

The Daedalus Project

Vol. 1-2

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Welcome to the Second Issue

I'm hoping that the first and second issue form the main hump of getting The Daedalus Project going – the first issue is hard because of having to lay the groundwork, and the second is hard because it shows whether I have enough content to keep the issues going. And I hope that The Daedalus Project is something that you find useful, informative, or entertaining.

I really do appreciate those of you who have given me support and positive comments over the past 3 years. This is truly something I could not have done without the support of the player community and the webmasters of high-profile web portals. Your participation is literally what keeps all this going. And your continued participation is a reflection of the relevance and value of this research.

I have recently been accepted to a PhD program in Communication at Stanford, where I will be able to work with people who are both social-science-minded and tech-savvy, which is very difficult to find out there. Traditional psychologists don't have a vocabulary for talking about computer games (except for violence and aggression it seems), and traditional CS/HCI departments are not grounded enough in social-science to ask the relevant social and psychological questions.

It feels really good to be able to pursue something that began 3 years ago as a small online survey, and it feels really good for all this to come together in the way that it has. My online research in MMORPGs led me to a job opportunity with Accenture Technology Labs 2 years ago, numerous interviews with print and news media, and this forthcoming academic career at Stanford. The Internet truly can empower individuals who tap its potential.

Again, I would like to express my gratitude to all those individuals who have supported my research in the past, those who continue to participate in my surveys, and those who took the time to email me positive comments and constructive feedback. **Thank you for being a part of this.** And I hope you follow my research as I turn a new and exciting page in my academic career.

Learning Leadership Skills

The exploration of whether individuals can learn leadership skills from their MMORPG experience is important for several reasons. First of all, it demonstrates that actual real-life skills can be learned in virtual settings. Secondly, it allows educators and corporate training creators to think of MMORPGs as more than just games, and shows that MMORPGs should be thought of as potential educational mediums. And finally, it highlights the possibility of a kind of "emergent learning" where the pedagogy isn't dictated as in traditional training software, but emergent in the sense that it occurs because of the rich system mechanics.

MMORPGs allow for some provocative training scenarios. One could imagine asking job candidates to join a group and persuade the group to move to a different hunting spot to gauge a candidate's persuasion skills. Or alternatively, have an individual join a group and then attempt to take over the leadership role while gaining the loyalty of the existing group members. Of course, these training scenarios depend on a more straight-forward rule-set so there isn't too much domain specific knowledge that doesn't apply to the real world. As the pervasiveness of MMOGs increase however, these might be a very possible scenarios.

Because the power of MMORPGs is the ability to place individuals in different ad-hoc groups every time they play, it makes sense to explore whether people are able to learn complex social skills from their experiences. Respondents were asked whether they had learned anything or improved their ability in the following 4 leadership skills from their MMORPG experience.

Mediation: Resolving in-group conflicts. Reducing in-group tension.

Persuasion: Convincing the group to move to a different area, or change hunting tactics.

Motivation: Instilling loyalty. Providing encouragement.

Overall Leadership: Overall leadership ability.

The following table shows that almost half of respondents felt that they had learned a little or a lot across all 4 leadership skill areas.

Leadership Skills Transfer				
N = 2804				
	Mediation	Motivation	Persuasion	Leadership
Not At All	43.1%	50.5%	54.9%	48.2%
Learn A Little	44.5%	38.8%	38.0%	39.6%
Learn A Lot	10.7%	9.6%	5.8%	10.7%

While there were no gender differences, there were significant age differences. In particular, younger players were more likely to feel they had improved their leadership skills from their MMORPG experiences.

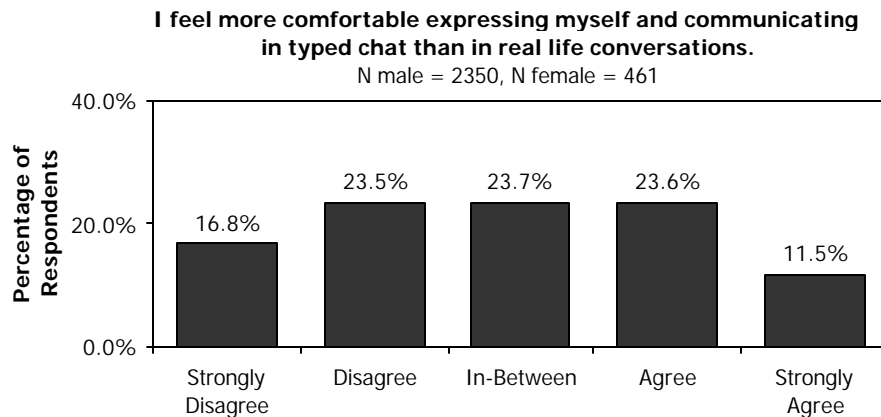
Average Ages and Leadership Skills Transfer				
N = 2804				
	Mediation	Motivation	Persuasion	Leadership
Not At All	28.0	28.0	27.8	27.9
Learn A Little	25.1	25.5	25.2	25.5
Learn A Lot	23.6	22.8	23.0	22.0

Respondents were also asked whether they were in a manager or leadership role in their real-life jobs, and the interesting finding was that this had no effect on whether the individual felt they had learned anything from their MMORPG experiences. In other words, someone who was in a leadership or management role in real life was not any more or less likely to feel they had learned something from their MMORPG experiences.

This data set demonstrates that MMOGs can, and should be, thought of as potential educational mediums for complex social skills. Beyond training, one could imagine MMOGs used as candidate screening tests. Instead of asking candidates to answer Critical Behavioral (CBI) questions, one could imagine observing them behave in stressful group situations instead, which provides a far better assessment tool than the CBI questions where a candidate can provide prepared answers.

Communication / Relationship Skills

Previous results showed that a significant portion of MMORPG players do tell their online friends about personal issues and secrets that they have never told their real-life friends (<http://www.nickyee.com/mosaic/adolescence.html>), and these results hint at how these virtual worlds provide a different kind of communication channel than face-to-face communication provides. When respondents were asked whether they felt more comfortable expressing themselves and communicating through typed chat as opposed to face-to-face, it was interesting to find a near-perfect normal distribution.



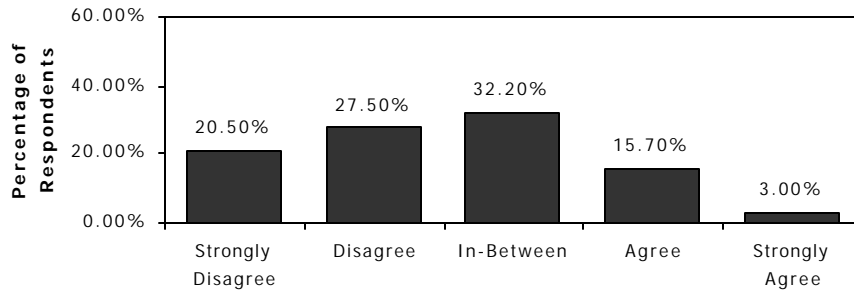
While there were no gender differences, there were significant age differences.

Average Age and Communication Comfort N = 2819	
Strongly Disagree	28.3
Disagree	29.4
In-between	26.9
Agree	23.8
Strongly Agree	20.9

Respondents were also asked whether their MMORPG experiences have helped them be better communicators in real life, or whether it has helped them in forming and sustaining relationships in real life. About 1/5 of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their MMORPG experiences have made them more comfortable with face-to-face communication. There were no significant gender or age differences.

I have become more comfortable with F2F communication because of my MMORPG experiences.

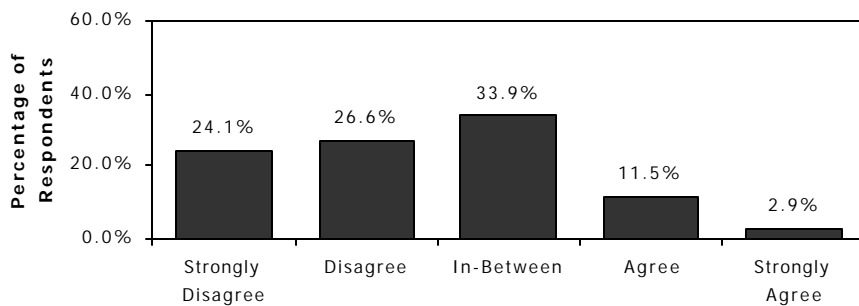
N male = 2350, N female = 461



A small, but sizeable portion of players also felt that their MMORPG experiences have helped them become more comfortable forming and sustaining relationships in real life.

I have become more comfortable forming and sustaining relationships in RL because of my MMORPG experiences.

N = 2809



While there were no significant gender differences, there were significant age differences. In particular, younger players were more likely to have benefited from their MMORPG experiences.

Average Age and Relationship Comfort	
N = 2809	
Strongly Disagree	27.9
Disagree	27.4
In-between	25.7
Agree	23.5
Strongly Agree	22.5

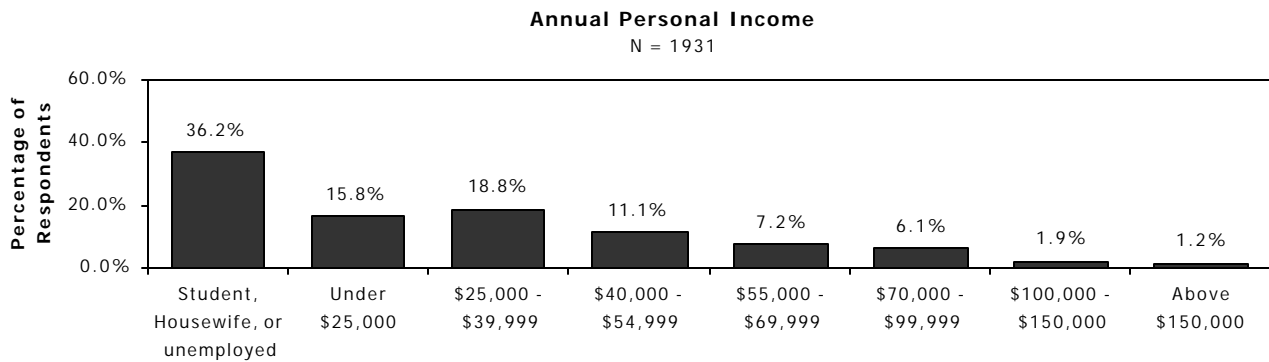
The safe, anonymous environment that an MMORPG provides may very well facilitate individuals overcoming their real-life anxieties about communication and relationships, and provide them with a variety of practice settings. This is one of the many reasons why it doesn't make sense to think of MMORPGs as "just games" – because it denies the existence of the transfer of experience and lessons that occurs all the time.

Demographics: Education and Income

33% of the respondents were students. Here is the "highest education level achieved" breakdown for players who are and are not students.

Highest Education Level Achieved		
N = 1931		
	Student (N = 725)	Not Student (N = 1206)
High School	22.2%	26.1%
Some College	44.0%	28.3%
College	20.3%	29.4%
Graduate	12.8%	15.4%

Of those players who are students, 33% are pursuing a degree in the Technology area. Here is the annual personal income breakdown.



Players Who Have Quit

Players who have quit are by definition difficult to target, because they are far less likely to go to MMORPG portals when they are no longer playing the game. Because I maintain a database of respondents to facilitate analyzing across survey phases by matching a respondent's email address, I found myself in a position to target players who were in my database but who had quit the game since they first participated in my surveys. Of course, the following data is by no means representative of all players who have quit, but it is a first step in understanding players who quit and why they quit.

418 respondents completed the "exit survey", of which 51% are not currently playing any MMORPG.

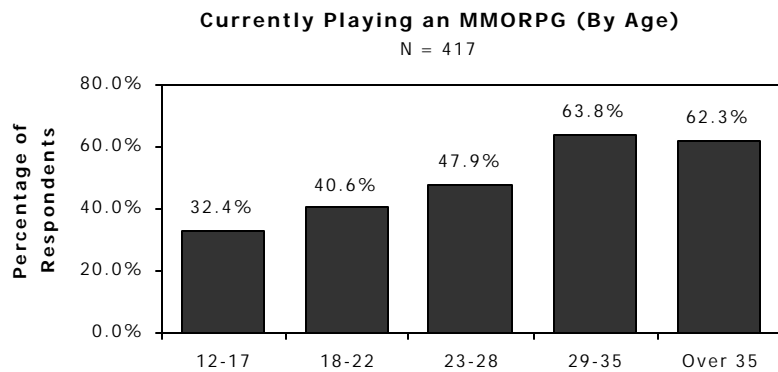
Respondents were asked to indicate how long they played the game before they quit, as well as how long they kept their account active for after they stopped playing. Because of the large variance of the responses (0 to 60), it was difficult to do significance testing on age and gender differences.

Average Number of Months Until Player Quit Game N = 418			
	N	Mean	Median
EverQuest	N=249	22.7	24
Ultima Online	N=43	28.1	32
Dark Age of Camelot	N=62	9.9	6.5
Anarchy Online	N=23	5.4	6
Asheron's Call	N=26	18.5	18

Average Number of Months Account Kept Active After Quitting N = 418			
	N	Mean	Median
EverQuest	N=247	2.5	1
Ultima Online	N=43	4.3	1
Dark Age of Camelot	N=61	2.7	1
Anarchy Online	N=23	0.7	0
Asheron's Call	N=26	2.5	1

Even with a non-representative sampling, we can still find valid subgroup differences. For example, even with a non-representative sampling of the general population – 4 times the number of women versus men, we will still probably find that the men in this sample weigh more than the women. This is true as long as there are no systematic biases that affected these subgroups. Thus, the age and differences below are likely to be true even though the overall sampling is probably skewed.

There were significant age and gender differences with regards to whether these respondents were currently playing an MMORPG. Overall, 48.5% of these respondents were currently playing an MMORPG. Female players were more likely to be currently playing an MMORPG than male players (68% as opposed to 45%). Furthermore, older players were more likely to be currently playing an MMORPG when compared with younger players.



Respondents were also asked whether they gave away their character's items when they left the game. Overall, 60% of respondents did not give away their items, 29% gave them away to friends, and 10% gave them away to strangers. There were no significant gender differences, but players under 23 were more likely to give away their items than players above 22 (50% as opposed to 35%).

Narratives: Why We Quit

Asking players who have quit why they quit gives us insight to an aspect of MMORPGs that we can't explore by asking active players. Ironically, it also highlights the not-so-fun parts of what is advertised as an entertaining experience.

The most common reason ex-players gave for quitting was the boredom and repetition that these games revolved around:

No content other than high-end hack and slash, got boring, even the quests involved either rampant killing or boring delivery-style stuff. [EQ, m, 14]

Coming into EQ from UO left me feeling rather unsatisfied with the game play. The mechanics of the world itself didn't help either, it may seem like a little thing but not being able to sit in a chair or really change clothes to an extensive degree was really immersion breaking. Early game when I played was also extremely monotonous, and I simply did not desire to spend 20 hours killing the same rat when I could go role-play in UO. [EQ, m, 18]

The game got old. I don't care what anyone says, after a while it's all the same old grind. I play these games for fun. When they are no longer fun, or when I start feeling like I 'have' to log on...I quit. In fact, I'm about to quit my current game (DAoC) for those very reasons. [EQ, m, 30]

The game reached a state of repetition for me. The only activity that I followed in-game was leveling, which was very dull considering I was unable to find anyone to role play with. No one had any interest in taking chances or doing things differently, which created this mediocrity that made the game lose its sense of fun. It simply ceased to be worth my time. [DAOC, n, 33]

All of a sudden, I found myself being logged in and sitting in front of the computer, bored or anxious. I tried for a couple of weeks to come up with things I could do to make the game fun again -- working on tradeskills, starting a new character, even moving to a different server -- but then I realized how silly it was to try and force myself to like again something I'd grown tired of. [EQ, f, 24]

Other players elaborated on how playing had become almost like working, and what should be fun had become a second job where there was a whole new set of responsibilities, worries and stresses.

It became a chore to play. I became defacto leader of a guild and it was too much. Being an officer was too much. Pleasing people did not interest me. I wanted to get away from real life and politics and social ettiquite followed me in! [EQ, m, 20]

Was more like work then fun. One day got burnt out trying to get exp for level 55 and quit. Got tired of always complaining about how I disliked the game but still playing it. Also had a traumatizing event happen in real life. Stop playing and never went back. Sold all my gear and gave character to an online friend. [EQ, m, 22]

I've played EQ off and on for almost 3 years now. I quit this time for 2 reasons: 1. Other people's attitudes. Some people were downright rude, just to be mean and hurtful. 2. There was no possible way to get past level 46 without a serious guild and serious playing and I was just playing for the fun. Didn't want to put in the incredible amounts of time and effort in the hopes of being invited into a guild and being allowed to loot what was needed to improve my characters. [EQ, f, 32]

The community became too eccentric over time. More and more people took everything personally as if their whole life was depending on this game. Also everything had to be bigger, mightier and more and more complicated. The pure fun playing the game with just a handful of nice people has vanished over time. To put it simple: playing the game was much more stress than fun. [EQ, m, 34]

I stopped playing because I just didn't want to commit to the crazy raid times (6+ hours in the evening?) and because I'd kind of stalled out on my interest in my main character. [EQ, f, 27]

It was also clear to some players that this was a giant treadmill to nowhere.

No specific events made me quit, it was rather that i couldn't find myself any semi-longterm goals to achieve. I absolutely need a longterm goal to strive toward to enjoy the game. In the end the game was more 'work' than 'play', and with no personal goal to achieve my gaming experience deteriorated. I played the game for about three months feeling like this before i finally decided to take a break and check wether that certain 'withdrawal syndrome' would present itself or not. Unfortunately it never did. [AO, m, 30]

Nothing in particular. The game just seemed like an endless race to nothing...in other words it was more work than fun. [EQ, m, 21]

I stopped playing EQ because: 1. As I leveled, I felt less powerful. At first level, you can hunt in any number of places. Not so at 49th. 2. Difficulty of getting the content I paid for. Maiden's Eye, a high level area, was difficult to get a group in, i tried several times, albeit briefly. That had a lot to do with my leaving EQ. I have few places to hunt and getting groups there is not worth it. 3. It takes ~1 hour to get a group together. That's unfortunate. 4. The guild I was in spent more time saying hello to one another than adventuring. [EQ, m , 36]

For some players, it was the frustrations that arose from their social relationships that caused them to quit.

I guess I stopped playing it because a lot of my close friends had left the game, or I just kept missing them the times they were on. Got a little harder to level, and some new MMORPG's were coming out that I wanted to try. [f, EQ, 14]

I took a break from EQ to play DAOC; EQ was getting to me a bit and I needed time away. DAOC I found interesting, there was much to like about it (especially in contrast) but what I missed was all the social interaction I had in EQ. I knew that I could develop a new social network on DAOC but I was wondering too much about my EQ friends to get interested in that. Soon I found myself popping onto EQ to see if any of my EQ friends wanted to go to DAOC with me. When that didn't pan out very well, I finally quit DAOC. [DAOC, f, 49]

All friends out-leveled me, so I could no longer group with them. [EQ, m, 32]

Several players left because they felt the game lacked either complexity or true role-play.

Wasn't as good as EQ. Found that because EQ is a more difficult game it took longer to master, and therefore had more lasting appeal. I think they should stop making these games so simple. I have quit other games for the same reason, and also because it is harder to communicate well on some games EQ was easy to speak to people, so was DAOC...all the other games out there i have played and quit because it was to difficult to speak to people in game. [DAOC, m, 26]

I feel that there is no real role-playing in the game, I had imagined it as a world alive with creatures and characters/personalities but was disappointed. After a year I gave up trying to find other role-players in the game and decided to quit. There are some very talented role-players out there but they are few, most people are only interested in gaining levels as fast as possible. [EQ, f, 28]

Many players complained about persistent bugs and game-balancing issues that the game developers never seemed to get right.

Mythic did not address bugs and balance issues in a timely manner. When they tried to fix something, they did so in a way that didn't really fix the problem and caused several additional problems. I've since tried a free month of AO and AC2 (and briefly re-subscribed for Shrouded Isles), and I think DAoC is still the best game out there. It's just not quite good enough for me to give them money every month. [DAOC, m, 28]

Although the addition of new content via monthly patches was fun, it also caused a number of problems due to Turbine's constantly rolling over for the loudest players. They nerfed their own game balance and then completely destroyed the in-game economy at which point I left. Additionally, Turbine's attitude towards exploiters was unbelievably irresponsible to their larger player base -- people who are utilizing in-game exploits should be removed from the game to avoid incumbent issues (server crashes among them). Overall, I felt that Turbine was incredibly disrespectful to the largest part of their community while catering to the vocal few. [AC, f, 39]

The developers' actions and attitudes towards the game encouraged me to quit, because they keep messing around with stats, spells, skills, classes, nerfing this group of players or that group, but never finding the holy grail of a happy medium and sticking with it. [DAOC, m, 28]

Anarchy Online was a great premise handled horribly by a company who wanted to get their product out before it was finished. The lag and bugs that I experienced in the game made it unplayable. I gave it 4 months of my time that I wish I had back. I have heard that it has solved all of its lag and bug issues and even was given some awards, but I have

refused to return because of the initial bad experience. That is one company whom I will never play another game by strictly because of its handling of the release of Anarchy Online. [AO, m, 31]

Game balance was pathetic. Developer had no idea what the issues were and was making changing that had little or no impact. Often made changes that made stronger classes stronger and weaker classes weaker. [DAOC, m, 37]

Other players became frustrated with the customer support or the company's attitude towards the player base.

The first reason I stopped playing was terrible customer support. Should something happen regarding your account, in-game, or other reasons there was virtually no assistance. The phone support was quite poor, slow, and unhelpful. The second reason I quit UO was tremendous lag problems. They spent all of their time and effort creating a new version of the game no one wanted to play because the old version was faster and more manageable. These people ruined an extremely fun game by allowing their bow-tie management to dictate what the customers wanted. They have no clue what their game is, what makes it tick, and what the customers wanted out of a game. My conclusion was that the people making the decisions had never even played the game before. [UO, m, 31]

Grew tired of the repetitiveness of the activities and annoyed by the way they were self sustaining. (kill something to gain skill and items so you can kill something stronger to get more skill and better items so you can kill something stronger) Also Verant / Sony's downright antagonistic attitude toward their customers really pissed me off. The atmosphere of the game became such that it was as if they were doing you an enormous favor just by allowing you to pay and play, a privilege they would rescind at their slightest whim without any justification or chance of defense. [EQ, m, 34]

And finally, some players left because they felt they were becoming addicted to the game, and needed to get away from it.

I didn't like the direction it was taking my life. I didn't like the feeling that I needed to be playing. After spending just a few weeks constantly on EverQuest, I decided that that was no way to live. [EQ, m, 24]

I found it was an escapist mechanism; a growing addiction; a way to keep me irresponsible & childish; a way to get away from my bad relationship. I didn't give away any avatar items because I cancelled on a 1-minute realization.... it still feels good. [AO, m, 29]

After the recent slew of media paranoia about MMORPGs as incredibly fun and addictively entertaining environments, it's refreshing and jarringly humorous to hear ex-players talking about how what was supposed to be an entertainment turned out to be a frustrating, boring, and repetitive job. The "danger" of MMORPGs is exaggerated if only because the media never cares to interview players who have quit.

Number of Accounts

From the respondent sampling, 1 out of every 3 EQ players has a second account, while about 1 out of every 4 DAOC player has a second account, and about 5 out of 9 UO players has a second account.

Percentage of Players and Number of Accounts N = 1904			
	1	2	> 2
EverQuest	69.8%	22.1%	6.0%
Ultima Online	56.0%	27.6%	15.0%
Dark Age of Camelot	75.9%	20.9%	4.0%

Female players were more likely to have a second account than male players (1.48 as opposed to 1.34). And age was positively correlated with number of accounts owned.

Age and Number of Accounts N = 2809		
12-17	N=256	1.22
18-22	N=423	1.30
23-28	N=483	1.33
29-35	N=443	1.42
Over 35	N=291	1.56