

**Understanding the Individual Views and Experiences of Gamers:
Guild Wars 2**

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ABSTRACT

The gaming subculture is a not so looked into subculture that tends to be admonished from negative views, more so the subcultures that focus within a genre of video games called MMORPG's or Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game. To understand the inner workings of said subculture, specifically of the MMORPG variety is to give voice to these individuals, as the notion to understand is to broaden the knowledge on the various subcultures that currently exist, none more so than the residents of the online space. The research was done through the interview of individuals and participants who exist within the MMORPG gaming subculture within the game Guild Wars 2, The 5 participants are individuals who have spent a majority of their time within the game space and have shared their own experiences to better piece the puzzle that is understanding the MMORPG communities that exist. The results indicates that the participants shared experience showing how they are not as glued to their computers as most outsiders would think, that they feel a sense of belonging within the chosen community, and that they don't really change their identity much and still reflect their own self the same as how they would act outside of the game. This shows that to understand the gaming subculture, we see how they are still functioning members of society with a heavy hobby of playing such games, still have and chase their real world aspirations and ambitions, and have identities that go beyond being people who play games.

Keywords: Identity, Reality, Sense of Belonging, MMORPG

INTRODUCTION

Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game (MMORPG) is a genre of game that focuses more on the online and social aspect of a game. In a sense, you can see MMORPG's as a game attached into a social media of sorts that supports the existence of hundreds even thousands of players all adventuring in the same world. Now, there is a stark difference between Massive Multiplayer Online (MMO) and Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing game (MMORPG), Massively multiplayer online role-playing games are games with huge numbers of players that lean into the RPG aspect of the game. RPGs (role-playing games) involve players filling the shoes of a fictional character (that you can customize yourself) in a new and fictional world whilst Massive Multiplayer Online drops the RPG and becomes an encompassing wider genre of games that can still be played with a myriad amount of players (Zalace, 2024).

Within MMORPGs are a variety of activities to do, commonly that of skill-based activities such as Dungeons, Questing, Raids, Crafting, Player versus Player (PvP), Player versus Environment (PvE), and there are also activities that stem from creativity in the arts department in terms of looks and design, such as Furnishing a personal house, Designing the clothes combination you can use on your character which pays dividend to the amount of customizability of your creation, coloring, and photos. However, the main draw in or end goal of most MMORPG players are the Raids, which are high-skill challenging instanced content involving a limited amount of players within a group to tackle the fights head on. Instanced within this context would be that the event or the activity takes place away from the main world played would normally explore and meet each other in, you are effectively locked in a realm or a zone with no one but the members of the group you are going with. Raids on its own as a highly challenging content was aimed to be the zenith of progression, which was used by the games

developers to keep players within the confines of the game to have something to achieve or 'work towards' (Wright, 2020).

The culture within MMORPG's can vary independent to their communities, such is the same outlook in regards to raiding. Raiding is an activity beloved or sought after whilst also having the effect of padding for the players. As such the means to understand the specific behaviours and state of the raiding community will be prevalent in understanding how the game subculture will handle itself. Raiding to explain it in detail however, in practice, is the action of playing in a group of people to master the instance and the included bosses (Raudonat and Marsten, 2018), the reason to this act is often backed up by the heavy need of collaboration within the members to be able to follow and understand the callings and leadership of a 'raid leader' to achieve mastery over the challenge and receive the prizes locked behind the entire raid instance such as loot drops in the form of items, or completion for achievement and glory.

However, in a larger view- there is a stigma when it comes to those who play games. Gamers are often seen as belonging to a community that often 'overflows' with toxicity or negative connotation of the 'colourful' language they use that stamp them into the various labelling of either Sexism, Racism, ageism, sexual prejudice, and other abuse stigmas. The most common misconception shows itself within the aspects of health, mental health and physical health, often the violence of video games may show itself may be at risk to your mental health and that the constant posture and hand movements may result in carpal tunnel or 'gamers thumb' because of the lack of movement being so confined in one space in the same position, But, The reality is that the health risk imposed is not to harrowing especially to those who critically think. The reality of mental health also comes in the fact that there are good benefits in the way games can be used to further increase mental health or perhaps some body function based on the movements being done, whilst the most damning part being toxicity within communities might be the main attention

drawer, most individuals will rather look for more supportive and accepting groups rather than single themselves out for a specific view (Barna, 2024).

the reality is that all these places of belonging and skill-oriented game play combined with community often becomes a reason that gamers tend to find places where they do indeed 'belong' in, from the groups that are elitist to their core, to the groups that are more relaxed in their choices- the groups they end up joining becomes a cocoon that forms behavior and views. The stigmas and prejudice surrounding the gaming community often has its own real-world consequences as most has shown and deemed that games on their own are a subject matter that can bring out the worst in people from their toxic communities to their preconceived application of disorders that may lead to health risk and extreme behavioral changes to suit the reality they deemed more 'important'. The constant backlash and doubt when it comes to the positive effects of gaming is often thrown out the window and replaced with a more closed-minded view of the activity to be nothing more than a 'time waster' or 'money waster' when it could be seen more as a hobby or a social activity.

OBJECTIVE

The Objective of the study is to give voice to the Gaming Communities inhabitants and show a difference perspective to the way gamers should be viewed. The way this could be achieved is by understanding three main points, Identity, Reality, and Sense of belonging. Identity being how they would identify themselves and where the identification may come from, Reality being the preferred reality of either real life or game virtual world, and Sense of belonging being the way an individual feels as if they belong somewhere.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Research Paradigm

This study uses the Qualitative Descriptive Paradigm aiming to understand how the gaming subculture develops the sense of belonging within a part of the group and the notion of reality of the community as well as the interactions found within the members of the community or between other members of the group. Through Interpretive coding, which interprets the results to form a narrative.

According to Margarete Sandelowski in *Whatever happened to Qualitative Description?* (2000), Qualitative descriptive designs are typically an eclectic but reasonable and well-considered combination of sampling, and data collection, analysis, and representational techniques. In the following sections, described as having typical design features. Qualitative description is especially amenable to obtaining straight and largely unadorned answers to questions of special relevance to practitioners and policy makers.

Casual and Elitist

Realities differ, that of real life being the reality of the outside world. Outside of the anonymity and the freedom of expression the online world has over real life, there is also the aspect of loneliness as a comparison between real life and Online life. WoW players feel less social anxiety and less loneliness in game in comparison to real life instances (Martoncik and Loksa, 2015). The reality of MMORPG's or online is often less anxiety inducing and easier to swim through compared to social interaction in real life, the anonymity helps- as well as the main ways of interaction being that of voice calls and text-based-interactions. In *Guild Wars 2*, such variables are also shared, as the in-game world is easier to swim-through with the ease of reach and conversation being so locked within the game that outward appearances and expectations are often non-existent, being that they would only interact through avatars. Often this can be seen as a sense of escapism, a break or even a small reprieve from the demanding lives they may live in real life or offline. Within the virtual scape of *Guild Wars 2* also exists two main cultures within the game, one that is casual which is the general viewstance for the game- those

who see it as casual will set their goals within the gamescape to be only for fun and without the need to try or even put in the effort to improve putting 'casual fun' over the game, and those that are of elitist mindset, those who have certain expectation within the game and put genuine effort into it but are usually labeled as toxic as having a regards to how people play the game and being disappointed if they do not meet their expectations (Greenrose, 2022), this gives the opposing views of the games culture and its subculture- with the casual perspective being the more dominant culture, and the elitist perspective setting more of a subculture status within the game.

Group Polarization Theory

The Group polarization theory on its own can be seen as a phenomenon where an individual's decision making or experience may shift due to the overall notions of the group, they are a part of- with terms of such as 'risky shift' highlighting how these individuals tend to have their choices polarize due to the groups synonymous intentions (Gould and Walker, 2021).

This theory becomes a way to see how experience within a group may change an individual's way to perceive and experience their time within the game as differing. Within the context of the research, the defining theory will be used to view the existence of those who see the game through a casual lense (individuals who only play to have fun) and through the elitist lense (Individuals who enjoy putting effort beyond fun and have expectations on how the game is played) as the two ideas exist within the game (Greenrose, 2022)

Subculture Identity Theory

Subculture identity by its definition, allows an individual's identification into a social group where they may adopt their semiotic views, behaviours, and their ideologies to fully become one with their chosen subcultures (Winter, 2014).

As the topic stands, understanding individuals' experiences when being a part of a subculture, that being the gaming subculture, or more specifically the MMORPG subculture of Guild Wars 2, the theory stands as an exploration into said forming of identities. The focus on internalized traits and values may reflect towards the culture that the game has made, in specifics- being that of casual and elitist behaviours as a subpart within the grand explanation of the individuals experience and how such views carve their identities.

Choice Theory

The theory of choice, or choice theory, highlights the myriads of needs humans need to fulfil and how their ability to choose and react is maybe based on their surroundings, but they are still able to determine for themselves what actions they decide to do regardless of their surroundings also (Vodopivec, 2014).

William Glasser's Theory of choice, may be utilized in the context of exploring the 'sense of belonging' as a focus. As the theory utilises its reach and identifies 'belonging' as a basic need of emotional capacity and becomes a drive to the decisions we make- it would be useful in understanding the sense of belonging as its own interpreted view, as well as what individuals have done to finally fulfil this emotion of belonging. Sense of Belonging would refer itself towards the need to belong, to be accepted as well as to feel as if such an individual is a part of something. The need to choose, to react towards certain things becomes an indicator to how they develop and how they see their environment. At most, this theory will suffice in the identification of the admittance of a sense of belonging, or even the grounds to the existence of an identity. The choice to to play or form individual views of the game Guild Wars 2 can be seen by the ability an individual will choose for themselves.

Identity Theory

Identity theory is explained as a theory that

tackles how individuals' identities are related with the roles they have and their role-related behaviours that affect such identities (Desrochers, Andreassi, and Thompson, 2004).

A straightforward theory to better decode the meanings in speech in regards to the forming of identities. The individuals who experience what they have within the groups inside the games, from the people they play with to the communities they interact with, Guilds and Statics as well to understand what influences their formed identity and see what factors lead to such an identity, or if there even was a forming of identity is the exact utilization needed. Examples of such would be if playing with specific groups of like minded individuals enforces the pre-existing identity to further blossom into a more well-fitted form, or if playing with those who expect a higher standard of skills would push an individual to form their identity on the basis of competency.

Theory of Belonging

To feel a sense of belonging, or feeling as if you've finally found your spot within a collective, relational in nature and often shares within it certain similarities (Halse, 2018).

When one becomes a part of a subculture, and continues on to become a part of specialized groups within said subculture, the urge and need to belong or feel as if where they are is where they are needed most becomes a key concept to an individual's growth. The crave a sense of belonging, either for that feeling of social acceptance, or for survival becomes a continuance to realizing how an individual might develop certain senses to belong after prolonged existence within the community. This theory of belonging becomes a way to view how those within the gaming community find their own circle of comfort, where they belong in, within the causal or elite, with the content they choose between PvP and PvE.

RESEARCH METHOD

Using the Qualitative Descriptive method and paradigm, with the theories of Identity, Theory of Belonging, Theory of Subculture Identity and Theory of Choice will lead to an opening of the understanding of the Gamer communities views and experiences within the flows of the gaming scene. Through careful interview and interpretations based on the theories used, it will be able to show the way the gamers think and how they think and how things truly are.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Interpretation of Reality

When it comes to the talks of reality, It can be put out that between the two realities, both real life and in-game, the ability to choose becomes integral as it is highlighted within the Choice Theory. The Choice theory (Vodopivec, 2014), submits that to fulfil an individuals needs psychologically, individuals may choose certain spaces or behaviours to fulfill the needs, and based on the interview results we see how the notions are that they choose the real life more than the game, and that the game world and the real life reality is inseparable. The inseparable notion stems from the experience of the people you meet within the game can also become an integral part of your life within the real world, meeting up and enjoying festivities with individuals whose encounter was only based on a game avatar and interactions of voice and texts but never face to face. On the other hand, participants who have chosen the real world over the game stated so with the fact that life is going quite well for them, either success in life or love, the dreams and ambitions within the real world that they keep and hold that prevents them from fully letting the game take them away from such moments. As such, it is a new view that those who are within the binds of a certain reality or group may always give their all into the reality through unhealthy ways and behaviours, each individual is able to choose which reality to abide in and which reality to be a part of within the grand scheme of things. The be allowed to choose regardless of their surroundings is a sign of their choices being their own, the reality is that in-game or out of game, their surroundings could influence them with how they react-their needs or perhaps their wants, depending on how it can all be used based on the culture (Aditya, 2016). The perceptions of the real world may

differ from their perceived perception however, within the game world that they perceive- their beliefs don't truly change, which in a way can be taken that their choices are sound to themselves and that in the real world it is positive enough to not see their perceived game reality as a better reality to be a part in (Aditya, 2016).

2. Interpretation of Identity

The aspect of identity based on the results of the interview was that, 1) their identity is formed through the roles they were given within the game, and 2) Their identity is only a reflection of how they are in real life. This shows that within the Identity Theory (Desrochers, Andreassi, and Thompson, 2004) that individuals may develop their personal reflections or self born identities from the roles they are given to further 'get along' with the rest of the members of the group. The identity that is being shown here is that when the roles are given, it comes with it the ideologies as well as the role-behaviours that stem from it, such as participants may relate that the way they carry themselves weigh in on the faces they show and how people perceive them. Those within the gaming subculture would often reflect themselves online as they do offline, their mannerisms in speech, their behaviours, nothing much changes from within this standpoint as there is nothing to scale up to in comparison to other subcultures, the only exception is the role they have, as mentioned, leaders tend to be stricter or harsher, and specific in-game roles will have their own role-behaviours that glue to them, which also carries with it stereotypes of said roles, which could indicate a blurring of their identity, an unknown, a moment of not knowing what is the 'real' you (Winter, 2014). The blurring of concepts can also be seen within the focus of roles, as the theme was that there are certain identity formations that is caused by

the roles given to the individuals come with role-behaviour centric applications, it is apparent that such a growth can lead to a blurring of roles, where the identity is formed from the mix and mash of personal identity with the identity that is needed for said role (Desrochers, Andreassi, and Thompson, 2004).

3. Interpretation of Sense of Belonging

The sense of belonging that shows is viewed by the participants by either sharing the same mind set and expectation while also spending an ample amount of time with them, or by being within a friendly environment that promotes growth while sharing the same ideas. The theory of belonging (Halse, 2018), posits, that to fulfill the needs of psychological comfort- one can choose how they get to such a point, The choice is that they feel at most ease being within the vicinity of people they share ideals with and have a generally friendly atmosphere may urge on the feelings of belonging with the group. This posits that an individual's sense of belonging stems from a place of comfort and familiarity, being able to bond with those that share similar experiences or even ideas with one another helps boost the growth of bonds between the individuals. The participants themselves show with their experiences that the feeling of comfort they receive is through spending ample amounts of time within the groups they are in, understanding the beings of their peers while also sharing with them their own views, sharing the same beliefs and social construct while also sharing the same game space. They call and talk through messaging applications and let their friendship grow through shared experiences and past achievements, from other games to the games they currently are a part of now, this shows that an individual's sense of belonging is a choice, to spend time with the group of their choosing, to have fun and let the

seeds of comfort blossom into new bonds and relationships.

CONCLUSION

The themes of Reality would be discovered to be interpretations of reality as an intertwined product of both real life and in game life and the preferred reality being that of the real-world reality. It can be inferred that whilst the majority would prefer the real life due to real life connections and achievements as well as their lives enrichment being suited for them to avoid the feeling of heavy escapism, it would also show how it could also be an intertwined product of both real and game reality, as connections made within the online scape could be carried on to the real life.

For the Identity, the themes found were that the identity is a reflection of their real-life identity, showing how they would not change how they are as a person, nor how they show a different face but would rather wear their heart on their sleeves, showing nothing but their own real life characteristics in their mannerisms than forming an identity based on what they've gone through within the game. On the other hand, there were also interpretations that show how identities can be formed due to the roles they are given or chosen for themselves. These identities based on roles can be in the form of found leadership and change in behaviour due to the position they have, such as a leader of a group being more strict on certain matters and being viewed as the strict leader only due to the said role when it doesn't fully reflect their real life.

The last main point is the sense of belonging, where its interpretations would stem from it

being rooted in sharing the same expectations and time spent together, that their sense of belonging grew due to the shared expectation of certain outcomes or certain beliefs that help the sense of being a part of something settle within the individual which could also be seen within the time spent together, the longer time spent the more familiar and more settled an individual will be, keeping with the group they've decided to choose to be with due to the sense of time being their root in their bonds. Another would be the sense of belonging being interpreted as having rooted from friendly environments and having the same mindset, where the group they interact with and the level of acceptance and support they are given become the base of their sense of belonging, how a friendly group and encourages growth would become the reason they feel as if they want to be a part of the group as a collective, and how having the same mindset alongside it would show how the shared way of thinking, of understanding would make an individual would feel more a part of the collective rather than feeling as if they don't belong.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATION.

Academical Recommendation

There could be found some discrepancies within the theories chosen with the results of the study, such as how group polarization mentions how an individuals decision making skills and views may change within the extreme when the groups synonymous decision is extreme within its own, although not to the level of extremes, there are exceptions in which some individuals may choose to be their own self even with the pressure of roles and behaviours that come with said roles. They still choose how they react and how they identify themselves which means there could be more than meets the eye when it comes to the growth of polarized groups within subculture entities.

Within the Choice theory as well, how individuals will often seek out the needs of psychological well-being, but the way they do so is through the act of escapism, an often unhealthy way of seeking out the care they truly need. Escapism in its own right is the act of running away from the dangers in front through games and hobbies that is often done in an unhealthy way.

The identity theory, as straightforward as described being a thought process that an identity is formed through the roles given can be proven true within this instance, as participants who have been given roles or have formed their identity through the roles they play often shapes the identity or how people would see them because of it, such as how leaders within the community will often have the mindset of acting harsher to deliver a point across, or how those with specific in-game roles such as healers will often be seen as patient or shakey as the role given to them are quite important in regards to the content they tackle.

This would give a new perspective to how the theories may be viewed, as well as become a source of new insight. Contribution as willing, this study will bring in a new perspective towards the research of media study, as games have become a big part of the media world- the stigma of those who live within the confines of the gaming culture should not be shunned by negative connotations, they are not only those who play the game and revel within its communities, but also the ones that do live a life of their own, with this a new perspective on how games are studied can be made- without stigma but dialogue towards the individuals at hand who have a relationship with said gaming community.

within the confines of their room living in addiction to the games they play. They are real people, people who are also around every block normal humans within the workforce that may have an unhealthy relation with it, most will still choose to focus on their real life instead of the virtual life they may have. Giving them a voice has resulted in another perspective, that behind the stereotyping and views, lies hobbyists that enjoy the games they play, and form identities, groups and sense of belonging within it. This should give the view that the subculture does not deserve the bad labels and stereotypes it receives, as the times have shifted

Practical Recommendation

The results of this study puts up the implication that the study of the gaming subculture can be done with the idea of individual experiences in mind. With the current scape of the internet and its accessibility, it can be confirmed that to reach out to those who are far in real life is made easier through the games and interactions online within the virtual world. A new consideration would be that studies moving forward will have a point of reference that those within the gaming subculture are not truly labeled as those who are inseparable with the game they chose to spend their time in, but also have various views and points of influences.

One can adopt a new view whenever tackling the Gamer subculture, seeing it through the lense of the individual. Learn to understand and reach into what the subculture has to offer before making hasty judgements.

Social Implication

The social Implications of this study will relate to the views that gamers have. They are not as they are stereotyped to be, those who only live

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