

# The Daedalus Project

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## Life as a Guild Leader

About 15% of players have been guild leaders at one point or another (<http://www.nickyee.com/daedalus/archives/001467.php>). In a recent survey, I asked some of these players to talk about their experiences and to describe pain-points and lessons learned. About 280 respondents wrote about their guild leadership experiences. What their narratives make clear is that being a guild leader is tough, oftentimes a thankless job where moments of satisfaction are very memorable but rare.

Leading a guild is very rewarding, watching it grow and thrive, being respected by your members as a good leader. Politics and folks leaving the game eventually ruins the experience. Overall it was very fun, time consuming and an emotionally exhausting experience. Not sure if I would do it again. [GW. M, 41]

I'm hoping that bringing their stories together here can serve two goals. First of all, the disparate experiences do reveal common pain-points that some respondents suggested potential solutions for. Players who are currently guild leaders or are thinking of becoming guild leaders might be able to glean some helpful information from them. And secondly, the experiences of these players highlight the complex, emergent properties of play in a networked environment. When you are the leader of a guild of 50 players, gaming can become more stressful than your daytime job.

### You Can't Please Everyone

Most novice guild leaders fall into a trap of trying to be everyone's friend and making sure that everyone in the guild is happy. The most common lesson that respondents learned was that it's simply impossible to please everyone.

The toughest thing about being a guild leader is maintaining relationships with all of your members on a personal level, and realizing that no matter what, you're not going to please everybody. [WoW, M, 30]

The most valuable thing I have learned from playing the role of a guild leader is one akin to life: No matter what you do there will always be some folks that do not like you. [Legends of Cosrin, M, 30]

One reason why this is the case is because guild leaders do not have the resources to make everyone happy. And in fact, trying to do so creates a culture of asking the guild leader for more.

God damn, people don't listen. I hated it. They are so whiny and expect you to do exactly what they say and give them what they want. Balancing the needs of 50 people suck... I won't do it again. I don't even want to be an officer. Takes all the fun out of the game. [WoW, F, 26]

But the main reason you can't please everyone is because of the sheer diversity of needs and motivations in any group of people. Different guild members are in the guild for different reasons and derive satisfaction from different things.

The toughest part of being a guild leader is that my guild is comprised of people who have great personalities and get along really well, but are a real mixed bag of playing styles. You've got the guy who has 10 lvl 30 characters, you've got the guy who levels at a glacier pace, you've got the guy who hits 60 in a month but only wants to solo, you've got your hardcore raiders, the guy who has 8 lvl 60 toons, your casual players, your night crew and your stone cold PVPers. Trying to come up with goals and content for people like that, people who are all my friends, but have a million different goals, has been a really stressful balancing act. On top of which, I am a casual player who has a busy job and a RL of her own, and can't be on every night of the week to make sure everyone is happy. Being a guild leader has taught me about personality types and how to manage people more than any job I've ever worked on. While its not always a fun lesson, its definitely the most valuable thing I've gotten from the game. [WoW, F, 27]

The toughest thing about being a guild leadership is dealing with very disparate personalities among the members. Our members are older, have jobs and families ... Because they are a more mature group they have stronger personalities and opinions. Occasionally this leads to conflict, either in how things are being done or how people are being treated by other guild members. [WoW, M, 34]

Another feature of the MMORPG demographic exacerbates this problem. Groups in real-life workplaces are typically composed of people with similar backgrounds, experiences, and training. Being a leader at college means leading people between the ages of 18-22. And the new recruits at big consulting firms every year are eerily similar people. But being a leader in an MMORPG means leading people between the ages of 10 and 70 - some have never had a job, some are professors, some are retired grandparents, while others are veterans. Pleasing everybody has never been so hard.

### **Mediating Conflict**

In any situation where people have different needs and motivations, conflicts will arise. Inevitably, the guild leader will be asked to become the mediator.

The toughest thing is playing mediator. A guild can become like a small community or a family and with that comes bickering and squabbles that can break up the harmony of the guild. It's important to be able to maintain peace and harmony among members so that fighting and bickering doesn't destroy the guild. People tend to leave if guilds if they get too 'political'. [UO, F]

For many guild leaders, mediating conflict becomes stressful due to their petty nature and the time it takes to resolve these constant conflicts.

The toughest thing about being a leader is people want you to solve their problems. You become their surrogate parent. It's analogous to running a business or any other organization in that respect. Actually helping them solve a problem or three is rewarding, but for me that pleasure is rapidly overwhelmed by the silliness of most of their problems. [Eve Online, M, 49]

However, there is an awful lot of hand-holding and personal conflict resolution that you have to do. I know, in my first guild, I would find myself dealing with interpersonal player problems for 1 to 2 hours a night. I knew it was time to change when I found myself creating an alt - just to play without guild headaches. [EQ2, M, 42]

These conflicts tend to be particularly stressful because of the existing friendships and ties within the guild. Because guild leaders are friends with many players in the guild, these disputes oftentimes involve one or more of their friends.

The toughest decision has probably been so far, was when a couple of my friends had a fight, and the fight went that far that the both members would resign if I wouldn't do anything about it. In the end I decided to boot the other member, mostly because of his way of handling things amongst the other players as well. [UO, M, 18]

the toughest thing for me is the Constant demand and pressure from guild mates, and conflicts between IRL friends and Friends i made in WoW. being the constant 'Anvil' those conflicts Hammer on can be a real Pain. [WoW, M, 24]

As several respondents noted, being fair and impartial was the most important aspect of mediating these conflicts.

Hmm the most valuable lesson learned... Being able to talk with all kinds of people, great communication skills really is the most important aspect of the leadership. Keeping the head straight when listening to people and solving their disagreements without getting personally involved. Actually my skills as a mediator increased a lot from being a guild leader. [WoW, F, 31]

## **A Firm Hand**

Many respondents noted that laying down a firm hand was important. Because many guilds start off as small, casual and friendly guilds, guild leaders oftentimes feel conflicted when it comes to disciplining guild members.

On the personal side, it is toughest for me to punish an existing guild member, especially with the sanction of removing them from the guild. I play the game for fun, and want other to have fun as part of our guild. When we have to come down on someone, it makes the game less fun for everyone, especially that person. Still, sometimes it has to be done for the good for the guild. [WoW, M, 34]

The most difficult thing was removal of someone that I had come to call friend because they wouldn't comply with guild rules and code of conduct. [EQ2, F, 48]

A common theme that arose was the uneasiness in learning that sometimes you have to be tough and say no. The following two players describe this transition in their leadership experience.

The hardest thing for me was learning to say no, or to draw the line and be tough. When I began, I was very worried about pleasing people, and knocked myself out trying to make everyone happy. Over time I got much much tougher - learning to crack down not only on jerks, but on my friends. Having experienced a few very messy guild-removes, including two occasions where in my anxiousness to be 'fair' and give everyone a hearing, I delayed guild removes for so long that the problem person had a chance to really go to town in stirring up guild drama. I started to think of guild removals like surgery, do it clean and quick, and it might not cause hemorrhaging. Sometimes it is better to be firm as soon as you see a problem. It isn't fair to the guild to let a drama queen or manipulator build a power base before you deal with them. [EQ, F, 33]

It took me some time to realize that as by nature I detest conflict and try to defuse situations by talking them through, however when leading a raiding guild there simply isn't the time to sort things out as 'touchy feely' as you'd like, and many seasoned raiders simply don't want to be treated that way. I made more than a few mistakes. I put up with far too much 'drama' when I should have stomped it out much quicker. I was a little tentative to use my authority at times when I should have been much more confident in my position. I allowed personality conflicts within the guild to consume far more of my time than they were really worth. Overall it was a draining experience but a very valuable lesson in leadership - unless you lead you aren't a good leader. [EQ2, M, 32]

Other guild leaders agreed that delaying these hard decisions tends to make things worse, and that problems tend to fester if they are not dealt with.

The toughest thing about being a guild leader is keeping everyone in line and kicking out or penalizing people that you like on a personal level, but have transgressed one to many times. The most valuable lesson I learned from being a guild leader is that if you give someone an inch they will take a mile. The experience drove me much farther to the political right. [WoW, M, 18]

### **Den Mother + Bitch Goddess**

At the same time, several respondents articulated the duality of being a guild leader. It is not easy to be friend and leader at the same time.

A guild leader has to be den mother and bitch goddess in one. You have to be prepared to lay down the rules and abide by them, while at the same time, taking care of everyone in your guild. It's a lot of work and it's a really fine line to walk along at times. [WoW, F, 27]

The most valuable lesson I've learned from being a guild leader is: You'll never be everybody's friend, and wholly expect half the guild to have it out for you. There's two sides to being a guild leader. There's your social side, and your leading side. The social side is everybody's friend, the leader side gets things done. You have to break eggs to make cake, so to speak. [WoW, M, 23]

The notion that guild leadership was a form of motherhood echoed among other respondents.

Well it sometimes was like being a mother of 15 children ;) [GW, F, 28]

And this aspect of being a guild leader also produced its unique set of challenges.

The hardest part about being a guild leader is listening to people's real life problems. I am sort of a 'mom' to people in the guild and a lot of them confide in me. I listen to some really sad stories and it's very difficult to hear them, they effect me greatly. Probably the most difficult was when a 27 year old woman in the guild told me she had terminal breast cancer and that she just needed to talk to me because she was 'so scared'. I think the toughest part about hearing things like that is the realization that these folks had to confide in someone that they don't even know - I feel so bad that they don't have a real life friend or family member that they can reach out to. [EQ, F, 50]

## **In and Out**

One final pain-point that emerged was the difficulty in picking the right people for the guild as well as the difficulty in kicking people out of the guild. Several guild leaders lamented that they oftentimes do not have the resources to screen potential guild members.

Probably the most memorable experience has been inviting ppl to the guild and then very quickly realizing it was a mistake ie the person is annoying, greedy or something like that and then having to deal with the stress of kicking them out or keeping them in.. also had a few similar experiences that were reversed - ie ppl i was very very skeptical about adding because say they had a bad rep as loot hungry turned out to be great and generous best lesson from this is being careful in judging ppl. not to be to quick to judge and also diplomacy in getting rid of ppl is quite a challenge, while maintaining morale. [WoW, M, 34]

The worst of these cases would deliberately use the guild for their own persona gains and had no intention of staying with the guild.

Toughest thing about being a guild leader is when new people come to the guild with a hidden agenda of leaving the guild after they used the guild for their personal gain. This leaves a bad situation in the guild since other people spent their time helping those people out. Best lesson learned is help those in guild that help others. My guild does everything together! [DAoC, M, 40]

I started off with high expectations and slowly got worn down by lack of support and the draining of your time by some members who rarely appreciated your efforts. These members usually added nothing to the guild but demanded both support (assistance in leveling, questing, items, gear, crafting etc) and also constant advice and information. These people either left to join a new guild at some point or would stop playing without any warning and hence made you feel less inclined to help them unless you knew and trusted them. [WoW, M, 33]

And as we've seen already, kicking people out is difficult for many guild leaders because they are uncomfortable with taking on a disciplinary role. But for some players, having someone leave their guild is sometimes an emotional loss.

The toughest thing and at the same time, the most valuable thing was to learn to let go. When it was time for someone to move on to another game or monarchy (by their choice), it was time for me to be gracious and supportive.....difficult things in Asheron's call where my personal status and experience points were directly tied to the number of people playing under me. I knew that when I became monarch but it wasn't often easy. It was the most valuable thing because those actions maintained relationships, which are more important (although less tangible) than experience points. It really is 'just a game' so it was valuable to keep that perspective and not focus on the loss. [WoW, F, 47]

### **Make Rules. Follow Them.**

As respondents discussed their difficulties in leading guilds, two important guidelines emerged. First of all, guild leaders highlighted the importance of having ground rules, making people aware of them, and being consistent with those rules.

I learned to NEVER back down from the established rule-set of the guild and to kick out those who will not work within the system we all agreed upon.(even if the system needs changing, people need to follow the established procedure to bring about that change) [EQ2, M, 35]

Be consistent. NEVER deviate from your charter. Never assume that a conflict is a single dimensional issue. Get all the facts and then make your decision. Never jump to conclusions. Always be honest. NEVER show any favoritism. Everyone in the guild is on equal standing with you. [EQ, F, 48]

You can only be consistent if you have pre-established rules. And these narrative suggest that it is this consistency that makes conflict resolution and discipline far easier to deal with.

### **Delegation**

Secondly, there is only so much one person can do. As a guild grows, it becomes impossible for one person to deal with everything that happens.

I found the toughest thing about being a guild leader was the fact that you are supposed to be 'everywhere' at the same time to help all you members. One way to avoid that is to have 'officers' in the guild who can help you. [Lineage 2, M, 27]

As the following players have learned, guild leaders need to learn to promote trusted guild members to officer roles and delegate duties to them.

Without a doubt, the most difficult and the most crucial thing for any guild leader to do is to find highly qualified and committed officers. Very, very few people have the playtime and the motivation to be able to do everything themselves over an extended period of time. Excellent officers are a must to ensure the longevity of a guild. Every time I've been in a guild that had taken a turn for the worse, it has been because of a lack of quality officers. I think that lesson can transfer to all areas of life as well. If you can find good people who are trustworthy and committed, keeping them around you can enrich your life in ways you've never thought possible. [M, 28]

One of the toughest experiences as a guild leader is to find players in the guild that are dedicated to the game and the guild. Because as a guild leader you need officers to help you run the guild as smooth as possible. Because the guild is the members in the guild. So as a guild leader i need to promote people to officers that help me create an active and fun guild to be a member of. [WoW, M, 35]

### **Obligated To Play**

Now that the difficulties and complexities of guild leadership and management have been laid out, it should not come as a surprise that many respondents described their game-play as an obligation. For many of these players, there simply was no longer time for “play” in the game.

Toughest thing I think, is that you never get time to really play yourself. Between in game tells and answering question on guild forums, or messing with the in game loot rules and sets, ya just never find time to go play the game. [EQ2, M, 31]

It's tough that after a while you just feel that you have to log on so that you don't let down the other people in the guild, sometimes even if you are not really in the mood to play the game. Sometimes I neglect 'doing my own thing' in the game because I think it's part of my duties as a guild leader to help other members if they got questions or can't solve quests on their own. [WoW, M, 29]

The toughest thing for me, about leading a guild was just showing up. I never wanted the job, but I felt obligated to maintain the guild I loved. I spent an average of 4 hours a day replying to ICQs and e-mails while attending alliance meetings in IRC and writing up announcements for the website. This before I even logged in ... which when I did, being a RP guild I was forced to attend every event and function I was invited to, to keep up community relations. Not to mention weekly guild and alliance meetings or any impromptu meetings that came up. Whatever time I had left was used up dealing with the inevitable daily guild issues ... So I got maybe one to two hours a week for myself. [UO, M, 35]

### **More Work Than Their Real Jobs**

Some players described their game-play more explicitly as a second full-time job.

After becoming a guild leader I found that I had taken on a second full time job. Creating a nice website was a pain and was time consuming. Then came trying to plan raids that the people in our guild could all attend (too much variation in levels), trying to keep people interested, recruiting new people. It was way too much work. [EQ2, M, 31]

The single toughest thing about running a guild is managing people. It can quickly turn into a serious job. You have to referee disputes, come up with events, loot rules, and organizational structure, recruiting. In short, running a guild is a lot of work, just like managing people in a real life position. [WoW, M, 37]

Others lamented that they escaped into a fantasy world only to be doing their day-time jobs again, the difference being that they didn't receive pay checks in this fantasy world.

Being a guild leader is a bit more responsibility than I enjoy in a game. If I wanted responsibility I wouldn't be hiding from the real world ;). It may also be that I work as a PR professional and being a guild leader feels a little bit too much like I'm at work. [WoW, M, 25]

The toughest thing about being a guild leader is finding the middle ground between all the members, and being able to keep the group entertained at the same time. Being a guild leader is like being a manager at work, only without the paycheck. It's frustrating but rewarding to lead a group and see it function and grow, but it's a pain in the rear more often than not to get it to that point. [EQ2, M, 33]

The following narrative draws out an unsettling question. What happens when our leisure activities become more work than our day-time jobs? After all, how many of us get to lead 500 people in real life?

I do not regret it at all although I doubt I will do it again anytime soon: during that time, I was leading 10-12 guilds (via an alliance) which meant I was indirectly touching over 500 people, maybe up to 7-800 if you count the not-so-active people. I was definitely having an impact on the server as I always brought up conflicts and difficult situations that players might encounter while playing at the meetings, to make sure our alliance roughly shared similar policies, and obviously, so many people roughly sharing the same rules would have an impact on the other 1500-2000 people on that server. The toughest thing about being a guild leader is that it is really a job, managing all the conflicts and it takes huge amount of time and you receive no thanks for it. [DAoC, F, 38]

### **Acquiring Leadership Skills**

One theme that has flowed through many of the narratives we've seen is that people have learned important leadership and management skills from their game-play experiences. After all, leading people involves many of the same skills regardless of where it happens. Several players noted how these new skills have helped them outside of the game.

Being a guild leader has effected my RL ability to lead people and stand up and do what is good and needs to be done. I have received numerous promotions at work into leadership positions and I make almost 8 times more now than when I started WoW last year. [WoW, M, 24]

I learned several things; I could manage events for a few hundred people, I could mediate agreements, I began to notice traits in individuals which were helpful in predicting what they were most likely to do next or likely to be interested in. I learned to delegate authority without releasing responsibility. I am very proud to say that my experience strengthened my diplomatic skills which had never been a strong point prior to my experience. I also learned more about the internet, building sites, moderating forums that I didn't know before. [WoW, F, 56]

These examples highlight games as places where the opportunity to learn important skills emerges, without prior planning by explicit teachers, and without a set curriculum. Video games do change people, and fortunately, those changes aren't always towards mindless violence or aggression. It is unfortunate

that so much of the current media attention on video games, with the incessant finger-pointing at addiction and violence, distracts us from the far more interesting ways in which games can affect and change people.

Most valuable lesson is that realistically, its not whether you win or lose, or even how well you play the game, but who you meet, the relationships you form, and the personal growth that happens as a result of meeting and playing with people from cultures that can and do significantly differ from your own, and even if they don't, just learning of different attitudes and approaches to everything from the game to life in general. [WoW, M, 19]

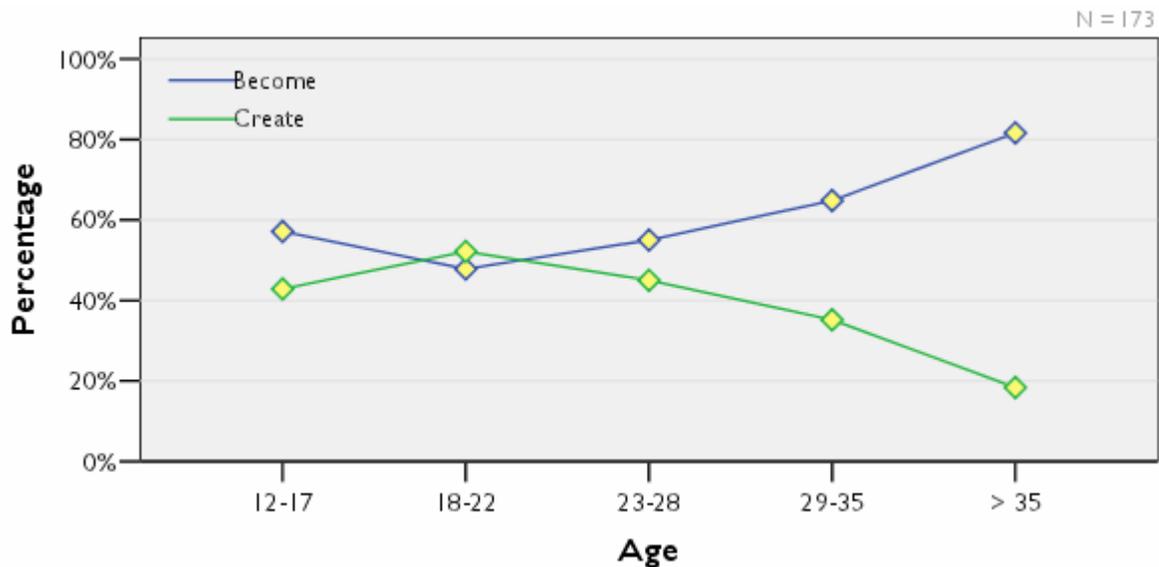
In being a guild leader for most of my 6 years of online gaming, I have learned a great deal about what power means in an online gaming environment; compassion, understanding, organization and cooperation are required, and I have become a better person for my experiences. My personal journey has been largely through my interactions with people who are intelligent, understanding, creative, supportive, skilled negotiators and good friends. We have people from all walks of life in our guild, and everyone has much to contribute to our ephemeral social fabric; we are all in the same guild by choice, and I am honoured to be among them. I may 'Lead' but really ... I learn and I follow by example. [EQ2, F, 42]

# The Origin of Guild Leaders

As I was thinking about guild leadership, I became interested to learn more about how guild leaders become guild leaders. For example, are they more likely to be guilds they created themselves, or did they inherit or get the position later on. At the same time, I didn't want to assume that those were the only two options. So I asked players who were guild leaders to describe how they became a guild leader in an open-ended format.

I received 231 responses altogether. For this data set, I'd like to thank James Scarborough who offered his assistance in coding the open-ended responses. Of the 231 responses, 173 could be coded as either "created myself" or "became guild leader after guild was created". The remaining 58 cases consisted of responses where: 1) the response didn't make it clear how guild was created, 2) the player helped create a guild that he later became a leader to, 3) the guild was created by two or more people, or 4) a missing or unrelated response.

Among the 173 coded responses, the majority of guild leaders (68%) consisted of players who became guild leaders of guilds they did not create. The remaining (32%) created their own guilds. There were no gender differences, but there were significant age differences. Older guild leaders were much more likely to have assumed leadership of a guild they did not create, whereas younger guild leaders tend to have created their own guilds.



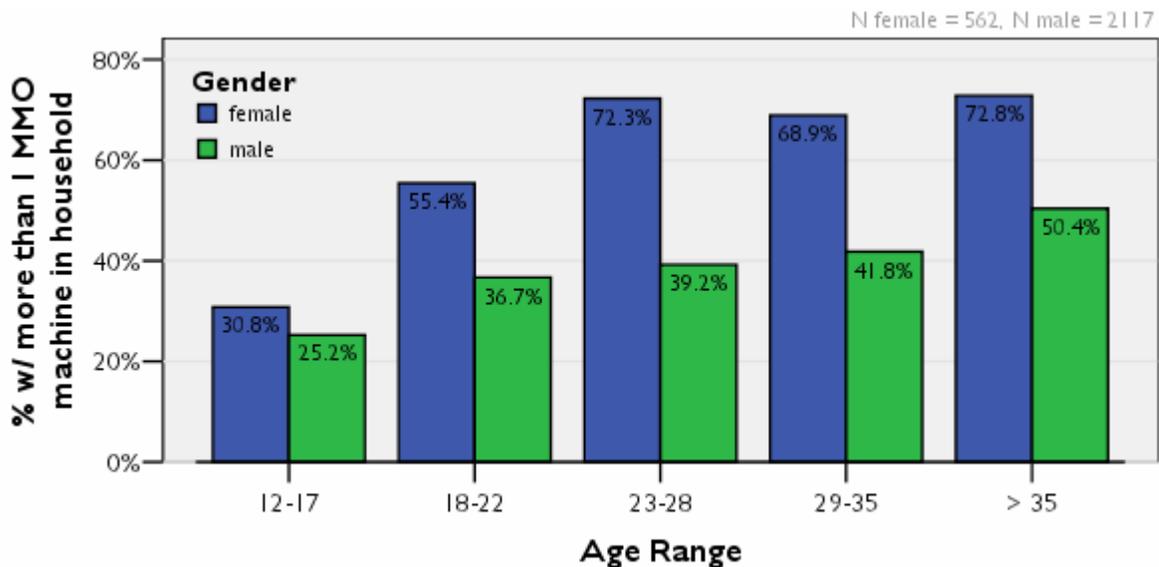
This suggests, to a certain degree, a life-cycle of guilds. While guilds tend to be created by younger players, it is older players who tend to assume the leadership role some point down the line.

# The Gamer Habitat

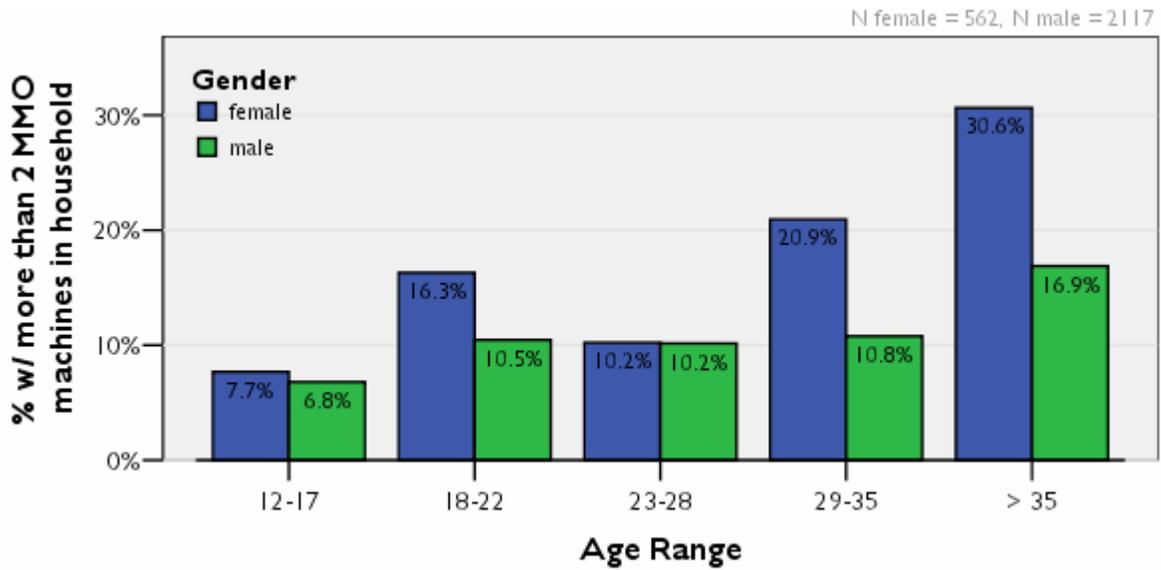
I was pursuing several different ideas that led to this data set. One theme was the use of laptops vs. desktops. Within the MMO gaming sphere, there is a notion of “drawing spousal aggro” - spouses getting angry at gamers who spend the whole afternoon/night playing. In one of our PARC meetings, Bob Moore commented that the low technical requirements of WoW allowed gamers to play the game on a laptop next to their spouse while watching TV (i.e., increasing physical proximity via mobility), and might thereby lower their spousal aggro. But this interaction between form factor and social proximity led me to thinking about broader questions about whether gamers usually play alone (physically) or whether they usually play with someone else in the room. And given the number of gamers who regularly play with someone in their family, the next natural question was how many gamers play in a room where someone else is also playing.

Overall (N = 2692), 90% of respondents typically play on their desktops, while 10% typically play on their laptops. There were no gender differences, and the age differences were very mild (7% in the 12-17 group, peaks in the 18-22 age group at around 13%, and the rest averages around 9-10%).

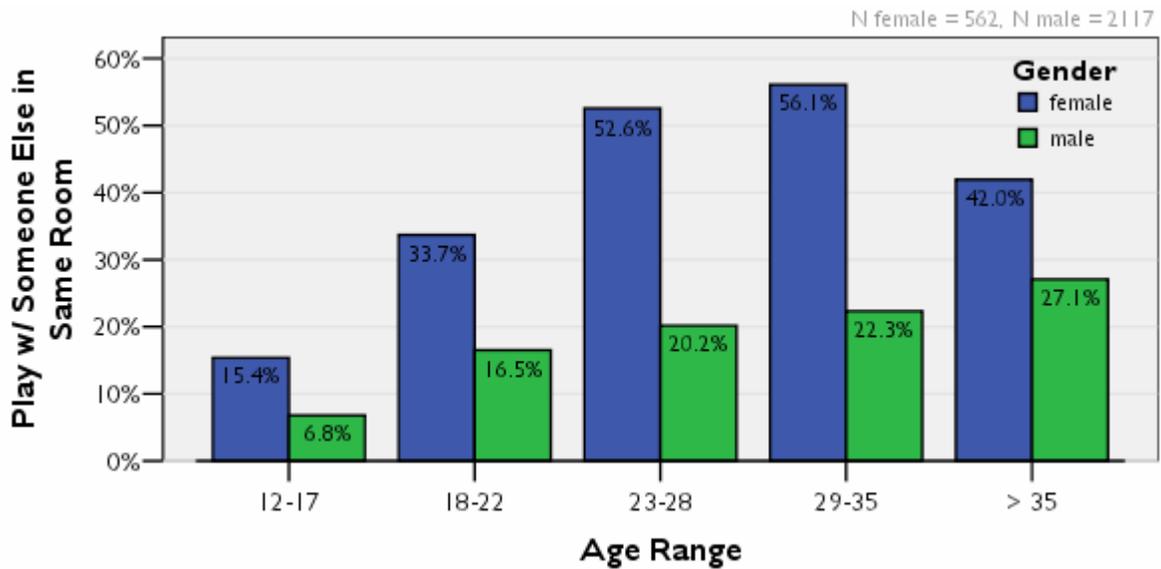
I started out by asking players how many computers they had in their household on which an MMO was regularly played. Overall, 45% of respondents had more than one computer in their household on which an MMO was regularly played. The gender differences that emerge make sense in the context of earlier data showing that female players are more likely to be playing with someone they know in real life (i.e., romantic partner, children, etc.)



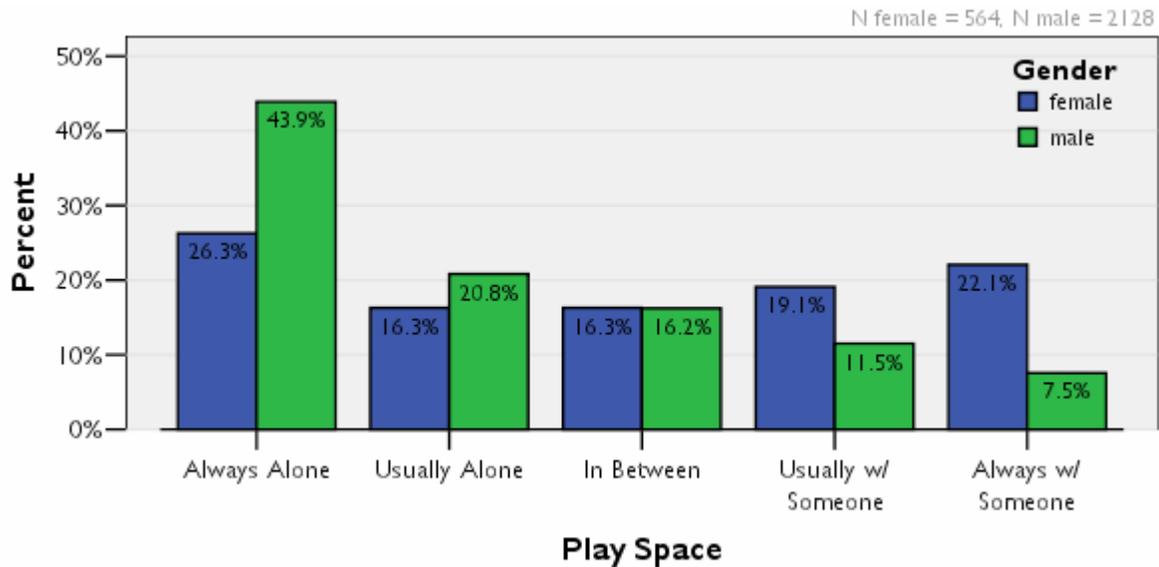
Here is the graph for players who have more than 2 computers in their household on which an MMO is regularly played. Again, we see a gender difference, although this time it is only apparent after the 23-28 age range.



This leads us to the frequency of MMO gamers who usually play with someone else in the same room (i.e., two gamers, two computers, playing together). It was striking that for female players in the 23-35 age range, more than half regularly play together with someone else in the same room.



Here's another way to think about the issue. I asked players to indicate whether they usually play alone or with someone else in the room. With the numbers we've seen so far, it makes sense that female players are more likely to be with someone else while playing, whereas male players are more likely to be alone.

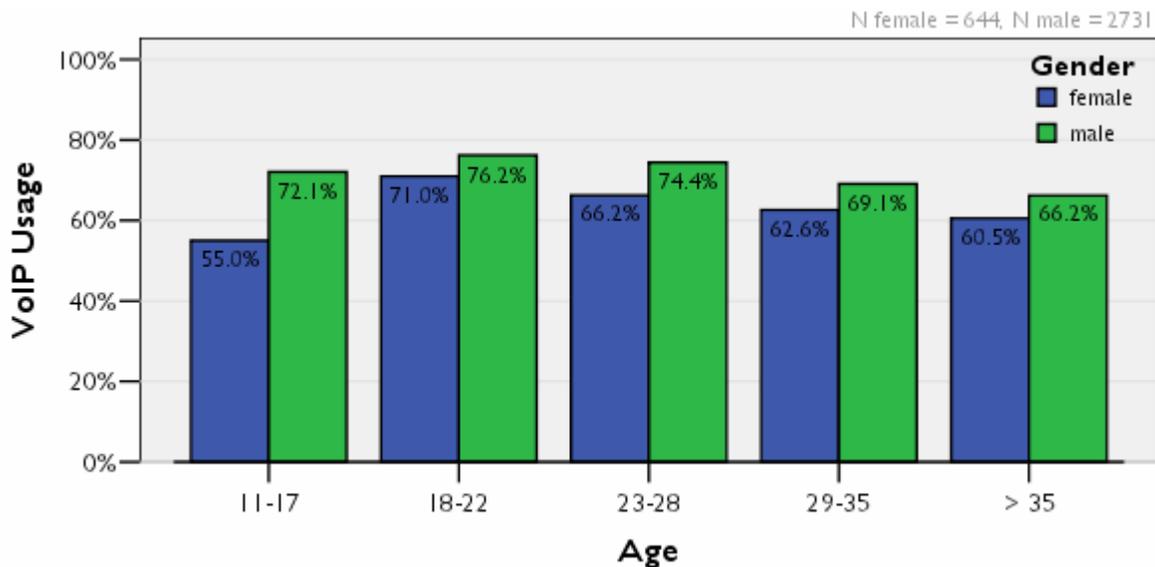


But overall, I think these numbers highlight the often social aspects of game-play, not only in the virtual world, but in the physical world. MMO gamers are playing together with other people in two separate worlds. Some may argue that people are displacing interaction with each other with a virtual and less real experience, but watching TV together passively seems to me to be the far more pervasive and less interactive phenomenon. Narratives from players who do play together also challenge the non-interactive argument. Their descriptions highlight how playing together in the virtual world can strengthen real world relationships.

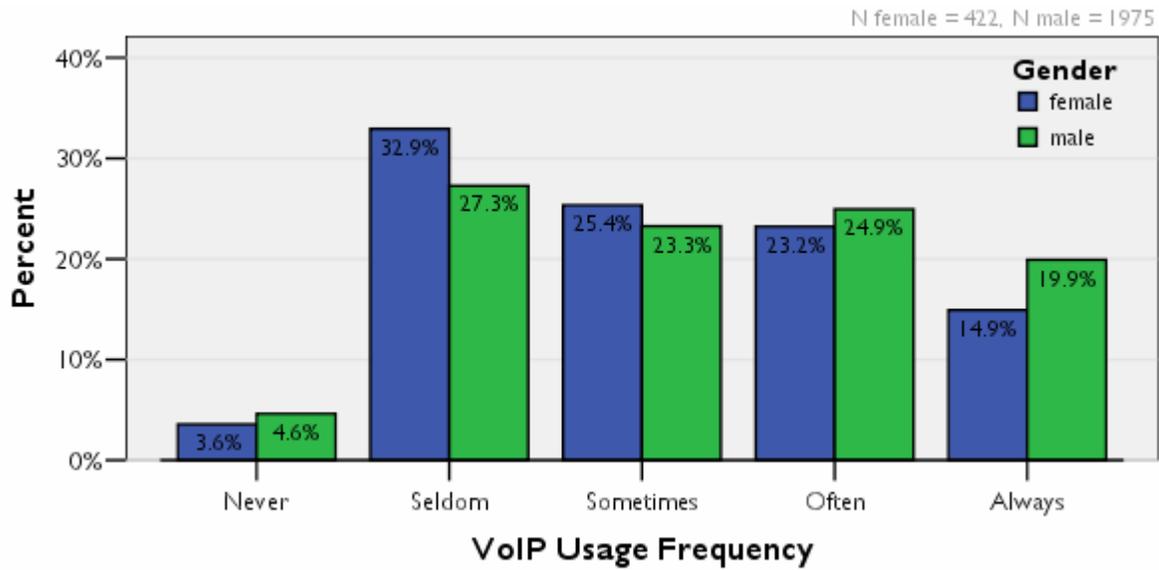
# VoIP Usage

As preparation for a panel presentation at Spring VON 2006 (focus on voice over IP tools) on communities and communication in MMOGs, I collected some survey data on VoIP usage among MMO players. Anecdotal, and from personal experience, VoIP usage seems to be associated with high-level raids where tight coordination and real-time crisis management are needed. I was interested in exploring this more.

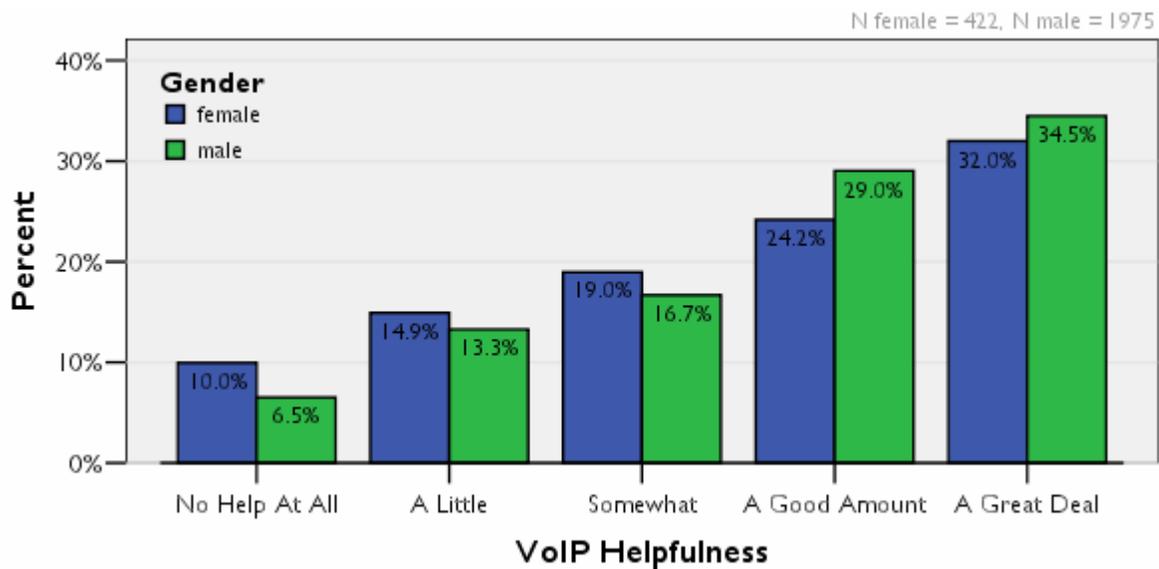
In a recent survey, I asked players whether they had ever used a VoIP tool. Across the board, the results were fairly stable. About 70% of respondents had used a VoIP tool at some point. There were minor age and gender differences. Male players were slightly more likely to have tried a VoIP tool than female players. And we see a slight decline over age. After a mild peak in the 18-22 age range, we see a gradual decrease.

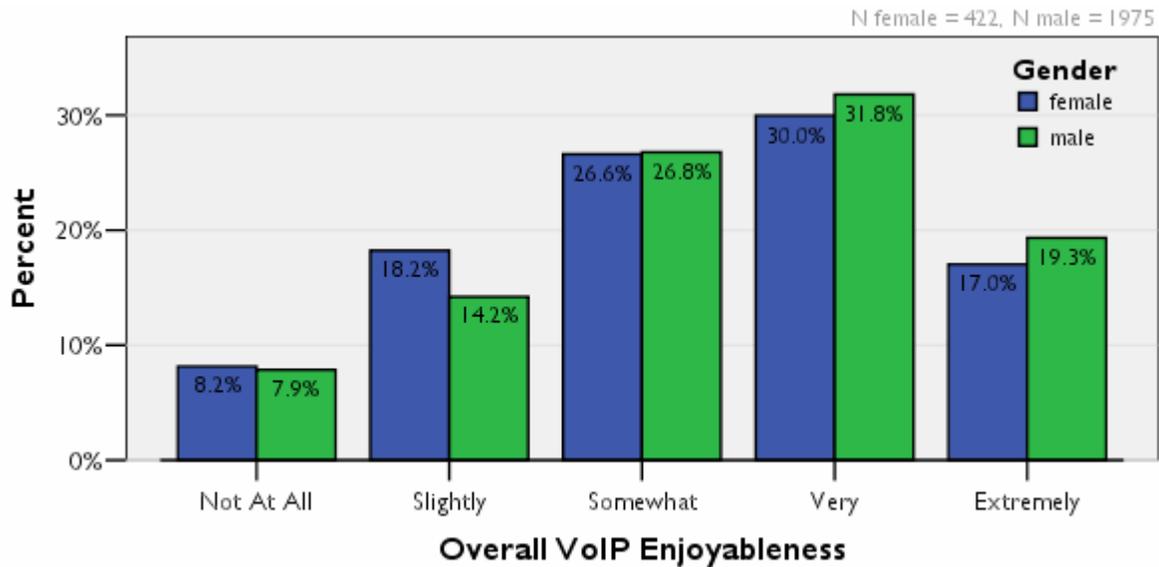


I then asked how often they use a VoIP in their actual game-play. Of the players who have tried a VoIP tool, about 40% would indicated that they “often” or “always” used a VoIP tool. If we count these users as regular VoIP users, then combining this data with the previous graph, approximately 30% of all MMO players use a VoIP tool on a regular basis.



I then asked these respondents to rate the helpfulness and overall enjoyableness of the VoIP tool they use. Responses were mostly positive in both measures. There is a mild gender difference. Male players rated these tools as more helpful and enjoyable than female players.





These three ratings of usage frequency, helpfulness, and enjoyableness actually correlate to a high degree (cronbach's = .86). Because I was interested in exploring what kinds of players were most likely to have enjoy VoIP tools, I created a composite measure out of these 3 variables. Then I ran a multiple regression using the motivation factors as the predictor variables and the composite measure as the dependent variable. The resulting predictive model was somewhat weak (adjusted r-square = .11), but the best predictor of VoIP use was the Achievement factor (goal-oriented, quick progression), followed by a negatively-signed Immersion factor (stories, character, fantasy world), and then the Socialization factor (chat, gossip, help others).

So players who use VoIP tools tend to be those players who enjoy leveling quickly, who care a lot about how powerful their characters are. On the other hand, they do not care about being immersed into a fantasy world. And finally, they enjoy chatting with their online friends. It's interesting that the adoption of a social tool is more strongly driven by achievement factors rather than social factors, but high-level raids do often necessitate tight coordination, so one might expect that high-level guilds would adopt VoIP tools for these purposes (i.e., giving military commands and following orders).

If this is the case, then one interesting corollary is that VoIP adoption would be higher in MMOs where there is easy access to enjoyable raid content. By raid content, I mean content that requires well-coordinated groups. For example, instances in WoW that are easily finished by pick-up groups (i.e., Stockades, SM, ZF, etc.) would not require the tight coordination afforded by VoIP. In other words, we might expect VoIP adoption to be lower in games that had little content that required this level of tight coordination, if that content was accessible to very few players, or if that content was simply not enjoyable.

Of course, once players adopt VoIP tools and become familiar with them, then they do become social in addition to instrumental tools. VoIP then may play a significant role in creating stronger bonds within a guild. In other words, accessible raid content that is enjoyable may indirectly enhance guild cohesion via the pressure to adopt VoIP tools.

### **Social Constraints and Player Reactions to VoIP**

I also think there are some social constraints to VoIP adoption within these environments. One thing that I've already mentioned is that it breaks immersion. The ogre voice in your head always sounds better than the ogre voice most people can produce. So mismatch can be a problem in terms of immersion.

But these mismatches can cause other kinds of problems. So for example, given that 50% of all female characters in WoW are played by male players, how might they react to VoIP. One player provided an interesting perspective on this site.

*I am a male that has never played an interactive game like WoW before. I will tell you I'm married and 50 years old ... If I knew then what I know now about WoW I would have never rolled a girl player.*

*I have found out there are a lot of players that expect to be talking to a girl when they see a female player. I felt uncomfortable in certain situations but I would not lead anyone on and figured no one would ever know since I was in some unknown area of the world.*

*Now as I get closer to level 60 I'm finding out that game end raid parties use speech/sound software to communicate instead of typing. Because of this I now have to ditch this player and roll a male player so that I fit in with what's expected.*

Another thing to keep in mind is that voice carries social markers that can indicate age, social status, ethnic background, and geographical location - markers that could potentially be discriminated against. So for example, a mature 16 year old player who is leading a guild may not want others to know his/her real age. Many Chinese players also complain about being accused of being a gold farmer when they are seen using Mandarin in typed chat. The "English Test" used to screen out potential gold farmers in pick-up groups also reflect this discrimination. VoIP may exacerbate this discrimination based on accented English.

There are also anecdotal cases of players who have VoIP tools but prefer to not use them for fear of alienating their friends who do not have VoIP access. And finally, technology can ostracize people in another way. It is important to remember that enablers can also disable. After all, technology never benefits everyone equally and oftentimes create unintended victims. The following remark on NerfBat.com illustrates one of these cases.

*I've also had the good fortune to game with a tight-knit community of deaf MMO players that absolutely dread the coming of VC ... online, they feel like there's no disability, there's no stigma, there's no barrier. To them, guild-enforced teamspeak, let alone inherent voice chat, just puts all the barriers back up. It's truly upsetting to see the anguish this brings to them. [from NerfBat.com]*