

# The Daedalus Project

VOL. 4-3

(06/10/2006)

BY NICK YEE

[\(\[HTTP://WWW.NICKYEE.COM/DAEDALUS\]\(http://www.nickyee.com/daedalus\)\)](http://www.nickyee.com/daedalus)

---

## Introduction to the Role-Playing Series

I had always assumed that the “RP” in MMORPG was ironic. After all, most MMORPGs have had to deliberately set aside designated role-playing servers, and these have always been in the minority. This suggested that role-playing wasn’t something most players wanted to do in an MMORPG. At the same time, it was clear that a role-playing subculture existed that operated with its own rules and etiquette. In the most recent survey phase, I decided to explore this player subculture.

I knew from the start that defining what “role-playing” is would be difficult, and yet without a working definition, it would be even harder to figure out what the results meant. So I approached this in two ways. I used an open-ended survey to explore the role-playing space, and in the multiple-choice portion, I presented a loose, working definition of role-playing. Respondents were told that role-playing referred to “creating a novel persona for your character that fits in the context of the game world and interacting with others through that persona”. As we’ll see, even among self-described role-players, what counts as role-playing can be contentious subject, but overall, a coherent set of guidelines and etiquette do emerge from the open-ended responses.

For some, role-playing is a spontaneous act between two or more players who play out a short scenario on the spot. These players typically do not have background stories and have a low likelihood of interacting again in a role-playing context.

I was standing in my house when a ghost ran in. I tried to resurrect it, but it refused the resurrection. I thought perhaps the player had pushed the wrong button, so I attempted to resurrect again - again it refused. At this point, it occurred to me 'aha! a role player?' The ghost's job was much harder than mine as a savage, because a ghost can't even emote... all a ghost can do is OoooOoo. But I allowed it to lead me around - it was many years ago now so I can't remember - it led me to a monster which I worked out it wanted me to kill in revenge, then led me to a nearby 'treasure' and disappeared (as a satisfied ghost would). [Irth Online, F, 39]

A murder-mystery that spontaneously occurred, the main catalyst for it, was that some player, had been killed in front of the cantina, then decided to go AFK, leaving his corpse there. only two people started it, but a lot of other players really stepped up well during questioning, it ended with about 8 players staying there, until the issue resolved itself. (Not an 'RP Server, Bria in SWG. SWG doesn't designate servers) [SWG, M, 32]

On the other side of the spectrum are elaborate, sustained interactions between a network of players, each of whom has a background story, some personality quirks, and a set of psychological motivations. The stories amongst these players typically develop over time in a combination of planned and spontaneous scenarios.

What followed was about 3 months of slow, careful build up where my character came more and more to depend on them as her emotional support while they tried very hard to wean her away from her own unhealthy tendencies, while the designated future beau tried to hide her enormous crush (which, of course, my character was wholly oblivious to, as she'd never even consider that someone else might love her again). The day when everything finally came together was one of the greatest moments in RP I've ever had. It was so great to watch something that had been building up for so long finally bear fruit, and it's had more of an impact on that character than anything else to date. I feel truly blessed to have had a chance to participate and help design in such a great story. [WoW, M, 24]

I was at a Guild Wedding for our Guild leader. It was a roleplaying Guild and we had many members. We also had a 'rival' Guild and a whole situation was played out including the kidnapping of the bride and her rescue. It was memorable for the great roleplaying efforts of everyone. The Guild leader had invited many players who were not apart of the Guild nor roleplayers so they could see how we operated. It was an enjoyable night for all. [CoH, F, 35]

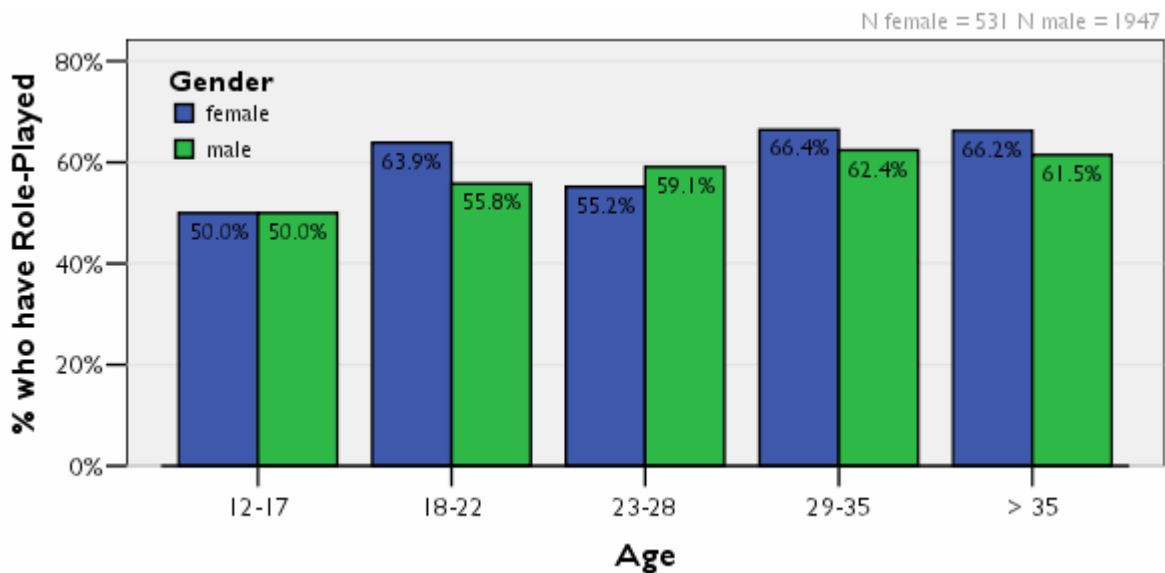
And of course, there are players at different points on that spectrum. Because I was interested in the specific player subculture amongst the group of players who self-identify as role-players, I emphasize the guidelines and etiquette of the more elaborated role-playing rather than that of the spontaneous role-playing. The data from the surveys is presented in 3 articles:

- 1) **The Demographics of Role-Playing:** Quantitative data on how many MMO players role-play, how often they role-play, and whether there are gender or age differences.
- 2) **Faces of Role-Playing:** Qualitative data on the personas that role-players create.
- 3) **The Protocols of Role-Playing:** Qualitative data on the guidelines and etiquette of role-playing and player's responses on what constitutes good role-playing.

**Note:** It is also worth noting that role-playing also technically does include sexual role-playing such as in the case of Furry Sex or the sub/dom culture in worlds like Second Life. I think these forms of role-playing are equally interesting and valid, but they are not reported here because, with the exception of one respondent (among 215 respondents in the open-ended responses), no one described participating in role-playing in a sexual context. This may be because role-playing in a fantasy MMO has a particular meaning, and role-playing in a sexual context becomes bracketed off instead as "cybering".

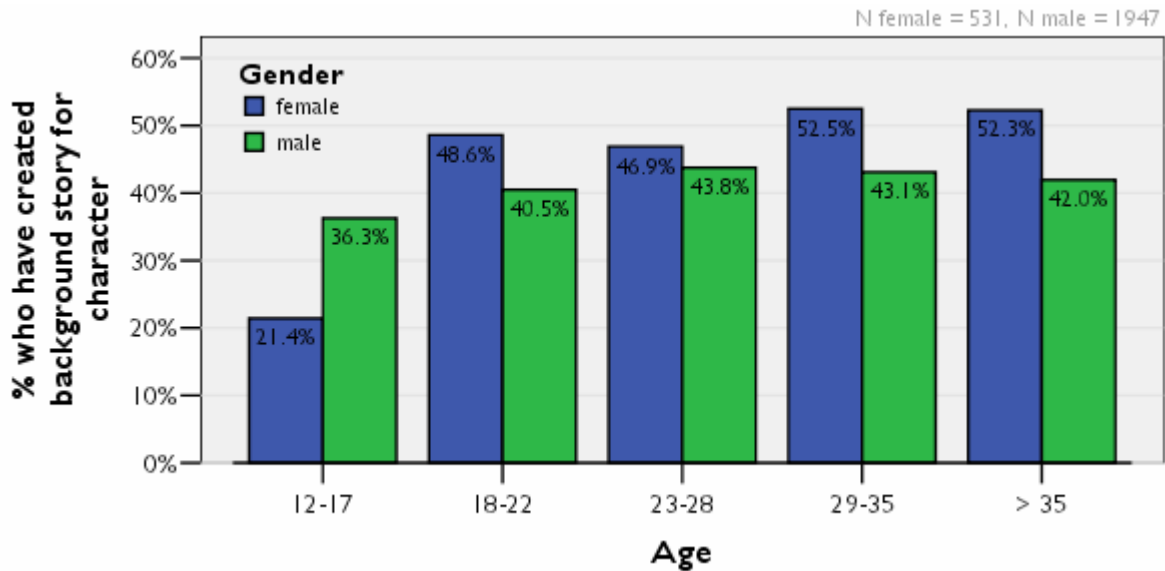
# The Demographics of Role-Playing

In the multiple-choice section, respondents were given a loose, working definition of role-playing. Respondents were told that role-playing referred to “creating a novel persona for your character that fits in the context of the game world and interacting with others through that persona”. Individual questions then explored in detail how elaborate their role-playing experiences have been. I began by asking respondents whether they had ever role-played in an MMORPG. Overall 60% of players (N = 2467) replied that they had role-played at one point or another. Female players were not significantly more likely to have role-played than male players, nor was there a significant difference with regard to age (except for the slightly lower responses in the 12-17 age range).

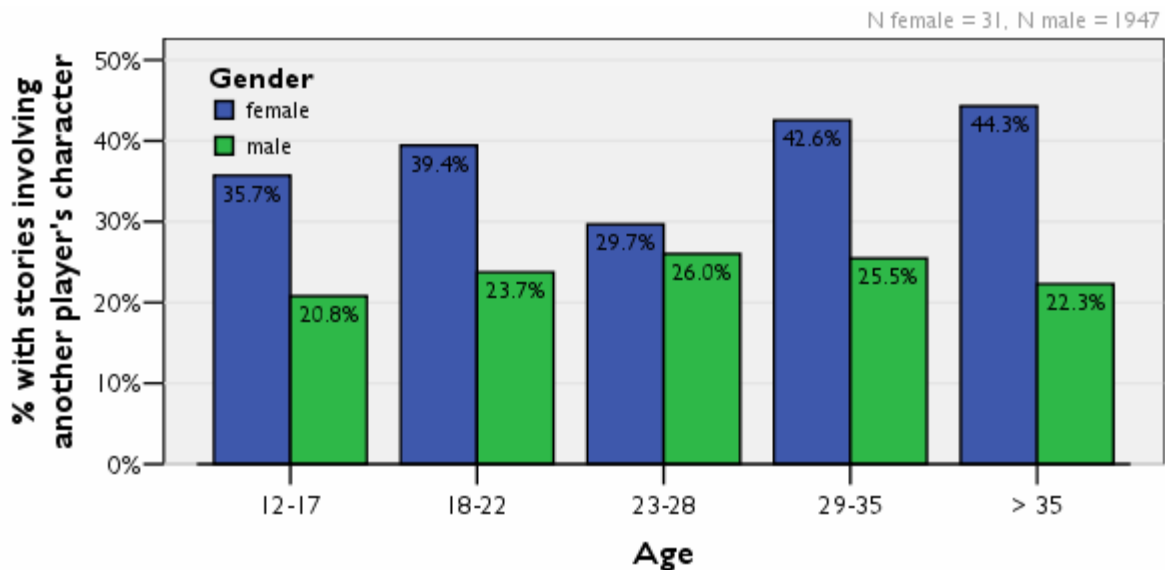


## Background Check

I then walked through a variety of possible role-playing activities to gauge how involved players were in this space. I started by asking respondents whether they had ever created a detailed background story or history for any of their characters. Overall, about 44% of the respondents indicated that this is something they've done. Female players are slightly more likely to have created background stories for their characters.

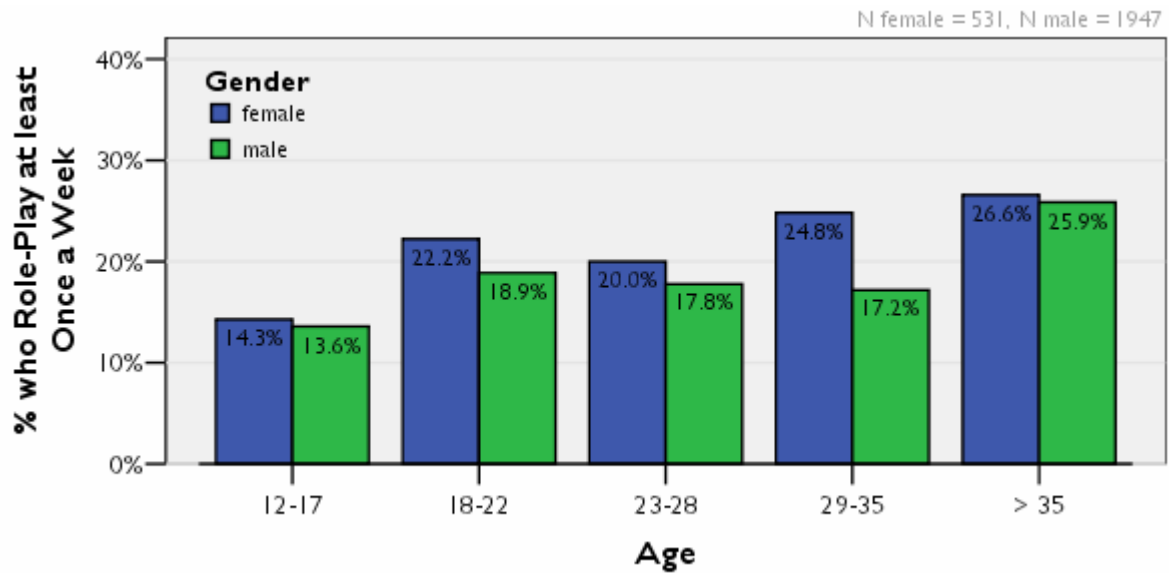


Another point of interest is whether these background stories involved another player's character. This would be one way to gauge whether players tend to create these stories alone or deliberately weave other player's into their own character's stories. Overall, about 28% of players have background stories for their own characters that involve another player's character. Female players were about 50% more likely to have directly involved another player's character in their own character's background story than male players.

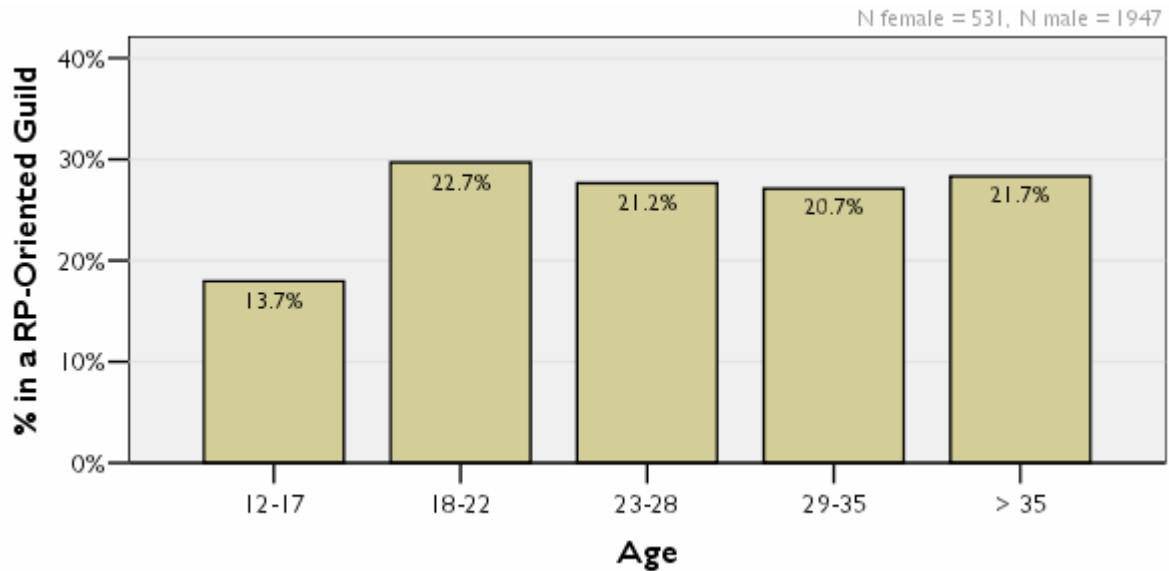


### Regularity

I then wanted to get a better sense of how regularly players role-played. After all, it could be the case that many players have created background stories for their characters, but very few actually role-play regularly. Overall, about 20% of players indicated that they role-played at least once a week in an MMORPG. We see a negligible gender difference in the response to this question, but a very mild age trend emerges. The likelihood of regular role-playing increases slightly with age ( $r = .08$ ).

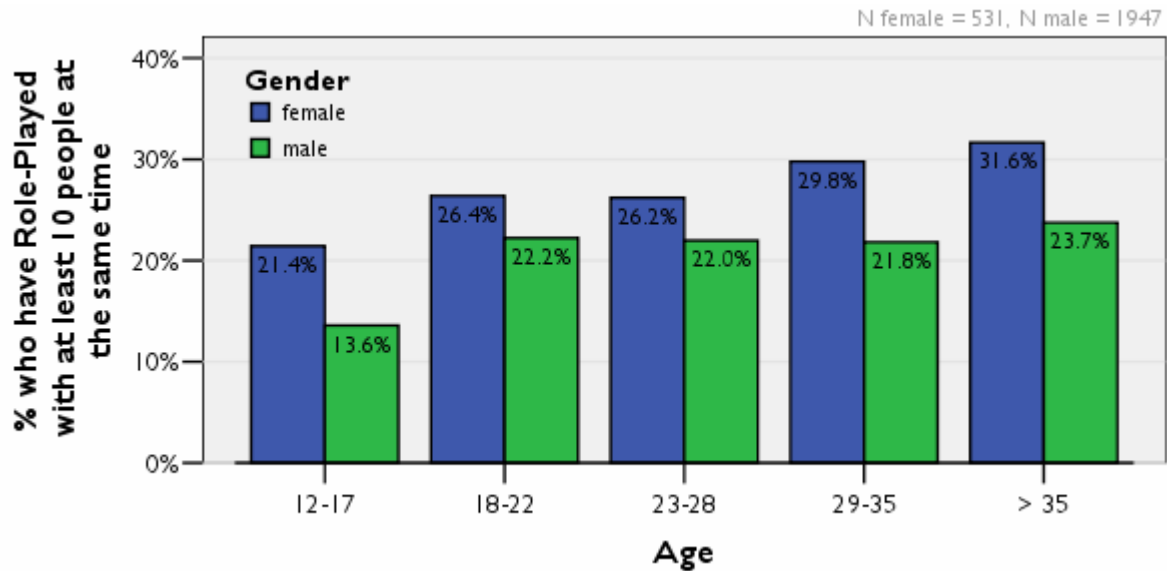


About 28% of players indicated that they belong to role-playing oriented guilds. There were no significant gender differences, but again we see the dampened response rate in the 12-17 age group that we've observed throughout this data set.



### Size of Groups

Finally, I was interested to get a sense of how large these role-playing activities were. Overall, about 24% of players have role-played a scene/event with a group of at least 10 players (including themselves). Female players were slightly more likely to have done so than male players.



Overall, it would appear that the majority of players have at point or another tried to role-play (around 60%), but regular role-players consist of a smaller cohort (around 20%). There is a consistent age difference where players in the 12-17 age group are less likely to have role-played, but almost no age difference exists beyond that. Female and male players appear to enjoy role-playing just as much and role-play just as often, but female players are more likely to involve other players into their role-playing (both in their character's stories and the number of people they role-play with at the same time). This gender difference might largely to due to the differing social access points into these games (<http://www.nickyee.com/daedalus/archives/001335.php>).

# Faces of Role-Playing

As a player subculture in mainstream MMORPGs, role-players are interesting because they need to subvert the actual game to a certain degree to create their own play-space. The emphasis on play shifts from levels and grinding to stories and improvised scenarios. I was interested in exploring this hidden play-space created by role-players. In a series of open-ended questions, role-players were invited to talk about their own character creations, their thoughts on what good role-playing was, the etiquette among role-players, and what actually counted as role-playing. While there was a great deal of diversity in the responses, certain themes did emerge in each question. In the following article, I try to piece together these clusters of commonalities to highlight different facets of role-playing.

## Character Creation

When role-players are asked to describe some of their most memorable characters, three types of characters seemed to emerge. These character types are also largely corroborated by the role-players themselves in a latter question asking them to describe the range in and any common tropes or fads they observe among role-played characters. Roughly, these three types are the Tragic, the Zany, and the Interaction-Scripted.

### **They killed my parents, my sister, my dog, and my entire village**

One pervasive theme among created characters was having a tragic past (the “Tragic”). Descriptions of slain parents, loved ones, and pillaged towns during early childhood were common in the background stories of many characters.

With the boy still not willing to give up his beliefs and learn the ways of magic, the wizard took a drastic step; he killed every single member of the order while the boy was out studying the wildlife. [WoW, M, 20]

From the time she was seventeen or so, everyone she became close to inevitably was killed. [Neverwinter Nights, F, 23]

Her family's farm was destroyed when she was four, and her family killed, but a valiant hero on a horse managed to rescue her, and bring her to Northshire Abbey, where she was raised to be a priest. [WoW, F, 18]

To a certain degree, this mechanism might serve to avoid the possibility of having to deal with a certain category of people. As one player put it succinctly:

On WoW, everyone is an orphan. Well, that's true most places where you roleplay because it's easier than having any kind of relationship with ... parents. \*gasp\* [WoW, F, 21]

This “parental exclusion” mechanism could be thought of as a move of symbolic liberation, but more often than not, this background plot serves to explain a psychological burden or flaw (typically emotional

insecurity or general distrust) that the character currently bears. What's interesting is that both elements tend to sever relationships (both past and future).

Emotionally, she dumped every feeling she could and buried it in a mental graveyard that, every night, she would methodically dig up and force herself to relive the moments to teach mental toughness ... Poor girl thought she was the cause of every death, including the destruction of her home village due to an orc invasion caused by drought. She never did find out that everyone made it out safely. [Neverwinter Nights, F, 23]

Having basically lost everything she ever loved on that day, she sunk into a deep depression, eventually turning to alcoholism and morally dubious mercenary work in a sort of 'passive aggressive' attempt to get herself killed. [WoW, M, 24]

Herjolf is a human mercenary. His mother was a whore, his father a mercenary. As he was 12 years old, his mother died of disease and his father took care of him, taking him with him to the army he was currently employed. Herjolf learned fighting as a craft. He took part in many battles, that earned him quite a score of scars. To forget the horrible things he saw in battle he has begun drinking. [DAoC, F, 36]

When players are asked about common tropes or character types they see, the Tragic is indeed the most well-described type, however, it is also the type that is thought to be most banal due to its prevalence.

Entirely too many people seem to want to turn having a tragic past into some kind of contest ('Orcs killed my mother' 'Oh yeah? Demons killed my whole family!' 'Oh yeah? I never HAD a family' 'Arthas ninja'd my thorium!') which is not only obnoxious but also kinda dumb; very few people like to deal with tragedy by using it as a bludgeon against others. [WoW, M, 24]

Unfortunately, there are only so many lead female and head hero roles to go around, and comically, there are only so many parents, siblings, lovers and pets that can be murdered to give some future heroic figure a motivation to become great. [AO, F, 40]

We will return to this theme later on when we talk about drama queens among role-players in the etiquette article, but for now we'll move on to the next character type.

### **I may be bald and short, and I may have stubby ears, but I'm an Elf dammit**

Another class of character types are deliberately humor-driven (the "Zany"). These characters typically do not have elaborate background stories as much as they have incredibly quirky characteristics or beliefs (typically comically delusional). And even when background stories are invoked, they are almost never tragic or emotionally scarring, but serve to better explain the character quirk.

A crazy scenario. A gnome who was abandoned at birth on the doorstep of someone in Teldrassil. So he's raised by Night Elves and thinks he's just a short elf with stubby ears. [WoW, M, 32]



My most memorable concept was a gnome necromancer in EQ1 who became a necro in order to raise his wife from the dead. He had her soul stored inside a clockwork gnome, which he commonly talked to and followed around the city. [EQ2, M, 24]

Dexter grew up a very poor boy. His father, an abusive alcoholic retired clown with a story of his own, would often throw books at Dexter because, no matter how little Dexter ate, he seemed to always gain weight. The unfortunate fact was, though, that Dexter was suffering from a rare form of Elephantitis, caused by the very books thrown at him. [CoH, M, 27]

This character type is recognized by other players and is sometimes seen as the polar opposite of the dramatic types with tragic pasts, both of which can become stagnant when role-played poorly.

The first style is 'serious' roleplaying, which relies heavily on pre-scripted events, and contains quite a bit of drama and tension, sometimes to soap opera levels. The other style is 'humourous' roleplaying, which usually relies on a few 'concept character quirks' to react non-seriously to any situation. The 'serious' style of roleplaying sometimes turn to angstfests and excessive conflicts, while the 'humourous' style has quite a lot of throwaway gags repeated ad infinitum. [CoH, M, 23]

### **Who I am is the accumulation of all the decisions that I have made**

The final category of characters that emerged were those of players who deliberately created characters with unremarkable personalities and allowed the ensuing role-playing to guide their character development (the "Interaction-Scripted"). Beyond some basic set of personality quirks (seldom overly traumatic or heroic), these players allowed their interactions with others to shape who their characters became. In a sense, this category isn't a "character type" as much as a method of character development. Whereas some players prefer to script their characters up-front, these players leave those characteristics loosely scripted and open to change.

I didn't have any personality or backstory planned out for her at first. After I was recruited into a roleplaying guild, my character started to develop. I suppose if you roleplay during most of your ingame time, you end up with a hell of a lot of RPed moments, memories, various factors that contribute to your character. So every day you log in, your character's personality, experiences, and history is developed. I'd say maybe two thirds of my character's development has occurred in this way, and the other third was steered by me. [The Saga of Ryzom, F, 14]

While the initial character background was formed around the class and gender of the character, as always it was interaction with other role players that really solidified the characters personality. In AO the class of Fixer is a 'rougue'ish one who slips around and uses stealth and speed. Miyuki eventually got a reputation of being a little bit of an 'ice queen', aloof and suspicious. I have worked that reputation into her interaction with her 'family' (alt characters). [AO, M, 40]

Indeed, some of these players emphasized that their character might have turned out very differently had they experienced a different set of experiences in the game world.

I also get most of how the character itself acts based on actual playtime - she was more cruel and introverted because of the people I met while playing with her - if she had ran into some more healthy, compassionate players, she may have turned out COMPLETELY different. [UO, M, 19]

These three character categories suggest two underlying axes. First, there's a spectrum of character personas that might be roughly described as Tragic to Comic. And secondly, there's a spectrum of character development that might be labeled as Prescribed to Open-Ended.

## **Tropes**

### **Drama Queens**

It was also interesting to ask players about any tropes or fads in role-played characters they've seen. As I've mentioned before, the Tragic is the most type that is most commonly referred to as overdone and banal. Other players commented that too many players strive for high-strung drama.

Goodness gracious. There are so many fads and cliches in roleplaying, it's extremely frustrating at times. Every character has a dead family. Everyone has a tragic past and wants to get revenge on someone...that is, some vague, nebulous NPC on whom they can never possibly get revenge. [EQ2, F, 37]

I had kept the background pretty 'lo-fi', because it used to annoy me (still does) that everybody had some high strung story involving nobility, treason, blood, sweat and tears for their characters. I wanted mine to be somewhat normal, without a past full of wealth, power and drama. [WoW, M, 33]

AO has its neverending cycle of Clan Heros persecuted by the unremitting corporate evil of OmniTek (which is apparently guilty of killing more people and pets than the black plague, ww2 and smoking all rolled together). [AO, F, 40]

### **Ultra Heroes/Villains**

Another character type that is seen as overdone are personas who are described as heroic and valiant to the point of being flawless, or those that are purely evil and without any redeeming qualities or nuances. The ultra hero/villain is frustrating for other players because they are implicitly inflexible character types that typically do not change or develop over time. In other words, they are seen as easy-to-play one-dimensional personas.

A lot of players tend to play absolutes (because they are easier to stay in character) like the ultra-good paladin who never does anything bad or the scheming backstabber who is \*always\* looking to gain an unfair advantage. Archetypes like these are very transparent. Good characters are more like real people, with grey ethics and morals and compromised values and internal hypocrisy. [Seed Beta, M, 26]

The only difference to me is that some people's characters are very inflexible. Too many people attempt to roleplay the ultimate hero or villain, but refuse to test that theory in combat (generally PvP), so too many egos will exist. [WoW, M, 19]

As another player points out, these ultra-villains typically do not even do a good job of being evil in the first place.

Most people who want to be evil do it in an infuriatingly wannabe way. Right. I'm evil. I will now skulk in the shadows, giggling, sharpening my blades and poking people in the back. This is stupid. True evilness is giving an outward appearance of goodness, and then manipulating things from the backdrop. [WoW, F, 22]

### **Blessed with Elune's Grace**

One theme we've seen in the previous examples is that role-players look down upon character personas or qualities that are absolutes or flawless. It then comes as no surprise that another area this is often seen is in descriptions of physical attractiveness.

One style that I've noticed is a player wanting to be a 'bombshell' or just 'drop-dead gorgeous' -- if I had a nickel for every description I've read of someone being 'as beautiful as the light of Elune' or having skin as 'pure as the white snows of Winterspring,' I'd be a rich man. It's almost a running joke between me and my friends to see how many descriptions we can spot like this in a single session. My personal record is a dozen. [WoW, M, 24]

Every female character is devastatingly beautiful and probably has purple eyes. [EQ2, F, 37]

I think the main source of frustration with these tropes is that they render the extraordinary as conventional. It gets tiring to live in a world where everyone's family was slaughtered, where everyone is tragically beautiful, and everyone you meet is either an ultra-hero or an ultra-villain. Thus, ironically, it is the ordinary (i.e., lepers or bakers with interesting personalities) that oftentimes sticks out as the extraordinary in role-playing. After all, being a princess is special only when everyone else is not a princess.

# The Protocols of Role-Playing

One way to understand role-playing is by asking role-players to describe what counts as good role-playing and what the etiquette of role-playing is. Responses to this question were surprisingly similar, with a key set of attributes articulated over and over again by many players. These guidelines fall roughly into three aspects of role-playing: 1) character interaction, 2) textual communication, and 3) story-telling.

The primary set of guidelines that players articulated revolved around how a player's character should behave and interact with others.

## Character Interaction

### **Stay in Character**

The most common guideline given was that good role-players "stay in character". There are two layers of meaning in this phrase. The superficial one is that role-players should avoid making out-of-character comments (OOC).

Maintaining an in character presence is definitely one of the top rules. Personally, I have no problem with the occasional out of character comment, such as 'brb' or 'phone' or something similar (and most people that I know of don't), but to come out of nowhere and start asking about game mechanics ooc'ly...that just comes across as either 'newbie!' or 'idiot'. [Neverwinter Nights, F, 23]

But the underlying assumption is that good role-players can stay in character because they have a character personality that has sufficiently depth and can deal with a wide range of scenarios.

A good roleplayer knows all aspects of their character; they have a thorough background and a concept of how their character would act and react and they go with that. A newer roleplayer will often drop out of character, or they will forget that they are roleplaying a certain character and not only drop ooc but revert completely to their personality, or the personality of one of their other characters. [EQ2, F, 23]

Good role-players stay in character when on-stage. Newbies generally have limited ability to respond; their conversation armamentarium is small. [Second Life, F, 57]

In this second reading, a player breaks character because of a limited behavioral repertoire. A good role-player is not only consistent, but draws from a coherent character story or psychology to react to a wide range of scenarios.

### **Accommodate Others**

As we've noted elsewhere, many players try so hard to be extraordinary that it becomes banal because everyone has a woefully tragic past. In other words, many role-players want to be in the spotlight. But in

anything that resembles a story, there can only be so many lead characters. The “drama queen” is a recognized part of the role-playing community.

In my opinion, a lot of RP'ers tend to need/want attention. (Guilty! :) ) Each of us is a little 'drama queen' just screaming to get out. As much as we enjoy getting together & having a scene with all of us together, we each crave our moment when we're the center of attention. [CoH, M, 30]

The drama queen is usually really easy to spot, as he's probably the one obsessed with winning the e-peen waving contest over who has the most tragic past, or who has the greatest greater destiny, or is just generally not happy with ever being a supporting player, even in someone else's plot. [WoW, M, 24]

Thus, what marks good role-players is their willingness to accommodate others, whether this means playing a support role or being responsive to the quirks of other characters. In sum, it is the ability to share the spotlight.

Good roleplaying is interesting, original, spontaneous and very open-ended. Good roleplaying does not impede the progress of other players in the game or interfere with their game experience, but rather, happens alongside it, enhancing the game for those passing through as well as those who are engaged in the act of roleplay. [AO, F, 40]

A good roleplayer is responsive to characters around him/her and doesn't feel the need to constantly be in the spotlight; a good roleplayer improves the RP of those around him/her just through the quality of the interaction. [EQ2, F, 37]

### **Develop Character Over Time**

As we've seen, static and inflexible characters are frowned upon largely because they suggest a lack of imagination or a resistance to interact with other players.

A bad roleplayer tends to be stuck with only a few ideas (e.g. kill x-race on sight), have either stereotypical characters (e.g. Elminster wannabe mage) or wild ideas (I was brought up by a race that kills my own race on sight) and often struggles with thee/thou because 'that is part of roleplaying'. The character will remain the same even after 'life-changing events' and during roleplaying sessions with others they try to make their character the Hero or force things on other characters (e.g. when in a barfight 'I cast a spell and everyone falls on the ground writhing in pain'). [WoW, F, 31]

On the other hand, good role-playing allows for character development. In other words, these characters are open to interacting with other characters and changing because of significant interactions.

Good role playing involves the creation of a whole character, the ability to allow others to influence that character through relationships and interaction, and the character's growth and development. [EQ, F, 53]

Good roleplayer: is able to adapt to a situation and to make the character evolve throughout the time, gives the character the opportunity to learn and change his/her mind (with reasons to do so). [SWG, F, 29]

A corollary of this is that good role-players develop relationships to make these character developments visible to others and to create the potential for these developments. After all, no one knows you have changed (or can provide a context for you to change) unless they have known you for a while.

Develops in-game relationships with other characters, from romance and friendship to rivalry and feuds. Really good role players allow these relationships to grow and change over time. [DAoC, M, 45]

Good role playing involves the creation of a whole character, the ability to allow others to influence that character through relationships and interaction, and the character's growth and development. [EQ, F, 53]

## **Textual Communication**

The second set of guidelines described by players revolved around expectations of writing skills and the conscious effort to bracket off out-of-character comments.

### **Writing and Spelling**

The primary pet-peeves of role-players are poor spelling, grammar or incessant abbreviations. Specifically, leet-speak is very much frowned upon.

There are a few standard rules that really help roleplay. Actually spelling words out. The difference between 'What do you mean?' and 'wut do u mean?'. From my experience, this will get you slaughtered. [WoW, M, 25]

An attempt at good spelling is always appreciated, when you're trying to roleplay. No one is perfect, but lots of 'lol kthx u help me?' isn't going to go over very well. Doing that on an RP server will get you some pretty snippy responses, I've seen. [WoW, F, 23]

### **Mark OOC Comments**

Secondly, consistent with the importance of staying in character, the deliberate separation of out-of-character (OOC) commentary is also seen as necessary. In an environment where all communication is textual, this means developing strategies to explicitly mark OOC comments. This is commonly done via bracketing.

Any chat that's OOC--out-of-character--must be marked as different somehow. Generally this means double parentheses--like ((hi!))--or brackets of some sort, like [ ] or { }. [CoH, M, 30]

The only etiquette things i can think of is declaring out of character comments, it tends to break up the flow if people talk out of character and are not declaring it. [WoW, M, 24]

## **Story-Telling**

We've looked at guidelines that players described related to character interaction and communication. We'll now turn to what players noted were unacceptable ways of story-telling in the context of an ongoing plot or role-playing event.

### **Don't "God-Mode"**

Above all, role-playing is a shared consensual experience among players. Thus it's important that actions are not forced on other players. Breaking this rule was referred to either as "god-modding" or "power-emoting" by respondents.

The most common rule that is broken, that I know of, is forcing someone into something they might not otherwise do. For example, a role player would emote, Laeque leans in to kiss Joe. A non-role player would emote, Laeque kisses Joe on the cheek. The first emote is open ended. The other player chooses to back away or accept the kiss as his character would let him. The second emote is typical of the novice role player. It allows nothing to react to and dictates the action. [DAoC, F, 50]

Well, there's a big one. Don't godmode. Do NOT act like an action that you roleplay succeeds immediately. Roleplaying is all about mutual consent. If you are going to do something that could totally alter the other character, ASK. Don't even try to do it at all and allow for failure. Ask the player in private. [CoH, F, 18]

### **Don't "Meta-Game"**

And finally, echoing the early guideline to stay in character, players noted that it was important that players are consistent with what their characters know and do not know about the world. This was referred to by respondents as "meta-gaming".

You also should never meta-game. This is when you have, for example, played WoW to level 60 once already and have seen the entire world. Then you start another roleplay character, and you use knowledge from your first character in your second, while your second character shouldn't actually have this knowledge, because it hasn't seen all these places and things yet. [Seed Beta, F, 24]

Most roleplaying newbies and 'outsiders' don't understand the concept of 'meta-gaming'. Meta-gaming is applying knowledge or influence from an out-of-character context to an in-character situation. For example, talking about the inner layout of a high-level dungeon as a low-level character who could not possibly have first-hand knowledge of such a thing. [WoW, M, 29]

## What is Role-Playing?

One internal conflict I've side-stepped so far is what actually counts as role-playing. Many respondents commented that perspectives of what counted as role-playing vary from player to player and is a constant source of tension. Given this underlying tension, it is actually interesting that a coherent set of guidelines could be extracted from role-players. Indeed, the most common source of tension did not involve the guidelines themselves, but rather, from how strictly and how often they were to be followed.

An alliance my guild was in during the relatively early days of DAoC had a rather strict policy of not breaking character in alliance chat. While it seemed like a good policy at the time, the steady scolding after every slip ended up leaving alliance chat mostly unused. When this same alliance announced that they were going to focus even MORE on role-playing, our guild (and several others) left. The realization we made at the time was that role-playing is at it's best when it just happens, and at it's worst when it is forced. [EQ2, M, 37]

There are wide differences in degree of tolerance for adherence to roleplay, and significant disagreements can be sparked over these disagreements. I find that roleplaying guilds in particular suffer from this, and rarely enjoy the longevity of a more accepting and varied guild, though a common thread and recognition of other's characters in their roles and some perhaps 'lighter' roleplay certainly adds to the fun of a good guild. [EQ, M, 51]

In other words, for some role-players, having strict guidelines and enforcement diminishes the spontaneous fun of role-playing. The rules begin to constrain, rather than enable, creativity.

I have been a member of a guild that took their role playing very seriously and had rules of conduct etc. which I didn't agree with as I found it constrictive in a similar way to how I view the raiding guilds which are non-rp but have numerous rules on how you should behave. I suppose that my thinking here is that real life has lots of rules in it, why create more in a fantasy world that is (for me) a form of escapism? [WoW, M, 32]

I've been in very strict RP guilds where any conversation that took place that was not in the 'approved' vernacular of the Guild had to be noted as being 'OC' (Out of Character) before the conversation took place. Failure to abide by that rule could result in the offender being kicked from the guild. Most guilds aren't that strict because it does, at some point, make it more difficult to have a good gaming experience (diversion from real life) when you're constantly having to look over your virtual shoulder for the RP Police. [WoW, M, 43]

And finally, I'll leave you with one interesting "is it role-play?" dilemma that several players articulated.

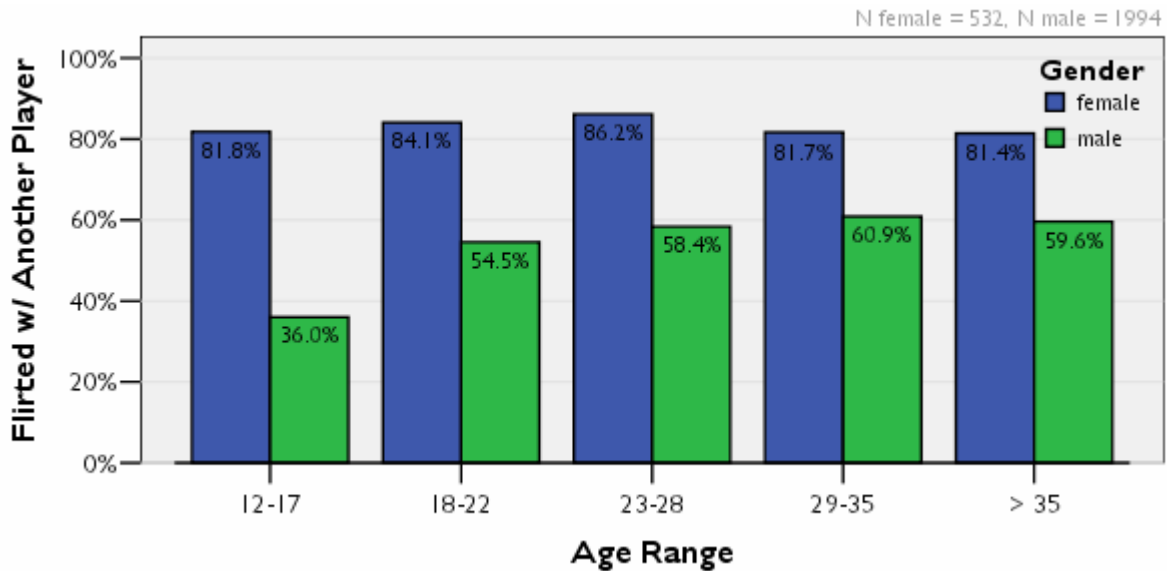
As to what constitutes RP, many will say anything goes (and this is the school to which I subscribe) as long as it's sensible, but there are many views on this too. A favourite quote of mine is 'Your character isn't a Night Elf that has fallen through a wormhole to find herself in Eve. Ever.'. Some people will say that anything which refers to another game/world/life and so on is effectively 'disqualified' from being In Character (IC). [EO, M, 19]



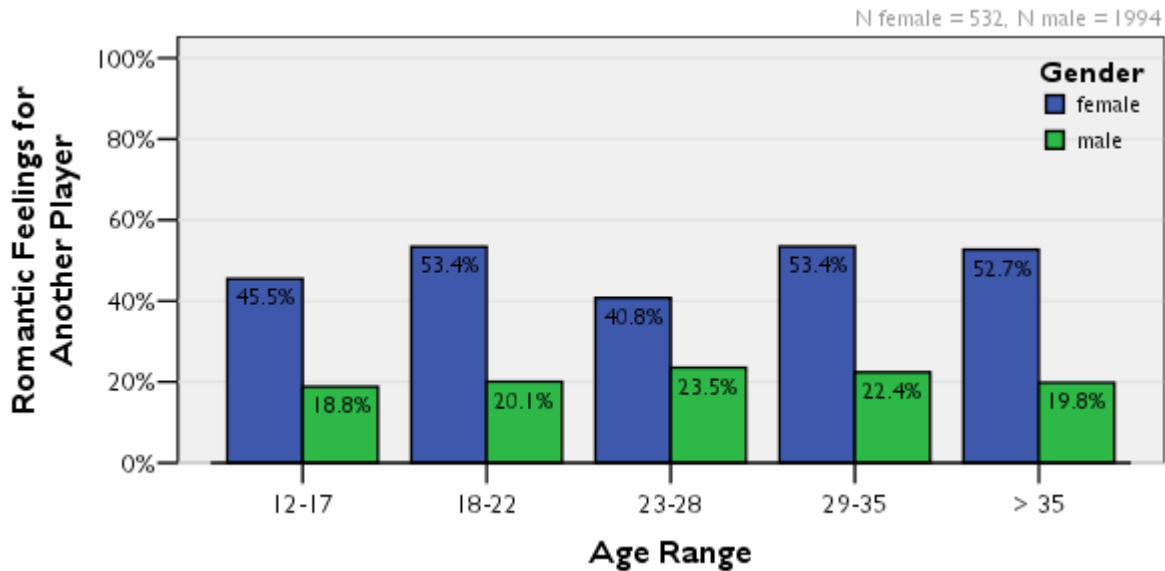
# Love is in the Air

We hear a lot of anecdotes of players who met their romantic partners in an MMO, but how prevalent is this? In a recent survey, I asked players about their experiences in a variety of courtship stages to get a general idea about the prevalence of romance in MMOs.

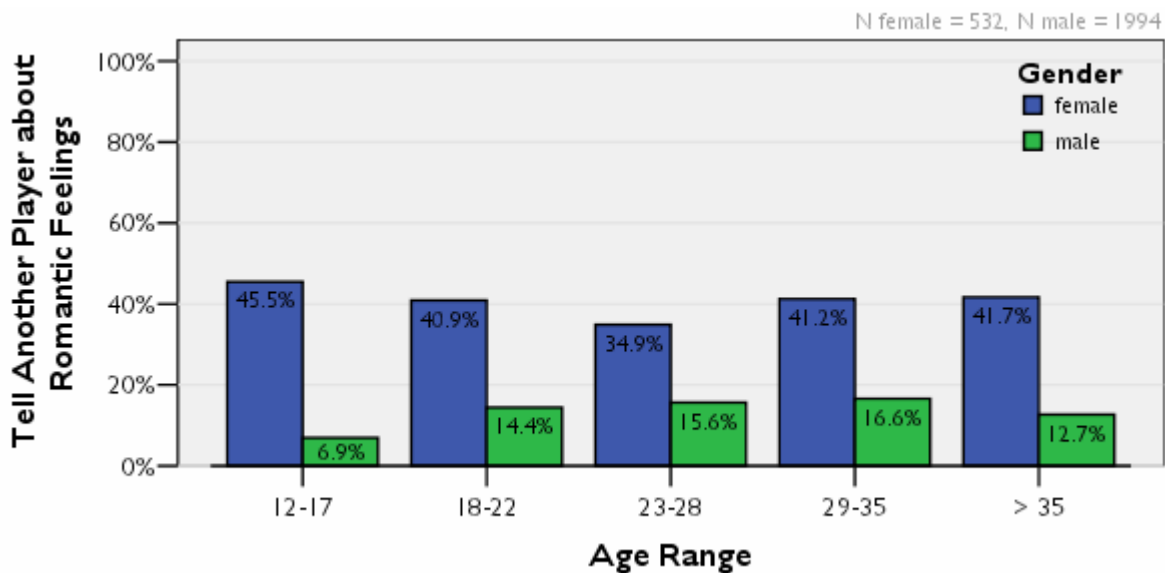
Many players have at one point or another flirted with another player. About 80% of female players and 60% of male players have flirted with another player. There were almost no age differences except for the lower rate of flirtation among male players in the 12-17 range.



About 50% of female players and 22% of male players have developed romantic feelings for another player. These percentages largely did not change with age. Players from 12 - 40 and above were just as likely to develop romantic feelings for another player.

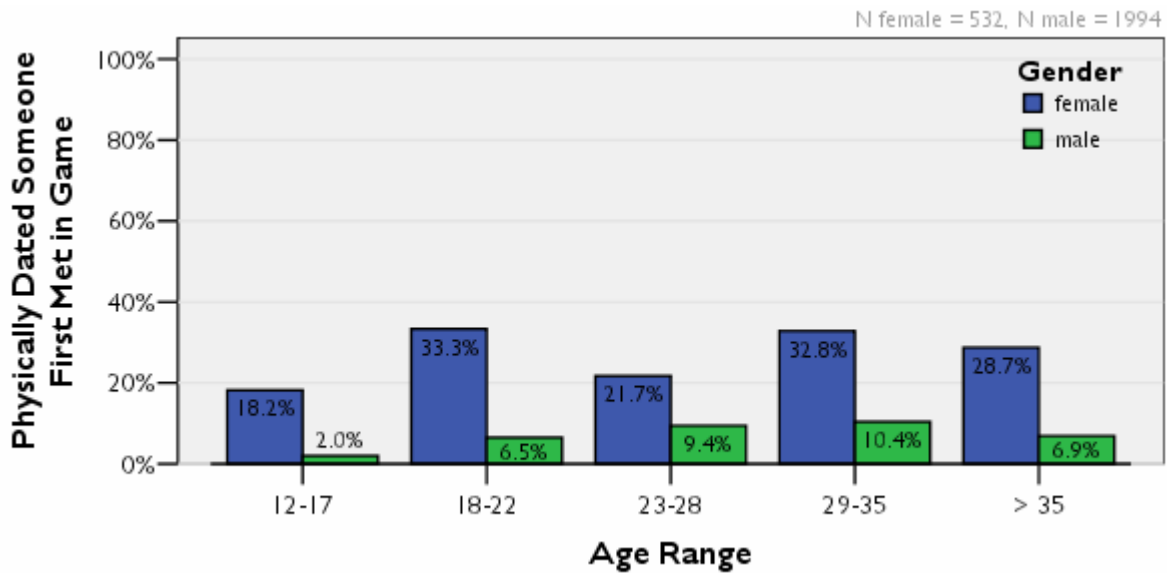


About 40% of female players and 15% of male players have told another player about their romantic feelings for them. Again, we see very few age differences.



And finally, about 29% of female players and 8% of male players have physically dated someone who they first met in an MMO. Again, it's hard to discern a strong age difference. Both these percentages feel very high, and the only other data point I have comes from the 2000 survey on EQ players (<http://www.nickyee.com/eqt/relate.html#8>), where the corresponding numbers were 15% and 3% (so almost double of what was found 6 years ago). Now, the other thing may just be that the survey respondents are skewed towards more involved players who are thus more likely to report relationships. So I tried to see if the likelihood of physically dating someone increased dramatically with hours played per week. The correlation came out at  $r = .07$ , not strong enough to have a dramatic effect. In other words,

even if heavy time involvement was a general sampling bias among the respondents, it has only a mild impact on these particular percentages.



**Question for readers:** Do you know anyone who is dating (or has dated) someone they first met in an MMO? If you've played MMOs for a few years, have you noticed an increase in these kinds of relationships?