Which Profession Suits You?

The Motivations of Profession Selection

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A sample of players from the massively-multiplayer online game *World of Warcraft* was surveyed to find the reasoning behind an individual's in-game profession selection. An online survey was provided to players from popular gaming forums to gain an understanding of why gamers choose professions and how he or she utilizes the profession. Also, several in-game observations took place to learn about the mechanics involved with a few of the professions. It is apparent that *World of Warcraft* gamers choose professions for a variety of reasons. However, our study shows that the majority of individuals select their profession based on three main reasons: acquisition of money, class-based performance optimization, and entertainment.

Introduction:

World of Warcraft, often referred to as *WoW*, is one of the most popular massively-multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPG). The game immediately became a huge hit after it was released in 2004. Nearly eleven and half million people hold monthly subscriptions, making the game the world's most subscribed MMORPG (Blizzard Entertainment, 2008). The game allows individuals to control a character avatar within a game world. The chosen avatar explores the landscape, fights various

monsters, completes quests, and interacts with non-player characters (NPCs) i.e. computer-controlled characters, such as questgivers, vendors, guards, bankers, and trainers. NPCs are either neutral, meaning both factions can interact with them, or they have a faction affiliation to the Horde or Alliance (Blizzard, 2005). Although following the predetermined quests can complete the game, players also have the option of exploring the territories freely and making their own decisions. One of the optional facets of the game is having a profession. The game allows for the player to choose from eleven different primary professions and three different secondary professions (Suznjevic, Dobrijevic, Matijasevic, 2008). The following study will examine the reasons gamers choose certain professions.

During gameplay, as previously mentioned, individuals have fourteen choices when selecting a profession. To begin, the eleven primary professions are Alchemy, Blacksmithing, Enchanting, Engineering, Herbalism, Jewelcrafting, Leatherworking, Mining, Tailoring, Skinning, and Inscription. The three secondary professions are Fishing, First Aid, and Cooking. These 'professions' are a set of skills that players may incrementally learn in order to construct, gather, or enhance items that are used in game play. Avatars improve their profession abilities by visiting trainers. Avatars are allowed a maximum of two primary professions, but are permitted to use all three secondary professions if the player desires to do so (Suznjevic, Dobrijevic, Matijasevic, 2008). Before examining why gamers select each profession, it is first crucial to have an understanding of the benefits and categories of each profession. To begin, professions are separated in two categories: production and gathering. Production is a single-player activity that can only be performed in a stand still position (Suznjevic, Dobrijevic,

Matijasevic, 2008). Players are able to create items from other ingredients and then sell them in auction houses. Gathering professions are based on retrieving items, such as ore, herbs, and leather. Often times individuals who hold gathering professions sell the items to individuals who hold production professions so they can craft items. Therefore, the professions are quite connected in the game. Players often require products that only other profession holders can provide. For example, in order to make a certain explosive, engineers need a liquid that only alchemists can make.

According to WoWwiki.com, an extensive database dedicated to covering reference books, strategy guides, novels, and other sources related to *World of Warcraft*, the professions are described as follows:

Gathering:

Mining: This profession mines ores, minerals, various stone and gems from highlighted veins and deposits. These individuals must possess a mining pick.

Herbalism: These individuals harvest herbs from the ground and some dead mobs. This is almost a necessary profession for Alchemists.

Skinning: This profession skins corpses for hides, leather, and scales. This individual must possess a skinning knife.

Production:

Alchemy: With this profession an individual can mix potions, elixirs, flasks, oils and other alchemical substances using herbs and other reagents. The concoctions created by an alchemy profession can temporarily ward against magic. Alchemists can be master of potions, master of elixirs, or a master of transmutation.

Blacksmithing: With this profession the character can make various metal weapons and other trade goods like keys, shield-spikes, and weapon chains. Blacksmiths can also make various goods from stone to buff weapons. Lastly, they can socket one-handed weapons, bracers, and gloves.

Enchanting: These individuals can make wands, oils that are applied to weapons, and magical rods to cast enchantments. Enchanters use magical dusts and essences to enchant powers and attributes to items.

Engineering: These characters make mechanical devices, guns, ammunition, and many explosives. This profession is not very profitable, but it is quite entertaining.

Jewelcrafting: This profession makes rings, necklaces, and trinkets just to name a few of the various items. Jewelcrafters can prospect rare minerals from raw ore. With the gems, theses individuals can improve any stat and attribute.

Leatherworking: This profession primarily makes goods such as leather, armor, and armor kits. However, they can also make low-level cloth capes and sets of mail armor.

Tailoring: These individuals sew cloth goods, such as cloth armor and many kinds of bags. They also weave raw cloth items such as linen into bolts of that cloth. Tailors can also create nets to slow down enemies, flying blankets, and magical threads.

Inscription: These avatars create glyphs that modify existing spells and abilities. They can also create buff scrolls and offhand books, which provide different spells. The scribes can also make scrolls that teleport them around the world.

Secondary Professions:

Fishing: Just as it sounds, this secondary profession gathers fish from lakes, rivers, and oceans using a fishing pole. The items gathered from the water can range from very little value, to an epic treasure.

First Aid: This secondary profession creates bandages and poison-cleansing anti-venoms and applies them. This is a necessary back-up profession for individuals who cannot heal themselves.

Cooking: This profession cooks ingredients to create food that can provide temporary buffs. The profession holder must create a campfire before cooking the buffs that increase stats.

Research Question

This project is focused on answering the research question, "Why does a *WoW* player choose a specific profession and how does he or she utilize it?" After a fair amount of research, we discovered that there is a significant amount of information on player behaviors in MMORPGs. Studies have looked at players' ratings for the importance of professions in MMORPGs (Yee, 2009) and motivations of play in online games (Yee, 2006; Yee, 2007), but no study has specifically asked about each profession in *WoW*, or the motivations for profession selection. We gathered a lot of information about the basics on the professions from the official Blizzard website; however, we failed to find information on the reasoning behind profession selection. Therefore, the above question sparked our curiosity. We wanted to discover the reasoning behind the gamer's choice. From our surveys, observations, and research, the following research essay will point out tendencies for choosing professions. Also, the survey asks questions, such as

"How much do you use your profession?" and "How has your profession benefited you?" to research how individuals use their professions. More specific questions were asked, such as, "Does gender affect a player's profession choice?" and "Does class affect a player's profession choice?" These more specific questions spawned from the data that we gathered and made it easier to answer the primary research question.

Methods

The first step in gathering data and information about professions was simply to research them. Information was gathered online and via observations of players in game. This information was used to gain a simple understanding of what the professions do, how they are used, what goes into maintaining the professions and the advantages and disadvantages of each profession. Through the observations, it was found that each profession has its strengths and weaknesses. Some professions are better suited for the acquisition of gold while others are designed to help the players improve themselves (via gear enchantments, potions, and jewelcrafting).

The second step in the process was to create a qualitative survey about players' professions, demographics and hobbies outside of *World of Warcraft*. The survey was created on Google Docs and asked specific questions aimed at answering our research question. In order to get an idea about the sample of people taking the survey, two questions were asked about demographics (age and gender). The other questions on the survey were about the players' character in game and were designed to answer the research question. These questions asked ranged from the class and level of the player's character to the professions that he or she chose. The survey link was posted on the

forums of a few different websites including Inc Gamer, Wowhead, and the official *World of Warcraft* website. The forum topics that the survey link was posted to were Off Topic and Profession. After approximately two weeks, the survey results were compiled and patterns began to emerge from the data. Results were taken from 129 players from ages 13 to 55 (*M*=23.63 *SD*=8.57). These results were not too far off from Palo Alto Research Center's research scientist, Nick Yee, who found the mean age of *WoW* players to be 28.3 (Yee, 2006).

The last step was to draw conclusions about why professions were chosen based on patterns within the data. This process mostly involved interpreting results qualitatively. This led to the construction of the categories for the three main topics for why people chose their professions. The data were then organized and certain correlations and patterns that were embedded in the data were interpreted.

Results

From the survey, we gathered that individuals choose professions for three main reasons: acquisition of gold, class-based performance optimization, and entertainment. The following information will explain why these three categories are crucial to profession selection.

Acquisition of Gold

From the survey given, it was determined that at least one reason that 57 of the 129 players chose their profession was in order to earn gold. Certain professions are very good for earning gold whether by gathering materials and selling them on the in-

game auction house to other players or by offering their services to other players. Professions such as mining and herbalism are gathering professions in which players can gather natural resources from the environment. They can then refine these materials before they put them on the auction house or simply put the raw materials on the auction house. The materials can be refined in a manner that makes them more usable for other players (such as smelting copper ore into copper bars). The players then take these materials to the auction house where they can decide a price for other players to bid or buyout the materials. Often times these refined materials will sell on the auction house to other players for significantly higher amounts of gold than if they were to be sold to an in-game non-player vendor.

The second most common way that professions were used to acquire money was by offering the services of certain professions to other players. Some of the professions offer services that give benefits to gear and increase player statistics (statistics are mathematical indicators of a player's ability to perform an action in the game). The professions offer permanent gear upgrades or stat increases include jewelcrafting, enchanting, inscription, tailoring and blacksmithing. Alchemy is a profession that offers temporary stat increases and benefits for the player. The most economically beneficial professions when it comes to selling services are the ones that offer permanent benefits to players. For instance, Jewelcrafters can craft gems that offer stat increases. When a player wants to acquire one of these gems and he or she does not have the jewelcrafting profession, they can contact other players who have the jewelcrafting profession and have the gem made. The jewelcrafter can then charge a price for the service of crafting the gem for the player and acquire gold that way. Our observation of a player using his

enchanting profession showed how this sort of process works. He started by posting "Enchanter LFW (looking for work)" into the chat system used by all of the players in a certain area. After someone was found that needed to have a certain gem created for him or her, the player looking for the service brought materials to the player that was observed and then the player being observed made the gem for the other player. He was 'tipped' an amount of gold that was decided upon between the player in need of the service and the player that was observed. This method of earning gold generally takes a lot of time because the services provided are not beneficial until the player has reached his or her maximum level, or very close to the maximum level of the profession. The maximum level of professions cannot be reached until the player has reached level 80, which takes a significant amount of time as well.

Our survey results showed that a common reason that players choose a profession is based on the acquisition of gold. This was similar to what Yee found (See Figure 1) in a study that examined the enjoyment of making money versus the importance of a robust crafting system (Yee, 2009). Even if the main reasons players chose a profession was not to obtain gold it was at least a secondary reason that the professions were chosen. Since gold is such a necessary commodity to have throughout the game, many players choose their professions in order to make obtaining gold faster, simpler and easier.
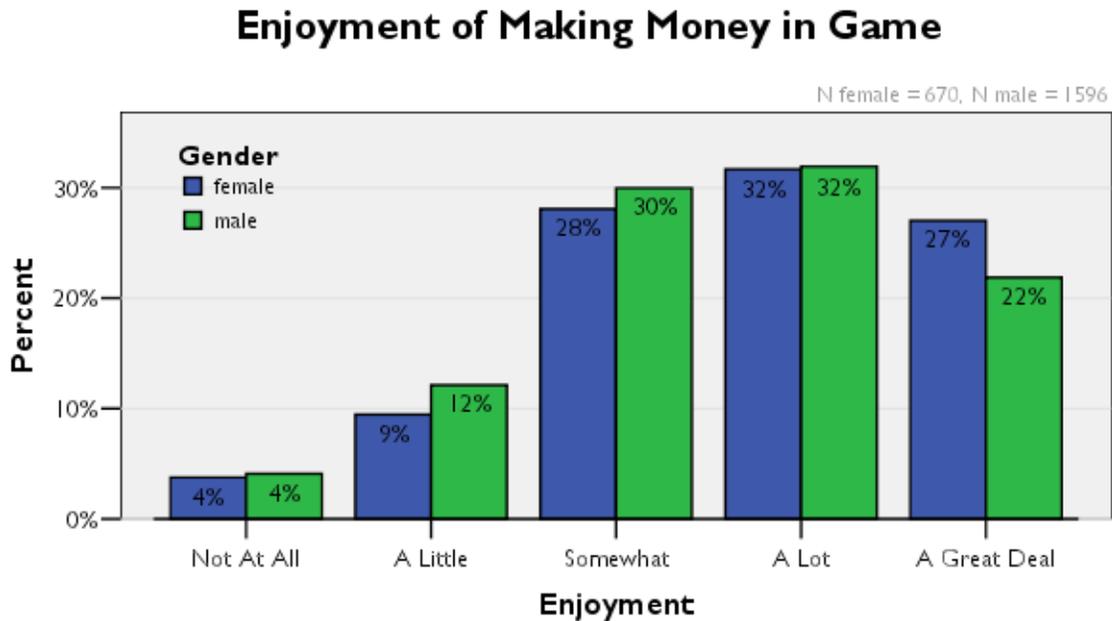
Enjoyment of Making Money in Game

N female = 670, N male = 1596

Figure 1. Source: (Yee, 2009)

Class-Based Performance Optimization

The second main reason players choose their professions is for class-based performance optimization, this means modifications to their gear in order to boost their overall stats. This increases their characters abilities to allow them to perform better in what they do. Players typically choose one of 5 professions in order to accomplish this, primarily Enchanting, Tailoring, Leatherworking, Jewelcrafting, and Inscription. According to the survey, 70 out of 129 of the players surveyed chose one of these professions. One such player said this: "Leatherworking for making my own gear (especially in tbc), leg and wrist enchants also" (Male, 26). This player chose the leatherworking profession in order to make gear to benefit his character as well as the boosts to his pants and bracers. In much the same way cloth based classes such as mages,

warlocks and priests choose tailoring for their self crafted gear as well as gear modification. "Tailoring is good for cloth users, it can also produce gear that I can DE and a good cloak enchant. Enchanting is good for enchanting (Oh really? ^^), and I also like the ring enchants" (Male, 16). Jewelcrafting is a profession in which players turn unrefined gems into gems that other players, or themselves, can use in specific slots in their gear. This action is used to benefit one's stats by stacking gems to increase his or her most desired stat. Players who choose enchanting and jewelcrafting often do it for the stat boosts and the cheaper prices on receiving them. One participant explained, "Free enchants and gems whats not to love." This is an ideal example of one's rationalization of the enchanting and jewelcrafting professions.

Entertainment

The third major reason for profession selection is to make the game more exciting and fun for the gamer. When the words profession and fun are in the same sentence, engineering is almost automatically included in the discussion. From the survey, 27 out of the 129 individuals claimed that engineering is one of their two main professions. Out of these 27 *WoW* gamers, 15 people, 55% of the surveyed, explained that they chose engineering for entertainment purposes. These gamers explained that they chose engineering for bombs, "jeeves", and fun toys. One individual went as far as to say, "Engineering for a rogue practically makes you Batman." However, only 2 out of the 129 individuals surveyed said they chose a profession, excluding engineering, for "fun." One individual said that he chose the enchanting profession for fun, while the other said the same for alchemy and inscription. Therefore, from the survey, it is apparent that

entertainment is a major reason for profession selection, and more specifically, that most

players chose the engineering profession for fun.

The majority of players believe engineering is fun because the profession allows

individuals to create strange things that are fun to use and also catch the attention of other

gamers. Engineers have the option of making explosives, guns, bullets, mechanical

dragons, aquatic helmets, flying machines and many other exciting items (Blizzard,

2005). The newest expansion, the *Wrath of the Lich King*, gives gamers another

incentive to choose the engineering profession for entertainment. This profession now

has the option to make motorcycles (Blizzard, 2005). These are extremely popular and

fun in the new expansion. Although the engineering profession is primarily the only

profession that has aspects designed solely for vanity according to the survey, the in-

game observations demonstrate that the other professions can be quite entertaining as

well. Other professions, such as tailoring, have some fun aspects, but they are useful as

well. A person who has chosen the tailoring profession can create Flying Carpets, which

are not only 'fun' but serve as a flying mount as well. Lastly, after observing an

individual and asking a few questions, it is understood that jewelcrafting can also be an

entertaining profession. The observed individual claimed that he enjoyed the profession

and making icy prisms and other useful objects. He is now at the highest possible level

of jewelcrafting. Therefore, although engineering is probably the most fun profession,

other available professions can be quite enjoyable as well.

Other Findings

Although this study set out to find why *WoW* players choose a profession, a

couple other things were discovered in the process. It was found that the most popular

profession from our sample was mining. 43 out of 129, or 33% of the players from the

survey chose mining as one of their professions (See Figure 2). It would appear that this

profession was mostly chosen for the moneymaking aspect. One player stated that

"…mining is good for grinding gold…" while another player stated that "I chose mining

to make money while leveling up…" It was apparent that one of the primary reasons that

mining was chosen was because it helps with making money.

Despite the fact that the sample of females who participated in the survey was

extremely low ($n=12$), it was thought that there might have been a relationship between

gender and profession selection. The survey results showed that there was no apparent

relationship between the gender of the player and the profession that they chose. Almost

all of the professions were chosen based on the players' class in the game. Gender

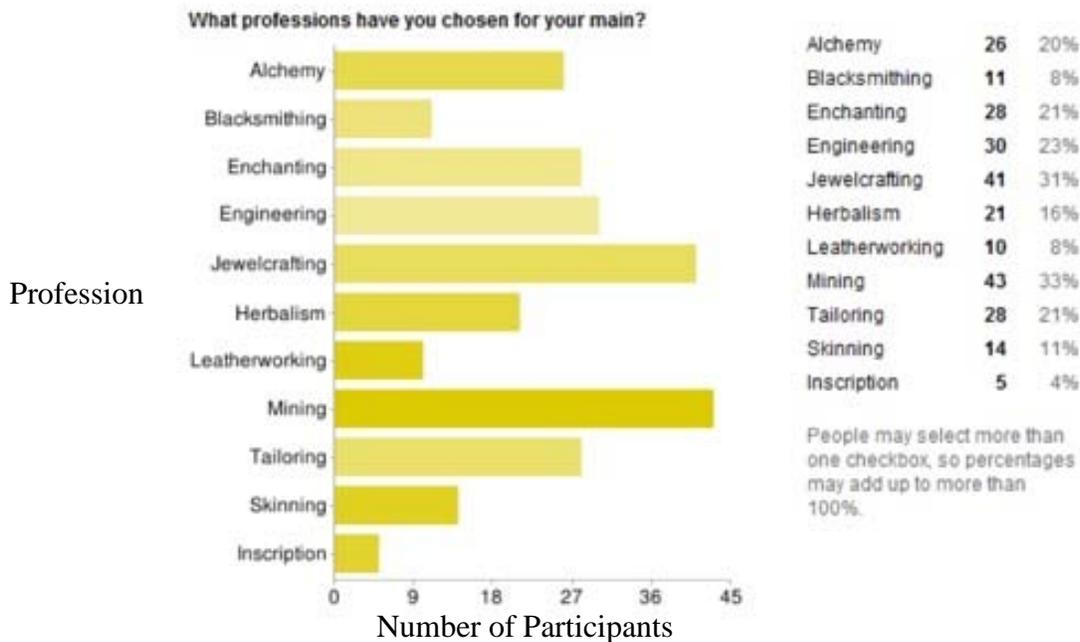seemed to have no affect on what type of professions were chosen.

Figure 2: Professions Chosen

Discussion

Through research, a survey, and observations, we explored a research question centered on player motivation to choose professions within the game. Professions were chosen by players for reasons all pertaining to personal preference and the individual's end game goals and for ease of play. It was found that the decision to choose professions was based on the players' individual preferences. These preferences were categorized into three reasons that all of the players' preferences could fall under.

Personal preference drove all of the selections of professions. It was found that these preferences all depended upon the players' motivation and in-game goals. Further research could be done on the motivations of players to choose professions based on their overall goals for the game.

These findings are significant because they show that the choices that players make in the game are complex and layered. Players are not just motivated to play the game, but have a complex set of motivations within the game that drives their choices and how they spend time while playing. While players may choose to play *World of Warcraft* for a certain reason(s), other motivations emerge while the players play and make choices about what to do while playing and what activities they want to participate in when they play.

One significant finding was that the mean age for our sample was 23.63 compared to Nick Yee's study in 2006 that found the mean age of WoW players to be 28.3 (Yee, 2006). Although this does not necessarily show a change in the demographics in the age of players it does leave room for further research.

Further studies could be done about the specific crafting professions. This topic alone has enough depth to it that other studies could look at player choices between the only the crafting professions (jewelcrafting, enchanting, inscription, leatherworking, tailoring, and blacksmithing) and look at the motivations to choose these professions from a certain standpoint (whether it be acquiring money, or making gear etc).

The limitations of this study mostly lie in the sample population the data was taken from. The survey was posted to online forums where the majority of visitors are experienced gamers. Of the total 129 people who responded to the survey, 123 of them had level 80 characters in the game (which is the maximum level that can be reached). This means almost all (if not all) of the people who responded are experienced and know the game very well. The results may have been different had we been able to get data from a different set of people because less experienced gamers may have had completely different motivations to choose professions and play the game.

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