The Daedalus Project

The "Impossible" Romance

What it means to fall in love in an MMO

In the past, I've presented some stats on the romantic relationships that form online as well as some thoughts on how the social architectures of MMO environments may encourage relationship formation. In a recent survey, I was interested in exploring the formation of romantic relationships from the perspective of players who have physically dated someone they first met online. In particular, I wanted to get a better understanding of how the formation and development of these online relationships differed from ones these players have had that started face-to-face (F2F). Their narratives help illustrate that these online romances have their own set of constraints and affordances and are not simply inferior or superficial versions of F2F relationships.

I received 115 responses to an open-ended survey targeting players who have physically dated someone they first met in an MMO. The majority of these relationships were still ongoing when the survey was conducted (67%). Of course, there is likely a sampling bias here of players who have had positive and ongoing relationships in the sample. On the other hand, I was less interested here in getting representative stats, and more interested in a qualitative understanding of the issue. Nevertheless, it is important to point out this sampling bias so readers are aware that even though a lot of important information can be gleaned from the narratives that follow, these narratives are probably more positive in tone due to an under-sampling of failed relationships.

Brief Sketches of Love

First Contact

Let's start by going over some representative sketches of the formative period of these online romances. These sketches will help ground us before we talk more conceptually about these relationships. Most players describe fairly commonplace and low-key situations for how they first met their romantic partner.

> Our characters met in North Freeport in EverQuest. His dark elf cleric was on top of the roofs, an area which I didn't know characters could access. I sent him a /tell, asking how he got up there, and he kindly showed me how. [EQ, F, 22]

We started out as two people who were looking for a group. None were available, so we decided to group together. [EQ, M, 25]

In many circumstances, both players belonged to the same guild and the guild played an important role in the initial meeting and providing sustained contact.

We played at different times, but people kept saying things like 'lol that's just what [she] said!' about things I said, and apparently vice-versa, so we started to take note of each other, as we had both thought we were pretty unique. [WoW, M, 28]

On our guild channel we would talk for a long time bouncing off of the other ones jokes and we talked casually about our RL when hunting partners in private. [unnamed MUD, F, 17]

Incubation Period

An incubation period then typically follows where the casual relationship evolves very gradually over a period of typically 3 months to 12 months.

We started to get to know each other out of character and became friends, chatting about our day and about life in general. After a couple months of this, I went through a period when I was having a very rough time at work. He was very sweet and considerate to me through that time, asking how I was and listening to me bitch about things. [WoW, F, 30]

After roughly 6 months feelings developed, we found out we were 1 hour away and took things to phone not just game. [EQ2, F, 41]

Moment of Truth

These developing emotions then come to a point where the players decide to express their romantic feelings to each other. Most players had fairly detailed descriptions of this part of their relationship.

About 6 months into WoW I met someone who lived in the same state as I and was planning to meet him. My now boyfriend then said 'I don't want you to meet him. I have feelings for you.' I had had feelings for him all along but was too afraid to say anything. When he told me he wanted to be with me I was on cloud nine. I couldn't believe it but was so happy that he felt the same way. [WoW, F, 29]

It was awkward, I believe, because we both figured out that we missed one another. We talked about it the same way we talked about everything else, in game. We were chatting and it came up. We talked about our feelings and what it meant for our current situations, and we were both giddy. The moment was like ... beyond words. Let us say that. [EQ, M, 25]

Cascade of Communication Mediums

This early period in the relationship is often supported by increasingly synchronous and intimate forms of communication (i.e., phone or webcam). The relationship starts to progress via other communication mediums. In other words, most players don't jump from avatar to F2F directly as assumed by some media reports that try to paint these relationships as largely based on fantasy.

> I didn't really have much of a surprise when I met him for the first time, I'd seen him in photos, through a webcam, and heard him on the phone for around 6 months straight prior to meeting him. [EQ, F, 34]

> No there weren't any surprises, we went on cam, talked over skype and ventrillo, just now we could touch each other as well. [anon]

Meeting F2F

These romantic partners were almost always separated by great geographic distances. In fact, in all the 115 responses, no pair of romantic partners were living in the same state. In many cases, romantic partners lived in different countries. Meeting F2F was thus a multi-layered problem for many of these couples. It was likely to have been a significant emotional, time, and financial investment.

> The steps were pretty much simple - the topic was brought up, and over the next week or so, a date was decided on. The distances involved were quite large - me living in Norway, and she in Canada. [EQ2, M, 28]

> It hasn't been easy, particularly since we were citizens of different countries and one of us (me, because I was interested in moving to Canada and he didn't want to move to the States) had to go through immigration. [WoW, F, 30]

Many players expressed great anxiety and fear as they step foot off the plane or train and were about to see their romantic partner F2F for the first time. The word "intense" was used very often in this section of the open-ended responses.

> A month later he flew to Wisconsin to meet me, and it was a wonderful but almost frighteningly intense experience. From the first day that we spent together, we both felt very intensely that we belonged together (though neither of us admitted it until several months later), which was very confusing. [WoW, F, 30]

> It was a challenge to work out the logistics of the thing, but ultimately, it was worth it. The first meeting? Well, I spent all day on a plane, got to my final destination exhausted and ready for dinner. When I laid eyes on my future wife, I felt the exhaustion melt away and my hunger remained, but I no longer wanted dinner. [EQ, M, 25]

> I spent the flights to her (I had to change planes) in the same nervous and excited state (I was very impatient to get there, the planes seemed to take forever and a day), and I was particularly nervous that fate might intervene and I might be somehow denied entry to the

US (I wasn't, of course) … Two years after that we're married and living in the UK! :) [WoW, M, 28]

Ever After

There were many happy endings from the responses. Many of the couples had relocated to be together geographically, and many indicated plans for marriage or children.

That was five years ago and we are still together, happy, and working on the future. From online start to present day, we've been best friends for nine years now. We still game together, too! [WoW, F, 33]

It has been nearly 5 years and we are still together. I moved from the US to Europe a few years ago and there are no regrets. [EQ2, F, 32]

I am currently living in Sweden with him, and we're getting married in August. After the wedding we'll be moving back to the US because it's easier to support our gaming needs there. [Eve Online, F, 24]

But there were also stories that didn't have happy endings. Among the relationships that ended soon after the F2F meeting, some cited the geographic distance as the primary problem, while others cited problems with "chemistry", and a few described gradual conflicts or personality differences similar to ones that would terminate F2F relationships.

It could have been a very good relationship had we lived closer. That was the only real difference and no, we decided neither of us could move closer together (we each had children). [EQ2, F, 49]

Our relationship ended after about 6 months in a heartbreaking situation for both. He needed more than I could provide online, and I needed someone more stable and less clingy. [WoW, F, 22]

He does not have the stability nor the commitment, to be with one person. I found out he was married 3 times, and 5 kids. And did not pay child support. To this day now 10 years later, he still is not divorced. And still doing the same thing. No, we are not together any longer, 2 years was enough of this roller coaster ride. [EQ2, F, 41]

Low Pressure Environment

Let's now talk more conceptually about these romantic relationships and the unique constraints and affordances of MMO environments. While it's easy to compare this aspect of MMOs to a dating website or a romance chat room, these analogies are in fact inaccurate and frame these relationships incorrectly. First of all, none of the respondents described themselves as deliberately looking for love when they met their romantic partner. In fact, they often described the opposite.

> I was in no way 'looking' for anyone ... in fact I turned down advances I received in real life citing I was not ready to start dating up again because I had just gotten out of a serious relationship. [WoW, F, 24]

> I wasn't looking for this to happen, it just did. [City of Villains, F, 25]

The more apt analogy is probably the gym or the office - places where romance is not the primary goal for social interaction. This is an important distinction to make because people interact very differently when under and not under the pretense of a date. In other words, the formative and incubation period of these online relationships typically occur without this additional emotional pressure.

> I think it's easier to get to know people online than in person, because when you date somebody in person, you spend half your time sitting in movie theaters or restaurants not talking. Online, all you can do is talk, so you kind of have to get to know each other, lol. [CoH, F, 31]

> I believe that the online environment made it much easier. There was nothing in the way of awkward social pressure that is the 'first date'. It started out with two people of the opposite sex talking and having fun with absolutely no expectations of romance or sex. [EQ, M, 25]

> We were able to be more honest with each other without worrying about looks or sex and all of the pressure and distractions that go along with that. [WoW, F, 22]

More importantly, the game environment provides a variety of collaborative tasks that allow players to get to know each other. In fact, players are forced to communicate with each other.

> The necessary communication led to us becoming soulmates with a good understanding of what made the other person tick before.... oh I suppose *life* got in the way. :-) [WoW, F, 42]

As other players point out, working together through crises reveals much more about another person than going to the movies with them. Watching how someone interacts with others in different social settings (under different amounts of stress) and how they work through problems can be very character-revealing.

> I found that the way people acted to me in-game was usually the way they acted towards me and others in real life. EQ was a great way to see how a potential partner treated others. [WoW, F, 22]

> We'd tackled life-threatening crises together before we ever went on our first date … The biggest difference between this relationship and my previous ones was that I didn't run screaming as soon as it became serious. Perhaps that was because I already knew that if push came to shove, he'd be there for me - or perhaps because I never dreamt it would last. But looking back over the last ten years, I must say that I don't think it made a whit of difference how we met - it's what we did after which counts. [WoW, F, 32]

In other words, many of these players got to know each other without the intent of trying to impress, date, or get in bed with each other.

Anonymity and Honesty

The notion of anonymity intersects with relationship formation in many different ways. Let's walk through several of these. We've seen that most of these players were not specifically looking for romance online when they met their romantic partner. We've also noted that they typically live great distances from each other. Because players assume that they are talking to someone they will never meet F2F, the initial formative period can encourage honesty. After all, there is little incentive to lie to someone you don't know and assume will never meet.

> I believe you get to learn more about a person's feelings when you meet them online, because it is easier to talk to someone whom you originally think you won't meet IRL, and thus won't be embarrassed to tell them secrets about you. [M, 23]

> I think the internet makes it easier to be more open with people about your likes, dislikes, feelings etc because, most of the time, you know you're never going to meet them and so can be freer with information. [WoW, F, 36]

Others commented that it's easier to get to know someone precisely because of the anonymity - people are more open with each other.

> In my case, because we were talking in chat, almost anonymously in a sense, I think it made it easier for us to get to know each other, because we could say things that might have been hard for slightly 'stiff-upper-lip' type people like us to express in real life. [WoW, M, 28]

Honesty was in fact an issue that many respondents brought up themselves. These players typically suggested extreme caution about taking what people say at face value. Nevertheless, when they then described their own experiences, most players noted the complete honesty that they and their partners exhibited prior to meeting F2F.

> I don't think it's easier to get to know someone else online. Yes, it's easier to talk about difficult times in your past, and secrets you may have, since you're not as worried about what the other person thinks. If the other person rejects you for who you are, it doesn't hurt as much. You close the chat window, and move on. However, this makes it just as easy to lie, since there aren't really any consequences. Before I met him, I did worry a lot about if all that he told me was true. When I met him, there were no surprises, he and his family were exactly who they said they were. I didn't lie to him about anything, either. I think our case was one of the few lucky ones. [FlyFF, F, 21]

> The main reason that our on-line relationship worked out so well is that we were completely honest with each other from the get-go. Whenever people ask me if I was

worried that he wouldn't be who he said he was on-line, I reply, 'He told me he was 30, an accountant, and was losing his hair. I was pretty sure he wasn't lying!' [WoW, F, 30]

I think I was lucky that he was everything he said he was. I wasn't surprised at all. [EQ2, F, 49]

Another potential buffer to deception is the presence of other communication modalities that we mentioned earlier. It's much harder to lie to someone about physical appearances when they can see you on a webcam.

I didn't really have much of a surprise when I met him for the first time, I'd seen him in photos, through a webcam, and heard him on the phone for around 6 months straight prior to meeting him. [EQ, F, 34]

Masks and Superficiality

Superficiality was another issue that many players dealt with in their narratives. One argument was that players necessarily embellish themselves online and thus online identities are typically superficial.

To believe that online and real life personalities are equal is foolish. The anonymity and 'safety' of online games makes a lot of people embellish - on their personalities, on their habits, and on their behavior. It often provides those few extra moments to think that makes one appear more in equilibrium than one might be in real life, when the seconds pass into uncomfortable silence. Thus, I think it is easier to appear more confident and self assured online than it is in real life. [EQ2, M, 28]

Others countered that people are superficial in real life as well, and in fact, many common tools of self-embellishment in the physical world do not exist in virtual worlds.

Dating online is a lot less pretentious, imo. There's no perfume, no makeup, no posturing, etc., and qualities like intelligence and eloquence are hard to fake. Any issues of honesty don't really differ between real life and the internet -- you can be dishonest anywhere if you choose. [WoW, M, 21]

You can also meet people in the offline world that can disguise themselves and look and act differently from what they really are, deceiving people who meet them. [WoW, F, 25]

Another line of counter-argument noted that physical appearances are deemphasized online, leading to a stronger concentration on internal qualities - such as personality and intelligence. These players question why emphasis on physical appearances in F2F relationships is considered normal while emphasis on internal qualities in online relationships is instead considered superficial.

In my opinion, it's the most honest way of falling in love, as you fall in love with the person without the interference of physical appearance. [CoH, F, 27]

I feel that OFFLINE relationships are actually the more superficial of the two. Being able to get to know a person without the obstacles of appearance, fashion, style, and so forth allows you to meet people you might otherwise not have approached. [WoW, M, 27]

Contrary to idea that such relationships are superficial, I felt like I got to know him on a deeper level ... without being hindered by the superficial facade most people have in social situations 'IRL.' [WoW, F, 20]

Creating Possibilities: Part One

One statistic was the most surprising from the narratives. Of all the respondents who were still in the relationship that began in an MMO, 60% of them indicated that they didn't think the relationship would have happened in a F2F context, even had they met. Another 18% were not sure. Only 22% were somewhat certain that the relationship would have happened F2F. Thus, one very intriguing theme that emerged in the narratives was the notion that these virtual worlds had made it possible for otherwise "impossible relationships" to happen. By this, some referred back to the geographic separation, but many respondents suggested that their relationship would not have occurred F2F even if they had met each other. Respondents described two kinds of "impossible relationships" that were made possible by virtual worlds.

The first kind of "impossible relationship" revolves around shyness. As I read through the narratives, it surprised me how often respondents described, without any prompting from the questions, either their own shyness or their partner's shyness.

My now-husband was very shy, but obviously a very sweet guy. [WoW, F, 30]

I find myself to be a very shy and introverted person in real life …Due to my social personality, most women had overlooked me as shy, not confident or any of my other redeeming qualities. [WoW, M, 25]

I have a easier time in opening myself up to others online, since I'm usually too scared to talk to new people in real life. [ROSE, F, 16]

About 25% of all respondents mentioned shyness somewhere in their narratives, either in describing themselves, their romantic partners, or both. Of course, it's not clear whether this percentage is higher or lower than online gamers, video gamers, or the population in general. On the other hand, it makes it easy to understand why a non-trivial number of respondents felt that their shyness or their partner's shyness would have prevented the relationship from ever happening even had they met in real life.

Since we are both shy, we probably would not have talked in real life.. then again, I've always liked the cute shy ones, so who knows.. ;) [EQ2, F, 20]

He is shy and very reserved and I do think he would let the opportunity pass him by. It is sad to admit that, but it is the truth. [WoW, F, 29]

If I had met her in RL first neither of us would've stepped up to make the first move due to our shyness. [FlyFF, M, 38]

We are both shy and introverted people, so if we had met each other in real life first, we probably wouldn't have been brave enough to reveal ourselves as honestly as we did online. [FlyFF, F, 21]

I would probably have oogled him and he would have oogled me and nothing would have happened ... [WoW, F, 33]

These narratives show that virtual worlds can enable the formation of relationships that would otherwise have been considered impossible F2F, even though the two people are actually highly compatible and can develop a significant romantic bond. The confidence that people can acquire online due to anonymity, something that has been critiqued as leading to superficiality, can in fact have very real and positive consequences for some people.

Creating Possibilities: Part Two

There was another kind of "impossible relationship" that was made possible in virtual worlds. As we saw earlier, many respondents felt that the virtual environment deemphasized external qualities (such as physical appearance) and made it easier to get a sense of another person's internal qualities (such as personality and intelligence).

I tend to see real life relationships as more superficial.. Well, I was in high school then too. :) Seeing everyone get together for cause the other was 'hot', or to become more popular. I do not agree with that. Falling in love with someone online, before I even knew what they looked like ... it just seemed the best possible way to really know it was HIM I loved ... not just his looks, or what it could do for my reputation. [EQ2, F, 20]

Some respondents described this as getting to know someone from the inside out - a reversal of how things typically progress in relationships that start F2F.

This was certainly by far the deepest and most meaningful relationship I'd had, partly because I think, we talked about everything that mattered before we had any chance to have a physical relationship (sounds awfully near 'no sex before marriage', but it wasn't really like that, and we didn't get married until we'd lived with each other for two years). [WoW, M, 28]

In other relationships that started offline they were much more heated and physical at first and then finding what we would have in common. Meeting someone online is different if they are truly honest with you - which in most cases people are not honest. We found that we already knew a ton about each other by the time we met so we had a lot to talk about and share. [WoW, F, 29]

In fact, this process of "inside-out" made possible many relationships that would never have started if they began "outside-in". Many respondents suggested that they would never have given their partners the chance to learn about the inner qualities that they now love them for had they met F2F.

> I probably would not have developed this relationship in RL. She isn't my typical love interest but because I got to know her emotionally first, I was able to find someone that was a perfect fit. [EQ2, M, 32]

> Ironically, we would not have had a relationship if we had first met at a party or something. Neither of us was the other's 'type', and our age difference would have been obvious and a barrier to both of us. [WoW, F, 59]

> I would never have dated this person in real life. Totally different worlds. I am a grad student and he works in the service industry. Our paths would not have crossed. We lived in different countries. This is the relationship :) On the outside we seem totally opposite. But we work so well on the inside. I guess that is what comes of meeting inside out :p [WoW, F, 25]

> I doubt we would have had a relationship if we had met in real life. At first glance, I'd say he definitely wasn't my type. Too nice, too accommodating, without a sense of adventure. I would have pigeonholed him without ever giving him a chance. [WoW, F, 25]

It is ironic that the norm of F2F relationships makes it easy for some to argue that virtual relationships are necessarily superficial. But as these narratives show, the absence of physical cues can in fact make relationships less focused on superficial qualities between people who are in fact highly compatible.

Ending Thoughts - Stronger Foundations

Not only do virtual worlds make "impossible relationships" possible, but many respondents argued that the process itself provides much stronger foundations for a long-term relationship than is typical in F2F relationships.

> With gaming together, you can screen people's quirks, their political views, temperament, religious beliefs, without the clouding of RL sex and lust complicating it. You can become friends FIRST. Then when you meet in real life AFTER developing the relationship, it's just, wow. [EQ2, F, 47]

> And yes, we can 'yell' at each other and make up, and no, I don't think that's a bad thing. If nothing else, having been able to get to know each other so well before introducing all the trials of a relationship has helped us know how to deal with each other making mistakes. We're only human. [Ragnarok Online, M, 23]

The theme that the low-pressure game environment allowed them to become good friends before romantic partners was described by many other respondents. These players had gotten to know each other well, worked together, and gone through crises together before love happened.

> The game WAS the reason we fell in love. Going through all the adventures and quests together really built our relationship. We found out how the other person is when they are mad, tired, sad, happy, excited, annoyed (etc). We got to know each other without the physical aspect of the relationship and I believe that made our emotional connection sooooo much stronger. [City of Villains, F, 25]

> It has been the easiest to maintain. It wasn't the result of anything impulsive or simply hormonal, it has a much stronger foundation than that. [EQ2, F, 32]

It's easy to argue that MMO relationships are somehow superficial because they are "missing" things that people have in F2F relationships, but I think that argument fails to understand that sometimes less can be more, and that there can be something superficial about the emphasis on physical attributes in F2F relationships. The notion that the MMO can render the "impossible relationship" possible is intriguing indeed. But ultimately, the most interesting thing that we've learned from the narratives is this. The MMO relationship isn't something you can look for. It's something that just happens to you.

Time Spent in the Meta-Game

Playing an MMO is more than just about the time spent within the game. Many players seem to spend time reading and posting on forums, managing guild websites, or looking up FAQs and guides that others have written - activities that are very much a part of their MMO game-play. I was interested in getting a sense of just how much time the typical player spends in these meta-game activities.

I first explored contributions that players may have made to the body of knowledge that surrounds MMOs. While 30% of players indicated that they almost never post on forums, about an equal percentage (36%) post on MMO forums once or several times a day.
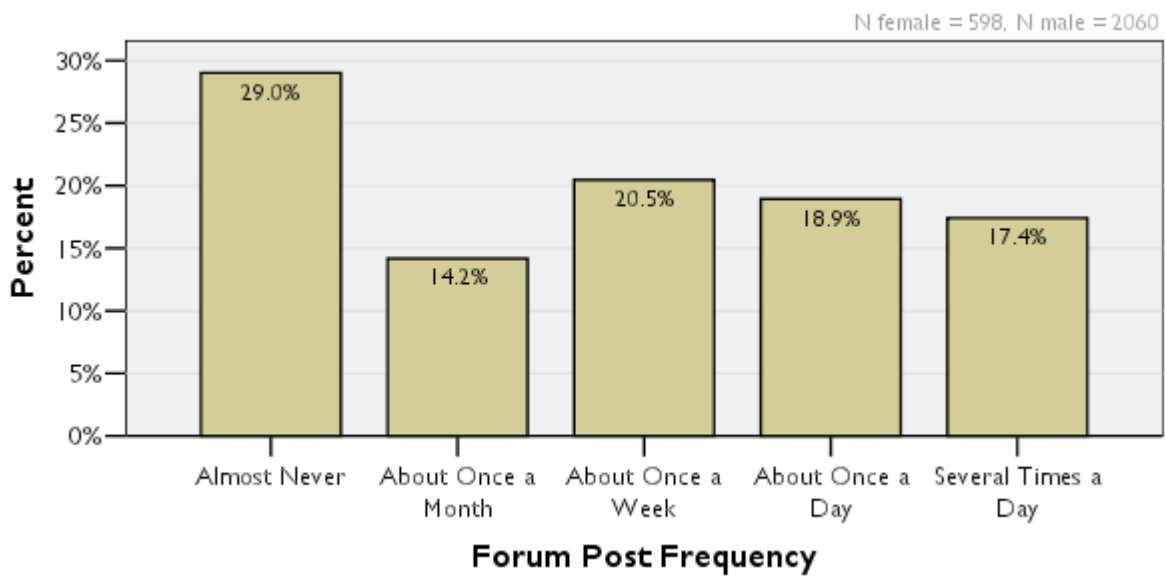
And about 35% of respondents indicated that they had created at least one FAQ or guide for an MMO at some point.
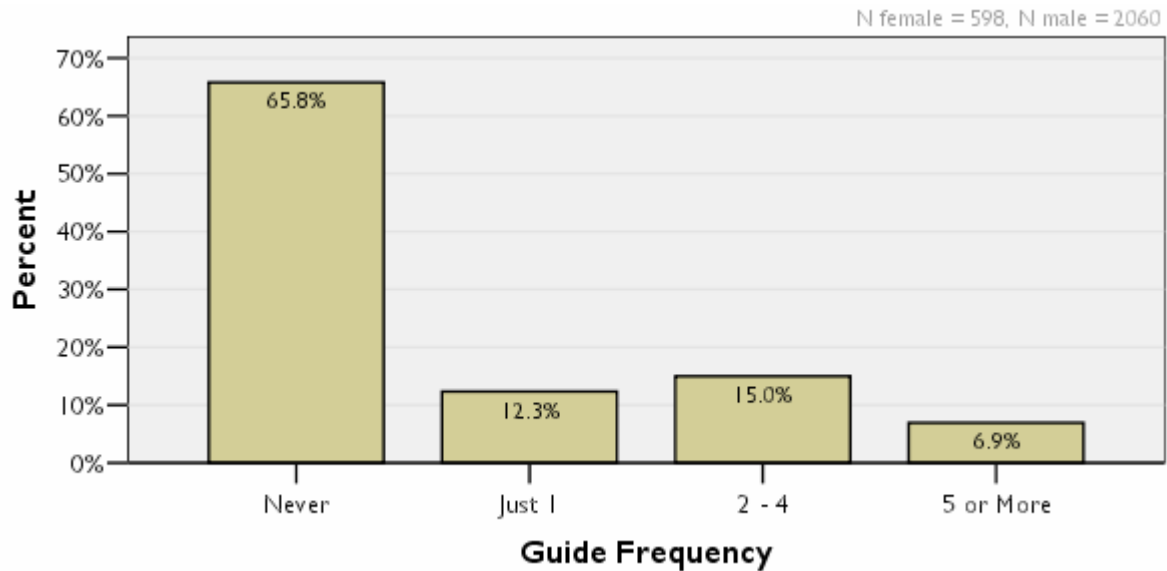
I then asked respondents to estimate the number of hours each week that they regularly spend in four types of activities:

1) Searching for and reading up on information about the game (i.e., character classes, abilities, quests, etc.)
2) Reading and/or posting on forums related to the MMO I play (excluding time spent on the your guild's website).
3) Reading and/or posting on your guild's website.
4) Guild related tasks such as scheduling raids / managing DKP points / other guild logistics.

Players spent on average 3.5 hours each week looking for and reading up on game-specific information, and 3.55 hours reading or posting on forums. For players who belonged to guilds (about 87% of respondents), they spent on average 2.7 hours reading or posting on their guild's website, and 1 hour managing guild related tasks. In other words, the average player spends about 10.8 hours each week performing game-related tasks outside of the game.

In the sample that this data was drawn from, players spent on average 23.4 hours each week in the game. Thus, on average, the majority of players spend about an additional 50% of their game-playing time outside of the game performing game-related activities. While time spent in the game is the more intuitive and visible part of playing an MMO, this data shows that a significant part (about one-third of total invested time) of what it means to play an MMO happens outside of the game itself.

Seasonal Fluctuations in Playing Time

There are several stats that I check often as basic guards for data sanity. So typically, I check average number of hours and gender distribution to make sure they are close to the numbers I've seen before. I had also found before that age doesn't correlate with number of hours played each week, so I was terribly surprised when I checked for that in the most recent data set and found a significant correlation (r = -.13, p < .001). I plotted this out and indeed the correlation looked strong.

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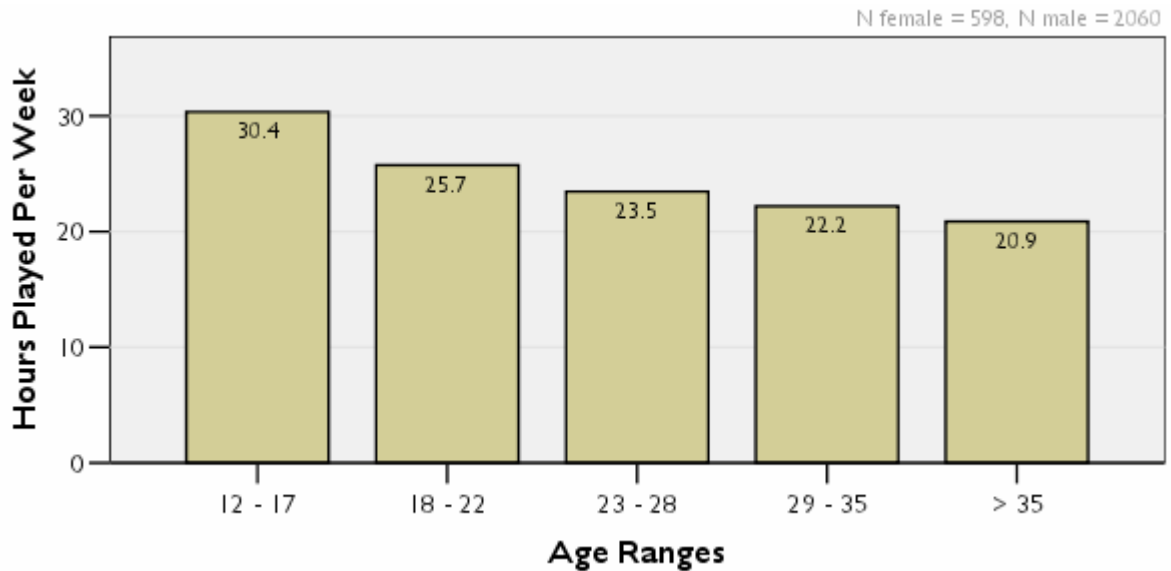
So I went back through the past survey phases one by one to see how long this had been the case. And then something more puzzling showed up. The correlation does not appear in data set from the phase before (r = -.03, p = .21), or the one before that.
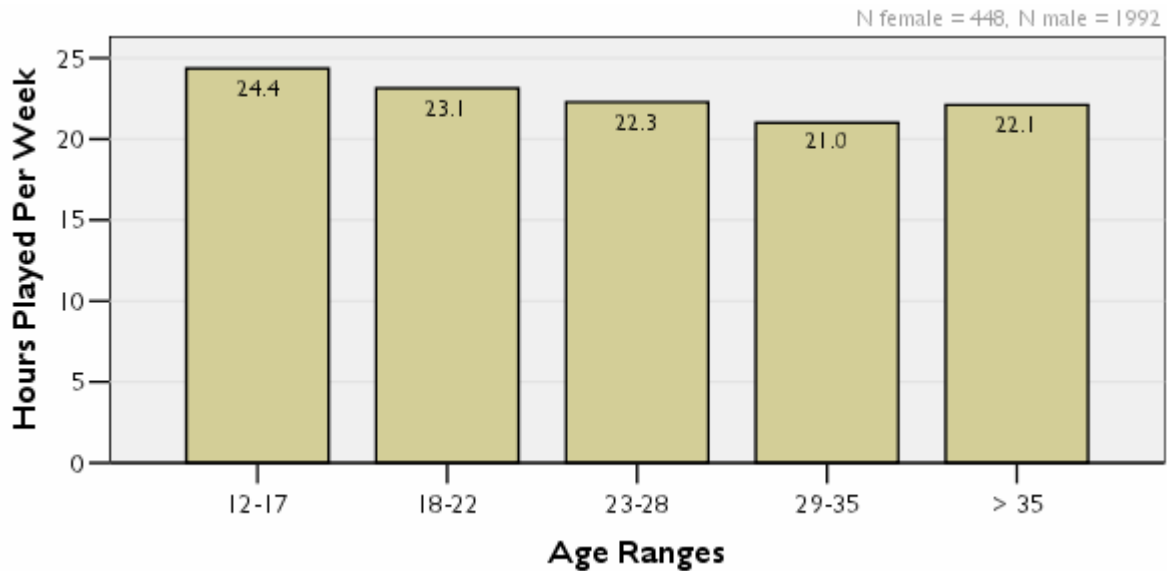
Over the past 6 years, I had come to expect relative stabilities from phase to phase especially because the sample sizes tend to be large. And then I realized that this may be driven by teenagers and college students being out of school for the summer since I started the phase in early June, while the previous phase started in late March. I ran some numbers and playing time overall was higher in the June sample than the March sample (23.5 vs,. 22. 3), and most of the difference came from the 22 and under crowd (as the graphs show).

I then went back to last year's data and found the same pattern. There was a correlation between age and playing time if a phase was run in the summer months, but not in normal school months. So what I used to say about the correlation about age and hours played per week isn't entirely correct. Age is not correlated with hours played per week, except when school is out in the summer, in which case younger players do play significantly more than older players and there is a correlation between age and game-play.

Number of Active Subscriptions

In the most recent survey, I also asked players about the number of active subscriptions they had to MMOs. The majority of players (76%) only have one active subscription, and most of remaining players had 2-3 subscriptions. In less than 2% of cases, players had 4 or more subscriptions.
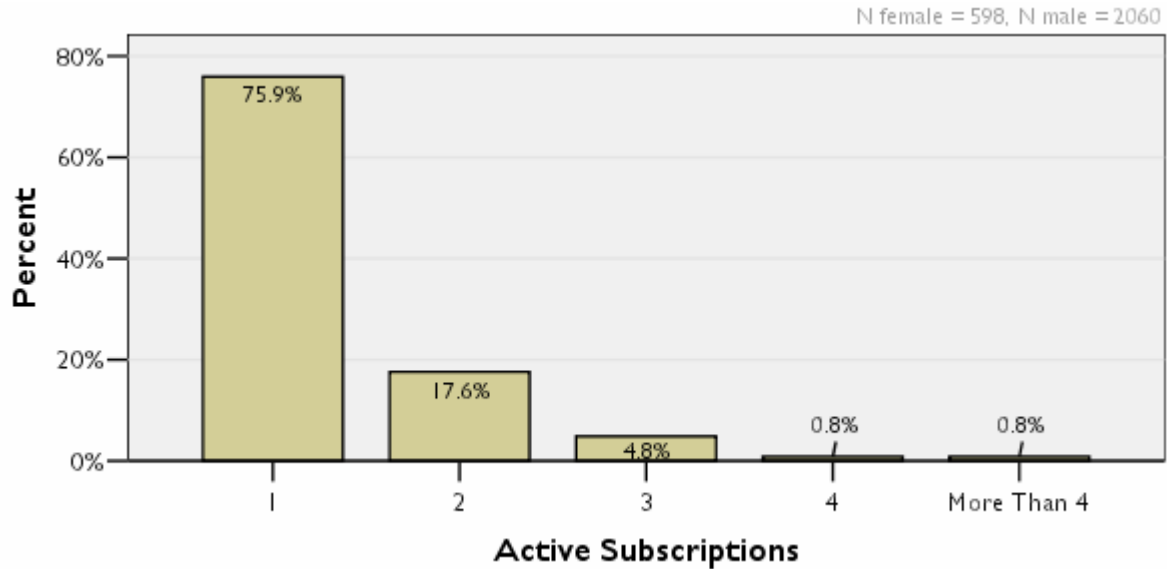
Of those who have more than one subscription, about one-third are playing just one of the MMOs they are subscribed to. Most of the remainder (58%) prefer one game among the ones they are subscribed to. Only very few players (10%) spend about equal time in the games they've subscribed to.
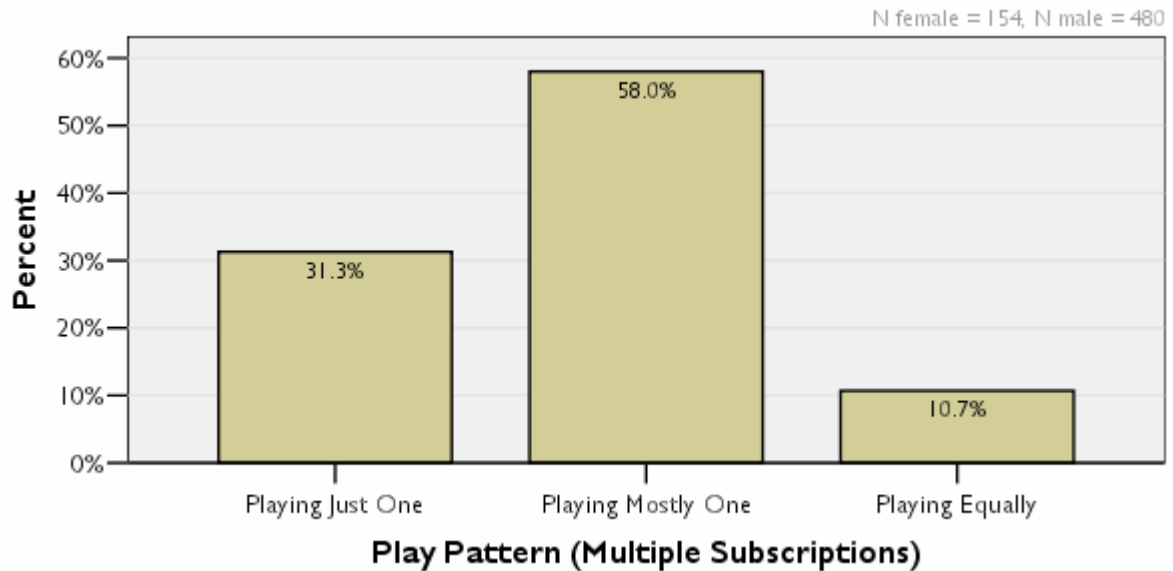
This data suggests that many players with multiple accounts may be transitioning between games, rather than deliberately trying to play both. Open-ended responses probing respondents for why they kept largely unplayed subscriptions active brought out a set of distinct reasons.

Social Links

For some players, keeping the account active allowed them to stay in touch with friends or family members who were still active in those games, even though they themselves had moved on to other games.

> While I prefer playing SWG, my husband prefers WoW so I keep an account active so we can play together sometimes. [SWG, F, 27]

> Waited for SWG to get fixed, but since that never happened I went back to it for the roleplay. I kept WoW because I have many friends that play. DDO same reason. [SWG, M, 35]

Sentimentality

Other players were sentimental less about their friends online than for the accumulated hard work and memories that their characters carry with them. For them, canceling the account might mean seeing all that effort disappear.

> The time that I've spent building up my character and the equipment that I've gathered prevents me from deleting my account. [M, 23]

> Lots of time invested in the toons, have a certain affection for them, something like that for a pet. Even if not active, it is hard to. [WoW, M, 54]

> the time commitment is huge, and i don't want to lose all the progress i have made with the game (eqoa: frontiers) because i feel that i may play again. [WoW, M, 15]

> I don't want to lose the time invested in the character, I have a awesome bounty hunter in SWG and i have put entirely too much time in the character to have him disappear. [WoW, M, 33]

Subscription Plan

Others were simply waiting for their subscription plans to run out. They had bought long-term subscription plans for the discount that they will not renew in the next cycle.

> Waiting for subscription to die on its own ... 3 month payment plan. [WoW, M, 28]

> Purchased a 3-month sub, and have 2 months left. [WoW, M, 46]

Just in Case

While some players are keeping their accounts to maintain their past efforts, other players are keeping their accounts in case they may be interested in the game again in the future.

> Just in case I want to come back and play full time. [WoW, M, 49]

> It's a matter of leaving my options open...If the MMO I am currently playing gets too frustrating, I can easily switch to the other. [SWG, M, 39]

> I think I would be wasting my money either way, but I would rather have the option of playing it, and having paid for it, than deactivating time and not having that option. [Lineage 2, F, 18]

Hard to Cancel

Some players note that canceling an account may not be as easy as it seems. Several players noted that in certain instances, canceling may require a phone call.

> Just down time, find it difficult to cancel subscriptions - not like a click to unsub, it is a phone call if you do not remember the secret type questions answers. [EQ2, F, 41]

> Seems that every time I remember to cancel the account, I'm not near a computer to actually cancel it. Other times I'll remember but procrastinate and tell myself that I'll cancel right after ____. Also, the difficulty of canceling an account greatly comes into play for me. To cancel one of my accounts, I had to call customer service. It took me months to get around to actually calling them. [EQ2, M, 22]

Forgot to Cancel

And finally, a very few players admitted that they had simply forgotten about those active subscriptions until they filled out the survey. You heard it here first. Participating in online surveys by Nick Yee can save you money.

> Because I forgot to cancel it :) I had subscriptions to three MMORPGs Dark Age of Camelot, EverQuest2 and World of Warcraft. As I am only playing WoW, I cancelled the DAoC account but forgot to do the EQ2 one. That's now cancelled as well. [WoW, F, 36]

> I keep forgetting about it. Will go there right now after this survey to cancel the other account. [WoW, M, 31]

PARC Forum Talk

I gave a talk at PARC's Forum in late July on MMOs. It was a 45 minute presentation with about 15 minutes of Q&A. I touched upon several issues during the talk, ranging from the blurring of work and play, how RL race can matter in fantasy worlds of elves and ogres, and whether there is such a thing as "online gaming addiction". The audience was a mixed group of IT researchers and lay people, containing both MMO veterans and newbies. So the talk starts very basic, but dives into the interesting concepts pretty quickly as well.

The PARC AV folks did a great job in capturing the presentation. The only thing I wish they had been able to do was pick up more of the audience reactions along the way. They have both a streaming video and an MP3 file of the presentation on their website. In case you've ever wished that you could have Nick Yee on your iPod, your wish has just been granted.

http://www.parc.xerox.com/cms/get_article.php?id=569

Index of Journal Articles and Conference Papers

For other researchers who are looking for published material that they can cite, here is a list of my journal articles and conference papers that I will keep updated. I will provide brief summaries for each to make it easier to pick out what is relevant for you. The digital copies of these papers are also provided for easy access.

Yee, N (in press). Motivations of Play in Online Games. CyberPsychology and Behavior.
http://www.nickyee.com/pubs/Yee%20-%20Motivations%20(in%20press).pdf

This is the more recent 10 component model of player motivations. An earlier 5 factor model is presented in the Presence (2006) paper.

Yee, N. (2006). The Demographics, Motivations and Derived Experiences of Users of Massively-Multiuser Online Graphical Environments. PRESENCE: Teleoperators and Virtual Environments, 15, 309-329.
http://www.nickyee.com/pubs/Yee%20-%20MMORPG%20Demographics%202006.pdf

This is a three-part paper that has much of the earlier demographic and usage data. If you need a paper for age, gender, and usage breakdown of users, this is the most relevant paper of mine to cite.

Ducheneaut, N., Yee, N., Nickell, E., and Moore, R.J. (2006). "Alone Together? Exploring the Social Dynamics of Massively Multiplayer Games." In conference proceedings on human factors in computing systems CHI 2006, pp.407-416. April 22-27, Montreal, PQ, Canada.
http://www.nickyee.com/pubs/Ducheneaut,%20Yee,%20Nickell,%20Moore%20-%20Alone%20Together%20(2006).pdf

This was the CHI 2006 paper that came out from my research at PARC with my colleagues there. In this paper, we argue that the "social" nature of MMOs may have been over-estimated. We present analysis of longitudinal data of groups and guilds to suggest that many players enjoy the "alone together" aspect of MMOs.

Yee, N., Bailenson, J.N., Urbanek, M., Chang, F., Merget, D. (in press). The Unbearable Likeness of Being Digital: The Persistence of Nonverbal Social Norms in Online Virtual Environments. The Journal of CyberPsychology and Behavior.
http://www.nickyee.com/pubs/Yee,%20Bailenson,%20Urbanek,%20Chang%20&%20Merget%20-%20SL%20NonVerbal.pdf

In real life, our social interactions are guided by well-known psychological rules. For example, when people get too close to us, we avert our gaze to lower the intimacy (i.e., the elevator effect). But do these rules transfer into virtual worlds? In this paper, we collected data from Second Life to answer this question.

Yee, N. (2006). The Labor of Fun: How Video Games Blur the Boundaries of Work and Play. Games and Culture , 1, 68-71.

http://www.nickyee.com/pubs/Yee%20-%20Labor%20of%20Fun%20(2006).pdf

A short paper on how complex play can be in MMOs and talking more broadly about the intersection of work and play in virtual worlds.

Yee, N. (2006). The Psychology of MMORPGs: Emotional Investment, Motivations, Relationship Formation, and Problematic Usage. In R. Schroeder & A. Axelsson (Eds.), Avatars at Work and Play: Collaboration and Interaction in Shared Virtual Environments. London: Springer-Verlag. http://www.nickyee.com/pubs/Yee%20-%20MMORPG%20Psychology%20(2006).pdf

A book chapter that provides an overview of MMOs with an emphasis on relationships and motivations, but with a broader focus and provides more narrative data than the Presence (2006) paper.