OF ORCS AND MEN:
A STUDY OF INDIVIDUALISM AND COMMUNITY IN
WORLD OF WARCRAFT

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BY
MATTHEW SHARP

DR. DON MERTEN
DR. PAUL WOHLT
DR. RONALD HICKS

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY
MUNCIE, INDIANA

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Introduction

*World of Warcraft* (WoW) is a massively multi-player online role-playing game (MMO) that draws millions of players together from around the globe. It is currently the most successful MMO in America, as well as in China. It is also a growing popular culture phenomenon, with Toyota ads set in its fantasy world, commercials with William Shatner and Mr. T talking about their avatars, and being the focus of parody in South Park’s episode 1008 “Make Love, Not Warcraft.”

For this thesis, I want to analyze WoW as it stands as a cultural text for its American players. Particularly, I will consider how it serves as a metacommentary on America’s cultural tension between individualism and community. This paper will be broken down into three chapters. The first section of Chapter 1 will begin with a literature review on play and games and why they are important to humans. The following section of Chapter 1 will focus on a brief history of video games and the evolution of MMOs, so that readers can understand how WoW developed. This is important because WoW’s success came from incorporating game mechanics of other MMO’s into its structure. Lastly, this chapter will feature a brief description of entering the world and gameplay mechanics. The next chapter will contain an analysis of players describing their experience of the game, focusing on the social aspect of the game and how it stands as a cultural text. Finally, Chapter 3 will conclude this thesis with a discussion on WoW’s possibility for addressing the individualism/community tension.
Chapter One

Literature Review

“All mammals play, and humans play the most and throughout their lives” (Schultz and Lavenda 2001:127). But when it comes down to critical studies of play, there is little agreement about what play means between the varying disciplines. For biologists and psychologists, play helps in growth, development, and socialization (Sutton-Smith 1967; Bruner 1975). Communication theorists argue that play is a type of metacommunication before language. To the sociologists, play is a social system that is controlled by those in power for their gain (Sutton-Smith 1997). Anthropologists are concerned with how play relates to other aspects of culture (Roberts, Arth, and Bush 1959). Huizinga defines play as:

a free activity standing quite outside “ordinary” life as being “not serious”, but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means (1950:13).

To be sure, play is a multi-faceted phenomenon with no one theory being absolute. Yet, it cannot be denied that mammals, children, and adults all play.

This paradoxical nature of play is another reason why it is difficult to understand. Oftentimes, play is viewed as “disengaged from reality in a variety of ways, while at the
same time it is credited with a great number of useful real-life functions” (Csikszentmihalyi 1979:14). Play is considered a frivolous, non-serious endeavor, yet it improves communication skills, aids in socialization, and, according to Huizinga, is the origin of culture.

Another problem with the study of play is the notion that play is separate from reality, with play being a fun experience and reality consisting of “real” activities (making money, growing food, etc.). However, there are play activities that can be very real and potentially life-threatening. For example, skydiving is considered a recreational activity. For the most part, people achieve successful dives with no bodily harm. But, problems can occur with the parachute (such as a chute not opening), causing the skydiver serious peril if the problem can not be resolved. So, why would anyone want to label something like that as “play,” or even call that play at all?

People engage in play to experience that specific “reality.” Csikszentmihalyi argues that for any individual reality “is defined in terms of the goals he or she invests attention in at any given time. Reality is not an invariant external structure. It is relative to the goals that cultures and individuals create” (Csikszentmihalyi 1979:17). This is one way to bridge the paradox of play, by understanding how we are, in a sense, choosing a specific reality when we play.

While playing indicates a selection of a specific type of reality, play also sends out signals to others that the actions happening in play are play actions. This is how play operates as a metacommunicative process. Bateson argues that play messages still generate a paradox, “a negative statement containing an implicit negative metastatement” (Bateson 1972:180). To clarify, when two dogs play fight, the message that they are
sending is that the actions (biting) they are engaged in do not represent what those actions (biting) normally mean, i.e., asserting dominance or attempting to cause bodily harm.

According to Bateson, play is the activity that allows children to learn that behavior can be framed into certain logical types. He is not saying that children learn social roles through playing them. For example, a child does not learn to be a doctor by playing doctor. Rather, play’s importance lies in its epistemic value, that it teaches people about different logical types (Lightfoot 1997:79). Play allows people to learn the differences between a mood-sign (such as blushing when embarrassed) and messages that simulate a mood-sign (such as a raised, clenched fist signifying an impending fight). Play messages set up “an attempt to discriminate between, or to draw a line between, categories of different logical types” (Bateson 1972:190).

How can play be the origin of culture when it contains a paradoxical nature and allows people to distinguish between logical categories? Huizinga argues that play is the central civilizing force in human existence; particularly play that is based on contests between different groups (Huizinga 1950:75). The outcomes of contest produce the hierarchies that societies are based on (Sutton-Smith 1997:78). This is not to say that play turns into more structured forms of society, such as law or politics. Rather, culture has the same essence to it that play does, “that it proceeds in the shape and the mood of play” (Huizinga 1950:46). This is reminiscent of Jacques monologue from Shakespeare’s As You Like It, “All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players.” While Huizinga’s argument about competitive games creating hierarchies is one that I have trouble agreeing with, games certainly express what is important in the culture that created them (Munroe and Conroy 1978:152). This point will be addressed shortly.
In English-speaking countries, games are often viewed “as a subset of play” (Juul 2005:29). Typically, games consist of a specific set of rules that players must follow, with a certain goal (most points, fewest cards held, etc.) equaling victory. What make games different from play are rules. Games are constituted by rules. For instance, soccer is a game, yet simply kicking a soccer ball is an example of play. A game would not exist if there were no rules to bring it into being.

French sociologist Roger Caillois further classified games, as he felt that Huizinga’s definition of play is “too broad and too narrow” (Caillois 1961:4). Caillois’ categories of games are agon (competition), alea (chance), mimicry (role-playing), and llinx (games that induce vertigo, such as merry-go-round), which is what he argues are the four fundamental features of games (Caillois 1961:12). While these four points are present in games, llinx is closer to the nature of play than a rule-based game because the fun that is derived from these games are more based on the natural responses of the human body, not adherence to a human-made rule structure. Caillois’ main argument was that these features of play are found in diluted forms inside of social institutions (Davenport 1963:179). This view combines well with Huizinga’s position, in which play and culture have similar traits.

Now, this may seem like a counterintuitive point that Huizinga and Caillois argue. However, there does appear to be some validity to their argument. Most games are modeled after specific cultural practices, such as combat, hunting, and religion (Roberts et al. 1959:599). I would have to agree that play and games appear as attenuated forms of cultural activities. There are data showing that more socially complex societies (i.e., cultures that have hierarchies/social classes) are more likely to have games of strategy.
(agon) present, whereas less complex societies are less likely to have games of strategy (Roberts et al. 1959:600). There are less complex societies that have games of strategy, but the majority of strategic games are present in more complex societies.

Key to both Huizinga and Caillois analysis of play and games is the concept of the magic circle. The magic circle is the area, whether it is a board, a courtyard, an arena, or a computer screen displaying the video game images, in which the game takes place. It is separate from the rest of the world, and it lasts only as long as the play/game’s duration. The magic circle also removes the player’s consciousness from “everyday life” to the sphere of “play life,” where one reality (play) is chosen over another (non-play). In the magic circle, the sanctity of the game is upheld (Huizinga 1950:10).

An important thing to note is that within the circle there is order. Order is maintained through rules. Rules hold the game together (Huizinga 1950:11). As mentioned earlier, rules are what make play into a game.

The magic circle is not impervious. There are two types of players who threaten the magic circle, the cheat and the spoilsport. The cheat is one who plays within the magic circle and maintains it, yet also finds ways to cheat within the rule structure of the game for his or her benefit. The spoilsport is the player who denies the magic circle, thus shattering it and ruining the game for the other players. Society is more forgiving of cheats than spoilsports, since it is the spoilsport who destroys the game, whereas the cheat only ruins the integrity of the particular game (Huizinga 1950:11).

Caillois is also defensive of the magic circle. He argues that the magic circle protects play from the dangers of human “nature,” which will threaten personal and social integrity. In his view “Left to themselves, destructive and frantic as are all instincts,
these basic impulses can hardly lead to any but disastrous consequences” (Caillois 1961:55).

This defense of the magic circle does more than defend the sanctity of play. It also is making a statement about how theories of play are arguments about human nature. There is no reason that Caillois could not have made an argument about humans’ tendencies for solidarity, concern, and cooperation (Rodriguez 2006:11). It follows that since there are so many different theories about human nature, then there will be multiple theories as to what function play fulfills.

I would argue that Geertz’s position on play and games gives a much better link to the role these activities have for culture. Geertz argued that play operates as a metacommunication to members of a given society as to what key features of its culture mean to a member of that society (Geertz 1973). Geertz, while doing fieldwork in a Balinese village during 1958, began to conduct research on cockfights, a popular pastime in Bali. While it is illegal to have a cockfight, male villagers (as they are the only ones allowed to handle fighting cocks) continued to raise and fight cocks on a regular basis. In fact, cockfights have significant culture features for the Balinese. Before a temple festival is held, a cockfight occurs. When natural disasters strike, villagers conduct a fight as a collective response to those ills. During the Njepi holiday in Bali, where everyone sits silent and still for an entire day (to avoid contact with demons), legal cockfights happen in almost every village on the island (Geertz 1973:420).

Betting does take place during the cockfights, with principal bets occurring at the ring and side bets going on in the shadows of the spectator’s seats. Yet, making money is not the main reason so much importance is put into cockfighting. Victory
brings a brief moment of improved status, one that only lasts during the evening’s fights. What makes the cockfight important for studying play and culture is how it brings the meaning of being Balinese to the forefront (Geertz 1973).

According to Geertz, the Balinese are “precisely controlled” people, keeping passions in check (Geertz 1973:413). Cockfights, consisting of a violent explosion of madly flapping wings, razor-tipped feet, and blood, are in juxtaposition to the normal reserve that the Balinese people possess. Their society also reflects Polynesian title ranks and Hindu castes, thereby making status an important feature of Balinesian life (Geertz 1973:447). I mentioned earlier that status is the main reason why people fight cocks. Yet, it is in the cockfight where “the sentiments upon which that hierarchy rests are revealed in their natural colors” (Geertz 1973:447). To put it another way, the cockfight provides a metanarrative to the Balinese, “a story they tell themselves about themselves” (Geertz 1973:448). A final note I would like to add to Geertz’ analysis is that this contest between rival cocks reflects Huizinga’s argument about competitive play being the basis for hierarchy and culture as a whole.

It is easy to define the area that play occurs in, or create a typology of games. Yet, conceptualizing the meaning of play brings many difficulties with it. Play is ambiguous and paradoxical, being many things at once. It appears to be a non-serious activity, but many people put considerable time and money into play. Some even risk their lives for the thrill of play. Play is frivolous, yet people can learn different skills from play.

Games teach people what it “means” to have a certain role. As mentioned earlier, play does not teach children how to be a doctor (how to stop bleeding, setting a
broken bone, etc.). Rather, it teaches children what it means to be a doctor (helping repair bodily damage, caring for the sick, etc.).

Lastly, play and games allow people to try on new roles and see if they suit them. Games are a perfect learning environment for people who want to try a new role. In a game, a person can see what “role” he or she likes, without the dangers and complexity of normal life. For example, if a person is timid in real life, he or she can choose to make a powerful warrior in WoW. If that “role” does not suit him or her, then he or she can drop it for a new one. Now, this can happen in real life. A father can forego his responsibilities to his child; a fast-food employee can learn to become a doctor, etc. Yet, there are usually consequences when dropping and adding roles in real life. Being a “dead-beat dad” is a punishable offense, and going to medical school is very expensive for a struggling restaurant employee. But in games, people can drop and add roles easily. The player may not “win” the game, but he or she will not suffer any lasting harm from experimenting with roles during game-play.

Perhaps it is because games makes statements about what it means to be a member of a given culture that allows “everyday” life to be viewed in play metaphors. Play helps to give people a sense of control in a world that has rules and winning conditions set for them. Life is a complex game that wraps itself in a shroud of seriousness, where losing does not equal a bruised ego, but death, poverty, or imprisonment.
Enter the Video Game

Games have been a part of human cultures for centuries. For example, the Egyptians had a board game called Senet, dating back at least to 2686 BC, which is a predecessor to backgammon and Parcheesi (Juul 2005:4). Yet, video games are a much more recent phenomena. The American Heritage Dictionary defines a video game as “an electronic or computerized game played by manipulating images on a video display” (2004). The first video game was Spacewar!, which was created in 1961 by students at MIT (Juul 2005:3). Ten years later, the first arcade video game, Computer Space, was released (Herz 1997:14). A total of 1,500 units were created and shipped out to a variety of different venues, such as arcades (which at that time consisted of test-your-strength games, pinball machines, and novelty rifle games), restaurants, student unions, and bars. The game premise was fairly basic, with players controlling a rocketship that blasted flying saucers in space— all for the cost of one quarter. One thing that made Computer Space unique, apart from it being the first arcade video game, was the design of the unit. Computer Space’s cabinet was designed to look space-age, like something out of a sci-fi novel, which stood out in clear contrast to the typical aesthetic of arcade games. Even later arcade games did not have cabinets that contributed to the imagery of the game. Unfortunately, Computer Space was a commercial flop, mainly due to the public’s inability to master the mechanics of the game (Burnham 2001:71).

However, Computer Space’s failure was not the end of the video game. Nolan Bushnell founded Atari in 1972 (Herz 1997:14). Atari went on to make the first commercially successful arcade video game, a video game version of Ping-Pong entitled Pong. Pong was a hugely popular game (selling over 8,000 arcade units), with very
simple gameplay. Players controlled a white, vertical dash that represented the paddle and would move the paddle up and down to hit the ball (represented by a white square). The rules of the game simulated those of *Ping-Pong* (Burnham 2001:87).

The first home video game system was also released in 1972, the Magnavox Odyssey (Herz 1997:14). This video game system would plug into an owner’s television set, enabling video games to be played in the comfort of one’s home. It was not a popular system, but it is important since it was the first home video system, and home video game systems eventually led to the collapse of arcades.

The game that brought the video game out of bars and bowling alleys was *Space Invaders*. The gameplay consisted of a lone ship facing an ever descending army of aliens bent on galactic conquest, which needed to be destroyed before they touched the ground (Burnham 2001:182). This was also the first video game to provide a high-score display, which opened up the competitive aspect of video games (Herz 1997:15). People were drawn to arcades, to see who could gain the coveted high-score.

*Space Invaders’* tremendous success ushered in the Golden Age of Video Games. This period lasted from 1979 to 1983 with some of the most popular video games of all times coming into existence, including *Asteroids*, *Pac-Man*, and *Donkey Kong* (Burnham 2001). Video games also began to appear in areas that traditionally did not have video games, such as doctor’s offices and supermarkets.

Yet, the Golden Age would not last forever. The year of 1984 is considered the crash of the video game, when arcades began to close down, arcade machines were pulled from their non-traditional locales, and home video game systems, like Atari, were selling poorly. Video game over-saturation was one cause for the collapse. The home video
game system also contributed, particularly from poor quality video games being rushed into the market. Finally, computer video games began to catch up with the console and arcade market, providing better sound and graphics (Herz 1997:19).

Still, the video game did not die out after the crash. Improved graphics and sound processors were entering the market, as well as improved home video game systems (Nintendo, Sega, Sony). Home PC’s also provided superior video games, as the technology for home computers improved (Herz 1997). While the video game arcade has diminished significantly, video games have improved to the point of being able to host virtual 3-D worlds of improving quality.

**The Evolution of World of Warcraft**

*World of Warcraft* can trace its history to tabletop roleplaying games, particularly *Dungeons and Dragons* (D&D). In fact, most MMOs have D&D as their legitimate ancestor. D&D itself was influenced by Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, which set the feel, as well as player races (humans, elves, dwarves, and halflings) to choose from. Initial statistics, such as strength and intelligence, and hit points, a numerical representation of health, are rolled with a six-sided die, and skills are picked from a list appropriate to the class chosen. **Classes** can be viewed as the adventuring profession that a player wants to play as. Examples of classes to choose from are fighter, wizard, cleric, and rogue. Equipment is then selected, and use is dependent on class, such as wizards being unable to use a sword. Players start out at first level and gain experience through successfully completing quests. When a certain amount of experience is gained, the player gains a level. This gives the player more skills and powers to use and more hit
points, making the player a much stronger character. Simply put, the higher the level, the stronger the character (McCubbin 2006:111-112).

This combination of fantasy, group interaction, and character statistics and equipment was transferred to computer gaming by the creation of multi-user dungeons (MUD’s) in 1979. MUD’s are text-based virtual environments that are hosted on a computer, in which players can log in and interact in the world. Players would use Telenet to connect to the host computer through the internet. Players interacted in the world by typing commands such as look, run, say, or attack. These games also allowed people to interact and chat with one another as well as adventure together in a text-based fantasy setting (Taylor 2006:21-22).

In 1985, Lucasfilm Games created the first online graphical social world, Habitat. To access this world, players would dial into the QuantumLink computer system using their home computer and a modem. They would then create a digital representation of their body, called an avatar, and interact with other players who were logged in at the same time. These player interactions were similar to MUDs, yet the setting was contemporaneous not fantasy. This game, with its economy, social interaction, and emergent player culture, is seen as a forerunner to the MMOs of today (Taylor 2006:24-25).

Origin Systems released in 1997 what is considered the first true MMO, Ultima Online (UO). This was based on the long-running fantasy computer role-playing game franchise Ultima. UO was different from conventional computer RPGs. There were no classes or levels in the game. Advancement in the game was built on skill development. For example, in order to be a mage, a player needed to practice casting spells. Also,
mercantile professions, such as mining and cooking, were professions to be pursued in the game. These professions were an important addition, as players were able to make items, which they could then sell or use. It also introduced MMO players to the guild system, a facet that is integral to MMOs (McCubbin 2006:115).

However, this game was not without problems. The game designers had no idea how players would interact with one another. Player killing was unrestrained, and experienced players preyed on new ones. Lag problems and unscheduled downtime, which actually provoked a class action lawsuit against Origin Systems, were problems that had to be dealt with (McCubbin 2006:116). Lagging is when the computer does not receive the command a player enters immediately, causing a delay in the action. The unscheduled downtime refers to servers not operating due to programmers fixing problems occurring in the system.

The next MMO to be released was *Everquest*, or EQ (Sony Online Entertainment 1999). *Everquest* brought back the class and level advancement system that players were used to and did away with the more precise skill-based system of UO. This was also the first MMO to allow users to play as “monster” races, such as ogres and trolls. The game was a smash hit and, until the release of WoW, was the most popular MMO in America (McCubbin 2006:116-117).

Everquest’s long term success had largely to do with its ability to keep the interest of high-level players. MMOs are dependent on the monthly subscription to run, so keeping the subscribers playing is necessary to maintaining the game world. To achieve this goal, *Everquest* always has something for players to do, regardless of level. In 2004, Sony released *Everquest II*. This was a revamped version of the first, with improved
graphics and game play (McCubbin 2006:117). The main change in game play was locking encounters. To activate this, a player sets the option of locking encounters in the game interface. This means that only the players who first engaged the creature get the experience points and dropped items from the defeated foe. Locking encounters prevents kill stealing, which is when another player runs into a current battle and kills the creature, thereby getting the experience and whatever items are dropped. This feature added fairness to the game.

The year 2001 saw the release of *Dark Age of Camelot* (DAoC), from Mythic Entertainment. This MMO finally brought an end to player killing. DAoC was the first to have different styles of game play, Player vs. Environment (PvE) and Player vs. Player (PvP). In PvE, players could not kill other players. Only the environment and non-player characters could assault subscribers. In PvP, players could kill other players, but only in specific battle zones (McCubbin 2006:119).

*World of Warcraft*, by Blizzard Entertainment, was released in 2004. It drew on all the strengths of the previous MMOs, including the guild and skill-improving systems of UO, the class and reward system of EQ, and the different server styles to choose from. Its emphasis is on fast, fun game play, as well as beautiful graphics and smooth transitions into different zones on the maps. In 2007 came the release of WoW’s first expansion, *The Burning Crusade* (BC). At the time of this writing, 10 million players subscribe to the game ([www.blizzard.com/press/080122.shtml](http://www.blizzard.com/press/080122.shtml)).
Methodology

In order to understand the game, I began to play on January 3, 2007. This was the participant observational period of my research, where I learned the mechanics of the game and made connections with other players. A typical game session lasted about four hours, roughly four times a week. Also, I monitored message boards about the game and visited databases about the game on the internet.

After becoming comfortable with the game, I then began to seek out informants. I interviewed six players face to face, two through e-mail, and three in the game. Out of my interview set, nine were male and two were female. Their names have been changed for this study. The ages of my informants fell between 21 and 35. The face-to-face interviews ranged from forty-five minutes to over an hour.

The interviews were unstructured (Bernard 2006:211). I chose this type of interviewing style because I felt it was the best way to get information from my informants. Keeping the interviews unstructured allowed for the informants to open up more than they would in a more formalized interview. After I got to know players, I would ask them if they wanted to participate in my research.

Interviews I conducted in the game lasted about a half an hour. These interviews were unstructured as well. Finally, the correspondence with players through e-mail happened three times with each of my informants, where I e-mailed them questions I would have asked in person. The questions I would ask started with more general questions, such as what faction he or she belonged to, how long a typical game session would last, and how many characters he or she has in the game. From there, I would
move on to questions dealing with aspects of the game he or she liked or disliked, how important ties to others players were, and if he or she played alone or with others.

I want to add that initially I did not introduce myself as an anthropologist doing research on WoW. Here is the major difference between real world fieldsites and virtual ones. There would be no way to set up rapport with the players if I were to just stay in a major city at level one and try to get players to participate in an interview. Most of my interviews began at level 40, as I felt that this level showed proficiency in the game and that I was knowledgeable in lexicon, symbols, and strategies needed to become a successful player.

The anonymity the game provides is why that would occur. Imagine if an anthropologist tried to immerse himself or herself in a real world community, such as Papua New Guinea. The anthropologist could not act as a member of whatever group is being studied right off the bat. This is the tension that a researcher feels when trying to understand what it means to be a part of that culture while still holding on to the role of researcher. Yet in WoW, a researcher can truly enter into a given society and learn how it operates very easily. In order to understand the game, I had to become a player.

**Entering an Online World of Warcraft**

In order to enter this world, one needs either a personal computer with Windows 2000 or a Macintosh with Mac OS X 10.3.9 or newer. The game costs twenty dollars and the new expansion BC is available for $39.99. The expansion can be bought physically, or can be directly downloaded onto a computer running WoW from the WoW website.
Players pay a monthly fee either with their credit cards or prepaid game cards. Monthly subscriptions are one month at $14.99, three months at $41.97, and six months at $77.94. A prepaid game card is $29.99 and adds sixty days onto an active account.

Installation of the game is a rather long process. Not only does a user need to wait for the game itself to install on the computer, but all previous patches that have been released need to be installed as well. Patches are minor changes to the game that the developers program to repair flaws. Fifteen patches have been released so far, and this causes installation to take about two and a half hours, even with a fast internet connection.

Once installed, players must then agree to both the “End User License Agreement” and a “Terms of Use Agreement” (see appendices A & B). However, players rarely read these agreements. They just scroll down, click “yes,” and begin playing (Castronova 2005:208). This is an interesting phenomenon, given that many rights are surrendered in order to play the game. For example, point 2 of the “Terms of Use Agreement” clearly states that characters and their names are property of Blizzard. Point 5 subheading A of the “Terms of Use Agreement” discusses what names are appropriate for game use. Both of these points take away ownership rights and freedom of speech, two aspects of human rights that many people, particularly Americans, find to be tantamount to human existence and part of their identity as individuals.

Both of these agreements prohibit the use of “mods” in the game. Mods (modifications) are programs developed outside of Blizzard that aid the players in certain ways, such as showing what character will be attacked next and revealing parts of the map a player has not discovered. Even though mods are technically cheating, players of
WoW do not view these programs as detrimental to the magic circle. In fact, all of my informants use mods. The one thing that players consider destructive to the magic circle of WoW is bots. Bots (robots) are software applications that run automated tasks in the game, while the player is not playing WoW. For example, a player installs a bot, which will play his character while he is away at work. Players’ view bots as ruining the spirit of the game, since players who use bots are improving their characters without playing themselves.

After agreeing to the two legal contracts, subscribers can connect to WOW through a program that communicates with the realms run by Blizzard Entertainment. Currently, there are 226 realms for subscribers to choose from. These realms are then separated into PvP, PvE, RP (role-playing), and RPPvP (role-playing player vs. player). 
PvE stands for player versus environment and is a server that prevents players from killing other players at will. If players want to fight members of opposing factions, then they have to turn on the PvP flag, which appears by their name in the upper left-hand corner of the screen. On a PvP (player versus player) server, there is no option to turn PvP on or off; it is on all the time. Players can fight other players of the opposing faction at any time. The RP realms have the subscribers actually role-playing their characters. Players are expected to act as their avatars. So, if a player is a troll warrior, than he or she needs to act and talk as a troll warrior throughout the entire game. When players want to bring up something outside of their character, then they type “OOC” which stands for “out of character.” For example, if Sharon wants to talk about a movie she saw outside of the game while playing in a RP server, then she needs to indicate OOC to other players before talking about the movie.
The next step is the creation of a player’s avatar. Players first choose what faction they want to play as a member of, either the Alliance or the Horde. It should be noted that the Horde is the faction of “monster” characters, and the Alliance consists of “non-monster” characters. However, according to the storyline of the game, the Horde is not evil. They are trying to exist in a world that barely survived the Chaos War.

Players then choose their sex and physical characteristics (hair and skin color, tusk size, or degree of rotting flesh). Names are created by the players, but they cannot be anything offensive. Physical characteristics and names can be randomized by the use of the randomize function on the character creation screen. Most of my informants did not use the randomize function for their avatar’s appearance. However, one of my informants used the randomize function for his name, since every name he wanted to use was unavailable. With the number of people playing, names get taken quickly by other players. The last step is choosing what class to play (warrior, priest, mage, etc).

The main world consists of two continents. These continents have richly detailed environments, including jungles, snow-capped mountain ranges, deserts, salt flats, swamps, and temperate forests. These different areas on the map are called zones, and they are level specific. For example, the starting zone for players is an appropriate level of difficulty for players level 1-10. Each race has its own starting zone (Valley of Trials for orcs and trolls, Deathknell for the undead, etc.) were there are simple quests that help teach the new player the mechanics of the game, as well as an area to level up relatively quickly. If a player enters a zone that is a higher level than he or she currently is at, it means almost certain doom at the hands of the creatures that occupy that zone. The expansion added another landscape to explore, the demon-infested extra-dimensional
plane called the Outland. Players start in their chosen race’s starting point, with no knowledge of the rest of the world. They then have to explore the game to gain access to other areas. Each race has a major city that belongs to it, and it is in these cities that players interact with other players the most.

A player starts at level 1 when he or she first enters the game. Each character has five statistics that correspond to the player’s avatar. These are strength, agility, stamina, intellect, and spirit, and these traits are given a numerical rating for how effective they are. For instance, a strength rating of 50 is better than a strength rating of 20. Players also have an armor rating based on the armor that is currently being worn. A higher armor rating is better than a lower one. Lastly, players have health points and mana points. The health points represent the ‘life’ of an avatar. When a player’s health points reach zero, he or she “dies” in the game. Mana points represent the player’s ability to use magic, and when mana points reach zero a player cannot cast spells. Health points replenish slowly over time, but more health can be gained from food or healing spells. Mana replenishes slowly as well, and it can also get replenished more quickly from drinks like water. However, a player can get “drunk” in the game if his or her avatar consumes alcoholic drinks. When a player is drunk, the game visuals become blurry, and the player will have trouble controlling the avatar. Players drink alcohol in the game to experience a “drunk” avatar, as well as for fun.

When a player dies, he or she is prompted from a dialogue box in the game, asking if the player wants to release his or her spirit. If a player chooses yes, then he or she will become a ghost appearing in the nearest graveyard, causing his or her equipment to take 10 percent loss of its durability. After becoming a ghost, the player needs to run
to his or her body, which will bring the avatar back to life. Some classes (priest, paladin, shaman, druid) can bring players back to life. Also, a player can choose resurrection at the graveyard from a spirit healer. This causes the player’s armor to take a 25 percent penalty, as well as reducing all of the player’s statistics for ten minutes. Ultimately, death is an annoyance for players.

Advancement in the game is based on gaining certain numbers of experience points. For example, if a player gains 1000 experience points, then his or her character reaches level 2. Reaching higher levels is important to players, as higher levels mean improved statistics, health, and mana. The highest level players can achieve is 70.

Experience is gained through killing monsters, discovering new areas in the game, and completing quests. Quests are missions where a certain task must be accomplished. Typical quests include killing a certain number of monsters, gathering a specific number of items (such as twelve necklaces from an enemy group), or delivering items to non-player characters (NPC) in the game. These quests are assigned to players through various NPC’s, who are indicated by a yellow exclamation mark over their heads. Quests are then turned in at specific NPC’s indicated by a yellow question mark over their heads. Once again, exploration is important to the enjoyment of the game, as this opens up new quests to achieve.

After reaching level ten, players gain skill points that they can put into talent trees. Talent trees are three distinct areas where players can focus their avatars’ abilities. For example, a priest has the talent tree of discipline, holy, and shadow. Discipline increases the priest’s ability to cast “buffs,” or beneficial spells that help other players in some way (such as improving a player’s stamina). “Holy” improves healing spells, and
“shadow” improves a priest’s damage-dealing spells. How players distribute their points alters their avatars’ abilities, and players refer to talent tree point distribution as their “build.”

Besides completing quests for experience, players also gain professions that they have to practice in order to advance. For example, if the player is a miner, then he or she has to practice mining to improve in it. Professions allow players to become more self-sufficient, as well as providing another way to generate income in the game. To learn a profession, a player needs to pay a profession trainer for training. Players have a maximum of two professions that each avatar can learn.

Players need to be able to communicate effectively if they want to get the most out of this game. In order to facilitate communication between players, Blizzard put certain features into the game. These are chat channels, the Looking for Group feature (commonly referred to as “PUG” [pick-up groups] by players), friends lists, and guilds.

Chat channels are various communication threads that players can use in the game. There are trade channels for players selling goods and services, general chat for casual chat, asking for advice, or looking for others to group with, and party chat, which is reserved for players grouped together. Players can also “whisper” other players, establishing a communication line that only the two of them share. For players on a raid, there is a raid chat line to coordinate the massive endeavor. Lastly, there is a guild chat, which only guild members can participate in. Aside from guild chat, players can enter into any chat channel. With so many chat channels available during play, players are literally surrounded with conversations going on, which they can enter into at any time. Players are aware that others are playing, even if they are not grouped with any of them.
Besides typing as a communication technique, the game also has emotion indicators. For instance, by typing /cry, the player’s avatar will begin to sob. This feature adds more realism to players’ avatars, as they can laugh, cry, and joke, allowing more elements of non-verbal human communication to happen, instead of typing, “I’m laughing.”

The Looking for Group feature is a tool built into the game that places players together into groups for different zones and dungeons. Players activate this option by accessing it in the toolbar. It is used if they need more players to accomplish a task but do not have any friends or guild members to help out.

The friends list is a list of friends players have made in the game. This list notifies the player when a friend logs on and off. It also tells the level of the player and the zone they are in. To place a friend in the list, the player selects the Friends option in the game interface and enters the screen name of the player.

Players can interact with others through dueling, raiding opposing faction’s cities, or in the battlegrounds. Dueling is when players fight each other in one-on-one combat. This is initiated by a player placing a dueling flag on the ground, which asks the other player if he or she wants to participate in the duel. The victor of the duel wins honor points, which can be used to buy special sets of weapons and armor, while the defeated recovers from his or her wounds. A defeated player does not lose his or her armor or weapons.

Raiding an opposing faction’s city takes a large number of players to succeed. Not only do the raiders have to fight NPC city guards, but they have to fight off wave after wave of high-level players coming to defend their city. The raid I participated in
was very entertaining, as well as eye opening regarding the mass of other players willing to get together to invade a city. It started from a simple question in guild chat, “I’m bored. You guys wanna raid Ashenvale?” After that question, everyone in the guild agreed and began to arrive at the meeting point. Over the general chat, players were asked if they wanted to join in the raid. Also, friends of guild members who were in other guilds were also invited. From my estimate, there were over a hundred players gathering at the designated meeting point. They arrived on foot, by mount, and through warping. It truly was a sight to behold, as our makeshift army descended on the opposing city. We were able to hold the first gate, until we were overwhelmed by other players coming to defend the city. It was incredibly enjoyable and was something that players talked about for days.

These raids can affect the game, but it is a rare occurrence. The time I witnessed such a raid was during a night of fieldwork. The game began to lag horribly, and then the server shut down. Confused, I decided to check the message boards on the website. What I was able to discover was that the Horde had successfully raided the main Alliance city and killed the king. The mass of activity at the city, as well as the king’s death (an event the server was not expecting), ended up crashing the server. Yet, as I mentioned earlier, this is a rare occurrence, since this takes a massively coordinated attack to accomplish, and it can only happen with the help of other players.

The battlegrounds are where players enter a zone separate from the main game zones to fight the opposing faction in specific competitive games, ranging from capturing the flag to fighting for control of resources and siege warfare. Players enter battlegrounds by going to one of the major cities and finding a battlemaster, who will
place them in a queue for the next available battle. Honor is awarded to players who kill other players as well as to the faction that wins the battlegrounds main objective.

One unique aspect of this game, which sets itself apart from other video games, is the player-generated economy. The money in the game breaks down as one gold piece equals 10 silver pieces, and one silver piece equals 100 copper pieces. There are many ways a player can make money in the game. Oftentimes, the reward for a quest is some monetary amount, such as 10 copper pieces. Monsters also drop money, as well as items called “vendor trash.” Examples of these are eyeballs or feathers, which have no use to the player besides being saleable. Vendors are NPC’s that sell players items, such as weapons and armor. All vendors buy items at the same rate. If players want to make more money from rare items dropped from monsters, or from items that they have created, then players can use the Auction House.

To make an auction, the player goes to the Auction House in one of the major cities in the game. Players talk to an auctioneer, which opens up the Auction House interface. From this interface, players can search for specific items that are currently being auctioned as well as create an auction. To do this, the player places what he or she wants to sell, and sets the starting bid, as well as a buyout option that has to be at the same price as the starting bid. After the starting bid, the player sets how long an auction lasts, which can be for two, eight, or twenty-four hours. There is a deposit fee when making an auction, which is returned to the player if the auction is successful.

In addition, “farmed” material is also sold in the Auction House. Farmed materials are items gained from the various farming professions. For example, a player with the mining profession can mine various metal ores from mineral veins that randomly
appear in the world map. Farmed material can then be sold, or given, to players who have professions that require specific farmed materials for production of various items, such as light leather being the main ingredient needed to make a pair of leather bracers (armor for the wrist).

It is farmed material that makes the most in-game money for players. Some players are not patient enough to attempt to control the market, but the ones who do profit considerably. Here is a part of a discussion on making money in the auction house, by two informants (Robert and Thomas) who understood how to maximize their profits:

T: We’ve actually controlled the auction house before. We’ve had so much gold, and so much stuff to put on there that we’ll buy it all off. We’ll buy it all off, then repost it on there for more. And you don’t have a choice now, you have to buy mine. Controlled the market, and I made it go to a certain price and I kept it there.

This does take an initial amount of money to be able to buy every piece of a certain item and then repost at a different price. Here’s how it works, following my informant’s example. A player purchases all the light leather on the Auction House, twenty sets of twenty light leather pieces, at the buyout price of 10 gold per set. Now, this would equal 200 of the player’s gold. The player can now repost the same twenty stacks of light leather at a buyout price of 25 gold. After eight stacks are sold, the player has made back his or her initial investment and still has twelve more stacks to sell at 25 gold, making a 300 gold profit.

Another clever way that players make money on the auction house is through the use of alternate characters, or alts. A player can have ten characters on one server. Often times, alts are used as a way to supplement the main character on the account. Examples of this are farming to make money for the main character, or creating objects
for the main character to use. The way alts make money for the main character is through
the selling of farmed materials. After that, all of the profits or created items are sent to
the main character through the mail system in the game. Mail works like any postal
service, where letters and objects can be sent to other players from one mailbox to
another. But alts can also be used to further control the market. My previous two
informants state:

R: Right, you raise it up. Or you give something to one character, right? And set on there what
we call “crack smoking” prices. And then you take your other character, and you put two or three
stacks on [of the same item], undercutting it but still higher than it is normally. And then people
buy it…

T: They’re like, “Oh my god, this guy’s…twenty gold?!?! I’m gonna get these for ten.” When it
really goes for six ninety nine.

While that may seem like an underhanded tactic, it is considered fair game in
WoW. These players also realize the “magic number” in pricing, ending it with a 99.
This is based on classic economic theory, which assumes that people make rational
choices about consumption. People in America read left to right, so something that is
$5.99 is more appealing than $6, even though buying the former still ends up costing the
consumer $6. People tend to not realize this, since the first price’s digit is one lower than
the second’s. That is why something that is priced $1.49 versus $1.50, where both first
digits are the same, does not influence the consumer the same way the “magic number”
does (Roth 2006).

Money is important to the game in many ways. It allows players to buy better
equipment or food to replenish health, learn new skills and spells, buy a mount to
improve landspeed (the speed which avatars move in the game), etc. Players need money to make their avatars stronger.

“Loot,” or items that players use, are very important to level progression in the game. Players have twenty slots to put equipment in, sixteen for worn equipment such as helmets, rings, and pants, and four slots for things held in the player’s hands, such as a sword and shield. Equipment has specific ratings of uniqueness, indicated by the color of its name. Grey items are poor quality items. White items are common. Items with green text are uncommon. Blue items are rare items. Epic items are indicated by purple text. Finally, legendary items are items with orange text. Items become better quality the rarer they become. Often times, it can take hours to get an epic or legendary piece of equipment, since the chance the item drops is low.

Furthermore, some items come as sets. For example, a complete set of epic armor may consist of six pieces, those being head, shoulders, legs, hands, wrist, and a belt. These sets not only have an aesthetic quality to them, but additional bonuses can be present. An example of this might be a better attack bonus for a player who has all six pieces.

Also, certain equipment can increase player’s statistics, such as a staff increasing intelligence. Therefore, better equipment can hit harder, take more damage, and improve the player in certain areas, such as statistics.

Players can get better items of equipment through quest rewards, from vendors, by creating them, through their dropping off of a defeated monster, by buying them from the Auction House, or by using honor points. Players spend hours trying to get the best equipment, since this allows them to progress farther in the game. This is another way
that players become “more powerful,” in addition to gaining higher levels. In fact, better equipment makes it easier to gain levels.

Equipment that is reserved for players in the mid-sixties to seventies levels is called end-game material. It is called this because those pieces of equipment are reserved for players who have gotten to the zones of the game specifically for level 60-70. End-game material is important to sustaining the game, because it allows players who have reached level 70 to continue having something to attain, thereby keeping their interest.

Game play in one sitting usually lasts a few hours, with some of my informants playing into the early morning hours. The game is designed to reward players quickly at first, with rewards taking longer to gain as a player advances in level.
Chapter Two

The Sociality of WoW

In the imagery of popular culture concerning video games, players are often awkward, adolescent males isolated from the outside world. However, WoW is a vibrant social space. Robert describes it in the following words:

I mean, I’ve even played first person shooters online, and it’s not personal. Even if you are on a team, and you see that one dude, maybe even talk to him. It’s a whole different thing when you’re spending four, five hours with the same people. Or their avatars [pause] and you’re coming up with strategies. You know, you get in arguments. You get out of arguments. You laugh, you have fun. You go kick somebody’s ass. It’s a lot different when you can go run around the world versus the same map over and over together.

Now, one would expect other online games, such as first person shooters (where the perspective of the game is in the first person) or online sporting games (basketball, hockey, etc.), to have the same amount of socialization. After all, those types of games have groups of people interacting in a graphical space to achieve a common goal. Yet, WoW is different because of the scope of the world. This game is a total immersive experience, with a huge world of players with whom to interact and not just the same basketball court over and over again. Also, players of WoW tend to spend more time working together on certain goals. For example, a difficult task can take hours to successfully complete (killing all the monsters, satisfying quest objectives, etc.), while an
online game of basketball may only take an hour. Additionally, the way that the game is
designed helps facilitate the social interactions that happen within the game.

The most obvious aspect of game design is the division of labor within the game,
stemming from both the classes and the professions that a player can learn. Classes all
have strengths and weakness. For example, the warrior class can inflict a lot of damage
and take a considerable amount of damage before dying, yet warriors cannot heal
themselves. The healer can cast healing spells but is physically weak. However, the two
classes together complement each other, making it easier to accomplish tasks (Nardi and
Harris 2006:150). While some classes, such as hunters, can effectively “solo,” much of
the end-game material is impossible to achieve without other players.

Professions work the same way as classes do, with some professions
complementing others. For instance, skinning complements leatherworking, as it allows
players to skin animals, then make armor out of the skin. It is possible for a player to
pick both of those professions and be totally independent. Yet, not every player picks
professions that correspond well with one another, thereby making that player more
reliant on players with the abilities needed for a specific task.

So, with all of the communication channels mentioned previously, the teamwork
needed to achieve goals, fighting other players, and participating in the player generated
economy, WoW is an extremely social space. This is one reason why it draws so many
people, people other than the “typical” gamer. One informant (Nick) described it as
follows:

And I think that’s the appeal of it, what draws the broad spectrum of people (pause) you wouldn’t
expect play Warcraft. Like this girl I know, she’s kinda ghetto, well really ghetto actually
[Laughs]. But she, I was like talking to her, it came out and she was like, “Hell yeah, I play
WoW!" And me and her started talking, you’d never expect that. There’s that whole stigma, that it’s only nerdy people, livin in their parents basement…when in all actuality, it’s neat. It’s very neat about it. The spectrum of people that play it is very broad. More than you would think.

Here my informant and the girl he is referring to also have a common ground through WoW, even though they are two completely different people with different lifestyles. Yet, they can connect offline through discussing the game. Shared interest enables people to develop friendships, and it also allows friendships to occur in WoW. Not only that, but shared interest also is a foundation to the construction of culture. These two different people can have a dialogue concerning the game (strategy, favorite zones, common annoyances, etc.) thereby continuing learned behavior and ideas about the game, thereby creating its culture. Besides having a shared interest in the game, these two also share cultural images, strategies, lexicons, etc., that are associated with the game. Additionally, as players of this game, both have had similar experiences that set the foundation of their conversation, as well as providing a way to make evaluations of the other person as a player and person. It is difficult to see if having the shared experience of WoW would allow them to be friends outside of the game. Yet, when they are together it will be easier for the two of them to relate despite their life-style differences.

Making friends in the game is a common occurrence. This once again is counter to the view that online games are an isolating phenomenon. As one informant (Ivan) described it:

I’ve (pause) probably [made] countless numbers [of friends]. I could probably still go back to Aggramar [a Server], and just like jump on Vent [a VOIP program], and say, “Hey guys, this is Haxx,” and it’d be like, “Oh dude Haxx, haven’t heard from you in a real long time. How’s that whole Japanese thing going?” They just don’t know, “Hey, you’re in the game.” They knew you,
they knew where you lived, who you hung out with in the game, what kind of player you were, what you really liked to do, what times you were available…that kind of thing. Even though it’s been so long, they would still probably know you.

These players know a considerable amount of personal information about my informant. To Ivan, this meant a more personal connection and what he considers to be a key component to friendship. I would have to agree with him, since there is a difference between playing with others and actually knowing what these other people like, dislike, or what these people do outside of the game. Thus, one does not just need other players to accomplish tasks but in interacting with them learns a great deal about them. This allows players to feel like they know each other in a meaningful way.

Deeper bonds also form through interacting with players. These emotional bonds can move into romantic relationships (Yee 2006b), or involve sharing pain and loss. Nick described how he shared a particularly hard moment with a friend he had made in the game:

When I was on Shandris, before I transferred my toon over, couple of the people that I played with, like I was talking to them [pause] him and his girlfriend played. And his brother died. And I talked to him for about two hours about it. His brother died of a drug overdose. I could relate to that, you know having friends die of that. I know what they’re going through. It was something, it was beyond [pause] obviously I would have never meet this person, and I don’t really know this person in real life [pause]. They are people that you have spent a lot of time with. You know, it may not be people that you are actually physically hanging out with, but its still people you are hanging out with. There is a certain amount of relationship that develops, and when things happen in their real life you have a certain amount of emotional investment in. I told the guy, “I’m thinking about you. I really am. I hope you get through this. It’s gonna be sucky.” And I’m not
gonna lie, I almost went to tears. Like I really did. I was really sorry he had to go through that. It was somebody I had spent a shit load of time with.

Even though Nick states that “I don’t really know this person in real life,” he is able to empathize with him like he would a friend offline. Plus, discussing a painful moment in one’s life, such as losing a sibling to drugs, is a real emotional conversation that the players were having. This is another counter to the claim that online games are isolating. If these games were isolating, then this type of deep emotional connection between the two players would not have happened.

Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP) features, such as Vent, Teamspeak, or the built-in voice option within the game allows players more than the opportunity to free their hands from typing commands during gameplay. VOIP also gives players a sense of “knowing” others better than just typing. Most of my informants who used VOIP felt that it allowed them to get to know a player better than by just questing. This is because players can hear the voices of other people that they are playing with, thus creating a more intimate connection through hearing the emotion in a player’s voice. So, closeness comes not just with shared experiences and working toward a common goal, but also with those expressive elements in voice communication that gives us insight into who another person is.

By far, the most social groups in WoW are the guilds. A guild is “a collection of players who have joined together to create a mutually beneficial relationship with each other” (Blizzard Entertainment 2004:145). Guilds are social networks in the game that provide assistance and goods to other members of that particular association.
To start a guild, a player must purchase a guild charter from a guildmaster NPC for 10 silver. Then, the player must get 10 signatures from other players and return the charter to the guild master to register the guild. It is not uncommon for players asking for charter signatures to ask in general chat, as well as offering payment for signatures. The ten players who signed the charter do not have to stay in the guild once it is registered.

Why players start guilds varies. Some create guilds to socialize with others. Others create guilds to make a name for themselves and their guild, through successfully achieving end-game material. More importantly, guilds are communities within the overall game community of WoW.

Guilds vary in size and structure. Guild size can be small (1 to 10 members), medium (11 to 35 members), large (36 to 150 members), and huge (over 150 members), (Williams, Duchenaunt, Xiong, Zhang, Yee, and Nickell 2006:343). These numbers are a rough estimate, as guild members often have alts that are in the guild. So, a player could have five characters on his account in the same guild.

All guilds have a hierarchical structure to them. At the top there is a guild master, who is in charge of the guild, officers who are under the guild master, followed by the rank-and-file. As for the structure of the guilds, there are two types--family and raiding guilds. The family guild is more laid back in their approach to the game. These guilds are more concerned with the social aspects of the game. This is not to say that they are unconcerned with end-game material, it is just that their level of commitment is not as high as the raiding guilds. Raiding guilds are solely concerned with the end-game aspect of WoW. These are the groups that are typically considered “the most glamorous” (Williams et al. 2006:345).
Guild names appear under the players names in between brackets. For example, under my character’s name appears my guild’s name, <Immortal>. Guild Masters also design a tabard (sleeveless shirt), which guild members can purchase from a tabard vendor. This is significant for players, as it stands as symbol of guild membership.

Guild ties for players can vary. One informant said he joined a guild so that they would “stop bugging me.” Another said that guilds are “Actually, not really (important). I like playing with people, you know, seeing people online. It’s casual. I like telling people what’s up.” To these two players, guilds are a social venue for them to interact with other players, but not necessarily the most important feature of the game.

Still, for the majority of my informants, the guild relationships are very important. Ivan states:

“I’d still be dropping bosses in the Eye, and I’d be dropping bosses in Serpent, going to Black Temple. But, it wouldn’t hold me as tight as the people in the guild that I’m in now.”

Ivan could be completing end-game dungeons on a previous server he was on. By this, I mean that he would be completing tasks in the game that only a certain percent of players get to. Yet, the guild that he is in now is more important to him than getting some of the high-end gear that many players try so hard to attain. Ivan plays WoW because of his social network in the game, the people he has come to know and respect.

More often than not, exchanges within the guild follow along the lines of generalized reciprocity, when a good or service is given for nothing in return (Sahlins 1972). One of my informants summed up this type of reciprocity as:

I get in the guild people are like, “Hey man, you got any large prismatics?” I’m like, “Yeah.” He’s like, “How much?” I’m like, “No, free.” And he’s like, “Why?” “Cause you’re a guildie.” Guildies got each other’s backs.
Now, this player also expects reciprocity from the other guild members, whether it is that particular guild member or others. When reciprocity does not happen, the bonds that hold the guild together begin to disintegrate. This point will be addressed later in the thesis.

Not every exchange in guilds is that harmonious. Blizzard very recently added a new feature to the game, the guild bank. The guild banks are right next to the banks in the major cities in the game. Guild members can donate money, materials, and items to the vault, which other members can access, depending on how the guild master sets up withdrawals.

Like economics in real life, arguments in the game about bank issues can become serious amongst guild members. Two of my informants discussed this issue in the following:

T: The Guild Bank was the worst. You got so many people arguing over imaginary stuff. Like, and I said, “The reason I play this game is to get away from real life, and you guys are making me feel like I’m there.” You know, it’s just a game.

R: When I got this recent run as the Guild Master, that’s when the Guild Bank started. That’s when I said, “Nobody can take anything. Nobody can do anything. I’ll deal with the Guild Bank. You want something, talk to me. Blah blah blah.” And I started going, “Well, you can have access, and you can have access. I’ve known you for years, and you’re not going to be stupid about it.” And then people were mad because they had to ask people to get stuff out of the Guild Bank. If I let it all go, let everyone have access to it, then it’s gonna be empty with people going, “Man, I donated a bunch of shit, and this person took stuff out without putting in anything, any gold.” It’s like (sigh), it’s just a bunch of stupid problems. It’s like, don’t use it. For the people I don’t know, I’m not going to allow you to [have] this stuff. Even though it’s imaginary stuff, I
can’t allow you to take it, cause somebody spent real time which is costing real money to go get that stuff.

As Robert stated, the time spent on earning an item gives it a value that is more real than the value of the item inside the game. Additional, Robert realizes that these items are “imaginary stuff,” but also have real monetary value due to the subscription fees paid, thereby enabling the player to have the game-play time needed to earn them. This further illustrates the paradox of play, that it is both real and imagined. It is understood that these items are not real in a physical, tangible sense, but inside the magic circle these items are “real.” Furthermore, Robert understands that reciprocity is an important aspect of running a successful guild, and players who do not understand that would bleed the guild bank dry if they had the chance. These points will also be addressed later.

Outside of the game, players still connect in many ways. There are databases where players post information about quests, equipment, how certain monsters attack, etc. There are message boards where dialogues happen between players on all kinds of topics, most of them game related. The previous two examples also indicate how players once again create the culture of the game and try to enculturate other players into it by enforcing reciprocity and by discussing ideas on how to play effectively and what it means to be a specific class (such as how to properly play a priest).

Of course, there is game-related merchandise, which is a clear indicator of playing the game. Ivan states:

But, I mean, it’s a very great way to spark off conversation. One day, I was wearing my WoW shirt in one of my communication classes, and a guy was like, “Hey, you play World of Warcraft.”
I’m like yeah, then I’m like, “Alright, the three questions.” He’s like, “Yeah, I know. I play on this server, here’s my character, here’s my class.” And I’m talking with him, he’s a frost mage. Wow, hey we got a lot to talk about. It’s a real great thing where you can just spark up a conversation. With similarities or differences, either way you get something you can talk about.

Most informants stated the “three questions” were how you initially introduce yourself as a WoW player to other players outside of the game. There are variations to what information is asked for. Another question asked is “Alliance or Horde?” Most of the time, exchanges between players are not hostile. Yet, they can be when it comes to faction identity selection. Robert and Thomas described a somewhat hostile exchange while waiting in line for the midnight release of BC.

R: And most of them are Alliance. Cause we started going, cause you been standing for forty-five minutes in the cold, “So who’s Horde here?” (Mumbled) “Fuck the Horde.” Nobody was Horde! Then these people came around and were like, “Yeah, we’re Horde man.” And then everybody at that point, they know you’re Horde and are like (begins looking around and over his shoulder) (Laughs) You know, it’s me and Mike, who has a red Mohawk, and Eric, who has a shaved head. I’m in a leather jacket, long hair. And they’re like, “So that’s what the Horde looks like. No wonder.”

T: I’m thinking it’s like a Bloods and Crips thing. It’s like you’re a gang.

None of my informants have had a real altercation over this type of faction affiliation. Yet, with the antagonisms between the factions programmed into the game, and with PvP allowing for players to fight each other, it is not surprising that players have hostility towards the other faction. This also shows how players of the game perceive the members of other factions. Typically, the Alliance is viewed as the faction that children play as well as people new to the MMO genre, and “clean-cut” types. The Horde covers
the other side of the spectrum, where the players are older, more experienced MMO players (Yee 2006a), and the “outcasts.” This became all the more clear one time when I was in a tattoo shop in Muncie. The head piercer was playing WoW on his laptop, which started a conversation between the two of us. I followed with the typical three questions. When he admitted that he was Alliance, he looked down at the ground, as if embarrassed that he of all people, covered in piercings and tattoos, would play the clean-cut faction. His reason for belonging to the Alliance was that all of his EQ friends in the game (who had all moved to WoW after its release) were in that faction, further elucidating the ties he wished to maintain with his friends. However, he clearly was torn between his ties to his friends and the created player culture of who plays on what side.

Still, this is not something that is set in stone. Regardless of the faction one plays, WoW players are still connected as players of the game, which gives them all a common ground. Ivan said:

Mostly, there’s unrest between Alliance and Horde, but you can still get along. I mean, if I run into an Alliance person, who rolls a frost mage…we got something in common. I can talk to you about it.

One final point to consider is how the game is played by players who have distinct real-world ties with one another. It is not uncommon in the game to have families playing together. One informant used WoW as a way to discuss roles in the family. She played with her husband, and when she was upset with him in real life over his lack of participation in domestic labor, she would let him die by not healing him (she played a priest). After talking about it, the husband began to do more chores around the house.
WoW also can connect families over a distance. Thomas was divorced and had to share custody of his son with his ex-wife, who has their son a majority of the time. Yet, both father and son play together. Not only that, but the game is also used as a way to just communicate between the two of them:

It’s like, we’re spending time together cause he doesn’t live with me. Through the game, I’m always there. He can go, “Dad?” So, it’s like I’m there. Even though, a lot of times we don’t play together. He’ll be doing his own thing. I’ll be doing my own thing. He’ll say, “How’re you doing?” We can just communicate.

WoW, for these two players, acts as a way for them to interact when they are not physically together. Thomas can “be the father” to his son, even while playing the game.

The game also connects friends, whether they live in the same community or not.

Robert was even given a computer by a friend, in order to play.

Well, I started playing cause they [his offline friends] were like, “Dude, you gotta get this.” And my buddy, Eric, bought me a computer so I could play the game. Cause I didn’t have a computer at the time. Like boom, here you go a computer. I was like, “Holy shit dude.”

That act cost his friend over seven hundred dollars, which is not an insignificant sum of money. Yet, he felt that it was important to get his friend to play WoW, where they could socialize in another venue.

Nick explained the shared experience that he had with co-workers who also played the game:

We could go to work, talk about it, and then later that night we’d all help each other out and get through it. Like, it was fun, because work sucks, its work. But, you wanna hang out with people, I hang out with people I work with all the time. But, it was something that we all shared, had in common (pause) something we all liked to do. It’s something we all have a shared interest in.
What is interesting about that narrative is the “shared” concept my informant refers to. This shared experience allowed him to connect to others in the workplace who have an interest in WoW. This is also the same type of shared experience that families that play together undergo. Shared experience also creates communities, a point that will be visited later in the paper.

**WoW as a Cultural Text**

Geertz argues that “The culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong” (Geertz 1973:452). It is by the reading of games as text that the latent cultural meanings behind them become apparent. As the Balinese cockfight tells its people what it means to be Balinese, WoW, for its American players, reflects what it means to be American. The question remains, what does it mean to be American? What issues do players confront while playing WoW that are present in everyday life?

According to Bellah et al. (2008), the ultimate cultural identity of Americans is that of being an individual. How a person stands as an individual is a marker of success for Americans. What is meant by the previous statement is that the individual is the primary reality for individualists, while society is second in the individualists’ perception of how life is to be ordered (i.e., the individual, then society). This can be seen in popular entertainment in America, with its loner cowboys, hard-boiled “Dirty Harry” style cops, and super-hero vigilantes fighting for justice outside of society’s laws and doing it largely on their own. In fact, society-at-large is often the reason these heroes have to step outside of the community, since society is presented as being the source of corruption. Even in team-based sports, superstar athletes stand out over the team at
interview time and in advertisements. This is an interesting phenomenon since laws and society are also viewed as being extremely important to holding the nation together as a whole. For Americans learning a team-based sport, or even a position in the workforce, the individual’s importance is placed in respect to his or her “position” on the team. Here is how the ambiguities of social life occur in strong, individualistic cultures, that the exemplars of both fiction and society are individuals who stand outside of the team as well as society-at-large. Americans have to make choices about individualistic pursuits and group commitments, and this is the tension of American life that Americans feel.

For many Americans, individualism demands personal effort and stimulates great energy to achieve, yet it provides little encouragement for nurturance, taking a sink-or-swim approach to moral development as well as to economic success. It admires toughness and strength and fears softness and weakness. It adulates winners while showing contempt for losers, a contempt that can descend with crushing weight on those considered, either by others or by themselves, to be moral or social failures (Bellah et al. 2008:xiv).

This means that outcomes, successful or not, fall on the individual. “You only have yourself to blame,” is a common attitude in America. When it comes to games (and life), America is highly competitive-- winning is very important, even all important for some. This is true in WoW as well, although winning in a game-ending sense is not possible. There is no “winning” objective to the game. It is designed to be unending. Yet, becoming a higher level player with the best equipment becomes the “winning” goal for WoW players. Also, all the points in Bellah et al.’s quote are present in WoW. Players want to interact with other players who are successful and avoid players who are unsuccessful, i.e., players who play their class effectively or not. Ivan describes it as:
But with this kind of game, you have not only you, but you can depend on other individuals. Because you can’t just do things by yourself. I try to break that rule a lot. If I really need to do it, I’ll do it myself. But for the most part, really deep things in the game, really epic things (pause) you have to have a group of people. And for the most part, you have to know those people. You have to know that you can count on those people, know they’re competent individuals.

This quote illustrates the ambiguities that are present in America’s reconciliation of the individual with the community, ambiguities that WoW presents to its players as a cultural text. Ivan understands that there are impossible tasks in the game, impossible in the sense that an individual would not be able to achieve their completion alone. Yet, he tries to go against this whenever he can. It could be argued that he is making the decision to go alone on difficult tasks due to situational reasons. For example, there is no one to team-up with on a difficult task, but he still wants to get the loot that is available after the task is complete thus making Ivan “go at it alone.” However, even a situational reason for going alone alludes to the idea of individualism in America, that an individual is ultimately responsible for himself or herself. Ivan realizes that it is easier to accomplish goals by teaming with other players, yet also is making the statement that no matter what, team or no team, he is the reason that he succeeded. Not only that, but Ivan is also seeing if he can accomplish a task that needs others “by himself,” following America’s ideological foundation. This also improved Ivan’s standing in the game, as he was able to achieve difficult goals by himself, thus proving his worth to other players and guild members.

What stands as the best example of community in the game are the guilds. While raiding, battlegrounds, PvP, and PUGs do offer teams for players to use, these are limited groups and may only exist for a task. Players may make friends with other players in
these specific groups and play with them on a regular basis, but the guild lasts much longer than the previously mentioned groups. Guild members team up together more frequently for difficult quests. After all, this is the point of the guild system, to have a social network for players to rely on. As mentioned earlier in the thesis, guild members follow generalized reciprocity through directly helping a player, making a player an item to use, or donating to the guild bank. In addition, guild members will also provide information to other guild members on how to play a class better (such as a warrior or priest), or on how to defeat certain monsters. WoW itself stands as the “magic circle” of the game, providing the overall community for the players; the guilds stand as communities of memory for their members. A community of memory is defined as a community that does not forget its past (Bellah et al. 2008:153). The guild has a sense of history to it, more than the overall game community does. Through guilds, players can achieve whatever goal they may have in the game. If a player wants to get end-level gear, then a dedicated raid-style guild will be his or her choice. If a player is more casual in his or her game play, then a family-style guild suits that type of play. It is the guildmaster that sets up the community he or she wants. So, a guildmaster can make it mandatory to play five days a week for his or her guild members. Those who do not adhere to this rule will get kicked out of the guild. This is because, in keeping with its role as a community of memory, the guildmaster is trying to continue “the memory” of the guild, which in turn keeps the community running.

Communities of memory operate as strong communities because “the ties to the past also turn us towards the future as communities of hope” (Bellah et al. 2008:153). This is what makes a community lasting, by connecting its members to the larger whole.
and the common good. This is why a culture’s history is important to its members, because it gives all of its members a sense of where it’s been and what is important to them. Take the Pilgrims for example. This is an important historical story for Americans, as it tells the story of a group facing religious persecution in Europe, who fled to America in search of religious freedom. Religious freedom, like freedom as a whole, is an important aspect of American culture, so it is not surprising that this is an important lesson that is taught to Americans about what it means to be American.

 Guilds follow this same principle in creating a strong community, that memory is a key component to the overall construction of community. Friendships, fun game sessions, and a network of players to assist players all are factors in maintaining the community of a guild, but without a way of linking a player to a larger conception of a common goal there is no way to keep a player in a guild. Players can maintain friends from other guilds and having fun game sessions with them without being in the same guild. A player stays in a guild because he or she feels like a part of a larger whole, a community of players who share the same sense of history and projections into the future as to what the guild should be. Ivan stated earlier that had he stayed on a previous server, he would have all of the end-level gear. Yet, the guild he was currently in was more important to him. Now, the friendships that he has made in that guild are undoubtedly a reason for him to stay. But, a player can maintain friendships with players of different guilds. In theory, Ivan could leave the guild he is in but still be able to quest with the friends he has made in it. There is nothing in the rules of the game that would prevent that action. However, Ivan chooses to stay in the guild, because he shares the “memory” of the guild. He understands that this network helped him to achieve his goals, goals that
were the same as his guilds’. And by sharing that “memory” he projects himself, and the
guild as a whole, into the future of the game, thereby sustaining the community of which
he has become a part. The “memory” of the guild is more than just shared goals (quests,
equipment, etc.). It is also shared commitments to one another. If it was a matter of only
accomplishing tasks, then Ivan could have stayed in his previous guild and achieved end-
level tasks (difficult dungeons, epic equipment, etc).

Nick elegantly describes this in the following:

Like Harold’s character. It’s like he’s an elder in the society. He takes the knowledge that he’s
gained through the years and applies it. Like you can look at it as the society of Warcraft. A
younger player, I ran a noob [a new player] through ShadowFang Keep [a dungeon in WoW]. He
offered to pay, but I was like, “Nah, I’ll do it for fun.” And just ran him through it. That was
because I ran it so much, and I was 61, so I could handle the mobs [groups of monsters]. That’s
like the community helping. You have the knowledge, abilities, and skills to help somebody that
doesn’t. It’s like teaching. I learned by having Harold run me a few times how to do it. When he
was running me through, I watched and learned everything. Like when you’re done, you jump
over the edge of the castle, and it resets the instance [another name for a dungeon]. You don’t
have to run back through it, and kill respawned mobs [regenerated groups of monsters]. Like, I
learned that from watching him. So, I did that with the guy I was running through. I was like,
“You didn’t get what you needed. Come on, let’s do it again. I got time.” Cause it only took me
like twenty minutes to run the kid through it. It’s the learning curve. And as a higher level
character, you should be able to do that, teach other people the tricks.

What he is describing is that guilds operate as communities of memory. This knowledge
that is shared is not only knowledge at an instrumental level (how to effectively run
ShadowFang Keep), but also imparting knowledge about how to treat other members of
the guild. Nick learned from Harold the tricks to that specific dungeon, which he in turn
passed on to a new member, but he also learned from Harold that high-level guild members need to take the time to help out lower-level ones. These types of actions are what maintain the guild.

Of course, players are going to bring their culture with them when they play. According to Bellah, Americans live in “a society that encourages us to cut free from the past, to define our own selves, to choose groups with which we wish to identify” (Bellah et al. 2008:154). This is a strong argument, as America’s history has been that of moving beyond original group commitments to individual pursuits. The American colonists rebelled against the British Empire, claiming that the colonies built themselves from the ground up, while forgetting both monetary and military support that was given to the colonists early on. Americans leave the family as part of the full transition into adulthood. When a better job or better personal relationship comes along, Americans often leave their previous ones in order to go for the better options.

It appears that this would be the case for WoW. Players do leave guilds for better ones, such as a player who feels he or she is ready to tackle the more difficult areas of the game, while the guild he or she may be in currently is not dedicated to such goals. My informants all stated that they had moved into the guilds that they were currently part of through learning about the game. This is not necessarily a bad thing, since more dedicated players will want to play with other like-minded players. The players that become a problem to the communities of WoW are “play the game for them” players--players who try to act as radical individuals while still using others for assistance.

A radical individualist is someone who acts as if he or she is an end unto him or herself, completely detached from the rest of society. Bellah et al. argues that this is an
analytical concept, one that is not really present in the real world (2008). However, in WoW a player can truly emulate this style of individualism. One of my informants (Paul) described this in the following, “And now it’s become (pause) any monkey can level up. Anybody can PvP, and either kill, or zerg [a mad charge in large numbers] their way to an epic.” Paul is pointing out specific changes that Blizzard has made to make the game enjoyable for every player. Leveling to 70 is something that can be done by a solitary player, but it may take some time for the physically weaker classes, such as priests or mages. Yet, Blizzard recently lowered the experience needed to get to level 60, making it easier for weaker classes to get there. The experience needed to get from 60 to 70 stayed the same, so it is better to get other players to help out at this point, especially since this is the point in the game where other players are needed to accomplish high level quests. But a player can level without other players; it just may take a little more time. Also, epic-level equipment can be gained through PvP battles, which allows players to get epics without having to take the time and create the strategy needed to complete difficult dungeons for the same equipment.

Enabling a player to act as a radical individual leads to conflicts in guilds. The tension of rational choices versus commitments to community is not the problem. The problem now lies in a game that can allow players to behave more like radical individuals in a game-world that is trying to establish communities online.

Thomas explains his view on this phenomenon in the following quote:

But I think the core of it [joining a guild] is so they can get better gear or higher level. It’s like togetherness in an aspect of if you already know the people in real life, and hang out. But, if it’s just, you don’t know anybody in your guild, they’re just there to see what they can get. You know, get all you can and go. And a lot of people leave your guild, what we call “play the game
for them” people. They want you to run them through every single quest, get every single item for them, and let them keep all the loot. And run them over, and over, and over, and over…give em gold so they can buy, it’s like, “No dude.” Then they’ll leave the guild. They gotta few levels, then they go to the next guild.

The “play the game for them” players are players who try to act as radical individuals. In this game world, a player can act in this way and still survive, whereas in the real world no one can behave that way. Besides Blizzard making it easier for players to level and gain epic-level equipment, the anonymity the game provides also factors into some players acting as radical individuals. Socially ostracizing “play the game for them” players does not have the same effect as it would outside of the game. After all, players can PvP to get all the best gear. It may take some time, but it can be done. However, the players who are able to “go alone” probably do deserve to call themselves radical individuals. They are beholden to no one, since no other players helped them level up and acquire equipment. What makes a “play the game for them” player different is that these players are playing as if they were radical individuals, when in actuality “play the game for them” players are dependent on others to help them achieve their goals. This is the same self-deception that happens in everyday life of Americans, that a self can truly be unconnected to others, even while being tied to others. When describing the role of other players, Nick states, “Like you look at it, and it’s very ironic in the idea of the game, that you go back to needing people, relying on other people for things you can’t do.” However, needing people is not ironic but necessary for society to function. Not everyone produces food, but everyone needs it, so it then follows that non-producers are truly dependent on food producers for survival. Yet, in America we are disconnected from knowing who produces what goods, and individualism is so firmly set in our
identities as Americans that it is oftentimes overlooked that no one is truly self-reliant. In WoW, players can move closer towards self-reliance, but a “play the game for them” player adopts an identity of self-reliance, while being completely reliant on his or her guild.

This is where the conflicts arise, not because players move to a guild that better suits them, but because players who are “play the game for them” players try to get what they want out of the guild without contributing back. These guilds try to operate as communities of memory, and to have “play the game for them” players disregard that angers guild members. Earlier in the paper, these types of players were the ones who caused problems in Robert’s guild bank. He set up rules to be followed in order for players to get access to the items in the guild bank. He did this because he knew that the “play the game for them” in the guild would take and not give back to the bank. While the “play the game for them” players’ disregard for the commitments to the guild may be an annoyance for guild members, the guild bank issues show how this type of attitude can be destructive to the work put into filling the bank with decent items, which, as Robert previously stated, equals time and money spent.

Earlier, Ivan mentioned how he tries to “break the rule” of running a hard quest by himself. Robert even states that people join guilds to “loot and level.” Both of these points could be argued as radical individualistic statements. However, I would argue that what is happening with these statements is illustrating the ambiguities of living in a strong, individualistic culture. Bellah et al. argues that Americans have two types of discourse, the “first” language of individualism and the “second” language of community, more specifically the languages of tradition and commitment in communities
(Bellah et al. 2008:154). Ivan and Robert are oscillating between these two languages because that is what it “means” to be American. They are both products of a culture that puts importance on the individual, while also promoting the community as the social and moral foundation of society as a whole. So, if games are a metacommentary on the culture, then I would argue that Ivan and Robert’s shifting use of both languages when describing how they play is to be expected, as both of these players are American, playing at what it means to be an individual in a community inside a world of digital fantasy.
Chapter Three

Discussion

Comparing WoW with Calliois’ (1961) classification of games, we can see that it has all of the four elements. Agon and mimicry stand out in WoW as the strongest elements from Calliois’ four categories. The game also coincides with the claims by Roberts et al. (1959) about games being attenuated forms of cultural practices, in this case reflecting the competitive nature of American culture, as well as more complex societies having games of strategy.

More importantly, WoW’s guild communities operate as communities of memory. The guild members work together for common goals and are united together with a shared sense of history, which also serves as a bridge into the future thus continuing the community beyond just completing quests and obtaining gear. In addition, the databases and conversations outside of the game (for example, Nick and the “ghetto girl’s” bar conversation) operate in the same manner. That is, a sense of history is generated that goes beyond just tips on killing monsters to include what it means to play the game and sustain its community. This is also why the piercer in Muncie continues to play as a member of the Alliance, even when he feels more suited for the Horde, because he is a member of a community of memory. He shares their past, as well as their hopes for the future.
Playing games has another important function besides commenting on what it means to be a member of a specific culture. Games allow people to “play” new roles or try new ideas. Within the magic circle, a player enters a new “reality,” which allows him or her to try new roles, to construct identity and create communities. WoW subscribers play WoW because of the interaction with different people. WoW contains features that are present in single-player role-playing games (with the exception of the economy), and if players were not wanting interaction, then they could easily pick up single-player games and get the same type of gameplay and fantasy.

WoW players are doing more than just leveling their characters and equipping themselves with outstanding gear. They are playing because communities of memory can be engaging and fulfilling in a game setting, they are also experiencing why strong communities are important in life outside of the game. These players are using WoW, and MMO’s as a whole, to create a sense of self and communities.

Most players prefer working together with others and sustaining a community that allows for continued, fun play. Yet, WoW also lets people play at an analytical concept that is impossible in “real” life, the radical individual. WoW can enable players to act in such a way since it is a game, and the consequences of acting as a radical individual rarely have consequences in the game. What does become a problem in the game are the players who act as if they are radical individuals when they clearly are not.

Still, players of WoW recognize that these “play the game for them” players are damaging to the guild’s community and to a fun game session. Ivan describes what the guild means to him in the following quote:

I like the idea that it’s a responsibility to your fellow guild mates. Cause when you’re in a guild, you should have…that’s my mentality. Now, I really wish I could enforce that amongst other
individuals. We’ve been having people leaving the guild left and right. Why? We’ve done all
this stuff for you. Not that I’m expecting you to reciprocate, but why don’t you act more in the
aspect of how I’d like you to act, you know? Treat how you wanna be treated. Treat everyone the
best way you can, unless they piss you off, you know? If someone acts like an ass, you’ve lost in
my mind the right for me to treat you like a civil individual. Which, that’s the whole thing. You
scratch my back, I scratch yours.

By responsibility, Ivan is talking about the memory of the guild. He also criticizes the
same thing that Thomas described, players who join guilds, get what they can out of
them, and move on. This angers him, as he points out when he states “We’ve done all
this stuff for you.” He gets mad at this type of player because he or she has entered a
community, but does not respect the goals, the memory, and the future of the guild.
Ultimately, Ivan does want players to act the way that he wants them to, but he is a
product of an individualistic culture, and forcing a player to act a certain way would take
freedom of play away from that player. Loss of freedom is punishment in America
(imprisonment being a punishment for an offender), but WoW does not have mechanics
to prohibit freedom of play. Players may get kicked out of the game for harassing other
players, running a bot, or by offering farming services to others, but being a “play the
game for them” player is not grounds for being kicked out of the game. The worst that
happens to that type of player would be getting kicked out of the guild, what Ivan
describes as losing the right to be treated “like a civil individual.”

While players can take individualism to the fullest, most of my informants saw
this as detrimental to the game, not only because my informants understand that the game
requires teamwork for most of the end-level aspects (equipment, quests, etc.), but also
because of such players’ lack of commitment to the communities in the game. However,
WoW differs from how other types of games speak to members of their cultures. Whereas the cockfight is a public event that speaks to all members of Balinese culture, WoW operates as a quasi-public event. Players bring their culture with them and eventually manipulate and enact aspects of their culture that they like or dislike. To put it another way, they are “playing” with their culture, and since this is not a public event, there are fewer restraints for this type of culture play than there would be in a public event. Even with 10 million players, people who play WoW need a computer and the ability to pay the monthly fee required for subscription, which not everyone can achieve. But the people who do play fall into the middle-class category of American life, which Bellah et al. argues is where the conflict of community and the individual happen the most (2008). And such players are addressing these tensions, by playing at creating strong communities of memory, which I would argue are lacking in their everyday life. As mentioned earlier, such players are playing WoW, and MMO’s as a whole, because the game allows them to play at how a strong community operates.
Conclusion

WoW, and MMO’s as a whole, let people play different roles. More importantly, the game can be used as a pedagogical tool for teaching what makes communities strong, and how dangerous radical individualism can be.

“It’s just a game,” is oftentimes how WoW is viewed. However, it really is more than that. In fact, if we take what anthropology has said about games, then WoW is not just a game. Players take their culture with them when they play, as well as being able to act in ways that may or may not be good for society as a whole. But, that is what games provide for people, a way to see how certain actions add or subtract from the experience of life.

For my informants, WoW is a game where they want to be strong players and have fun. What makes MMO’s fun is not necessarily having the highest level or best gear, but also being able to interact with people in new and different ways. The skills that make a player a valuable one are the same as they are in real life (discipline, teamwork, loyalty). What is different is that players can create the types of communities they want with others, to add themselves to something that moves them beyond just simply playing a game, and to creating a community that will last after they log off.
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1. Grant of a Limited Use License. If you agree to this License Agreement, computer software (hereafter referred to as the "Game Client") will be installed onto your hardware. If your hardware meets the minimum requirements, the installation of the Game Client will enable you to play the Game by accessing your account with the Service (your "Account"). Subject to your agreement to and continuing compliance with this License Agreement, Blizzard hereby grants, and you hereby accept, a limited, non-exclusive license to (a) install the Game Client on one or more computers owned by you or under your legitimate control, and (b) use the Game Client in conjunction with the Service for your non-commercial entertainment purposes only. All use of the Game Client is subject to this License Agreement and to the Terms of Use agreement, both of which you must accept before you can use your Account to play the Game.

2. Service and Terms of Use. As mentioned above, you must accept the Terms of Use in order to access the Service to play the Game. The Terms of Use agreement governs all aspects of game play. You may view the Terms of Use by visiting the following website: [http://www.worldofwarcraft.com/legal/termsofuse.shtml](http://www.worldofwarcraft.com/legal/termsofuse.shtml). If you do not agree with the Terms of Use, then (a) you may not register for an Account to play the Game, and (b) you may call (800)757-7707 within thirty (30) days after the original purchase to arrange to return the Game and to request a full refund of the purchase price. Once you accept the License Agreement and the Terms of Use, you will no longer be eligible for a refund.
3. Ownership.

A. All title, ownership rights and intellectual property rights in and to the Game and all copies thereof (including without limitation any titles, computer code, themes, objects, characters, character names, stories, dialog, catch phrases, locations, concepts, artwork, character inventories, structural or landscape designs, animations, sounds, musical compositions and recordings, audio-visual effects, storylines, character likenesses, methods of operation, moral rights, and any related documentation) are owned or licensed by Blizzard. The Game is protected by the copyright laws of the United States, international treaties and conventions, and other laws. The Game may contain materials licensed by third parties, and the licensors of those materials may enforce their rights in the event of any violation of this License Agreement.

B. You may permanently transfer all of your rights and obligations under the License Agreement to another by physically transferring the original media (e.g., the CD-ROM or DVD you purchased), all original packaging, and all Manuals or other documentation distributed with the Game; provided, however, that you permanently delete all copies and installations of the Game in your possession or control, and that the recipient agrees to the terms of this License Agreement. The transferor (i.e., you), and not Blizzard, agrees to be solely responsible for any taxes, fees, charges, duties, withholdings, assessments, and the like, together with any interest, penalties, and additions imposed in connection with such transfer.

4. Responsibilities of End User.

A. Subject to the license granted hereunder, you may not, in whole or in part, copy, photocopy, reproduce, translate, reverse engineer, derive source code from, modify, disassemble, decompile, or create derivative works based on the Game, or remove any proprietary notices or labels on the Game. Failure to comply with the restrictions and limitations contained in this Section 4 shall result in the immediate, automatic termination of the license granted hereunder and may subject you to civil and/or criminal liability. Notwithstanding the foregoing, you may make one (1) copy of the Game Client and the Manuals for archival purposes only.

B. You agree that you shall not, under any circumstances,
(i) sell, grant a security interest in or transfer reproductions of the Game to other parties in any way not expressly authorized herein, nor shall you rent, lease or license the Game to others;

(ii) exploit the Game or any of its parts, including without limitation the Game Client, for any commercial purpose, including without limitation use at a cyber cafe, computer gaming center or any other location-based site without the express written consent of Blizzard;

(iii) host, provide or develop matchmaking services for the Game or intercept, emulate or redirect the communication protocols used by Blizzard in any way, including without limitation through protocol emulation, tunneling, packet sniffing, modifying or adding components to the Game, use of a utility program or any other techniques now known or hereafter developed, for any purpose, including without limitation unauthorized network play over the Internet, network play utilizing commercial or non-commercial gaming networks, or as part of content aggregation networks; or

(iv) facilitate, create or maintain any unauthorized connection to the Game or the Service, including without limitation any connection to any unauthorized server that emulates, or attempts to emulate, the Service. All connections to the Game and/or the Service, whether created by the Game Client or by other tools and utilities, may only be made through methods and means expressly approved by Blizzard. Under no circumstances may you connect, or create tools that allow you or others to connect, to the Game's proprietary interface other than those expressly provided by Blizzard for public use.

5. Consent to Monitor. WHEN RUNNING, THE GAME MAY MONITOR YOUR COMPUTER'S RANDOM ACCESS MEMORY (RAM) FOR UNAUTHORIZED THIRD PARTY PROGRAMS RUNNING CONCURRENTLY WITH THE GAME. AN "UNAUTHORIZED THIRD PARTY PROGRAM" AS USED HEREIN SHALL BE DEFINED AS ANY THIRD PARTY SOFTWARE, INCLUDING WITHOUT LIMITATION ANY "ADDON," "MOD," "HACK," "TRAINER," OR "CHEAT," THAT IN BLIZZARD'S SOLE DETERMINATION: (i) ENABLES OR FACILITATES CHEATING OF ANY TYPE; (ii) ALLOWS USERS TO MODIFY OR HACK THE GAME INTERFACE, ENVIRONMENT, AND/OR EXPERIENCE IN ANY WAY NOT EXPRESSLY AUTHORIZED BY BLIZZARD; OR (iii) INTERCEPTS, "MINES," OR OTHERWISE COLLECTS INFORMATION FROM OR THROUGH THE GAME. IN
THE EVENT THAT THE GAME DETECTS AN UNAUTHORIZED THIRD PARTY PROGRAM, THE GAME MAY (a) COMMUNICATE INFORMATION BACK TO BLIZZARD, INCLUDING WITHOUT LIMITATION YOUR ACCOUNT NAME, DETAILS ABOUT THE UNAUTHORIZED THIRD PARTY PROGRAM DETECTED, AND THE TIME AND DATE THE UNAUTHORIZED THIRD PARTY PROGRAM WAS DETECTED; AND/OR (b) EXERCISE ANY OR ALL OF ITS RIGHTS UNDER THIS AGREEMENT, WITH OR WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE TO THE USER.

6. Termination. This License Agreement is effective until terminated. You may terminate the License Agreement at any time by (i) permanently destroying all copies of the Game in your possession or control; (ii) removing the Game Client from your hard drive; and (iii) notifying Blizzard of your intention to terminate this License Agreement. Blizzard may terminate this Agreement at any time for any reason or no reason. In such event, you must immediately and permanently destroy all copies of the Game in your possession and control and remove the Game Client from your hard drive. Upon termination of this Agreement for any reason, all licenses granted herein shall immediately terminate.

7. Export Controls. The Game may not be re-exported, downloaded or otherwise exported into (or to a national or resident of) any country to which the U.S. has embargoed goods, or to anyone on the U.S. Treasury Department's list of Specially Designated Nationals or the U.S. Commerce Department's Table of Denial Orders. You represent and warrant that you are not located in, under the control of, or a national or resident of any such country or on any such list.

8. Patches and Updates. Blizzard may deploy or provide patches, updates and modifications to the Game that must be installed for the user to continue to play the Game. Blizzard may update the Game remotely, including, without limitation, the Game Client residing on the user's machine, without the knowledge or consent of the user, and you hereby grant to Blizzard your consent to deploy and apply such patches, updates and modifications.

9. Duration of the "On-line" Component of the Game. This Game is an 'on-line' game that must be played over the Internet through the Service as provided by Blizzard. You understand and agree that the Service is provided by Blizzard at its discretion and may be terminated or otherwise discontinued by Blizzard pursuant to the Terms of Use.
10. Limited Warranty. THE GAME (INCLUDING WITHOUT LIMITATION THE GAME CLIENT AND MANUAL(S)) IS PROVIDED "AS IS" WITHOUT WARRANTY OF ANY KIND, EITHER EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING WITHOUT LIMITATION ANY IMPLIED WARRANTIES OF CONDITION, UNINTERRUPTED USE, MERCHANTABILITY, FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE, OR NONINFRINGEMENT. The entire risk arising out of use or performance of the Game (including without limitation the Game Client and Manual(s)) remains with the user. Notwithstanding the foregoing, Blizzard warrants up to and including 90 days from the date of your purchase of the Game that the media containing the Game Client shall be free from defects in material and workmanship. In the event that such media proves to be defective during that time period, and upon presentation to Blizzard of proof of purchase of the defective media, Blizzard will at its option (a) correct any defect, (b) provide you with a similar product of similar value, or (b) refund your money. THE FOREGOING IS YOUR SOLE AND EXCLUSIVE REMEDY FOR THE EXPRESS WARRANTY SET FORTH IN THIS SECTION. Some states do not allow the exclusion or limitation of implied warranties, so the above limitations may not apply to you.

11. Limitation of Liability, Indemnity. NEITHER BLIZZARD NOR ITS PARENT, SUBSIDIARIES OR AFFILIATES SHALL BE LIABLE IN ANY WAY FOR ANY LOSS OR DAMAGE OF ANY KIND ARISING OUT OF THE GAME OR ANY USE OF THE GAME, INCLUDING WITHOUT LIMITATION LOSS OF DATA, LOSS OF GOODWILL, WORK STOPPAGE, COMPUTER FAILURE OR MALFUNCTION, OR ANY AND ALL OTHER DAMAGES OR LOSSES. FURTHER, NEITHER BLIZZARD NOR ITS PARENT, SUBSIDIARIES OR AFFILIATES SHALL BE LIABLE IN ANY WAY FOR ANY LOSS OR DAMAGE TO PLAYER CHARACTERS, VIRTUAL GOODS (E.G., ARMOR, POTIONS, WEAPONS, ETC.) OR CURRENCY, ACCOUNTS, STATISTICS, OR USER STANDINGS, RANKS, OR PROFILE INFORMATION STORED BY THE GAME AND/OR THE SERVICE. BLIZZARD SHALL NOT BE RESPONSIBLE FOR ANY INTERRUPTIONS OF SERVICE, INCLUDING WITHOUT LIMITATION ISP DISRUPTIONS, SOFTWARE OR HARDWARE FAILURES, OR ANY OTHER EVENT WHICH MAY RESULT IN A LOSS OF DATA OR DISRUPTION OF SERVICE. IN NO EVENT WILL BLIZZARD BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ANY INDIRECT, INCIDENTAL, SPECIAL, EXEMPLARY OR CONSEQUENTIAL DAMAGES. In no event shall Blizzard's liability, whether arising in contract, tort, strict liability or otherwise, exceed (in the aggregate) the total fees paid by you to Blizzard during the six (6) months prior to the time such claim arose. You hereby agree to defend, indemnify and hold Blizzard harmless from and against any claim, liability, loss, injury, damage, cost or expense (including reasonable attorneys' fees) incurred by Blizzard arising out of or from your use of the Game. Some states do not allow the exclusion or limitation of incidental or consequential damages, so the above limitations may not apply to you.
12. Equitable Remedies. You hereby agree that Blizzard would be irreparably damaged if the terms of this License Agreement were not specifically enforced, and therefore you agree that Blizzard shall be entitled, without bond, other security, or proof of damages, to appropriate equitable remedies with respect to breaches of this License Agreement, in addition to such other remedies as Blizzard may otherwise have available to it under applicable laws. In the event any litigation is brought by either party in connection with this License Agreement, the prevailing party in such litigation shall be entitled to recover from the other party all the costs, attorneys’ fees and other expenses incurred by such prevailing party in the litigation.

13. Changes to the Agreement. Blizzard reserves the right, at its sole discretion, to change, modify, add to, supplement or delete any of the terms and conditions of this License Agreement when Blizzard upgrades the Game Client, effective upon prior notice as follows: Blizzard will post notification of any such changes to this License Agreement on the World of Warcraft website and will post the revised version of this License Agreement in this location, and may provide such other notice as Blizzard may elect in its sole discretion. If any future changes to this License Agreement are unacceptable to you or cause you to no longer be in compliance with this License Agreement, you may terminate this License Agreement in accordance with Section 5 herein. Your installation and use of any updates or modifications to the Game or your continued use of the Game following notice of changes to this Agreement will demonstrate your acceptance of any and all such changes. Blizzard may change, modify, suspend, or discontinue any aspect of the Game at any time. Blizzard may also impose limits on certain features or restrict your access to parts or all of the Game without notice or liability. You have no interest, monetary or otherwise, in any feature or content contained in the Game.

14. Dispute Resolution and Governing Law

a. Informal Negotiations. To expedite resolution and control the cost of any dispute, controversy or claim related to this License Agreement ("Dispute"), you and Blizzard agree to first attempt to negotiate any Dispute (except those Disputes expressly provided below) informally for at least 30 days before initiating any arbitration or court proceeding. Such informal negotiations commence upon written notice from one person to the other. Blizzard will send its notice to your billing address and email you a copy to the email address you have provided to us. You will send your notice to Blizzard Entertainment, Inc., P.O. Box 18979, Irvine CA 92623, attn: Legal Department.
b. Binding Arbitration. If you and Blizzard are unable to resolve a Dispute through informal negotiations, either you or Blizzard may elect to have the Dispute (except those Disputes expressly excluded below) finally and exclusively resolved by binding arbitration. Any election to arbitrate by one party shall be final and binding on the other. YOU UNDERSTAND THAT ABSENT THIS PROVISION, YOU WOULD HAVE THE RIGHT TO SUE IN COURT AND HAVE A JURY TRIAL. The arbitration shall be commenced and conducted under the Commercial Arbitration Rules of the American Arbitration Association ("AAA") and, where appropriate, the AAA's Supplementary Procedures for Consumer Related Disputes ("AAA Consumer Rules"), both of which are available that the AAA website www adr.org. The determination of whether a Dispute is subject to arbitration shall be governed by the Federal Arbitration Act and determined by a court rather than an arbitrator. Your arbitration fees and your share of arbitrator compensation shall be governed by the AAA Rules and, where appropriate, limited by the AAA Consumer Rules. If such costs are determined by the arbitrator to be excessive, Blizzard will pay all arbitration fees and expenses. The arbitration may be conducted in person, through the submission of documents, by phone or online. The arbitrator will make a decision in writing, but need not provide a statement of reasons unless requested by a party. The arbitrator must follow applicable law, and any award may be challenged if the arbitrator fails to do so. Except as otherwise provided in this License Agreement, you and Blizzard may litigate in court to compel arbitration, stay proceeding pending arbitration, or to confirm, modify, vacate or enter judgment on the award entered by the arbitrator.

c. Restrictions. You and Blizzard agree that any arbitration shall be limited to the Dispute between Blizzard and you individually. To the full extent permitted by law, (1) no arbitration shall be joined with any other; (2) there is no right or authority for any Dispute to be arbitrated on a class-action basis or to utilize class action procedures; and (3) there is no right or authority for any Dispute to be brought in a purported representative capacity on behalf of the general public or any other persons.

d. Exceptions to Informal Negotiations and Arbitration. You and Blizzard agree that the following Disputes are not subject to the above provisions concerning informal negotiations and binding arbitration: (1) any Disputes seeking to enforce or protect, or concerning the validity of, any of your or Blizzard's intellectual property rights; (2) any Dispute related to, or arising from, allegations of theft, piracy, invasion of privacy or unauthorized use; and (3) any claim for injunctive relief.

e. Location. If you are a resident of the United States, any arbitration will take place at any reasonable location convenient for you. For residents outside the United States, any arbitration shall be initiated in the County of Los Angeles, State of California, United
States of America. Any Dispute not subject to arbitration (other than claims proceeding in any small claims court), or where no election to arbitrate has been made, shall be decided by a court of competent jurisdiction within the County of Los Angeles, State of California, United States of America, and you and Blizzard agree to submit to the personal jurisdiction of that court.

f. Governing Law. Except as expressly provided otherwise, this License Agreement shall be governed by, and will be construed under, the Laws of the United States of America and the law of the State of Delaware, without regard to choice of law principles. The application of the United Nations Convention on Contracts for the International Sale of Goods is expressly excluded. For our customers who purchased a license to the Game in, and are a resident of, Canada, Australia, Singapore, or New Zealand, other laws may apply if choose not to agree to arbitrate as set forth above, and in such an event, shall affect this Agreement only to the extent required by such jurisdiction. In such a case, this Agreement shall be interpreted to give maximum effect to the terms and conditions hereof. If you purchased your license to the Game in New Zealand, and are a resident of New Zealand, The New Zealand Consumer Guarantees Act of 1993 ("Act") may apply to the Game and/or the Service as supplied by Blizzard to you. If the Act applies, then notwithstanding any other provision in this License Agreement, you may have rights or remedies as set out in the Act which may apply in addition to, or, to the extent that they are inconsistent, instead of, the rights or remedies set out in this License Agreement. Those who choose to access the Service from locations outside of the United States, Canada, Australia, Singapore, or New Zealand do so on their own initiative and are responsible for compliance with local laws if and to the extent local laws are applicable.

g. Severability. You and Blizzard agree that if any portion Section 14 is found illegal or unenforceable (except any portion of 14(d)) that portion shall be severed and the remainder of the Section shall be given full force and effect. If Section 14(d) is found to be illegal or unenforceable then neither you nor Blizzard will elect to arbitrate any Dispute falling within that portion of Section 14(d) found to be illegal or unenforceable and such Dispute shall be decided by a court of competent jurisdiction within the County of Los Angeles, State of California, United States of America, and you and Blizzard agree to submit to the personal jurisdiction of that court.

15. Miscellaneous. This License Agreement constitutes and contains the entire agreement between the parties with respect to the subject matter hereof and supersedes any prior oral or written agreements, provided, however, that this Agreement shall coexist with, and shall not supersede, the Terms of Use. To the extent that the provisions of this Agreement conflict with the provisions of the Terms of Use, the conflicting provisions in the Terms of Use shall govern.
I hereby acknowledge that I have read and understand the foregoing License Agreement and agree that by clicking "Accept" or installing the Game Client I am acknowledging my agreement to be bound by the terms and conditions of this License Agreement.

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YOU SHOULD CAREFULLY READ THE FOLLOWING WORLD OF WARCRAFT TERMS OF USE AGREEMENT (THE "TERMS OF USE" OR "AGREEMENT"). IF YOU DO NOT AGREE WITH ALL OF THE TERMS OF THIS AGREEMENT, YOU MUST CLICK "REJECT." IF YOU REJECT THIS AGREEMENT WITHIN THIRTY (30) DAYS AFTER FIRST PURCHASING THE WORLD OF WARCRAFT SOFTWARE, YOU MAY CALL (800)757-7707 TO REQUEST A FULL REFUND OF THE PURCHASE PRICE. ONCE YOU AGREE TO THE TERMS OF USE AND THE END USER LICENSE AGREEMENT (EULA), YOU WILL NO LONGER BE ELIGIBLE FOR A REFUND.

Welcome to Blizzard Entertainment, Inc.'s ("Blizzard") "World of Warcraft®" or "World of Warcraft®: The Burning Crusade®" (the "Game"). The Game includes two components: (a) the software program along with any accompanying materials or documentation (collectively, the "Program"), and (b) Blizzard’s proprietary World of Warcraft online service (the "Service"). All use of the Service is governed by the terms and conditions contained in this Agreement, including any future revisions. Any use of the Service not in accordance with the Terms of Use is expressly prohibited.

1. Eligibility.

You represent that you are an adult in your country of residence. You agree to these Terms of Use on behalf of yourself and, at your discretion, for one (1) minor child for whom you are a parent or guardian and whom you have authorized to use the account you create on the Service.

2. Ownership.

All rights and title in and to the Program and the Service (including without limitation any user accounts, titles, computer code, themes, objects, characters, character names, stories, dialogue, catch phrases, locations, concepts, artwork,
animations, sounds, musical compositions, audio-visual effects, methods of operation, moral rights, any related documentation, "applets" incorporated into the Program, transcripts of the chat rooms, character profile information, recordings of games played on the Program, and the Program client and server software) are owned by Blizzard or its licensors. The Program and the Service are protected by United States and international laws. The Program and the Service may contain certain licensed materials, and Blizzard's licensors may enforce their rights in the event of any violation of this Agreement.

3. Establishing an Account.

You may establish one (1) user account (the "Account") on the Service for each Authentication Key you receive from Blizzard. To establish an Account, you will be required to provide Blizzard with certain personal information and the Authentication Key provided to you by Blizzard. Your failure to supply accurate information to Blizzard when requested, or to update that information as it changes, shall constitute a material breach of this Agreement.

During the registration process, you will be required to select a username and a password that are unique to the Account (collectively referred to hereunder as "Login Information"). You may not share the Account or the Login Information with anyone other than as expressly set forth herein.

Notwithstanding anything to the contrary herein, you acknowledge and agree that you shall have no ownership or other property interest in the Account, and you further acknowledge and agree that all rights in and to the Account are and shall forever be owned by and inure to the benefit of Blizzard.

4. Limitations on Your Use of the Service.

1. Only Blizzard or its licensees have the right to host the Game. You may not host or provide matchmaking services for the Game, or intercept, emulate or redirect the proprietary communication protocols used by Blizzard in connection with the Program, regardless of the method used to do so. Such prohibited methods may include, but are not limited to, protocol emulation, reverse engineering, modifying the Program, adding unauthorized components to the Program, or using a packet sniffer while the Program is running.

2. You agree that you will not (i) modify or cause to be modified any files that are a part of the Program or the Service; (ii) create or use cheats, bots, "mods", and/or hacks, or any other third-party software designed to modify the World of Warcraft experience; or (iii) use any third-party software that intercepts, "mines", or otherwise collects information from or through the Program or the Service. Notwithstanding the foregoing, you may update the Program with authorized patches and updates distributed by Blizzard, and Blizzard may, at its sole and absolute discretion, allow the use of certain third party user interfaces.
3. You may not disrupt or assist in the disruption of (i) any computer used to support the Service (each a "Server"); or (ii) any other player's Game experience. ANY ATTEMPT BY YOU TO DISRUPT THE SERVICE OR UNDERMINE THE LEGITIMATE OPERATION OF THE PROGRAM MAY BE A VIOLATION OF CRIMINAL AND CIVIL LAWS. You agree that you will not violate any applicable law or regulation in connection with your use of the Program or the Service.

4. Blizzard reserves the exclusive right to create derivative works based on the Program. You may not create derivative works based on the Program without Blizzard’s prior written consent.

5. Rules of Conduct.

As with all things, your use of the Program is governed by certain rules of conduct. These rules of conduct (the "Rules of Conduct"), maintained and enforced exclusively by Blizzard, must be adhered to by all users of the Service. It is your responsibility to know, understand and abide by these Rules of Conduct. The following rules are not meant to be exhaustive, and Blizzard reserves the right to determine which conduct it considers to be outside the spirit of the Game and to take such disciplinary measures as it sees fit up to and including termination and deletion of the Account. Blizzard reserves the right to modify these Rules of Conduct at any time.

1. Rules Related to Usernames and Guild Designations.

Each user will either select a character name or allow the Program to automatically select a character name at random. Additionally, users may form "guilds" and such guilds will be required to choose a name for the guild. When you choose a character name, create a guild, or otherwise create a label that can be seen by other players using the Program, you must abide by the following guidelines as well as the rules of common decency. If Blizzard finds such a label to be offensive or improper, it may, in its sole and absolute discretion, change the name, remove the label and corresponding chat room, and/or suspend or terminate your use of the Program.

In particular, you may not use any name:

1. Belonging to another person with the intent to impersonate that person, including without limitation a "Game Master" or any other employee or agent of Blizzard;
2. That incorporates vulgar language or which are otherwise offensive, defamatory, obscene, hateful, or racially, ethnically or otherwise objectionable;
3. Subject to the rights of any other person or entity without written authorization from that person or entity;
4. That belongs to a popular culture figure, celebrity, or media personality;
5. That is, contains, or is substantially similar to a trademark or service mark, whether registered or not;
6. Belonging to any religious figure or deity;
7. Taken from Blizzard's Warcraft products, including character names from the Warcraft series of novels;
8. Related to drugs, sex, alcohol, or criminal activity;
9. Comprised of partial or complete sentence (e.g., "Inyourface", "Welovebeef", etc);
10. Comprised of gibberish (e.g., "Asdfasdfs", "Jjxcm", "Hvlldrm");
11. Referring to pop culture icons or personas (e.g. "Britneyspears", "Austinpowers", "Batman")
12. That utilizes "Leet" or "Dudespeak" (e.g., "Roflcopeter", "xxnewbxx", "Roxxoryou")
13. That incorporates titles. For purposes of this subsection, "titles" shall include without limitation 'rank' titles (e.g., "CorporalTed," or "GeneralVlad"), monarchistic or fantasy titles (e.g., "KingMike", "LordSanchez"), and religious titles (e.g., "ThePope," or "Reverend Al").

You may not use a misspelling or an alternative spelling to circumvent the name restrictions listed above, nor can you have a "first" and "last" name that, when combined, violate the above name restrictions.

2. Rules Related to "Chat" and Interaction With Other Users.

Communicating with other Users and Blizzard representatives is an integral part of the Program and is referred to in this document as "Chat." You understand that Blizzard may record your chat sessions and you consent to such monitoring or logging. Your Chat sessions may be subject to monitoring, logging, review, modification, disclosure, and/or deletion by Blizzard without notice to you. Additionally, you hereby acknowledge that Blizzard is under no obligation to monitor Chat, and you engage in Chat at your own risk. When engaging in Chat in the Program, or otherwise utilizing the Program, you may not:

1. Transmit or post any content or language which, in the sole and absolute discretion of Blizzard, is deemed to be offensive, including without limitation content or language that is unlawful, harmful, threatening, abusive, harassing, defamatory, vulgar, obscene, hateful, sexually explicit, or racially, ethnically or otherwise objectionable, nor may you use a misspelling or an alternative spelling to circumvent the content and language restrictions listed above;
2. Carry out any action with a disruptive effect, such as intentionally causing the Chat screen to scroll faster than other users are able to read, or setting up macros with large amounts of text that, when used, can have a disruptive effect on the normal flow of Chat;
3. Disrupt the normal flow of dialogue in Chat or otherwise act in a manner that negatively affects other users including without limitation posting commercial solicitations and/or advertisements for goods and services available outside of the World of Warcraft universe;
4. Sending repeated unsolicited or unwelcome messages to a single user or repeatedly posting similar messages in a Chat area, including but not limited to continuous advertisements to sell goods or services;
5. Communicate or post any user’s personal information in the Program, or on websites or forums related to the Program, except that a user may communicate his or her own personal information in a private message directed to a single user;
6. Use bots or other automated techniques to collect information from the Program or any forum or website owned or administered by Blizzard;
7. Harass, threaten, stalk, embarrass or cause distress, unwanted attention or discomfort to any user of the Program;
8. Cheat or utilize "exploits" while playing the Program in any way, including without limitation modification of the Program’s files;
9. Participate in any action that, in the sole and absolute opinion of Blizzard, results or may result in an authorized user of the Program being "scammed" or defrauded out of gold, weapons, armor, or any other items that user has earned through authorized game play in the Program;
10. Communicate directly with players who are playing characters aligned with the opposite faction (e.g. Horde communicating with Alliance or vice versa); or
11. Impersonate any real person, including without limitation any "game master" or any other Blizzard agent or employee, nor may you communicate in the Game in any way designed to make others believe that your message constitutes a server message or was otherwise posted by any Blizzard agent or employee.

3. *Rules Related to Game Play*

Game play is what World of Warcraft is all about, and Blizzard strictly enforces the rules that govern game play. Blizzard considers most conduct to be part of the Game, and not harassment, so player-killing the enemies of your race and/or alliance, including gravestone and/or corpse camping, is considered a part of the Game. Because the Program is a "player vs. player" game, you should always remember to protect yourself in areas where the members of hostile races can attack you, rather than contacting
Blizzard's in-game customer service representatives for help when you have been killed by an enemy of your race. Nonetheless, certain acts go beyond what is "fair" and are considered serious violations of these Terms of Use. Those acts include, but are not necessarily limited to, the following:

1. Using or exploiting errors in design, features which have not been documented, and/or "program bugs" to gain access that is otherwise not available, or to obtain a competitive advantage over other players;
2. Conduct prohibited by the EULA or these Terms of Use, including without limitation that conduct prohibited by Section 2(C); and
3. Anything that Blizzard considers contrary to the "essence" of the Program.


You are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of your Login Information, and you will be responsible for all uses of your Login Information, whether or not authorized by you. In the event that you become aware of or reasonably suspect any breach of security, including without limitation any loss, theft, or unauthorized disclosure of your Login Information, you must immediately notify Blizzard by emailing wowaccountadmin@blizzard.com.

7. Blizzard’s Absolute Right to Suspend, Terminate and/or Delete the Account.

BLIZZARD MAY SUSPEND, TERMINATE, MODIFY, OR DELETE THE ACCOUNT AT ANY TIME WITH ANY REASON OR NO REASON, WITH OR WITHOUT NOTICE. For purposes of explanation and not limitation, most account suspensions, terminations and/or deletions are the result of violations of this Terms of Use or the EULA.

8. Ownership/Selling of the Account or Virtual Items.

Blizzard does not recognize the transfer of Accounts. You may not purchase, sell, gift or trade any Account, or offer to purchase, sell, gift or trade any Account, and any such attempt shall be null and void. Blizzard owns, has licensed, or otherwise has rights to all of the content that appears in the Program. You agree that you have no right or title in or to any such content, including the virtual goods or currency appearing or originating in the Game, or any other attributes associated with the Account or stored on the Service. Blizzard does not recognize any virtual property transfers executed outside of the Game or the purported sale, gift or trade in the "real world" of anything related to the Game. Accordingly, you may not sell items for "real" money or otherwise exchange items for value outside of the Game.
9. Changes to the Terms of Use Agreement or the Program.

Blizzard reserves the right, at its sole and absolute discretion, to change, modify, add to, supplement or delete any of the terms and conditions of this Agreement at any time, including without limitation access policies, the availability of any feature of the Program, hours of availability, content, data, software or equipment needed to access the Program, effective with or without prior notice; provided, however, that material changes (as determined in Blizzard’s sole and absolute discretion) will be disclosed as follows: Blizzard will provide you with notification of any such changes to the Program through a patch process, or by email, postal mail, website posting, pop-up screen, or in-game notice. If any future changes to this Agreement are unacceptable to you or cause you to no longer be in compliance with this Agreement, you must terminate, and immediately stop using, the Program and the Account. Your continued use of the Program following any revision to this Agreement constitute your complete and irrevocable acceptance of any and all such changes. Blizzard may change, modify, suspend, or discontinue any aspect of the Program at any time. Blizzard may also impose limits on certain features or restrict your access to parts or all of the Program without notice or liability.

10. Termination.

This Agreement is effective until terminated. You may terminate this Agreement by terminating the Account and deleting the Program. In the event that you terminate or breach this Agreement, you will forfeit your right to any and all payments you may have made for pre-purchased game access to World of Warcraft. You agree and acknowledge that you are not entitled to any refund for any amounts which were pre-paid on behalf of the Account prior to any termination of this Agreement. Blizzard may terminate this Agreement with or without notice by terminating your Account. The provisions of Sections 2, 4 and Sections 6-17 shall survive any termination of this Agreement.

11. Warranty Disclaimer

THE PROGRAM IS PROVIDED "AS IS" AND BLIZZARD DOES NOT WARRANT THAT THE PROGRAM WILL BE UNINTERRUPTED OR ERROR-FREE, THAT DEFECTS WILL BE CORRECTED, OR THAT THE PROGRAM OR THE SERVICE ARE FREE OF VIRUSES OR OTHER HARMFUL COMPONENTS. BLIZZARD EXPRESSLY DISCLAIMS ALL WARRANTIES, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING WITHOUT LIMITATION THE WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PARTICULAR PURPOSE OR USE, AND NON-INFRINGEMENT.

12. Limitation of Liability
NEITHER BLIZZARD NOR ITS PARENT, SUBSIDIARIES, LICENSORS OR AFFILIATES SHALL BE LIABLE IN ANY WAY FOR DAMAGE OR LOSS OF ANY KIND RESULTING FROM (A) THE USE OF OR INABILITY TO USE THE PROGRAM OR SERVICE INCLUDING WITHOUT LIMITATION LOSS OF GOODWILL, WORK STOPPAGE, COMPUTER FAILURE OR MALFUNCTION; (B) THE LOSS OR DAMAGE TO PLAYER CHARACTERS, ACCOUNTS, STATISTICS, INVENTORIES, USER PROFILE INFORMATION STORED BY WORLD OF WARCRAFT; OR (C) INTERRUPTIONS OF SERVICE INCLUDING WITHOUT LIMITATION ISP DISRUPTIONS, SOFTWARE OR HARDWARE FAILURES OR ANY OTHER EVENT WHICH MAY RESULT IN A LOSS OF DATA OR DISRUPTION OF SERVICE. IN NO EVENT WILL BLIZZARD BE LIABLE TO YOU OR ANYONE ELSE FOR ANY DIRECT, INDIRECT, INCIDENTAL, SPECIAL, EXEMPLARY OR CONSEQUENTIAL DAMAGES.

13. Force Majeure

Blizzard shall not be liable for any delay or failure to perform resulting from causes outside the reasonable control of Blizzard, including without limitation any failure to perform hereunder due to unforeseen circumstances or cause beyond Blizzard's control such as acts of God, war, terrorism, riots, embargoes, acts of civil or military authorities, fire, floods, accidents, strikes, or shortages of transportation facilities, fuel, energy, labor or materials.


You hereby acknowledge and agree that:

1. WHEN RUNNING, THE PROGRAM MAY MONITOR YOUR COMPUTER'S RANDOM ACCESS MEMORY (RAM) AND/OR CPU PROCESSES FOR UNAUTHORIZED THIRD PARTY PROGRAMS RUNNING CONCURRENTLY WITH WORLD OF WARCRAFT. AN "UNAUTHORIZED THIRD PARTY PROGRAM" AS USED HEREIN SHALL BE DEFINED AS ANY THIRD PARTY SOFTWARE, INCLUDING WITHOUT LIMITATION ANY "ADDON" OR "MOD," THAT IN BLIZZARD'S SOLE DETERMINATION: (i) ENABLES OR FACILITATES CHEATING OF ANY TYPE; (ii) ALLOWS USERS TO MODIFY OR HACK THE WORLD OF WARCRAFT INTERFACE, ENVIRONMENT, AND/OR EXPERIENCE IN ANY WAY NOT EXPRESSLY AUTHORIZED BY BLIZZARD; OR (iii) INTERCEPTS, "MINES," OR OTHERWISE COLLECTS INFORMATION FROM OR THROUGH THE PROGRAM. IN THE EVENT THAT THE PROGRAM DETECTS AN UNAUTHORIZED THIRD PARTY PROGRAM, BLIZZARD MAY (a) COMMUNICATE INFORMATION BACK TO BLIZZARD, INCLUDING WITHOUT LIMITATION YOUR ACCOUNT NAME, DETAILS ABOUT THE UNAUTHORIZED
THIRD PARTY PROGRAM DETECTED, AND THE TIME AND DATE THE UNAUTHORIZED THIRD PARTY PROGRAM WAS DETECTED; AND/OR (b) EXERCISE ANY OR ALL OF ITS RIGHTS UNDER SECTION 6 OF THIS AGREEMENT, WITH OR WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE TO THE USER.

2. WHEN THE PROGRAM IS RUNNING, BLIZZARD MAY OBTAIN CERTAIN IDENTIFICATION INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR COMPUTER AND ITS OPERATING SYSTEM, INCLUDING WITHOUT LIMITATION YOUR HARD DRIVES, CENTRAL PROCESSING UNIT, IP ADDRESS(ES) AND OPERATING SYSTEM(S), FOR PURPOSES OF IMPROVING THE PROGRAM AND/OR THE SERVICE, AND TO POLICE AND ENFORCE THE PROVISIONS OF THIS AGREEMENT AND THE EULA.

3. Blizzard may, with or without notice to you, disclose your Internet Protocol (IP) address(es), personal information, and information about you and your activities in response to a written request by law enforcement, a court order or other legal process. Blizzard may use or disclose your personal information if Blizzard believes that doing so may protect your safety or the safety of others.

4. BLIZZARD MAY RECORD YOUR CHAT SESSIONS AND OTHER ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION TRANSMITTED OR RECEIVED THROUGH THE GAME AND YOU CONSENT TO SUCH MONITORING OR LOGGING.

5. You are wholly responsible for the cost of all telephone and Internet access charges along with all necessary equipment, servicing, repair or correction incurred in maintaining connectivity to the Servers.

15. Equitable Remedies.

In the event that you breach this Agreement, you hereby agree that Blizzard would be irreparably damaged if this Agreement were not specifically enforced, and therefore you agree that Blizzard shall be entitled, without bond, other security, or proof of damages, to appropriate equitable remedies with respect to breaches of this Agreement, in addition to such other remedies as Blizzard may otherwise have available to it under applicable laws. In the event any litigation is brought by either party in connection with this Agreement, the prevailing party in such litigation shall be entitled to recover from the other party all the costs, attorneys’ fees and other expenses incurred by such prevailing party in the litigation.

16. Dispute Resolution and Governing Law

1. Informal Negotiations. To expedite resolution and control the cost of any dispute, controversy or claim related to this Agreement ("Dispute"), you and Blizzard agree to first attempt to negotiate any Dispute (except those Disputes expressly provided below) informally for at least thirty (30) days before initiating any arbitration or court proceeding. Such informal negotiations commence upon written notice from one person to the other.
Blizzard will send its notice to your billing address and email you a copy to the email address you have provided to us. You will send your notice to Blizzard Entertainment, Inc., P.O. Box 18979, Irvine CA 92623, ATTN: Legal Department.

2. **Binding Arbitration.** If you and Blizzard are unable to resolve a Dispute through informal negotiations, either you or Blizzard may elect to have the Dispute (except those Disputes expressly excluded below) finally and exclusively resolved by binding arbitration. Any election to arbitrate by one party shall be final and binding on the other. YOU UNDERSTAND THAT ABSENT THIS PROVISION, YOU WOULD HAVE THE RIGHT TO SUE IN COURT AND HAVE A JURY TRIAL. The arbitration shall be commenced and conducted under the Commercial Arbitration Rules of the American Arbitration Association ("AAA") and, where appropriate, the AAA’s Supplementary Procedures for Consumer Related Disputes ("AAA Consumer Rules"), both of which are available at the AAA website www.adr.org. The determination of whether a Dispute is subject to arbitration shall be governed by the Federal Arbitration Act and determined by a court rather than an arbitrator. Your arbitration fees and your share of arbitrator compensation shall be governed by the AAA Rules and, where appropriate, limited by the AAA Consumer Rules. If such costs are determined by the arbitrator to be excessive, Blizzard will pay all arbitration fees and expenses. The arbitration may be conducted in person, through the submission of documents, by phone or online. The arbitrator will make a decision in writing, but need not provide a statement of reasons unless requested by a party. The arbitrator must follow applicable law, and any award may be challenged if the arbitrator fails to do so. Except as otherwise provided in this Agreement, you and Blizzard may litigate in court to compel arbitration, stay proceeding pending arbitration, or to confirm, modify, vacate or enter judgment on the award entered by the arbitrator.

3. **Restrictions.** You and Blizzard agree that any arbitration shall be limited to the Dispute between Blizzard and you individually. To the full extent permitted by law, (1) no arbitration shall be joined with any other; (2) there is no right or authority for any Dispute to be arbitrated on a class-action basis or to utilize class action procedures; and (3) there is no right or authority for any Dispute to be brought in a purported representative capacity on behalf of the general public or any other persons.

4. **Exceptions to Informal Negotiations and Arbitration.** You and Blizzard agree that the following Disputes are not subject to the above provisions concerning informal negotiations and binding arbitration: (1) any Disputes seeking to enforce or protect, or concerning the validity of, any of your or Blizzard’s intellectual property rights; (2) any Dispute related to, or arising from, allegations of theft, piracy, invasion of privacy or unauthorized use; and (3) any claim for injunctive relief.

5. **Location.** If you are a resident of the United States, any arbitration will take place at any reasonable location within the United States convenient
for you. For residents outside the United States, any arbitration shall be initiated in the County of Los Angeles, State of California, United States of America. Any Dispute not subject to arbitration (other than claims proceeding in any small claims court), or where no election to arbitrate has been made, shall be decided by a court of competent jurisdiction within the County of Los Angeles, State of California, United States of America, and you and Blizzard agree to submit to the personal jurisdiction of that court.

6. **Governing Law.** Except as expressly provided otherwise, this Agreement shall be is governed by, and will be construed under, the Laws of the United States of America and the law of the State of Delaware, without regard to choice of law principles. The application of the United Nations Convention on Contracts for the International Sale of Goods is expressly excluded. For our customers who access the Service from Canada, Australia, Singapore, or New Zealand, other laws may apply if you choose not to agree to arbitrate as set forth above, and in such an event, shall affect this Agreement only to the extent required by such jurisdiction. In such a case, this Agreement shall be interpreted to give maximum effect to the terms and conditions hereof. If you access the Service from New Zealand, and are a resident of New Zealand, The New Zealand Consumer Guarantees Act of 1993 ("Act") may apply to the Game and/or the Service as supplied by Blizzard to you. If the Act applies, then notwithstanding any other provision in this Agreement, you may have rights or remedies as set out in the Act which may apply in addition to, or, to the extent that they are inconsistent, instead of, the rights or remedies set out in this Agreement. Those who choose to access the Service from locations outside of the United States, Canada, Australia, Singapore, or New Zealand do so on their own initiative contrary to the terms of this Agreement, and are responsible for compliance with local laws if and to the extent local laws are applicable.

7. **Severability.** You and Blizzard agree that if any portion Section 16 is found illegal or unenforceable (except any portion of 16(d)), that portion shall be severed and the remainder of the Section shall be given full force and effect. If Section 16(d) is found to be illegal or unenforceable then neither you nor Blizzard will elect to arbitrate any Dispute falling within that portion of Section 16(d) found to be illegal or unenforceable and such Dispute shall be decided by a court of competent jurisdiction within the County of Los Angeles, State of California, United States of America, and you and Blizzard agree to submit to the personal jurisdiction of that court.

17. **Miscellaneous.**

If any provision of this Agreement shall be unlawful, void, or for any reason unenforceable, then that provision shall be deemed severable from this Agreement and shall not affect the validity and enforceability of any remaining provisions. This Terms of Use Agreement is the complete and exclusive statement of the agreement between you and Blizzard concerning the Service, and this Agreement
supersedes any prior or contemporaneous agreement, either oral or written, and any other communications with regard thereto between you and Blizzard; provided, however that this Agreement is in addition to, and does not replace or supplant, the EULA. This Agreement may only be modified as set forth herein. The section headings used herein are for reference only and shall not be read to have any legal effect.

I HEREBY ACKNOWLEDGE THAT I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE FOREGOING TERMS OF USE AGREEMENT AND AGREE THAT MY USE OF THE PROGRAM AND/OR THE SERVICE IS AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF MY AGREEMENT TO BE BOUND BY THE TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF THIS TERMS OF USE AGREEMENT.

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