

# The Daedalus Project

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## Welcome to the Seventh Issue

It feels great to be back in school again after working for almost 2 years. Being in a seminar with a good prof is so satisfying. I'm also finally in the right place and context to write up some of my data for submission to journals. The task of crystallizing the most important findings from 3 years of online surveys will be challenging and rewarding.

And for all those of you who participate in these surveys, those who discuss the findings on other message boards, or those of you who help publicize the surveys, I just want to express my appreciation for your help because the support from the community is so important in these studies.

This issue focuses more on how different game elements or genres appeal to different people – focusing on gender and age differences. The combined big picture is quite interesting.

## Appeal of Game Elements

Knowing how different key elements of an MMORPG differ in importance across age and gender help us predict how games that emphasize different components will appeal to different people and gives us a sense of why certain gender or age skews appear. It also lets us understand how enhancing an element in the game might impact the player base. For example, if a game enhanced the visual quality of the landscape, who is most likely to enjoy that change?

Respondents were asked to indicate on an 8-point scale how important the following elements of an MMORPG are relative to each other.

- A good combat system
- A good crafting system
- Varied and interesting landscape
- Varied and interesting quests
- Highly customizable character creation

Overall, the “combat” element is more important to male players as would be expected, and the “quest” element is more important to female players. The age differences among male and female MMORPG players are summarized below. The percentages shown are percentages of players who ranked that element in the 2 highest points on the 8-point scale. The range shows the combined percentages of the 12-18 age group and the over 35 age group to give a rough sense of how strong the trend is.

<b>Appeal of Game Elements (N = 2639)</b>				
	<b>Male</b>		<b>Female</b>	
	(N = 2329)	<b>% range</b>	(N = 310)	<b>% range</b>
<b>Character Creation</b>	Lowers with Age	71 -> 53	Lowers with Age	85 -> 67
<b>Combat System</b>	Lowers with Age	67 -> 51	Stable	40 -> 43
<b>Crafting System</b>	Stable	38 -> 40	Increases with Age	22 -> 51
<b>Landscape</b>	Stable	54 -> 51	Lowers with Age	70 -> 52
<b>Quests</b>	Stable	58 -> 58	Increases with Age	52 -> 65

### Appeal of Genres and Implementations

On an abstract level, a speed increase spell (like Spirit of Wolf in EQ) is the functional equivalent of a hovercraft (when that gets implemented in SWG) in that they both enhance traveling speed. And in the same way, a heavy plasma cannon is the functional equivalent of a Darkwood Bow in that they are both ranged weapons. The question is how these implementation and genre differences influence appeal across age and gender differences. Knowing how these differences interact with genre differences lets us understand what demographic an upcoming game might attract.

Three sets of implementation/genre differences were used that focused on different aspects of a game – pet instantiation, ranged weaponry, and method of enhanced traveling. The following tables summarize the age and gender differences among these implementation differences. All differences shown are significant at  $p < .001$ . The appeal column is the average rating on an 8-point scale across all respondents. This gives a rough indicator of each implementation relative to others.

Because a higher percentage of respondents came from medieval/fantasy-based MMORPGs, those implementations that come from those genres appear to be skewed higher, so do not focus on the Appeal column too much.

<b>Appeal of Different Implementations of Method of Enhanced Travel (N = 2639)</b>			
	<b>Appeal</b>	<b>Gender Differences</b>	<b>Age Differences</b>
<b>Tamed/Bio-Engineered</b>	4.8	Women Prefer	None
<b>Mechanical / Droid</b>	4.1	Men Prefer	None
<b>Summoned Elemental</b>	5.2	None	None
<b>Charmed/Mesmerized</b>	5.1	None	None

<b>Appeal of Different Implementations of Method of Enhanced Travel (N = 2639)</b>			
	<b>Appeal</b>	<b>Gender Differences</b>	<b>Age Differences</b>

<b>Creature Mount</b>	6.2	Women Prefer	Sharp Decrease for > 35
<b>Spell/Potion</b>	5.5	Women Prefer	Increases with Age
<b>Innate Levitation Ability</b>	5.3	Women Prefer	Sharp Increase for > 35
<b>Personal Hover Craft</b>	4.9	Men Prefer	None

<b>Appeal of Different Implementations of Ranged Weaponry (N = 2639)</b>			
	<b>Appeal</b>	<b>Gender Differences</b>	<b>Age Differences</b>
<b>Darkwood Bow</b>	5.9	Women Prefer	None
<b>Lightning Bolt Spell</b>	5.9	Women Prefer	Sharp Increase for > 35
<b>Psionic Shockwave</b>	5.1	None	None
<b>Laser Cannon</b>	4.2	Men Prefer	Sharp Decrease for > 35

And finally, as a fuller synthesis of an actual genre, respondents were asked to rank the appeal of the following 4 hypothetical tribes that had different values and strengths.

- A tribe that relies on technology and mechanical inventions (droid, hover-craft, laser cannon)
- A tribe that relies on magical abilities and spells (magical pet, speed spell, lightning bolt spell)
- A tribe that relies on a symbiotic relationship with nature (creature pets and mounts, darkwood bow)
- A tribe that relies on psionic abilities (charm pet, levitation ability, psionic shockwave)

<b>Appeal of Different "Tribes" (N = 2639)</b>			
	<b>Appeal</b>	<b>Gender Differences</b>	<b>Age Differences</b>
<b>Magic Focused Tribe</b>	5.9	Women Prefer	Sharp Increase for > 35
<b>Nature Focused Tribe</b>	5.7	Women Prefer	Sharp Increase for > 35
<b>Psionic Focused Tribe</b>	5.0	Women Prefer	None
<b>Technology Focused Tribe</b>	4.5	Men Prefer	Decreases with Age

Personally, an MMORPG that had Nature/Tribal factions against Technological/Mechanical factions is very appealing. Is there one like that in Beta or design around?

### Occupational Preferences

Respondents were asked to rank the appeal of 4 non-combat oriented professions. The 4 chosen professions are likely to be instantiated in many upcoming games, so it's interesting to see how different people are drawn to them.

- A farmer or shepherd that grows crops and breeds livestock on a large plot of land. Provides base resources for crafters.

- A geologist or miner that explores different areas to locate and mine precious ores and gems for crafters and gems for spells.
- A fashion designer or stylist that provides other players with fashionable clothing, hair styles and personal flair.
- An elected governor of a town or city managing taxes and resources, and the approval and construction of new structures.

All differences shown below are significant at  $p < .001$ . The appeal column is the average rating on an 8-point scale across all respondents. This gives a rough indicator of appeal relative to each profession.

Appeal of Different Professions (N = 2639)			
	Appeal	Gender Differences	Age Differences
<b>Geologist / Miner</b>	4.8	None	None
<b>Governor</b>	4.4	Men Prefer	Decreases with Age
<b>Farmer / Shepherd</b>	3.6	Women Prefer	Sharp Increase for < 18
<b>Fashion Designer / Stylist</b>	3.4	Women Prefer	None

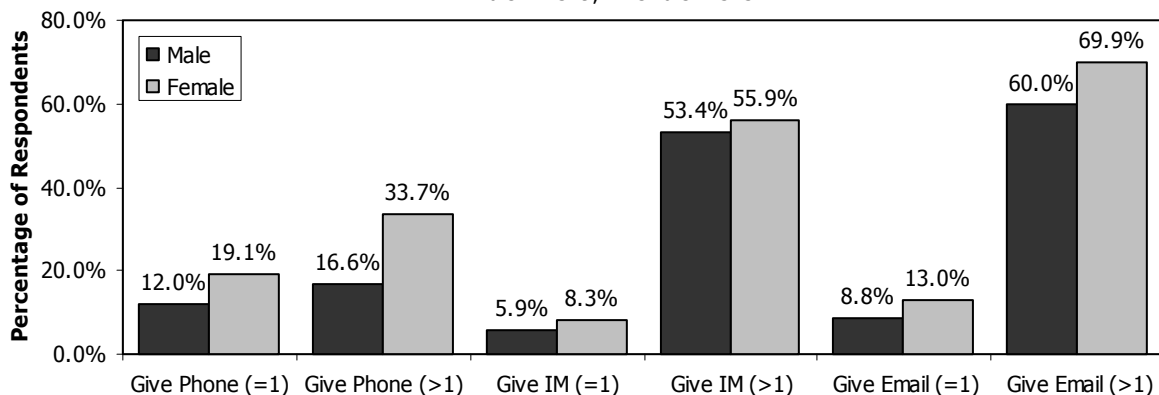
### Sharing Contact Info

Sharing real life contact info is one way to measure how willing MMORPG players are in bringing their virtual social network into the real world. While it could be argued that people giving out their IM's and emails are maintaining superficial guild contact information for distribution, that is a less viable argument for why people give out their phone numbers. I feel that measuring the prevalence of sharing contact information gives a rough approximation of the strength of social ties that develop in the game. Any thoughts?

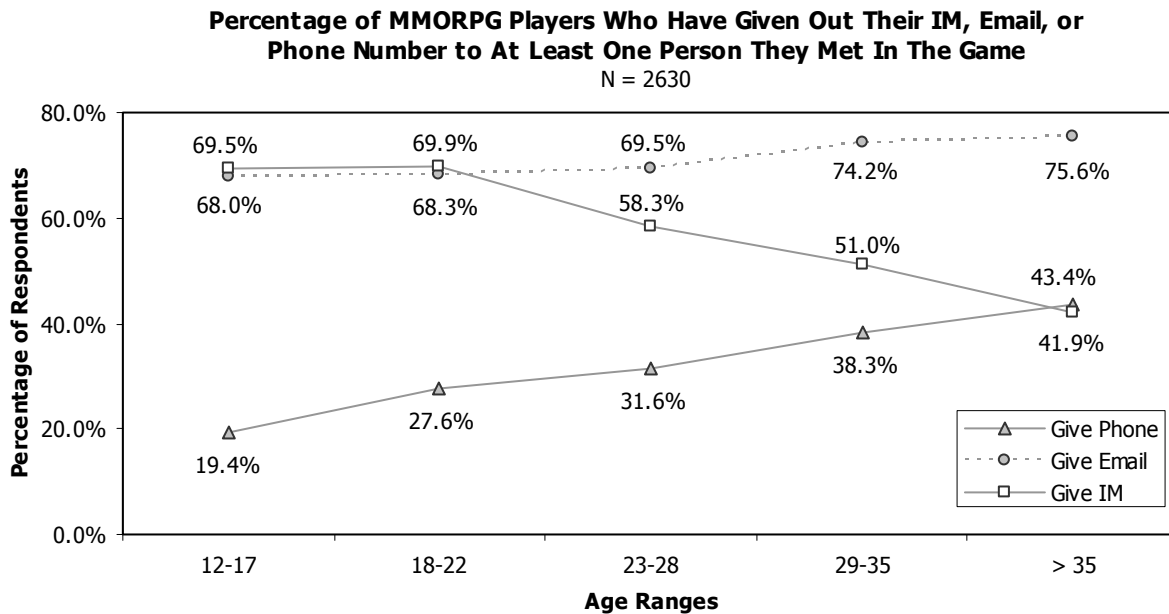
Below are gender differences in the sharing of contact information, separating the people who have given their contact info to only one person from the people who have shared that information with more than one person.

### Have You Given Out Your Email or Phone Number to Someone You Met in the Game?

N male = 2329, N female = 313



And here are the age differences. The doubling of people who give out their phone numbers over the age range is quite striking.



### Are MMORPG Relationships Meaningless?

That was the question posed to MMORPG players, and they were asked to use their own personal experiences in explaining their answer. The responses presented below help highlight the different ways that players approach the question as well as point out what the key issues are.

The respondents who believed that the relationships in MMORPGs were superficial mainly used arguments focusing on the facelessness of the communication:

I don't maintain close relationships in-game. If I can't touch or feel it, it's not very real to me. So I tend to develop more acquaintance type relationships in game and more personal/meaningful relationships in real life. [EQ, M, 43]

I feel that relationships in MMORPGS can be 'real', but not 'meaningful' as in real life - although people can find someone with whom they 'click', they may in fact be clicking with a totally different person's invented Avatar, which in many ways detracts from the potential of a relationship being meaningful. [NWN, M, 17]

They are meaningless. You can be anything you want. I have a distrust for what people tend to say about themselves in game. [SWG, M, 27]

One player on the other side of the spectrum articulated that the facelessness of the communication is in fact a good thing:

I believe that relationships formed in game are even more structured than those in real life. I love the fact that your appearance doesn't affect your relationship with someone; only the content of your character. I know my best friend through the game, and I can tell that person things which I wouldn't even be able to tell my siblings or parents. [EQ, M, 17]

And as another player points us, are we kidding ourselves if we say that people don't pretend to be things they aren't in real life or that there are only good people in the real world?

It is just as easy to have a 'superficial and meaningless' relationship with someone in a game, as it is to have one in real life. I have made more, and closer friends in MMORPGs than in real life. This doesn't mean I don't have close friends in real life, as I do. Both RL and online friends are a very important part of my life. I have also seen meaningless relationships formed in game, a few times. Where one would use the other for money, items, power leveling, etc. But I have also seen a good deal of real life relationships where one used the other for money, games, clothes, and other things. It all depends on who you are dealing with. There are going to be bad people online who don't care for a meaningful relationship, but these people also exist in the real world too. [EQ, F, 17]

Of course, others in the same side of the discussion would also point out that at the other side of the communication is another person in flesh and blood, and that you are interacting with a real person after all regardless of the apparent facelessness:

To me, there is a real person at the other end of the screen. The fact that you interact with them online is incidental, they aren't any less real or any less of who they are just b/c the medium of communication is a computer. That said, there are those who just want to play the game w/o any social attachments or complications. They point out you can't really know if the person at the other end tells the truth. They have a legitimate point of view as well. Perhaps they just want to keep the focus on the real life people they live with. As long as they don't use their view on superficiality as an excuse to be hurtful, I generally have no problem w/ either point of view. [EQ, F, 37]

There is no question in my mind that some relationships formed in an online game can be every bit as meaningful as those in real life. When you find folks who share your goals and aspirations, and you can work together with them for the benefit of all involved, that can be the foundation for a strong relationship. It gets you off on the right foot. And no matter what any guilt-ridden griever may say, there's always a living, breathing person on the other end of our in-game actions. If there weren't, nobody would play the game. The fact of physical separation is only a minor limitation and not a barrier to friendship; can a blind person not make friends? So why should it be that because we cannot physically see or touch the people in the game with us, we cannot interact in a meaningful way? A particularly significant example I can remember is talking a troubled young friend that I met in game out of ending her real life. I knew she needed a friend, and I knew she needed to talk, but it wasn't until the end of the discussion that she let on she had been thinking about making the big mistake, and I had given her hope. That qualifies as meaningful, and the entire conversations took place in game and over ICQ. [UO, M, 29]

Other respondents took this point one step further, arguing that a relationship is a relationship and that that is the core of the issue:

Relationships are relationships, regardless of the vehicle one uses to create them. It is just as possible to fall in love or make a wonderful, trusted friend online as in real life. Certainly, there is more risk involved, since if you see this person IRL after meeting online, there is the possibility that they've misled you about themselves, and that can create trust issues at the very least ... the slight but definite possibility of this person being an axe-murderer can, of course, not be ignored. However, the vast majority of people out there are just as normal as you and I (scary, isn't it?), and so you can safely assume that a large percentage of people you meet aren't out to kill you. That said ... I have to say that while it is just as possible, and maybe even easier for some people to FORM relationships online as in real life, some people have denounced the quality of these relationships. I have a friend I met online (not in game, but online just the same) and we just met for lunch a week ago. We talked for hours, and had a great time. We made a deal to get together again soon. Is this any less a real friendship because I met his intelligence and humour before I met his face? No. Similarly, I have online friends that I have met in game that I can talk to if I'm worried, and I am there for them when they are. Just the other day, my husband was very late coming home, and I was very worried. Two good friends, both of whom I met online, talked me through it, and helped to calm me till he came home. They are just as much my friends as the ones who I see with my eyes every day. Just because I've never seen them in real life doesn't mean we can't be friends. I talk to them when I'm worried or sad, or happy ... and I'm there for them at those times as well. A relationship between lovers or friends can span time, distance, religion, politics ... why shouldn't it be able to overcome the WWW? Those who say it can't are clearly missing out on the possibilities of meeting people from all over the world, befriending them, and learning about them and their homes. [EQ, F, 22]

I see no evidence that relationships formed in the Game Online cannot be just as meaningful, real and fulfilling as those in Real Life. I have 'friends' in the Game that I have never met in Real Life but we are concerned about each others welfare and interests and communicate those things the same as if we could walk next door and shake hands with our neighbor in Real life. [UO, M, 57]

But as other players highlight, it's more about how the individual player approaches the game that determines whether they will form meaningful relationships in the game:

This seriously depends on the person you're becoming friends with. I've made many friends in games who become outside-of-game friends because we have a lot in common, same maturity level, looking for the same things in a friendship, and just click. I would call these very meaningful. But I also have many friends in games who are just sort of there to pass the time while I play... they're silly and fun to chat with... but I'd never want to deal with them outside of the game. Those relationships I would label as superficial. [EQ, F, 22]

Most of the relationships I've formed (with guild members and the like) are superficial, even when we talk about real life issues. But there's a small group of players that I've become close to, and this group forms a network of people that know each other in real life. In other words, I know Jon, and Jon knows Barry, and Barry's worked with Steve and Brian, and Ruth and Heather are their

wives....etc. This group is geographically scattered across two continents, but I now regard these folks as my friends as much as most of the people I meet physically. I know their personalities, know that they'll be there for me if I need them (as much as they can be), and appreciate their company. The military moved us to a town where Brian and Ruth lived. We'd never met them face-to-face (my husband had played EQ with Brian regularly for about 2 years, while both of the wives had come into EQ later), but they invited us over to their house the first week we were in town and offered help in getting settled in the new place. That's more help than the hubby's job friends offered, and we certainly consider them 'real' friends. [EQ, F, 34]

I believe that the nature of the relationships formed will depend on the people forming them. Some people approach MMORPGs as strictly a game, with no interest in the social aspects beyond how they can advance the game. These people make 'game friends' -- superficial and meaningless friendships IRL, but all you need when it comes to the game. Others take advantage of the medium to be deceptive -- to pretend to be someone they are not. These are also superficial relationships. My husband's step-mother does this repeatedly, she left her husband, moved in with someone from EQ, then left him for another person from EQ. Others play for fun, but have come across people they felt especially close to over time. I met my husband that way -- over the course of a few months, we went from being friends in game to conversing IRL, then getting married in game, then meeting IRL, then getting together IRL. Since we've been married for 20 months, I'd say that's definitely not superficial or meaningless. :) [EQ, F, 40]

And ultimately, it's really what you want it to be, which is what real life relationships turn out to be about as well:

A relationship is as meaningful and real as you make it, in-game or in real life. I have some very good friends in-game who ask me if I am feeling better when I have been sick for a while, while people in RL hardly even noticed that I was gone. Someone whose real name I don't even know remembers my birthday, while my closest colleague doesn't remember that I don't smoke or drink alcohol. [AO, F, 28]

I, personally, feel that a relationship in any medium, Real Life or any game, can be as true as \*both\* sides want it to be. I had a friend on the game EverQuest for several years. He eventually decided to actually come and visit my family for a month. It was an absolute blast and I wish he coulda stayed with us longer. [Planetside, M, 16]

Actually, both of these are correct statements. The relationships formed are as 'superficial' or as 'meaningful' as you allow them to be. I have people that I group with on a semi-regular basis that I know next to nothing about other than their character information and yet I still enjoy their company. I look them up when I need a group, we have fun and experience the game together but it never goes any further. There are others, however, whom I have formed deep friendships with. These are people I speak with on the phone, who I share RL experiences and problems with and whom I confide in. I am still of the firm belief that MMORPGs are like RL; the experiences you have are what YOU make of them. YOU dictate the length, depth and breadth of the relationships in them. The one caveat I would like to make is that I have found MMORPG friendships to be more 'dangerous' based on the fact I have to take a person's word for their



actions and their true hearts. You can be one person IRL and a completely different person in game. All players must keep this in mind. [EQ, F, 39]

Relationships in MMORPG's can absolutely be as meaningful as those in real life. In general, as with real life, you get out of relationships what you put into them. I have a friend from DAOC that became quite ill, and I called her (for the first time ever) at the hospital. I made brief phone calls to her every day I could after that, until the time that she passed away. I can not say that if she had been a 'real life' friend, her loss would have affected me any less. [DAOC, M, 35]

I disagree completely with the idea what MMORPG relationships are meaningless. However, I have to concede that the answer really depends on the player. I'm sure there are many players who do not take friendships forged in the game seriously, simply because it is, after all, a game. One rarely even sees what the person on the other end of the relationship looks like, or sounds like, and quite often a player will not truly project their real persona into the character in the game- I know this because I know I act somewhat differently in the game than I do in real life. However, for many people I've seen besides myself, that's not the case. I have met several people I truly consider friends through online gaming. I'm happy when I can talk to them, I miss them when they're gone, I am familiar with their personality and interests and generally know when they will like or dislike something. Distance doesn't preclude friendship or even familiarity. [DAOC, M, 22]