VIRTUAL RITUALS: STRUCTURAL RITUALIZATION THEORY AND MASSIVE MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

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VIRTUAL RITUALS: STRUCTURAL

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Rituals in Virtual Worlds

On any given afternoon all across the world people are taking a break from their normal everyday jobs and responsibilities to enter into a world that is very different from their own, virtual world. In this world fry-cooks at McDonald's can become shining knights of a great good, combating the evils of a wicked world. They can wield magic spells and have supernatural powers at their disposal. The best part is that they are not alone. They are joined by thousands of other players (including me) who want the same experience, one that is unavailable in the real world.

These knights, mages, druids, thieves, bounty hunters, Jedi, aliens, monsters, and any other manner of fantastical archetypes are not in their respective virtual world to simply play out a role. There is a job to be done. The forces of evil (or good) need to be fought and the job is too big for one person no matter how powerful they are. The only option is to band together to take on the monsters of the virtual world. Guilds are formed that serve as rallying places for players to form groups to take on the insurmountable odds placed before them. The satisfaction of victory is not the only drive. There are treasures of great power and value to be found within the darkest dungeons of the world.

Power itself is to be gained as well, for the more experience a player has at combating evil the easier it becomes for them to combat their foes.

A raid is an organized group of players brought together to achieve a common goal. The goal can be anything, but usually involves stopping the evil plot of some supernatural being or force. The focus of the group is to use the diverse skills of all the participants to overcome the odds to defeat evil and share in the spoils of victory. The cries of anguish can be heard when victory is not met, but when the odds are overcome and the enemy defeated, the cheering of the party is only matched by the feeling of camaraderie that comes with working together to achieve something that cannot be achieved alone.

Massive multi-player online role-playing games (MMORPG) have become increasingly relevant to the study of human interaction. These counterparts of real world social phenomena have not only become increasingly possible but increasingly popular. When at last count over 50 million people have participated in what can be called a virtual world at some point, it is hard to deny the social implications (Woodcock 2006). In particular, the study of secularized rituals must be reevaluated in a post virtual world environment, because some of the traditional assumptions about ritual dynamics can no longer be clearly demarcated into a face-to-face only arena.

The reevaluation of ritualized practices in virtual worlds must not only show that the components of ritual exist in a virtual world but that those components have a strength and relevance for the participants in a virtual world. The ability for internet based inter-personal communication to mimic real life, face-to-face interactions has

steadily grown with the development of computing technology. The traditional modes of internet communication (e-mail, instant message systems, message boards, and chat rooms) while maintaining their place, have had to make room for voice chat and video chat. Developing along these same lines the ability to communicate and interact in virtual[1] worlds has expanded from only text based to include voice communication as well. MMORPGs also offer a third category of social communication: non-verbal body language. Within the animation regimes of MMORPGs are command lines called *emotes* that can be given to a character and they will perform generalized bodily actions such as crying, bowing, nodding, dancing, waving, blushing, and laughing (the list is long). The continuing development of computer generated imagery (CGI), artificial intelligence (AI) programming, and new and intuitive interface devices will only allow emotes to become more elaborate and representative of face-to-face interaction.

Research on video games has been concerned with many distinct topics: community ethnographies, economic realities, cultural meaning, and general establishment of videogames as important cultural artifacts of our time. While all of these are good goals it is difficult for me not to notice a tendency for deemphasizing the experience of the videogame and what it means to the development of community commitment. Considering MMORPGs, the recent ethnographic work of Taylor (2006) in *Play Between Worlds* emphasizes the relationships that develop while playing the game and how these relationships provide a network that assists players in finding new groups

[1] The word virtual has been abandoned by Edward Castronova and others in favor of synthetic when discussing "video game worlds." They argue that calling them "virtual worlds" only exacerbates the difference and allows critics to denounce then as not real. I argue that merely rephrasing them "synthetic worlds" does little to calm critics. I use the term "Virtual" not because I think the reasoning behind the switch is invalid but because "Virtual" is more popular and I think that the term "synthetic" may be confusing.

and training new players. While she discusses “habits,” “socialization,” and “organized quests” she never considers that these disparate parts essentially outline social rituals that are happening within the game (Taylor 2006).

Durkheim considered ritual to be one of the most basic forms of human interaction and considered it as the place where social morality and solidarity were reinvigorated and expressed (Durkheim 1947[1915]). Taylor was touching on some of the essential processes and components of a ritual in her ethnography of *EverQuest*, but because it was not her focus she did not make the connection that the virtual world she was investigating was filled with ritual. The study of social ritual has been broad. The work of Knottnerus covers such distinct topics as ritual in ancient Sparta, the lives of boys in French boarding schools, the instrumental rituals of Italian Americans in Oklahoma and many more (Knottnerus1997, Knottnerus1999, Knottnerus and Van de Poel-Knottnerus 1999, Knottnerus, Monk, and Jones 1999, Guan and Knottnerus. 1999, Sell, Knottnerus, Ellison, and Mundt 2000, Knottnerus 2002, Knottnerus, and Berry 2002, Van de Poel-Knottnerus and Knottnerus 2002, Varner and Knottnerus 2002, Knottnerus and LoConto. 2003, Mitra and Knottnerus 2004, Knottnerus 2005, Wu and Knottnerus 2005, Guan and Knottnerus. 2006, Knottnerus, Ulsperger, Cummins, and Osteen 2006, Ulsperger and Knottnerus 2006, Wu and Knottnerus 2007, Knottnerus and Migunov In Progress, Ulsperger and Knottnerus forthcoming, Thornburg, Knottnerus, and Webb forthcoming, Edwards and Knottnerus. forthcoming Knottnerus,Van Delinder, and Edwards In Press)

Expanding on the work done by Knottnerus and others, this thesis will seek to answer a simple question. Do secular rituals in MMORPGs have a positive impact on a

player's emotions and their connection to their online community? In answering this question the bigger question about whether rituals have a strength and relevance in a virtual context is answered as well.

Historical Context

Since the first video game, *Tennis for Two,* was created by William Higginbotham to entertain guests to his laboratory, video games have been a social activity (Juul 2005). Over the next 49 years video games[2] have grown from a novelty into a multinational and multibillion dollar business (Castronova 2005). The current state of the video game industry has developed from an out of the home arcade experience of one or two players, into an at home online adventure that involves thousands of people playing simultaneously. The development of home video game systems in the late 1970s and the spread of the personal computer in the early 1980s have generated a whole generation of people who have grown up with video games (Berger 2002).

The social, economic, and medical impact of video games have been researched in the academy almost from the beginning of the video game boom (Rutter and Bryce 2006). The early association of the academy and video games is often overlooked or glossed over by many because only recently has the study of video games has gained greater legitamacy (Rutter and Bryce 2006). The legitimation of video game studies has followed along with the legitimation of video games, not only as a powerful entertainment industry but also as an art form (Kelman 2005).

Video games have always pushed the boundaries of technology. The link between the development of modern computing and the video game industry is a close one. As

[2] I chose to use the term 'video game' as opposed to the term 'computer game' because 1) computer games do not necessarily have to have a graphical component and 2) video game is the more popular phrase.

one develops a technology the other devises ways for that technology to be used. The relationship that binds computing development and video game programming and development has taken a lead and follow approach for many years. With the recent release of Sony's Playstation 3 that relationship took on a dramatic change. Sony used the Playstation 3 as the vehicle to introduce two new advances in technology: the Blu-ray storage format and the IBM Cell Microprocessor (Rutter and Bryce 2006). The importance of the videogame for the whole computing industry is confirmed by Sony's use of this new technology first in a video game console

The relationship between general computer technology and video game technology (computer games) has been linked in a sort of symbiotic relationship almost as long as computing technology has been around. The relationship of these mutual technologies can be traced to the development of programming languages (Malliet and Meyer 2006). As programmers developed practical business and scientific software applications they would develop games using the same programming architecture. This relationship is exemplified by Steven Russell's *Spacewar* developed as an entertainment application for The MIT mainframe PDP-1 (Malliet and Meyer 2006).

Massive multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) origin developed in a similar way. The development of campus wide usenets, networked mainframes, and BBSs (Bulletin Board Systems) for the sharing of data and computing power allowed for the development of a computer gaming architecture that suported multiple players. These early online multiplayer games were called MUDs or multi user dungeons (dimensions, or domains) (Taylor 2006). The key characteristics of MUDs, namely a

multi-player interface and a moderated synthetic environment, serve as the foundation for MMORPGs (For a fuller discussion see Taylor 2006).

MUDs differ from MMORPGs in two major respects. First MUDs were often user created and free to play. The majority of MMORPGs are developed by established video game corporations, released as boxed games to be purchased, and typically there is a periodical fee associated with playing (there are exceptions to both). The second and most important for this research is that MUDs were not video games. That is they did not have any graphical output other than text.

The first proper graphical MMORPG was *Neverwinter Nights* in 1991. It was delivered through AOL. When the internet was made public domain in 1995, several companies introduced MMORPGs. The most financially successful was *Ultima Online* 1997 (Taylor 2006). The format of the MMORPG was on good financial standing but was not popularized until the release of *EverQuest* 1999. Since the release of *EverQuest* the genre of MMORPGs has seen exponential growth in the variety and number of games. While there are any number of different types of MMORPGs the great majority (93.5%) are medieval/fantasy (Woodcock 2006). The most successful and prolific game so far is Blizzard's *World of Warcraft* (*WOW*). *WOW* enjoys a healthy 53.9% of the entire MMORPG market and currently has just fewer than 7 million subscribers (Woodcock 2006).

The MMORPG genre of video games will undoubtedly grow over time with the continued increase in the number of broad band connections and personal computers across the globe[3]. The profitability of MMORPGs is much greater than many other video

[3] While the Western and Eastern industrial world may be seeing growth in the spread of both personal computing and broadband technology, developing countries have been at a disadvantage accessing this

game genres and because of this more MMORPGs are likely to be developed (Castronova 2005). In fact the MMORPG business model has been adopted by Microsoft for their X-box Live "online gaming service" which amounts to a subscription to an internet server that allows players to meet in order to play online games. The future of MMORPGs looks bright.

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technology. This "digital divide" as it has been called not only separates disadvantaged countries but also disadvantaged groups within industrialized countries. While not the focus of this research, it is important to keep in mind that while new communities, new forms of communication and entertainment have a real impact on many people, there are that many more people who are denied access because of global and local inequalities.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Community

The discussion and study of community have been one of the central themes in sociology since its beginning. Durkheim, Weber, and Tönnies each lent ideas to the study of community that we still use to conceptualize it today (Durkheim 1984[1893], Tönnies 1963[1887], Weber 2002[1920]). The communities that these scholars studied were characterized by the transition from rural agricultural communities into large industrialized metropolitan cities. Some have argued that in the past 50 years with the adoption of more and more advanced computing we have entered into a new age: an information age. With this new technology the way in which we define communities has had to be expanded and adapted.

Even before the widespread use of communications technology it was clear that a community is more than just a collection of people centered on where they live. Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft* concept is used as a basis for community that focuses on the connection that "persons of a common faith feel, like members of the same craft, or rank, everywhere united by a spiritual bond…[which] forms a kind of invisible scene or meeting"(Tönnies 1963 [1887]: 42-43). The distinction between communities of locale and what Chayko calls *communities of the mind* are based on the significance and preeminence of social bonds (Chayko 2002).

The definition of community has been debated and changed many times but there are three key characteristics of community that are generally agreed upon: locale, common interests, and social interaction (Bernard 1973). Bernard warns that this formulation is deceptive because it encompasses two distinct conceptions of community namely "the community" and "Community." The distinction between these two types of community is a simple one: "the community" focuses on the relationship of people based on their location and the second, "Community," is focused on the common cultural and social ties that people share. This distinction is important when examining a virtual community because issues of location and place are problematic.

These different definitions of community can lead to some interesting conclusions. The definitional debate is convenient because it can be used to outline and reinforce theoretical debates. For instance, some theorists have argued that community is incompatible with modernity (Cohen 1985). This assertion is problematic because it does not account for the rise of community consciousness in the modern world (Cohen 1985). A better way to conceptualize community, according to Cohen, is to focus on the *use* of community (Cohen 1985). He outlines two components that describe this use: (a) have something in common with each other; (b) are distinguished in a significant way from other groups (Cohen 1985).

This *use* oriented description is helpful because it focuses on the boundaries of community (Cohen 1985). Where does one community begin and one community end? The expansion of communication technologies, especially the internet, has led to a focus on cultural distinctions to create the boundary for communities (Putnam 2000, Robinson

et al. 2000, Wellman 2001, Bell 2001, Jenkins 2006, Hand and Moore 2006, Henderson and Hodges 2007)

Virtual communities are exemplified by the exclusion of spatial orientation as a key descriptor (Putnam 2000, Bell 2001, Chayko 2002, Taylor 2006, Hand and Moore 2006). This distinction may appear at first to be problematic (Chayko 2002). Although virtual communities are relatively new phenomena the emphasis on local space as a key defining factor in community has been an area of contention for quite some time (Bernard 1973).

Social bonds or social capital are an important component of community and some argue its key function (Putnam 2000). Some critics have argued that the emergence of mass media technologies has distracted the public to such an extent that the development of close social capital ties is hindered (Postman 1985). While Postman was not developing his argument centered on the internet, similar reasoning has been used by internet critics (Putnam 2000). In the seminal work *Bowling Alone* Putnam considers the internet:

> "By the time that the internet reached 10 percent of American adults in 1996, the nationwide decline in social connectedness and civic engagement had been underway for at least a quarter of a century. Whatever the future implications of the internet, social intercourse over the last several decades of the twentieth century was not simply displaced from physical space to cyberspace. The internet may be part of the solution to our civic problem, or it may exacerbate it, but the cyber revolution was not the cause." (Putnam 2000: 170).

The extension of social capital networks can be seen as one of the most beneficiary aspects of the internet. Putnam refers to the internet as "the network to end all networks" (Putnam 2000:171).

Social capital networks can be seen as the key feature of the internet when considering community involvement (Hampton and Wellman 2003, Malaby 2006, Stern and Dillman 2006). Internet networks provide a platform for community participants to become more engaged in community activities. Internet users are more likely to be involved in the community through attending events, joining groups or leading groups (Stern and Dillman 2006).

MMORPG players develop distinct communities within the game they play. Within the game are systems that analogue the function of the internet in building community involvement in the real world. There are mail systems, bulletin posting systems and even a list of all the available people online. These systems allow players to quickly become participants in the main activity of an MMORPG: the quest or raid. The easier and more efficient participation becomes, the more players will participate and the greater the impact of ritual events in the game will be.

Ritual

Ritual has been the topic of much discussion in sociology since the very beginning of the field (Collins 2004). The definition and the use of the word "ritual" is not always clear and straight forward. In common usage ritual usually refers to a religious or formal ceremony. In other academic fields "ritual studies" are equated with religious studies (Collins 2004). A good sociological definition is "ritual is a mechanism of mutually focused emotion and attention producing a momentarily shared reality, which thereby generates solidarity and symbols of group membership (Collins 2004: 7)." This definition deemphasizes the religious overtones of ritual while outlining its key contribution.

Ritual is an essential part of community (Durkheim 1947[1915], Cohen 1985, Knottnerus 1997, Collins 2004). The importance of ritual to community can be exemplified by Durkheim's study on the rudimentary religions of certain primitive tribes. He describes the nature of ritual in what he considered its most elementary form (Durkheim 1947[1915]). Durkheim emphasizes two concepts that serve as a guide to understanding rituals: the sacred and the profane. The sacred and the profane are characterized by their heterogeneity (Durkheim 1947[1915]. Durkheim emphasizes "… the sacred and the profane have always and everywhere been conceived by the human mind as two distinct classes, as two worlds between which there is nothing in common" (Durkheim 1947[1915]: 38). The moral beliefs of a community can be seen as stemming from the reinforcement of what is sacred and what is profane during a ritual (Collins 2004).

The distinction of sacred and profane objects is important for ritual analysis even if the rituals are of a secular nature. Secular rituals such as parades or political rallies develop symbolic-emotional responses to items that take on the qualities of sacred items. A good example of this is the American flag. It is held separate and higher than other flags, social events often begin with the national anthem with the flag at the central positon, and there are certain rituals associated with the handling of the flag such as the proper way to fold it. In MMORPGs certain objects within the game often develop a similar secular-sacred position. Rare and unique items that are beneficial to the player are often held in such high esteem. The distribution of these items often becomes highly contested and small rituals are developed to resolve the issue of ownership. Most commonly is a rolling of virtual dice with the highest roller winning the item.

The components of a ritual have been defined in several ways. Here I will discuss two ways by Collins and Knottnerus. Collins argues that a ritual has four ingredients: group assembly (bodily co-presence), barriers to outsiders, mutual focus of attention, and shared mood (Collins 2004). All of these ingredients interact with each other in a collective effervescence to generate three ritual outcomes: group solidarity, emotional energy symbols of social relationship, and standards of morality (Collins 2004). The development of a ritual event defined in this way is problematic because emotion is seen as both an antecedent and a consequence of a ritual event.

The development of a causal model then is problematic because emotion can be seen as both a dependent and independent. Structural Ritualization Theory provides a better causal explanation because it removes emotion as an antecedent and consequent component of a ritual and makes emotional intensity just a consequence of the ritual event instead of both antecedent and consequent to it (Knottnerus forthcoming).

Ritual study as a whole has been concerned with rituals in the context of face-to-face interaction (Durkheim 1947[1915], Goffman 1967, Cohen 1985, Knottnerus 1997, Collins 2004). This has placed ritual studies outside the realm of virtual worlds. Collins asserts that to even be considered a ritual there must be face-to-face interaction (2004). He argues that a telecommunication interaction reduces the significance and emotion possible in an interaction. The example he uses is a person calling a friend who is attending a funeral (Collins 2004: 54). The caller is not really a part of the interaction and the called person is likely distracted by the call. This should exclude any study of rituals in virtual worlds but his argument ignores one key fact that differentiates a virtual world context from any other telecommunication context: there are events and activities that are

only possible in a virtual world. One cannot band together a group of adventurers with various magical abilities, invade a dungeon, and slay a dragon in real life. That experience is unique to the context of virtual worlds.

Affect and Emotion

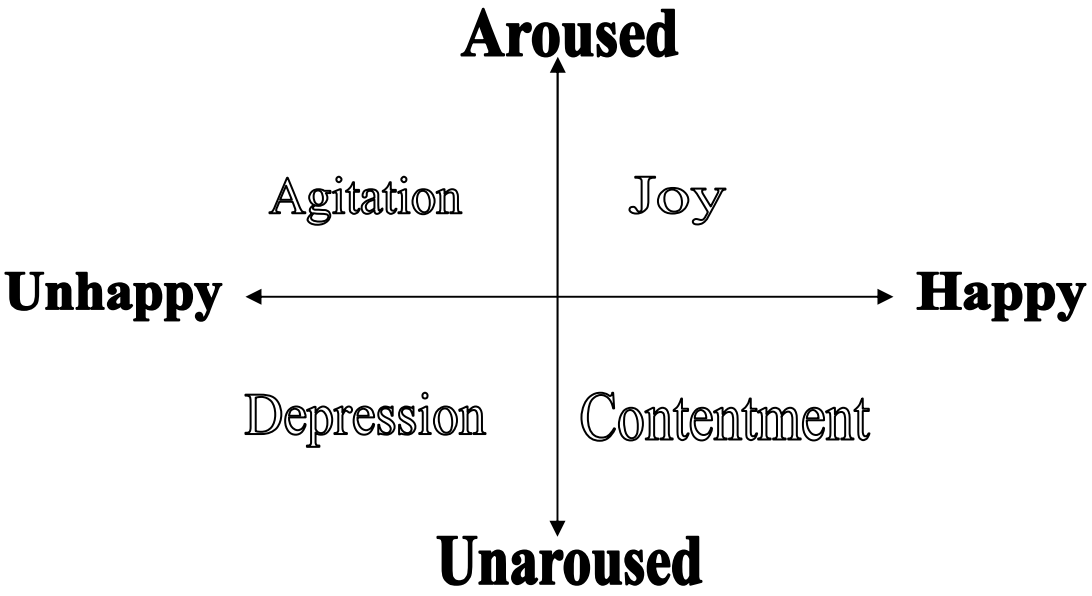
Affect and emotion are important components of social interaction. Sociology of emotion has developed from a mere consideration in wider theory to a topic worthy of discussion in its own right (Smith-Lovin 1995). The growth of the Sociology of emotions has developed along with a greater medical and bio-physical understanding of emotions and what they do to us (Layard 2005).

Affect and emotion have been defined many ways and have been given many characteristics. In the most general sense affect can be seen as a positive or negative orientation toward an object (Smith-Lovin 1995). This can be further expanded to three general dimensions of affect: evaluation (good vs. evil), potency (powerful vs. powerless), and activity (lively vs. quiet) (Smith-Lovin 1995:119). Layard further develops this concept into a diagram that explains the relationship between these dimensions; see Figure 1 (Layard 2005: 21). Layard (2005) argues that this two dimensional description of affect best explains it because emotions are mutually exclusive. A person cannot be both happy and sad. The diversity of emotions that humans experience becomes points on this scale.

Emotions are more specific descriptions of affect. The diverse emotions of humans can be well expressed by four qualities: (1) appraisals of situational stimulus; (2) a change in bodily sensation; (3) expressive gestures; and (4) cultural meanings applied to the first three elements (Kemper 1981, Thotis 1989). These four qualities of emotion

can have analogs in a virtual setting that allow an emotional intensity to become developed.

Figure 1: Two Dimensions of Feeling



{(Layard 2005:21}

First because a virtual setting allows the players to appraise their situation, there is concrete feedback of success and failure. The communication systems, both verbal and textual, also provide a system in which players can evaluate the situation (King 2001). Second, bodily sensation can be influenced because of the ability to appraise situational stimulus available to players. Third, expressive gestures are available to the players. Players can command their avatars to cheer, clap, kiss, hug, sing, dance, or almost any other expressive gesture. These expressive gestures are usually over the top caricatures. Expressive feedback is also available through voice and text communication. Finally, cultural meaning from the real world context as well as the in-game context can be applied to these virtual representations. For example after completing a raid, a character

may yell in a joyful tone across voice chat, start dancing, and announce success to their guild through text chat. Along with this a physical feeling of joy may accompany their virtual representation of joy. This gives opportunity for others to interpret the emotion of another player. In this way emotions are shared in virtual settings.

Videogame Research

The general field of videogame research is very diverse and multidisciplinary. There have been several medical studies on the effects of video games most notably the case report on '*Space Invader* wrist' (Rutter and Bryce 2006). The scope of this research narrows the relevance to the social sciences. There are three major social science theoretical and methodological themes that run through video game studies. First there is a Social-Cognitive Theory tradition based on the work of Albert Bandura (1963). Second, there is a literary analysis approach that views videogames as art objects and texts (Rutter and Bryce 2006). Finally there is a culture and community approach that conducts ethnographies and focuses on the players more than the games themselves (Rutter and Bryce 2006). Apart from these three main theoretical trends is the work of Edward Castronova (2005). While rooted in the third approach his ideas on the economics of videogames are unique.

Social-Cognitive Theory has been focused on the impact of media on social action (Bandura 1963). Social-Cognitive Theory began its empirical research focused on the relationships between media and human action (Bandura 1963). The social-cognitive research agenda attempts to prove how social action can often be directly correlated with the viewing of social actions in media. The basic premise is best exemplified by the Bobo Doll experiments in which children were exposed to videos of certain actions, such as

kicking or hitting a doll in a particular place. They were then given dolls and were observed to be more likely to repeat the actions on the video than control groups (Bandura 1963).

Bandura's research has been used as evidentiary proof that mass media such as TV, movies and video games are broadly responsible for violence and injury among American youth. Bandura's theory is used as proof by cultural critics and lobbyists as ammunition against violence in mass media. While research is still being done along these same lines it has also been used to develop a more positive relationship between media and advancements in teaching techniques.

The mainstay of videogame research has been focused on analysis of videogames as texts. There are two main camps of this type of analysis. First is the direct literary tradition of relating fictional narratives to the real world (Kücklich 2006). When looking at texts in this fashion three approaches are used: poetics, what are the rules of the genre; hermeneutics, what is the meaning of the text; and aesthetics what is the effect of the text on the reader (Kücklich 2006). The second approach is that of film studies, a distinct field that looks at the qualities of visual representation and what impact visual arrangement can have on viewers (King and Krzywinska 2006). Film studies focus on the characteristics of the visual image through time. Formal analysis of film considers point of view, *mise-en-scéne* (the arrangement of the on screen environment), narrative, spectacle and sensation (King and Krzywinska 2006). Both literary and film approaches are not narrowly confined to these areas of concern; they often include wider approaches to medium including socio-cultural-political analysis and industrial-institutional analysis.

They are not included here because they are so broad they become perspectives of analysis in their own right.

Literary and film studies have both been applied to the study of video games. It is easy to see how they are applicable to the medium of the video game. Literary analysis does a good job of deconstructing narratives to reveal the cultural biases and messages that a reader (players) may encounter. One of the most important issues raised is the use of gender in video games (Rutter and Bryce 2006). Both men and women are portrayed in over the top archetypical masculine and feminine bodies and social roles (Bryce, Rutter and Sulivan 2006). While the analysis of video games as a literary text are somewhat applicable they are criticized because they are ill-equipped for looking at issues relating to visual time-space and the interactivity associated with games (Kücklich 2006).

Film studies, too, are readily applied to the video game media. Film studies bring a tradition of visual space-time orientation that transfers well to videogame analysis. Point of view or perspective plays a central role in the emersion of viewers (players). First-person, third-person and even further removed god-like perspectives not only differ in the visual information they give the viewer but in the situational and emotional tension they can create. (King and Krzywinska 2006). Spectacle too can generate these tensions and emotions and it is argued that the spectacle in modern popular culture can create intense emotions (Jenkins 2007). While formal film studies approaches make a step in the right direction they also lack key theoretical components that would be necessary for a solid analysis of video games. The most important area that is lacking in both the film studies and the literary tradition is the concept of interactivity (King and Krzywinska

2006). Interactivity has been placed as an add-on component for both schools when looking at video games as texts.

The future of this line of analysis is in the field of new media studies. New media studies takes the foundation of both film and literary traditions and keeps what is relevant and incorporates it into a ground-up approach that begins to look at digital media and video game consumers not as readers or viewers but as active players and producers (Giddings and Kennedy 2006). Key concepts brought forth by new media studies are interactivity, simulation, technological imaginary (how technology can create new places i.e. cyberspace), and the cybernetic organism. New media studies focuses on characteristics that make it unique from old media.

Cultural Studies also plays a key roll in videogame research. The study of popular culture in a serious context goes back to the Frankfurt School with such theorists as Max Horkheimer, Theodore Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse (Crawford and Rutter 2006). The main thesis was that popular culture has a particular role to play in maintaining capitalism and helping oppress and exploit the working class (Crawford and Rutter 2006). The Birmingham School using the ideas of Antonio Gramsci contends that hegemony exists in popular culture. The dominate culture's values and ideologies are the ones that are largely expressed in a society's culture. Both of these schools are based on the work of Marx and it is clear that the focus on the division of class and the dominance of the ruling class are the most important qualities in popular culture (Ridener 1999).

MMORPGs are a perfect reflection of this. The Frankfurt schools might see MMORPGs as an attempt to expand the influence of the dominant culture. MMORPGs

require a monthly fee which resembles the concept of private property (Kelly 2 2004). A player is only renting a virtual character and land in virtual world.

The ethnographic and community centered research agenda of video game research is best exemplified by T.L. Taylor's work *Play Between Worlds.* (2006). This book is a cultural analysis of the world of *EverQuest.* It involved an extensive participant observation and interview process. Taylor explores many topics such as gender, embodiment, community and ownership. The primary significance of this book is its comprehensive look at how the relationships developed online are not simply superficial and easily forgotten but instead they are real tangible relationships that more frequently than not lead to real world meetings (Taylor 2006). The examination of virtual communities, particularly those surrounding virtual worlds, has shifted from a defensive position in which the feasibility and validity of the community is called into question; to a posture in which the mechanics of virtual communities can now become the central focus.

The final research approach taken to examine virtual worlds is a unique one developed by Edward Castronova in his seminal work on the economies of virtual worlds *Synthetic Worlds: The Business and Culture of Online Games* (2005). The premise of his work was to see how the economies of virtual worlds such as *WOW* interact with the real world economy. Using economic data gathered on gold sellers websites, Castronova ranks virtual gold pieces against real world monies (2005). The *WOW* gold piece is found to have a higher trading value than some real world currency because of the demand created by players in the game. Besides this finding Castronova develops what he calls "the economics of fun." The basic premise is that the enjoyment of a game in a virtual

world is based on the wage that character earns from the game plus the fun the player has earning that wage and these are equal to the total compensation the player gets (i.e. enjoyment) (Castronova 2005). This model ignores the fact that some players will never see the exchange value for their online labor and to them fun is the key component of compensation (enjoyment).

The research done on video games up to this point is a mismatch of different approaches. The recent work on virtual worlds has begun to focus on the experience of the player in a community context. The text based approaches focus on content of the game rather than on the experiences of the players. This study of collective ritual events in MMORPGs will take the middle ground of these approaches and ask the players themselves to evaluate their experience playing MMORPGs. Through their own evaluation of their experiences the process of developing community commitment can also be evaluated.

CHAPTER III

THEORY

Introduction

Collective events, by their definition require, the participation of more than one person. Traditionally these events have been seen as a local phenomenon that occurs when groups of people come together in the same place. This definition must now be expanded as our ways of human interaction have been augmented and expanded through the use of technology. Long-distance communication has existed for well over a hundred years and has changed our perception of distance and proximity in that time. In the last twenty years there has been the development of a more sophisticated and complex social networking system in the form of online video games.

Special collective ritual events are an important aspect of the social world. These events have a direct impact on the emotional states of actors and their commitment to a group (Knottnerus forthcoming). The variety of these events is as diverse as the people involved. These collective events include holidays, wedding celebrations, sporting events, political rallies, parades, and of course religious ceremonies.

Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGs) are synthetic, persistent environments that rely on a social system to function. Within this synthetic environment a real and viable community is created. One important aspect of a community is the special collective ritual events that exist within that community and the

meaning and importance of those events. Knottnerus' Structural Ritualization Theory (SRT) explains how these collective events impact the actors involved in them and how these events help to build community solidarity and commitment to group ideals (1997). Before examining how these impact actors, Knottnerus outlines four qualities of a special collective ritual event. To gain a better understanding of how MMORPGs develop their own special collective ritual events it is important that these four qualities be met first.

Qualities of Special Collective Events

The first quality of a special collective event is that it should be clearly separated from typical everyday social life and behavior (Knottnerus forthcoming). MMORPGs fill this requirement in two ways. First, online games in and of themselves are separated from the everyday social world. When these games are activated, the player takes on the role of a character in another world. That change alone takes this event outside the realm of everyday social life. This, however, does not entirely satisfy the requirement. The practice of signing on to this synthetic world can become a regularized event that has no uniqueness because it has become a part of the everyday social life and behavior of the player.

The second way in which an MMORPG can be seen as an avenue for collective ritual events is the way in which special collective events happen within the world of the game. There are several aspects of these games that can be considered here but the raid is by far the most prevalent. A raid, simply put, is a group of players who come together to complete a task or quest in the game that cannot be achieved alone by one player.

The second quality of a special collective ritual event is that it occurs in a regularized manner (Knottnerus forthcoming). The synthetic, persistent worlds of

MMORPGs are available all the time and require no preplanning to participate in at a basic level. That said, the reality of playing a team oriented game requires some coordination of events. The most important aspect of this is the availability to play. People play when they can, after work or after school. Because of this, the players develop a regularized time for participation within the game. This becomes an important aspect of the social element of the game because the access to other players in the game is limited to when they choose to play. The special nature of raids can require scheduling to ensure that all the people needed to participate can be online at the same time. Raids, however, are not always scheduled and can take form spontaneously as well. Even though these events do not have to be scheduled to happen they often have a set of prerequisite events that must be accomplished for them to happen within the game.

The third requirement for a special collective ritual event is that it involves stylized activities. The parameters that are created for the player within an MMORPG are like a set of actions that can be chosen from. The special collective rituals that are part of an MMORPG usually involve the interconnected activities of the players. Each player has unique skills and abilities that are tied to the type of character they chose to play. These abilities take on a different context when in a group situation. The way these powers interact is like an organic system each fulfilling a specific role while supporting the organism as a whole. The way these characters interact is a built-in feature of the game and is designed that way to encourage interdependence.

The final criterion for a special collective ritual event is that it involves multiple actors (Knottnerus forthcoming). The numbers that can be involved range from groups of thousands to groups involving only a handful of people. MMORPGs by their very

definition involve multiple actors. The construction of the game often requires the participation of others in order to complete certain objectives. There are both implicit and explicit reasons why people create groups within online games. First, there is a degree of interdependence that is built into the mechanics of the game. Each character has abilities that complement the abilities of others. Play in the game works best in groups because of this. Second, certain activities, such as raids, simply cannot be done alone because they require the participation of others. Finally, people form groups because they do not want to play alone; simply put, people socialize.

Some important definitions of a special collective event must be outlined before a more in-depth discussion of special collective events. The original theory presented by Knottnerus defines ritual events in a very specific way (Knottnerus 1997:260-261). "Socially Standardized" refers to a regularly engaged in social practice. This concept implies that continued use of a custom or social practice (Knottnerus forthcoming). "Action repertoire" is formally defined as a set of elements of which are socially standardized practices (Knottnerus forthcoming:7). "Schema" refers to a cognitive structure. With these definitions "ritualized symbolic practice" can be formally defined as a socially standardized action repertoire that is schema-driven. Nomenclature for a ritualized symbolic practice is RSP (Knottnerus forthcoming:8).

For the development Structural Ritualization Theory this definition of an RSP has to be expanded. The original definition does not include any aspect of the emotions that can be involved in an RSP. An RSP is an action repertoire that is schema-driven and emotion laden (Knottnerus forthcoming:8). This conception of an RSP says that not only

are these regularized events based in the symbolic framework of that actor, they also have an emotional content.

The theory also outlines the context in which the theory applies. The theory applies to scope conditions designated as "domains of interaction" (Knottnerus forthcoming:8). This refers to the geographic area in which two or more actors are interacting. The theory also implies that these actors are assumed to be interacting in a face-to-face manner. For the purposes of this study, this aspect of the theory must be critiqued and expanded. Following this strict definition, the interaction that takes place in an online environment lacks the criteria for this theory, namely face-to-face interaction.

There are two key aspects that define face-to-face interaction: space and the presence of the body. Space, in a traditional sense, has meant a physical space in which people can be situated. The definition of space has been expanded in the recent decades as technology has made it possible to create virtual space. The validity of these new spaces can be seen in the ready adaptation of spatial language when people disscuss their spatial relationship. When referring to websites, the most basic form of virtual space, it is common to hear phrases such as "I am going to that website," "I have been to that website," or "I am at that website." The language of spatial orientation fits very nicely to this medium because it represents for the user an actual place that can be occupied.

Carrying this example out to the MMORPG, space is even more important. As opposed to the online world of websites, MMORPGs offer the ability to be oriented in a three-dimensional space. *Dungeons and Dragons Online: Stormreach*, for instance, places individuals within a city called Stormreach that can be freely explored. There are taverns to go to and people to talk to. There are landmarks in the city that people

recognize. The representation of space for the players allows them to not only orient themselves spatially in a place, but to also interact with others in a spatial manner. This ability creates an analogue to face-to-face interaction.

Structural Ritualization Theory recognizes four main components of an RSP: shared focus of attention, interactional pace, resources, and interdependence of actors (Knottnerus forthcoming). Recent development of the theory has led to the inclusion of a fifth component which is a byproduct of the other four, emotional intensity. Each of these components is typically used to examine face-to-face RSPs, so some modification and adaptation was necessary to adapt them to the study of a virtual setting.

Shared Focus of Attention

The shared focus of attention of actors refers to the degree to which participants in collective events are directing their attention to certain objects (Knottnerus forthcoming). The objects that can be the focus of attention can be any thing from a sacred religious object to a speaker on a podium. In the case of MMORPGs there are several things that become the center of collective events: the goals of a quest or raid, treasure and gold, or a ferocious monster the group has to fight. The degree of attention given to an object can vary during collective events. This leads to the assumption that "the greater the shared focus of attention, the more intense the collective emotions experienced by participants in the collective event" (Knottnerus forthcoming: 10).

The physical layout of a collective event can alter the degree to which participants attention is focused (Knottnerus forthcoming). In collective events such as a protest, the shared attention can be diffused while a speech can generate more focused attention. MMORPGs are unique in this aspect because they are designed to generate

attention for the game. The environment of a virtual world artificially creates attention by creating scenarios that require the engagement of each participant to complete goals (i.e. banding together to fight an exceptionally tough monster). Another important aspect when considering MMORPGs is where the game is played. The ability to focus on the game for each player can be dramatically different For instance; one player could be in a private study in a house by himself while another player could be playing in a coffee shop full of people.

Interactional Pace

Interactional pace is the most difficult component to adapt to a virtual environment. The definition of interactional pace is "the degree to which actors are engaged in a sequence of (socially) interconnected acts and the nature of the recurring or repetitive acts". Interactional pace is a function of both rates of interaction and of rhythmic motion (Knottnerus forthcoming).

Rate of interaction can be simply described as the frequency of interaction (Knottnerus forthcoming). Rate of interaction is concerned with the acts that make up a ritualized event and how these acts are paced. For MMORPGs this can be expressed in several ways: how often the game is played; how often players play in groups; how often players play with the same people. The second component of interactional pace rhythmic motion "refers to whether and to what degree physical movements in the social interaction recur in a uniform manner" (Knottnerus forthcoming). Rhythmic motion is best expressed by collective events such as dancing and marching. The nature of MMORPGs as computer based ritual event requires a certain degree of rhythmic motion in a sense. The act of using a computer keyboard and mouse can be seen as the "rhythmic

motion" of the online experience. This assertion is, however, stretching the definition of rhythmic motion. Within the virtual environment of the game, there are situations where analogous rhythmic behavior can be observed such as posing for pictures or large groups all dancing together. These instances convey a type of equal participation that is similar to what rhythmic motion describes. The majority of MMORPGs interaction is more like a coordinated SWAT team or Special Forces unit in which each person has a unique job to fulfill.

Interdependence of Actors

Interdependence of actors is concerned with the "distribution or relative occurrence of acts by different participants in the ritual event and how differentiated the actions are that are required to conduct the collective ritual" (Knottnerus forthcoming). Interdependence of actors has two distinct parts. First, is how much each participant contributes to the ritual event (Knottnerus forthcoming). In MMORPGs this can be expressed in several ways: more experienced players leading the way for less experienced players; who is contributing more to killing monsters; who is providing access to a certain area that is usually not accessible. The differentiation of duties in MMORPGs, as in real life, can be evenly distributed or be lopsided.

The second component is the level of complexity of different actions (Knottnerus forthcoming). The complexities of actions in an RSP refer to what actions are required to carry out a ritual event. The actions required to carry out a ritual event can be equally distributed among the participants as in a protest situation, or they can be unequally distributed as for instance, in Catholic mass where the priest has more responsibility. The degree to which these actions are equally distributed will increase the emotional intensity

of the participants (Knottnerus forthcoming). In MMORPGs this is best exemplified by "running services." High level or more experienced players will often lead lower level or inexperienced players through areas or quests. They take on the responsibility for all aspects of play and the players who tag along are really passive participants. This is in contrast to running a quest with other players who are all working together to complete the goals of the quest.

Resources

The final and original component of Structural Ritualization Theory is the presence or absence of resources (Knottnerus 1997). Resources can be divided into two categories; these are human and nonhuman resources (Knottnerus 1997). Nonhuman recourses are any material components required to carry out a ritual event. This includes things like a place to hold the event, money, costumes and symbolic artifacts. In MMORPGs this includes the computer, the game program, internet connectivity and in-game recourses such as equipment and virtual money.

Human resources include things "such as the social, cognitive, and physical skills of group members, number of persons involved in the episode, and the arrangement or positioning of people in relation to each other" (Knottnerus forthcoming:15). All of these aspects of human recourses can be expressed easily in an MMORPG. One of the most important human resources is the degree to which actors are co-present (Knottnerus forthcoming). "The more likely that all individuals involved in the ritual event are seen by, visible to, and conscious of each other, the greater actors' awareness that they are part of the collective ritual effort and the greater the impact the collective activity will have on them."(Knottnerus forthcoming:15). Co-presence is another case in which an adaptation

for a virtual environment must be made. In an MMORPG setting, co-presence can be simulated in various ways such as avatar co-presence (virtual characters), friends lists, chat windows, and looking for group postings. While it may be difficult to build the same intensity generated by physical co-presence it is not completely absent from a virtual environment.

Emotional Intensity

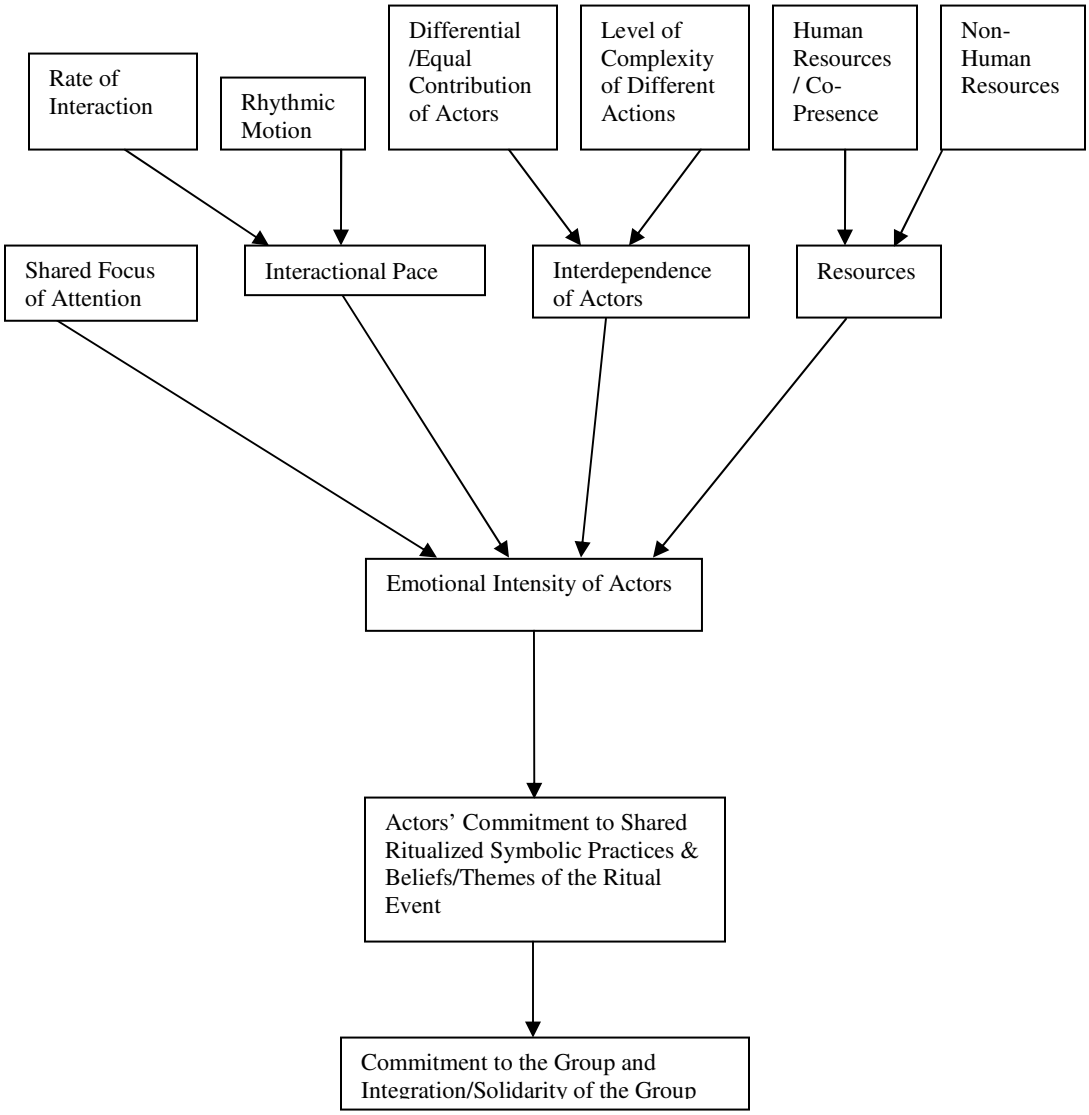
Emotional intensity is developed as a fifth component of Structural Ritualization Theory is the degree or strength of positive emotions generated by the other four factors and their subcomponents (Knottnerus forthcoming:18) Emotional intensity focuses on the generation of the positive emotion, satisfaction-happiness, by ritual events (Knottnerus forthcoming). This "emotional intensity, results in increased commitment to the ritualized practices engaged in by actors in these collective events and the beliefs or symbolic themes expressed in these ritual" (Knottnerus forthcoming: 20). Emotional intensity can be expressed in several ways in MMORPGs, such as satisfaction when a new level is reached, or the satisfaction of completing a quest.

Now that each factor of Structural Ritualization Theory has been described, the complete model can be described. Simply put, the four factors of an RSP influence emotional intensity, which shapes commitment to the shared ritual practice which in turn influences the commitment to the group (Knottnerus forthcoming). "Stated in a more precise manner the theory argues that: 1. Shared Focus of Attention + 2. Interactional Pace [a. Rate of Interaction & b. Rhythmic Motion] + 3. Interdependence of Actors [a. Differential/Equal Contribution of Actors & b. Level of Complexity of Different Actions] + 4. Resources [Human Resources/Co-Presence and NonHuman Resources] influence the

Emotional Intensity of Actors which impacts Actors' Commitment to Shared Ritualized Symbolic Practices and Beliefs/Themes of the Ritual Event which then influences Commitment to the Group and Integration/Solidarity of the Group" (Knottnerus forthcoming). This can be better expressed in Figure 2 presented below.

The process of SRT can be clearly expressed in the context of an MMORPG. Here is a short example. A group of players form a raiding party [resources, human]. They check to see if they have the necessary provisions to finish the quest [resources non-human]. All of the members of the group are focused on completing the quest and all the tasks associated with it [shared focus of attention]. Once the players begin the quest, they interact as an elite attack unit moving together, reacting to each others actions, and the environment that surrounds them [interactional pace]. Each player in the group has a specific role that is determined by their character class and they must perform their role for the quest to go smoothly (i.e. the knight must fight the monsters with his sword and if he is injured the cleric must heal him) [interdependence of actors]. During the quest battles are hard fought. All feel excited to finally complete the quest and receive their reward [emotional intensity]. After the quest is over and the reward received, everyone agrees they had a good time and would like to meet again tomorrow to continue questing [commitment to community]. This example illustrates the impact of SRT in MMORPGs.

Figure 2: Structural Ritualization Theory



CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

Item Construction and Development

The ability for massive multiplayer online role-playing games to create a literal virtual space for players to interact with and congregate in has many implications for sociological research. The division of real space from virtual space and real life from a virtual one has pervaded the research on this subject. The focus of this research is to explain how people playing MMORPGs develop *ritualized symbolic practices* (RSPs) which generate a positive emotional response in the players which leads to the development of community solidarity.

Structural Ritualization Theory (SRT) provides a well defined framework of components that lend well to the development of a survey instrument (Knottnerus 1997). There are five key components that Structural Ritualization Theory uses to measure RSPs: shared focus of attention, interactional pace, interdependence of actors, resources, and emotional intensity. The clearly defined components of Structural Ritualization Theory lend well to the development of scales. In addition to the development of scales to measure the components of SRT, items will be developed that measure general demographic information such as race and sex and specific population demographic data such as guild membership.

The questionnaire created for this study is based on the Lawler emotion and commitment research (Lawler and Yoon 1993; Lawler and Yoon 1996; Lawler and Yoon 1998, Lawler et al. 2000, Lawler 2001, Adcock 2004). The scales developed by Lawler use bipolar word sets on a ten point continuum. Izard (1991) is cited as the source of the word categories and pairings used to construct the scales. The development of these scales as a quantitative measure for emotional response allows for a strong footing on which to build similar word pairings to measure the components of Structural Ritualization Theory.

Since emotional intensity has become an important component of Structural Ritualization Theory (Knottnerus forthcoming) it is conducive to develop similar scale items for the other four components as well as community commitment. Pairing down SRT to a quantitative scale level required that the scaled word pairs clearly described each component. The four components of SRT shared focus of attention, interactional pace, interdependence of actors, and resources are each given word pairings that reflect a level of intensity for each component. Each component must be broken down into its essential qualities to develop these scales.

Shared Focus of Attention

The first subscale of SRT that will be discussed is shared focus of attention. Shared focus of attention is the concept that during an RSP individuals are focused on the same thing or person. In the case of an MMORPG the assumed focus of attention will be the goals explicitly defined by the game. Since many MMORPGs share the same goals this scale is not specific to one game. Seven items were developed to measure the strength of attention given to the shared focus of these goals. Three items were developed

to measure the general focus of attention on "goals." The first item measures the player's perceived likelihood that any goal for that particular day was prepared ahead of time. The assumption is that if preparation is given to a goal that will increase the focus given to it. The second item measures the player's perceived importance of completing these goals. Finally the third item measures the player's perception of how often other players are focused on the same goal as he or she is.

> **6. When you are playing how often do you have a prepared goal for what you want to accomplish with your time spent playing?**
> 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
> Never--All the Time
>
> **7. How important is it for you to complete these game goals?**
> 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
> Not Important--Very Important
>
> **8. How often are your goals shared by those you play with?**
> 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
> Very Rarely--Very Often

Two items were developed that measure the general level of focus. The first item measures the personal perception of focus during play and the second item measures the perception of the focus of other players.

> **10. When you are playing online how much do you focus on the game?**
> 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
> Very Unfocused--Very Focused
>
> **41. How difficult is it to keep the attention of the players in a raid or quest?**
> 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
> Difficult--Easy

The final two items measure shared focus of attention and asks directly about two specific goals that are common to the majority of MMORPGs. The first item measures the importance of leveling to the player. Leveling is a general goal in most games which

centers around gaining experience to increase the character's power and skills. The second item measures the importance of questing and raiding to the player. All MMORPGs have some form of either questing or raiding and these events are the primary focus of the game. A quest is generally considered a goal oriented mission involving a small number of players. A raid is a goal oriented mission that involves a larger number of players and is usually set aside by either rarity or difficulty. These events are also central to the measurement of SRT because the quest or raid serves as the RSP common to all MMORPGs.

13. How important are each of these activities to you while playing an MMORPG?

Leveling
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Not important--Very Important

Completing quests or raids
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Not important--Very Important

Combining these items creates a sub-scale that measures the shared focus of attention given to RSPs in an MMORPG. The scale ranges from 7 to 70. A score of 7 indicates little or no shared focus by the player and a score of 70 indicates a high degree of focus by the player. The Cronbach's alpha is.644.

Interactional Pace

Interactional pace has two distinct components. The first component is the frequency and rate of interaction between participants. The second component is any rhythmic motion that participants take part in, such as marching or dancing. It has been difficult to operationalize items that measure the degree of rhythmic motion player's experience for the purpose of developing a scale to measure the level of interactional

pace. In general terms, this scale assumes that players have a similar rhythmic motion experience related to using a keyboard and mouse to produce character actions.

This scale will instead focus on the measurement of the frequency and rate of interaction that players experience. Five items were develped to measure the rate of interaction between players. The first item simply asks players how often they play solo. This item was scaled in reverse order to avoid response set bias and was recoded for data analysis.

> **5. How often do you play solo?**
> 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
> Rarely--Often

The second item measures the degree to which players play with groups even if that group has different goals than they do. Players who score high on this item find benefit in being in a group and are indicting a strong degree of interactional pace. In other words, group interaction is a goal in and of it's self.

> **9. How often do you play with groups even if their group goals differ from your own?**
> 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
> Very Rarely--Very Often

The third item measures the degree to which players play with groups made from members of their guild or with pick up groups (PUGs). This item basically indicates the degree to which players play with either those they are familiar with or with players they are unfamiliar with. Players who score higher on this scale represent increased interaction with the same players.

> **22. Do you play more often with members of your guild or with pick up groups (PUGS)?**
> 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
> Pickup Groups--Guild Groups

The fourth item measures the frequency at which players participate in raids.

> **37. How often do you participate in Raids?**
> 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
> Not at all--As often as possible

The final item measures the satisfaction of a repeated effort to complete a raid. A high score here indicates that continued interactions with the same group trying to accomplish the same goal are a positive experience for the player.

> **43. How would you rank the experience of completing a raid or quest that took several unsuccessful attempts to complete?**
> 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
> Unsatisfying- Satisfying

These five items make up the interactional pace scale. This scale ranges from 5 to 50. A sore of 5 indicates little or no interaction with other players and a 50 indicates constant interaction with other players. The Cronbach's alpha is .509.

Interdependence of Actors

Interdependence of actors refers to the degree to which individuals in an RSP rely on others to perform the RSP. There are two components to interdependence of actors: first the differential or equal contributions of actors to the RSP and second the level of complexity of different actions. Items were developed that touch on both components of interdependence of actors.

Nine questions were developed that measure interdependence of actors. The first series of items looks at the role different game functions play in putting together a group. These game functions are not simply a resource. They operate as forums for building groups to perform RSPs. Building a group can be one of the most difficult tasks in a gaming session. The reliance on other players and often the player himself to construct a

group is differentiated. Looking at the mechanisms that can be used to construct groups, various levels of both equal and differential contribution can be gauged. Five items were constructed to look at the differential and equal contribution of actors. Each item was asked in the same format and asked in series.

23. When putting a group together or joining a group what game mechanism do you find the most helpful?

A. Friends Lists
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Not Helpful--Very Helpful

B. Looking For More (Groups needing more players)
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Not Helpful--Very Helpful

C. Looking For Group (Players looking for Groups)
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Not Helpful--Very Helpful

D. Guild Window/ guild Chat
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Not Helpful--Very Helpful

E. General Chat
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Not Helpful--Very Helpful

One additional item was asked in relation to the differential and equal contribution of actors in an RSP. This item specifically looks at the role that a guild plays in organizing raids. Again, the inference is that the more important a guild is in planning raids the more interdependent a player is on that guild to perform an RSP.

38. How important is your Guild in planning raids?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Not Important --Very important

Three items were constructed to look at the second component of interdependence of actors: complexity of different actions. To measure this, roles that players take on while

playing the game or choosing characters was used. The importance of role may not be a direct indicator of the complexity of an action, but it does indicate the pressure associated with a particular role. This can indicate that the actions are made more complex because of increased pressure to perform. Two items measure this.

> **32. When choosing what type of character to play how important is the role of that character in the game in you decision to play that type of character?**
> 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-910
> Not Important--Important
>
> **33. How important do you consider your role within the group?**
> 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-910
> Not Important--Important

The last item measures the perceived difficulty associated with leading a raid or quest.

> **40. How difficult do you think quests and raids are to lead?**
> 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
> Very Difficult--Very Easy

These nine items form a scale that measures the interdependence of actors participating in an RSP. Specifically, the differential or equal contribution of actions for the RSP and the complexity of actions involved are measured. Issues of reliability necessitated the removal of three of the items: item 23E, item 32 and item 40. The scale ranges from 6 to 60. A score of 6 represents no or little interdependence between actors and a 60 indicates a great degree of interdependence between actors. The Cronbach's alpha is .532.

Resources

Resources refer to the presence or absence of the necessary components to participate in an RSP. Resources can be divided into two categories: human and non-human resources. When considering human resources one of the most important is the co-presence of actors. A five item scale was developed to measure both of these

components. First, three items were constructed to look at the non-human resources required to play the game. The first two items measure the importance of gaining in-game resources such as new equipment for the character or in-game money.

13. How important are each of these activities to you while playing an MMORPG?

Finding better equipment
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Not important--Very Important

Earning in-game money
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Not important--Very Important

The third item measures how much the experience of playing on computer equipment that is optimized to play the game is important. This measures the physical resource that is required to participate in an RSP.

15. How would you rank the experience of running the game on optimum settings on premium equipment?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Unsatisfying--Satisfying

The final two items were developed to measure the human component of resources. Since interactional pace is measuring the frequency of interactions and interdependence of actors is measuring the reliance of players on others to form groups, the measure for human resources needed to be more geared toward the co-presence of actors. To measure this as a separate entity, relationships from outside the game are going to be considered as a more salient measure of co-presence. When a relationship from outside the game is brought inside, the awareness of co-presence is heightened. Extending this to measure the use of social networks to form an RSP, a phone call is an indication of a developed resource for generating an RSP. Two items were developed to measure this.

28. How important is it to you that you play with people from real-life?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-910
Not Important--Important

34. Do you ever contact Players by telephone to get them online to play?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-910
Not Important-- Important

These five items form a scale that measures the human and non-human resources necessary for an RSP. The scale ranges from 5 to 50. A score of 5 indicates a little or no resources to perform an RSP and a 50 indicates a great amount of resources to fulfill an RSP. The Cronbach's alpha is .520.

Emotional Intensity

Emotional intensity refers to the positive feelings that can be developed during an RSP. The items developed to measure emotional intensity come directly from the word pairings of Lawler and Yoon (Lawler andYoon 1993; Lawler and Yoon 1996; Lawler and Yoon 1998, Lawler et al. 2000, Lawler 2001). The items that are used with the emotional scales center on the emotional aspect of each of the four components of an RSP. Seven items were developed that measure the emotional intensity generated by the four components of an RSP. The first emotional component measured is the shared focus of attention. Two items were used to measure this. The first item measures how a player feels when leveling. The second measures how the player feels after completing a quest.

14. How do you feel when you level your Character?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Bored--Excited

42. How do you feel when you complete a raid or quest?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Bored--Excited

Next, three items were developed to measure the feelings associated with belonging to a guild. This can be seen as a measurement of emotional intensity related to interdependence of actors as well as resources. The first two items were coded in reverse to avoid response set bias.

19. If you were kicked out of a guild how would it make you feel?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Sad--Happy

20. If you ever left a guild how would it make you feel?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Sad--Happy

21. When you joined a guild how did it make you feel?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Sad--Happy

One item was designed to specifically measure the emotional impact of interactional pace. This assumes that sadness would occur if a player missed a scheduled raid and was therefore deprived of expected interaction. This item was also coded in reverse.

44. How would it make you feel to miss a scheduled raid because it was started early?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-910
Happy--Sad

The final item was constructed to measure the feelings associated with being interdependent on others to perform an RSP. It measures perception of how a player may feel when another player is not performing to expectations.

30. How does it make you feel when a member of your group is not fulfilling their duties?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-910
Sad--Happy

With these seven items a scale that measures the emotional intensity generated during an RSP was constructed. The scale ranges from 7 to 70. A score of 7 indicates no or little positive emotional response while a score of 70 indicates a great deal of positive emotions. The Cronbach's alpha is .617.

Commitment to Community

Commitment to community refers to the degree to which a player is committed to the other players who he or she interacts with on a regular basis. This commitment can be considered a desire to remain a part of the community and to spend time in that community. The items used to measure commitment to community come directly from the word pairings of Lawler and Yoon (Lawler and Yoon 1993; Lawler and Yoon 1996; Lawler and Yoon 1998, Lawler et al. 2000, Lawler 2001). Six additional measurements were also devised that measure commitment to community. The first four questions use the Lawler and Yoon word pairings. The first two items measure the perceived cooperativeness of other players. The first item is reverse worded and looks directly at how individuals who are not fulfilling their duties are perceived

> **31. How would you categorize a member of your group if they are not fulfilling their duties?**
> 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-910
> Extremely uncooperative--extremely cooperative

The second item measures the experience of cooperative play that a player has perceived during their entire experience with MMORPGs.

> **35. Taking into account your entire experience playing MMORPGs how would you rank your experience with cooperative play?**
> 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-910
> Extremely uncooperative--extremely cooperative

The next two items ask the player to rank the experience of being with either players they know or do not know. Item 46 was reverse worded.

> **45. When participating in a raid or quest with a group of players you do know and play with regularly how would you rank the experience?**
> 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-910
> Extremely uncooperative--extremely cooperative

> **46. When you participate in a raid or quest with a group of players that you do not know or do not play with regularly how would you rank the experience?**
> 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
> Extremely unsuccessful--extremely successful

The final two items measure the importance of the community to the player. Socializing is used as an indicator of a desire to interact with members of the community in a context outside an RSP. The final measure looks at how important relationships developed in the game are to the player.

> **13. How important are each of these activities to you while playing an MMORPG?**
>
> > **Socializing**
> > 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
> > Not important--Very Important
>
> **29. How important do you consider your in-game relationships with other players?**
> 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-910
> Not Important --Important

With these six items a scale that measures the commitment to the online community was constructed. Issues of reliability necessitated the removal of one item, item 46.The scale ranges from 5 to 50. A 5 on the scale indicates little or no commitment to the community and a 50 on the scale indicates a great degree of commitment to the community. The Cronbach's alpha is .600.

General Demographics

Some simple demographic items were included in the survey. The following items were included: age, sex, race, marital status, country of residence, country of origin, and individual income. The income item was broken into smaller increments than usual because of the predicted youthfulness of the population. The item wording and the results can be found in the appendix. The demographic data shows that the average respondent is typically a single white male, less than 30 years of age, from the United States that makes over $30,000.

Population Specific Demographics

Since a very specific population (MMORPG players) was invited to participate in this survey some specific items about them were generated. These items were also constructed as part of the survey design to eliminate response set bias. The items were designed around the different sections of the survey. Two items in particular look at procrastination and distraction a popular topic for internet research (Lavoie 2001). The item wording and the results can be found in the appendix.

Survey Design

This survey was designed using both the visual design components and question ordering components from the tailored design method developed by Don Dillman (Dillman 2000). The design of the survey is discussed and screenshots of what the survey looks like in its final form are presented. The ordering of questions is also briefly discussed highlighting some of the decisions made.

One of the most important items in a survey is the first item. For this survey four criteria from the tailored design method were considered: applies to everyone, easy,

interesting, and connected to the rest of the survey and respondent (Dillman 2000). The question chosen was:

> **1. Do you play everyday?**
> Yes-No

This question does apply to everyone in the intended sample and indicates that if you do not play an MMORPG this survey is not for you. It is an easy question and it exemplifies what the rest of the survey will be about. It also connects the respondent to the survey as a player of an MMORPG. The only qualifier that is not met is that it is not a very interesting question, but perhaps the topic may be salient enough that discussion about it evokes interest particularly for the narrow target population.

The question ordering for the rest of the survey was designed around certain themes that tie the questions together. It seemed appropriate to group the questions in this manner and it allowed for the scale questions to be more evenly dispersed throughout the questionnaire. The survey was divided into five sections; the first section was oriented toward general questions about playing the game. Section two focused on guild involvement. Section three focused on the player's experience with other players. Section four focused on questing and raiding. At the end of section four an encouragement statement was placed "Don't give up! Only one more section left**!"** Section five is the demographic section.

In an attempt to avoid response set bias different answer types were interspersed between questions in each section. Yes-No questions were inserted between 10 point scale questions. Some 10 point scale questions were also reverse worded to avoid response set bias.

The visual design of the survey instrument was guided by the tailored design method (Dillman 2000). The location of elements was placed at the far left of the screen. The response category was slightly indented from the question. The question was also in a bold font that was slightly larger than the response category font. The items were spaced so that the item appears as the biggest item on the screen and the answer is closely located underneath it. The next item is two spaces below the response category. At the end of each section a contrasting button appears indicating that to go to the next section it must be pressed.

The items use a sans-serif font that is softer on the eyes when viewing the survey on a computer screen. The font is colored black against a solid white background. The response categories are also black against white but have shaded blue-grey bubbles and boxes. This color scheme is very bright and the individual objects are easily distinguishable. A consistent figure-ground format is maintained.

Items that ask the respondent to rank several things were grouped into matrices to make them easier to respond to and less redundant (Salent and Dillman 1994). All of the scaled questions maintain the same format to ensure that the question and answers easily identified as a pair. The survey is laid out simply and intuitively. Each question follows one to the other and a consistent numbering scheme is used throughout the survey. Here are two sample pictures taken from the survey. One shows a matrix question and the other shows a complete section.

Figure 3: Screen Captures

Joe's Survey :: Section 3 of 5 - Microsoft Internet Explorer

File Edit View Favorites Tools Help

Back Search Favorites

Address http://josephmsimpson.com/form.html Go Links

Google josephmsimpson.com Go Bookmarks 53 blocked Check AutoLink AutoFill Send to Settings

Section 3 - Experiences with other players:

23. When putting a group together or joining a group what game mechanism do you find the most helpful?

Friends Lists
Not Helpful ○1 ○2 ○3 ○4 ○5 ○6 ○7 ○8 ○9 ○10 Very Helpful

Looking For More (Groups needing more players)
Not Helpful ○1 ○2 ○3 ○4 ○5 ○6 ○7 ○8 ○9 ○10 Very Helpful

Looking For Group (Players looking for Groups)
Not Helpful ○1 ○2 ○3 ○4 ○5 ○6 ○7 ○8 ○9 ○10 Very Helpful

Guild Window/ guild Chat
Not Helpful ○1 ○2 ○3 ○4 ○5 ○6 ○7 ○8 ○9 ○10 Very Helpful

General Chat
Not Helpful ○1 ○2 ○3 ○4 ○5 ○6 ○7 ○8 ○9 ○10 Very Helpful

24. Do you have a group that you play with more often than with other groups?
○ Yes ○ No

25. Do you play with people you know from outside of the game?
○ Yes ○ No

26. Have you ever asked a friend you know from outside the game to start playing the game?
○ Yes ○ No

27. Do you ever contact Players by telephone to get them on-line to play?
○ Yes ○ No

28. How important is it to you that you play with people from real-life?
Not Important ○1 ○2 ○3 ○4 ○5 ○6 ○7 ○8 ○9 ○10 Very Important

29. How important do you consider your in-game relationships with other players?

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Joe's Survey :: Section 2 of 5 - Microsoft Internet Explorer

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Address http://josephmsimpson.com/form.html Go Links

Google josephmsimpson.com Go Bookmarks 53 blocked Check AutoLink AutoFill Send to Settings

Section 2 - Guild involvement

16. Are you a Member of a Guild?
○ Yes ○ No

17. Are you an officer in a Guild?
○ Yes ○ No

18. Are you the Leader of a Guild?
○ Yes ○ No

19. If you were kicked out of a guild how would it make you feel?
Sad ○1 ○2 ○3 ○4 ○5 ○6 ○7 ○8 ○9 ○10 Happy

20. If you ever left a guild how would it make you feel?
Sad ○1 ○2 ○3 ○4 ○5 ○6 ○7 ○8 ○9 ○10 Happy

21. When you joined a guild how did it make you feel?
Sad ○1 ○2 ○3 ○4 ○5 ○6 ○7 ○8 ○9 ○10 Happy

22. Do you play more often with members of your guild or with pick up groups (PUGS)?
Pickup Groups ○1 ○2 ○3 ○4 ○5 ○6 ○7 ○8 ○9 ○10 Guild Groups

Next Section

Done Internet

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Invitation to Participate

This survey was designed for a particular audience and, because of this, no attempt will be made to develop a random sample. Instead respondents will be found using a snowballing methodology. Several techniques were used to invite respondents to participate. Some techniques were more useful than others. Some of the problems and successes encountered will be examined here.

The first method used to gather respondents was posting on community message boards related to the game and gaming community. Here is a list of the website forums where a message about the survey was posted: www.warcraft.com, www.ddo.com, www.guildwars.com, www.tentonhammer.com, www.mmorpg.com, www.characterplanet.com, www.mmosite.com, and www.guildportal.com. Three game specific forums were used. These forums were limited because to post on them an active account with the game is necessary. The remaining five forums represent the largest and most active community websites for MMORPGs. The key problem encountered in using this method is that because of the activity on the website, posts quickly get buried and a lot of tending must be done to keep the post active. This method appeared to be less useful.

> *Advertisement*
> Hi, I am a graduate student at Oklahoma State University working on my master's degree in sociology. I am writing my thesis on rituals and emotion in MMORPG's. The main premise is that playing an MMORPG involves certain ritual-like activities such as raiding and these events help build relationships with fellow players and the community at large. These relationships and events create emotions that if positive will cause an increased commitment to community. I am conducting a simple survey on my home website www.josephmsimpson.com that measures this relationship. I would be very thankful for all who take my survey. This research project has been approved by the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board and is not a solicitation. Again I thank you for your time. If you have any questions feel free to e-mail me at

josephmsimpson@hotmail.com. I can send you a full report of the findings if you would like, after the project is complete. Thank You

The second method used was sending out e-mails to MMORPG newsletters asking for a small advertisement in their next newsletter. This method proved fruitless because no official newsletters ever responded or posted the advertisement. Several community newsletters such as the Association of Internet Researchers did allow a small advertisement but the population available was very limited.

One of the most helpful methods was word of mouth advertising. Business cards were printed off with a small advertisement for the survey and contact information on the back. This was a very useful tool. Every opportunity to pass out the cards was taken and it seemed to have a substantial effect on the respondent count afterwards. A representation of the card is presented below.

Figure 4: Business Card

MMORPG's and Rituals
A new survey on emotion and ritual in MMORPG's
Looking for respondants. If you play an MMORPG go
to www.josephmsimpson.com to take the survey.
Thank you for your help!

Contact information on back

The most successful method for gathering respondents was the use of social networking sites. Myspace.com and Facebook.com allow a search by interests. That allowed the researcher to distinguish which people should be invited to participate in the survey. E-mails or postings were then be sent to those potential respondents. Personal social networks on these sites also proved to be useful. Friends who took the survey could

post bulletins that would appear in their friends' networks and the circle of people who could potentially hear about the survey expanded.

Facebook.com also includes a feature called groups. Groups are basically a collection of individuals who have a common interest in a particular topic. Groups that centered on MMORPGs were identified and advertisements were posted on the group site. Group sites have a similar problem to what were encountered using message boards to find respondents. Posts tend to get buried.

Finally advertisement was conducted real-time in a virtual world that the primary investigator frequents often, the world of Dungeons and Dragons Online. A message was sent out across the general chat channel and a message of the day posting was made on the primary investigator's guild window. All of these methods of finding respondents produced a sample size of 106.

Hypotheses

To be able to measure the impact that each component of Structural Ritualization Theory had on general community commitment, a series of subscales were developed based on Lawler and Yoon's work (Lawler and Yoon 1993, Lawler and Yoon 1996, Lawler and Yoon 1998, Lawler et al. 2000, Lawler 2001). These items will allow for a clear causal model to be developed. Using these subscales two hypotheses can be tested.

Hypothesis 1: An increase in the measured levels of all four components of ritualized symbolic practice is more likely to increase the measured level of emotional intensity.

Hypothesis 2: An increase in the measured levels of all four components of ritualized symbolic practice and emotional intensity is more likely to increase the measured levels of commitment to community.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS

Correlations

Before any test of the theoretical model is made, it is useful to look at the correlations between the subscales of the Structural Ritualization Scale (SRS) The SRS has six distinct subscales. Each of the subscales has been shown to be a reliable measure. Examining the simple correlations between the scales can give insight into how the variables are interacting with each other without accounting for the structure of the theoretical model. Table 1 shows the correlations for Shared Focus of Attention (SFA), Interactional Pace (IP), Interdependence of Actors (IA), Resources (REC), Emotional Intensity (EI), and Commitment to Community (CTC). Pearson's test for significance was conducted using a two-tailed test. N=106.

Table 1: Structural Ritualization Theory Subscales Two- Tailed Correlations

Subscale	SFA	IP	IA	REC	EI
Shared Focus of Attention (SFA)					
Interactional Pace (IP)	.239*				
Interdependence of Actors (IA)	.176	.580**			
Resources (REC)	.572**	.330**	.177		
Emotional Intensity (EI)	.165	.425**	.475**	.200*	
Commitment to Community (CTC)	.013	.505**	.587**	.144	.486**

*.Correlation is significant at the .05 level (two tailed).
**.Correlation is significant at the .01 level (two tailed).

As Table 1 shows, there is a high degree of correlation between the variables. In the model of SRT, four of the subscales operate as independent variables: shared focus of attention, interactional pace, interdependence of actors, and resources. There are no predicted interactions between these variables. From Table 1 it is clear that there are several significant interactions between these variables. Shared focus of attention correlates with interactional pace with a Pearson's correlation coefficient of .239 and is significant at the .05 level. This relationship indicates that individuals who are highly focused on the goals of the game are also more likely to interact with other players more frequently. Shared focus of attention does not correlate with interdependence of actors. This could represent a degree of autonomy that goal focused players have. Shared focus of attention correlates with resources with a Pearson's correlation coefficient of .572 and is significant at the .01 level. Focused players appear to be strongly interested in having the necessary equipment and human resources to play.

Interdependence of actors is correlated with interactional pace with a Pearson's correlation coefficient of .580 and is significant at the .01 level. This indicates that players who are more interdependent on other players are more likely to play more often. Interdependence of actors is not correlated with resources. Resources is correlated with interactional pace with a Pearson's correlation coefficient of .330 and is significant at the .01 level. Players who are well resourced to play the game must play the game at a frequent pace.

Now that the correlations between the independent variables have been examined lets see how each of the independent variables correlates with the two dependent variables: emotional intensity and commitment to community. Emotional intensity is not

correlated with shared focus of attention. This may indicate that players who are focused too much on the game can become disconnected from positive emotions generated through play experience. Emotional intensity is correlated with interactional pace with a Pearson's correlation coefficient of .425 and is significant at the .01 level. This indicates that players who play more often do generate a more positive emotional state related to playing the game. Emotional intensity is correlated with interdependence of actors with a Pearson's correlation coefficient of .475 and is significant at the .01 level. This indicates that players who are more interdependent do generate a more positive emotional state related to the game. Emotional intensity is correlated with resources with a Pearson's correlation coefficient of .200 and is significant at the .05 level. This indicates that players who have the sufficient resources to play the game gain a positive emotional state from their playing experience.

Commitment to community is not correlated with shared focus of attention. This, as with emotional intensity, may indicate that players who become too focused on the game may become disconnected from other players in their gaming community. Commitment to community is correlated with interactional pace with a Pearson's correlation coefficient of .505 and is significant at the .01 level. This indicates that players who play more frequently are more likely to commit to those with whom they play with. Commitment to community is correlated with interdependence of actors with a Pearson's correlation coefficient of .587 and is significant at the .01 level. This indicates that players who are interdependent with other players are more likely to commit to those they play with. Commitment to community is not correlated with resources. This could

indicate that players who are concerned with simply having the resources to play do not share a commitment to their gaming community.

Finally, the correlation between the two dependent variables needs to be examined. Emotional intensity is correlated with commitment to community with a Pearson's correlation coefficient of .486 and is significant at the .01 level. This indicates that players who experience positive emotional responses during game play are more likely to be committed to their gaming community.

Taking what these correlations indicate, some initial support can be given to hypotheses one and two. It is clear that interactional pace and interdependence of actors have strong positive relationships with emotional intensity and commitment to community. Shared focus of attention and resources seem to have less of an impact on emotional intensity or commitment to community. These indications are not enough to confirm or inform about the relationships predicted in hypotheses one and two because no account of the structure of the model has been given. To develop a more complete understanding of the relationship, these variables must be placed in the context of the theoretical model. To do this, a path analysis will be conducted.

Path Analysis

A path analysis uses regression analysis to develop a causal model (Mertler and Vannatta 2005). Causal modeling is useful because it can test the underlying theory of how variables are interacting. The results of a causal analysis are useful because they can show not only the direct effects of variables but also the indirect effects of variables. In causal modeling it is inappropriate to call variables either independent or dependents;

instead they should be labeled exogenous (independent) or endogenous (dependent) (Mertler and Vannatta 2005, Stern 2007).

Table 2 shows the direct, indirect and total effect of the exogenous variables on the endogenous variables. The path analysis shows that the exogenous variable interactional pace is directly affecting the endogenous variable emotional intensity. With a path coefficient of .37 the relationship is significant at the .001 level. This direct relationship indicates that the more frequently a player plays, the more positive emotions that player will experience. No other exogenous variables were significantly related to emotional intensity.

Table 2: Summary of Causal Effects

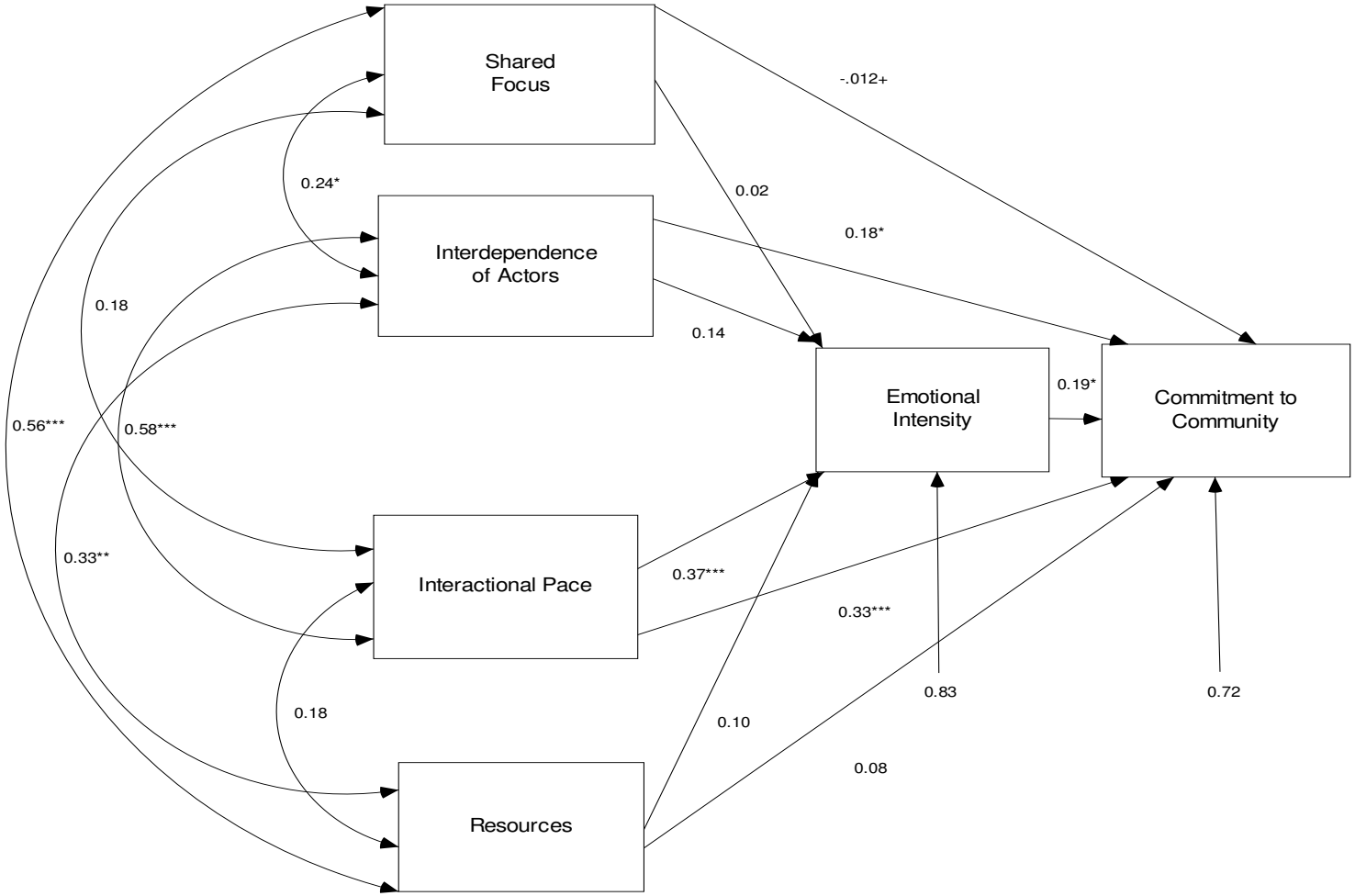
Outcome	Determinant	Causal Effects		
		Direct	Indirect	Total
Emotional Intensity (R^2=.83)	• Shared Focus of Attention	--	--	--
	• Interdependence of Actors	--	--	--
	• Interactional Pace	.370***	--	.370^
	• Resources	--	--	--
Commitment to Community (R^2=.72)	• Shared Focus of Attention	-.012+	--	-.012^
	• Interdependence of Actors	.180*	--	.180^
	• Interactional Pace	.330***	.070	.400^
	• Resources	--	--	--
	• Emotional Intensity	.190*	--	.190^

***p≤..001; **p≤..01; *p≤..05; +.10; ^ incomplete total because of paths missing in the model

The exogenous variable shared focus of attention is directly affecting commitment to community. With a path coefficient of -.012 the relationship is negatively related and significant at the .10 level. With a negative relationship between these variables it can be assumed that the higher the focus of attention on the game, the less committed to the community a player will be. The exogenous variable interdependence of actors is directly affecting commitment to community. With a path coefficient of .18, the relationship is

significant at the .05 level. This indicates that the more interdependent a player is with other players the more committed to the community that player will be. The exogenous variable interactional pace is directly affecting commitment to community. With a path coefficient of .33 the relationship is significant at the .001 level. This indicates that the more frequently a player interacts with other players the more committed to the community that player will be. No relationship was found with the exogenous variable resources. The exogenous variable emotional intensity is directly affecting commitment to community. With a path coefficient of .19 the relationship is significant at the .05 level. This indicates that the more positive emotions associated with playing an MMORPG, the more developed the commitment to that community will be. There appear to be no significant indirect relationships. The model is presented in Figure 4.

Figure 5: Structural Ritualization Theory Path Model



***p≤..001; **p≤..01; *p≤..05; +.10

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Discussion

All across the world, at any given time, thousands of people are playing in a world that does not exist. They are experiencing feelings about events that can only be replicated through digital magic. They are feeling a commitment to a community of people whom they have most likely never met and they would not have it any other way. The beginning of this project was simple. How does the experience of playing an MMORPG bring players from every walk of life together to build a community?

The simple answer is that players must work together. The necessity of collaboration and shared effort in overcoming the objectives of the game facilitate the formation of community ties. The ritual of questing and raiding is the central purpose of an MMORPG and every aspect of game play is developed to facilitate these events. Tangible and visually pleasing rewards are given to players who complete quests and raids. These rewards give immediate positive feed back to players which strengthen the emotional response to the ritual.

Virtual rituals are real and tangible to the players within the game. Players make the effort to organize groups and go on quests. They are rewarded with experience points which can be used to increase their character's power and level and the chance to gain

unique treasures. That is not the only reason these rituals become important to the players. The reliance on each other to achieve these goals develops relationships which are more than utilitarian. Players sign on to reunite with their comrades from past adventures and to reminisce about their experiences. The shared ritual of questing and raiding becomes the language of community in a virtual world.

For this study, two hypotheses were formulated that ask a basic question about the shared rituals of virtual worlds: what impact do they have? The first hypothesis asks: do the components of a ritual event contribute to the emotional intensity felt by the participant in that ritual event? It is clear that the high degree of interdependence of actors and the pace in which they interact drive positive emotional feelings.

Players who play regularly and depend on others to complete quests and raids exhibit positive emotions about their experience playing. Questing and raiding, as already stated, requires cooperation. The degree of cooperation will increase the necessity to have not only utilitarian relationships, but friendly relationships. Players respond to questions about leaving a guild or being kicked out of a guild with a great deal of sadness. The relationships built here are built under stress and, because of that, the emotional connection can be strongly felt.

The shared focus of attention given to ritual events does seem to stimulate the emotional intensity felt. The focus of the player on finishing the task at hand represents an investment of time and energy that is rewarded with feeling of joy at the completion of that task. When a group of adventurers is facing down a terrible and ferocious dragon and the fight is hard fought, the thrill of success can become very visceral.

The resources needed to engage in the ritual event seem not to effect the emotion of the moment. It seems that the development of emotion is keenly focused on the event and that the background components necessary to perform the event are taken for granted to a certain extent. This indicates that the resources necessary for ritual events are only of concern in their absence. When the resources necessary for a ritual are available, participants are either focused on the center of the ritual, concerned with completing their part or anticipating the next event.

The second hypothesis asks: do the components of a ritual event contribute to the emotional intensity felt by the participant in that ritual event increase commitment to that community? The rituals of a virtual world are the foundation of community for that virtual world. Without a purpose playing a powerful wizard or a shinning knight become a meaningless, vacant endeavor. There is no reason to join together and build bonds if there is no evil plot to foil. Quests are the ties that bind players together.

Communities in MMORPGs are focused on finding the most efficient and beneficial ways to complete quests. The search for treasure and the hunt for experience provide the grease for creative innovation in the community. The community, in an MMORPG, is the crucible of experience. Inexperienced players must rely on those with more experience to guide them through the virtual world. This interdependence drives the formation of communities. Networking and relationship building are important because no one can fight the evils of the virtual world alone. Experience, both tangible levels within the game and the intangible knowledge of the game, is regarded with great reverence. The knowledge of the experienced is passed from player to player through the network of community and being outside that network can put a player at a disadvantage.

Experience is so valued in a virtual world community because it represents time. The time spent playing a game can be as valued as unique or expert knowledge. Being seen makes a player a persistent part of a community. The development of networks and relationship requires time spent online. More directly, the pace of interaction confers not only sight recognition but also dependence. Players who play regularly and who are available to journey into the depths of a dungeon when no one else is, are valued members of that community.

There is a danger here. Players who focus too much attention on the material aspects of the game and consider their fellow adventurers as hangers-on do not build strong community ties and can become isolated from the other players. The relationships in the game become completely utilitarian and devoid of emotion save the momentary gratification of finding a new item or increasing their stock of gold. The focus of players on completing quests and adventuring for treasure is not unimportant in generating community commitment. The shared focus of completing goals and the sharing of the joy for others receiving rewards does create a strong community. Players who create strong community ties often sacrifice their time and energy just to help other players complete objectives that do not matter to them. That is the strength of a shared focus instead of a self-interested focus on common goals.

The resources for a collective event involve both non-human material resources and human resources. In a virtual ritual, the material resources are divided between the real world and the virtual. Every player who has ever played in a virtual world had all the real world resources necessary to play: computer, game software, subscription. These resources are taken for granted by the player. The resources needed within the game are

central to the game itself. Gold, equipment, experience points, and power up items are all obtained through questing. To play the game is to gather the resources necessary to play the game. They are one and the same. The human resources are much more important. Networks of friends, membership in a guild, and time to play are the important factors in conducting a ritual event in a virtual world.

The essential resource component of co-presence is just as central in a virtual world as it is in the real world. When players' sign on, their friends are immediately alerted to their presence and, even if they are not in the same place in the virtual world, co-presence is felt. Co-presence is increased through the proximity of avatars but that is not necessary because communication in virtual worlds is not spatially limited. Having a friend's avatar shoulder to shoulder with you fighting the forces of evil does create a connection.

The feeling when a friend is close, success is acheived, a reward received, and calls of "Again! Again!" cry out from the party can be joyous. People who participate in MMORPGs get a thrill out of doing so and when the thrill is shared the emotion can be palpable. Success in a quest, especially a hard fought quest, can be an emotional climax. That feeling lingers in the memory of those who were there and war stories are told to the next generation of players to inspire them to greatness as well. The connection felt in a community is directly related to the positive emotions generated at collective events. In the virtual worlds of MMORPGs strong communities are built around questing and when no questing is going on, the chattering of a closely knit community can be seen scrolling at the bottom of the screen.

Limitations

The biggest limit to that this study had was its respondent size. With a general population of over 50 million, a respondent group of 106 is not sufficient to generalize to the broader community. The most that can be said of the findings is that they are indications of larger trends in the population. Besides the limitation of sample size, this study suffers from a heterogeneous community. The people who play MMORPGs have diverse and different reasons for playing. Since the purpose of this study is to understand the impact of special collective events in MMORPGs it may not be reasonable to assume that the findings are an indication of how all players experience these events. They may only represent a portion of the overall gaming community.

Another factor limiting this study is the problem with conducting survey research on a topic that must rely on the memory, perceptions, and intentions of the respondents to provide accurate information. Any of the responses could be misinterpretations by the respondent and not represent actual behaviors. Related to this, the nature of the variables in the theoretical perspective limited the design of the survey. Does asking a respondent how often they play equate to measuring interactional pace, when rhythmic motion and interaction can be measured in micro seconds? The same can be said for co-presence. Does a measurement of the importance of having group members a player know measure co-presence? It seems that co-presence is an experiential and observational variable and adapts poorly to quantitative surveying. That being said, the other components of the theory seemed well suited to developing a survey and as a first quantitative test of Structural Ritualization Theory some limitations were expected.

Implications for Future Research

The implications for future research that can be derived from this study are twofold. First, this study has implication for the study of virtual worlds and rituals in virtual worlds. Second, this study has implications for the quantitative study of Structural Ritualization Theory and ritual theory in general. This study is an important link in the study of virtual rituals. The primary problem associated with virtual worlds study is in defending the relevance of virtual world interactions to real world interactions and equating the interactions in virtual worlds to real world interaction.

Future research into the importance of rituals in virtual worlds should look not only at rituals in virtual worlds that have no real world comparison but also at how real world ritual practices such as marriages and funerals are carried out in virtual worlds. Research in this area will lend further credence to the arguments made in this study.

This study also advances the theoretical range that can be applied to virtual worlds. The components of Structural Ritualization Theory were originally theorized to cover face-to-face interactions. The extensions to that perspective found in this study should allow for a more comprehensive theory of virtual worlds collective events to be developed. This is a first step in overcoming the tendency for sociological theory to assume that internet communication is less valid, less substantial and sometimes irrelevant when compared to face-to-face communications. This does not mean they are equivalent, it does mean that emotional response, community membership, and in particular rituals can all be played out in on the stage of the internet and virtual worlds.

The development of a quantitative survey that measures the components of Structural Ritualization Theory in MMORPGs should facilitate further quantitative

studies on Structural Ritualization Theory. The format of response categories can serve as a guidepost to develop other surveys. There are two problems with furthering research in this vein. Rituals are usually particularistic to certain populations and as in the case of this study, random samples may be hard or impossible to obtain. The second problem is that studies covering different rituals would have to develop new item wording to fit their particular subject matter.

One possible solution for the first problem is to look at a broad based community with common rituals. Some examples might include: Catholics and rituals in church services, Americans and rituals surrounding national holidays such as the 4th of July, or possibly the global community concerning funerals or marriages so cross cultural comparisons could be made. The only solution to the second problem would be to develop a generic scale for Structural Ritualization Theory. This solution is problematic because of the specific nature of ritual events. The development of the scale would need to be generic enough so that any person could take it and it seems that this type of scale would be less useful analytically because of the nature of ritual events.

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APPENDIX

Survey

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this survey on massive multi-player online role-playing games (MMORPG). This survey will ask items about your experiences playing MMORPGs. The items are divided into five sections. Please take time to fill out the survey completely.

Section One- Playing the Game- these items focus on your experiences with playing MMORPGs and your personal habits associated with playing MMORPGs.

1. Do you play everyday?
Yes-No

2. Do you have a scheduled day(s) that you play on regularly?
Yes No

3. Do you play on a schedule?
Yes-No

4. Do you play solo?
Yes- No

5. How often do you play solo?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Rarely--Often

6. When you are playing how often you have a prepared goal for what you want to accomplish with your time spent playing?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Never--All the Time

7. How important is it for you to complete these game goals?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Not Important--Very Important

8. How often are your goals shared by those you play with?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Very Rarely--Very Often

9. How often do you play with groups even if their group goals differ from your own?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Very Rarely--Very Often

10. When you are playing online how much do you focus on the game?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Very Unfocused--Very Focused

11. Choose one or more of these activities that frequently take your attention away from the game.

- Listening to music
- Watching TV
- Surfing the Internet
- Cooking
- Childcare
- Talking on the Phone
- Other

12. Do you put off any of the following activities to play the game instead?

- Watching TV shows
- Doing Homework for School
- Eating
- Answering the telephone
- Doing household chores
- Other

13. How important are each of these activities to you while playing an MMORPG?

Socializing
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Not important--Very Important

Leveling
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Not important--Very Important

Finding better equipment
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Not important--Very Important

Completing quests or raids
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Not important--Very Important

Earning in-game money
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Not important--Very Important

14. How do you feel when you level your Character?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Board--Excited

15. How would you rank the experience of running the game on optimum settings on premium equipment?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Unsatisfying--Satisfying

Section Two- Guild involvement

16. Are you a Member of a Guild?
Yes-No

17. Are you an officer in a Guild?
Yes No

18. Are you the Leader of a Guild?
Yes No

19. If you were kicked out of a guild how would it make you feel?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Sad--Happy

20. If you ever left a guild how would it make you feel?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Sad--Happy

21. When you joined a guild how did it make you feel?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Sad--Happy

22. Do you play more often with members of your guild or with pick up groups (PUGS)?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Pickup Groups--Guild Groups

Section 3- Experiences with other players

23. When putting a group together or joining a group what game mechanism do you find the most helpful?

Friends Lists
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Not Helpful--Very Helpful

Looking For More (Groups needing more players)
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Not Helpful--Very Helpful

Looking For Group (Players looking for Groups)
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Not Helpful--Very Helpful

Guild Window/ guild Chat
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Not Helpful--Very Helpful

General Chat
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Not Helpful--Very Helpful

24. Do you have a group that you play with more often than with other groups?
Yes- No

25. Do you play with people you know from outside of the game?
Yes-No

26. Have you ever asked a friend you know from outside the game to start playing the game?
Yes- No

27. Do you ever contact Players by telephone to get them online to play?
Yes- No

28. How important is it to you that you play with people from real-life?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-910
Not Important--Important

29. How important do you consider your in-game relationships with other players?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-910
Not Important--Important

30. How does it make you feel when a member of your group is not fulfilling their duties?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-910
Happy--Sad

31. How would you categorize a member of your group if they are not fulfilling their duties?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-910
extremely uncooperative--extremely cooperative

32. When choosing what type of character to play how important is the role of that character in the game in you decision to play that type of character?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-910
Not Important--Important

33. How important do you consider your role within the group?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-910
Not Important--Important

34. Do you ever contact Players by telephone to get them online to play?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-910
Not Important--Important

35. Taking into account your entire experience playing MMORPGs how would you rank your experience with cooperative play?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-910
extremely uncooperative--extremely cooperative

Section 4- Questing and Raiding

36. Do you participate in raids?
Yes- No

37. How often do you participate in Raids?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Not at all--As often as possible

38. How important is your Guild in planning raids?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Not Important --Very important

39. Have you ever lead a raid or quest?
Yes No

40. How difficult do you think quests and raids are to lead?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Very Difficult--Very Easy

41. How difficult is it to keep the attention of the players in a raid or quest?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Difficult--Easy

42. How do you feel when you complete a raid or quest?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Board--Excited

43. How would you rank the experience of completing a raid or quest that took several unsuccessful attempts to complete?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Unsatisfying--Satisfying

44. How would it make you feel to miss a scheduled raid because it was started early?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-910
Happy--Sad

45. When participating in a raid or quest with a group of players you do know and play with regularly how would you rank the experience?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-910
extremely uncooperative--extremely cooperative

46. When you participate in a raid or quest with a group of players that you do not know or do not play with regularly how would you rank the experience?
1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Extremely unsuccessful--extremely successful

(Encouragement Statement) Almost done just a few more items!

Section-5 Demographics

47. How long have you been Playing MMORPGs?
Fill in Blank

48. What MMORPGs have you played?
Fill in Blank

49. What MMORPGs are you currently playing?
Fill in Blank

50. How much do you spend per month to play MMORPG's?

$

51. How much did you spend last year on MMORPG's including any cost for computer upgrades and software?

$

52. How often do you play?

- 2-5 hours weekly
- 5-10 hours weekly
- 10- 20 hours weekly
- 20-30 hours weekly
- 30-40 hours weekly
- More than 40 Hours

53. Age

#

54. Sex

Male- Female

55. Race

White, Black/ African American, Hispanic/ Latino, Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American/ Alaska Native, Other

56. Marital Status

Single, Cohabiting, Married, Divorced, Divorced and Re-Married

57. Country of Residence

Fill In Blank

58. Country of Origin

Fill In Blank

59. Individual Income

- $0- $4,999
- $5,000-$9,999
- $10,000-$14,999
- $15,000- 19,999
- $20,000- $24,999
- $25,000- $29,999
- $30,000- 59,999
- $60,000- And up

--------Button (Finished)

Separate Page----------

Thank you again for taking the time to fill out this survey. Your input is greatly appreciated. If you would like to receive a report on the findings send an e-mail to josephmsimpson@hotmail.com with the subject MMORPG SURVEY.

------ Button (Exit Survey)- takes respondent to Google main page.

Demographic Data

Several Demographic measures were taken with the survey. The results are presented here. The valid percentages for each response category are given.

Table 3: Demographic Information; Age and Sex

Item and response category	Valid percent %
Respondents	100%
Age	100%
18-20	19.3%
21-25	26%
26-30	21%
31-35	16.3%
36-40	10.6%
41-45	4.8%
46-And up	2%
Sex	100%
Male	83.7%
Female	16.3%

Table 4: Demographic Information; Race, Marital Status, and Income

Item and Response Category	*Valid Percent %*
Race	100%
White	85.6%
Black/African American	1%
Hispanic/Latino	4.8%
Asian	3.8%
Pacific Islander	1%
Other	3.8%
Marital Status	100%
Single	46.6%
Cohabiting	17.5%
Married	30.1%
Divorced	3.9%
Divorced and Remarried	1.9%
Income	100%
$0-$4,999	19.4%
$5,000-$9,999	4.9%
$10,000-$14,999	12.6%
$15,000-$19,999	8.7%
$20,000-$24,999	6.8%
$25,000-$29,999	6.8%
$30,000-$59,000	20.4%
$60,000-And up	20.4%

Table 5: Demographic Information; Country of Residence and Country of Origin

Item and Response Category	*Valid Percent %*
Country of Residence	100%
USA	82.2%
Canada	5.8%
European Country	4.6%
Other	7.4%
Country of Origin	100%
USA	77.3%
Canada	4.7%
European Country	9.9%
Other	8.1%

Table 6: Playing Habits

Item and Response Category	*Valid Percent %*
Do you play everyday?	100%
Yes	56.6%
No	43.4%
Do you have a scheduled day(s) that you play on regularly?	100%
Yes	38.7%
No	61.3%
Do you play on a schedule?	100%
Yes	24.5%
No	75.5%
Do you play solo	100%
Yes	74.5%
No	25.5%

Table 7: Distractions and Procrastinations

Item and Response Category	*Valid Percent %*
Choose one or more of these activities that frequently take your attention away from the game.	% That checked box
Listening to music	21.7%
Watching TV	34%
Surfing the Internet	34.8%
Cooking	21.7%
Childcare	16%
Talking on the Phone	30.2%
Other	48.1%
Do you put off any of the following activities to play the game instead?	% That checked box
Watching TV shows	54.7%
Doing Homework for School	29.2%
Eating	27.4%
Answering the telephone	25.5%
Doing household chores	59.4%
Other	30.2%

Table 8: Guild Participation

Item and Response Category	*Valid Percent %*
Are you a member of a guild?	100%
Yes	87.7%
No	12.3%
Are you an officer in a Guild?	100%
Yes	52.8%
No	47.2%
Are you the leader of a Guild?	100%
Yes	19.8%
No	80.2%

Table 9: Group Participation

Item and Response Category	*Valid Percent %*
Do you have a group that you play with more often than with other groups?	100%
Yes	78.1%
No	21.9%
Do you play with people you know from outside of the game?	100%
Yes	73.3%
No	26.7%
Have you ever asked a friend you know from outside the game to start playing the game?	100%
Yes	85.7%
No	14.3%
Do you ever contact Players by telephone to get them online to play?	100%
Yes	48.6%
No	51.4%
Do you participate in raids?	100%
Yes	76.5%
No	23.5%
Have you ever lead a raid?	100%
Yes	69.8%
No	30.2%

Table 10: Time Spent Playing

Item and Response Category	*Valid Percent %*
How often do you Play	100%
2-5 hours weekly	6.3%
5-10 hours weekly	17.3%
10- 20 hours weekly	33.7%
20-30 hours weekly	20.2%
30-40 hours weekly	15.4%
More than 40 Hours	6.7%
How long have you been Playing MMORPGs?	100%
Less than a year	6.5%
1-2 years	26.4%
3-4 years	27.4%
5-7 years	18.9%
8 or more years	20.8%

Table 11: Money Spent Playing

Item and Response Category	***Average Amount Spent***
How much do you spend per month to play MMORPG's?	$15.95
How much did you spend last year on MMORPG's including any cost for computer upgrades and software?	$311.08

Individual Item Statistics and Scale Statistics for SRT

Table 12: Shared focus of Attention Sub-Scale

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
6. When you are playing how often you have a prepared goal for what you want to accomplish with your time spent playing?	6.21	2.31
7. How important is it for you to complete these game goals?	5.61	2.53
8. How often are your goals shared by those you play with?	6.18	2.53
10. When you are playing online how much do you focus on the game?	7.68	1.84
13. How important are each of these activities to you while playing an MMORPG? Leveling	6.85	2.40
13. How important are each of these activities to you while playing an MMORPG? Completing Quests or Raids	7.18	2.10
41. How difficult is it to keep the attention of the players in a raid or quest?	5.40	2.38

Table 13: Interdependence of Actors Sub-Scale

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
23. When putting a group together or joining a group what game mechanism do you find the most helpful? Friends Lists	6.92	2.60
23. When putting a group together or joining a group what game mechanism do you find the most helpful? Looking For More (Groups needing more players)	6.21	2.52
23. When putting a group together or joining a group what game mechanism do you find the most helpful? Looking For Group (Players looking for Groups)	5.73	2.63
23. When putting a group together or joining a group what game mechanism do you find the most helpful? Guild Window/ guild Chat	6.71	2.59
33. How important do you consider your role within the group?	7.47	1.90
38. How important is your Guild in planning raids?	5.53	3.59

Table 14: Interactional Pace Sub-Scale

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
5. How often do you play solo?*	6.04	2.72
9. How often do you play with groups even if their group goals differ from your own?	5.94	2.52
22. Do you play more often with members of your guild or with pick up groups (PUGS)?	6.67	2.59
37. How often do you participate in Raids?	5.10	2.88
43. How would you rank the experience of completing a raid or quest that took several unsuccessful attempts to complete?	7.97	2.32

* Indicates reverse wording

Table 15: Resources Sub-Scale

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
13. How important are each of these activities to you while playing an MMORPG? Finding better equipment	7.19	2.30
13. How important are each of these activities to you while playing an MMORPG? Earning in-game money	5.94	2.29
15. How would you rank the experience of running the game on optimum settings on premium equipment?	8.51	1.58
28. How important is it to you that you play with people from real-life?	5.11	2.74
34. Do you ever contact Players by telephone to get them online to play?	3.6	2.92

Table 16: Emotional Intensity Sub-Scale

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
14. How do you feel when you level your Character?	7.73	1.68
19. If you were kicked out of a guild how would it make you feel?*	7.54	1.68
20. If you ever left a guild how would it make you feel?*	6.60	1.83
21. When you joined a guild how did it make you feel?	6.90	1.66
30. How does it make you feel when a member of your group is not fulfilling their duties?	7.57	1.37
42. How do you feel when you complete a raid or quest?	7.74	1.95
44. How would it make you feel to miss a scheduled raid because it was started early? *	6.9	1.61

* Indicates reverse wording

Table 17: Commitment to Community Sub-Scale

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
13. How important are each of these activities to you while playing an MMORPG? Socializing	7.07	2.31
29. How important do you consider your in-game relationships with other players?	6.33	2.57
31. How would you categorize a member of your group if they are not fulfilling their duties?	7.75	1.32
35. Taking into account your entire experience playing MMORPGs how would you rank your experience with cooperative play?	7.6	1.51
45. When participating in a raid or quest with a group of players you do know and play with regularly how would you rank the experience?	8.06	1.97

Table 18: Sub-Scale and Scale Statistics

Scale	Scale Mean	Scale Std. Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha	N of items
Shared Focus of Attention (Subscale)	45.17	9.36	.644	7
Interdependence of Actors (Subscale)	39.08	8.64	.532	6
Interactional Pace (Subscale)	32.01	7.08	.509	5
Resources (Subscale)	30.26	7.07	.520	5
Emotional Intensity (Subscale)	51.40	6.63	.617	7
Commitment to Community (Subscale)	36.92	6.31	.600	5
Structural Ritualization Theory (Total Scale)	234.86	30.00	.738	6

VITA

Joseph Michael Simpson

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: VIRTUAL RITUALS: STRUCTURALRITUALIZATION THEORY AND MASSIVE MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLEPLAYING GAMES

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Pages in Study: 99 Candidate for the Degree of Master of Science

Major Field: Sociology

Scope and Method of Study:

Special collective events and rituals are important to strengthening commitment to a community. The world of MMORPGs has their own unique collective events and rituals that help build the community that players participate in. A recent theoretical framework known as Structural Ritualization Theory provides a set of formal definitions for rituals that allow the impact of special events on emotional states and commitment to a group in special collective events to be measured. This thesis will present data collected from an online survey that was designed to measure how the collective events that players take part in while online (i.e., in MMORPGs) create an emotional intensity that builds commitment to the virtual community in which they play.

Findings and Conclusions:

Ritual events in MMORPGs do generate emotional intensity and commitment to community. A path analysis indicated that certain components of a collective event have direct effects on emotional intensity and commitment to community. Emotional intensity does not provide an indirect path to commitment to community.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Dr. J. David Knottnerus