

Real Fictional Sociality: Agonic Relations in Online Gaming Communities

Stephen Kline,
Simon Fraser University
Working Draft/ Not for Citation

Abstract

The proliferation of combat themed online games like Quake, Asheron's Call, WarCraft, EverQuest and Counterstrike have cast a growing shadow across the consensual hallucination of the online gaming community. Our research employed qualitative and quantitative research tools to explore the social play experiences and attitudes of 700 on-line gamers. Our objective was to describe the dimensions of "agonic sociality" that have made multiplayer action adventure games into one of the fastest growing yet most troubling online communities in cyberspace by comparing the experiences of those who play EverQuest or Counterstrike. The respondents included many devoted gamers, one quarter of whom reported playing more than 25 hours each week and 87% of whom agree that people become addicted to the games. In terms of their preferred social experiences these gamers fell into four archetypes; the warrior, the narrator, the strategist, and the interactor. Nearly half the respondents report that they have been in conflict with family or friends over their online gaming, yet continue to play. We concluded that the attractions of this highly popular genre lay in the complex blending of social affiliation, role play, strategy simulation and combat that gamers experienced on line.

The Rise and Fall of Virtual Communities.

A lot of ink has been wasted describing the protean prospects of cyber culture by enthusiastic champions of the digital life. Educationalists like Seymour Papert (1982) were quick to proclaim that young people's enthusiasm for computers would free them from the drudgery of rote learning by instilling in them a sense of the playful possibilities of constructing knowledge on their own. Announcing the N.I.I which commercialized the internet in 1994, VP Gore promised that the world wide web would grow into an ever expanding universal library where young people quested for knowledge and forged new ideas. Media guru Nicholas Negroponte sanctified this vision, predicting that a digital generation 'empowered' by networked multimedia were about to make the world more democratic, egalitarian and responsive to human desires. The cultural transformation was abundantly evidence in cyberspace among the NetGen who embraced on line communication declared Don Tapscott (1997), whose research found them surfing the Web happily, inventively using emoticons in their messaging, chatting/ texting endlessly with ICU, and constructing their own fansites (often during computer class). All families should be networked he argued so that the next generation can continue to use computers in imaginative ways, to learn about history, chat amongst themselves about philosophy and culture, and on occasion to go shopping. The consensus of cyber culture theorists was that the networked world fostered creative identity quests in a community of communities from which would emerge a more democratic and variegated global culture (Wood and Smith 2001).

Well of course some kids did use their computers for homework and email to organize global resistance. Yet the dystopic visions of science fiction authors from Dick to Gibson have in fact proven as prescient as the information age guru's assurances: more networked communication isn't necessarily a good thing. More Canadian kids spent their time on-line stealing music than shopping, playing games than doing their homework, and surfing popular fansites than forging political action committees (Media Awareness Network 2001). Perhaps this is why, other more savvy commentators, pointed to the construction of virtual play communities, not email, virtual universities and eBay as a sign of the libratory cultural forces gestating in the "belly of the beast": (Stone, 1995) MUD's, fantasy simulation games, and chat rooms like the Palace were extolled by cyber culture theorist Roseanne Stone as signs of the anti-authoritarian ethos taking shape in online gaming communities. When Ultima was taken on line it was heralded therefore as a shining exemplar of the democratic ethos of online culture: Although empire building and battles took place in these game spaces, the designers creed was articulated around a postmodernist ideal which framed this virtual world as a counter-cultural forum which fostered exploration of imaginary spaces and self-discovering identity quests (Kline et. al 2003). This is why Stone believed that in these unbound discursive spaces young role players were free to explore imaginary landscapes of social possibility unbound by repressive social norms, to share contrapuntal ideas, and ultimately to develop new (transgendered) identities.

Pointing to the enormous popularity of play cultures in cyberspace Douglas Rushkoff (1997), advised worried parents to relax: Their fascination with the playful worlds of cyberspace were a sure sign that this chaos wracked generation were appropriating networked multimedia in healthy ways. Their love of gaming was a sign of their generational commitment to a form of constructive leisure which was already corroding the passive top-down cultural of television. Ken Ohmae (1995) even imagined the Japanese economy being lifted out of its doldrums by a Nintendo generation socialized to be more critical and demanding consumers in the virtuous communities of cyberspace (presumably by pirating billions of dollars worth of gaming and music?). Others imagined cyberspace as the place that transgressive and dissident movements could organize and exert pressure on the mainstream, pointing to grrl gaming as an example (Cassels and Jenkins 1998).

What this protean digital rhetoric got so wrong was that chips and wires do not inherently expand human capacities, flexibility and freedom. The future must be viewed through a rear-view mirror claimed Marshall McLuhan (1965) as old cultural forms are being constantly reworked in new media environments. We have since learned how right he was: new media do not magically transform entrenched cultural practices and problems. Prophecies that don't make reference to the actual cultural practices that frame what we do with media, almost always miss the mark (Kline 2003). In the post-bubble world we now know that video games supplement but do not entirely replace TV culture; that the wired schools can enable research, education and homework but also generate new possibilities for bullying, cyber-stalking, harassment and terrorism. Just as online gaming provides new possibilities for forging convivial play communities in cyberspace it can also create psychologically potent experiences where vulnerable and unbalanced individuals explore the dark side of social communication.

This was the lesson learned about on-line play communities by the tragic events at Jonesboro and Columbine. Perhaps not coincidentally Jonesboro was also the place where Dr. Dave Grossman a lieutenant colonel who built his career helping the US Army train soldiers to kill in combat simulators lived. Noting the similarities between the armies military training and children playing shooters and combat games he argued that video games are similar to "murder simulators which over time teach a person how to look another person in the eyes and snuff their life out." Like the training of these soldiers, Grossman (1998) believes that combat video games, can not only skill players in the tactics, strategies and mechanics of war, but also break down the normal psychological attitudes that prevent killing.

Testifying before the congressional committee investigating Columbine, cultural theorist Henry Jenkins does not think it makes sense to tar all video games with such tragic events. "So far, most of the conversation about Littleton has reflected a desire to understand what the media are doing to our children. Instead, we should be focusing our attention on understanding what our children are doing with media." Although Grossman's argument that video games are turning kids into mass murders is crude to say the least, its hard to conclude that a young persons deep fascinations with dystopian worlds of perpetual war and terrorism, where clans of killers roam the virtual landscape in search of wealth and power are without any psychological significance. According to Jenkins, children create their own personal mythologies out of the symbols, images and stories that are provided as raw material for fantasy. In some cases, those personal mythologies can be particularly dark. Jenkins is generally supportive of the transgressive exploratory symbolic experiences coded into most video games. Yet even Jenkins mused that multiplayer combat simulations like Doom, could be making the training experiences of the military becoming too readily available as children's entertainment. As Jenkins says "In the case of Harris and Klebold they drew into their world the darkest, most alienated, most brutal images available to them and they turned those images into the vehicle of their personal demons." The current murder case in Newport Tennessee in which two brothers have sued Sony claiming that playing Grand Theft Auto inspired their random shooting at cars, is a reminder that we have not resolved this issue. (Frith, 2003)

Online Gaming: The Dark Side of Virtual Communities

Although Canada, the USA, UK and Denmark like to brag about leading the way into cyber culture South Korea is in fact one of the most wired societies in the world. It has over 10 million broadband subscribers, and more than 25,000 cyber cafes - known here as PC Bangs - which are populated day and night with avid cybernauts. Hanging out in P.C. Bangs, my graduate student Kym Stewart hears the story of Mr. Koo a 30 year old Korean salaryman puts on his suit packs his brief case, kisses his wife goodbye and heads off to

the PC Bang. Although his wife still thinks that he is going to work he has been fired for over a month. Silently, in a room crowded mostly with young men Mr. Koo plays StarCraft on line for about 1000 won an hour (80 cents). Unable to admit his failure he spends every day in the PC bangs contemplating his next move in the virtual world of StarCraft. But Mr. Koo is not alone. WarCraft, has sold 10 million copies in Korea providing the most successful examples of this growing global entertainment business called on line gaming. Stewart and Choi's (2003) research depicts South Korea the Mecca for online gamers, who come from all over the world to play in the tournaments. Their survey reveals that the PC Bangs filled largely with male university students who spend on average 3 hours daily there. It also shows that they are not doing homework, emailing or even chatting with friends: not only do they play video games for long periods of time, but it is their dedication to multiplayer on- games like Diablo, Lineage, StarCraft and WarCraft that brings them back over and over again to the PC Bang's – a place where they can conduct strategic conquests beyond the scrutiny of families. Entering one of these gamer spaces can be a bit intimidating Stewart says because they look anti-social: Players are intently focused on the screen showing nary a flicker of emotion other than intensely immersive concentration that is typical of video game players. Yet the obvious difference between on-line games and computer games generally is that you play with/against other 'real' people (instead of avatars and bosses) from the point of view of the observer players paradoxically seem to become socially cut off from their peers.

It is therefore hardly surprising that another extreme case of internet obsession hit the news headlines in 2002, 24-year-old Korean Kim Kyung-jae collapsed and died after playing computer games at an internet cafe in the south-western city of Kwangju. He had been playing on-line games virtually non-stop for 86 hours. "The only breaks he had where when he briefly stopped to buy cigarettes and use the toilet," said Detective Hong Gun-hee, the investigating officer. Mr Kim did not have a full time job. His mother, Choi Yong-soon, is still trying to make sense of his death. "I told him not to spend so much time on the internet", she explained to the BBC reporter Caroline Gluck (Nov 22, 2002) "He just said 'yes mum', but kept on playing. Gluck interviewed Lee Sujin of the Centre for Internet Addiction Prevention and Counseling who insists that internet addiction is a real phenomenon: "We diagnose internet addiction as a compulsive disorder like pathological gambling or eating disorder." This image of a lonely geeks hanging out in chat rooms, virtual pleasure palaces and lurking in online game communities hoping desperately to make real human contact or escaping from their desperate lives is a popular one. Lee explained that there are many similar cases of internet gaming addiction in Korea: "Youngsters who become obsessed by the internet have (experienced) failure at school. They have less interaction with their family and friends and get lonelier."

Halfway around the world, it was a typical, if not ordinary evening at the ProGamer Internet Cafe in the suburban Vancouver community of Coquitlam. At 7:30 January 17th 2003 there were about 40 or so patrons, mostly young and male, gazing at their screens intently engaged in their game play or messaging. But these are cafes in name only for there is very little friendly banter taking place among the young men assembled at their combat stations. Combat stations, because at the ProGamer cafe Counterstrike (the on-line multiplayer video game that pits terrorists teams against anti-terrorists) is what many of the patrons are playing. Not only are these gamers playing with others here in Vancouver, but in cafes around the world they are hunting down and eliminating the enemy. The room is poorly lit, spartan in decor and functionally arranged, for all the users are intent on their task at hand. In gamer lingo they are intent on 'player killing' – that is claiming territory and eradicating other players characters in game space. Arming themselves and forming into clans they are on a mission to hunt out and kill as many enemies as possible. After all, that is the objective of the game and the way you gain experience points, fame, and more powerful weapons.

Most players are so intensely involved in their gaming, that they are startled when the pall of silence that envelopes internet arcades was broken by a group of young men who got up and began shouting and arguing with Christian Kwee, a 17 year old regular. Mr. Kwee apparently, had been playing Counterstrike too, but rather more successfully than his opponents. Three of his virtual victims were now grabbing Christian Kwee by his collar and threatening to punch his lights out. When Kwee's friends intervene, the threesome rushed out of the door, returning in a few minutes with a gun with which they blew him away with one deadly shot. The manager of the ProGamer cafe, Harry Law was quoted by reporters as saying that the games were not behind the slaying. The RCMP officer, Cpl Le Maitre investigating stated however that after interviews with friends and witnesses, that the police had eliminated other explanations of the murder such as gang rivalries and drugs. To date, the case remains unsolved. But it looks suspiciously like a case of 'real player killing'.

The tarnishing of the good name of online gaming with stories like this have provoked the usual response from the gaming industry which shuffles aside all responsibility for programming the parameters of engagement within the consensual hallucinations of online games. The industry's defense echoes that optimism about cyberspace once espoused by those cultural theorists who insisted that the internet was an inherently liberatory space where individuals voluntarily access knowledge, share opinions, chat with family, meet people and even galvanize resistive self-regulating virtual communities (Smith and White 2001). According to the Interactive Digital Software Association, the video game industry is not promoting addiction, promoting militarized masculinity or encouraging lonely geeks to commit psychotic acts of vengeance in the either the real or virtual worlds. Rather the industry portrays the growing popularity of online gaming communities as the 'good news' that demonstrates that video game culture is not a violent, mindless, addictive and isolating form of entertainment as some post-Columbine critics have claimed. "In short, everyone is playing computer and video games, and they're playing them together" said association president Douglas Lowenstein. Their research portrays online gamers, as savvy and mature entertainment consumers who convivially explore simulated worlds, freely taking on playful virtual roles to have fun with friends and family in cyberspace.

On Thanksgiving morning 2002 in Hudson Wisconsin, Liz Woolly went to pick up her 21 year old son Sean for dinner. Liz had grown increasingly worried about her son over the preceding weeks because he no longer answered his phone and stopped showing up for work due to an all-absorbing interest in playing EverQuest which remains the most popular on-line game in North America with more than 350,000 loyal players who pay \$10 US in subscription fees earning 3.5 million dollar a month revenue stream for Sony. Since Sean had been diagnosed for depression earlier in the year, Liz felt his devotion to playing online was making only him increasingly withdrawn and disconnected with friends and family. When she went to pick him up that November morning, she opened the door to find him there 'with the rifle and he had shot himself'. 'The EverQuest screen was still on' blinking mockingly at her. Liz Woolly concluded that her son had "shot himself because of the game". When Liz looked at the computer files she found that the last character Sean had played was called 'I love you'. This seems like an odd moniker to wear in a game where player killers roam freely. Since Sean had abandoned most of his friends and family, Liz Woolly concluded that he had in fact established a complex relationship on line. Desperation set in when he found himself abandoned or betrayed in the only social life that seemed to matter to him anymore – the one he had in EverQuest. Ms. Woolly believes that there is someone in the EverQuest community who knows the circumstances behind Sean's suicide because they are the 'other side of this relationship'. If playing on-line games were like a friendly pick up game of sandlot baseball, why would her son have killed himself Liz Woolly asked Sony. Although we will never know the truth about Sean's death, Liz Woolly makes a good point about not trivializing the real social interactions that take place in these online-gaming world.

Since the release of Doom, and its sequel Quake, the ideologies and rules governing playful social encounters in multiplayer on-line role play games have matured considerably (such as non-combatant zones; accumulation of power; weapons acquisition; hacking and cheats etc.). The most popular online games like Ultima X, WarCraft III, Counterstrike, Asheron's Call, and EverQuest are best described as virtual combat zones which locate new players in clan and imperial conflicts over personal power, wealth and fame. These games are still referred to as MMORPG (massive multiplayer role play games) largely because they are all derivatives of D and D. Multiplayer RPG's are after all still games, rule bounded agonistic contests structured around strategic combat. In all RPG's players explore virtual landscapes freely, but can affiliate or fight as they encounter demons and other players in the game. This means that players who wish their character to survive, need to negotiate their way into, through and around warring factions in perpetually conflicted landscapes. The games design parameters are embedded as rules which define the way players gain power through such encounters, by fighting, surviving attacks, and by strategically managing their social relations: they accumulate money and experience points by forming alliances, building their forces, resources and weaponry, and sometimes when necessary by betraying friends and followers. Indeed, one of the most controversial problems in on-line gaming communities is the phenomenon called 'player killing'. Player killing pits opponents against each other in battles to the death that is designed into game spaces would not come as a surprise to on-line players themselves.

Speaking publicly of his dedication to on-line gaming a Toronto computer support technician Lee Rott, 29, estimates he spends about 45 hours a week playing EverQuest. Rott, who has grown up on video games, explains how playing EverQuest is quite different from the console gaming he grew up with: he doesn't think about EQ "as just another computer game" but rather as a total immersion and involvement in the online community of players. This community ethos is enhanced by the fact that it is virtually

impossible to survive alone within the game's 60 levels where more powerful and experienced players roam freely. EverQuest players must therefore interact with each other, forming alliances, or "guilds," to team up against the constant threat of monsters, dragons and other evil villains. Unlike console games, on-line game play involves hours of negotiations, trading, team formation, and strategizing with real people. To gain experience points and survive, online play not only enables but fosters the formation of 'real social relations' in cyberspace. "For most of us that play, it's not that we're spending all this time with a game or with a computer. We're spending it with friends and acquaintances" Rott explains. Lee Rotts' roommate Nabeel Sherif, who witnessed him nearly losing his job because of chronic absenteeism caused by Everquest agrees but feels the virtual friendships forged in and through cyberspace contribute to the problem of communal addiction: "When I hear him talking about other people who play the game, it sounds like it's the major driving force in their lives as well." Dr. Kimberly Young, a leading expert in Internet addiction agrees, explaining that there is more than innocent friendships and bonding going on in games like EverQuest: "If you have low self-esteem in real life, you can go online and become a powerful person," Young says. The loyalty to their clans and guilds, and the sheer amount of time they devote to playing, have even lead some players to mockingly call this game "EverCrack". And many gamers report that to maintain effective on-line teams requires them to spend time together out of game as well.

Although EverQuest and Counterstrike differ substantially in the opportunities they provide for exploration, masquerade, accumulation of virtual wealth, honour and power, they both share the fundamental dynamic underlying all agonic playful: namely the ability to forge strategic alliances with which to engage in conquest. Agonic social relations are governed by rules and traditions established within the play culture so it is not surprising that faltering friendships, jealousy, betrayal, ostracism and loss of power and prestige are common stories told by regular players about their experiences on line. But because power is the ultimate currency of gaming, the most controversial issue in online communities concerns rules of engagement in combat. The community has evolved the word player killing (PK) which refers to specific rules governing acts of combat in which an opponents characters life is taken. This is because as in all RPG's, once dead, if the player decides to continue playing the game, they must re-enter the game without the accumulated wealth, power, weapons and prestige that their former character had accumulated. In EverQuest, combat zones and rituals are governed both by rules and communal moral sanctions. In CounterStrike, as in Quake, player killing is the very basis of the game.

Cases mentioned above have brought considerable notoriety to both these little understood but enormously popular virtual play communities. As one of the few academics who critically studies on line gaming, I regularly get asked by journalists how a fictional game could turn so deadly. Do some kids take these games so seriously that they will break the sacred code of fair play, and exacting real revenge on an opponent? Do years of playing these violent games gradually erode the moral restraints on murder and suicide, and train our young people to be military quality killers? Would I please speculate on why the playful interactions had spilled into the real world. Lee Rott's sense that his real friendships are on line, Sean Woolly's betrayed romantic alliance and player slaying of Christian Kwee are all signs we cannot ignore the playful social relations that are being transacted in online gaming communities. So at the Media Analysis Lab at SFU we decided to investigate the 'real' social relationships constructed in, around and through the internet in gaming communities by asking players of Counterstrike and EverQuest to talk about their play experiences.

Methodology

The first part of this research involved a year long ethnographic study comparing the team formation and conflict relations transacted in these two on-line gaming communities. Avery Arlidge, an avid role player and on line gamer, acted as a participant observer in both a Counterstrike Clan and an EverQuest Guild. His research focused on the conversations, meetings and social relations that took place in, around and outside of the game including real meetings, romances and families. This ethnographic research led to the formulation of an on line survey of gamer experiences including the differences between on-line and off-line gaming, the social expectations governing game play, the experience of addiction to on-line gaming, and the extent to which gaming impacted their real friendships and families.

The 709 respondents who took part in our on-line survey were solicited with invitations posted at Internet cafes, comic book and game stores. Recruiting was also undertaken online, by submitting invitations to video game 'news' web sites such as Gamers.com and Gamespy. Web sites focused on EQ and CS such as Everlore.com and Counterstrikecenter.com were also solicited, as well GUComics.com and Penny-

Arcade.com and Slashdot.net. All in all, more than 100 news and forums submissions were made. Most responses were posted within a week of the questionnaire going live. Our sampling strategy was clearly biased towards English speaking "hardcore" gamers. These gamers are more likely to take gaming seriously, be more informed of social issues surrounding gameplay communities.

Results

Gender and Gameplay

Overall, our sample included 10% female respondents, a figure which seems high for combat and fighting game aficionados, but perhaps a bit low for EQ. While most online gamers tend to be between 13 to 25 years of age, female gamers are twice as likely to be 40+ than males (9.8% vs. 4.9%), while males are more likely to be under 18 (28.5% of males are youths vs. 17.7% of females). Females are also more likely to have children that they do not live with than males (9.8% vs. 2.9%), and more likely to be married or dating than single (40.0%, 40.0% and 20.0%, respectively), while half of male gamers are single (26.5%, 24.0% and 49.5%).

Gender vs. Predominant occupation	Non - employed, non-student	Student	Homemaker	Administrator / Owner of large business	Owner of small business	Professional	Technician / Semi-professional	Office worker / White collar	Tradesperson / Blue collar	Un - skilled worker	Sales / Service	Farmer / Fisherman
% of Males	2.6	42.5	0.2	11.1	0.4	3.2	14.6	6.3	2.8	0.8	3.6	0.2
% of Females	0.0	19.1	4.3	12.8	2.1	4.3	10.6	17.0	0.0	2.1	10.6	0.0

In our sample of online gamers, males are twice as likely to be students (2 in 5 males), and more likely to be unemployed, blue collar, technical or semiskilled workers, agricultural workers, or artists. Females are also more likely to be white collar workers, small business operators, sales or service people, or unskilled workers. Only 4% are homemakers.

Three in five (58.5%) of respondents have played EQ, with a similar number having played CS (55.3%). Of the regions in which significant numbers of respondents participated, Americans are most likely to have played EQ (68%), followed by Europeans (47%) and finally Canadians (34%) while Europeans and Canadians were more likely (63%) than Americans (53%) to have played CS. Most European EverQuest players are experts or pros at the game, Americans taking the middle road and Canadians are twice as likely to be EQ rookies and novices with very few pros. Counterstrike players in all three regions claim to be approximately equal in skill.

Males and females both rate role-playing games highly (87%), with online RPG's at the top of both their lists of favourites. Fighting and shooting games (75.9%) and strategy adventure games (67.4%) were also valued but more highly by the males. Simulations (38.0%), maze and adventure games (36.0%), racing games (26%), puzzle, educational and board games (25%), sports games (17%), and finally gambling games (9.2%) were not considered as desirable and males and females differ in the ranking of their preferences. The sexes diverge in taste most over sports, which females dislike (86.5% vs. 52.3%) and racing which females strongly dislike (45.7% vs. 18.3%) and fighting, which females loathe (46% vs 4%); what they prefer are puzzle (55.0% vs. 21.9%) and gambling games (23.1% vs. 7.8%).

Given their consistent preference for role play, it seems unsurprising that female and male gamers are very similar in many other ways as well. Gender differences in genre preferences and other play judgements were negligible. Furthermore, the amount of time these gamers spend playing games online each week is similar, with a 33% females playing 25+ hours online compared with 25% males. Moreover both sexes are

just as likely to have tried EverQuest (58.8% of females and 58.7% of males), while females are more likely to report being expert or pro players (63.3% females vs. 45.6% males) while males are more likely to claim novice or rookie status (16.6% males vs. 6.6% females).

Playing Counterstrike, a more classic shooter style combat game however is another story. Only 17.6% of female respondents have tried the game, compared to 59.1% of males, and only two female respondents claim have achieved even average skill. The social relations of martial combat that pervade this game seem to be the key reason explaining female disfavor. Only 4.2% of women like fighting / shooting games whether they are played online or offline whereas 24.8% of males like offline and 46.3% online fighting / shooting games. Males also find weapons and technology (49.4% vs. 35.2%) competitiveness (56.3% vs. 33.3%) and combat or military themes (70% vs. 36.0%) to be important.

Females, in general, tend to be newer video game players and also to have moved online within the last year (14.0% vs. 5.2% of males). Although males and females rate most game play features similarly games have great graphics (45.1% vs. 27.7%), characterization (80.4% vs. 47.1%), complex themes and plot (76.5% vs. 53.0%), opportunities for exploration (64.7% vs. 49.7%), and imaginative play (37.3% vs. 22.8%) are more valued by female players.

Addiction and Online Gaming

Parents, educators, friends and researchers have been especially concerned that on-line gaming is addictive. While not everyone agrees on what addiction is, we set out to learn the opinions of the online gamers themselves and to document their experience of the four most discussed symptoms of addiction: excessive use, displacement of valued activities, social conflict over gaming with friends and family, and a subjective sense of lack of control over gaming.

As expected, most of our respondents are net-savvy online gamers who spend a lot of their spare time playing – on average about 12 hours a week, with a quarter playing more than 25 hours each week. Only 7.3% spend less than two hours per week online. Moreover they have a longer term commitment to Role Play Gaming: In fact most of our respondents have been playing online games for 3 to 6 years. Many of them also report being actively involved in online gaming, whether through reading online game forums and news sites, chatting with other players, or just going to their local net cafe for a gaming outing.

Not surprisingly, 87.2% of online gamers feel that some other people get addicted to online games, while only 5.4% disagree with that viewpoint. Moreover, 29.4% of respondents felt that they themselves play too much, yet only 18% feel that they are addicted, although these individuals also tended to be the ones who spent more time on line. With regard to displacement, three out of ten (30.5%) admit to frequently playing online when they really should be doing other things. For example, many players find they lose sleep or stay up too late playing (27.8%). Social problems are also common among gamers with 45.2% of respondents reporting conflict with their friends or family about their gameplay in the past. Nevertheless, only 5% report being currently in a conflict. Lack of a sense of control in one's life is also associated with many addictions and this applies to the vast majority of on-line gamers: only 15% of these respondents are willing to claim that their gaming is *never* out of their own control.

Interestingly across all these criteria, EQ players report more frequent evidence of addictions and 22% feel that they are addicted to EQ compared with 10.4% CS players. The one exception, is that CS players report conflict with family and friends over their gameplay more than EQ aficionados.

Social Mores and Values

The ability to forge new friendships meet up with old ones is often touted by gamers as the reason they play. Given bonds of affiliation and intense tribal conflicts that emerge in gaming communities strong views on what is fair, appropriate and acceptable standards of play emerge. Moral standards do emerge in gaming communities: social transgressions such as cheating, deception and betraying (or letting down) one's comrades are not generally well regarded. Cooperation within the team can be more important than personal glory, and very few online gamers would say that helping friends and enhancing general conviviality was unimportant. In fact, honorifics like impressing other players and building a reputation for oneself were widely valued equally with power and victories.

When asked specifically about the importance of social relations, respondents reported that communicating with other players is crucial (87.5%) ahead of exploration of new online game environments (83.6%) and teamwork (82.6%) which are also important in typical online games. Secondary in importance are trying out new characters (79.9%), building a character's power, money or items to use again (77.4%), generosity and giving help to other players (77.1%), seeing old friends by playing (74.1%), practicing their skills (73.8%), and relying on and being relied upon by other players (73.2%). Tertiary social elements including building a reputation (66.2%), making new friends by playing (65.5% - with only 8.0% feeling that this is unimportant), competition with other players (58.9%), trading items between players, characters or accounts (57.2%), and learning game secrets without help (57.2%) are also valued. Less valued elements include role-playing a character's personality (55.9%), winning the game (51.0%), getting a good score (49.4%), impressing or charming other players (47.3%), joining a clan or guild (43.1%), puzzle solving (41.1%), defeating computer opponents violently (39.5%), learning game secrets from others (38.2%), and defeating other players in combat (36.5%).

This does not mean that transgressions of those mores never happens. A few gamers admit to having exploited a game flaw against other players in EQ, CS or other online games (10.1%, 15.3% and 18.5% respectively), but say they are more likely to do so if no other player directly suffers harm, particularly in EQ (24.5%, 18.9% and 18.5% respectively). Fewer players admit to having used a disallowed game hack or program against another, with more having done so in CS (3.4%, 7.5% and 4.5% respectively) and many more having done so against nobody in particular (7.3%, 8.2% and 15.0% respectively). Few players in EQ players, more than twice as many in CS players and many in other online games have intentionally betrayed their team mates or companions during gameplay (8.8%, 18.9% and 15.6% respectively).

	<i>Transgressions</i> Scale: <i>I=Strongly like,</i> <i>5 = Strongly dislike</i>
When another player exploits a game flaw to get an edge against other players in EQ	4.38
When another player exploits a game flaw to get an edge against other players in CS	4.55
When another player exploits a game flaw to get an edge against other players in other online games	4.50
When another player exploits a game flaw to get an edge against other players in offline games	3.80
When another player exploits a game flaw to get an edge against nobody in particular in EQ	3.76
When another player exploits a game flaw to get an edge against nobody in particular in CS	4.10
When another player exploits a game flaw to get an edge against nobody in particular in other online games	3.85
When another player exploits a game flaw to get an edge against nobody in particular in offline games	3.36
When another player uses a disallowed game hack/cheat or other program to do harm to others in EQ	4.84
When another player uses a disallowed game hack/cheat or other program to do harm to others in CS	4.88

When another player uses a disallowed game hack/cheat or other program to do harm to others in other online games	4.85
When another player uses a disallowed game hack/cheat or other program to do harm to others in offline games	4.41
When another player uses a disallowed game hack/cheat or other program to do harm to nobody in particular† in EQ	4.26
When another player uses a disallowed game hack/cheat or other program to do harm to nobody in particular† in CS	4.45
When another player uses a disallowed game hack/cheat or other program to do harm to nobody in particular† in other online games	4.33
When another player uses a disallowed game hack/cheat or other program to do harm to nobody in particular† in offline games	3.84
When another player harms their team or group by intentional betrayal in EQ	4.75
When another player harms their team or group by intentional betrayal in CS	4.72
When another player harms their team or group by intentional betrayal in other online games	4.62
When another player harms their team or group by intentional betrayal in offline games	4.21
When another player harms their team or group by mistake in EQ	3.44
When another player harms their team or group by mistake in CS	3.52
When another player harms their team or group by mistake in other online games	3.42
When another player harms their team or group by mistake in offline games	3.41
When another player harms their team or group by being a poorly skilled player in EQ	3.77
When another player harms their team or group by being a poorly skilled player in CS	3.54
When another player harms their team or group by being a poorly skilled player in other online games	3.56
When another player harms their team or group by being a poorly skilled player in offline games	3.46

Social relations are the sine qua non of online gaming, whether they be friendly or antagonistic. Nearly half of EQ players (47.5%) however report having made real-life friends through their play, while one quarter have done so in CS (24.8%). 36.8% have done so in other online games compared with 19% who report that offline video games have helped them make friends. 6.0% of EQ players (have pursued real-life romantic relationships through the game. Pretend romance is different, however, fully a quarter of EQ players have role played pursuing romance in character (25.4%) compared with 2% of CS players.

Gamer Archetypes and the Conception of a Good Game

Their conception of a good online gaming included exploration (88.5%) and good plot (88.5%) good characters (86.2%), graphics (79.3%), the opportunity to cooperate with other players (76.1%). Unpredictable gameplay (68.9%) thinking a lot (66.9%) and feelings of control also figure prominently (66.8%). Complex strategies (60.1), imaginative gameplay (59.5%), constant excitement (56.0%), challenge (54.8%), and competition against other players (53.9%) ranked ahead of weapons and technology (48.1%), realism (41.3%), fast-reaction play (36.9%), and military or combat themes (31.9%) as attributes

they were looking for.

Our factor analysis of these elements of gaming suggested four distinct archetypal gamers in the online community. The loadings of each attribute are indicated in the "Rotated Component Matrix chart below. Values close to zero, either positive or negative, indicate relative indifference to that element of gameplay, while highly positive values indicate a strong comparative regard for that element, while a highly negative value indicates a relative dislike for that element of gameplay.

Rotated Component Matrix

	warriors	Narrators	strategists	Interactors
Graphics	.636	.301	-.098	.117
Realism	.668	.011	.147	.200
weapons & technology	.829	.029	.084	.048
combat or military themes	.763	-.087	-.101	.104
Characters	-.183	.770	-.073	-.048
themes and plot	.089	.780	-.012	-.036
complex strategies	-.016	.066	.749	-.044
fast reactions	.456	.307	.290	.289
Imagination	.226	.584	.475	-.176
Exploration	.221	.593	.058	.078
make me think a lot	-.121	.448	.608	.042
Unpredictable	.385	.024	.475	-.266
competition with other players	.212	-.097	-.014	.882
cooperation with other players	.166	.038	.008	.843
challenging and hard to master	.039	-.239	.675	.165

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. † Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

(Rotation converged in 5 iterations.)

The most prevalent type of player are warriors who value weapons and technology, combat and military themes, realism, graphics, and to a lesser degree, fast-reaction and unpredictable play. Warriors tend gravitate to the combat oriented world of CS finding the playing out of characters and strategic thinking to be secondary. The second type are narrators who place emphasis on the imaginative themes and plot, the acting out of characters, exploration, thinking and imagination to be the key elements of a good game experience: they do not like games that are challenging and hard to master, intense competition and shun combat and games with military themes. These players find a more comfortable place in the EQ world. The third group could be called strategists. These gamers focus on complex strategies, challenging gameplay and mastering their skills and enjoy games that make them think a lot, use of their imaginations, and surprises them. Finally, there are the interactors whom rate competition and cooperation with other players above all else, and don't care for surprises and using their imagination.

While these archetypes seem intuitive offering quantitative support impressions gleaned in the ethnographic phase of research about the propensities of role players to prefer EQ style games and that of combatants to prefer CS.

Bibliography

Maxine Frith. 'Grand Theft Auto' makers sued over teenage killing, The Independent, 18 September 2003