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### Introduction

When I began playing on the Silverhand server, I was aware that it was designed for roleplayers, yet I saw few visible signs of roleplay, and I certainly wasn't roleplaying either. What did it mean to roleplay, exactly? I had a vague and probably inaccurate idea, but wanted to explore this idea further. It seemed kind of scary to me because I thought maybe it was like giving up one's true self. How in-depth did people go? I knew there were varying degrees, but wasn't sure the extent. Were some people just acting, while some unconsciously became their alter-ego? I knew there was more to it than just putting on a phony Elizabethan accent in the chat channels, and I wanted to find out what this alien practice was. After a few misguided attempts, I finally arrived at a research question: "What do gamers identify as their motivations for roleplaying?" This question would help get to the "why" of it all by looking at internal factors that lead people to roleplay.

So what is roleplaying anyway? Making an operant definition of this term is extremely difficult because there are literally hundreds of slightly different definitions out there. It seems better to look at a few different ideas in order to get a general picture. In *As LARP Grows Up—Theory and Methods in LARP from Knudepunkt*, a Nordic live-action roleplaying convention, various schools of roleplaying are represented, and each gives their definition of roleplaying. "Roleplaying is an immersion to an outside consciousness ("a character") and an interaction with its surroundings" (Pohjola, 35), says Mike Pohjola, of the Turku school of roleplaying, which sees art as creativity and personality, and therefore, roleplay as art and entertainment (Pohjola, 37). Joc Koljonen sees roleplaying as "people creating and sharing a story through the process of assuming characters and imagining actions, feelings and dialogue for these characters in interaction with each other and their surroundings" (Koljonen, 48). Stenros and Hakkarainen, of the Meilahti school of LARP, see roleplaying games as "what is created in the interaction between players or between player(s) and gamemaster(s) within a specified diegetic framework" (Stenros and Hakkarainen, 57). They emphasize the interaction more than the rule system, which I will discuss further later. Daniel Mackay, an expert on roleplaying games, quotes David Cook's *Dungeons and Dragons handbook*, saying that roleplaying involves 'the player adopt[ing] the role of a character and then guid[ing] that character through an adventure. The player makes decisions, interacts with other characters and players, and, essentially, 'pretends' to be his character during the course of the game'" (Mackay, 4).

Mackay explains that a true definition is hard to reach, saying that Cook's definition could describe anything from a laser-tag game to a game of cops and robbers (Mackay, 4). He defines the game itself "as an episodic and participatory story-creation system that includes a set of quantified rules that assist a group of players and a gamemaster in determining how their fictional characters' spontaneous interactions are resolved" (Mackay, 5). So what do all these different definitions mean? They can refer to every sort of roleplaying, which entails everything from real life, to chat programs, to live-action roleplay, to tabletop games, to video games (online or not), to online forums, to renaissance fairs, and beyond. What do these four definitions have in common, then? They involve

immersion, interaction, something outside of one's self, creation and imagination, and a story. Rules and other factors matter to varying degrees. So I define roleplaying as people creatively taking on the role of someone outside of themselves to interact and immerse themselves in a world and story. A person who desires to roleplay imagines a character they wish to be, or determines one based on choices, as in World of Warcraft, or by chance, as in Dungeons and Dragons, where dice rolls determine attributes. Once the person has the character, they may become the character to whatever extent they wish, building back stories, props, and developing the character further. They then throw themselves into the imagined world of that character (which can actually be the real world, if desired), and become engrossed and immersed, interacting with other characters, whether online, across a tabletop, or otherwise. Sometimes the interaction is the goal, but more often, there is a quest or adventure which player and character, now a unit (though independent of each other in some ways), must complete.

Now that roleplaying has been explained, and the question of motivation has been introduced, it seems fitting to examine the literature surrounding roleplaying. The overarching ideas will be discussed, but more literature, specific to respondents' answers will be introduced later.

### Literature Review

The most helpful and complete literature I read was Daniel Mackay's book, *The Fantasy Role-Playing Game*, which is an extremely in-depth look at roleplaying, mostly from a tabletop point of view. It contains an incredible amount of theory, and theorists from Foucault to Nietzsche are addressed. He seems to leave no stone unturned, so this book proved invaluable. Mackay divides the book into four parts, the first three of which come from Zimmerman and Lantz's (game theorists) ideas. These are the formal structure, or rules, the social structure, or interaction of players, and the cultural structure, which is what parts of the game are internal, and what parts are entered into the game by its players (Mackay, 3-4). Mackay adds an aesthetic structure to these three, which is essentially related to creation. The players are like artists who are making something as they go (Mackay, 3-4). This is especially relevant to tabletop and live-action sorts of roleplay, but players who engage in roleplay in any format use their imaginations and creativity, forming something new. So now we can see roleplaying in terms of rules, interaction, culture, and art.

Gary Alan Fine, another roleplaying game researcher, and author of *Shared Fantasy*, a book that Mackay used to write his revision of *The Fantasy Role-Playing Game*, wrote during the height of tabletop roleplaying. Tabletop roleplaying, no matter which game you choose to play, has an intricate set of rules. This is in keeping with Mackay's section on rules, yet Fine says they aren't the most important thing:

Like play and games generally, the central purpose of fantasy gaming is the creation of "fun"; "fun" being the only legitimate justification for this use of leisure time. This desire to have "fun" dwarfs all other expressed motives. This means in practice that the official "rules" are less important than the informal decisions that promote engrossment in the fantasy. For the game to work as a game, players must become engrossed, willing to accept the fantasy world which is provided as a "real world." This means that all fantasy must be shaped to what is considered engrossable by the players—and humor, references to sex, and aggressive behavior all contribute to

this. This emphasis on the importance of engrossment is more characteristic of what we term “play” than what we term “games,” which typically have “victory” as the main outcome. Despite the existence of highly technical rules, these rules are secondary to the desires of the players.... Yet the existence of the rules provides a basis from which the players can construct their own engrossment (Fine, 2334-234).

Thus, gaming is for fun, and rules are a basis for the fantasy, not the most important part of the fantasy. Mackay quotes Richard Schechner, who said that a game without rules can be “dangerous” because “players need to feel secure in order to begin playing” (Mackay, 50). A respondent in one of the interviews I conducted explained that in a videogame setting, you roleplay, but you are also bound by the rules. Another respondent described the rules as like in *The Matrix*, in that some can be “broken and bent.” I was also told that the large number of rules didn’t interfere with gameplay in arenas like tabletop roleplaying because once you knew them, that’s all you know, and all the rest was the fantasy in your head. “What makes roleplaying so interesting to a lot of people that have never played is that it’s all technical, but your creativeness comes in, so if the gamemaster tells you that you walk into a cave, or forest, you have to imagine and visualize, goblins, weapons, it releases your creativeness.” Michael Wohl, in his book *Editing Techniques with Final Cut Pro*, discusses much the same thing, in that digital editors’ tools must be learned well so that they actually disappear and editors are focused only on their art, not the “rules” of the program. The fact that rules exist in roleplaying but are not the goal of roleplaying is precisely why I will downplay their presence in this paper. Roleplaying is in the realm of imagination and interaction, not laws and boundaries, though these must exist to give the game shape.

Mackay also discusses social theorist Erving Goffman, who I will also discuss further later on. Mackay discusses Goffman’s Frame Analysis from Gary Alan Fine’s point of view, and adds a few frames of his own. These frames are essentially various realms that gamers find themselves in and can switch between by doing what Goffman calls up-keying or down-keying (Mackay, 53-54). People do this to varying degrees based on the game and what is going on in-game (Mackay, 53-54). Mackay lists the frames that he and Fine developed for roleplaying. They are: “1) the social frame inhabited by the person; 2) the game frame inhabited by the player; 3) the narrative frame inhabited by the raconteur; 4) the constative frame inhabited by the addresser; and 5) the performative frame inhabited by the character” (Mackay, 56). As Mackay explains, the social frame is where the person is coming from, and entails everything they know, the game frame is restricted to players playing the game and relates to those topics, the narrative frame is the frame where anyone telling a tale resides, the constative frame, which is a frame in which one addresses characters (“you feel” etc.), and is generally related to a game master who referees and tells the story of the game the players are playing and that the characters are in, and lastly, the performative frame, which is where the characters are, and where they speak and interact in the first person (Mackay, 53-56). So, to simplify these various frames that roleplayers reside in and can navigate through, there is the real world, the player world, the character world, the world of the storyteller, and the world of the game master. I will not address these last two any further because they are important, but only to tabletop roleplaying, which is only part of what I wish to examine. The main thing to remember about roleplaying is the outside world, the world of those playing a game now, and the world of their characters in-game.

The Turku school of roleplaying sees art as creativity and personality combined. Mackay explains that the appearance of a world created during roleplay is “really nothing more than the cut-and-pasted, remixed, sampled recapitulation of popular culture” (Mackay,

81). Thus, players seem to be postmodern artists, intermingling elements from the social, game, and performative frames. In other words, elements from the world of the person, the player, and the character mix without being referenced to their sources. A person might have read a fantasy book and combined elements from it into the character world for players to use.

So we know that roleplayers roleplay, and in what realms they do it, but why do they do it? What is the motivation? This is, of course, the point of the research I did, but I'd like to offer various reasons before I discuss what players actually said.

A combination of Nick Yee's gaming motivations and Richard Bartle's player types seem to be a large part of the motivations for roleplay. Yee came up with many types of motivation, including immersion and power, based on interviews and other research (Yee, 12), which he boiled down into five main groups. The motivations are: relationship, immersion, grief, achievement, and leadership (Bartle, 152). Bartle's player types are killers, socializers, achievers, and explorers. The set of motivations and set of player types overlap in some ways, but motivations are cognitive, while player types are based on quantifiable behaviors. Relationship and socializer are essentially the same—a desire to interact with other players (and their characters)—so I will use the term “social” for both. Immersion is one of the most predominant motivations for roleplayers, and this factor will encompass the explorer type as well. They are not totally compatible terms, but for the sake of simplification, the desire to be lost in a world will encompass the exploring of this world as well. In my research, I found that many players of tabletop games find killing monsters to be tedious. It's part of the game, but not the point of the game. Thus, I will combine killing with grieving. Grief is generally seen as being harassment towards other players, which is not a big motivating factor in roleplaying, probably due to its interpersonal nature. Thus under grieving, I will include killing, destruction, pranks which players do for fun, as well as the typical sense of hassling other players. An achievement motivation is essentially the same as the achiever player type, and has to do with gaining power and status in-game. Lastly, the leadership motivation has to do with directing and taking charge. This is more of a factor in tabletop games, in which bands of travelers journey through an immersive world, but even so, it is not a terribly common motivation based on my qualitative data, which certainly doesn't necessarily represent the greater population. However, in analyzing my data, the leadership motivation won't be necessary. So, Yee and Bartle's motivations and player types have been reduced to social, immersion, grief, and achievement.

But there are still some key motivations missing. Fine discusses engrossment much as Yee uses immersion. As we discussed in class, immersion is a feeling of presence in-game and engagement is when a player is caught up in a game. Thus, engrossment is in the range of these two terms. Fine says:

A key concept is the engrossment of players in the game. For the game to work as an “aesthetic” experience players must be willing to “bracket” their “natural” selves and enact a fantasy self. They must lose themselves to the game. This engrossment is not total or continuous, but it is what provides for the “fun” within the game. The acceptance of the fantasy world as a (temporarily) real world gives meaning to the game, and the creation of a fantasy scenario and culture must take into account those things that players find engrossing (Fine, 4).

Thus, players play for fun, and this fun is provided by engrossment. Mackay develops the idea of engrossment:

...community is established among the role-players who continue to role-play to satisfy the desire to return to the presence of emotion before its disappearance and subsequent memorialization. This presence, occurring during performative moments of total engrossment, can be likened to what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has called the experience of 'flow' (Mackay, 85).

What Mackay seems to mean, based on his Social Structure chapter, is that players are so involved in the world that they are in that they can connect to each other on the character plane, totally engrossed and in the flow state, and at times are also connected to themselves in the character state. "The player realizes that he is looking not at another person, but at the other side of his own imagination, which is united in the cooperative effort of creating an aesthetic object through game play" (Mackay, 107). Fine adds that "the engrossment is in itself the indicator of success, and the game is structured to maximize this engrossment (Fine, 53). Thus, I will replace the immersion motivation with the more relevant term "engrossment."

There is one last type of motivation which is closely tied to the previous discussions, but is slightly different. One who wants to be engrossed wants to enter the game. The last type of motivation is "escape," or one who wants to exit the real world. Mackay, once again, offers great insight into escapism:

Espen J Aarseth writes about a similar, although most certainly not identical situation, in MUDs where the use of "anonymity, multiple nicknames, identity experiments (e.g. gender swapping), and a generally ludic atmosphere suggests that the participants are not out to strengthen their position in society but rather to escape (momentarily) from it through the creation of an ironic mirror that will allow any symbolic pleasure imaginable" (1997:144). (Online gaming is not face-to-face like tabletop role-playing is, so the online role-player can get away with much more in terms of identity and experimentation). However, this motivation to create imaginative utopic and dystopic unrealities instead of participating in existing social structures suggests a dissatisfaction with the present-day political and economic territories in which role-players live (Mackay, 83).

Some roleplayers take on new personas in new places to get away from real life. They "are explicitly concerned with the development of a cultural system" (Fine, 229), and try to forge a new world outside of the one they live in. Mackay says "the social structure of the role-playing game performance emerges from the opposition between the redemptive possibilities of fantasy and the degenerating influence of modernity" (Mackay, 107). Roleplayers who are motivated by escape, as many are, seek to create new culture due to dissatisfaction with some aspects of the one they exist in, also known as the social frame.

So now we can see roleplay as interaction, culture, and art, which exists in the frames of the person (social), the player (game), and the character (performative), motivated by social, engrossment, escape, grief, and achievement reasons.

## Study Design and Considerations

In the qualitative roleplaying research I undertook, I only had one basic research question: “what do gamers identify as their motivations for roleplaying?” This question was basic, but included the sample I wanted—gamers—and the reason for studying them—their motivations. I then developed a series of questions for personal interviews, many of which had been on my mind for quite a while, which I ended up using in an online survey as well. I will discuss these questions in the results section of the paper. I knew the sample group had to consist of roleplayers, and chose to use a “purposive sample of convenience,” meaning that I would talk to people who were willing to talk to me.

Now that I had a group to look at, I needed to know something about this group, and to specify the roleplaying types I wanted to look at a bit. Fine provides some general characteristics of the roleplaying community, which are somewhat helpful but rather outdated. He explains that the community, especially the tabletop roleplaying community, is largely young, male, well-educated, imaginative, and of varied political leanings. The most important factor here is imagination. Roleplay falls under Caillois’ category of mimicry games (Salen and Zimmerman, 31), and roleplayers must be imaginative by definition. The other factors mentioned might be transferred from real life into the realm of imagination, explaining the presence of male fantasy, violence, politics, as well as any number of things derived from a strong education, especially in relation to game aspects such as medieval warfare or history. I also had to decide what types of roleplaying I wanted to look at. The focus was to be video games, but since tabletop gaming (derived from wargames and usually set in a world of fantasy) is widespread, has a solid body of literature, and accessible interview subjects, I chose to focus on this as well. It is similar in many ways to video games, as Mackay explains:

The computer serves as a surrogate gamemaster. These characteristics, derived from tabletop role-playing games, are the following: 1) 3-D, first-person, perspective, immersive game play; 2) nonplayer-character interaction; 3) responsive environment; 4) quantified assessment of character’s abilities; 5) access to a map of the game environment (Mackay, 24).

Focusing on video games and tabletop roleplaying, then, made good sense. I was interested in other ways people roleplayed, which I tried to learn about during my sampling, but I didn’t want to focus on them because they were generally very small, devoted groups. The specificity of the groups would lead to sidetracking of the focus.

I had always intended to do an online survey due to a wider range of sampling and ease of use. The questions that I developed for the personal interviews were combined into ten survey questions. A couple of questions had to be combined in ways that were somewhat odd, due to the obnoxious fact that the sampling tool I used, [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com), only allowed ten questions per survey for free. The survey had three somewhat open-ended questions, which gave choices, of which more than one could be selected, in addition to an option for “other,” in which respondents could reply more specifically to the question if one of the choices they wanted wasn’t provided. The other seven questions were open-ended, with essay-style response slots. One of the seven open-ended questions was simply a place to provide an alias for anonymity if I needed to use some sort of name. Thus, this question is unimportant for the actual survey data. The personal interviews and the online survey covered the same ground, then, in somewhat different ways.

I had to figure out how to talk to roleplayers. Since they are a specific group of people, there are specific places to look. I used the survey in the roleplaying and off-topic

forum areas of the official World of Warcraft website and in the general and off-topic forum areas of the World of Warcraft Roleplaying Association website. The dedicated nature of the World of Warcraft Roleplaying Association website seemed perfect, as did the official WoW roleplaying forum. The off-topic area on the official website seemed to be a good backup. It seemed logical that only roleplayers would respond due to the amount of first-hand knowledge required to complete the survey, but of course, on the internet, nothing can be guaranteed. The assumption that more dedicated roleplayers would read roleplaying forums was something I was hoping for, though that assumption was not necessarily true either. It occurred to me that perhaps the most devout roleplayers might not: a. know that they were roleplaying because they were so immersed in their alternate reality, or b. read the forums because it breaks the fantasy of roleplay. These ideas might potentially be true, but nearly everyone roleplayed for enjoyment, and these two ideas were perhaps rooted in misconceptions about the extremity of roleplay. I was prepared for skewed results due to the inaccuracy of the internet, but this was something that couldn't be avoided if it did arise. I received thirty responses to the survey, plus a few posts to the forums (which I did not use due to their unofficial nature). There were also some jokes made in the forums, and a couple of people encouraged others to take the survey because it helped them to understand their own motivations, which was an interesting but unexpected result. One response to the actual survey was discarded because the person only provided an alias and no answers. The turnout was unexpected, and due to some posts and other responses, I got the impression that some roleplayers: a. took pride in the fact that they roleplayed, b. felt they were misunderstood in the eyes of the general public, and c. were interested in understanding their own reasons for roleplaying. These factors, I believe, led to the large number of responses.

I also did three in-depth personal interviews using the same questions as the survey. I did these first, and between the three official interviews and an informal talk about tabletop gaming (which I got permission to use in the paper), hours had passed. The information I obtained was similar to the online survey, but of course, far more detailed. I also learned some great background information, and the interview subjects drew links which I would never have seen. These interviews were done locally at a venue which caters to many Magic: The Gathering players.

## Results and Discussion

After the data was collected, it was time to look through it and find patterns and themes. I think it will be clearest if I go through each survey question one by one, discussing each implication. I will sometimes keep the personal interviews and online survey slightly separate because the personal interviews are far more detailed. Another consideration before delving deeper is the idea of "fun." Many respondents use this term, and fun is a valid reason for roleplaying. It is, however, a more overarching theme, and I wish to see motivations for roleplaying a little more specifically. If a respondent gives "fun" for an answer, I will try to discern what motivation etc. they are referring to based on their other answers. If this is not possible, then that is a limitation in my survey, not in the response. Also, if many players said the same things, I will quantify these, if they are quantifiable, rather than quote thirty-two different participants. I will also punctuate responses if necessary, but be sure to keep the same intent. I also refer to players as "participants," "interview subjects," and so on. This is to ensure the anonymity I guaranteed every person, and is not intended to distance myself as though I am a scientist and players are lab rats. The responses were extremely well informed and insightful, so condescension is certainly not the intent. Lastly, there are a number of outliers in the responses which don't specifically fit into any area discussed so far, but are worth including for the sake of interest.

The first question simply asked for an alias because anonymity was guaranteed to participants. I thought that asking for, rather than assigning, a pseudonym might make things a little more fun and participatory. This question is irrelevant to actual data.

The second question asked for a definition of roleplay[ing]. This question is mostly irrelevant at this point as well, since I have defined how I am using roleplay in this paper, but it is interesting to hear what roleplaying means to actual roleplayers. I will quote and comment on the most interesting, varied, and insightful definitions below:

- "It's kind of like make-believe with a set of rules you can use." [Player imagination and rules to give it form]
- "Roleplaying would be an escape of reality, and escape to more of an adventure life than what you have now, since a lot of people are living in life right now and want to free themselves from it, so for a few hours, they can escape from it and let their inhibitions free..." [Escapism, dissatisfaction with real-life in some ways]
- "To me it's creating a character and using your imagination to see and play things that aren't in this world." [Focus on imagination and creation, aspects of art]
- "To enter mentally into a role or character other than your own." [A focus on mental aspects, rather than physical or otherwise]
- "Pretending to be a character in a story. In pen and paper roleplaying, you are forging a story with other players as participants and a gamemaster as a guide. The gamemaster sets the scenario, theme, and tone and usually allows the players to advance a plot, whether scripted or made up on the fly. In computerized roleplaying, roleplayers generally emote their character's social actions and spend a lot of time talking and socializing. Most roleplayers see combat as a way to resolve disagreements and less as a way to advance their character." [An explanation of tabletop roleplaying and an emphasis on the social aspects]
- "Blowing shit up. Becoming someone of great power other than myself. Heck, to get really cool items to beat the hell out of monsters!" [Griefing emphasis]
- "Becoming someone else. Molding your speech and actions into that of your characters. Responding how they would to situations and people, loving as they love, hating as they hate. Putting your own feelings/emotions aside and immersing yourself in the life of another." [Heavy emotional content, immersion as well]
- "To create a character with a background story and personality and then to extend the character by acting it out and interacting with other such characters/RPers." [Emphasis on creation, acting, and interacting]
- "Playing as a character of your own making, in character. By no means is your character a manifestation of yourself, rather an entirely different person." [Clear distinction between frames of person and character]
- "To take on the role of a character and act him/her out with other people." [Focus on acting, and social interacting]

Based on the responses quoted above, it's clear that the roleplayers I heard from and talked to put a heavy emphasis on creating, interacting, immersion, emotions, and escapism,

among other things. The lines between motivation, frames, interaction, culture, art, and the definition of roleplay I use in throughout the paper (people creatively taking on the role of someone outside of themselves to interact and immerse themselves in a world and story) are blurred.

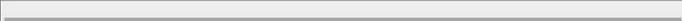
The third question I asked was “how long do you roleplay (in increments of time, i.e. hours, weeks, etc.)?” I was interested in seeing how involving roleplaying was in terms of time. If I had this project to do again, I would ask a little more specifically, because an uninterrupted duration of time (related to flow and engrossment) is more useful than a segmented total amount of time, which is how the question was often answered due to its wording. I asked the question open-endedly because it was difficult to determine what increments of time to use. I had no idea how long people roleplayed, so I let them tell me. This is problematic because this is an easily quantifiable question that was answered qualitatively, making analysis more of a chore. I asked this question in conjunction with questions about roleplaying venues and partners to the personal interview subjects, but I will treat the answers separately to help keep continuity between the personal interviews and the survey respondents. The data is very hard to convey for this many people, so I will make a range of various answers again:

- 4-12 hours a week
- whenever playing
- 3-16 hours a week
- 2-6 hours a week
- 6-10 hours a week
- 1-3 hours on weekdays, 5-6 on weekends
- a few hours a day sporadically
- roleplay half the time online
- don't keep track
- 3-4 hours a day, 6 hours on Sunday
- 2-3 hours a day
- roleplaying for about a year
- “Hours, although there are always out-of-character moments.”
- “I'm not sure if I've ever stopped. I believe I am constantly roleplaying subconsciously. Or perhaps I'm not roleplaying at all, and I am what I am trying to be. It is hard to tell.”
- 2-3 hours a day, 36+ on the weekends
- ten month tabletop campaign 5-9 hours each weekend
- formerly 40-50 hours a week online, roleplaying the whole time
- once a week, 2-4 hours per campaign

Clearly there is a wide range of roleplaying time, as well as the seriousness with which each player roleplays. Some roleplay every time they log into a game or do a tabletop campaign (in which roleplaying is essentially required in some form), some do it for fun when they want to, or half of the time they're on, some play a couple of hours a day to more than 40 hours a week. This question should have been quantifiable for ease and accuracy, but the fact that it wasn't brought up some more varied responses, which is a bonus.

The fourth question I asked was about what arenas people roleplayed in. I asked this open-endedly to the personal interview subjects, and in a multiple choice way (with an “other” option to the online survey respondents). The question was “I roleplay (check all that apply):” and the options were “in my everyday life,” “in tabletop games,” “in Live Action Roleplay,” “in Massively Multiplayer Online Games like World of Warcraft or

EverQuest," or "other (please specify)." There were some factors which I left out, such as chat and online forum roleplaying. The results are below:

4. I roleplay (check all that apply):			
		Response Percent	Response Total
In my everyday life		10.3%	3
In tabletop games		41.4%	12
In Live Action Roleplay		13.8%	4
<b>In Massively Multiplayer Online Games like World of Warcraft or Everquest</b>		<b>96.6%</b>	<b>28</b>
<input type="button" value="View"/> Other (please specify)		13.8%	4
<b>Total Respondents</b>			<b>29</b>
(skipped this question)			0

There were options for multiple responses, since players often roleplay in more than one venue. Clearly the majority of the respondents roleplay in MMORPGs and in tabletop games. It is odd, in fact that only 28 of the 29 players roleplay in MMORPGs since the survey was posted in World of Warcraft forums. Perhaps the outlier was a forum roleplayer. In response to the "other" category, two players said they roleplayed in forums, one player said that they roleplayed on MSN Messenger, and one player said they roleplayed at renaissance faires. The results of the online survey respondents were not surprising, tabletop roleplaying and video game roleplaying (especially in an online fantasy game like World of Warcraft, which I originally set out to study) are the most prevalent types of roleplaying in general, so the sample reflects the whole. Live action roleplaying is more rare, and roleplaying in everyday life in the sense of roleplaying previously discussed, very rare. I will come back to everyday life roleplaying later on. The personal interview respondents generally said the same things as the online respondents—all three roleplayed in both videogames (one in RPGs, one in MMORPGs, and one in many different types of video games, even action) and tabletop games.

The fifth question I asked was also a basic quantifiable question—"I roleplay (check all that apply):" with the options being "by myself," "with friends," "with people I don't know," and "with my significant other." This question was designed to get at the social aspect of roleplay, perhaps its key aspect. The online results were:

5. I roleplay (check all that apply):			
		Response Percent	Response Total
By myself		65.5%	19
With friends		86.2%	25
<b>With people I don't know</b>		<b>89.7%</b>	<b>26</b>
With my significant other		27.6%	8
<b>Total Respondents</b>			<b>29</b>
(skipped this question)			0

There were more varied results here, and many people roleplayed with different partners. I didn't give an "other" option here because there didn't seem to be any other options. Most people roleplayed with friends or people they didn't know. Roleplaying with friends could be in LARP, in video games, or in tabletop games. Roleplaying with people the respondents didn't know was the predominant answer, and most likely a reflection of the thousands of people who play MMORPGs like World of Warcraft, where the survey was posted. Players who roleplayed by themselves might be forum or chat roleplayers, might play offline games,

might roleplay in their everyday lives, or might consider playing online, even in an MMORPG, as by themselves. Those who said they roleplayed with their significant other were, by definition, people who had to have significant others. The personal respondents' answers coincided with the online respondents once again, with friends, people they didn't know, and alone as the chief answers. All three people played with others in tabletop games and also played games online, by themselves, or both. The respondents online and interviewed, then, reflect the highly social nature of roleplaying because nearly all, if not all, of these people roleplay with others, even if they roleplay by themselves sometimes.

The sixth question I asked was about motivations, so I will save that for the end and discuss it in detail. I will now look at the seventh question I asked, which was "do you think everyone roleplays in some sense, whether they call it roleplaying or not?" The last part ("whether they call it roleplaying or not") was an addendum that I added for the online survey only, to help clarify that roleplay is meant in a more general sense than the previous definition this paper has been using. This question was based on Erving Goffman's book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. In the preface, Goffman explains the basis for his book:

I shall consider the way in which the individual in ordinary work situations presents himself and his activity to others, the ways in which he guides and controls the impression they form of him, and the kinds of things he may and may not do while sustaining his performance before them.

He is concerned with how people interact and show themselves to others, explaining that others attempt to learn all that they can about another person from the first time they meet (Goffman, 1). Thus, "in Ichheiser's [a sociologist] terms, the individual will have to act so that he intentionally or unintentionally expresses himself, and the others will in turn have to be impressed in some way by him" (Goffman, 2). This is interesting in terms of roleplay, because it appears that every person plays roles in various instances, both intentionally, through "feigning" and "deceit" (Goffman 2-4), which is not always malicious, and unintentionally. "At one extreme, one finds that the performer can be fully taken in by his own act; he can be sincerely convinced that the impression of reality which he stages is the real reality...At the other extreme, we find that the performer may not be taken in at all by his own routine" (Goffman, 17). People play the roles of "brother," "daughter," "student," "teacher," and others, but they also control others' impressions of them by acting. This roleplaying is subtle and not always on purpose, as Goffman said, but it is certainly roleplay.

In the definition of roleplay that has been used throughout this paper, roleplay is taking on the guise of another to interact and immerse. In Goffman's sense, roleplayers take on a different guise (perhaps a splinter of themselves or something fictional), not for the purpose of interacting with others, but when they interact with others. They are roleplaying whenever they are interacting! Goffman's ideas made me curious about what roleplayers thought about those who would deem themselves "non-roleplayers." Are we all alike, in that we roleplay? The occasional impression I got from roleplayers was that they considered themselves misunderstood by some people. It would be ironic to think that those who misunderstood roleplayers were actually roleplayers themselves. There were varied responses from the online survey takers—some responded in Goffman's sense, some responded to the idea of gamers roleplaying even when they don't consider themselves to be. I will quote a range of responses below:

- "Yes I do. Even the l33t d3wds are RPing whether they like it or not. If they're acting differently in game than they do IRL, then they're RPing to an extent. "Sadly, for

many people, this difference is simply acting without inhibitions and getting the chance to play the bully.”

- I personally think that people are \*always\* roleplaying. Whether that means roleplaying a clerk at a bookstore, or a college student, etc. It is all essentially roleplaying. But that is another story... As far as MMORPGs go, yes, I think that to an extent everyone roleplays just by assuming the persona of their character. Although most people have different ideas about what "good" roleplay is and will claim that those who do not fall under their definition of what is "good" are not actually roleplaying. My personal definition of "good" roleplay in, for instance, WoW, would really be any character who avoids real world references, terminology, and keeps themselves limited to the language and events that are appropriate for the WoW universe. Back story and an idea for a character arc are great, but not what I consider essential.”
- “No, I don't think that everyone does it. Roleplaying requires that the participants play cooperatively to create a story that is fun for everyone involved. It is primarily a tool for stimulating the mind.”
- “I think everyone does to lesser degrees. For example, at work. When you're smiling at a customer and pretending to be interested in their third Grandchildren's horrible case of the chicken pox, when in your head you're secretly wanting to throw them into the street and lock the doors - that's roleplaying. Some take it farther than others, some put more thought and effort into it. WoW for example, is a brilliant community of artists and writers. Just sitting in a tavern for a few hours will show you glimpses of the great minds working behind each of the characters.”
- “Everyday life is a game. You have your role in life, even though you can choose to make it yourself or play by other people's rules.”
- “Well if you count people being fake and acting like someone that they aren't, then I would say most people do.”
- “Yes. Children play 'house,' or 'army men,' or similar free-form play-acting. Adults do it on a grander scale, and tend to delude themselves with games like 'I love my job and want to make my boss happy,' or 'I'm a suburban housewife living the American Dream.'”
- “In the most strict sense, yes. Everyone adopts roles in everyday life to help them achieve different ends. To be perfectly honest, if we didn't role play just a little each day, the world would be a much more ugly, violent place. Even something as simple as a lie is playing a role: I told the people at work I was busy on the stocktake today while I filled out this sheet, thus I played the role of a good worker while in reality I'm getting my revenge for working this Saturday without overtime pay... bwwhahaha! The example aside, yes, everyone wears a mask and plays a role each day...”

It's clear that the roleplayers who responded to the survey are hilarious, besides being extremely insightful. The personal interview subjects were equally as helpful. One person said “some people, when they make a character in Dungeons and Dragons, design it around their personal self, so they try to bring aspects of themselves into it.” Here, he is talking about roleplay in everyday life by bringing everyday life into roleplay. Another interview subject said that roleplaying exists in everyday life in a very Machiavellian way:

[E]specially in the office. You can look at office politics at the same time as court politics in medieval times. People were vying for power [and trying to] get above other people, so you can see the court played out in the office space, when people want a new position or more power, they will do what they can to undermine others or outmaneuver their boss to a new position. There's a lot of psychology in it. [Roleplaying] is psychological and visionary, [those are] the biggest thing[s].

The other person I talked to was insightful as well: "everybody does that [roleplaying] to an extent, if you're going for a job interview, you put on a professional aura, when with friends, you're whoever you are with them. There are some people who are fake and put on a front." Clearly, the roleplayers I talked to don't just see roleplaying as wizards and hit points. Roleplaying for them does exist in everyday life, for the most part, and everyone engages in it.

The eighth question I asked was "when I roleplay, I (check all that apply):" and the options were "find myself roleplaying consciously," "don't know I'm roleplaying until afterwards," "don't ever stop roleplaying, but I'm aware I am doing it," and "other (please specify)." This question allowed multiple responses, which can be seen below:

8. When I roleplay, I (check all that apply):			
		Response Percent	Response Total
<b>Find myself roleplaying consciously</b>		85.2%	23
Don't know I'm roleplaying until afterwards		14.8%	4
Don't ever stop roleplaying, but I'm aware I am doing it		22.2%	6
<a href="#">View</a> Other (please specify)		7.4%	2
<b>Total Respondents</b>			<b>27</b>
(skipped this question)			2

Clearly for the large majority of the people who responded, roleplaying is a choice. I asked the question because I wasn't sure how people roleplayed, and was interested in whether it was a trancelike or constant state, which for some people, it was. In the "other" category, one person said that they spoke in one chat channel in character and one channel as themselves, while another respondent said that they participated in all three, by being conscious of decisions at first, then having the character become "second nature. I thought of this question after I had done my personal interviews, so only online respondents answered.

For the ninth question, I asked, "do you become your RP character, or are you play-acting? Does this character have aspects of yourself in it? How is your character different from your real-life self? Does time fly by when you're in character?" This question was a mish-mash, but generally related, though the last part, about time flying, is slightly out of place. This combination question became necessary, however, because the survey tool forced me to use only ten questions at maximum. What I wanted to know was: a. was roleplaying acting or real? b. was character derived from the person (was the performative frame from the social frame)? c. in what way was the character different from the person/player? and d. what was the flow state like when in character? I will answer this question using only a few quotations, and will include a few good examples from a,b,c, and d.

In response to the question "is roleplaying acting or real," sample responses included:

- "I consider it play acting, but I consider a lot of my day to day life play acting as well."
- "I try to become the character and as the character grows and the longer I play the character the easier it is to simply 'be' the character instead of acting it out."
- "I become my RP character. She has a life of her own, and I find myself acting as she acts, and thinking how she thinks."
- "I neither become my character nor play-act—I tend to find the middle ground there."

The rest of the responses are similar, and split about 50/50 between play acting and actually becoming a character.

In response to the questions "---" and "---," some participants mentioned the following:

- "Characters vary as to how different they are from me some are not like me at all."
- "All characters will have some aspect of their controller. However when you RP a villain (As I've chosen to do, since heroes are a dime a dozen.) many of your traits and motivations come from outside yourself. I chose Hannibal Lecter crossed with my ex-wife as role models for my favorite villain."
- "My characters always have some element of myself projected onto them, although I find that the most interesting characters are usually the ones least like me."
- "I become my RP character. She has a life of her own, and I find myself acting as she acts, and thinking how she thinks. I know her basic sense of morality, and the things that drive her—and I find myself naturally turning to those things in situations. Whereas I used to have to make an effort, her personality now comes naturally to me. She does have aspects of myself in her, some of my faults, and some of my strengths."
- "I keep most of my personality; ironically enough I happened to pick an RP character that's a lot like me... eats meat...kinda grunty...likes to hit things... am I an orc?"

Nearly everyone I heard from or spoke to felt that their characters had aspects of themselves in them, to varying extents, but also differed from them in ways other than obvious traits like magic power.

Add more descriptive transition here.

- "Time definitely goes quickly when I am wrapped up in immersive RP."
- "In really good stories or play sessions, time does fly by, to the point of not realizing you have been playing all night. Those sessions usually end with everyone sleeping on the floor or crawling home to bed."
- "Time can fly by when I am in a strong role play session but this does not happen every time I am playing my characters."
- "Time really does fly by. I can be in character and play all night without realizing it."

I've actually looked outside and shocked myself that the sun had come up."

These responses seem fairly typical as well; time flies when things are engaging and immersive, when players are engrossed and in the flow state. The personal interviews I conducted all had similar results as well. "when it comes to the game, for me personally, I have an ideal idea of what I want the character to be and I try to go towards that as much as possible. Because it's so social, it's easy to break from game to talk as yourself, so a lot of you comes out either way and lines are blurred..." Here, the interview subject explains up and down-keying through frames without conscious shifts, meaning that character, player, and person get accidentally mixed. The frames leak from one to the next, which is why he describes his character as becoming more like himself over time. Another person I interviewed prefers tabletop roleplaying because it's a "more personal reaction with friends and other people. You've got [all of their] alter egos sitting at the table." Thus, he likes to play an evil character largely unlike himself as his alter ego. This helps him see his own faults, and he explains that roleplaying makes you "see your own limitations in [your] own life." According to this, roleplaying can be a psychological tool. He also believes that it's best to leave as much of yourself behind, if you can, however, because it makes the now of the game more immersive. The other interview subject I spoke with explained that it's pretty typical to roleplay as the same character, and that he likes to include aspects of himself because it "gives him a sort of freedom," most likely because the character has aspects of him, but is not him. His character is derived from a variety of sources and gives him a chance to "let loose" and be who he wants to outside of his actual self. This is linked to escapism to a high degree. All three subjects agreed that time raced by when things were going well, story-wise etc.

The last question I asked the participants was another combination jumble, though less complex than the previous question: "What is your goal when you roleplay? Would you consider yourself an artist who is creating something when you roleplay?" The goal aspect of the question was a little bit different from motivations, much as Yee's motivations are different from Bartle's player types. One is in the realm of the mind, one is in the realm of the physical. Motivations are cognitive, goals and player types are more tangible and quantifiable. I knew this question was similar to the motivation question, but I was hoping to get some more depth to add to the motivation question. The art question was a question which was spurred by Mackay's discussion of roleplaying as art, and was further developed by Pohjola in his article about Turku LARP. I thought this question was one that is similar to a "self-fulfilling prophecy" in psychology. I thought the fact that the question was even posed meant that people would most likely answer favorably due to the positive perception of the term "art." Fortunately the question was posed in a qualitative way, allowing for some variation. I will discuss this latter part of the question first, which is slightly more complex but less crucial than the former part of the question. Here are some representative quotations:

- "Certainly it is an art that is in its infancy, but art none the less."
- "I consider roleplaying less about being an artist, but more about being a cross between an author and an actor. It is no coincidence that the White Wolf system of gaming uses the terms "Storyteller" and "Storytelling". The author part is in creating a history for your character, chronicling things that happen outside the experience of the game and in the creating of stories as the Gamemaster. The actor part is twofold. In pen and paper, it's emoting your character out loud. Showing the anger, sadness, happiness, and what actions your character performs. In computer roleplaying, it's about emoting, but doing it in text."

- “I do not consider myself an artist, I consider myself a game player who likes to role play as part of my game playing experiences.”
- “An artist? what the heck does that mean? this is a fucking game! not RL!”
- “I think everybody that roleplays is an artist. They're making a world, a life out of just a few shapes and some color.”
- “I'd say I consider myself an artist. I put a lot of thought into my roleplaying 'acts'.”
- “.I am not creating something new, just pulling out of me.”

The respondents seem split about roleplay as art, which surprised me. It is definitely in the realm of drama and creation, and seems very artistic. Based on the “no” responses, they seem to generally be either a. a desire to keep games as games and nothing more, which is a common reaction to researchers in MMO worlds, or b. modesty on the part of the players who don't consider themselves artists. The personal interview respondents saw roleplaying as art, saying that “you create as you go,” and that roleplaying is a “creative outlet...[that] has textures and layers, like a tapestry almost. You have the skeleton of it all, and every players adds so much to it through their character's personality.” The last respondent said that “being able to have vision is the biggest part of roleplaying.”

Now, what did players see as their goals for roleplay? Enjoyment and fun, enriching the game experience, having your character remembered, grieving, seeing the world from a different perspective, social reasons, seeing other players reactions to the character, trying out ideas, telling a story, immersion, interaction, creating something beautiful, or to purposely have no goal at all were all responses from real players. These can all be simplified and categorized into the previous categories of motivations— social, engrossment, escape, grief, and achievement. Fun might be an escape, enriching the game experience is engrossment, being remembered has to do with achievement and engrossment, grieving has to do with the grieving motivation, seeing the world in a new light is related to engrossment and escape (from the day-to-day world), social reasons are obvious socially motivated, seeing other players reactions has to do with engrossment in the world (performative frame), trying out ideas has to do with the art aspects of roleplay as well as the escape motivation (if the idea can't be tried in real life), telling a story has to do with the narrative frame, immersion has to do with engrossment, interaction has to do mainly with the social frame, creating something beautiful is in the art realm, and having no goal at all is involved with total engrossment such that goals become irrelevant (or if one wants to be cynical, having no goal may be seen as a goal in itself, though this is probably a little farfetched). Thus, goals fall under the realm of motivations, but as I mentioned earlier, are slightly different. Hence they can encompass frame, interaction, cultural, or art aspects as well.

With all of this information and data on our plates, then, examining what players see as their motivations is not too difficult. Remember that the motivations previously determined are social, engrossment, escape, grief, and achievement. I will look at all thirty-two respondents' motivations and categorize them (personal interviews and online survey participants will be lumped together in this case). Some respondents identify more than one motivation, and all motivations will be taken into account. Also, some respondents identify motivations throughout without explicitly stating them as motivations. I will use these here if they are clear. Here are some examples:

- “[Roleplaying] is fun and social. It's a bunch of just geeks geeking-out and having fun; you get to pretend to be somebody else for a while.”

- “To me it’s an escape, you can beat a video game or table top game—you can immerse yourself and escape in it even if it’s for a short amount of time.”
- “I roleplay for the sense of adventure.”
- “It is a way to let out all the voices in my head that want something to say, also it is an excuse to “kill” things that does not involve going to jail. Mostly it is the most immersive and complicated type of game to play.”
- “Role playing allows just a little bit of [your] dream[s] to live and be experienced.”
- “I can't help it. It's a part of who I am. We all want to improve ourselves, right? What better way to do so than to become something better than us, or else to give ourselves faults that we normally could overcome? Aside from that, it's an excellent experiment in psychology.”

After analysis, there are a number of flaws in the setup, which I will discuss later. The rough numbers show a small number of grief motivations (about 4), a small number of social motivations (about 4, though probably more than this, though some weren’t explicit), a very small number of achievement motivations (1, so achievement is clearly not the point for the roleplayers I talked to), a fairly large number of escape motivations (14), and a very large number of engrossment motivations (19). Some motivations couldn’t be quantified (“because it’s a great experience,” “I can’t help it”), and other categories that weren’t exactly motivations arose. One was adventure, which I included under escape. Another common one was entertainment alone, so it was hard to determine motivations much further than that at times. The most important ones that were related and generally unqualifiable were creative motivations, imagination motivations, and challenge motivations (in a mind challenge sense, not in an achiever overcoming an obstacle sense). These fall under the realms of roleplay discussed earlier, in terms of interaction, culture, and art, which are outside motivation. Perhaps the lack of a creativity motivation is a flaw in my research. Another difficulty was when a respondent talked about experiencing through another. This could be put under either the escape category (escaping one’s self), or under the engrossment category (experiencing in another world). I placed this identified motivation under the immersion motivation, which came out as the largest motivation category. On the whole, the motivations and the responses corresponded fairly well, but there were definitely unexpected responses which needed new motivation categories.

Lastly, and briefly, there are the outliers. I identified a few, but two are of more interest than the rest. The first relates to something a personal interview subject said to me: “The reason I roleplay is for the sense of adventure. I feel like I was born in the wrong time...I love the medieval era and wish I was born then...I’m a very adventurous type of person.” Fine mentions this idea, saying, “one motivation for gaming discussed in chapter 2 [about players] is the desire to immerse oneself in a strange environment and test oneself to determine if one could have survived in that perilous time...this type of gamer does not separate the information which he (the player) possesses from that known by his character” (Fine, 207). The adventure and sense of being out of place is related to escapism and a desire for immersion, but can’t quite be categorized.

The other important outlier I discovered, I actually didn’t discover at all. This is the idea of writing as roleplaying, which was brought to my attention by a personal interview subject, and which I have come across in at least four different interviews or responses from players. This really brought things home for me, and hopefully others as well. I do

not roleplay myself, but I have written stories, and can see exactly what is going on with the characters and the world I am creating. Using this same logic, a survey respondent stated that everyone had roleplayed before. The personal interview subject who told me about writing as roleplay said, "I picture everything that's going on as I'm writing it down, as you write, you roleplay by yourself, creating the world, characters, and situation. You play a god in your own world like that..." It appears that a writer is immersed in the world that he or she is creating and a sense of immersion and flow state when writing are closely linked to roleplaying.

### Conclusion

Roleplay exists as interaction between players and characters, the culture of the game and of the outside world brought into the game, and art in the form of creativity and personality. It lies in the frames of the person, the player, and the character, combining these through up-keying and down-keying. Roleplayers enter an immersive world for the sake of achievement, grief, social interaction, total engrossment in the game, and escape from a dissatisfactory real world. The sample I looked at had obviously given great thought to their craft and were able to articulate the subtleties and largely mental and unspoken elements of roleplaying clearly. They clearly do not necessarily represent the greater population of roleplayers, nor are they able to speak for them, but their insights provide valuable information about the specific roleplaying sample and can be used as a starting point for further research. The field is relatively un-examined; possibly those who know it best prefer to write fantasy rather than fact. There is still so much that could be examined. I found that the achievement motivation, at least in my study, was not nearly as important as a creativity motivation might be. In the future, researchers could take a look at the creativity and mental exercise behind roleplaying, and at roleplayers as creators. Does roleplay transform some leisure activities into art forms and scholarly endeavors? No matter the case, there is so much that could be learned from roleplayers, who seem to be incredibly creative and self-aware by definition. Roleplaying is based in interaction and can be applied to any person in their everyday life. This is perhaps the most fascinating aspect of roleplay, and perhaps by talking with devoted roleplayers who have a heightened self-awareness and sensitivity to others, we could develop the roleplay that we all engage in to a helpful degree. It seems that roleplaying is, at the least, a healthy mental exercise which can help us learn what makes us tick.

## 1. Survey:

Your anonymity is guaranteed; if you have any questions, please feel free to e-mail me at: rpggrahamd@yahoo.com

Thank you so much for your participation, you can see the results of the study online in May.

**1. Please provide an alias you wish to use, for the sake of anonymity:**

**2. Please provide your definition of roleplay[ing]:**

**3. How long do you roleplay (in increments of time, i.e. hours, weeks, etc.)?**

**4. I roleplay (check all that apply):**

In my everyday life

In tabletop games

In Live Action Roleplay

In Massively Multiplayer Online Games like World of Warcraft or Everquest

Other (please specify)

**5. I roleplay (check all that apply):**

By myself

With friends

With people I don't know

With my significant other

**6. What do you see as your motivations for roleplaying? (please be as detailed as possible):**

**7. Do you think that everyone roleplays in some sense, whether they call it roleplaying or not?**

**8. When I roleplay, I (check all that apply):**

Find myself roleplaying consciously

Don't know I'm roleplaying until afterwards

Don't ever stop roleplaying, but I'm aware I am doing it

Other (please specify)

**9. Do you become your RP character, or are you play-acting? Does this character have aspects of yourself in it? How is your character different from your real-life self? Does time fly by when you're in character?**

**10. What is your goal when you roleplay? Would you consider yourself an artist who is creating something when you roleplay?**

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