

Nicole G., "What are the Uses and Gratifications Players Seek from Guilds in World of Warcraft?" June 2005.

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INTRODUCTION

World of Warcraft is a game that allows for many different types of play. People can play the game as it was written and created by designers or make up their own form of game play within the World of Warcraft environment. The game is a massively multiplayer online game that allows thousands of players from all over the world to play together. The aspect of the game that interests me most is why players join guilds. A guild is, "a group of people that play a game together. They do quests, perform raids, and chat together" (World of Warcraft Guilds, 2004). Becoming a member of a guild in World of Warcraft is described by players as being beneficial and enhancing the game playing experience. Blizzard describes guilds to the World of Warcraft gaming community by saying,

"Guilds offer many benefits including free items, opportunities for groups, access to trade skill masters, quest items, and readily available trade skill ingredients through gathering guild members. You may discover that a guild greatly enhances your gameplay experience. You can meet friends, share adventures, and find people to protect you if you fight in faction versus faction combat. Typically, players in good guilds can go places and do things that players in poor guild or no guild can't" (Joining Guilds, 2005).

The guilds are not run by Blizzard, which means players must take the initiative to create a guild, join a guild, or help maintain the guild. Each guild varies in membership size and it is up to that community to determine how large or small it will be (Guild Support, 2005). Players cannot enter into any guild they want. Many people play in groups to find people they enjoy playing the game with and eventually become members or start their own guild. Other players research specific guilds that they would like to become a part of within World of Warcraft. Players can find information about guilds through recruitment forums that contain links to guild sites. Finding the right guild can even involve interviews with current and past guild members. Blizzard warns those looking to join a guild saying, "Be on your best behavior. Asking to join one of the more powerful guilds can actually be similar to a job interview in real life" (Joining Guilds, 2005).

Joining a guild is an aspect of the game that anyone can chose to participate in or to avoid. Why do some people join when others don't? Guilds are expressed as enhancing game play and allowing you to do more than you could if you were to play the game alone. They are said to provide a stronger sense of community and create a social environment with people who share similarities. There are many players who are members of guilds but there are also players within World of Warcraft who are not. Some players were once part of a guild but no longer are. Other players are not part of a guild and are searching for the right one. Prior to researching and

conducting interviews I became curious as to why these people chose to join or not to join guilds. I was curious to see if the guilds really offered players what they advertised. Anyone who has access to the game can get information about what guilds offer players but the game never shows you the steps to join one. Do players join guilds for the reasons listed above? Do the guilds actually offer players what they say they will? Why do people leave guilds? Does a player have to join a guild in order to advance through the game? I have chosen to take on this task in hopes to uncover the answers to my questions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

"Uses and gratifications theory attempts to explain the uses and functions of the media for individuals, groups, and society in general" (Uses and Gratifications Approach, 2004). This theory is looked at closely in my research question as to why people join guilds in World of Warcraft. The theory tries to explain how people use the media, the guilds in the game, to gratify their needs; what do players do as a member of a guild? What are the motives for individuals to be a part of a guild? The theory of uses and gratifications applied to my research, assumes that audience members, World of Warcraft players, actively seek out guilds to satisfy individual needs. It is important to understand that it can be difficult to connect a particular need with a particular type of media content (guilds) since media use can supply multiple benefits at different points throughout its use (Underwood, 2003). In my research I hope to find patterns within the interviews that will lead me to a better understanding as to why players join guilds.

World of Warcraft strategy sites tell players, "Guilds in World of Warcraft will be essential in letting players play to the game's full potential. Guilds offer players with a friendly atmosphere and community to journey with, as well as players to help them along on quests and raids" (World of Warcraft Strategy, 2004). This site, like many others, tell players the "perks" that come with being a member of a guild and "push" players to join a guild. Those players who are not members of a guild are told what they are missing, "Guilds also get a boost in what content is available to them. There are certain instance zones which are guild-only, meaning that only players with a guild can enter that instance" (World of Warcraft Strategy, 2004). Blizzard states that players can still play solo and attain the same desired goals within the game. But Blizzard warns players that their experience will not be the same, "Guilds will offer much more player immersion than one would get from hours of solo play. Guilds also allow for quests to be completed faster and more efficiently, as well as many grouping possibilities" (World of Warcraft Strategy, 2004).

Guilds often span across different games which can make it difficult for a new player to become part of a close-knit guild. As a new player, joining a guild can also be a good way to make friends and learn from those players who are more experienced (Guilds, 2005). Overall the main benefit of a guild has been listed as having a group of people to associate with and play with. Do guilds offer this? Is this why players join guilds? Is this really important for the game in World of Warcraft? Some players find joining a guild to be an important aspect in playing the game, while others prefer solo play and they find guilds to be unappealing. Warcraft Wars, a guild management site, says that there are currently 345 registered guilds in World of Warcraft with 229 of them from Alliance territory and 116 from Horde territory (Guild Management, 2005). The number of guilds change at any time since anyone who has gathered at least ten people can create a guild. Current guilds range from groups who want to advance in game play to those who just want to have fun with

people who are like them, for example a gay guild. Nick Yee says, "Most forms of advancement in MMORPGs require increasing cooperation or dependency on others, oftentimes mutually beneficial" (Yee, p. 6). Are guilds becoming a necessary part of games in order to play the games?

If advancement in MMORPG's requires players to work together it would make sense for designers to make joining a guild a required part of the game. In World of Warcraft, and on other games, joining a guild is not a required part of game play. Since joining a guild is not a required aspect of the game I am curious to know, why do these players choose to join? Each player has motives for playing a particular game which leads me to believe that these same players have motives for joining or not joining a guild.

STUDY DESIGN

What are the uses and gratifications players seek from guilds in World of Warcraft? This paper explores the social aspect of the game design and whether joining a guild is important to the advancement in the game or more of a personal preference. This "personal preference" motive looks at uses and gratifications in joining a guild. If my research shows that joining a guild is necessary for the fullest game advancement, like many of the literature I have read, at what point in the game does this occur? Also, for those who are high level players, how did they get as far along as they have and why have they not joined a guild?

To find the answer to my research question I felt interviews would be the best method in obtaining the different gratifications players receive or feel they receive from being part of a guild. I hoped to also interview people who were not members of a guild and uncover their reasons for not joining. My sample size consisted of ten World of Warcraft players with five from Alliance territory and the other five from Horde territory. I felt that interviewing both factions within the game could lead to new information and possibly help identify specific motivations for players who choose to join guilds based on their territory. While conducting my literature research I came across several forums that listed the registered number of guilds within the game and found that there are more registered guilds from Alliance territory than Horde. This could simply mean that more Alliance guilds are registered than Horde and the numbers not reflect the actual number of guilds within the game. But there may be something else hidden in these numbers, such as Alliance players join guilds more than Horde players or Horde guilds are larger than Alliance guilds. Whatever the reasons, I feel that it is an important topic to explore in my research.

To recruit participants I entered the World of Warcraft game and played the different characters I had created. In both the Horde and Alliance territories, I asked people if they would mind being interviewed for a research paper I was writing for class about joining guilds. I chose characters based on the information provided when you click on them (i.e. names and levels). When I came across a character who was willing to participate I gave them all the class information, where they could find it, and allowed them to ask me any questions about the project or any concerns they had in participating. I received informed consent from each of the participants and set up a time and place to conduct the interview. Most of my interviews took place through AOL Instant Messenger and I was able to save all of the dialogue. A few interviews took place within the game with the use of our characters and the whisper option in chat. A quiet and "safe" place was located within the game and the interview was conducted. I informed the participants that none of their identities

(real life or character's) would be exposed and that my research would be made available to them once completed. I also gave each participant an email address to contact me at if they had any questions or comments they wanted to discuss with me after our individual interviews were completed. I used a separate email address from hotmail to be used specifically for my research collection.

As part of the class I have had to play the game myself and this also plays an important role in data collection. I was able to observe guilds, by the clothing and emblems they displayed, and how often they interacted with their group. Guild members are able to wear a guild tabard, which is a special slot of the avatar's body that displays guild colors and symbol. I could not observe their chat, but I was able to see if they were traveling the game alone or with their guild. I felt that this part of the research was important, to see how much of a role the guild plays throughout the game play. I know it is not possible to have every member of every guild signed on at the same time so that they can always and only play together, but when a member was signed on, I was curious if they played together. I have several game characters on different servers and in both territories, but I have not joined a guild. At the beginning of my research I planned on joining a guild in order to gather more information but later felt that entering a guild would create a biased view. Because each guild is different I felt it best to avoid joining. The better method would be to approach those guild members I interviewed as an ethnographer. Approaching guild members as an interested potential member also could harm my research because they would be attempting to "sell" me their guild, not really talking to me about it. Also, by pretending to be interested in joining their guild and gathering information I would not be obtaining their informed consent.

I also used my literature research to collect data on this topic. Based on information that had already been acquired through previous research, I was able to form questions for my interviews. I was unable to find any specific data as to uses and gratifications for joining guilds, but the information collected relating to my issue was very helpful. This was especially important for me since I am not a member of a guild. By learning a little bit about guilds prior to my interviews I was able to better understand the participants' responses and continue with follow up questions after the initial questions were answered.

RESULTS

After collecting information from ten interviews, I was pleased to find patterns emerge from the data. The main pattern I discovered, found in almost all the interviews, is that different players seek a similar gratification from guilds. Those I interviewed played characters from different levels, territories, classes, and professions but all used guilds for the same thing. Although my results clearly show the importance of this function that guilds offer players, it is not the only gratification players use guilds for. Each guild member participant was asked, "If you weren't in a guild, what aspect(s) of it would you miss the most?" All of the players said that they enjoy chatting with guild members. One participant said, "I like having conversations with my guild mates. It helps pass the time when I'm grinding or just flat out bored." Another participant labeled their guild chatting as "shit talking" and how it the guild offered a great place to make friends. After gathering many similar quotes it became clear that guilds offer a socializing function that players seek out.

Even those participants I interviewed who were not members of a guild recognized the strong social aspect of the guilds. A non-guild member participant

said, "I haven't joined a guild because I'm not very social in the game and don't see a necessity in my joining one." This participant, although not a member, was aware of what the guild could offer her/him, which shows that chatting and the social function are one of the things that guilds offer players. Guilds in World of Warcraft offer a social function to players, which is something the designers hoped would be one of the gratifications sought out by players. Chatting within a group of players who all have some similarities, even if it is that they are in the same guild, is said by one participant to make the game "more personal."

All the players who said they enjoyed the chatting aspect of game also expressed that the game would not be the same without guilds. One participant said that they would just join a group if there were no guilds while others felt the guild offered more than a group ever could. A participant said, "I would miss talking to them (guild mates). If I was to just play solo the whole time the game would seem too boring, because I would spend half my playing time looking for people to group with." The quality of guild chat is so important to some players that they have left guilds because saying, "Either no one talks, and it negates the purpose of being in a guild, or they talk too much and about nothing, making it annoying."

Later in the interview I asked participants why they joined the guild they are currently in. For those players who are in their first guild, most were invited and just joined without knowing what it was really all about it. Players who had been members of other guilds played a more active role in searching for their ideal guild. One participant explained, "I have seen a lot of them (members of the guild) around before and I had heard about them. It was hard to get recruited into. What I didn't like about other guilds is that they just let anyone in." This comment is in agreement with the research that says joining a good guild can almost be like a job interview. The participant would not go into further detail about his initiation process but did say that it was not an easy task. I noticed that players are initially invited to join a guild and join out of curiosity instead of knowledge and desire to be a part of the guild. Those players searching for a new guild research forums, talk with players, and ask around. One participant interviewed said, "I am a member of a guild but so it happens that I am always the only one online." This participant falls into the category player who joins a guild because they were invited. In other interviews I discovered that some players send out invites all the time, because anyone can create a guild, but guilds don't always last. Many players will start a guild and send out invites and after some time not play that character again. I did not have to opportunity to interview someone who had created a guild; all those participants I interviewed were invited.

I also interviewed players who were not members of guilds. I was interested in why they were not members of guilds and got very different responses from the two participants. One participant told me that they were asked to join a guild at the very beginning of their playing and didn't know what they were or why they should be a part of one. Although this participant still does not have any desire to join a guild they say they recognize the importance of a guild in game advancement. "I never group with others and have not joined a guild and that is why I am at a standstill on leveling. I can't seem to beat these quests without a guild or group to help me." In this participants opinion, joining a guild would drastically help in game advancement, but the social function of guilds is not an attractive aspect for him/her and keeps him/her from joining. The second non-guild member I interviewed had never been asked to join a guild but had been asked to join a group. The participant said, "I am not social inside the game, but I am outside the game. I don't want to

join because the people I've randomly asked have all been kinda weird and we're just not on the same page. But I still feel like I don't totally know what's I'm doing." The socializing function is also an unappealing aspect to this non-guild member.

DISCUSSION

The interviews helped me find at least one of the functions a guild offers its players, which is also something they want from the game. Chatting and socializing are an important part of the game for players who want to socialize, find friends, or just pass time while the game is not entertaining. While chatting is something many players desire from guilds, it is also a factor that other players are turned off by. The two players I was able to interview were not attracted to the chatting in guilds or within the game. These players prefer solo-gaming and feel that socializing and chatting are not things necessary or fun in the game. The players seek the guild for the use of socializing. I am aware that this is not the only reason or the most important reason to other players, but in my research collection the data clearly reflects the guild as having a socializing use.

My data collection also showed that both guild members and non-guild members felt that guilds are a necessary aspect of the game. Guild members said the game would be less personal and boring without guilds. Non-guild members commented that even though they do not want to be a part of a guild, game advancement would be easier if they would join. The guild may serve as a social atmosphere for its members, but is also for whatever reason, seen as necessary component within the game. Out of the ten interviews I conducted, no one said anything negative about guilds. There were comments made about particular guilds as to why the player had left it or what made the guild unappealing, but there was never a negative comment directed towards all the guilds in the game. Participants who had no desire to join a guild just expressed that it was not the "right thing" for them.

There were limitations in my research mainly due to time constraints. If given more time I could have interviewed more people to get a more accurate collection of data. With more time I would have been able to interview many more different players, offering me more uses of guilds in World of Warcraft. Having more time to interview a players in the gaming community would lead to more patterns, or even disprove the patterns my data collection shows. The different players I would interview include more levels, more servers, and more players from the two territories. The interview environments, through AOL and in game, were not all as in depth as I would have liked. I feel that the internet worked as a barrier, keeping participants from fully engaging in the interviews. During the interviews I felt that I did not have the participants' full attention because the internet allowed them to multitask during the interviews. Overall time was my biggest limitation.

CONCLUSION

The research helped me find the beginnings to my research question. I feel that I did find a true use in guilds, which is socializing, but was unable to collect data on any other gratifications received from the guilds. The participants I interviewed consisted of players with different character levels, races, and professions. Even with these differences all of the participants were homogeneous in the sense that they all felt socializing was the most important use of guilds. In order for this research question to be truly answered, a larger sample will have to be interviewed and more

time allotted for the collection of data. Socializing may be the main use players seek in guilds, but more interviews need to be collected to verify this.

I did not find a difference in opinions between Horde players and Alliance players as I had hypothesized. More interviews, since only five out of the ten were conducted for each territory, need to be conducted to see if the two sides are in fact similar in opinions when it comes to guilds or if they are different. I was also hoping to find out if guilds were necessary for the advancement of game play. I received information claiming this to be true, but not enough information was given on the topic to find a pattern in the data leading to this conclusion.

With the little data I was able to collect, a whole new line of questions appeared that will remain unanswered until further research and time is put into my topic. I am curious about the actual "initiation," if there even is one, to becoming a member of a guild. My research revealed that most people are just invited and join, but other players say that they had a difficult time becoming a member. If I had the time, I would have liked to discover and explore any other uses guilds offer players. With this information I could try to find a real world group that offers people similar gratifications. Maybe a guild is similar to some sort of real world organization or it could just be a unique aspect of the virtual world. Future researchers on this topic need to have a lot of time to conduct as many interviews as possible on all the servers, in both territories, among all the races and levels. Once the uses and gratifications of guilds are discovered, it could be possible to find a real world group that offers people the same things. This group connection in the game world and real world may not be as different as people think. That new aspect only appeared after the data collection and I wish I had more time to explore and research.

Questions

Level?

Are you a part of a guild?

If yes: How long have you been a member in your guild?

If no: Have you ever been a member of a guild?

If yes: When? Why did you leave?

If no: Why? Have you ever been asked to be a part of a guild?

Appendix A Guild Members

What was the last thing you needed your guild for? Could you have done this on your own? Why or why not?

What kind of role do you play in your guild?

To what degree does the guild impact your regular game play? When you sign on to play world of warcraft, do you always play with the group. Why or why not?

If guilds were not incorporated into the game, would that adversely affect your game playing? Why?

Why did you join this guild (level or playing experience)? What were your reasons? What made it more appealing than the others?

What does the guild offer you that you couldn't do without? If you weren't in the guild, what aspect (s) of it would you miss the most?

Why do you think other players choose not to group with guilds?

In your opinion, what aspects make a great guild?

Appendix B Non-Guild members

Would game play be easier if you were a member of a guild? Why?

If you are not a guild member, do you ever group with others? If so, how is this different from joining guilds?

Why do you think other players choose not to group with guilds?

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