



Jonas Linderöth
Ulrika Bennerstedt

Living in World of Warcraft

*– The thoughts and experiences
of ten young people*

Cover/inside cover photography: © Pelle Kronestedt/Link Image
Images from World of Warcraft used with kind permission by
Vivendi Games Nordic AB
Graphic design: John Eyre
ISSN-1102-447X

Living in World of Warcraft

*– The thoughts and experiences
of ten young people*

Jonas Linderöth
Ulrika Bennerstedt

*Göteborg University
Department of Education*

WORLD
OF
WARCRAFT
THE BURNING CRUSADE



Contents

Foreword	7
Introduction	9
Background	11
Previous literature and research into high frequency computer game playing	14
The purpose of this report	17
High consumption and problematic usage	18
What is World of Warcraft?	20
The shaping of the study	24
The informants	24
The interviews	26
The result	27
What problems do young people see as likely to result from high consumption of World of Warcraft?	27
Timed consumption – ground for several problems	27
Description of problems – summary and discussion	42
What drives players to consume at high levels?	43
Social pressure	43
Social discrepancy	52
The nature of the game – built to take time	53
Reasons for high consumption – summary and discussion	58
Reasons for changed playing habits	60

Changes in the social structure	60
Changes in the game's mechanisms	67
Reasons for changes in playing habits – summary and discussion	68
Discussion	71
The study's limitations	71
World of Warcraft – a dynamic game	72
Economic incentive is the real name of the game	73
A new phenomenon calls for new knowledge	74
What can be done about problematic usage?	76
References	77
Glossary	78

Foreword

What are children really getting up to with their computers? Why can't they stop playing so we can eat together as a family? How will they be able to cope in school when they've been up playing all night?

Such questions indicate a widespread lack of knowledge of computer games, especially those played online with other enthusiasts all over the world. In recent years, "World of Warcraft" (WoW) has established a unique, leading position in the computer game universe, with around 9 million users.

This is why the Media Council has chosen it as the focus of its latest report. In this report, a number of youngsters who are high WoW consumers describe how the game affects their lives, both online and off, what attracts them to it and the conflicts that can arise from the demands it places upon them.

In debating modern media, we often use the expression "computer game addiction". As this report points out, something like WoW doesn't really fit into traditional research into addiction. Neither can it be likened to older forms of media such as television viewing, or earlier computer games. Instead it becomes necessary to create new concepts, such as, to take one example, "problematic usage".

The world of computer games has its own language and it's right there we encounter the first problems. What on earth are they talking about? What do they mean by "guilds" and "levelling" and "raiding"? This report represents an exciting challenge for anyone who wants to know more about the world of computer games. As an adult, there is every reason for taking time out to get to grips with what it is all about:

Computer games are here to stay. They are no passing fad.

Through a comparison of WoW with other, more traditional organised leisure activities, such as football, the authors provide a way of understanding the social power and group psychology that form part of the game – and thereby provide the reader with the key to a better means for dealing with the situation. Why do so many parents abdicate from engagement, in making demands on their children when it concerns a leisure activity like the playing of computer games, when – if it were a question of football – they would happily devote time to learning the rules of the game and accompanying their children to training sessions and matches?

But this report is dominated by the voices of youth. With it, the Media Council once again puts the focus on the real experts. Our hope is that it will create an understanding of what online playing is all about and thereby provide adults with a tool for dealing with problems that may arise.

Inger Segelström
Chairperson

Ann Katrin Agebäck
Director

Introduction

This report is concerned with problems players encounter through too much playing of computer games. More precisely it concerns young people describing in their own words problems they've encountered playing the vastly popular online game World of Warcraft.

Computer games are a relatively new form of media of which our knowledge is limited. Not least this is true of the type of game to which World of Warcraft belongs, in which the player enters a fictional world and plays with other enthusiasts on the Internet. As will have become evident from the foreword, it is far too facile to try to understand a new type of media by comparing it with other, better known phenomena. Taking this approach, several of the problems that can occur with this kind of game have been likened to gambling or games of chance. We maintain that it is far more productive to seek to understand the problems of playing computer games on their own terms. Our point of departure with this report has therefore been to let young people themselves tell of their experiences in playing a particular computer game. In this way, we hope to contribute to greater, more in-depth understanding of this new media form.

In the spring of 2007, we interviewed ten young people in west Sweden and were given the opportunity of sharing their game playing experiences. It is their words that form the main body of the report, but in order for readers who are not themselves familiar with the world of computer games to be able to understand the content, we also describe the actual game. Some of the words and expressions that the young people use are italicised in the text and explained the first time they crop up in a footnote. Such expressions also appear in the glossary at the end of the report.

Excerpts from the youngsters' stories have been grouped thematically in the text so that patterns in the problems described become apparent. The purpose of this study is to identify *types* of pattern. By grouping and categorising similar problem descriptions we arrive at a certain mapping of problems seen to occur in playing World of Warcraft. It should be noted that, as it is based on a limited interview study, such mapping is by no means complete. It does not, for example, quantify how often a certain type of problem occurs, neither does it speculate on the connection between game-related problems and other factors in the lives of the young people involved.

What the youngsters' stories seem to indicate is that problems with games such as World of Warcraft have to do with how the game's construction governs social interaction between players. The game regulates the player's opportunities for spending time with friends and doing things in the online world. If the player does not accept one of the game's most fundamental rules – that time invested in WoW will result in progress – he or she will be excluded from the possibility of participation.

Background

Computer game playing has become a very visible part of youth culture. The growth of this new and influential visual medium gives rise to a number of questions concerning how it influences its consumers for better or worse. Questions raised about depictions of violence in computer games have been complemented by a debate concerning the time that is spent consuming such media and the consequences this has for a player's social and physical health.

In this respect, a new type of computer game, one that has become particularly popular in the past three years, has given rise to specific controversy. This is MMORPGs (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games). *Lord of the Rings online*, *Guild Wars*, *Star Wars Galaxies*, *Everquest*, *Tibia* and *City of Heroes* have achieved success in this genre. But most popular of all is the Blizzard company's *World of Warcraft*. An MMORPG is a computerised role-playing game that takes place on the Internet, with many people taking part simultaneously in the same game world. The player's character starts as an actor without resources but by carrying out tasks develops ability and acquires assets. The world of the game become social communities in which players carry out different tasks together. The game is administered continuously. New content, objects and places to visit are added, along with fresh challenges. Some of these games, once purchased, cost nothing to play on the Internet but the bigger ones, such as *World of Warcraft* charge the player a monthly fee. The business idea is built on players signing up to long-term subscriptions. The tasks to be carried out in the game take time and in the higher levels, it is necessary for players to become part of a social unit, or *guild* if they are to continue to develop their character.

Yee's investigation (2006a; 2006b) found that an average MMORPG player spends 21 hours a week taking part in the game and a majority of players have on occasion played for 10 hours or more at a stretch. Around 18 percent of the players in Yee's study (2006b) say that as a result of playing MMORPGs they have suffered some kind of problem, in terms of health, poor results at school, their relationships with others, or economically.

In describing this type of problematic consumption it has become acceptable to talk of *addiction*. As a result, high frequency computer game playing has been likened to the phenomenon of compulsive gambling. Private companies working with rehabilitation for different forms of addiction even provide services for young people who feel they are playing computer games too often.¹

Various social actors have created a picture of intensive computer game playing as a form of *addiction*, sometimes going so far as to refer to *computer game addiction* as if it were an established clinical diagnosis. However, if we look at accumulated scientific knowledge concerning the problem, it must be an open question as to whether such a phenomenon actually exists.

Several of the studies that have been made of high frequency computer game playing base their assessments on the classification for pathological *gambling* contained in the American Psychiatric Association's *Statistic Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM). However, this classification concerns games of chance for monetary reward, phenomena that differ essentially from both MMORPG and other computer games. The problem of categorisation has become acute of late as people start to realise that is impossible to understand virtual worlds and fantasy roleplay by comparing them with such very different phenomena as casinos, lotteries and web poker. Within the

¹ See, for example www.spelberoende.se/ (in Swedish)

American Psychiatric Association, individual researchers have tried to posit a new classification allowing high frequency computer game playing to be seen as a psychological disturbance. In June 2007, at a conference on revision of the DSM manual (scheduled for 2011), it became clear that it is by no means certain that *video game addiction* will be accepted as a diagnosis. Rather, delegates expressed the opinion that, instead of falling back on myths and stereotypes, more research was needed. (Source: Reuters)

Previous literature and research into high frequency computer game playing

High frequency computer game playing has been studied from both psychological and ethnological perspectives. The psychological tradition often links high frequency playing to different forms of addiction. For example, Griffiths and Davies (2005) liken it to *TV addiction*. Young (1999) regards computer game addiction as a sub-category of *Internet addiction* and uses the following classifications:

- Cybersexual addiction: compulsive surfing of pornographic sites
- Cyber-related addiction: compulsive engagement in online-chat
- Internet addiction: online gambling, Internet trading, virtual shares
- Information overload: compulsive surfing and searching of data bases
- Computer game addiction: compulsive computer game playing

However, Griffiths (1999) points out that Young's definition of Internet addiction is problematic because the Internet is first and foremost a channel for other forms of addiction. Researchers in this tradition claim high frequency computer game playing may be related to compulsive gambling, primarily the use of *slot machines* or *one-armed bandits* (Brown & Robertson, 1993; Fisher, 1994; Gupta & Der-evensky, 1997). The theoretical explanation for grouping together such phenomena is that computer games may be said to use a short-

term reward system similar to that of one-armed bandits (Griffiths & Davies, 2005). One particular study (Koepp, Gunn, Lawrence, Cunningham, Dagher et al, 1998) claims that there is a secretion of *dopamine* during the playing of computer games, which could explain addiction. Dopamine is believed to strengthen creation of addiction on alcohol and drugs (Griffiths & Davies, 2005).

We lack current studies of *the effects* of high frequency playing. An older longitudinal study (Shotton, 1989) followed up on 127 players who described themselves as “hooked”. It showed that, five years on, most of them had done well educationally and found good jobs.

However, it should be stressed that even if researchers in the psychological tradition use the concept *addiction*, this usage is in sharp contrast to some of the rhetoric of the popular press, and hedged around with reservations and pleas for further research. In *Does video game addiction exist?* (Griffiths & Davies, 2005), a study of research carried out so far, the authors say this suggests that “excessive video game playing can have potentially damaging effects upon a minority of individuals” (p. 366). But whether this problem is a form of *addiction* must be an open and central question for future research to decide. The authors emphasize that even if one should allow talk of *addiction* in this connection, another concept of the word is needed than that used in research into alcohol and drugs.

Ethnological and sociological oriented studies give a more complex picture of high frequency computer game playing. Yee (2006b) who uses the term *problematic usage* suggests that this may be triggered by an “escapism” factor, some devotees stating that they play to get away from other problems in their lives. Yee draws the conclusion:

In other words, the people who are most likely to exhibit problematic usage are those who are purposefully using the online environment to escape their real-life problems. They are playing to avoid thinking about their real-life concerns.

The above points to the probability that high frequency online role playing is most likely a symptom of health problems rather than a reason for them. Taylor (2006) who carried out participatory observations of the online roleplaying game *EverQuest* suggests that one reason for high frequency computer game playing is that social pressure has been built into the game at the design stage. Online role playing is often designed so that players in principle must be on the same level to be able to play together. This results in them investing a great deal of time to “keep up” with one another. Taylor also says that experienced players in *guilds*² feel a compulsion to help newcomers. Lazzaro (2005), who studies computer game playing from a designer’s perspective, suggests that the game’s social dimension is one of the central driving forces for players and that “it’s the people that are addictive, not the game” (p. 4). Both Yee (2006a) and Taylor (2006) point out that the border between game and work tends to become blurred in online roleplay. Several players saw the administration of *guilds* more as a half-time job than as a leisure activity. The game for these players was not something pleasurable, a result which lends support to the idea that it is not the pleasurable feeling of quick reward that is the motive for high frequency computer game playing.

² Guild: A gathering, or clan of players.

The purpose of this report

A reading of the current research debate on the problems MMORPG players may encounter points to the fact that the concept of addiction is all too often used, despite there being no solid, unified agreement within the research community on its definition. Consequently, in this study, the point of departure has been to examine problems players themselves say they have encountered, without using the addiction concept. Based on an unbiased hearing of ten players' experiences of World of Warcraft, we have mapped out problems that can result from high frequency playing. The study took as its point of departure three all-embracing questions:

- What makes the game especially time consuming?
- How do the participants themselves experience their play?
- Which problems/conflicts crop up in playing the game, especially in terms of the amount of time it takes?

High consumption and problematic usage

The report makes use of two concepts which at the outset need to be explained in more detail: *high consumption* and *problematic usage*. The Media Council sent a questionnaire to 2,000 children and young people aged from 9–16 asking them about their computer game habits (Ungar & Medier 2006). Of these, 9 percent could be classified as high consumers of games, meaning that they played on average three hours or more each day. This group was dominated by boys, somewhat older than the average of those questioned, and who rated the Internet higher in their list of activities than sport or homework. The Media Council emphasizes in its report that this high consumption should *not* be regarded as “an accepted definition indicative of risk-filled and negative behaviour” (p 6). It simply means that certain forms of media call for more devotion in terms of time if they are to be meaningful to the player. In this report, we use the term high consumption to refer to playing habits in which the player *periodically* plays for more than three hours daily. For linguistic variation, we sometimes use the term *high frequency computer game playing*. This should be seen as synonymous with *high consumption*. As far as we are concerned, high consumption does not of itself necessarily constitute a playing problem. Instead, we choose to adopt Yee’s suggestion and talk of “problematic usage” when players describe their computer game playing as causing some sort of problem in their lives. As Yee (2006a) points out, the term “addiction” gives a misleading picture of the problems encountered in computer games. He says that the addiction concept confuses the issue in reaching an understanding of problems connected with high frequency computer game playing.

To sum up, high consumption means a player periodically plays

more than three hours a day. Such high consumption can, but not necessarily does lead to *problematic usage*. *Problematic usage* means that playing has some sort of negative effect on the player's life.

What is World of Warcraft?

For the benefit of readers who are not acquainted with the game, we shall now attempt to present a picture of what World of Warcraft is all about. We have also compiled a glossary of terms used by players in the course of their interviews, which can be found at the end of the report.

World of Warcraft, often shortened to *WoW*, was developed by *Blizzard Entertainment*³ and is based on a background story and fantasy world created in earlier games in the same company's *Warcraft* series. The difference between WoW and those earlier strategy games is that the new game is a MMORPG (*Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game*), computerised roleplaying in which several thousand people participate simultaneously, connected via the same server to the Internet. World of Warcraft has a total of around 9 million users worldwide.

Blizzard provides several servers, or *realms*, which each have their own name. Every *realm* contains a copy of the game world. The copies are distributed according to where players live in the real world. In Europe there are different versions in various languages, including English, Spanish, French and German. The various servers are subdivided according to types, which encourage different styles of play. There are three main types, *Player versus Player* (PvP), *Player versus Environment* (PvE) and *Roleplay* (RP). PvP servers, reserved only for those who choose this alternative, allow players to fight against each

³ See www.wow-europe.com for further information on the game.

A few of the races you can choose to play as.
From left to right A Tauren, an Orc and a Human.



other anywhere in the game world. Players who prefer to focus on game tasks and do not wish to be hindered by other players during the course of the game often choose a PvE type server. An RP server is constructed in the same way as a PvE except that, when communicating with others, players are expected to do so from within the role they are playing, as if they are the character concerned.

Players choose to create a character on a certain server and may then only change server with that character every third month – for a fee. But they can also have several different characters playing in different realms.

In World of Warcraft there are, as a result of the background story encompassing the game, two different sides on which to play. These are *the Horde* and *the Alliance*, within which players can choose from

A group of characters take on a real challenge. The image shows what it can look like when players meet a Boss.



five races. A player may only communicate with others on the same side. Opponents' talk is scrambled. In addition, the player chooses which class to play. There are nine of these, including *Hunter*, *Warrior* and *Priest*. There can be no combining of races and classes.

In practice, most players play on just one server during their time in the game. The game continues around the clock even when the player is not connected. The game world is not static but can change, with Blizzard creating new places, objects and tasks for players. The game is continually being updated via patches. The subscription fee for World of Warcraft is EUR 12 a month, paid via credit card or by the purchase of *Gamecards* in computer game shops.

In comparison with other MMORPGs, World of Warcraft is regarded as a game that most people play regardless of their qualifi-

cations and the game's success is sometimes ascribed to its simple, user-friendly interface. The highest level in the game is at present 70 and on the way there, through the various other levels, the player's character grows as it takes on new functions.

When the player reaches Level 70, the "end game" takes place. Here the focus is very much on group playing and on having good equipment. Players get this by playing together in *raids*.

The equipment the player acquires for his character can come from various forms of game play. Partly this can be done by winning *honour* on isolated PvP *Battlegrounds* which can then be exchanged for objects. Partly it is a question of going into *instances*, dungeons and caves in which lurk all manner of monsters and strange beings. When killed, they "drop" treasure in the form of equipment which players can then use. Normally five players go into an instance but in the end game there are 10 and 25-man instances.

As World of Warcraft is continually being updated and as different aspects of the game change, a player is required to adapt. In 2007, a new update, *The Burning Crusade* (TBC) was launched, inaugurating a whole new region of the game world with new races. It also brought the possibility of passing from Level 60 to Level 70. The result was that previously advanced equipment became devalued compared to that which could now be acquired in The Burning Crusade.

The shaping of the study

Interviewees for the study were identified from a questionnaire we distributed in west Sweden in the spring of 2007 to youngsters aged 17-19. We made contact with nine upper secondary schools with courses in media education and suchlike where there was reason to believe that a number of pupils played WoW. We then visited four of these schools. In conjunction with our visits, a summary of the purpose of the study was presented to selected classes which, according to school personnel contained several pupils who were extremely interested in computer games. Through this inquiry, we identified a total of 50 young people who played World of Warcraft as suitable interview material. We narrowed down the choice partly by asking how much time the person in question devoted to the game, partly by asking them their player profiles. Players were chosen with a view to featuring a mix of different player profiles. We also took note of players likely to talk freely, those who gave extra information on the questionnaire and seemed willing to give more in-depth answers concerning their playing. Finding female players was a problem. However, by enlisting the help of identified interview subjects, we eventually found a girl who was willing to take part. All informants chosen were high consumers, i.e. they played periodically for more than three hours daily.

The informants

The young persons interviewed came from three different schools. While all had wide experience of World of Warcraft, their experience of computer games varied. Some had played other MMORPGs,

one had played *Counter-Strike*⁴ as part of a team and others chose to supplement their playing of *World of Warcraft* with games on *Xbox*⁵. Some had separate leisure activities, such as football, martial arts and music, while others named computer game playing as their principal interest. As noted, we succeeded in finding only one female participant. This was somewhat unfortunate since it made our group of informants more homogeneous, although it did reflect the division of the sexes among players of *World of Warcraft*, where the overwhelming majority is male. Note that the purpose of the study is not in any way to posit a connection between game patterns and the background of players. Such an analysis cannot be made with this type of material. Questions on how frequent a certain problem is in relation to other problems, or attempts to see if there are underlying factors in the computer game player's life that lead to game playing related problems must be questions for future research. The reason we wanted a heterogeneous group of informants was so there would be no generalising based on any patterns that might be revealed.

The study was conducted according to ethical guidelines established by the Swedish Research Council. The persons interviewed were, as stated above, given information and told the purpose of the study, partly when the questionnaire was handed out and partly when the interviews were conducted. The names of interviewees and the identities of their characters have been changed in the report.

⁴ *Counter-Strike*: A popular online game that calls for technical skill, the ability to react and predict an opponent's tactics, speed etc. You play in teams and communicate in real time.

⁵ *Xbox*: A game console.



A Blood elf, one of the new races that were introduced with The Burning Crusade expansion.

The interviews

The interviews took the form of conversations about the game. Each took around an hour and was digitally recorded. A template was used as the point of departure for a discussion but the player was given considerable leeway to touch on the aspects he or she considered important. Much of the dialogue concerned players themselves telling how they spent their time in WoW and openly reflecting on their own and others' playing activities. Above all, the conversations were about the effect the game had on other areas of their lives. All informants were given two cinema tickets as thanks for their participation.

The result

Excerpts from the youngsters' statements have been categorised below on three levels. The first of these is purely descriptive and concerns *which type of problem* the players themselves experienced as being connected with computer game playing.

The second level features their descriptions of *reasons and underlying causes for problems with computer game playing*.

The final level concerns the young people's descriptions of *what caused them to change their computer game playing habits*. This level seeks to identify what may be seen as critical elements as to how the game became more or less attractive to play. A certain amount of editing has been made of these extracts to increase readability and some colloquialisms have been changed to make the statements more understandable.

What problems do young people see as likely to result from high consumption of World of Warcraft?

Timed consumption – ground for several problems

A recurring theme in the youngsters' statements was that the game takes a great deal of time and demands considerable commitment. Timed consumption may not be a problem in itself but problems arise because of it in relation to the player's everyday life. For the young people this means that their eating habits are disturbed, that they encounter problems at school and that they have rows with their parents. According to the youngsters, such problems are often caused because a player has to put so much time into the game there is no

room for other activities, sometimes not even for such everyday tasks as personal hygiene. It is therefore not the amount of time the player invests in the game that causes problems but rather the fact that the game structures time in a fashion that demands the player's complete attention for a certain period.

Christoffer, who stopped playing a couple of times but went back to the game tells how timed consumption was the reason that he finally quit:

It takes an awful lot of time. That was perhaps one of the reasons that I packed it in this last time, because it took so much time away from a load of other things I wanted to do. [...] What I mean is, yeah, it's cool to play, but you need to have time for other things too. If you play World of Warcraft on PvE, you must be pretty active, perhaps take part in four raids a week, and that's quite a lot. It takes a whole lot of time. So that was why I and my friends quit.

Christoffer says the game calls for a proper investment of time and that certain means of playing, PvE, demand that you are active. Staffan too says that serious playing takes time, something parents find hard to understand:

My parents think it's a waste of time playing so much. They say World of Warcraft takes too much time. But it takes time to play seriously.

As we've already noted, the time factor is not just a question of the amount of time the game takes, but also of the way in which playing time is structured. This cannot be put "on hold". A player who is involved in a group task cannot go away from the computer without landing his friends in a fix. It is this characteristic of World of Warcraft that players say gives rise to conflicts with parents because youngsters find it impossible to leave the game even for a short time, for example to eat. Magnus takes up the story:

It can be really difficult when you live at home. My parents shout out, "Dinner!" But I have to call back, "No, I'm playing!" It's like I can't just go away. People become so unbelievably angry if you leave the game to eat. To be able to do all those long instances means you can't have a life on the side.

What are the problems that players attribute to the time consuming nature of the game? Below, we list five of these: conflicts with parents, late nights, food habits, problems with personal hygiene, and neglected schoolwork.

- Conflicts with parents

Conflicts with parents described by the youngsters have various causes. Partly, as in the above example, it is a question of parents' lack of knowledge of the conditions WoW imposes on players, partly it is a question of who should have access to the family computer. A whole lot of other conflicts are grounded in differing concepts as to what constitutes a meaningful occupation.

Edward and Sacha both say their parents have no idea of the time needed to play the game:

Edward: It's something my parents have never understood. It's not enough to just play for an hour. You can hardly get into the game in that time. After all, it takes 20 minutes before you get to the point where you start levelling⁶. Then you have to chat a bit with everyone and stuff like that. So it doesn't work – you need at least three hours to be able to play just a little. Sacha: When my parents say, "We think you should sit at the computer for two hours max a day", I try to explain that to find a group for an instance and then do that instance takes two-and-a-half hours. So there's not a lot you can do after that.

⁶ *To level:* To climb to another *level*. See *Level* in the glossary.

WORLD OF WARCRAFT



*A Hunter belonging to
the Dwarf race with his
Combat Pet, a Bear.*



*Samuli32
2009 #20*

Davoud tells of arguments as to who shall have access to the computer:

When I get home I go straight in to my room to start raiding. So I don't eat with them, I just, like, stay in my room. And they get worked up about it. But it was worse when I didn't have my own computer and there were lots of people wanting to use the computer when I was sitting at it. Then there were rows. They got fed up with me using it all the time.

Conflicts arise because parents and young people have different ideas as to what are meaningful activities. Parents will suggest alternative activities to computer game playing, activities they consider more meaningful than World of Warcraft. John's parents would prefer that he read books rather than use the computer:

It's not just that I sit playing World of Warcraft. It's that I use the computer too much. All the time they say things like: "Can't you do anything else?" and when I say, "What should I do instead?" they usually can't come up with anything better. "Read a book", they say. I reply that that's not particular sociable. They get fed up sometimes because I sit in front of the computer so much.

Michelle's father, himself a practised computer user, doesn't appreciate his daughter playing games:

Mum is quite understanding but dad gets really worked up about us sitting and playing World of Warcraft. He was dead against me and my sister each having our own computer. But he sits at his computer and downloads stuff and all that. He gets himself in a right state just because we sit and play WoW. He's got a thing about it because to him it's just a game. But when he sits and surfs on Tradera⁷, that's not a game. Computer game playing is a bit of a hot potato at home.

Once dad shut off the broad band at midnight. He thought we were neglecting our schoolwork, said we weren't getting enough sleep.

Magnus points out that criticism of WoW by the older generation is grounded in different norms as to what constitutes a “good” life:

The summer after the game came out, I played it, like, really a lot. My mum could get touchy and say things like: “Shouldn't you go out? You must get a life, Magnus. You should get out more.” Then it dawned on me like if I'm out, breathing fresh air does that mean that I have a life? Living is when your heart beats, isn't it? I don't get how anyone can define exactly what it is to have a life.

Magnus says his friends in the game care as much about him as his “ordinary” friends. Like Michelle, he accuses the older generation of not questioning its own media consumption:

Mum says: “Come and be sociable” and then we sit and watch TV, don't even look at each other. That's hardly being sociable. When I'm playing the game I'm constantly talking and mingling with loads of people. But she's begun to be more understanding now, gives me more time. In the beginning when I had the computer in my room, she was always saying things like, “I'm going to come in and pull out the plug.” Then I'd say, “OK, then I'll pull the plug out on the telly” and stuff like that. Then we come round to that whole thing that sitting and playing computer games is not having a life. I just don't get it. It's like saying that you only have a life if you earn 40,000 a year and have a title like “doctor” and stuff like that. Is that how you get a life?

⁷ *Tradera*: Swedish auction site where private persons and companies buy and sell things.

Edward has similar experience of his parents seeing computer games as a meaningless activity:

My generation is the first to play so much and really get into it. Our parents don't understand. They spend their time doing things that are just as unnecessary. For example, my mum's bloke said to me: "You're paying them to waste your time. Don't you find that bloody stupid? What do you get out of it?" I told him it made me happy. "You can't measure happiness," he said. No, but I get it anyway and that's worth an investment. It's an argument that a lot of those who play take up – that it costs money. Sure, I don't like shelling out each month for something, but say it costs me 250 kronor – that's just four shots in a bar.

Edward tells how he and his schoolmates made friends with a group of university students through the game. But parents find it difficult to understand that the game can create friendships that disregard traditional age groups:

Most of the friends I made in WoW were older than me. Several were students at Lund University, really nice blokes. We wanted to travel down there and play with them. But our parents said we weren't old enough to travel all that way with our computers in our rucksacks to play in a LAN⁸ with people we'd never met before.

Online games have a way of disregarding traditional social conventions (see, for example, Linderoth & Säljö, 2008; Yee, 2006b). Groups of people who would rarely come together in day-to-day life meet in the game. Age is of no great importance in online game playing and there can be considerable variation in ages between different

⁸ LAN: Local Area Network. To play in a closed network.

players. This is something that has become a natural part of game culture. But, as the above example indicates, it can be difficult for parents with no knowledge of that culture, to come to terms with this.

- *Late nights*

Alongside arguments with parents, players also talk of problems with late nights. Edward describes how he and a friend used to sit up late even if they had to be in school the next day:

Sometimes Wille and me would stay up till two or three in the morning doing daft things like fishing⁹ and suchlike. It was nothing serious and not really worthwhile because you need your sleep if you're going to cope in school. A lot of the time I felt too tired.

Players who carry out raids can't really decide for themselves when a raid should finish, which can mean late nights. John and Davoud have experience of this. John says:

I've managed to adapt when I've been raiding. I usually say that I'll finish at the latest around eleven, but there have been times when I've raided until one in the morning because there's been so much killing to do. The others will say, like "Can't you stay?" But I know my parents don't like it when I'm up so late. And I know that if I'm up late, I must still get up next morning, so I always set the alarm for when I need to get up. I've never arrived too late for school.

Davoud has similar experience:

⁹ *Fishing*: WoW features the possibility of fishing in diverse watercourses. Fish are a resource that can be used for different purposes in the game.

We say that we will raid from eight to twelve, but if we've tried twice against a Boss¹⁰ and got him down to 10 percent, then usually we stay for a couple more tries at bringing him down.

- Eating habits

Peter too describes problems with raids taking more than the allotted time. He touches on another problem that a number of players in the study talked about: that their playing can affect their eating habits:

We decided to raid from seven-thirty to twelve, so I'd be able to study and go training and that before. Sometimes there wouldn't be enough time and it was really difficult to find time to eat. Several times mum would shout out that it was time to eat and I had to say, "No, I can't eat now." Then I'd be really tired in school, because sometimes midnight wasn't long enough and you had to stay another hour. It was really tough.

Because some of the game's moves – for example, raids – demand a participant's complete attention, it becomes difficult for a player to leave in order to eat. This can give rise to arguments with parents and in some cases may perhaps also constitute a health problem. Staffan's experience is that players coordinate their meal breaks with others in the game:

Food can quite easily be put off. You eat after raiding. Regular meal times are best for your body. But sometimes it's not easy to follow this rule if you're raiding a lot. You can see it with most players. There are times when you can sit for seven hours raiding really hard, for example on a Sunday. When you've finished you hear people saying, "Now it's time for some

¹⁰ *Boss*: The foremost monster in an instance. Bosses have valuable objects, weapons etc. that "drop" for players to take over if they defeat them.

food.” So then ten people leave to eat. Five minutes later they’re all back at their computers and talking, like with their mouths full. That’s the way it is. Or, if you’ve killed a Boss, you hear people saying: “Hang on, I’m just going to get a sandwich.”

In the interview material, we found just one example of a player neglecting to eat for longer periods. Larry tells how he skipped meals because of the game:

I’ve given up eating. Sometimes there isn’t much food in the house and I can’t be bothered making anything. But I’ve not heard of any of my friends doing the same.

Larry’s story was the only one of its kind in the material and he added, of his own accord, that it was exceptional for such a thing to happen. Concerning eating habits, the players more often say they have problems with meals being postponed, or eating only TV dinners, take-away food and sandwiches.

- Hygiene

One player, John, said his playing of World of Warcraft sometimes led to him neglecting to perform everyday tasks such as cleaning his room and personal hygiene:

Sometimes when I’m playing, I don’t feel like cleaning up my room. And I’m a bit ashamed to admit that there have been times when I’ve even forgotten to shower. You sit playing, realise you should shower but think, “Oh, I’ll do that later.” Then, all of a sudden, it’s too late to shower. And it goes on like that for a couple of days until you feel really yucky. But then it’s like “OK, let’s do this thing!” and I clean my room and take a shower. It’s only short periods it’s like that, that I let things go – a week max – after that I fix it up.

In cases of changed eating habits, John is conscious of the problem and describes it as occurring only on occasion. He says that then he gets to grips with it.

- Playing truant/Neglecting lessons

Players tell of investing more time in World of Warcraft than in schoolwork. The young people interviewed admitted to few problems with their own schooling and, although in certain cases they said they might have obtained better grades if they hadn't played so much, they said they were content just to get a pass mark. However, several players claimed to know someone else who had experienced real problems with schoolwork as a result of playing WoW. John says:

I had a classmate in First Grade who started playing World of Warcraft. He played it, like really a lot. He came to school the first half-year but then he stopped coming completely. He quit school. [...] His playing was more important than his studies. But other classmates who played with him still managed to come to school.

Larry too knows a player who suffered school related problems and was obliged to re-sit a year:

I know someone who had a hard time, not just because he played WoW but because he played other games at the same time. He should be in Third Grade now but he's still in Second, and if he keeps on studying at the same rate he'll have to re-sit Second yet again.

Christoffer tells of a classmate who played truant to play WoW but says the extra investment of time in the game produced a reward in terms of his playing skills:

I know there was someone in my class who played almost too much World of Warcraft for a time. Sometimes he wasn't in school at all. He played it something chronic. But he became really good at it, like best on the server.

- Influence on relationships and friendships

World of Warcraft playing can become more important than a player's social life to the extent that friendships and relationships with other people suffer as a result. Larry tells how during a period of intensive playing his contacts deteriorated with friends who didn't play:

That was a time when I really played a lot and they didn't play, so it was, like, they no longer bothered to phone me and that.

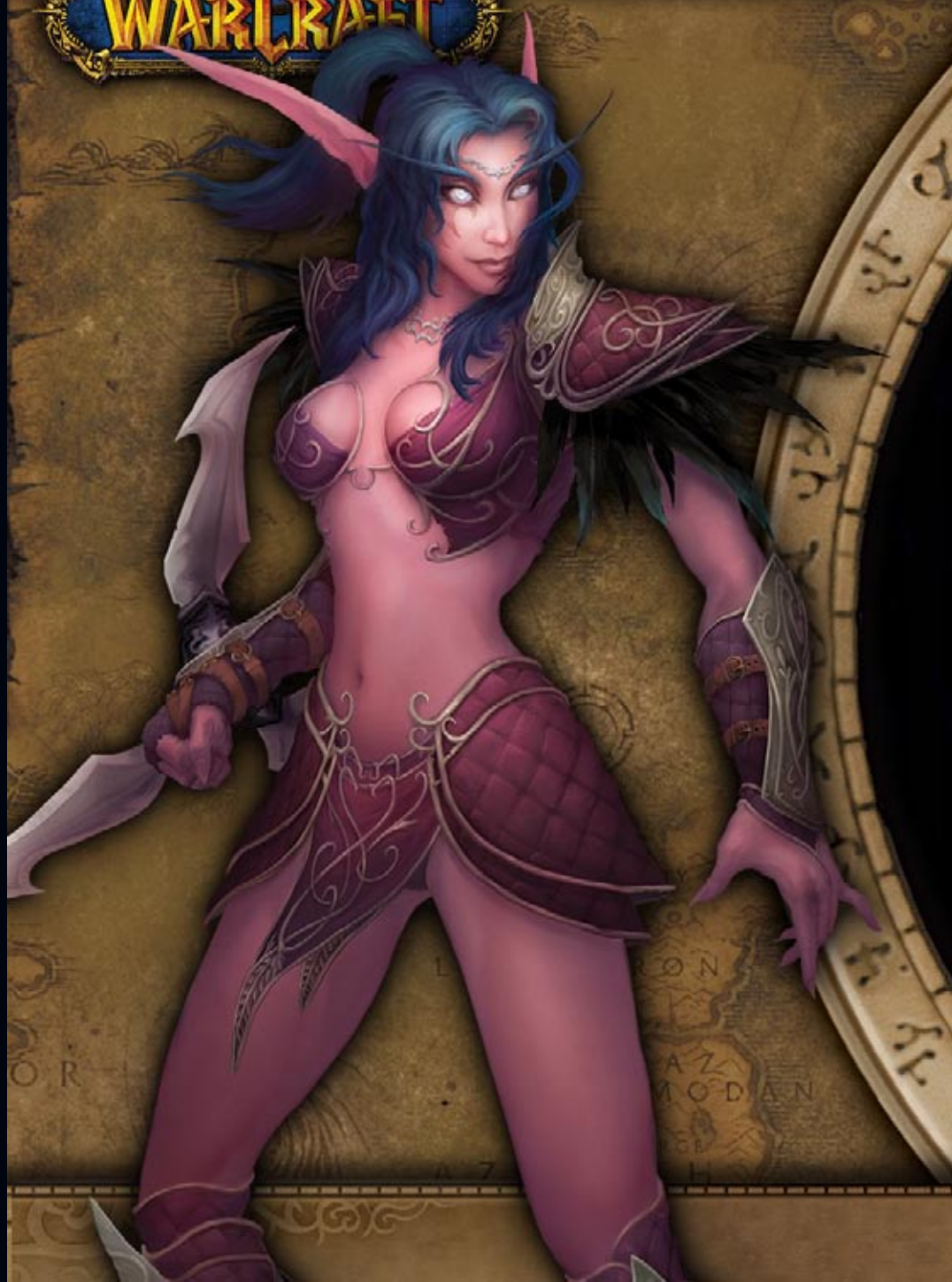
Michelle, who began playing under the influence of her boyfriend, tells how the rate he played for a time influenced their relationship:

When my boyfriend played and I didn't, he played in a really advanced guild. They made really big raids, like AQ 40¹¹ and that sort of thing. Then he'd say, like: "I can't do anything right now because I've got to do this instance at 18.00." That was no good as far as I was concerned. It's not a game anymore when it becomes that important.

Just as it causes conflicts with parents, it seems that the amount of time required for raiding can cause other problems too.

¹¹ *AQ40*: Stands for Ahn'Qiraj, 40 denoting it to be a 40-man instance (another requires 20 men).

WORLD OF WARCRAFT



A Night elf and the Night elf Crest.



© 2005 Blizzard Entertainment

Description of problems – summary and discussion

As previously noted, the fact that the game takes so much time is the cause of most of the problems experienced by the young players of World of Warcraft. Youngsters will often give the game greater priority than school work or socialising, being with parents and friends. None of the players interviewed admitted to experiencing serious problems themselves in school, although they owned up to playing truant on occasion. But several of them said they knew other youngsters who had such problems. These arise from the interaction of World of Warcraft with the player's day-to-day life. For youngsters in the study who live at home and go to school, serious playing of World of Warcraft may sometimes become problematic. In studies made of other groups of players with different living conditions, the same problems do not arise (Linderoth & Säljö, 2008). For example people living with a permanent illness or who are disabled, there are no such problems because the game does not collide in the same way with other social activities.

Problems such as changed eating habits arise because the game cannot be put on hold. In contrast with other forms of media, a player taking part in a group task cannot leave the game even for a short while without the group suffering. This is something that leads to rushed or sometimes completely neglected meals. Neither is it possible to quit the game without causing problems for the group, something which can lead to late nights. These aspects of the game are, according to the players' testimony, not understood by parents who expect World of Warcraft to function like other games or media.

One dimension of the problems described is concerned neither with the time taken up by WoW, nor with its way of structuring time, but with actual evaluation of the game. The youngsters' parents simply do not regard computer game playing as an acceptable leisure activity, but see it more as a waste of time, something that isn't truly a part of their children's lives. Some young people experience this as insulting and accuse the older generation of not being

aware of the limitations and problems posed by their own media consumption.

What drives players to consume at high levels?

What drives players to consume at high levels? What do youngsters see as the reason why they play so much that it creates problems in their lives? In the interview material, three types of answer can be identified:

- Players talk of different types of *social pressure* which cause them to play more frequently.
- Furthermore they describe a *social discrepancy* between different players which can lead to players having to adapt to a group with a different way of life.
- Finally they say the nature of the *mechanisms of the game* in WoW is such that it calls for high frequency playing.

Social pressure

The social environment of WoW means a player doesn't have full control over his game. Various sections presuppose playing with others. As a result social mechanisms arise that lead to high frequency playing. While a player works actively to become an ever more central participant, he also feels a *need for solidarity* with other players. At the same time the player may find himself subject to *group pressure* which in some cases can lead to a form of *status seeking*, in which the player seeks to establish an online identity on the server.

- *Need for solidarity*

Peter talks of the difference between WoW and other games. He touches on the social aspect and on the fact that one can find friends online:

What's special about World of Warcraft is that you chat with people. You don't get so much of that in other games, at least not in the same way. You might chat to someone but it's just a one-off thing, not like WoW, where you make real friends. For a time I felt more at ease with the other guys in World of Warcraft than with my friends in real life.

When Magnus plays he finds voice-chat, a means of communicating over the Internet, central to his gaming experience. This social aspect is obviously very important to him:

Why did I start playing again? It was just before TBC¹² came out that I and my IRL-friend¹³ decided that we would start with new characters on another server. We were part of the Alliance. But it wasn't as much fun as on the old server. The new server was more boring, people were really focused on getting Epics¹⁴. When you pass Level 70, the game is very much based on how many friends you succeed in making. It's unbelievably boring to play and not speak to anyone. Like when I was going to grind¹⁵ and there was no one else online, then I didn't do it. [...] Otherwise when I play I like to listen to my own music as I'm doing it. I wouldn't be able to get through World of Warcraft without music, it's so unbelievably slow. I turned off the game's own music two years ago and have never turned it back on again.

That Magnus turned off the game's built-in music may be seen as reflecting his experience of the game as social rather than aesthetic. Its contents were less important to him than meeting with other players.

¹² *TBC*: short for an expansion of *WoW*, *The Burning Crusade*.

¹³ *IRL*: short for *In real life*.

¹⁴ *Epics*: The best type of equipment a player can obtain.

¹⁵ *Grind*: When a player stays in the same place and kills the same type of monster again and again in order to collect Experience Points (XP).

A driving force for participation in WoW that the youngsters talked about was that their playing was linked to friends and classmates outside the game. Larry, who stopped playing twice, told how he got drawn into it again when his classmates started to play:

I played really a lot the first year. Then I took a break of around three or four months. I began again because all my friends started playing and I felt I had to keep up with them.

This is just one of several examples of how WoW is played with persons the player knows outside the game, for example schoolmates. For such youngsters the game becomes a topic of conversation in breaks and a recurring theme in daily discussions. When several young people in a gang of friends play, others may join out of social solidarity. Edward tells of a friend who had problems with his playing and how he himself felt guilty about this because it was he who persuaded the friend to start playing again. He says he encouraged his friend to get a grip on school work:

He became really tired because of staying up late at night. [...] So I felt, you know, a bit guilty that it was me that had persuaded him to come over from Guild Wars¹⁶ to World of Warcraft. Although he played Guild Wars too, so perhaps it wasn't just WoW. When I saw he had problems, I encouraged him to become more engaged in schoolwork instead. I was really pleased when he tired of World of Warcraft and began to get himself back together again.

Edward had himself previously been persuaded by a friend to start playing again with a new character, a *Rogue*. One argument for this

¹⁶ *Guild Wars*: A MMORPG.

was that the game mechanisms surrounding the Rogues changed. Larry compares World of Warcraft with other games and points out that just this social aspect of WoW can create situations in which you so much want to be part of the action with your friends, that you no longer know where to draw the line when it comes to the time spent playing:

I think World of Warcraft is really fun and that, but it's just that I feel bound to it when I play. I can't really draw the line. Sometimes when I play, a friend may ask me to do something together with him in the game and I find myself going along with this when really I should be doing something else.

- *Group pressure*

A driving force for high consumption that the young people often refer to is that a player may be subjected to group pressure, resulting in a compulsion to play. Peter says his character was a *Main Tank*, a role much in demand for raids and instances, resulting in him being a key player, given a privileged position in raid-guilds. However, at the same time, this required that he played frequently because the character's contribution was so central:

With the Warrior I was built so I could tank. As a result I felt forced to tank all the time. I was like the most important person in the guild. It was really tough. I was always needed. I had to be there every night. I was given first pick of all the good things so I felt I had to take part, like in gratitude, otherwise I would feel guilty. It felt like bad form not to be there.

Peter tells how his playing went through different phases but how the obligation to take part for the sake of the guild eventually won through:

To start with it was just fun. But for a time it wasn't cool to play anymore.

It was like I felt I had to play just to get things. Then it was the raiding that took over. I raided to get things, felt forced to play, half forced anyway.

Peter tells how he finally stopped playing World of Warcraft completely:

It happened like this. We played really a lot and had come a long way but we should play still more to see who would be best and all that. I remember it was the Christmas holiday. The guild had a forum and one of the topics was “play over the holiday” or something like that. I thought I’d write that I didn’t want to play so much anymore. I’d been doing it for ages and figured I deserved a break. There were a lot of things I wanted to do.

But then all the others wrote things like: “I can’t play Christmas Eve and New Year’s Eve but apart from that I can play all the time.” They wrote that and I thought, “Shit, that’s not for me.” So I made the excuse that I would be away for Christmas. I got back together with my friends and I saw what I’d been missing. So when I said I was back from the holiday, I told them I wanted to play football instead, and that’s how I stopped. That Christmas break gave me the push I needed.

The social pressure Peter describes feeling when facing his guild was so strong that he needed an excuse to enable him to stop playing. The social pressure in some guilds may be a conscious strategy of their leaders. The idea is to avoid raiding simply for personal gain. For the guild to work it’s necessary that players don’t quit just when it suits them. Therefore the guild has an institutionalised penalty system that discourages players from leaving a raid before it is completed. However, Christoffer tells how a guild that he was in took into consideration the wishes of some players to leave:

It worked out OK because they said: “We won’t punish if you want to go earlier. You won’t get minus-DKP.” In other guilds I’ve been in you got minus-DKP if you left, so you really felt you had to stay and raid.

Minus-*DKP* (Dragon Kill Points) means that points are deducted from those that the player has earned in previous raiding. Larry tells of a similar phenomenon in which players who couldn't be very active, were given lower priority in the choosing of players who would take part in a raid:

The raid most often finished around eleven, sometimes twelve, because the kids who were involved had to be in school next day and all that. In fact it was most often around eleven. [...] There were some who had to work and said they had to go earlier. Obviously they stood less chance of taking part in the raid. [...] Those who had jobs and were less active weren't allowed to take part as often. If you leave early you get relegated to second place in the pecking order.

Another factor that creates high consumption is also connected to raiding. The player at a certain level is expected to contribute *potions* to the raid. Potions are magic drinks that improve the qualities of a character for a limited period of time. This means that the player must play a while before the actual raid in order to collect either the ingredients for these potions or *Gold* (the game's currency) so he can purchase them. Davoud tells how he chose to buy Gold instead of playing for his potions:

The last guild I was in was really very serious. We played from Monday to Friday from eight to twelve every night. Then we really raided. But it wasn't just the time. You had to fix potions and stuff. That's very important in TBC. It took like one, perhaps two hours. But that was too much for me so I bought Gold on the Internet. I just never had enough time. I bought a lot of Gold that way. It cost around 150 kronor for 500 Gold. Not so much really.

Staffan too bought Gold to avoid *farming*¹⁷ for his potions:

It takes a lot of time. If it was a crafted¹⁸ item you wanted to have, you had to farm like there was no tomorrow. The same with potions. You had to get money together the whole time in order to be able to continue to play. When I was in Naxxramas¹⁹ I bought Gold. Then I had to fork out 300–400 Gold in a couple of days and I couldn't get hold of any more. At that time there must have been around 20 people like me buying Gold.

- *Status seeking*

A third type of social reason for high consumption that can lead to problematic usage has to do with the player's status and identity in the virtual community of the game. Having the best equipment, the most difficult to obtain, gives the player status and reputation. This is something which, according to the youngsters' statements, can be even more important if the player has a low social status outside the game. Peter says that status seeking is one of the things that makes World of Warcraft special:

What's great about World of Warcraft is that it is extremely personal. Lots of people who play do so because they want to have a certain status, or whatever you call it. I think that is the difference with this game – that the character can gain in status on the server.

¹⁷ *Farm*: to play with the aim of obtaining a certain resource. Farming often means that players will spend hours killing only a certain type of monster which may give them the specific resource they want. Related to the expression “to grind”.

¹⁸ *Crafted item*: An object that the player can make himself with resources found in the game.

¹⁹ *Naxxramas*: A raid-instance requiring 40 men.

Magnus points out that an *avatar's*²⁰ equipment has in itself become a status symbol. At the same time he is conscious of the fact that it takes an enormous investment in time to stay on top:

We weren't among the best exactly, but we still managed to make out pretty well. I was extremely focused and wanted my character to do well, which today I find really stupid. In the game you look up to people. When you go there in Orgrimmar²¹ you see people with Epics and you think: "Oh, I want that gear, my character would look great in that." But it doesn't work to think like that. If you do, you must really dedicate your life to it.

Peter tells about a fellow player who has achieved high status in the game but who in everyday life is bullied:

I don't want to be rotten but I know kids who are bullied at school but who have like real bad ass pimp status in the game. I know people like that, I've met them. People idolize them in the game.

Davoud has similar experience and points out that a player's appearance becomes irrelevant in the online world:

It might be that this is how you escape real life. It wasn't like that for me because I was too strong mentally to go for that. But there can be loads of kids who are bullied in real life but online aren't judged for their appearance or what they're capable of doing. If they perform well they can be real celebrities online. Small wonder they find that nicer than the real world.

²⁰ *Avatar*: A visualisation of a character, the player's figure in the game world.

²¹ *Orgrimmar*: *The Horde's* capital city.



*The Horde Standard.
The Horde is one of the two
major political factions
of the mortal races in
World of Warcraft.*



Unlike some other computer games, MMORPGs have inbuilt level systems. These are part of the game mechanism and allow players to progress through an investment of time. They climb the levels and in that way their play character becomes better and can take on new challenges. The time invested gives a reward in terms of status. A player with no playing ability can still gain status. In this way, the game has the potential to create online identities. All that is required is that the player devotes time to the game.

Social discrepancy

Yet another reason for high consumption, according to the youngsters taking part in the study, is the fact that, beyond the confines of the game, players of World of Warcraft may live completely different lives from one another. This means some players may be obliged to adapt themselves to the lives of others.

- Others can play later/more

The youngsters say they often have to adapt to adult living patterns, for example raiding at times when adult players are not working. Similar adjustments are made by secondary school children playing with university students. Larry played with adults who had day jobs:

Most players work and come home late in the evening. That's why raids are always so late.

Christoffer, for his part, describes how his guild was led by university students:

It was most often the students who led the raids. They had quite a lot of free time and could choose themselves when to study. Guild leaders were mostly those who were at university, because they didn't have to stick to school hours and had moved from home, so they could play as much as they wanted to.

- Time variations

Some players may live in different time zones from others.

When players are from different countries, group playing may have to be adapted, especially in carrying out raids. This can seem a trivial problem, but Icelandic and Russian players may have to adapt to a four-hour time difference with other players. Because of this, they are obliged to play later than they might like. John describes how this proved a problem one time when he was playing WoW:

I played with my Priest. Then we had a Main Tank who was from Serbia and I think they're an hour later than us. He played on a modem. He and some others were forced to begin a little earlier. If we started the raid at six o'clock, it was seven for them. They'd really have liked to start when it was five our time, but for us there's hardly anyone online then, everyone's eating and stuff like that. He was quite old but he could still raid and there were others who lived still further away, in Russia I think, who wanted to start even earlier.

Staffan is another youngster with experience of the effect of different time zones on WoW play:

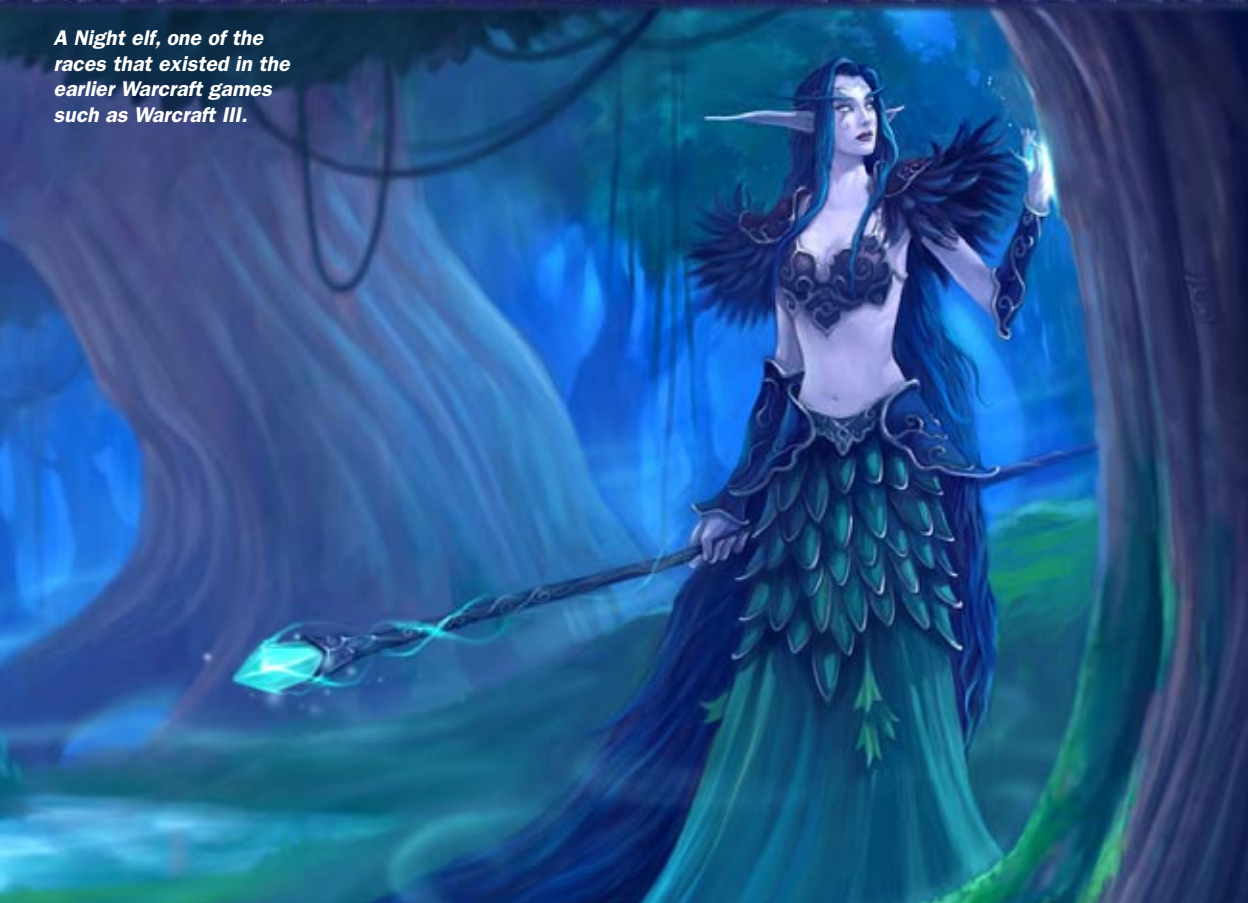
Those who led were an hour behind us so they came online later. But they could go on a long time, might often play until the raid was finished. Then we had Icelanders and there was a two-hour difference for them, so they found it difficult to be in at the start of a raid. Plus we had a Russian who was five hours behind. There were quite a lot of differences like that.

The nature of the game – built to take time

A recurring theme in the players' statements is how the game is built to take time. Of its nature, World of Warcraft is not a game you can simply play for a while when you have a bit of free time. Players make this point in comparing it with other games. Larry draws a comparison with the strategy game *Warcraft III*, which takes place in the same virtual world as WoW, but otherwise doesn't have that much in common with the later game. Warcraft III is played in short rounds with just a few players:

In other games it's not the same. In Warcraft III, if you play a match, it takes a quarter of an hour and then it's over. [...] I'd like to play WoW just on PvP and arena but that can't be done. PvE and raids and stuff like that don't work for me because then I have to log in at certain times.

A Night elf, one of the races that existed in the earlier Warcraft games such as Warcraft III.



Larry claims PvE is far more time-consuming than PvP, where it is possible to play shorter matches. Christoffer compares WoW with Warcraft III:

Because Warcraft III isn't a MMORPG you don't need to spend so much time on it. If you play MMORPG you have a character you want to become better so you spend a lot of time on it. In Warcraft III it feels better because you don't feel you have to do things or even be good at the game.

Players seem to be conscious of the underlying economic factors governing the game. These encourage players to keep active accounts. Peter has realised the relation between the game's mechanisms and the money made by the parent company:

The game is made so you play for a long time. When you start with a certain instance, you have to sit there for a month or so and as soon as you've finished with that they throw up a new one. That's to keep you occupied and so they can make money out of you.

Statements concerning the PvP system vary, something that isn't very surprising because the players have experienced different types of PvP play. The PvP system has changed continually since it was released. While the present system challenges you to only a few matches, the old version called for a much greater investment of time. Peter says you must play a great deal if you want the game to be rewarding. He continues:

That's just how it is. You must play a lot if you want to be able to play properly. The same thing applies if you want good things. Then you must play a lot and do instances and stuff. If you are forced to do an instance 20 times to get something, that takes a long time. It's the same with PvP. I have a friend who had to play for 20 days to be best. It's made so you play a lot. If you don't play much for a week you find you've gone down in status.

The older PvP system was built up so that players reached an honour level depending on how many other participants they rendered harmless in *Battleground* matches. However, this level could sink if a player didn't play very much for a week, or wasn't successful in the matches. Magnus knows the system in detail:

The first honour system that came out was based on how much you played each week, or how much you PvP'd. To get to rank 14, the highest, you were theoretically bound to play PvP 16 hours a day for around two months. Then you got to rank 14. It's a bit nasty to set up something like that. I remember when I played then it was with adults who just didn't give a damn about their jobs. They were at work for nine hours, just sitting out their time, and then they'd come home and play WoW. They'd say

things like, "It was the bloody job that stopped me getting to rank 14, I could only make 12." I mean that's pretty high anyway. When I played, the most I managed to get to was rank 8. I couldn't make it any higher. I was playing around seven hours a day. But I couldn't keep it up. I managed for about a week. But to succeed at PvP and reach rank 14 and all that depends on how much time you're there, not on how good you are, not by a long chalk. It's like, "This guy's rank 14. He can't really play." I'm better than him.

Sacha compares WoW with another game in the same genre, Tibia, which he says takes even more time. He says one difference between Tibia and WoW is that in WoW everyone has a chance to do well:

In Tibia, there you have things that really take time compared with World of Warcraft. [...] In World of Warcraft it's like everyone can do well, there isn't just one person on the whole server who is best of all.



The fact that the game mechanisms of World of Warcraft allow more players to be successful than many other online games, is a recurring theme in the youngsters' statements. Really seasoned players with experience of other games don't always appreciate this. Magnus says he prefers games where it is skill that decides the winner:

Like in Tekken 3²², there it's the same thing. You can train yourself to be really good at it. That's because you start out the same for every fight. It's not like that in World of Warcraft. Say you're Level 30 and really clever you can't take a Level 60 who knows the game. That's not on, which I think is really a shame. That's the way it is when a game is time-based.

According to Magnus, World of Warcraft is “time-based”, i.e. it is built on the idea of the player investing time in the game, levelling and acquiring equipment. The game does not depend purely on skill. Someone who has invested more time in the game can be a greater success than a player who is skilful, though both will have won the same fights and have started out under the same conditions. Davoud claims experience of this:

World of Warcraft is not like other games such as CS²³ for example, which I also played at a really high level before. There you were able to train yourself to become better at it, though not everyone became good at it even if they trained for really a long time. But despite that, it took talent to be good at CS. But World of Warcraft functions so that if you invest a lot of time and are a member of a guild, then you can get the things that make your character better.

²² *Tekken 3*: A fighting game on console.

²³ *CS*: Acronym for Counter-Strike, a popular online game.

The game is described as having qualities which allow anyone at all to be good at it, just as long as they invest enough time. In this way, the mechanism encourages high consumption and compensates for lack of skill by rewarding the player with objects that increase the prestige of his character.

Reasons for high consumption – summary and discussion

In the above interview excerpts, the youngsters talk about the various motives that led them to become high frequency players of World of Warcraft. A central reason why people start to play and/or return to the game is that their classmates also play. They meet in the game after school, World of Warcraft fulfilling the function of a kind of virtual youth club. The players also describe making friends online. They value them highly and enjoy being with them in the game. This does not necessarily constitute a reason for high consumption or problematic usage. At the same time, the game's construction steers the possibility of such friendly get-togethers. As Larry points out, it is difficult to do things with friends online if you "fall behind". World of Warcraft is so constructed that in order for it to be meaningful in encouraging togetherness, players have to be at roughly the same level. Partly this is as a result of the level system. There is simply no point in players many levels apart performing a task together. This continues to apply even when players reach the highest level because then they have to possess the same level of equipment in order to raid together. This means that players wanting company in the game must keep themselves on the same level as their friends, something which can lead to high consumption.

At the same time as a player may choose to play a great deal in order to be together with friends in, for example, raid guilds, the need for such togetherness can exercise a group pressure on the player. Several youngsters who raided seriously described how they played because they felt obliged to perform for the guild. This applies in particular to players who have key roles, for example Peter who tells

of being Main Tank in his guild, thus a central player in raids. Many raid guilds choose to let their players have precedence when it comes to obtaining good equipment because a good Main Tank benefits the entire guild. This makes players feel they owe a debt of gratitude to the guild and should, as a result, take part in all raids. The game will fulfil the same function in a player's life as if he or she were practising some form of athletics, one that calls for training and match-play.

Both these social mechanisms, *the need for togetherness* and *group pressure*, are apparent in the youngsters' statements of how players want to achieve status in the game world. In some cases this may be compensation for the status a player enjoys in everyday life. Online games are social arenas in which the person you are in everyday life is not really all that interesting. You are given the possibility of starting over again when it comes to the identity you wish to project and are not hampered by your social history. The youngsters describe how people they know who have been subjected to bullying in the real world have achieved high status in the game. Other studies (Linderoth, 2007), show that older players may use World of Warcraft as a compensatory social arena. In the game status is manifest in a very concrete way through the avatar's equipment and nowadays in the player's skill in PvP on the Internet.

Yet another reason that leads youngsters into high frequency participation is that they find themselves playing with persons with a different way of life to themselves. In other words, there is a social discrepancy between the players. The youngsters must adapt their playing to fit with people who have more time to spare and who may play later into the night. The youngsters may also have to adapt their play to fit with people living in different time zones. This too can mean late nights.

Finally the young people describe the game as being designed in such a way that things take time. The game is "time-based", depends less on developing your ability as a player, more on the amount of time you put in. In this fashion WoW differs from other games the

youngsters have played in which it is skill – that is to say the player’s ability – that decides how good they are in the game and the status they are awarded. Furthermore, there are *de facto* time limits on many of the matches. Several players make the point that PvP playing is far less time consuming, allowing you to come into the game and just play a few matches. Playing PvE is seen as more “serious”, taking up a great deal of time. However, the PvP system has not always been designed the way it was at the time the interviews were conducted. The players tell of an older honour system, in which participants were obliged to play PvP matches a large part of the night in order to reach the highest levels. The way the system worked your honour sank if you abstained from playing for a week.

Reasons for changed playing habits

In this, the last section of this report, we shall discuss the youngsters’ statements on what it was that caused them to change their playing habits. What is it that makes a player quit, play less, start to play more or take up playing again after a break? The players say there are two types of factors. In part, they change their playing habits when something happens in the *social structure* surrounding them in the game, in part when *the game’s mechanisms are changed* as it is updated by the manufacturer.

Changes in the social structure

- *Server problems*

The social dynamic that causes WoW adherents to change their playing habits is described as existing on different levels. It can come about in the event of major change, such as a server being developed in a certain direction. Sacha tells how the server he played on changed:

Sometimes I've played more than others. It just depends. A lot of it's to

do with how the server is and what I've got to do. Once, it happened like this: just when 2.0 was released, our entire server went down. No one raided anymore and I was left standing as Restoration Shaman²⁴ and couldn't do a thing. Quite simply, I had nothing to do in the game so I stopped playing completely.

Michelle tells how she tired of the game because of a lack of enemies, i.e. the game on her server became unbalanced because too few players had chosen to play on the side of the Alliance:

I started a Blood elf²⁵ along with the rest of the world. But there were hardly any Alliance players on the new servers. That's why you get fed up with it, because it's so unbalanced. On our server it was 70-75 percent Horde and 20-25 percent Alliance. When it is a PvP server things become really boring and it takes a really long time to get into the Battlegrounds. That's why you get tired of being high level. There are too few high-level Alliance characters.

- Guild problems

However, in the collected interview material, players say the social dynamic in the guilds influence an individual's playing more than changes on the server. John tells how he was in a guild where he at first felt at home but later became uncomfortable:

From the start I was in a completely Swedish guild which was led by some people from Stockholm. In the beginning they were, like, totally OK. We made MC²⁶ to start off with and really fought hard. Then, when we came up to BWL²⁷ they suddenly started to become megalomaniacs. They were like totally rotten, I thought. They talked shit about people all the time,

²⁴ *Shaman*: One of the classes players can choose.

²⁵ *Blood elf*: One of the races players can choose.

called them noobs²⁸ and were really stupid. [...] Then they started spreading rumours. There was a girl in our guild who I talked a lot with. We're friends now, we talk a lot on MSN and I met her once. But they started spreading stories about her. She had a boyfriend who was in the guild too, and they spread a story that during a raid they'd had sex and had forgotten that the mike was on so that everyone could hear it on the voice-chat. [...] Then I started to get fed up, but I'd already left the server.

Sacha has also tired of the game because of conflicts in a guild. In his case, this involved disputes over Dragon Kill Points (DKP):

I won that part to the staff with 900 DKP. I'd collected quite a lot for it so I got the eye, made the quest and got the Benediction staff. Then I came back and then I had like 2,000 DKP. So minus 900, I was left with 1,100. But then our guild leader wrote that I'd paid 2,000 DKP so I had zero. I pointed out that there was something wrong but he said that now we had to go to the third Boss. So then the gloves I wanted dropped to me and I won them for 300. No one else wanted them. Then I was lying at minus on the home page, although really I wasn't because I had 800 left. Then at the next Boss another thing I wanted dropped. Then I thought, "Ah, I'll have that too", and bid 650. The guild leader said nothing. It was sold and then I saw that it didn't go to me but to another player. I asked how that came about. "You don't have any DKP, you loser," he says. "But it was you who got it wrong. That was two months ago and you still haven't fixed it," I said. Then he started to, like, keep nagging on about it. [...] I really don't like things like that, so I quit and went over to my older brother's girlfriend's guild.

²⁶ MC: *Molten Core*, an instance.

²⁷ BWL: Acronym for the raid instance Blackwing Lair (BWL), a 40-man raid that players make after Molten Core.

²⁸ Abbreviation of *Newbie*, beginner in the game. Often used pejoratively.

- *Changed playing habits among friends*

A reason why youngsters' playing habits change is that their friends – both those who they know through the game and classmates – change their playing. Players say that when friends quit, change server or start again with a new character, it influences their own playing. For example, Larry changed server so he could play with his friends:

Then I started off a new character in the same realm, with someone else who I'd never met who wanted to start again. I played with him for a few weeks. Then I started all over again with my friends instead, and it's been like that ever since. The first two characters were the same but then we all changed after my break.

Edward too started with a new character when his friends did the same:

We all of us came to the same decision, that now we'd start again. There were some other friends who'd started again, so we thought we would do it too. Everyone should start a new character on a new server, we thought. Our whole gang went up to Level 45, except for Christoffer who got to 60.

Christoffer stopped playing completely when his friends did:

When I stopped, I had a chat with the guild leader who thought it was a shame. But I'd only been with that guild for two months so I didn't know them all that well. I had no friends there, which meant it was quite simple to stop. In the other guild it was different. The first guild I was in with my Priest when I started to play was a Swedish guild. That was in 2005. They came from Skåne I think and I played with them for seven months. They were students then and I knew that they were going to stop playing because it took up so much of their time and they had to spend a lot of time studying. Then I stopped playing and my friends stopped playing too because they just didn't find WoW fun anymore. Some went back to Tibia.



A scene from a Battleground with a mounted Warrior in the foreground.

A screenshot from the game World of Warcraft showing a battle scene. In the foreground, a large, armored orc-like creature is engaged in combat with a smaller, blue-armored character. The background features a mountainous landscape with a bright sun or moon in the sky, and several fireballs or magical effects are visible. The scene is framed by a decorative border.

WORLD
WAR
CRAFT

Davoud tells how his computer game playing is dependent on his cousin's playing:

In the end, the last two months, I'd got so tight with the guys in the guild that I played just for their sakes. But then there were a lot of rows to do with the raiding and we started quarrelling about everything and I couldn't put up with them. So I thought, "Hell, I don't play just for them." My cousin didn't play either then. So I said, "What the hell." I just couldn't put up with it anymore. But then my cousin started to play and he kept going on at me to play too but it didn't work, by then I was totally tired of the game. Then he said, "Hell, this isn't any fun." So I think he's going to buy an Xbox 360 now. We're very dependent on each other when it comes to games. We've played together since he was eight and he's fourteen now.

Apart from the purely social aspect that players want to play in a group, the game is constructed so that in its higher levels you have to play in a group. Magnus tells of a player who succeeded at one of the most difficult challenges in the game because she had such a good network of contacts:

She wanted a shield that you build with bits from all over the world, so she really played seriously. But she succeeded in the end because she had such good contacts. There are people who put in so much time but still don't succeed because they are antisocial. I was too, in the beginning. I didn't like talking to people I didn't know. But I've become more and more social. Before I just played CS. How many intelligent conversations do you think you'll have there?

If the player doesn't have a social network among the people he is playing with, it is in principle impossible to get further in the game. When friends disappear, the individual player's game experience is influenced, both socially and in terms of the game mechanism. Some players tell how they stopped playing when the game became dependent on hav-

ing a network of friends if they were to get any further with it.

Changes in the game's mechanisms

According to the players, changes in the game's mechanisms can also be a major reason for changed playing habits. When the game is updated and the various point systems are revised or certain of the classes participants can play are changed, this influences the players. They may also put their play on hold while they wait for certain updates. Larry says he waited for new equipment to become available, along with new possibilities to play PvP in the arenas:

I didn't say that I'd stopped raiding to the people in the guild, but I wasn't there on any raids. I could still be in the guild because they knew me pretty well. I'd grown tired of raiding but I waited for the Gladiator set and that you could play two against two and three against three. I thought that sounded cool.

Michelle has experience of another game that she stopped playing when its mechanisms were changed. She says that if something like that happened with World of Warcraft she would stop playing that too:

I would stop playing if they changed the idea of the game, because I've been through that sort of thing with other games. That was why I stopped playing Conquer. They changed the whole idea and it went to hell. You could win things in a lottery that were better than those that you fought for. You bought the lottery tickets for real money and with that the whole idea of the game fell apart. Why should I fight for something that other people could just buy for cash?

Christoffer tells how one of his friends started playing when the powers of the Druid class were changed by the game's creators:

One of my friends has always chosen to play a druid. They came up with a patch that made the Druids much better. When we told him this in the lunch break at school, he was hyper for a whole week. We all started playing again because of that patch.

However, Magnus points out that other players stopped taking the role of another class, the Shamans, because later patches changed them for the worse.

They are continually patching the game and generally making things better, which is good in a way. But the Shamans have got steadily worse... right since the first patch. As a result people are stopping playing Shamans. I would guess that only around 6 percent now play Shamans while 41 percent play Rogues.

Staffan, who plays in a very serious guild, tells how the entire guild tired of the game because of their disappointment over an instance which came with a long-awaited patch:

Today interest is very much on hold. We'd waited a really long time for them to release the 2.10 patch. Then when it came, we found it idiotic that you had to run around picking flowers for four hours in order to try against a Boss for a quarter of an hour. That's got to be one of the most idiotic things we'd ever encountered.

Reasons for changes in playing habits – summary and discussion

Players seem to change their playing habits when their possibility of interacting with the game world is changed. This applies to both the social environment and the game's mechanisms. Conflicts in the player's social network can lead to that player losing interest in the game. To start again on another server or in another guild calls for players to invest energy in building up a new social network from nothing, something that can be very time consuming. It also entails



A typical Orc Warrior. The Orcs are one of the races that belong to The Horde.

sacrificing progress made thus far, i.e. they may have to play instances they've already played. In such cases, the desire to play can disappear, causing players to quit. At the same time it seems that players are inclined to follow their friends and copy their playing habits. The game would seem to have inbuilt mechanisms making a player dependent on the group. As a result an individual player will willingly follow group play.

Play is also dependent on changes in the game world. If new patches change the game's mechanisms for good or ill, this will influence the playing habits of its young players. The youngsters in our study talked of how their disappointments and surprises concerning such patches led to either increased or decreased playing. Changes in the social structure and in game mechanisms may either limit or make possible new content. If the player loses his social network, he is prevented from playing in certain parts of the game. A patch may change the player's character, either giving it new possibilities for interaction, or worsening its relationships. When the game fails to offer them new content, players may consider quitting. In more traditional linear computer games the player will often lose interest in a game when it reaches the end or if the player "gets stuck" and can't get any further. One of the ideas of MMORPGs is that this won't happen, that updates to the game world will hold the player's interest. However, according to the youngsters' stories, it can happen that players find it difficult to access the new content and deal with new challenges.

Discussion

The study's limitations

Because this study is of a purely qualitative nature, it is impossible to say anything about how frequently certain problems occur and what the principal reasons are for problematic usage. The study has identified a number of social mechanisms connected with problematic usage of World of Warcraft, which may be worthy of further investigation. To what extent these social patterns occur must be a task for future, statistically based research. Furthermore it should be emphasised that the results of this study build on the players' own appraisals of their playing. As a result, there may be problems connected with World of Warcraft of which they themselves are unaware or find difficult to discuss in an interview situation. Such problems will not become apparent in a study of this kind.

There is even reason to believe that some of the players who may have had most problems with computer game playing chose not to take part in the study. In the questionnaires that we sent out there were indications of problematic usage by players who later declined to take part. Neither did we succeed in identifying an informant whose playing focused on RP (role-playing). There may be reason to believe that such players manifest other playing behaviour, connected with other problems (see Linderoth & Säljö, 2008).

Despite these reservations, the study provides a framework for understanding high consumption that takes into account both the social dynamic of the game and its design. In this way, a first step has been taken to understanding the problems with WoW and other

MMORPGs on their own terms, without the discussion becoming blurred by arguments based on compulsive gambling or drug addiction.

World of Warcraft – a dynamic game

What becomes apparent from the young people's stories is that World of Warcraft can be played in various ways. Two different players can in principle play two very different games and there is a very conspicuous difference between PvE and PvP play. Several problems concerning World of Warcraft would seem to stem from PvE and playing in raid guilds. Such playing may allow youngsters to be part of a social network with persons who have a completely different way of life to their own. People meet in a community of players. Computer game playing is an activity that in a very marked way breaks down age barriers and makes it possible for persons who otherwise would most likely never have met in other social arenas to interact with one another on equal terms. However, this can mean in certain cases that youngsters at secondary school level, who often have a very fixed structure to their lives, with regular school hours, family life and other leisure activities, are obliged to adapt to conditions set by older persons, who can stay up later and spend more time on the game.

Young people can become seriously engaged in the game in the same way as others practise athletics seriously, but without either the approval of parents or the social acceptance that goes with athletics. Parents have a totally different way of looking at more traditional leisure activities and find it quite acceptable that family life should adapt to them. For example, meal times may be adjusted so as not to conflict with matches and it is quite acceptable to spend the evening training. Schools too adapt, allowing time off for athletics. No such acceptance applies to computer game playing, which is not seen by the public to be a *bona fide* organised leisure activity. In certain cases,

a player can win a key role in a guild, something which might be likened to reaching an elite position in athletics, without that player's family having any idea of what is going on. Problematic usage is often concerned with the relationship between the computer game being played and the player's day-to-day life. Computer game playing at the high level many youngsters reach takes place without society's approval and can therefore give rise to conflicts.

Economic incentive is the real name of the game

In some instances, the young people we talked to made reference to the economic realities underpinning World of Warcraft. They pointed out that the game is designed to encourage people to play over a long period of time and keep their accounts open, thus generating profit. More light needs to be shed on this problematic aspect of usage. Blizzard earns its money primarily because the player holds an account over a long period, not that he stays online for several hours at a time playing. Such a business concept calls for the game to provide time consuming challenges. As these cannot be exhausted too soon, it is not cost effective to promote round-the-clock playing.

The changes made in the game's mechanisms after the major upgrade that took place with the addition of The Burning Crusade encourage players to have a long-term commitment to the game without being permanently connected. As noted, the older PvP system in the game was such that participants were obliged to play on a daily basis so as not to lose their honour points. The new system is based on players taking part in at least 10 matches a week, with each match taking two to three minutes. Players receive points on a weekly basis, making it difficult for them to boost their own progression by playing even more. Instead, they are rewarded for patiently waiting week after week and seeing their total number of points grow to a point where they can be exchanged for different objects. Further-

more, the more difficult instances²⁹ can be tackled only once a day. A player seeking a special object to be found in a particular instance can therefore not play the instance several times a day, but must wait 24 hours for a second chance. Also, “Daily Quests” have been introduced. These are tasks that can be performed several times, with a player earning gold for them. However, it is only possible to perform a limited number of such quests each day, and the same quest may only be carried out once a day. All in all, these changes of the game’s mechanisms prolong the time it takes to reach the principal goal, because the amount of progress a player can achieve each day is limited. At the same time, there is no encouragement for extreme playing nor for staying connected night and day.

However with the MMORPG genre growing, and with more and more games coming onto the market, there is every reason to be vigilant concerning further developments. In a highly competitive situation, game designers can be obliged to create systems that outdo one another in encouraging players to progress. Furthermore, it is by no means obvious that all games will in future earn their money from monthly fees. A game company that succeeds in taking payment for each hour the player is connected, will in all probability create a completely different game mechanism.

A new phenomenon calls for new knowledge

After collecting the youngsters’ statements, it became clear that a major part of the problem concerning computer game playing is a

²⁹ Each Boss you kill has a number of objects, armaments, swords, etc. and there is a chance it will give up these when you kill it. Consequently, players may need to kill the same Boss several times before they can obtain a particular object.

lack of knowledge as to how the genre works. People close to the youngsters share neither their knowledge of the game nor their evaluation of what constitutes meaningful leisure activity. A whole apparatus of concepts have grown up around MMORPGs that is incomprehensible to those who do not play the games. Most likely this is one of the reasons why problems are still described using concepts derived from compulsive gambling and terminology taken from addiction research. The players' stories indicate that it is more fruitful to avoid such preconceived categorisation in attempting to reach an understanding of problems concerning MMORPGs. The players' descriptions point rather to group psychology and micro-sociology as being more suitable starting points in any attempt to formulate knowledge of these games.

We see here the formation of a whole new set of problems concerning media consumption. It has become a tradition to talk of the harmful influence of media from the point of view of its content, for example depictions of violence, or that a certain usage may bring with it risks for vulnerable groups. But what we see in a study of MMORPGs is game designers creating interactive systems and game mechanisms that may sometimes encourage varying degrees of high consumption. Concerning the contents of the media, the computer games industry has established its own ratings system of suitability for different age groups, the PEGI system. If a similar self-regulatory system is to be possible concerning problematic usage, criticism of the games industry must be relevant, directed at the way designers construct the mechanisms of their games. But this is something which, in turn, presupposes knowledge of an aspect of computer games that is only rarely discussed.

What can be done about problematic usage?

This study gives merely a broad outline for understanding problematic usage of World of Warcraft and other MMORPGs. Suggestions for any measures that might be taken can, as a result, only be sketched in. Obviously more research into problematic usage is needed, research that seeks to understand the phenomenon on its own terms, without recourse to studies of compulsive gambling for example. One concrete measure we can suggest is the education of parents, educators and people in other professions working with children and young people. Once parents understand that a MMORPG does not function in the same way as an ordinary computer game but more as an organised leisure activity, they will be able to help their children to balance their playing with their day-to-day life.

A more far-reaching and spectacular proposal is to make it possible for guilds to be organised in the same way as offline leisure activities like sports for example. This could lead to an improvement in the structuring of the game so that it might become possible for it to fit more easily into players' day-to-day lives. The player would then spend less time looking for other players and could be sure there were vacant places for a raid. Such a system might furnish parents with a contact person with whom they could talk about their children's playing habits.

With such a system it would be possible to shed light, with public discussion of problems concerning games constructed to be time-consuming. This would imply a whole new way of discussing media and its effects. At the same time it is essential that people who are not themselves consumers should realise that MMORPGs differ considerably from earlier generations of computer games. Parents who believe that an infatuation with a new game will just last over the Christmas holiday are fooling themselves when they purchase an MMORPG. The boxes they bring home contain not just games, but whole online lifestyles.

References

- Brown, R. I. F., & Robertson, S. (1993): Some contributions of the study of gambling to the study of other addictions. In W. R. Eadington & J. A. Cornelius (Ed.) *Gambling behaviour and problem gambling* (pp. 241 – 272). Reno: University of Nevada press.
- Fisher, S. E. (1994): Identifying video game addiction in children and adolescents. *Addictive Behaviours*, 19, 5, 545 – 553.
- Gupta, R., & Derevensky, J. L. (1997): The relationship between gambling and video-game playing behaviour in children and adolescents. *Journal of gambling studies*, 12, 375 – 394.
- Koepp, M. J., Gunn, R. N., Lawrence, A. D., Cunningham, V. J., Daghera, A., Jones, T. et al. (1998): Evidence for striatal dopamine release during a video game. *Nature* 393, 266-268.
- Lazzaro, N. (2005): Why We Play Games: Four keys to more emotion without story. Taken, on 18 April, 2006, from: www.xeodesign.com/whyweplaygames.html
- Linderoth, J. & Säljö, R. (2008): “In here I am pretty” – online role play, stigma and identity. In R. Säljö & H. Rystedt (Ed.). *Lärande och människans redskap: Bildning för hand och tanke*. (Learning and humanity’s tools: Education for hands and minds). Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- The Media Council (2005): *Ungar & Medier* (Young People and Media) Taken, on 18 april, 2006, from: www.medieradet.se/upload/Rapporter_pdf/Ungar_&_Medier_2005.pdf [20060418”
- Griffiths, M. D. & Davies, M. N. O. (2005): Videogame addiction: Does it exist? In J. Goldstein & J. Raessens (Ed.). *Handbook of computer game studies*, pp.359 – 369. Boston, MA: MIT Press.

- Shotton, M. (1989): *Computer Addiction? A study of computer addiction*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Taylor T. L. (2006): *Play Between Worlds: Exploring Online Game Culture*. Boston, MA: MIT Press.
- Yee, N. (2006a): The Labor of Fun: How Video Games Blur the Boundaries of Work and Play. *Games and Culture* 1(1), 68-71.
- Yee, N. (2006b): The Daedalus project: The psychology of MMORPGs <http://www.nickyee.com/daedalus/> [20060418].
- Young, K. (1999): The evaluation and treatment of Internet addiction. In L. VandeCreek & T. Jackson (Ed.), *Innovations in clinical practice: A source book* (pp. 17, 19-31). Sarasota, FL: Professional Resource Press.

Glossary

- Alliance:** The Alliance is one side in the conflict in World of Warcraft. It comprises five races. The opposing side is known as The Horde.
- AQ40:** Stands for Ahn'Qiraj, 40 denoting it to be a 40-man instance (another requires 20 men).
- Avatar:** See Characters.
- Azeroth:** The world in which the World of Warcraft game is played out.
- Battleground:** Battlegrounds are specially demarcated areas where the two sides, The Horde and The Alliance, fight one another in various ways.
- Blizzard:** Blizzard Entertainment is the American computer game developer and publisher that created World of Warcraft and the earlier Warcraft series.
- Boss:** The foremost monster in an instance. Bosses have valuable objects, weapons etc, that “drop” for players to take over if they defeat them.
- The Burning Crusade:** An expansion of World of Warcraft released

in January 2007. A new continent was created, along with two new races, a new profession, new instances and the possibility of passing from Level 60 to Level 70. The honours system was also revised.

BWL: Stands for Blackwing Lair (BWL). A 40-man raid which players tackle after the instance Molten Core (MC).

Characters: The players' roles in the game world. In the beginning, the player has a number of choices as to how a character is created, such as appearance and sex. The various races have different advantages and disadvantages. Examples of races are night elves, humans, trolls, the undead and dwarves. The characters' possibilities in relation to game moves and style of play depends on which class they are. In World of Warcraft such classes include warriors, priests, druids and hunters.

Counter-Strike: A popular online-game that calls for technical skill, the ability to react and predict an opponent's tactics, speed etc. You play in teams and communicate in real time.

DKP: Stands for Dragon Kill Points, used to distribute points between players in raids. The players may then use the points to "buy" the objects obtained in the raids.

Epics: Epics are the best items of equipment a player can obtain.

Experience Points (XP): Points that are added together until the player levels, i.e. passes to the next level.

Farm: To play with the aim of obtaining a certain resource. Farming often means that players will spend hours killing only a certain type of monster which may give them the specific resource they want. Related to the expression "to grind".

Faction: The game world of World of Warcraft has two different sides who fight for control over the world. One is The Horde, the other The Alliance.

Fishing: WoW features the possibility of fishing in diverse water-courses. Fish are a resource that can be used for different purposes in the game.

- Gamecard:** A card with a code that activates entry to the game. Available in different values, based on days, for example 10 or 60 days. Can be bought in certain computer game shops.
- GM:** Stands for Guild Master, the person who is highest in the guild and therefore has the possibility of deciding on which tools are needed to keep the guild together.
- Gold:** The game's currency.
- Grind:** When the player stays in the same place and kills the same type of monster again and again in order to collect Experience Points.
- Guild:** A gathering, or clan of players. The game has functions and tools that bind such gatherings. Certain guilds are focused on certain playing factors, such as raids or role-playing. The guilds have a Guild Master who has the supreme power to recruit or throw out players.
- Honour:** A type of point won by defeating other players. These points can then be exchanged for objects.
- Horde:** The Horde is the collective name of the races on one side of the conflict in World of Warcraft. The other is The Alliance.
- Instance:** An instance is a clearly defined place, a dungeon, cave or suchlike, which five or more players enter together. In these instances are a number of Bosses, monsters who require group-coordination if players are to conquer them. These Bosses "drop" treasures players can take when they have won the battle.
- IRL/RL:** IRL stands for In Real Life, things that happen in the real world and not in the world of the game.
- Karazhan:** Also referred to as Kara. Karazhan is the first raid-instance in the area released with the Burning Crusade expansion. A 10-man raid.
- LAN:** Local Area Network. Often synonymous with playing in a closed network.
- Level:** World of Warcraft has a component shared with all MMORPGs, namely that the play characters advance and develop

in the course of the game. A special measurement tool enables the player to see how much the character has developed. It is based on which level the player is on. In order to advance (to *level*) the player can, among other things, perform tasks and kill monsters, picking up a number of XP (see Experience Points).

Main Tank: A central player in raids that has powerful armour and can therefore be the one to take the brunt of the monster's attack.

A good Main Tank is very often essential for a successful raid.

MMORPG: Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game.

Naxxramas: A raid-instance requiring 40 men.

Noob: An abbreviation of newbie, a beginner in the game. Often used pejoratively.

Orgrimmar: *The Horde's* capital city.

Patch: A patch is an updating of the game's contents and operation.

Smaller corrections usually take place once a week.

PvE: (Player versus Environment). The PvE-servers enable attacks against other players in certain situations and areas. PvE is also used to describe a style of play focused on carrying out tasks and raids against other players.

PvP: (Player versus Player). On a PvP-server the players can, generally speaking, attack one another everywhere. The expression is used to describe a style of play focused on playing matches against other players in Battlegrounds or Arenas.

Quest: A task the player is given by non-player characters (NPC) in order to gain Experience Points (see XP) and equipment for his play character.

To quest: To carry out a number of quests, or tasks.

Raid/to raid: A raid is a larger group of players (10/25) which enters one of the more difficult instances (see Instance). Raiding calls for the player to have reached a certain level (often the highest one), and to have acquired certain equipment and the ability to control his play character in a way that is expected of it in the group of players.

Realm: The server on which you play. Each Realm is a copy of the whole WoW world.

RL: Se IRL.

RP: (Role-Play) a style of play in which the player is called upon to pretend to be a fictional character, not quitting the role for example in communications with other players.

TBC: Acronym for The Burning Crusade.

Tekken 3: A fighting game that calls for fast reactions and good coordination.

Tibia: A MMORPG.

Tradera: A Swedish auction site where private persons and companies buy and sell.

WoW: Acronym for World of Warcraft.

XP: See Experience Points.



The Swedish Media Council is a Swedish Government committee working with questions concerning the impact of media on children and young people. Its purpose is to lessen risks of harmful influence. All motion picture media falls within its orbit: film, TV, computer games and the Internet.

In brief the council's aim is to:

- Be an authority on media development and its consequences for children and young people
- Keep abreast of research into the influence of such media, to disseminate facts and provide guidance
- Promote self regulation by the media industry
- Work for increased knowledge of media in schools
- Protect and empower children in the new modern media landscape in collaboration with other social actors
- Keep up with international developments and take part in international cooperation in the field

What are children really getting up to with their computers? Why can't they stop playing so we can eat together as a family? How are they going to be able to cope in school when they've been up playing all night?

Such questions indicate a widespread lack of knowledge of computer games, especially those played online with other enthusiasts all over the world. In recent years, the game World of Warcraft has established a unique, leading position in the computer game universe, with around 9 million users worldwide.

In this report, we look at high consumption of World of Warcraft via interviews with a number of young people on their lives in relation to the game, both online and off. They tell what it is that attracts them to it and describe the conflicts that may arise from the demands it places upon them. The report provides a unique insight into the effects of extensive online playing, adding nuance to the picture generally reflected in the newspapers and on TV.

The study was carried out by Jonas Linderöth, PhD, and Ulrika Bennerstedt, MA, of Göteborg University Department of Education.