follow norms were generally perceived as less mature, an essential factor to how you were perceived by other players. As social networking was a catalyst to get help and being able to participate in more complex and social activities within the game, being well considered by other players appeared to be of high importance.

Participating in such activities were also considered to give status and consequently result to higher positioning in the social hierarchy of WoW. Gender and age were both real life factors that influences how you were perceived within the game. The negative attitudes the participants displayed towards “newbs” is perhaps best explained by Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This in the sense that the players were motivated to enhance their social identification with one group and not another, through making intergroup comparisons along dimensions that are valued by the group (Augoustinos, et al., 2007).

The participants illuminated the inbuilt structures that positioned players in different power structures. For instance guilds are often organized in a military fashion; (1) having a guild leader on top (e.g. a king or president), (2) a group of close trusted players that were ranked beneath him/her (e.g. generals/admirals), (3) players who had responsibility for the different classes within the guild, often referred to as “class master” (lieutenant), (4) raiders (soldiers) and lastly (5) social members (civilians). These, structural organizations made it easier to arrange social activities, and the players mostly felt that they did not have to relate to them as authorities. However, this apparently was greatly dependent on the situations; when the need to uphold these structures was highly present, such as in a raid, not respecting the authorities could have serious consequences within the game. In less formal settings, however, these authority positions appeared less visible. Length of “service” in the guild also

affected to what extent players were allowed to stretch or even break the norms within the guild.

The game undoubtedly had its own social code, and breaking these norms and rules were considered as both uncomfortable and to some extent immoral. Some of the rules were highly analogous to those in real life, for instance we would argue that its generally considered a bad thing to walk out on someone when working together, or most people do not take things that are not rightfully theirs. Other norms for instance may appear less mundane such as if you play a healing class you don't focus on dealing damage, or that writing in CAPSLOCK IS REALLY UPSETTING to the players (Corneliussen & Rettberg, 2008).

Communication in WoW

The participants' experiences were in consensus with prior studies on CMC have reported, e.g the participants experienced face-to-face relationships and interaction as more rewarding than text based communication (Döring, 1999; Krangnes, et al., 2010; Krangnes, et al., 2009; Skouverøe & Krangnes, 2009; Wicklund, 2007). Furthermore, the players preference for using voice chat while playing also lends support to prior findings suggesting that the exclusion of sensory qualities in text based CMC may lead to reduced experienced quality in communication (Döring, 1999; Wicklund, 2007).

According to earlier theories on CMC, the exclusion of the sensory qualities would hinder team spirit and empathy (Döring, 1999; Wicklund, 2007). However, the participant appeared to have a great sense of belongingness to their guild and WoW-friends in general. In addition they also displayed feelings of empathy towards player they never had met or spoken to outside the game. Thus, the participants' experiences suggest that empathy and community spirit are indeed created and developed through the use of CMC, which is further enriched if meeting these players outside of the game.

Limitations Of The Study

The sample in this study consisted of many shortcomings, as it was a heterogeneous small group in regards to age and experience with the game. Further, the participants self-recruited from online video game forums, and was limited to one geographical area of Norway (Bergen and its vicinity). Consequently, the findings in this study cannot be generalized to the entire population of WoW-players nor video game players. The themes that emerged in this study should therefore be regarded as examples of the ways WoW-players experience and give meaning to the game play.

Furthermore, the interview was highly characterized by one of the participants being more eager than the other two, giving less room for all of the participants to fully share their experiences and thoughts on the topic. In addition, two of the participants were from the same guild, which may have hindered them to speak freely due to the reprisals this could lead to, or it could have overly emphasized the traditions and meaning systems that were custom in their way of playing.

Another issue arises in that we have chosen to write in English, whilst the interview and analysis was done in Norwegian. Thus, some aspects may have been lost in translation. However, we have attempted to account for this by stating the Norwegian terms in cases we experienced this to be prominent, in addition to adding the translated quotes in our appendix.

This was our first time conducting an IPA analysis, which we believe had implications for the quality of both interview situation and the analysis. Additionally, while Smith, Flowers and Larkin stress that IPA requires a flexible and versatile approach to the data, other theoretical models also influenced our work with the data. This may have affected the consistency of our approach.

Research from other theoretical interests and of researchers of different backgrounds should conduct further studies, in order to produce more complementary findings. Following

Malterud's (2001) principle of triangulation, additional investigations from different perspectives may give a further and more enriched description of the phenomena.

Conclusion

In this focus group interview we explored how WoW-players discussed their experiences with the game. It became clear that the game in itself was considered a significant and valued real life experience, which had an impact on their social life as well as how they perceived themselves. The game, the player-identity and the social aspect were closely connected and seemed to reciprocally influencing one another. The players reported the social aspect of the game as one of the most important reasons to why they play. Many of their best memories of the game were due to sharing experiences with other players, IRL as well as WoW. Players experienced this as an overlooked in the publicity the game receives.

The player-identity was positive when players when in relation to other players, as they felt a sense of belonging in player groups. The player-identity was experienced as more negative when applied by to non-players, and they experienced to be prone to stigmatization. This experience was explained by to the fact that non-players were ignorant and uninterested in their experiences with the game. Also, we saw how difficult it could be for female players in this male-dominated universe.

The bad publicity the game has received was present in how the players discussed their relationship to the game. Furthermore, it seemed to be the cause of confusion in regards to assessment of their playing, and the use of negatively laden words might also create stigmatization of players. It turn it may cause players unnecessary worry in regards to this otherwise pleased activity. As video game addiction is not a diagnosis due to its vague nature, we would advise more caution applying diagnostic terms to players.

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Appendix A

Glossary

- Azeroth – The universe in which the Warcraft History is set, the land of WoW
- Blizzard – The developers of WoW, as well as many other successful games
- Blood Elf – Race within the game, tall, light skinned beautiful creatures with long pointy ears.
- Class - The primary adventuring style of a character that determine e.g. its strengths and skills
- CMC – Computer Mediated Communication
- Dungeons/Instance - a separate zone filled with elite mobs, and perhaps some non-elite mobs. There are also bosses in instances that rewards items of great value
- Hunter – Class that has the primary task of dealing damage
- Ganking – the act of attacking defenseless players, either by one far more advanced player, or a group of players combined.
- IRL – In Real Life, referring to things happening outside of WoW
- MMO – Massive Multiplayer Online (Game)
- MMORPG – Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game
- Nab – Paronym for newb: an inexperienced and unskilled player
- Ninjaing – Taking an item which is not rightfully yours
- PUG – Pick Up Group, used by players who look for others to play with
- Raid – A party of players, between 5 and 25, co-operating in completing a task
- SI – Symbolic Interactionism
- Tauren – A big and hairy ox-like character race within the game
- Vanilla – First edition of WoW, without any of the expansion packs added.
- VoIP / VT – Voice over Internet Protocol, enabling voice chat on computers

Appendix B

Translated quotes

English translation**Theme 1**

1. Interviewer (Joachim): You [Uther] stated that it was a sore issue, WoW, was there anything in particular you were thinking about?
2. Participant, Uther: There's awful lot of stigma out there, a little bit from the media and perhaps a little because some WoW-players suit the stereotype pretty well (laughs).
3. Participant, Uther: There's awful lot of stigma out there, a little bit from the media and perhaps a little because some WoW-players suit the stereotype pretty well (laughs).
6. Jana: You can get judged really fast, ehm, wow, you are ... then
7. you're like, because of media you may have, they believe perhaps that it is
8. dangerous and that you become hooked and never manage to get out of it. And
9. eh... that is like really nerdy, and that those who haven't played it, never have
10. tried it, just give you a stupid look, and, but I've never experienced it myself, but I
11. understand that it's like that, that people look down on people who play.

Norwegian original text**Identity: Being A WoW-Player In The Eyes of The Public**

- J: Men du sa at det har en litt sånn betent greie, Wow, er det noe spesielt du tenker på?
- 1: Det er jo fryktelig mye stigma ute og går, litt fra media og kanskje litt fordi at enkelte WOWspillere faller veldig fint i stereotypen (ler)
- 3: Du blir jo veldig fort dømt da, atte "oi, du er.. da er du liksom, på grunn av media så har du kanskje, har de kanskje troen på at det er farlig og at du blir hekta og aldri kommer deg ut av det. Og, eh... at det er veldig nerd liksom, og at de som ikke spiller det, aldri har prøvd det, ser bare dumt på deg, og. Men aldri har jeg opplevd det selv, men jeg kan godt forstå at det er sånn, at folk ser litt ned på folk som spiller.

12. Jana: [...]but no one, -no noe- has ever said anything "oh my god, you're like a
 13. nerd", kind of.
 14. Laughter
 15. Jana: And, but it might be a bit strange because they would maybe have
 16. considered it as really tacky. But they know me so well that it's like, don't consider
 17. like a computer gamer kind of. So I got two personalities
 18. Laughter
 19. Jana: (Laughs) Like, a split personality. When I start using the computer and when I
 20. get out amongst normal people (laughs), people who are (laughs). No, but..

3: [...]men de vet jo at jeg spiller, men ingen, -ingen- har sagt noe "herregud, du er nerd da" liksom
 Latter
 3: Og, men det er kanskje litt rart fordi at de ville kanskje ha sett på det som skikkelig hary. Men de kjenner meg så godt at det liksom, tenker ikke på meg som en dataspiller liksom. Sånn at jeg har to personligheter
 Latter
 3: (ler) sånn splitta personlighet. Når jeg kommer på dataen også kommer ut liksom, blandt normale folk (ler), sånn som er (ler)

Theme 1

1. Jana: I had some pretty good gear when I applied to The 2. Dragonmaw Clan, but I did not dear to apply as a "soldier", since I thought 3. that it was so deadly serious; woah! I can't join that! Then I got better and 4. better gear, eventually I started sobbing every night because I wasn't allowed 5. to join the raids with the big boys.

6. (Jana) Nobody sits there and says "she", they're more like "ok, let that guy do it". They
 7. take it for granted that it's a "he". When that happens I correct them right away.
 8. I'm no fucking boy. Then they like cross the line

Identity: Being A Woman In A Mans World

[...] jeg hadde nå ganske greit gear når jeg søkte inn i (nåværende guild), også turte jeg ikke å søke inn som soldat da, fordi at jeg trodde det var -så- dødsserøst og bare , "woah, der skal ikke jeg være med". Så ble det bare bedre og bedre, bedre gear på meg, så tilslutt satt jeg bare sutra hver kveld fordi at jeg ikke fikk være med å raide sammen med de store gutta (andre ler), så.

ingen som sitter der og sier "she" liksom, de sier jo liksom "ja, la han der få gjøre det da". Det tar det for gitt at det liksom skal være en "han". Og da, jeg retter jo opp det med en gang, jeg er faen ikke noen gutt jeg nei, det. Der går grensen liksom

6. Jana: [...] but in raiding and such you are often looked down upon, 'oh a girl, you don't know how to play'. And then I get really angry. And it took some time before I got more, mmm.. What should I call it, before everyone understood that I'm not like that, I knew how things were and that it wasn't any problem to understand and get into things by myself. Of course you ask about things, boys do that too, and that... But I don't want others to be seen as a bad player who doesn't know things like that and when I see...

Theme 1

1. Jana: but we had this barbecue, barbecue party, in Oslo, then we like... most of 2. the people from Trøndelag who are guild members we, I had a car so I drove 3. and picked up the other [members] in Trondheim, I had never met them before, 4. so I just drove, we took a road trip down to Oslo. It was really fun. So after 5. that it became more like, got to know the other [members] better and we talked 6. with each other almost every day after that, on Ventrilo [VoIP]. I have tried to 7. arrange it once more this year, but it did not happen. But we have in 8. Trondheim its this LAN [event where players get together in the same room or building to play] 9. Thrall: Yes 10. Jana: Trønder-LAN [wordplay on Trønderlag] 11. Thrall: At Easter we usually drive up to Trondheim and we arrange a LAN

Uther: "when I came back to the game after a huge break, and everyone sat there and was like waiting for me, that was really uplifting."

Theme 2

men ikke, men sånn raiding og sånn da, så kan du bli veldig sånn sett ned på, "åh jente, du har ikke peiling." Og det har jeg, da blir jeg veldig sint da. Og det tok litt tid før jeg fikk mer, nja, hva skal jeg si, før alle forstod at liksom at jeg ikke var, jeg kunne, jeg visste hva ting var og det var liksom ikke, det er ikke noe problem å forstå og sette seg inn i ting selv. Og klart du spør jo om ting, det gjør jo gutter og det, men jeg vil ikke at andre blir sett på som en dårlig spiller som ikke vet om sånne ting og sånn når jeg ser..

Identity: belonging

3: men vi hadde sånn grill, grillparty da, i Oslo. Så da dro vi liksom, de fleste trønderne som er med i gildet vi, jeg hadde jo bil da så da kjørte jeg og plukka opp de andre i Trondheim, jeg hadde aldri truffet de før, så bare kjørte vi, tok vi road trip ned til Oslo da. Og det var jo ganske artig da. Så etter det så ble det litt mer sånn, ble kjent med de enda bedre og vi snakker jo ilag hver dag nesten da, på Ventrilo og sånn så. Jeg har prøvd å fått det igang i år og, men det ble ikke. Men de har jo, hva, i Trondheim er det jo sånn LAN2: Ja3: TrønderLAN (ler)

etter jeg kom tilbake til spillet etter en stor pause, også satt alle liksom der og ventet på meg, det var veldig oppløftende.

Play: Comprehensive World

1. Thrall: [...] there's an awful lot to learn
 2. Jana: M-mh
 3. Thrall: in the beginning, but.. If I were to explain WoW to a person, I could explain
 4. for days. But yeah, well, people don't really give the game a chance when you
 5. begin at level 10 right, you don't get to see anything of the game then.
 6. Jana: I usually say the game doesn't start before you reach 80 [the current top level].
 7. Thrall: No (laughs)
 8. Jana: But that's when it begins, when people reach level 80, then, "Yeah, so what do
 9. I do now?" But that's when it [WoW] begins!
10. Jana: Yes, there some who take those half-year-breaks and say they'll never return
 11. Laughter
 12. Thrall: Always come back.
 13. Jana: Then they come
 14. Laughter
 15. Jana: They come crawling back
 16. Uther: Sometimes when new MMO's are released then people might switch.
 17. Thrall: Yesyesyes.
 18. Uther: Then they grow tired, so they come back, I did it myself multiple times.
19. Jana: yesyes, true, that is really cool, that. They have done a scoop there, Blizzard,
 20. yes.
 21. Thrall: Yes.
 22. Jana: Ye-ah, nifty.
- det er jævlig mye å sette seg inn i
 3: M-mh
 2: i starten, men.. Sånn skulle jeg forklart WOW til en person så kunne jeg sittet i dagesvis og forklart, men ja. Altså, som regel så gir jo folk ikke spillet en sjanse når de begynner på level 10 sant, du får ikke sett noe av spillet da.
 3: Nei, det begynner ikke før du blir 80 som jeg pleier å si da
 2: Nei (ler)
 3: Det er jo da det begynner, når folk har levla til 80 så "ja, hva skal jeg gjøre nå da?" Men det er jo DA det begynner
- 3: Ja, det er jo noen som tar seg sånne halvårs-pauser og sier at de aldri komme tilbake
 Latter2: Kommer alltid tilbake
 3: Så kommer de
 Latter3: De kommer seg snikende tilbake
 1: Av og til når det kommer nye MMO så bytter folk kanskje
 2: Jajaja
 1: Så blir de lei, så kommer de tilbake igjen, jeg har gjort det selv mange ganger
- 3: jaja, sant, det er kjempegreit det da. De har gjort et scoop der, Blizzard ja.
 2: Ja
 3: Ja-a, snedig

Theme 2

Play: Immersion

1. And stuff like when we, I and him [referring to Thrall] and one more, went to
 2. Karazhan (laughs), and it wasn't long ago, perhaps a month maybe, never been
 3. there before you know. And god damn, I was sitting there and just "listen to that
 4. music!" And they, who have been there probably a thousand times before, were
 5. probably sick and tired (laughter) and I was sitting on VT and just shouting "oooh
 6. how cool!" They had probably muted me and everything (laughter). So, stuff like
 7. that I find very amusing.

Theme 2

12. Jana: All my characters are female blood elves, and all look the same and it's sort of
 13. like that, because I think that, I'm maybe a little more interested in the details and
 14. stuff, like I can not be bothered to walk around being an orc and look like a
 15. complete idiot. (laughs) But then, I have a Tauren, that destroys everything, the
 16. whole system
 17. Thrall: "Cuddly" 18. Jana: "Cuddly", you know...
 19. Laughing

3: Og såne ting som når vi, jeg og han ("2") og en til, gikk i Karasan (ler), og det var ikke lenge sia, sikkert en måned sia, aldri vært der før vet du. Og fy fader, jeg satt jo bare og "Hør den musikken da!"
 De som har vært der tusen ganger var sikkert drit lei
 -Latter-
 3: Også jeg satt jo på VT og bare ropte og "Ååå så kult da", de hadde sikker muta meg og alt liksom
 -Latter-
 3: Så såne ting synes jo jeg er veldig artig da.

Play: My Character

3: Alle mine characters er blood elves female da, og alle samme utseende og det er liksom sånn, fordi at jeg synes det, jeg er kanskje litt mer nøye på detaljer og sånn, jeg gidder ikke å gå rundt som en sånn ork og se helt dust ut liksom.
 (ler) Men så har jeg jo en Tauren da, som ødelegger alt, hele systemet
 2: (navnA)
 3: (navnA) vet du
 Latter

20. Thrall: My name Vasailne then, everyone called me Vaseline as they thought
 21. it was funny I guess. [...] I could not play one day, so another guildmember was
 22. playing for me. When I came online again, I was female, naked with pigtails and
 23. also named Vaseline, I was on a deserted island out in nowhere.
 24. Laughter
 25. Jana: Aaw.
 26. Thrall: did not have my horse, or gold or anything [...]
 27. Jana: Sure, I remember it, they whispered me and said "come here, come here, you
 28. GOTTA see this, and just "huh?", and then you sort of turned into Vaseline, I was
 29. dying of laughter, well, it was the funniest thing I've ever seen. But you do still
 30. have that nick.

Theme 2

1. Interviewer: Vi can really just begin, we could perhaps begin with you, tell us
 2. a little about what you enjoy about the game?
 3. Uther: Yes. I've played since its release. I began mostly because it was Warcraft,
 4. and I've had a healthy and good relationship to Blizzard from earlier on

1. Jana: [...] it might have been more nerding than it should have been (laughs). 2. Thrall: [...] we began [him and his father playing WoW], and I got the feeling 3. it's something dad highly regrets, ever since (laughter). I play mainly because 4. there's always something to do, and yeah, when I don't play, in periods when 5. it's boring, then there is not much else to do than homework perhaps, but that's 6. not always that nice, so [...]

2: Så het jeg (navn) da, alle kalte meg (navn, forandra noen bokstaver så det blir morsom referanse), for de syntes det var festelig da. Så en dag skulle, vi er to volley paladiner da, han ene er healer, så kjørte jeg gjennom Ulduar ti mann for å få mouten fra (bossnavn? :P) og jeg kunne ikke den ene dagen så han spilte for meg da. Så kom jeg online igjen, så var jeg female, naken med musefletter liksom også het jeg (navn2), var på en øde øy ute, til helvete ute i en eller annen plass
 Latter
 3: Aw
 2: hadde ikke hest eller gull eller noe som helst [...]
 3: Jada, det husker jeg, for det sa dem, de whispra meg og sa "kom hit, kom hit, du MÅ se det herre her" og bare "Hæh.." Og da var du liksom gjort om til (navn2), jeg holdt på å dø av latter altså, det var artigeste altså jeg har sett da. Men du har jo det nicket enda.

Play: Addictioin

J: Vi kan egentlig bare begynne, vi kan jo kanskje begynne med deg, fortelle litt hva du liker ved spillet?

1: Ja. Jeg har spilt siden det kom ut. Jeg begynte mest med det fordi at det var Warcraft det var snakk om, og jeg har vært et sunt og godt forhold til Blizzard tidligere.

3: [...]Det har blitt endel mer nerding enn det kanskje burde ha blitt (ler).2: [...] prøvde vi nå, begynte nå med det, og jeg har på følelsen av at pappa har angra mye siden den gang #latter#. Men spiller det helst fordi det er alltid noe å finne på og, ja, når jeg ikke spiller det, sånn perioder det er kjedelig, så er det jo stort sett ikke annet enn å gjøre lekser kanskje, men det er jo ikke alltid like kjekt, så.

7. Thrall: naaah (very low)
 8. Jana: Recently, yeah, actually
 9. Thrall: ok.
 10. Jana: because I have nothing else to do [...] I might be playing a lot more than
 11. I used to, and it gets a little difficult to just, if he [boyfriend] comes around
 12. asking "nah, are you gonna.. wanna do something, watch a movie?" and I just
 13. "Naaaah, I can't be bothered".
 (Laughter). So there it might have been a bit
 14. often recently, that I've chosen WoW partially above other social stuff. But,
 15. it's just because, like, if something were happening in WoW, if there was
 16. nothing happening, and it has occurred, then there would be no problem.

Theme 3

1. Jana: I started raiding Naxx, and at that time I was in a guild, which also consisted
 2. only of Norwegians, and we did 10 men raiding. And then a couple [of
 3. players] from The Dragonmaw Clan boosted us again, and I got to know more
 4. and more [of The Dragonmaw Clan players]. Then when Garrosh [player
 5. name] came, the guild more or less fell apart. So I started applying to The
 6. Dragonmaw Clan.

7. Jana: We have made some raids ourselves, just kinda filling up with as many
 8. guildies as possible, and then bring some extra PUGs, or scrubs [inferior or less
 9. talented players], if there's not enough.

10. Thrall: [...] So you're there with this really good paladin and you're going to heal, and
 11. that's boring as hell because it's no challenge at all. Then you end up with
 12. four newly dinged nabs [new/inexperienced players] who don't manage to do
 13. shit, so it ends up taking half an hour for something that could have taken five
 14. minutes with our group.[...]

2: Neh (lavt)
 3: I det siste, ja, faktisk egentlig
 2: Okey
 3: Fordi at jeg ikke har noe annet å gjøre [...] jeg spiller kanskje mye mer nå enn jeg gjorde før, også blir det litt vanskelig å bare, hvis han kommer og spør "nei, skal du.. skal vi finne på noe, se en film?" Jeg bare "neeei, det gidder ikke jeg".
 Latter
 3: Så det har blitt kanskje litt i det siste, at jeg har valgt WOW litt mer ovenfor andre sosiale ting. Men det er bare fordi at liksom, hvis det er noe som skjer i WOW, hvis det ikke hadde vært noe som skjer, det har skjedd, så hadde jo ikke vært noe problem liksom.

Social Interaction: Working Together

jeg begynte på raid Naxx jeg. Og da var jeg med i en guild som het for X (ler). Og da var vi bare norske da og, og da raida vi 10 mann da. Og da kom det et par stykk fra (guildnavn) da, og boosta oss igjen. Og da ble jeg liksom kjent med fler og fler gjennom det, og så ja, når X kom så datt det liksom litt fra hverandre i vårt guild da. Så da begynte jeg på å søke til (nåværende guild) da

vi har jo laget endel raids selv bare sånn fylle opp med mest mulig guildies også bare tar med ekstra PUG, eller sånn scrubs da, sånn hvis det ikke er nok,

2: [...] Så kommer du på den drit bra, og paladinen skal heale og det er jo drit kjedelig for det er jo ingen motstand i det hele tatt, så ender du opp med fire nydinga nabs som ikke klarer å gjøre en drit, så ender det opp med å ta en halvtime liksom, noe som kunne tatt fem minutter i vår gruppe.[...]

15. Uther: We have a nice recruiting policy, we focus on personality instead of
 16. ability to demonstrate that they've got good gear score and such,
 17. Jana: "mm-mm" (aha!-sounding)
 18. Uther:... simply because it is easier to train someone who may not be a top
 19. notch player, but otherwise a nice person, than to try to get someone who is an
 20. asshole to sort of, get in line.

1: Vi har et sånt veldig greit rekrutteringspolicy, vi fokuserer på personlighet fremfor at de kan demonstrere at de har gearscore og sånne ting
 3: Mmm ("a-ha" aktig lyd)
 1: rett og slett fordi det er lettere å trene opp noen som kanskje ikke er en top notch player, men som ellers er en grei person fremfor å prøve å få noen som er en drittsekk til å liksom, get in line

Theme 3

1. Jana: There was this one person who got thrown out after a week, he was really
 2. Thrall (interrupts): Attempted to revolt against the leaders
 3. Jana: M-mh (confirming sound). I don't think he knew who the guild leader was,
 4. before we were
 5. Thrall (interrupts): No
 6. Jana: in a raid one evening just for fun, and he tagged along. And then he stood
 7. there yelling at the guild leader. And I just "oh my god, no, now he is going to be
 8. thrown out" (laughter).

Social Interaction: Social Hierarchies In WoW

3: Det var en som ble kasta ut med en gang etter ei uke, for han var skikkelig
 2: Prøvde på skikkelig attentat mot ledelsen
 3: M-mh (bekreftende). Jeg tror ikke han visste hvem som var guild leder, før vi var
 2: Nei
 3: i et raid en kveld bare for artig også var han med da. Også stod han og kjefta på guild ledern da. Og jeg bare "herregud, nei, nå kommer han til å bli kasta ut!"

1. I thought about it [age] with him, it was like 'what, you're that old and you're
 2. sitting there playing?' (Laughter) No, I didn't, but, it was like 'oh my god, you
 3. could be my father' (laughs). [...] But now maybe I have gotten, the longer I've
 4. been there, I've got less and less respect for (laughs), or maybe it
 5. subsided, so now I'm not scared of them anymore. [...] But it's not like I got
 6. less respect to those younger than me, maybe the thirteen year olds, yeah
 7. (silenced laughter), but not those two years younger than me, I don't get any
 8. less respect from them. -But-, like 30 year old, I kinda got a little respect for
 9. them. But I also have respect for those who know how to play, I'm not
 10. sitting there disrespecting and being rude to those who are skilled.

3: Jeg tenkte jo på det på han da, det var liksom "hæ, er du så gammel også sitter du og spiller liksom?"
 3: Nei jeg gjorde jo ikke det da, men, for det var sånn "herregud, du kan jo være pappa min liksom" (ler). [...] men nå kanskje så har jeg fått, etter dess lengre tid jeg har vært der så får jeg mindre og mindre respekt for (ler) [...] er jeg ikke noe redd for de lenger [...] Men ikke sånn to år mindre enn meg, det, jeg får ikke noe mindre respekt av de. MEN, sånn 30åringer de har jeg litt sånn smårespekt for. Men jeg har og respekt for de som kan å spille, jeg sitter ikke og er utidig og frekk mot de som er dyktige altså.

11. Uther: I've met people who are in their mid-twenties and are terribly immature
 12. Jana: M-mh
 13. Uther: and people several years younger than me who are very mature. So I
 14. try not to base it on their age when I, like, judge them (scoffs).
 15. Jana: M-mh.

1: Jeg har møtt folk som er midt i 20årene og er fryktelig umodne og
 3: M-mh
 1: folk som er flere år yngre enn meg som er veldig modne, så jeg prøver å ikke basere meg på alderen de deres når jeg skal liksom, dømme de (fnys).
 3: M-mh

Theme 3

Social Interaction: Norms Are Made To Be Broken

1. Jana: It was a really long time ago. So then the staff dropped, and 'yes, now finally it 2. was my turn!' And then there was this nab hunter who, 'aaaargh!', he had not 3. contributed with anything in Naxx (titters). He was so bad. And he rolled ninety-4. nine or something and then I rolled two (laughing) And I was about to log out 5. (laughs) and then I see 'you have received Journeys End'. And then the guy who 6. lead [the raid] had ninjaed it for me (laughter). And then I felt really bad and I 7. thought ... I was a bit happy and, and also terribly sorry. And all that bad luck I 8. had afterwards, I thought, I was convinced that it was because I was in on ninjaing 9. that staff (laughter).

3: Det var dødslenge sia. Så droppa jo den staffen da, og "yes, nå var det endelig min tur". Også var det med en sånn nab hunter som gjorde, aaargh, han hadde ikke gjort noen ting i hele NaxxFnising3: Han var så dårlig. Også rolla han 99 eller noe såntno da, og rolla jeg to da. Latter3: Og jeg var på vei til å logge ut (ler) også ser jeg bare "you have received Journeys End", og da hadde jo han som leada, hadde jo ninjaet den til meg da. Latter3: Og da fikk jeg jo forferdelig dårlig samvittighet og jeg synes.. Jeg var jo litt glad og, også var jeg fryktelig lei meg. Og all den uflaksen jeg hadde etterpå trodde jeg, var jeg helt sikker på at var på grunn av at jeg var med og ninjaet den staven da (Latter)

Appendix C

Recruitment Post

WTB WoW-informanter i Bergen!

Hei,

vi er to psykologistudenter ved Universitetet i Bergen som i forbindelse med et studieprosjekt ønsker å undersøke din opplevelse av å være en World of Warcraft spiller, eventuelt en tidligere spiller.

For å delta må du:

- Være minst 18 år.
- Ha, eller ha hatt, en karakter på høyeste level.

Vi vil først understreke at vi begge er WoW-spillere, og at det ikke er noen riktige eller gale svar vi er ute etter. Det er du som WoW-spiller som kjenner dine egne erfaringer. Vi vil i prosjektet søke å forstå de erfaringene du har med å være en WoW-spiller. All informasjon blir behandlet strengt konfidensielt. All informasjon i oppgaven vil bli fullstendig anonymisert, og ingen vil vite hvem som deltar i undersøkelsen, hverken i WoW eller RL.

Veileder for prosjektet er førsteamenuensis Norman Anderssen: Norman.Anderssen [at] psysp.uib.no tlf: 55582055.

Har du noen spørsmål så send oss gjerne en mail.

Med vennlig hilsen

Lise Krangnes og Joachim Skouverøe

Lise Krangnes -Lise.Krangnes [at] student.uib.no

Joachim Skouverøe - Knut.Skouveroe [at] student.uib.no

Appendix D

WoW Forums

<u>Forums:</u>	<u>Comments:</u>
International Forums:	
Battle.net	- Blizzards official website
Neverendless-wow.com	- Popular WoW Forum
Norwegian Forum Sites:	
Forum.no	- General discussion forum, with own WoW thread
Innlegg.no	- General discussion forum, with own WoW thread
Norwegian Video Game Sites:	
Spill.no	- Popular web site concerning video games in general
Catch-Gamer.no	- Popular web site concerning video games in general
Pressfire.no	- Popular web site concerning video games in general
Games.no	- Popular web site concerning video games in general
Norwegian Guild Sites:	
Thedragonfeltribe.net	- Norwegian Horde guild
Coldeforged.no	- Norwegian Alliance guild

The tables left collumn "Forum" displays the different forums and website, headings are written in bold to indicate what kind of site the below listed forum-/website names represents. The right collumn "Comments", gives a short description of the sites.

Appendix E

Information about the study to volunteering players

Informasjonsskriv:
-forespørsel om deltakelse.

Undersøkelsen skal hjelpe med å belyse problemstillingen; ”Hvordan oppleves det å være en World of Warcraft-spiller?”. Undersøkelsen er en del av en hovedoppgave ved profesjonsstudiet i psykologi ved Universitetet i Bergen.

Du som deltager vil delta i en mindre gruppe sammen med andre spillere (fokusgruppe). Dere vil bli invitert til å fortelle om og diskutere erfaringer dere har med ulike aspekter ved spillet. Intervjuet blir tatt opp på lydbånd, og deretter skrevet ned og anonymisert. Intervjuet antas å vare i omtrent en og en halvtime. All informasjon blir behandlet strengt konfidensielt. Lydbåndet slettes og opplysningene anonymiseres innen oktober 2010. Dette innebærer at opplysningene i den endelige oppgaven ikke vil kunne føres tilbake til deltakerne.

Opplysningene som hentes inn, skal ikke kunne føres tilbake til deltakerne. Dette gjelder både opplysninger om forhold utenfor og innenfor spillet.

Det er frivillig å delta og du kan trekke deg på et hvilket som helst tidspunkt. Å trekke seg medfører ingen begrunnelsesplikt eller andre konsekvenser.

Datainnsamlingen er i tråd med Personvernombudet (ved Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS) sine kriterier for personvern.

Veileder for prosjektet er professor Norman Andersen.

E-mail: Norman.anderssen<at>psysp.uib.no Tlf: 55582055

Med vennelig hilsen

Joachim Skouverøe - Knut.skouveroe<at>student.uib.no,

Lise Krangnes - Lise.krangnes<at>student.uib.no

Appendix F – Focus Group Interview Guide

Intervjuguide:

Hensikten i dette studiet er å holde i gang en samtale rundt ulike aspekter ved og i spillet. Videre er det viktig at spillerne ikke "låser seg fast" i et tema, men berører flere aspekter igjennom intervjuet. Spørsmålene under er således "knagger" som kan lede diskursen inn på andre områder.

Intervjuet varer 1 ½ time, etter de første 40 min. får deltagerne en 10 min. pause.

1. Hva liker dere med World of Warcraft?
2. Har dere noen spesielle minner, som dere vil dele med oss?
3. Hvor sosiale er dere i spillet?
4. Hva ville dere gjort dersom dere ikke spiller World of Warcraft?
5. Hva liker dere mindre med World of Warcraft?
6. Når spiller man for mye?/Hvor mye er for mye? – for deg? – for de rundt deg?
7. Hvordan opplever dere at andre imøtekommer spillingen deres?
8. Opplever dere at spillingen har noen innvirkning på møte med andre i hverdagen?
9. Opplever dere at spillingen får innvirkning på andre områder eller aktiviteter i hverdagen?
10. Har dere noen gang fortsatt å spille på tross av negative konsekvenser? Hva mener dere er negative konsekvenser?