

Game or Reality

Introduction: The basis of this research paper was to determine whether or not social interactions in the gaming world of “World of Warcraft” are similar to social interactions in reality. In a world that is very technologically centered, it is important to know if human social interactions are now incorporated into the technological world and how closely these different types of interactions are related. In this study, a specific social interaction was observed in Goldshire – a well known and busy city in WOW –as well as in social environments in Denver, Colorado, such as Cherry Creek Mall and on 16th Street Mall. Because the players in “World of Warcraft” are from all over the world, it was important to choose and observe a social interaction that is ubiquitous in the sense of the world, which was why I chose to use waving. In this study I observed the responses that different players in WOW gave my player when she would wave at them. The research for this study also included me waving to people that I did not know in the Denver area. My hypothesis for this study was that when interacting with other WOW players, the alliance players are typically friendlier than horde players, plus since my character is part of the alliance, it is more likely that alliance characters will interact with her, more so than the opposing horde characters. More specifically, I thought that gnomes would be the most responsive because my character is a gnome and I also predicted that females would overall, be more responsive than the male players, because often times women are more open and inviting to making friends than males are. For real life observations, I predicted that once again females would respond more than males. I also predicted that younger people, people that were more in

my age group (17-21 year olds), would wave more often than those of drastically younger or older ages. However, age and socioeconomic class were only taken as notes in order to help to explain results. Determining the socioeconomic class of strangers is very difficult and this is why this part of the research was not calculated into the results and it was only included as a side note in the results. Overall, in both the game of WOW and Denver, Colorado, research was conducted using a variety of players and people that I did not know, so as to get unbiased data.

Materials and Methods: In this study it was very important to get a wide variety of observations in order to determine whether or not the interactions between the players in WOW are similar to interactions between people in reality. This study consisted of two separate sets of data, one from the interactions between WOW players and my player, and another set for the interactions between people in Denver, Colorado and me.

In order to get an assortment of observations for the first data set, I observed different races of players – humans, dwarves, night elves, and gnomes for the alliance races and orcs and trolls for the horde races. My character, a female gnome, went around the town of Goldshire and waved at a numerous amount of alliance members. When waving to the other players, I would have my character stand directly in front of them and wave once. Then, I would wait for thirty seconds to see if the other player would respond. If they responded, I recorded how they responded, their gender, and their race. If the player was unresponsive, I simply left after thirty seconds was up. For each race I observed ten different players – five male and five female. I followed the same procedure when interacting with members of the horde, except that I traveled to Deathknell instead of Goldshire. When interacting with the different races, of both the horde and the alliance, I also noted the class and the level of each character. Noting this information was important because it could possibly provide more information for interpreting the results.

For gathering observations for my second data set, I went to Cherry Creek Mall and 16th Street Mall in Denver, Colorado to observe different kinds of people. Again, in order to get a wide variety of data, I observed 10 people of different ethnicities (African American, Caucasian, Hispanic, and Asian) 5 female and 5 male. I also made sure to wave at people of different age groups (16-20, 20-30 and 40+). Although there were 5 males and 5 females of each ethnicity that I had waved at, I waved at no more than 2 people from each age group within the different ethnicities. Within the different age groups I had waved at both males and females depending on which gender was around. By waving at different age groups I was able to find different trends by generally observing which age group was most responsive.

When researching, I would stand a couple of feet away from the person I was waving to and then record what their responses were. When researching in WOW I would record my data around eight at night, when there were more people to interact with. However, when researching in Denver, I would do so in the afternoon. Each time was different because 8pm in WOW is usually busier than the afternoon because there are not a lot of players who play in the afternoon due to jobs, school, etc. On the other hand, observing people in Denver had to be done in the afternoon because that was when I could interact with the most people. As I did before, I also waited for about thirty seconds for them to respond and if there was no response I took note of that and left. An important note for the research done in this study was that everyone I interacted with was a complete stranger, because the importance of my research question was to determine how similar, if at all, player to player interactions in WOW were to real life interactions.

After each set of data was collected in the research conducted from WOW, I looked at the data sets individually and found out, on average, which characters were more responsive and which gender was more responsive. I did this by first adding up the number of characters from

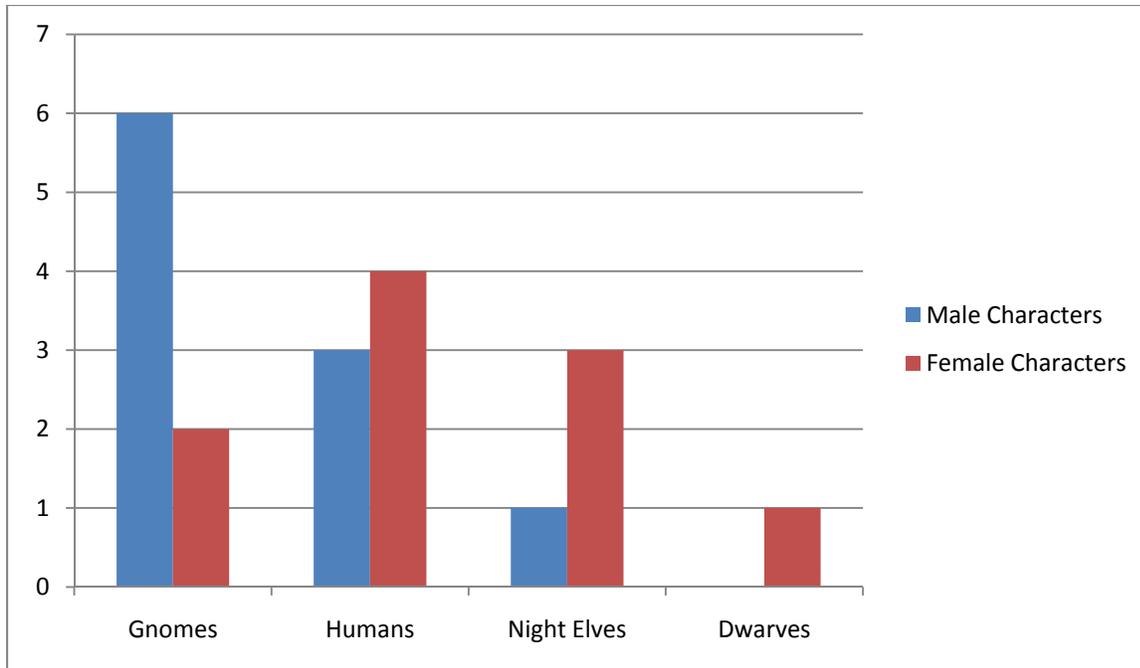
one race that responded to my character and then divided that number by ten (the total number of characters approached in each race) and finally multiplied that number by one hundred in order to get a percent average. Then to figure out which gender out of each race was more responsive to my character, I took the total number of females that responded, divided by the total number of characters that responded in the same race and then multiplied that number by one hundred to get the percent of the females that responded out of total number of characters in the same race that responded. I did this again for the males in each race. So, for each race there were three percentages: one was the percent of characters, out of the ten characters approached, that responded, the second was how many of the characters of a race that responded were females, and the last was how many of the characters of a race that responded were males.

Then, when conducting research in the public settings of Denver, Colorado, observed ten people in each ethnicity – again five females and five males. Then from the data collected I calculated on average, how many people – a percentage – out of each ethnicity responded to me when I waved and then I again looked at how many of those that responded were males and females; these calculations were done exactly the same as the calculations done for analyzing the characters in WOW and so for this set of data there were also three percentages for each race studied.

This data was collected in the same fashion for five days: five days of interacting with other WOW players and five days of interacting with real people of Denver. On each of the days I tried to get as much data as possible, in a thirty minute time period, in order to analyze each of the different races that I was studying. After all of my data was collected and I had the averages of the different races, both in the game and in real life, I was able to find some trends amongst the data that was collected.

Results: When analyzing the data that was collected in this study, it was possible to determine what kinds of characters were most responsive to my character as well as what types of people in Denver were most responsive to me. Also, when looking at the data that was collected, I noticed that some of my hypotheses were correct.

According to the data, the alliance race that was most responsive when my character waved at them was gnomes. Out of the ten gnomes that I waved at (five females and five males) 80% responded – 75% of which were males gnomes and the other 25% were females. I hypothesized that the most responsive race would be gnomes just because that is the race of my character and in WOW, race of a character is an indicator of similarities between players. So, according to my hypothesis that similar races – such as gnomes – are more likely to interact with each other more so than with other players turned out to be correct. The next most responsive race in this study was the humans, 70% out of the characters that were approached responded: 43% males and 57% females. The night elves were the next most responsive with 40% of the characters responding: 25% male and 75% female. Finally, the least responsive alliance race was the dwarfs, only 10% responded and that 10% was a female character. Of the horde races, orc and troll, 0% of each of these races responded to my character.

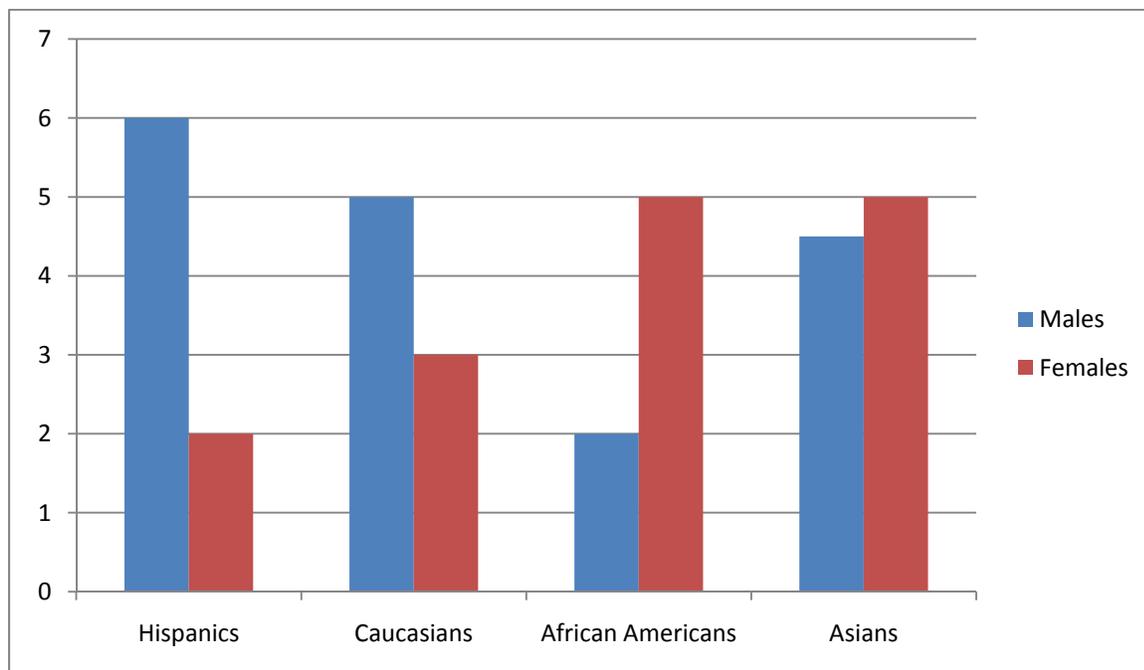


→This graph shows how many characters from each race that responded were male or female.

This chart is for the alliance races.

When collecting data from real people in Denver, Colorado, found that the most responsive ethnicity to my waves were both Caucasians and Hispanics, each of these two ethnicities responded 80% of the time. Out of the 80% of Caucasians that responded, 63% were males and 37% were females. This means that out of the 10 people of this ethnicity that I waved at, 8 people responded – 5 of which were males and 3 of which were females. The majority of these people, which was 5 (4 males and 1 female), were presumably around 18-20 years old. Of the Hispanics that were observed, also 80% responded: 75% were males and 25% females. Again, 8 out of 10 of this ethnicity responded to my wave, but this time 6 were males and 2 were females. Of these people it was also observed that these people were around my age group (18-20). The next most responsive ethnicity were African Americans, 70% of those observed waved back: 71% were females and 29% were males. In this case 10 people were again waved at and

out of these 10, only 7 responded – 5 were females and 2 were males. Out of the people observed in this ethnicity, 6 out of 7 (about 86%) ranged in age from 20s to 30s. The remaining person was an older female in her mid to late 30's. Finally, of the Asian ethnicity, I again waved at 10 individuals, 5 males and 5 females, however this ethnicity was the least responsive. Only 60% responded – 83% were females and 17% were male. In this particular race, the majority of people that responded, were in their 30s – about 4 out of the 6 people that responded were of this age group.



→This graph shows how many people in each race that responded were male or female

Discussion: By looking at the data that was collected in this study, it was possible to determine which race of characters in WOW as well as people in Denver, Colorado, were most responsive

in a social interaction with a stranger. It was also possible to compare how male and female characters respond differently as well as men and women of Denver.

The data that was collected from WOW showed that the most responsive alliance race to my character – a female gnome – were gnomes. This was what I had predicted because since my character is a gnome I hypothesized that same race interactions were very common, especially in WOW where designing a character is a way for players to express themselves. However, I was not expecting more male characters to respond than female ones. This is because I thought that the male characters were most likely male players, and therefore they would be more focused on the competitiveness of the game, while female characters – most likely female players – would be more interested in the social aspect of the game. However, because it is difficult to know for sure the gender of the players, this was only an assumption and these assumptions were made so as to be able to determine some correlations between which gender was more responsive than the other. The least responsive race of characters were the dwarfs, which shows that out of the all of the races, the dwarfs are most likely the least social – at least when it comes to interacting with a character of another race. Overall, I did notice that the majority of responses, from each race, were females, with the exception of the gnomes. This shows that female characters – most likely female players – are more willing to use WOW game time to make new friends as well as new guilds. With the gnome race, however, the majority of the responses were from male characters – most likely male players – which could be due to the fact that they are looking for a character of the opposite sex, with some of the same personality traits. This data was not expected because the hypothesis was that more females than males would respond because of the assumption that females are more social than males, especially with another female player. However, player gender is very difficult to determine and so this data is interpreted off of the assumptions that

male characters are played by male players and female characters are played by female players. There are though, other aspects of the player that are more easily interpreted, such as class and level.

Class and level of each character that I interacted with was noted and from the information collected, it was determined that when it came to social interactions, there were no correlation between class and level; all of the classes and levels of characters that responded varied. This supports the fact that WOW is a game and that players are just having fun, even trying to make some new friends who share the interest in the game. For the characters in the horde, I received no responses, which is what I predicted since the horde and the alliance are two very separate personality types and rarely interact in WOW, since the horde races are usually in different locations than the alliance characters.

When looking at the data collected from observing different ethnicities of people in Denver, Colorado, I was also able to determine, on average, which race is the most responsive in a social interaction with a stranger. Out of all of the data, Caucasians and Hispanics were the most responsive, more specifically males. This surprised me, because I predicted that the most responsive gender would be females, because just as I had hypothesized I had predicted that females would overall be more responsive than males just based off of the social norm that women are more social than men are. Based on the research collected, however, the people of my age group (16-20) who responded were mostly male, which could also mean that they had thought that I was interested in meeting them. Just as in the game of WOW, it is very possible that the reason for the responses from the opposite sex would involve starting a relationship. Still, out of the people that responded, most of them were around my age group, which makes sense since age groups share many similarities. With African Americans and Asians, however, I

noticed that more women than men waved back which could mean that the men I happened to wave at were in a hurry. Overall, when conducting this real life experiment, generally, most of the people that I waved at, waved back.

When comparing the data that was collected for WOW and the data that was collected for people in Denver, Colorado, there was a much higher response rate among real people than there was with the characters in WOW. Players in WOW are often more focused on personal matters,”...one player summarized this situation nicely by saying that WOW’s subscribers tend to be ‘alone together:’ they play *surrounded by* others instead of *playing with* them,” (Ducheneaut (2009), Yee (2009), Nickell (2009), Moore 4 (2009)). In real life however, people try to be more aware of the people around them and therefore are more interactive with others, even if they are strangers. It can also be true that since waving is such a common gesture, some individuals that waved might have done it as a reflex without realizing that they did not know who I was. On the other hand, the people that did not wave were most likely caught up in whatever they were doing and did not notice me, or they were too shy and tried to just avoid the situation completely.

The final conclusion that can be made from the research conducted is that the players in WOW are more interested in playing the game and completing their individual quests than they are interested in waving back at a player that they do not know. Although WOW is a highly social game, the majority of the social behavior lies within the guilds, “Online game guilds have a hierarchical leadership structure that allows players to act as unified groups to solve joint missions,” (Chen, Sun, Hsieh, 2008) However, in real life people are surrounded by social interactions constantly, so waving back to a stranger is less noticeable and more often than not happens as a reflex. The game of WOW is a place where players are supposed to be more

focused on themselves, because it is a game and it is used as a source of relaxing – a place where they can escape the rush of humanity and have time to just be on their own.

Overall the research that was conducted in this study was sufficient enough to determine the relationships between the players in the game of WOW and the real people in the Denver area. From the results it can be determined that on a whole, the players in the game of WOW are very similar to people in Denver, Colorado. In the game and in real life about the same amount of people responded to the interactions started by either my character or by myself. Also, according to the data that was collected in this study, the majority of players that waved at my character were gnomes, while the most people that waved at me in Denver, were Caucasian. This hints at a possible correlation between what types of people might play gnome characters in WOW and although it is a very broad and assumptive correlation, it is still a possibility, especially according to the data that was collected in this study. Despite the outcome of the results, there were some limitations of this study, mostly in the game of WOW, because I am not able to actually know who is behind the character and therefore I cannot determine ethnicity and gender of the players' whose characters my female gnome interacted with. For the most part, this study proved to be efficient to study the relationships between how real people and characters in a game act similarly and differently when interacting with a stranger.

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