

From “Noob” to “Hardcore:” A Shift in Game Behaviors and Values among *WoW* Players

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### **Abstract**

*World of Warcraft (WoW)* is the most successful MMORPG today. The game has over 11.5 million paid subscribers. This study utilizes a survey distributed on *WoW* related forums, *WoW* Facebook groups, to students in a *WoW* writing and research course at the University of Denver, and interviews of *WoW* players to analyze the differences between new players versus experienced players and competitive versus unambitious players. The study also takes a look at some of the factors that make *WoW* such a successful game. The author discusses the importance of the social aspect in the game, as well as how this social aspect attracts new players. The gameplay diversity of *WoW* is also discussed as a way in which the game satisfies a diverse population of players, as well as changing player values.

### **Introduction**

*World of Warcraft (WoW)* is the most popular game among the MMORPG genre in the video game industry today. Blizzard released the game in North America, Australia, and New Zealand on November 23, 2004, and on the first day of *WoW*'s release, over 200,000 players subscribed to the game (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004a). Blizzard announced that the game was nearly sold out among stores a little less than a month later from the release date (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004b). A few years after the release of *WoW*, Blizzard released an expansion to the game: *The Burning Crusade*. Within the first day of the release *The Burning Crusade*, over 2.4 million copies of the game were sold out of the 4 million copies Blizzard released—the copies of *The Burning Crusade* sold was a record-breaking statistic for Blizzard (Blizzard

Entertainment, 2007). Blizzard released yet another record-breaking expansion, *Wrath of the Lich King*, on November 13, 2008; this time, 2.8 million copies were sold within a single day (Blizzard Entertainment, 2008a). Blizzard last announced that *WoW* has over 11.5 million subscribers in November 21, 2008; it would not be too surprising to find out that the current number of *WoW* subscribers is much greater than this number (Blizzard Entertainment, 2008b).

Due to widely acclaimed success and a record-breaking number of subscribers, *WoW* still remains as the most successful MMORPG today. As a result, the game has been subject to a wide variety of studies that look at the game aspects behind the success of *WoW*, as well as the players of the game.

#### *WoW: A game of variety*

Perhaps one of the strongest aspects behind the success of *WoW* is that the game offers a wide variety of choices that players can partake in, as well as different gameplay aspects that players of different amounts of experience can enjoy (Ducheneaut et al., 2006a). In *WoW*, a player can choose from a set of 10 races (5 races that are part of the Horde faction and 5 races that are part of the Alliance faction), as well as 10 different classes. Each race has a particular set of classes that a player can choose from, and each race has a unique storyline that a player can progress through. Although there are overlapping storylines between races, the majority of quests for each race are peculiar to the specific race a player chooses. Therefore, a player can progress through a different story in *WoW* with each different race. Furthermore, each class in the game offers an almost completely different type of gameplay and experience because the special abilities and style of playing for each class requires a player to develop different strategies to

effectively play as a specific class. *WoW* is a game that offers an almost limitless amount of gameplay variety through its unique story progressions and class branches for each race.

Even with the variety of choices available for players to choose from, the in-game demographics are quite unequally distributed. In 2006, the ratio of characters in the Alliance faction to the Horde Faction is about 2 to 1 (Ducheneaut et al., 2006a). Moreover, the race distribution is quite biased in the favor of the Human and Night Elf races; these two races make up a rough total of about 46% of the total population (23% Human and 23% Night Elves) of *WoW* characters (Yee, 2005). Interestingly, among males and females, the most preferred race for males is Human and for females it is Night Elves (Yee, 2007). Perhaps the overwhelming ratio of the Alliance faction to the Horde faction is because the Alliance faction appears more “politically correct” (Ducheneaut et al., 2006a). But, there are most likely other major factors that influence the unevenly distributed population of character between the Alliance and Horde Faction.

### *A Diverse World of Players*

Although the in-game demographics might not be particularly diverse, this is not true for player demographics. With its more than 11.5 million subscribers, *WoW* definitely has diverse community of players. Even though the game is rated “Teen,” the average age of a *WoW* female player is 32.5 years ( $SD = 10.0$ ), and the average age of a male player is 28.0 years (8.4); whereas the average age of a general player is 28.3 year ( $SD = 8.4$ ) (Yee, 2005). In a study of occupation and marital status of *WoW* players ( $N = 2834$ ), a majority of players (about 50%) are employed full-time, while 22% of players are full-time students, 12% are part-time students, 10% are unemployed, 3% are home makers, and 1% are retired (Yee, 2003). From the same

study, 36% of *WoW* players are shown as married ( $N = 2826$ ); a higher percentage of female players in *WoW* are married compared to males (Yee, 2003). *WoW* community is not just diverse in age, occupation status, and marital status. There are countless other physical player traits, group associations, and statuses that the diversity of *WoW* players is composed of.

Besides the diversity of player demographics, *WoW* players have different motivations, values, and experience that influence how they value and play the game. Many players are drawn to *WoW* because of its social aspects, such as guilds and friends (Williams et al. 2006). The social aspect of guilds provides a source of social support for many *WoW* players, which can be a powerful motivation for players to play the game (Williams et al. 2006). Even for players who “solo,” *WoW* is different from a single-player RPG because *WoW* offers a sense of “social presence,” which has drawn players to the game (Ducheneaut et al., 2006b). Perhaps because *WoW* offers players an environment in which they feel valued, people play the game as an escape from one’s social problems. Thus, the game is, in a way, used as a form of therapy for depression and development of social behavior (Yee, 2008a). Socializing is one of the most common reasons that motivate players to play the game, whereas game progression is the most common motivation for players (Yee, 2008b). This is because *WoW* is a game that is appealing to new players as well as “hardcore” players (Ducheneaut et al., 2006a). The leveling system of *WoW* allows new characters a faster rate of advancement that exponentially becomes slower at higher levels. As a player levels he or she unlocks new perks, such as mounts, the dungeon finder, and new abilities that provide a sense of achievement. Ducheneaut et al. say that at level 60 *WoW* is a whole new game:

It is quite clear that at Level 60, *WoW* becomes a much more intensely social game...As such, it is clear that *WoW* is in some sense two games in

one. For some players the game does not really begin until they reach the endgame...They might then find the endgame too hardcore (Taylor, 2003) for their taste and either leave, start a new Level 1 character, or transition to a new play style and join other “raiders” in high-end instances.

(Ducheneaut et al., 2006a)

*WoW* is a game that is enjoyable for players who want to relax, players who want to socialize, players who want to “escape,” players who are “hardcore,” and players who are new to the game; basically, *WoW* is a game for gamers of all types of personalities with different gaming preferences. Perhaps it is because of *WoW*'s diverse environment for players, that the game was able to overwhelmingly become one of the greatest MMORPGs of today with over 11.5 million subscribers willing to pay 13 to 15 dollars a month to play.

Many previous studies of *WoW* looked at player demographics and in-game metrics in relation to player choices in the game and reasons to play the game. There has not been a particular study that takes an in-depth look at how new players first play the game compared to more experienced players, as well as how competitive players compare to players who are unambitious. This study will specifically look at these two topics in relation to how players play *WoW*. Analyzing these two specific topics in relation to how players play the game could potentially unveil further aspects that contribute to the success of *WoW*.

## **Method**

### *Participants*

The purpose of this study focuses primarily on *WoW*, therefore the targeted participants in this study were players who were assumed to have played the game at least once. A total of 88

participants participated in this study. Of the 88 participants, 86 participated through an online survey and 2 participants were interviewed via email. From the surveyed participants, 9 participants' responses were not used as part of results due to invalid and inappropriate answers. Examples of some inappropriate and invalid response included participants who claimed to be 532 years of age, spent time “Slappin bitches” when first playing the game, and listed “The Cleveland Show” as their number of level 80 characters. Of the survey participants, 60 were male and 15 were female; 1 male and 1 female were interviewed through email. The average age of the participants was 20.4 years ( $SD = 6.8$ ); the average age of males was 19.8 years ( $SD = 6.3$ ) and for females it was 22.1 years ( $SD = 7.4$ ).

### *Survey*

A survey was created through the “Form” feature on Google Docs and was used to collect data. The survey was distributed on the official *WoW* forums, *WoW* related forums, *WoW* Facebook groups, and to students in a *WoW* writing and research course at the University of Denver. The survey was distributed in various settings to ensure that a diverse range of participants who were both experienced and new to *WoW*. The survey was given a time frame of about 2 weeks to gather data.

The survey was composed of a total of 16 questions. The survey had multiple question formats with the intention to illicit responses from participants that were used in the study as qualitative and quantitative results. Of the questions in the survey, five were open-ended questions that required participants to type in their answer, nine were selective questions in which the participants chose an answer from a list that best answers the question, one was a checkbox question where participants selected one or more specific choices that apply to him or

her for the question, and one was a question that utilized the use of the Likert scale. The questions were organized in a way that first asks respondents general questions, and as the participant progresses through each question, the questions become more specific. Unfortunately, the survey contained a notable error that was discovered after it was distributed; in the survey question that asked which type of realm that participants play on the most, “RP PvE” was listed as realm type rather than “RP PvP.” There is no realm type that is “RP PvE;” therefore, participants who selected “RP PvE” will be assumed that they meant “RP PvP.”

### *Interview*

A total of 3 potential participants were emailed ahead of time with a request to take a short survey via email. The potential participants were *WoW* players who have played the game at least once. Out of the 3 potential participants that were emailed, only 2 responded and agreed to take the survey. An email was then sent to the 2 participants that agreed to take the email interview; the email contained a disclaimer that described what the interview would be used for and contained a confidentiality statement that promised to not release the personal information of the participants. There was a total of 11 questions that the participants were asked to answer and 2 of which were alternate questions that required a response only if it applied to the participant. All the questions in the email interview are responses that are used for qualitative analysis; 4 of these questions also appeared on the survey. The participants were asked to provide short answers to the questions that do not have to be grammatically correct or complete sentences.

## Results

The surveyed yielded a relatively diverse set of results regarding player experience; there were participants who have only played the game for less than 3 months and participants who have played for more 5 years or more (Figure 1). Furthermore, the realm type that participants played on was observed; the majority of participants played mostly in either PvP or PvE type realms (Figure 2). The average number of level 80 characters for a participant is 2.2 ( $SD = 2.2$ ), and participants played an average of 3.5 hours of *WoW* each day ( $SD = 2.5$ ).

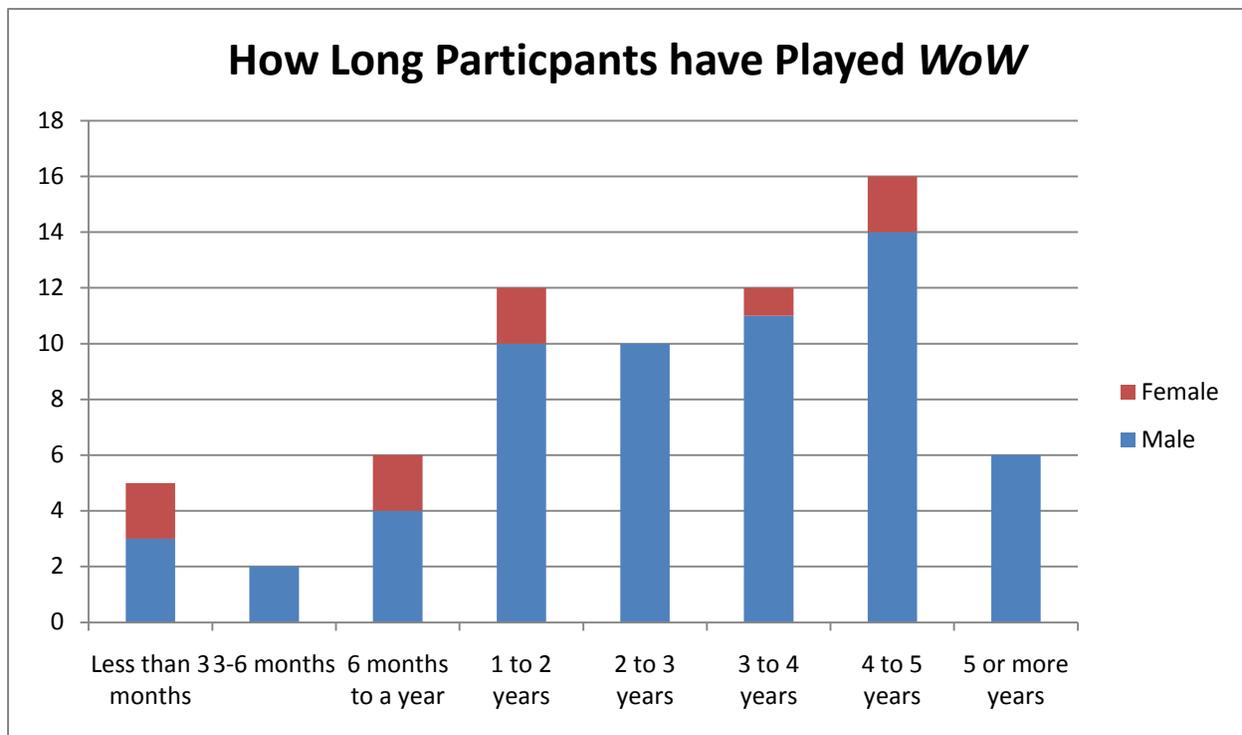


Figure 1. How Long Participants have Played *WoW*.

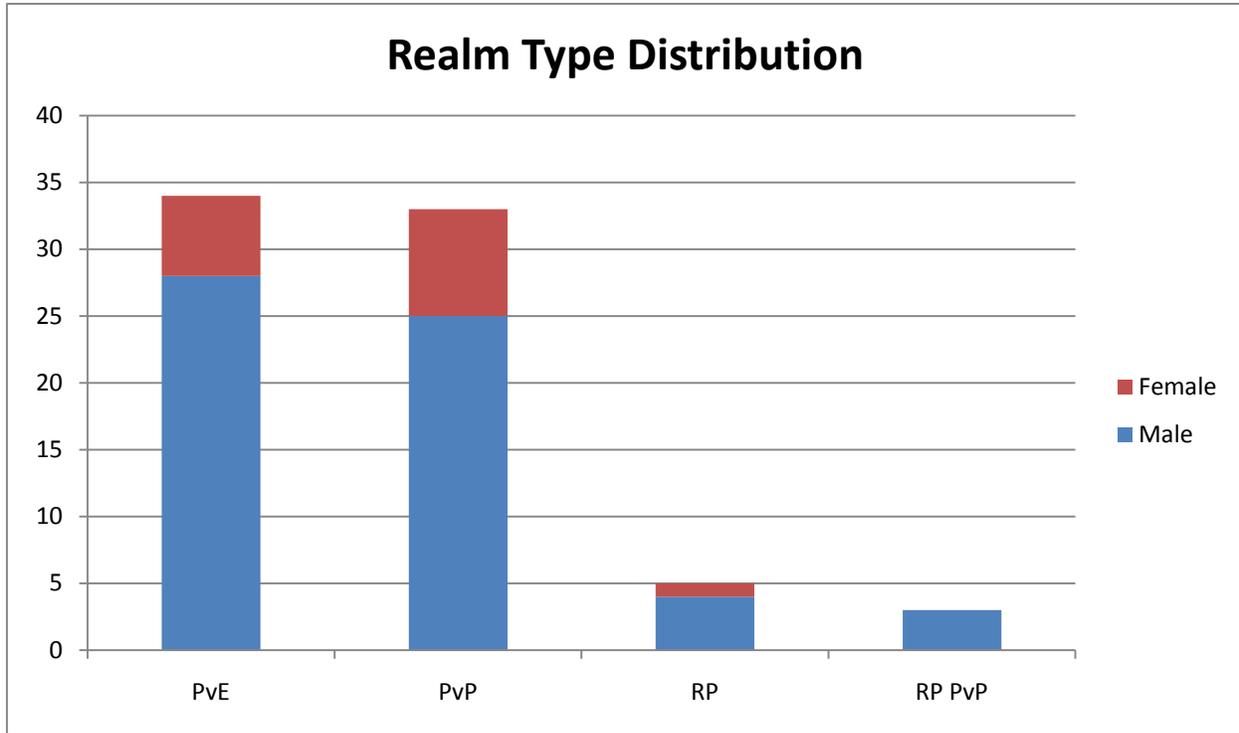


Figure 2. Realm Type Distribution.

### The Beginning Experience of *WoW* players

*WoW* offers a style of gameplay that changes as the player becomes more experienced with the game (Ducheneaut et al., 2006a). A new player plays the game a lot differently compared to an experienced player; these two types of players value the game differently from one another as well. This could possibly be related to the diverse aspects of the game.

#### *Selecting a Realm Type*

One of the many things that a new player first has to go through before playing the game is selecting a realm type. *WoW* offers four different realm types to its players, and each of type of realm offers a different environment for players:

In Normal realms, the focus of the players tends to center on player vs. environment objectives, such as defeating monsters and questing in the world. Normal realms offer a more accessible way to experience the player vs. environment content of *WoW*...Player vs. player realms have the same PvE objectives and content as Normal realms, but have the added element of perpetual faction vs. faction combat in most of the world. Outside of capital cities and starter areas, the various regions of the world are considered contested areas, meaning PvP combat is possible at any time...Players who choose to play on an RP realm should abide by the Role-Playing realm policies and remain in-character at all times. Role-Playing realms give players the chance to develop characters with a backstory who do not simply progress from quest to quest, but instead assist or hamper the efforts of others for reasons of their own. (Blizzard Entertainment, 2010)

To a new player, selecting a specific realm is just as important for experienced players because a specific realm type will influence the experience a player derives from playing *WoW*. Below are charts (Figures 3 and 4) that show the distribution of which realms survey participants selected when they made their first character (or earliest character they remember playing as).

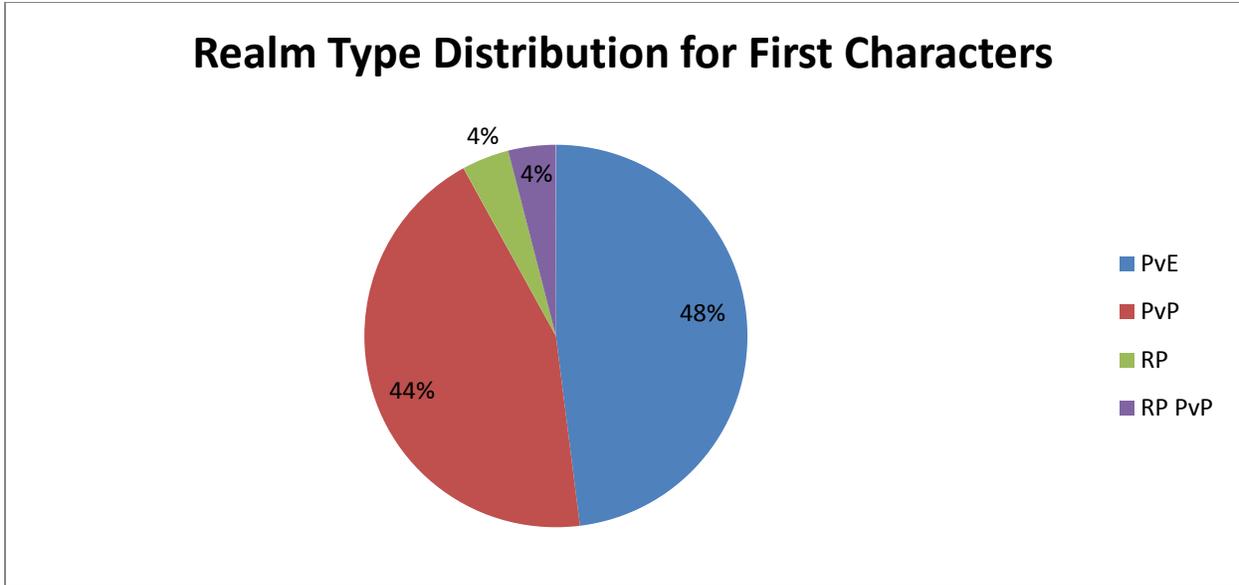


Figure 3. Realm Type Distribution for First Characters (Pie Chart).

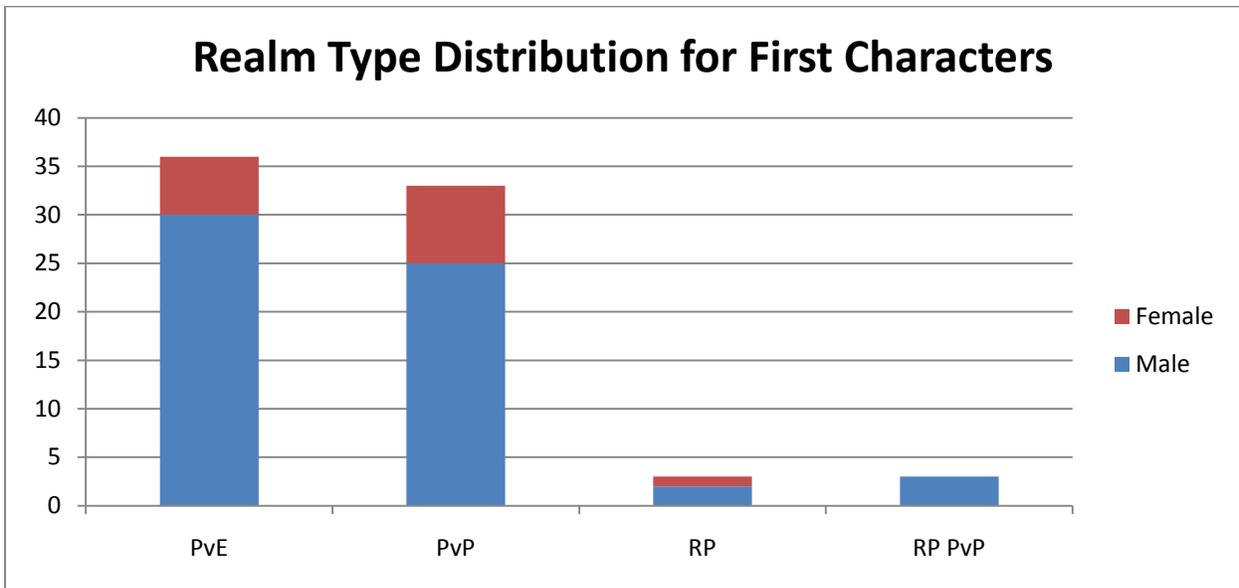


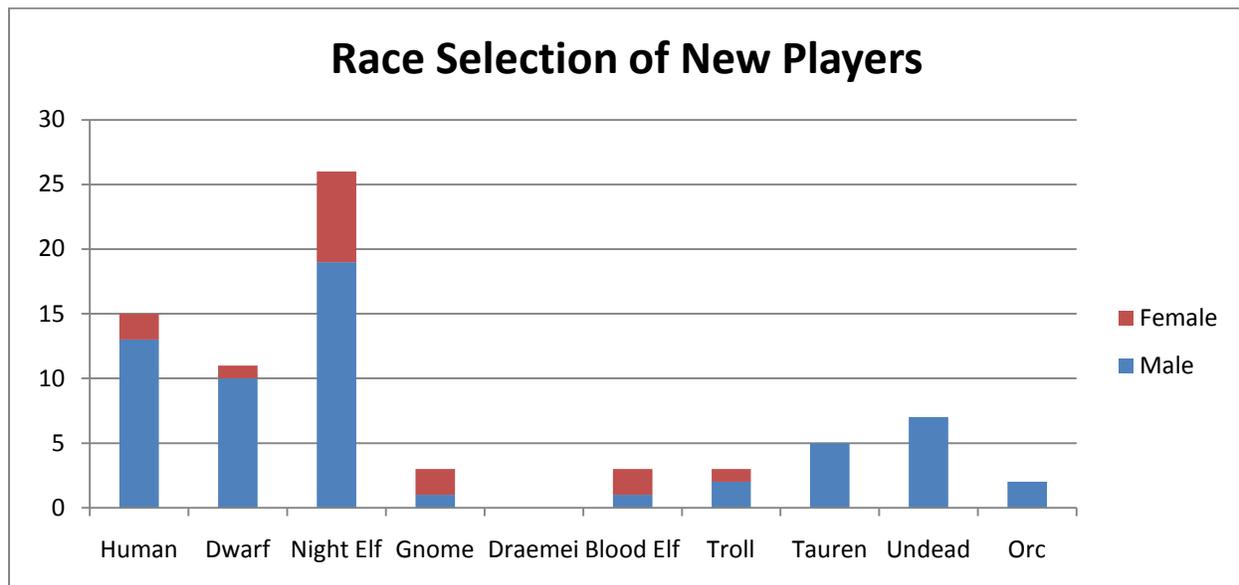
Figure 4. Realm Type Distribution for First Characters (Stacked Column Graph).

Figure 3 above shows that new players are most likely to choose either a PvE or PvP realm. There is slight difference of 4% (3 participants) between PvE or PvP realms, but participants indicated they chose these two realm types the most when they played as their first character.

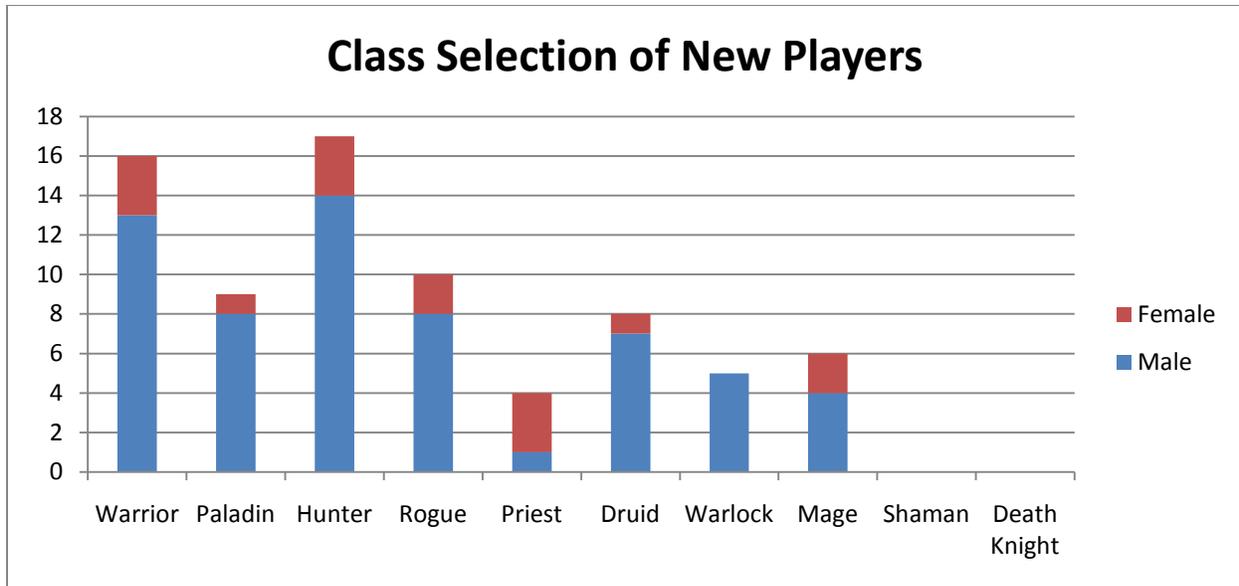
Female participants have selected all 4 realm types except RP PvP. The RP and RP PvP type realms seem to be the least selected among new players.

### *Selecting a Race and Class*

Probably the most important part before a player begins to play the game is the selection of character class and race. The selection of a particular race determines which storyline a player will progress through, faction the player will be part of, and particular class the player can choose from. The class a player chooses will greatly affect how he or she plays the game. Each class in *WoW* is special in its own way, some are better for soloing, some thrive off of groups, some are good for PvP, some are good for dungeon raids, and some are ranged attackers, while some are close combat. Essentially, a player's specific class will determine what he or she is able to do in the game. The charts below (Figures 5 and 6) show the race and class distribution of avatars players first selected when they played the game (or earliest character they remember playing as).



**Figure 5. Race Selection of New Players.**

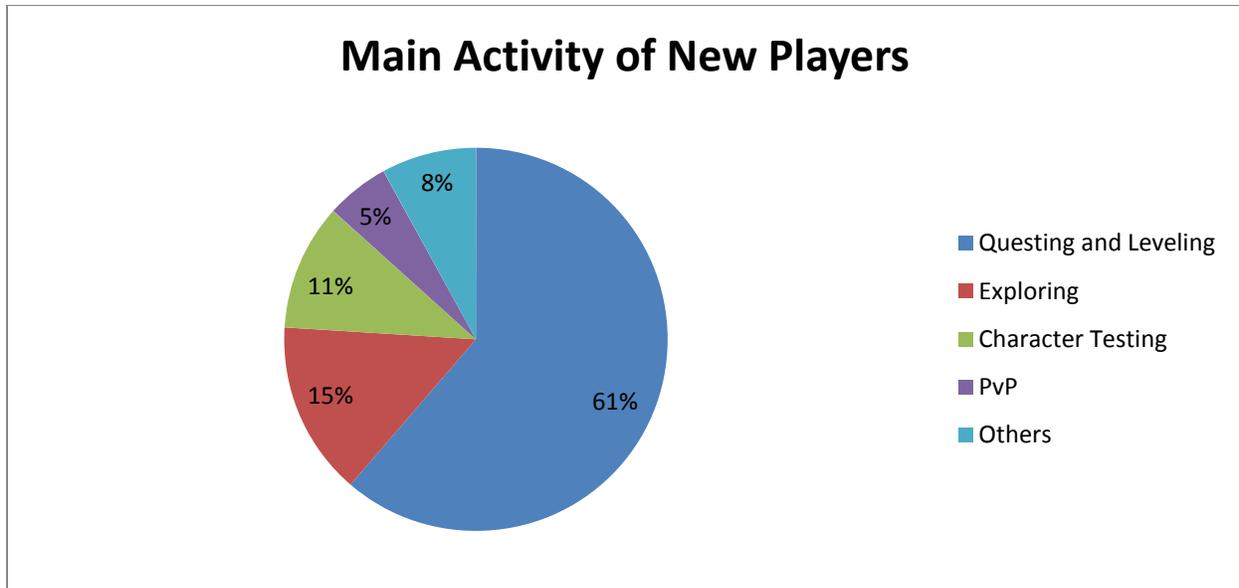


**Figure 6. Class Selection of New Players.**

The three most selected races for new players were Human, Dwarf, and Night Elf; while the three most selected classes for new players were Warrior, Hunter, and Rogue. A closer look at the race distribution shows that new players tend to select races that are part of the Alliance faction rather than races part of the Horde faction. It also seems that the three most favored races are races that are best suited for soloing. More interestingly, even though the male population ( $n = 60$ ) greatly outnumbered the female population ( $n = 15$ ) of participants, females selected Priests more than males.

### *Playing the Game as a New Player*

Participants were asked how they spent their time playing the game when they first started. The responses of the participants were categorized into 5 separate categories: questing and leveling, exploring, character Testing, PvP, and others. The chart below (Figure 7) depicts the percent distribution of responses in each category.



**Figure 7. Main Activity for New Players.**

A majority (46 out of 75) of participants stated that they leveled their characters and/or engaged in questing activities. Many of these participants at first leveled their characters and quested, but as they approached higher levels, participants began participating more in Dungeon Raiding:

I started back in Vanilla wow where I casually levelled a character along with my brother and friends. I took a huge amount of time to level because at this stage I was most interested in exploring each zone and working out the quests without the help of addons such as Questhelper. (Male, 30)

April, 2005. Leveling with friends and then both raiding and PvPing at the max level of each expansion. (Male, 17)

Levelling quickly and then jumping straight into raiding. (Female, 23)

Some participants in this category listed some overlapping activities in other categories, but these participants still listed questing and leveling as their main activity in *WoW* when they first began the game.

In the second category, exploration, participants (11 out of 75) said they spent their time primarily exploring the environment of *WoW*. These participants went to different cities and wandered around the environment in *WoW*:

When I first started playing WOW i spent the majority of my time trying to figure out the major cities and where everything was, and trying my best to level. (Male, 17)

leveling and exploring. i was very lazy and took a long time to level so i could explore every part of the game. also i investigated all of the myths associated with the game i.e. dire maul and the ashbringer etc... (i got the game right when it came out). then i started raiding (Male, 21)

Participants of this category commonly listed leveling and questing, in addition to exploring the environment of the game. But, for these participants, exploration was what they primarily did when they first began playing the game.

Character testing was the third most common activity that participants (8 out of 75) engaged in when they first played the game. These participants tried out different classes and races usually to find a particular combination that suits his or her needs:

10 day trial of all classes trying many races and exploring sense of community with WOW as 1st MMO played. (Male, 23)

Trying out some of the classes until I found one I liked and then leveled it by questing and doing instances. (Male, 21)

A majority of participants in this category indicated that they proceeded to level up after they found the specific character that suited their preferences.

The least common activity that participants engaged (4 out of 75) in was PvPing.

Participants of this category stated that they spent a majority of time PvPing compared to other activities in the game:

I did quests and participated in organized events (e.g: raids on cities, rp parties, etc) I then spend time doing a lot of dungeons, and in the BC a lot of pvp. (Male, 18)

PvP was what I probably spent the most time doing. My first toon was an undead mage and I must have spent weeks in the level 19 bracket - heck, I got Sergeant title from it before the titles were made unobtainable. (Male, 19)

In the final category, others, participants (6 out of 10) engaged in activities that are not specially focused on *WoW*, as well as answer that do not relate to gameplay aspects. These activities included participants playing *WoW* in comparison to other games and stating play times:

6th grade, played all day. (Male, 14)

I looked at it as a comparrison to another MMO I had been playing at the time. I spent time leveling as I could by myself, but found that nobody was still touring the old world, I gave up pretty quickly. (Male, 26)

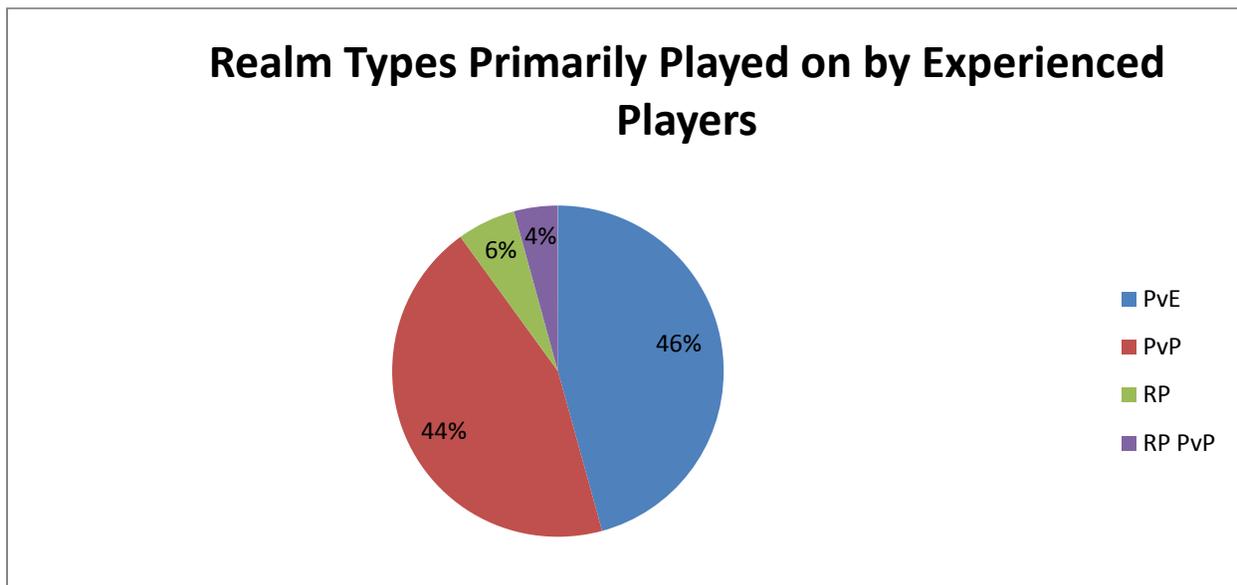
### **Playing *WoW* as Experienced Players**

Many players who have gained experience playing *WoW* tend to play quite differently from once they started. This is perhaps because *WoW* becomes a whole new game for players once they reach level 60 (Ducheneaut et al., 2006a). For the purpose of this section, participants who have listed that that they played *WoW* for less than 3 months will be excluded from the

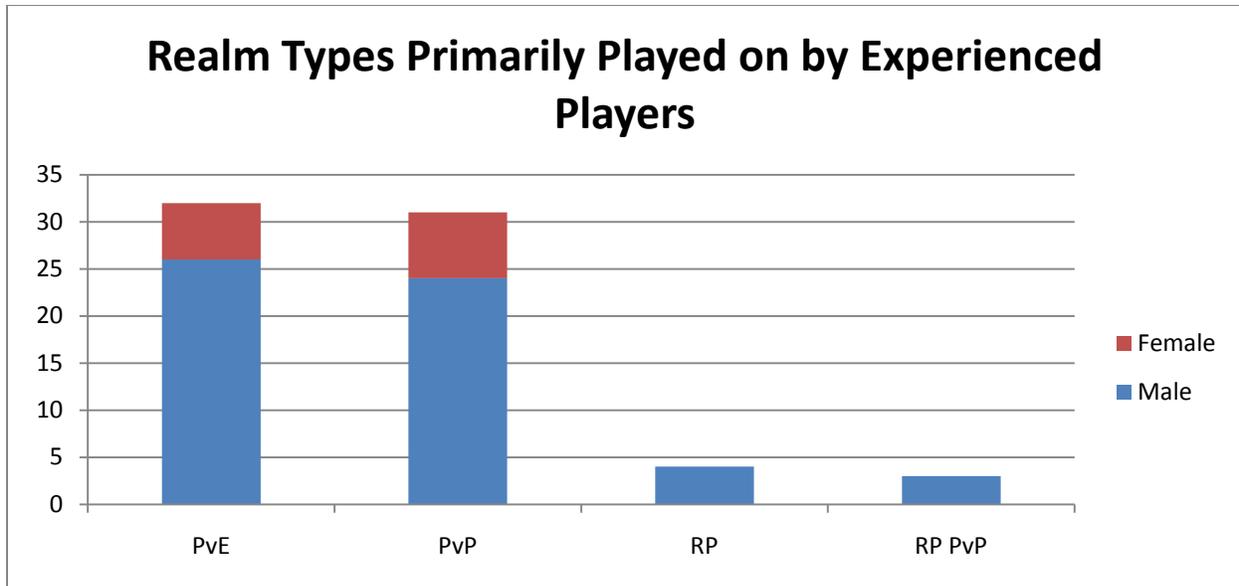
results section, as these participants are most likely new players themselves. Therefore, a total of 5 participants are excluded from the calculation of results; the remaining 70 participants will have played the game for more than 3 months. All 5 of the excluded participants stated they played primarily on the same realms they started in. This could indicate that participants of this category played with the same character and did not fully explore options in *WoW*.

### *Playing a Realm Type*

Once again, the realm type determines the type of environment a player plays in whether he or she wants to combat other players, play the game “in character,” or just combat with only NPCs in the environment. Experienced players are most likely to have tried all four realm types and develop a preference for a specific one. The participants who have played the game for 3 months are more were asked which realm type they primarily play on; the charts below (Figures 8 and 9) show the distribution of realm types among 70 participants.



**Figure 8. Realm Types Primarily Played on by Experienced Players (Pie Chart).**



**Figure 9. Realm Types Primarily Played on by Experienced Players (Stacked Column Graph).**

Interestingly, it seems that PvP and PvE realms remain to be the most selected realm types even among experienced players. But, the difference between PvE and PvP type realms are smaller than when participants first began playing. The excluded participants do not have influence on this difference; out of the 5 participants, 2 listed PvP as the primary realm they play on, 2 listed PvE, and 1 listed RP PvP. The smaller difference between these two realm types could indicate that a small percentage of experienced gamers are likely to switch to primarily to a PvP realm from other types of realms. Overall, the RP and RP PvP realms remain relatively the same from before, except the RP type realm increased by one participant, and no experienced female players selected the RP or RP PvP type realms.

### *Primary Avatars*

Once a player has the opportunity to try out different races and classes, there is usually a specific character that the player spends the most time on: this character is usually referred to as the "main" or "primary". Experienced players are more likely to consider further game aspects

such as race/class advantages and disadvantages, storyline progression, and available quests when selecting an avatar. Therefore, usually, an experienced player is more likely to select a character based on a more logical thought process than players who have just started due to the knowledge of the game. Also, experienced players are also more likely to find a specific race and class that fits his or her preferences the most. Below are charts (Figures 10 and 11) that show the race and class distribution of primary characters of players who have played the game 3 months or more. Interestingly, the three most favored classes that participants chose were Night Elf, Blood Elf, and Human, which is quite different from the 3 most chosen classes when players first started. This could be due to some of the races that weren't available for participants who started playing the game before the release of the expansion packs. But, it seems that the strong favor of the Alliance faction over the Horde is less prominent among experienced players. Although the Alliance faction is still favored over the Horde faction, the imbalance between the two factions is a lot lower for the primary characters of experienced players. Among experienced players, the 3 most selected classes were Druid, Hunter, and with Death Knight and warrior equally selected. The classes that were not selected by newer players, Shaman and Death Knight, significantly changed for experienced players. The Druid class had significantly increased in popularity among experienced players.

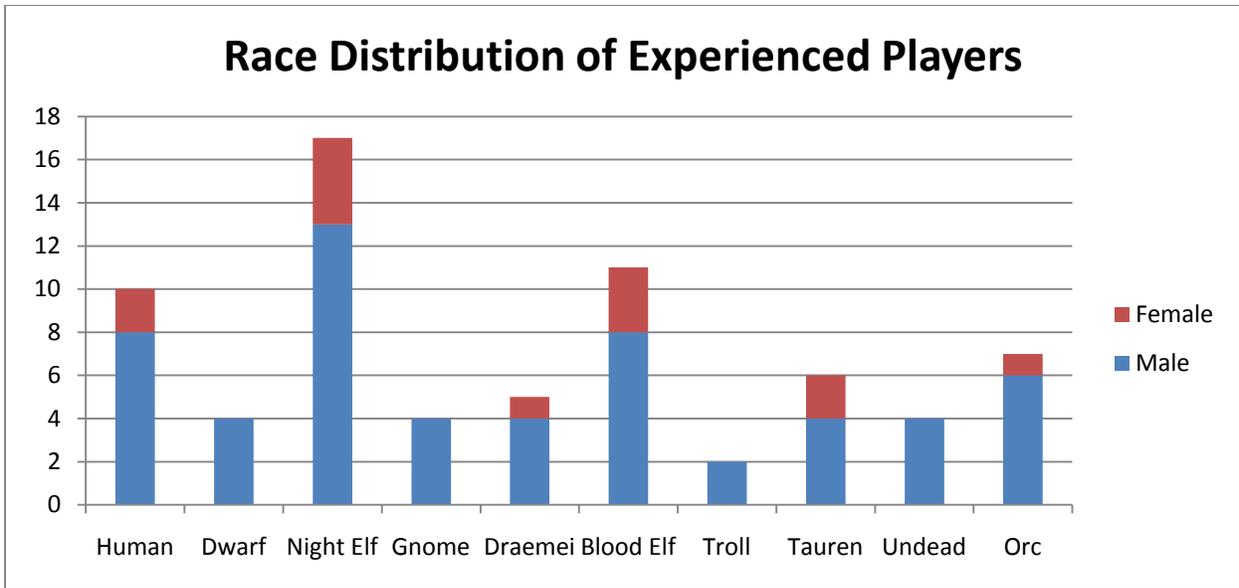


Figure 10. Race Distribution of Experienced Players.

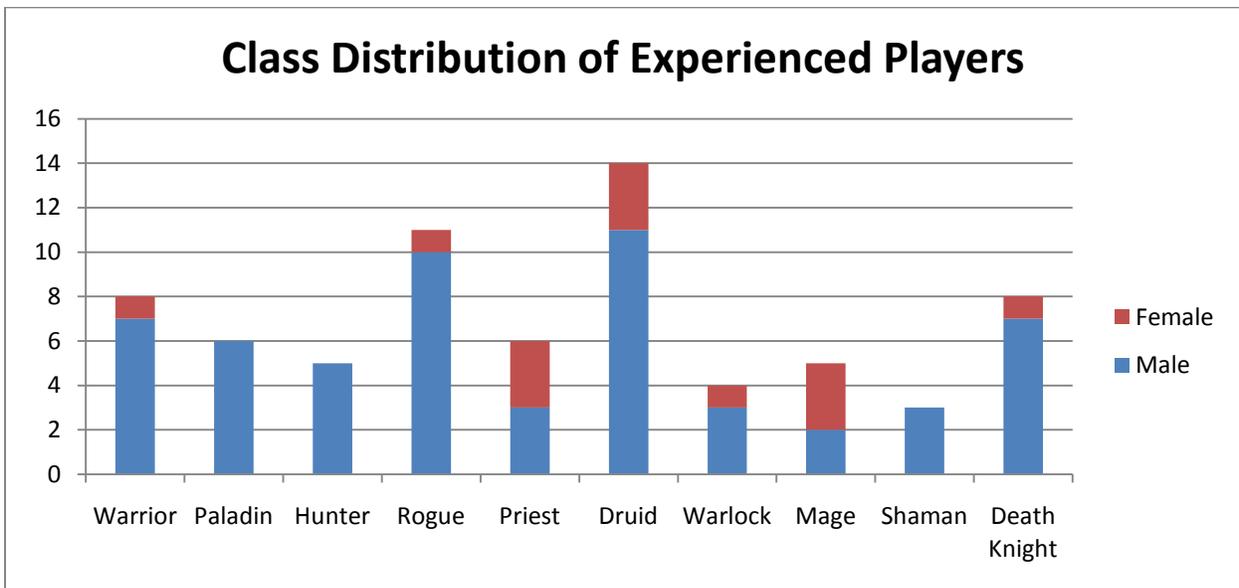
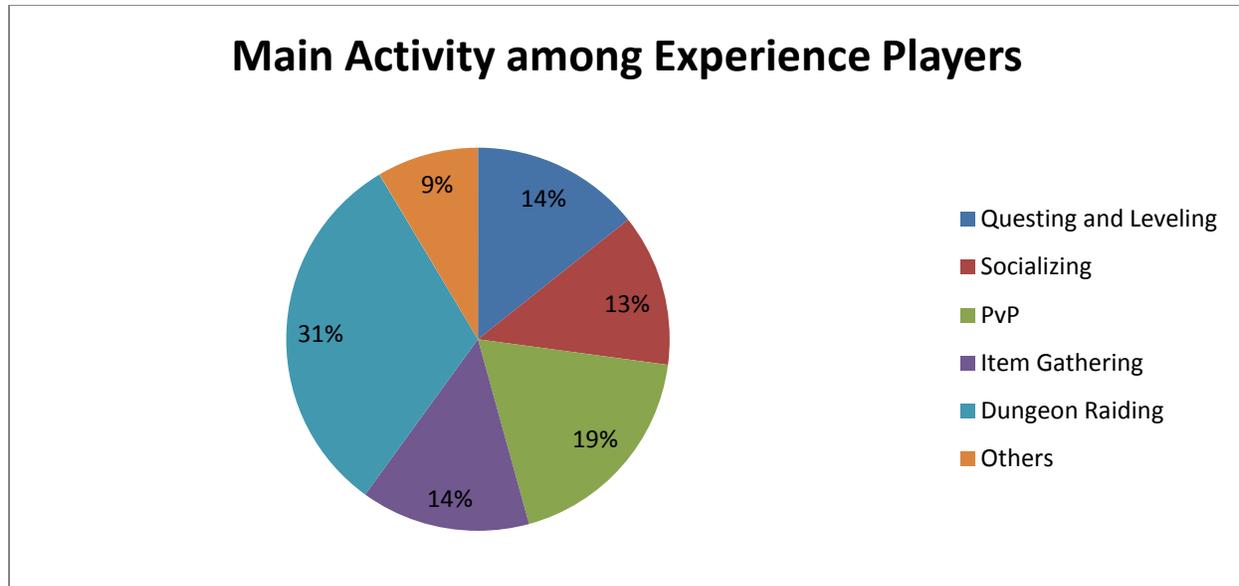


Figure 11. Class Distribution of Experienced Players.

*Playing WoW with Experience*

The 70 selected participants were asked how they spent a majority of their time playing the game. This time, the responses of the participants were categorized into 6 separate categories:

questing and leveling, socializing, PvP, item gathering, Dungeon raiding, and others. Exploring and character testing were activities that participants no longer engaged in compared to when the participants first started. The results were quite different from when participants first began playing. The chart below shows the percent distribution of participant responses in each category (Figure 12).



**Figure 12. Main Activity among Experience Players.**

Participants who engaged in mainly questing and leveling activities were significantly lower compared to when they first started (10 out of 70). A majority of these participants who said they primary engaged questing and leveling were usually participants who were working on alternate avatars:

Leveling alts, my mains are topped out on gear progression and my raid time is not avail (Male, 49, Played 5 or more years)

Recently I have started to level a new character, but for the most part I only play when my guild is raiding. (Male, 18, Played 4-5 years)

Leveling my character to 80. (Male, 16, Played 6 months to a year)

The next category, socializing, was significantly much more present (9 out of 70) in participant responses compared to when participants first played the game. In the socializing category, participants engaged in activities included in the other categories, but with a friends, groups, or guilds. Some of these participants listed they spent a lot of time just chatting with friends in the game:

Hanging with friends usually in dungeons (Male, 15, Played 4 to 5 years)

Prolly just getting on to do an instance, do a couple of quests, and just chat with friends. (Female, 16, Played 1 to 2 years)

Casual playtime. I do some dungeons with friends and family while doing a bit of questing and some Profs. (Male, 26, Played 1 to 2 years)

PvPing as the main activity among participants was much more present (13 out of 70) in participant responses compared to when the participants first started playing. Among these participants, PvPing was the main activity they participated in. PvPing was also present in many responses in other categories, but PvPing was a side activity that participants spent some time with:

Either doing instances or PvP battlegrounds (Male, 19, Played 6 months to a year)

I only play periodically. I get on to PvP when I have literally nothing else to do and for raids when my friends need me. When Cataclysm comes out I expect to be playing quite a bit more. (Male, 19, Played 4 to 5 years)

Lately I've been playing a lot of Arena. I like it a lot, though it took me years to ever try it. (Male, 21, Played 4 to 5 years)

Item gathering became an activity that participants (10 out of 70) listed as a main activity they engage in that they did not list before when they began playing *WoW* as new players.

Participants in this category stated that they mostly collect items or gold in the game through the auction house or dungeon raiding:

I spend probably 95% of my time sitting at the auction house making money. The other 5% is doing random dungeons. (Male, 19, Played 4 to 5 years)

Doing heroics or farming mats for blacksmithing. (Male, 21, Played 4 to 5 years)

Achievements, gearing up characters, performing heroics or possibly raids and seeking gold or new mounts. (Male, 23, Played 2 to 3 years)

The most common activity that participants (22 out of 70) engaged in as a main activity was Dungeon Raiding. Dungeon raiding is an activity in which players find a group or friends to raid a specific area in the game. In these raids, players have high chances of obtaining rare equipment, and they also get to fight a boss. Players are also awarded a “satchel of useful goods” for everyday they participate in a raid. Players can participate in raid with groups by using the “Dungeon finder” option within the game, or by organizing one with guild members and friends:

AFK in Dalaran waiting for a raid to start like everyone else. (Male, 33, Played 4 to 5 years)

Now it is only raiding. Though I wish for the old days where rep grinding, attunements and staggered progression added far more to the end game. (Male, 30, Played 4 to 5 years)

doing dailies/random dungeons and raiding on my main (Male, 19, Played 4 to 5 years)

raiding and dungeons (Male, 15, Played 4 to 5 years)

In the category of others, there were a total of 6 out of 70 participants. Participants in this category listed activities that were not so related to *WoW*, but rather more of the participants’

personal lives in relation to *WoW*. The others category also includes participants that said they spent their time in special events. Participants in this category said they took time off the game or did not do anything specific in the game:

Looking for new things. Easter eggs, Achievements etc (Male, 17, Played 2 to 3 years)

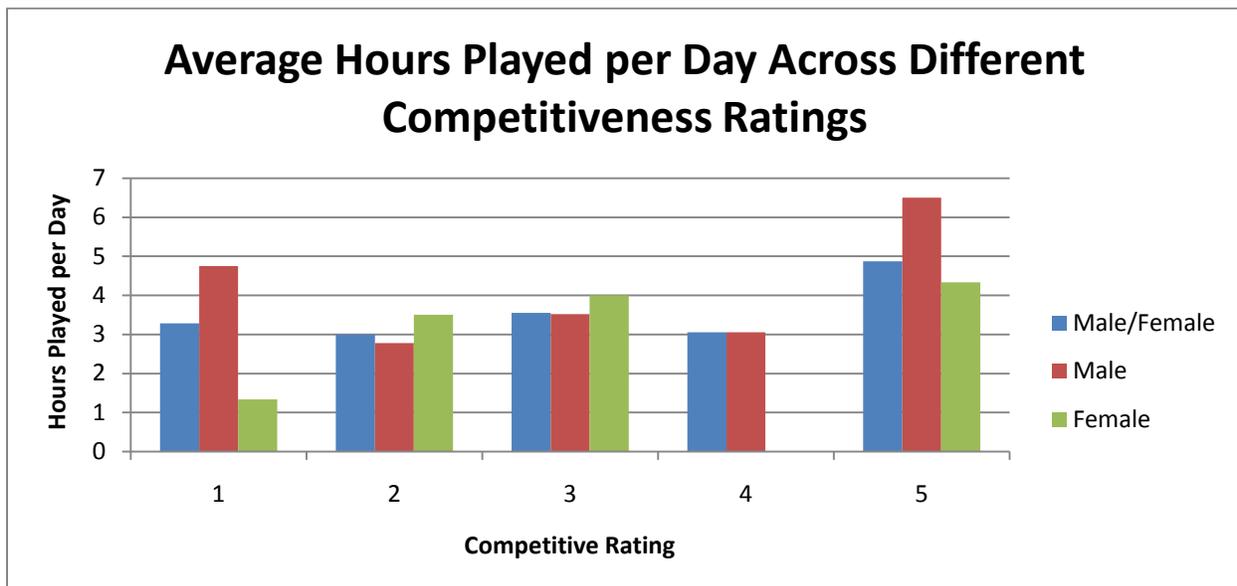
I do not play. I disliked that a Rogue Talent specialization was relatively useless. It is better now, but I would need to catch up my character's gear so I could battle others on equal ground in PvP. I do not wish to pay to play a game and not have fun while doing so just so I could have fun later. I have many other games fully paid for that I can go back to and enjoy without paying additional monetary costs as well as time spent being bored. (Male, 17, Played 2 to 3 years)

### **Competitive Players versus Unambitious Players**

Another purpose of this study was to look at the gameplay behavior and game values between players who consider themselves competitive to those who are not competitive. In this study, participants were asked to rate their competitiveness as a *WoW* player on a Likert scale of 1 to 5: 1 being not competitive and 5 being very competitive. These ratings were then used in comparison to player choices and game preferences. The overall competitiveness rating that players gave themselves was 3.09 ( $SD = 1.10$ ); for males ( $n = 50$ ) it was 3.08 ( $SD = .93$ ) and for females ( $n = 15$ ) it was 3.13 ( $SD = 1.68$ ).

#### *Play Time Habits versus Competitiveness*

Participants were asked how many hours on average they played each day. Participants who play more than 9 hours a day was classified as playing 9 hours. The overall average hours played a day by players was 3.45 hours ( $SD = 2.47$ ); for males ( $n = 50$ ) the average hours played every day was 4.39 hours ( $SD = 2.41$ ), and for females ( $n = 15$ ) it was 3.29 hours ( $SD = 2.77$ ). The average number of hours they played each day of all participants was then averaged for each competitiveness rating that participants rated themselves. The chart below (Figure 13) shows the average hours played per day for participants of different competitiveness ratings ( $N = 75$ ).



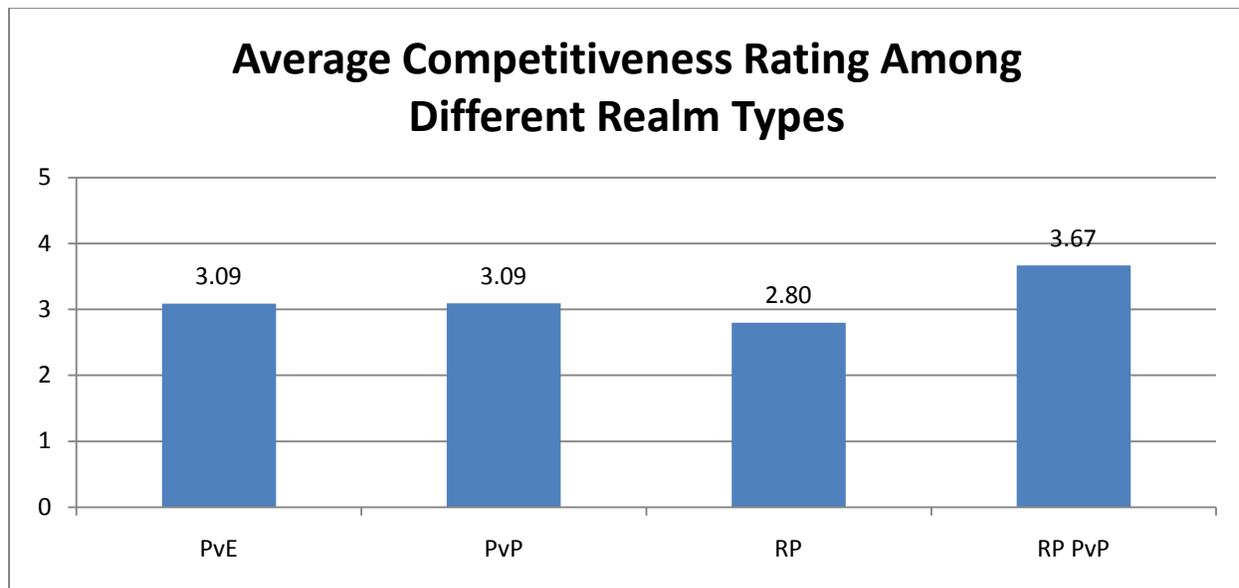
**Figure 13. Average Hours Played per Day Across Different Competitive Ratings**

From the results collected, there were no females who gave themselves a 4 as a competitiveness rating. Overall, it seems that players who consider themselves most competitive play the most hours a day compared to the other groups of players. Also, it seems that players who are not very competitive play the game a lot less. For males, those who were not rated among the either extreme, played the game less. Overall, there is not a strong relationship between the competitive rating and average hours played per day for the participants ( $r = 0.118$ ), but a look at this

relationship through gender shows that there is a weak relation between competitive ratings and average hours played per day for females ( $r = 0.353$ ). This relationship is almost nonexistent for males ( $r = 0.0057$ ). But, the weak relationship among females is most likely due to a lack of female participants.

### *Realm Type and Competitiveness*

Participants were asked what realm type they primarily play on. Based on the responses, the average competitiveness rating among the participants was calculated for each type of realm that participants primarily played on. The chart below (Figure 14) shows this average competitiveness rating among the 4 different realm types.



**Figure 14. Class Average Competitiveness Rating Among Realm Types**

From the chart, it seems that the most competitive players are in the RP PvP type realms, while the least competitive players are in RP realms. Interestingly, PvE and PvP realms have relatively similar competitiveness ratings among participants, indicating that players on PvE and PvP realms are equally competitive.

*Game Values and Competitiveness*

One of the questions on the survey asked what players valued most in the game, and checkboxes with varying game aspects were given. These game aspects selected by participants were then compared to participants’ competitiveness ratings. The chart below (Figure 15) shows the percent distribution of each game aspect that participants selected in comparison to the different competitiveness ratings. Among the game aspects that players were allowed to choose, there was an “other” option that participants could select and state a particular game aspect they valued. From the results, some responses that participants listed that belonged in the “other” option include making money, leveling characters, having fun, forums, and exploring.

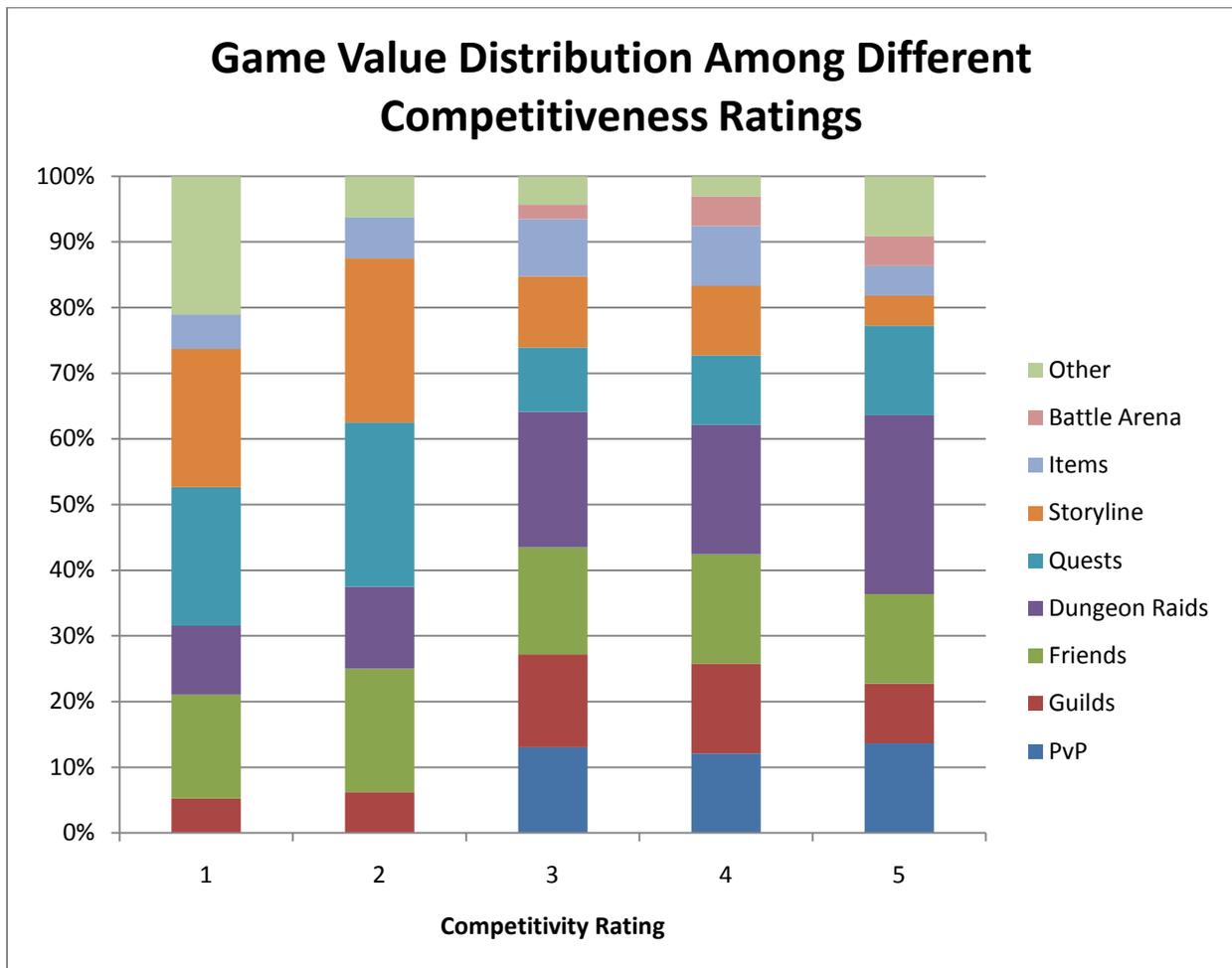


Figure 15. Game Value Distribution among Different Competitiveness

From the graph, it seems that the PvP and Dungeon Raids become more valued by players who consider themselves more competitive. While for players who are less competitive, the storyline and quests of the game are more valued among these players. Players who consider themselves between very competitive and not competitive (competitiveness rating of 3) value guilds the most. Players who are not competitive and players who are slightly competitive (competitiveness rating 1 and 2) do not think the battle arena is important aspect at all to their game experience. Overall, it seems that among all competitiveness levels, friends are valued relatively the same as an important aspect to gameplay experience.

#### *Why do Players like to Play WoW?*

One of the questions that participants were asked on the survey was why they liked to play *WoW*. The responses from this question were looked at and compared to the different competitiveness ratings among participants.

For participants who rated themselves a 1 for competitiveness ( $n = 7$ ), participants stated that *WoW* helps them relax and unwind. A couple of participants also said the storyline was why they chose to play *WoW*. Interestingly, there are also a few participants who said that they don't like to play *WoW* or that they are taking a break from the game:

I used to like to play wow for the raids and the excitement of seeing new instances and killing difficult bosses. These days, I play just to relax and get lost in my own little world and socializing with people. Like I said before, I rarely play the game anymore. I will play more when the new expansion comes out. (Female, 25, Played 4 to 5 years)

There are more things to do in WoW than many other games, and wow has a lot of lore and back-story. (Male, 19, Played 4 to 5 years)

I play WoW to relax. Although some elements of the game can be frustrating (school of hard knocks springs to mind) I really unwind when I play, and I feel it enhances my creativity. It can be a source of inspiration for my art, my writing and small factors in my day-to-day life. (Female, 18, Played 6 months to a year)

Participants who gave themselves a rating of 2 ( $n = 13$ ) seemed to like the game more because of its social aspect. Participants in this category commonly said that they like to “keep in touch” with friends and family through the game. In this group, participants also said they played the game as an “escape” and because it was relaxing and fun:

It is a good way to waste time and served as a form of relaxation. It also was nice to do something on a computer and be able to communicate with a bunch of people. It was also a good way to keep in contact with my brother before we both quit. (Female, 19, Played 4 to 5 years)

I dunno, it's a pretty good escape from real life. It's fun too. (Female, 16, Played 1 to 2 years)

It is a fun game and I enjoy relaxing with my friends on it. (Male, 12, Played 1 to 2 years)

Participants who rated themselves a 3 ( $n = 29$ ) also played the game for its strong social aspect that allowed them to communicate with friends and family. Another common response that showed up was that the game was entertaining, fun, and relaxing. A few participants also said they used the game as an “escape:”

In the past it was for the challenge - working out new strats, working as a team (crowd control and mob control), continually advancing my character's ability to perform. I also enjoy exploring the world, seeing all the secret hidden spot within zones. The inclusion of the dungeon finder has taken away the fun of world travel for me. Now the only reason I play wow is because of the friends I have made within the game. The challenge and fun of the world isn't as compelling as it once was. (Male, 30, Played 4 to 5 years)

It's like a whole other universe that can take you away from the real world, which is such a relief, especially when you're in college. You are pretty much thrown into a different planet while in the comfort of your own chair. (Male, 19, Played 3 to 4 years)

It is cheap entertainment in hard financial times. (Female, 38, Played 5 or more years)

For participants who gave themselves ratings of 4 ( $n = 18$ ), the social aspect of playing with friends and communication is present in a majority of the answers. About a third of the participants also said that playing *WoW* helps them relax and escape from reality, as well as a game that helps them pass time. A few participants also listed that they play the game because of immersion:

It's an enjoyable game that has been a nice time waster over the years with all of the variety. (Male, 20, Played 3 to 4 years)

well some things frustrate me about it but i have to say the whole atmosphere around it is so awesome. despite all of the gameplay that has been changed i really just love the story and love being immersed in it.(Male, 21, 4 to 5 years)

think of it as an escape from reality to a more fun and exciting environment.

Nobody can judge you before they get to know you, and that makes for less hatred and more enjoyment. Plus, you get to do things you'd never get to do in real life

(Male, 17, Played 3 to 4 years)

In the final category, participants who gave themselves a 5 ( $n = 8$ ) played the game because they liked to raid, pvp, and work on alternate characters. A few participants stated they liked the competitive aspects that *WoW* offers. For these participants, it seems that the social aspect of *WoW* is less important:

Player vs Player (Female, 16, Played 6 months to a year)

So I can be competitive in PvE (Female, 23, Played 5 or more years)

It's a fun way to spend my free time...usually.

There is always something to do, whether it be dungeons, raids, professions, pvp, or alts. Btw vent is the stupidest invention ever and I never go on it. Also I don't care much for guilds as I never found one where people didn't act like tards.

(Male, 15, Played 3 to 4 years)

Based on the results, the social aspect is majorly what draws players to play *WoW*. Furthermore, the feeling of immersion in the game and relaxation from playing were the second most common reason for players to play *WoW*. But, for players who think of themselves to be very competitive, raiding and pvp were the main reasons they choose to play the game.

## **Interviews**

Along with the distributed survey, an email interview was given to 2 participants. The responses to the interviews were used to further define the reasons why players are likely to play

*WoW*, even after players have a few level 80 characters. Among the two participants, it seems that the social factor of friends and guild activities is the strongest reason for them to play *WoW*.

#### *Participant 1*

The first participant of in the email interview was a 17-year-old-male. He has played *WoW* for about 2 years; his cousin introduced him to the game. When the participant first began playing *WoW*, he played as a Hunter and wandered around killing “things” with his pet. He currently has a total of two 80 level characters. The participant indicated that he has not played the game for a while, but will begin playing the game again once his summer break starts because of friends in the game. The participant does not consider himself as a competitive player and has never participated in any competitions with cash rewards. The participant plays on the PvP type realm the most.

#### *Participant 2*

The second participant was a 19-year-old-female. This participant has played *WoW* for about a year and half; she had friends that introduced her to the game. When she first began playing *WoW*, she and her friends made level one characters and completed quests together as a group. The participant currently has only one level 80 character, but she has a level 68 character that she plays with the most. The participant does not consider herself to be a very competitive player, and she has never participated in any competitions with cash rewards. She mainly plays on the PvE type realm.

## Discussion

Overall, a lot of the findings in this study reflect the many findings in previous studies related to *WoW*. The social aspect of *WoW* is very important to players, and perhaps many subscribers of game come from recommendations from friends and family to play the game (Ducheneaut et al., 2006a). Furthermore, it seems that players new to the game are more likely to select a race belonging to the Alliance and a class that is better for “soloing” (Yee, 2005). But, the imbalance of characters between the Alliance and Horde factions is a lot less for experienced players; moreover, players who are more experienced are more likely to select the druid class. Players in the game who consider themselves to be competitive are more likely to value PvP and dungeon raiding as activities, while players who are less competitive are more likely to value the quests and storyline of the game. *WoW* offers a widely diverse set of options for a diverse population of subscribers.

One of the interesting finding in this study was the strong value for socializing in the game among players, which reflects Yee’s study of Primary Motivations (Yee, 2008b). Players with different competitiveness almost equally value guilds and friends as an important aspect to the enjoyment of their gaming experience; although, it seems that the most competitive players are slightly less social. The social aspect of *WoW* manages to pull-in new players, as well as cement long term subscribers. Many players are introduced to game through friends and family, and a lot of players continue to play *WoW* because of the connections they have with other players. Perhaps, Blizzard has realized the importance of socializing and cleverly uses this aspect as a marketing strategy to expand its population of players in *WoW*. In the game, there are many incentives and requirements for players to play in groups: better item drops, guild competitions, raids, and specific bosses that are impossible to take without a group. Furthermore, class

specialization encourages further group activities. As a result, players are, in a sense, forced to be social to progress in the game, and through this forced social activity players unknowingly become friends and also bound to the game through friendship and connections. The social requirement probably influences players to look for a dependable friend to play with, and the dependable friends are, often times, real life people and family who players know outside the game. The “social factor” of *WoW* is a powerful appeal of the game (Ducheneaut et al. 2006b).

Perhaps, another factor that is behind the success of *WoW* is the diverse environment that is suitable for new players, but also constantly new to experienced players as well (Ducheneaut et al. 2006a). The majority of players who first began playing the game spend most of their time completing quests and leveling their characters. The leveling system in *WoW* is one that becomes exponentially harder as a player reaches higher levels (Ducheneaut et al. 2006a). New characters can gain levels quite easy in the beginning, and quests are a popular way to level up. As a result, new players can quickly feel absorbed into the game when they first play, and in-game “perks” are awarded to players as they reach specific levels (eg. Dungeon Finder, Mounts), which furthers a player’s adhesion to the game. In a sense, this could be Blizzard’s way of converting new players to experienced or “hardcore” players (Ducheneaut et al. 2006a). But, *WoW* remains enjoyable for veteran players who have completed most or all game content because end game content allows players to participate in raids for equipment and combat other players through PvP. Experienced players are more likely to be in PvP realms compared to new players. Furthermore, Blizzard’s releases updates and expansions to the game that have pulled players taking a “break” back to the game.

In MMOGs, there are usually always players who express differences in their competitiveness; *WoW* offers an environment for players of both extremes and players in

between. Players who are not competitive enjoy the quests and storylines the game has to offer, while competitive players enjoy participating in the Battle Arena and PvP activities. A majority of players play the game because it is relaxing and also an “escape.” The game is relaxing to many players because players feel like they can do almost anything in the game, and it is, in a way, a “second life” for some players. The different realm types provide a further diverse selection for players of different competitiveness; the RP PvP type realms have the most competitive players, whereas the RP type realm has the least. Moreover, the wide selection of races give players almost endless hours of gameplay with different quests and storylines, which is further added to with expansions that Blizzard has previously released and continue to develop. Along with new quests and story material, there is an almost limitless amount of powerful items that players can acquire, with new and limited items that are constantly being brought into the game.

*WoW* is the most successful MMO game today because the game gives players a feeling of “freedom” through its diverse environment. Many players are able to find the specific environment or gameplay aspects that they value because *WoW* provides players with these options. *WoW* satisfies the competitive nature of its subscribers, but it also has an alternate avenue for unambitious players. The game is also successful because it takes advantage of one of the most important aspects of a MMOG: socializing.

### *Limitations*

One of the major limitations is that the surveyed population would most likely not be the best representation of the whole population of *WoW* subscribers because this survey is primarily distributed on *WoW* forums, Facebook groups, and to students in a *WoW* writing and research

course at the University of Denver. WoW players from these three areas are most likely different from the actual population of *WoW* players. The best way to obtain better sample data would be to distribute the survey in the game or conduct observations, but these two methods are far too time-consuming to do within the allotted time for this research project. Also, a sample size of only 75 participants is too small to provide an accurate representation of the 11.5 million *WoW* subscribers.

### *Future Research*

One of the interesting aspects discovered in the in this study was that an overwhelming majority of participants primarily played on PvE and PvP servers, but this majority also applied to realms selected by first-time players; the RP and RP PvP type realms seem to be barely populated by the survey participants. Perhaps RP and RP PvP realm players are a minority among forums and Facebook groups related to *WoW*, or maybe the RP and RP PvP type realms are generally not favored among players. If this is true, how important would it be to keep the RP and RP PvP type realms in *WoW*? This study does not have enough evidence to answer this question, but perhaps future research can take a look into this question.

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